

February 2025 Ethical Navigation: Changing Times

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 explores how the role of Admissions Practices (AP) has evolved and was submitted by Kathleen Voss, Regional Director of Admission for Georgia Institute of Technology and current PCACAC AP Chair and Jake Talmage, Director of College Counseling at St. Paul's School for Boys and a past PCACAC AP Chair.

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:

Val Heart is the Associate Director of Admission at Cupid College. She also chairs the Admission Practice Committee for her regional ACAC affiliate. Earlier this month, her old friend Phil from Punxsutawney Prep reached out to her with an Admission Practice concern. One of Phil's seniors received a notification from a college to which they had been admitted. According to the e-mail, if the student deposits by President's Day, they will have first pick of housing on campus.

The student is panicking because, while they really like the college, they are still waiting to hear about financial aid from 2 other institutions. Phil expresses his frustration with Val and wants to file a formal complaint about College not following NACAC's Code of Ethics and Professional Practices (CEPP) because the college was pushing students to deposit before the May 1 deadline.

What can Val do? How can Val best assist her colleague and the student in this situation?

Historical AP Perspective:

In asking to make an official complaint, Phil seems to be referring to how an Admissions Practices Committee may have moved forward using the CEPP prior to the moratorium. At that time, some practices were considered "mandatory" and others "best." If anyone was concerned about how a member professional was acting, they could make a formal complaint through NACAC and the complaint would be explored through the national and/or affiliate processes. Essentially, after receiving a complaint, the national Admissions Practices committee would then share that complaint with the regional ACAC Admissions Practices Chair, who would explore the complaint. The regional chair would then contact the institution to discuss the issue.

Often these issues were a misunderstanding, and the issue would be resolved through simple communication; other times the regional AP committee would seek to educate the member about how actions not following the NACAC ethics could potentially damage students, the member's institution, and the profession. Through this conversation, members would often work towards compliance.

Sometimes, though, a member or institution would not agree to work towards compliance. In such rare cases, the complaint would be referred back to NACAC, and the national AP Committee and/or executives would become involved because following the CEPP was a NACAC criteria for membership. Now that the GEPCA is a "best" practice document, following "mandatory" practices is no longer required.

Current AP Perspective:

Since Val assumed the role of Chair of the Admission Practice Committee, these types of situations have come up from time to time. Val reminds Phil that the Admission Practice Committee can no longer enforce rules and file “formal complaints.” She recaps that back in 2017, NACAC underwent an investigation by the Antitrust Division of the US Department of Justice (DOJ), this led to a moratorium on the enforcement of the *Code of Ethics and Professional Practices (CEPP)*. At the March 2020 meeting, the NACAC board authorized the AP Committee to begin drafting the best practices version of the *CEPP*.

In response, the committee drafted the new [*Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission*](#), which was delivered to the board for their approval at their June 2020 meeting. The Code of Ethics and Professional Practices (CEPP), which allowed the Admission Practice Committee to enforce rules and standards set by NACAC, was dissolved and the Guide to Ethical Practice in Admission or GEPCA, had taken its place.

Possible approach:

With the Admissions Practices Committee focus on education, Val could share with Phil that the Guide is a statement of recommendations that promotes ethical and best practices in college admission. While there is not a formal complaint/resolution process, individuals can express concerns about actions that might not follow best practices and how that practice is impacting a student.

Thus, Val could send a copy of the GEPCA to Phil to share with the student, noting Article II. 1. C., which reads, “*Members are encouraged to work with other campus offices such as academic departments, housing and financial aid to create a consistent deadline that does not require students to make a commitment or accept an offer prior to May 1.*”

Phil could then encourage the student and their family/caregiver to talk with the university and ask for an extension to May 1. If he felt it was prudent, Phil could also reach out to the college to explain the quandary facing the student.

*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.*