December 2023 Ethical Navigation: Advising an Early Decision Admit

PCACAC is excited to present *Ethical Navigations*, an educational effort to proactively explore issues that might face professionals involved in the college admissions process.

Each month, *Ethical Navigations* explores a hypothetical scenario and potential avenues to approaching the situation using *NACAC's Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission* as the lens. This guide is built on the *principles* of honesty, transparency, equity, and respect for students and fellow professionals while including the *core values* of education, access and equity, professionalism, collegiality, collaboration, trust, and social responsibility. This month's navigation is submitted by Jake Talmage, College Counseling Director at St. Paul's School for Boys.

This month's scenario:
Jolly, a senior at Snowy High School, excitedly runs into their counselor's office with great news, exclaiming "I got in!!! I was accepted to Holiday University Early Decision!" After getting a high five from their counselor, Jolly seems to deflate before saying, "I am excited about this opportunity because Holiday is my dream school. But, I did not get any merit scholarship, and they have not posted my aid package because they are waiting for the new FAFSA. What should I do with my other applications?"

What options does the counselor have for providing advice? Is there any ethical guidance from the NACAC guide?

Possible approaches: With the delay to this year's FAFSA, scenarios similar to this might leave school counselors in a quandary. Not to worry, the NACAC Guide has advice.

First, a counselor should understand Article III. A. 2 which defines Restrictive Application Plans from the college perspective. Specifically, subsections:

- defines, "*Early Decision: Students commit to a first-choice college at the time of application, and if admitted, agree to enroll and withdraw their other college applications.*"
- iii, further states colleges should "*respond to an application for financial aid at or near the time of an offer of admission and before a deposit is required.*"

The counselor should also focus on a bigger picture; the Guide's Guiding Principle B states, "*Advocating for the student's best interest in the admission process is the primary ethical concern of our members.*" The counselor might also consider NACAC's core values of *Collegiality, Collaboration, and Trust* to drive a first possible step-- the counselor might contact the specific college (or suggest to the student to contact the college) to ask for insight given this year's delayed financial aid process. Hopefully, the college has developed an approach to get a tentative package and/or delay the required deposit deadline for students to get that information.

The Guide has specific advice in Section B. 1. b. ii., which recommends that counselors should, "*Educate students and families on their ethical responsibilities in the admissions process including counseling students that it is unethical to have more than one pending Early Decision application.*" In this case, even though the student has been admitted, the final decision (to accept the offer or not) is pending. Thus, the counselor could encourage the student to leave open or complete any other rolling, EA, or regular decision applications until an aid package is available.

Then, the counselor could explain to Jolly that they should withdraw those other applications once the situation is resolved-- assuming the student gets the necessary aid—because B.1. b. iii advises

counselors to educate students and families that it is unethical *to "maintain an active enrollment deposit or the equivalent at more than one US college."*

If you have any questions feedback, or proposals for future Ethical Navigations, please contact info@pcacac.org*. Do you have a question about NACAC's recommended ethical practices or a suggested revision to the* Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission*? Please submit via* this form *and a member of the national AP committee will follow up with you.*