

December 2024 Ethical Navigation: A Holiday Mystery

The Potomac and Chesapeake Association for College Admission Counseling (PCACAC) is excited to present *Ethical Navigations*, an educational effort to proactively explore issues that might face professionals involved in the college admissions process. This month's Ethical Navigation was submitted by Gretchen Steele, Assistant Director of Admissions & International Student Recruiter at Randolph-Macon College, and pays homage to the 60th anniversary of the stop-motion tv classic, *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*.

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 scenario:

Rudolph Reindeer, a new Admissions Counselor at North Pole University, is reading their first batch of applications with a mug of hot chocolate and snow flurries swirling outside. This cozy atmosphere puts them in a great mood to read Yukon Cornelius's application. When Rudolph takes a look at Yukon's transcript, their festive cheer dissipates. Yukon experienced a significant drop in grades during their sophomore year, resulting in a much lower yearly GPA than what NPU usually accepts. Stronger grades in freshman and junior years boost Yukon's overall admissibility, but the 10th grade drop gives Rudolph pause.

Following office protocol, Rudolph combs through Yukon's personal essay and additional information responses for any inkling of an explanation but comes up short. Yukon's counselor wrote a glowing recommendation that makes no mention of academic difficulties, so Rudolph decides to pick up the phone.

Yukon's school counselor, Hermei, has recently shifted careers from dentistry and strict adherence to HIPAA to a new position in school counseling. He shares that he does work with Yukon but cannot share any details from that year because of privacy policies. Rudolph is at a loss. They do not feel ready to recommend a decision on Yukon's application without some additional context, but they are also struggling to make heads or tails of the drop in grades.

How could Rudolph move forward in this sticky situation? NACAC's GEPCA provides possible guidance.

Possible approach:

Rudolph may wish to review the Core Values listed in the GEPCA, one of which is Collaboration: "We believe the effectiveness of our profession—college counseling, admission, and enrollment management—is enhanced when we work together to advocate for students and their best interests." Rudolph should remind himself that helping Yukon reach his potential is the ultimate goal and that collaboration with Yukon's counselor could be invaluable in this process.

Rudolph may then turn to Article I A. 1. b) which reads that members should "share information about students that is relevant to the college admission process as well as accurate, up-to-date, and free from misrepresentations of fact or material omissions at the time of submission."

Furthermore, Article I A. 1. g) reiterates, "to make the college admission process as intentional and efficient as possible for universities, high schools, and applicants, universities should strive to require in the admission process only that which is absolutely essential to yield an admission decision."

Optional components may put unnecessary burdens on applicants and secondary schools while creating confusion about what elements of the application process truly matter.”

Based on this advice from GEPCA, Rudolph could work with leadership in the Admissions office at NPU to determine whether providing an explanation for the 10th grade drop in GPA could play a central role in Yukon’s admission decision (i.e. is this information “absolutely essential?”).

If so, Rudolph may want to follow up with the counselor in the spirit of transparency and increased trust. Rudolph could share that, with respect to student privacy, NPU does require certain academic standards for admission that Rudolph’s application currently does not meet. However, the college also allows professional discretion to the Admissions office when extenuating circumstances affect academic performance. This transparency may help to strengthen trust between Yukon’s high school and NPU and lead to greater collaboration.

It is possible that school policy will not allow Hermey to disclose special circumstances. But, could Hermey advise Yukon to share with NPU any circumstances that he feels impacted his performance sophomore year?

It is also possible that school policy will not allow Hermey to advise Yukon in this way. In this case, Rudolph could also choose to follow up directly with Yukon, keeping in mind the core values of professionalism and trust during the conversation.

By following GEPCA guidelines and working within the outlined core values, Rudolph and their colleagues could hopefully come to a conclusion regarding Yukon’s admissibility to North Pole University.

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.