

## February 2024 Ethical Navigation: FAFSA Delay Causes Issues

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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 Kathleen Voss from Georgia Institute of Technology.

### ***This month's scenario:***

Jerry Valentine is the Dean of Admission at Heart University. Recently, the Director of Financial Aid informed Jerry that the Department of Education announced students' FAFSA information would be further delayed due to a processing error. Thus, the college will not receive the information until the first part of March, at the earliest.

Jerry is concerned. This delay means that students might not get their financial aid offers until April! Any delay can pose a big problem for **ALL** students but especially those from historically marginalized populations. With a traditional deposit deadline of May 1, Jerry knows that many applicants will not have the time needed to make such an important decision.

On the other hand, Jerry works for an institution that is tuition dependent and needs to make its class. The sooner the university can know student plans, the sooner the administration can plan for the upcoming year.

Where should Jerry turn for advice? Is there any ethical guidance from the NACAC guide?

### ***Possible approaches:***

NACAC's guide encourages professionals to be student-centered. Specifically, Article II opens with the statement, "Admission Cycle Dates, Deadlines and Procedures for First-Time Fall Entry Undergraduates NACAC members believe that college choices should be informed, well-considered, and free from coercion. We believe that admission practices should be student-centered and should not be designed to manipulate students into applying to or enrolling at a college or university before they are ready. Students benefit if they have an organized and developmentally appropriate schedule that allows for a reasonable amount of time to identify their college choices; submit applications for admission, financial aid and scholarships; and decide which offer of admission to accept."

NACAC's ethical guide Article II, 1. B. further defines the "National Candidates Reply Date: Colleges should use the widely recognized date of May 1 as the earliest enrollment confirmation deadline. Before being asked to make an enrollment decision and to commit to an institution, students should have time to hear from each school that admitted them and receive notice of i.) Offers of financial aid and scholarships, ii Admission to honors and other special programs, iii). Availability of housing."

Thus, to be student-centered, Jerry and the university administration could consider several questions such as:

- What amount of time is appropriate for students to make a well-informed choice?
- Even if Heart University was able to provide a tentative financial aid package thanks to CSS Profile or other forms, how much could final packages vary from early estimates?

- What is a reasonable timeline to allow the student to hear from all universities—some of whom might not have gathered information to estimate aid?
- What campus partners would need to be debriefed before making a decision – housing, new student orientation, advising, student affairs, registrar, etc.?
- What proactive outreach or communication could Jerry and the team do to help applicants and their supporters (parents, caregivers, counselors, etc.) through this already confusing process?

[In a January 31 statement](#), NACAC joined prominent financial aid and college access organizations encouraging colleges to consider extending their deadlines beyond the traditional May 1 date.

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*If you have any questions feedback, or proposals for future Ethical Navigations, please contact [info@pcacac.org](mailto: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.*