

July 2025 Ethical Navigation: Summer Submission Stress

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 Joel Lang, Director of College Advisement and School Counseling at [Padua Academy](#) in Delaware.

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:

Summer Tymes is finally taking a breath after wrapping up her rigorous junior year, including having taken several AP exams. She's looking forward to a summer of working a part-time job, having fun in her community theater's summer camp, and catching up on some much-needed rest. When she gets home, she receives an email from Earlyon University that reads "starting on June 15, you can submit an application. These applicants will be among the first to receive an admissions decision. Students who take this step now can send us all their supporting documents at a later time!"

Earlyon is on her short list of colleges so she goes to their website to find out more information (as the email encouraged her to do). Earlyon's website encourages juniors to submit their application rather than waiting until the fall to be eligible for their best scholarship offers and to have a better chance at being admitted to their more selective majors like Summer's first choice, Computer Science. The message on the home page reads: "Don't wait – you can apply now!!"

Summer panics, writing her required essay in just under an hour and immediately submitting her Common Application to Earlyon. Then, she emails her School Counselor, Mr. Beach, asking him to submit her transcript and letters of recommendation. She receives an automated response saying that Mr. Beach is not in the office for the summer, and he's only checking email periodically but will respond when he can.

Summer is now in high stress mode because although Earlyon's website says that supporting documents can be sent later, she would prefer her application to be complete as soon as possible.

A week goes by and Summer finally receives an email reply from Mr. Beach. His email tells Summer that her letters of recommendation haven't been written yet and her transcript doesn't have her finalized senior year courses on it. Summer is completely distraught, feeling she'll never get into Earlyon now because she's "way behind." Summer's father calls the high school passionately pushing the Principal to get the transcripts completed and submitted. He even emails Summer's teachers demanding they write the letters immediately.

The Conundrum:

Mr. Beach now finds himself in a hot situation. Summer and her father are putting a lot of pressure on the school, including him and the teachers, but the school is not prepared to send these documents. Mr. Beach wonders, should Earlyon University expect materials in the middle of the summer? Is it fair or equitable that Earlyon will review and admit students whose high schools are able to submit all

those materials in the summer while leaving other applicants “on hold” until their materials are submitted in September?

In hopes of finding some direction, Mr. Beach could refer to the NACAC’s Guide to Ethical Practices in College Admission. According to the preamble, *“Our work is guided by the principles of honesty, integrity, transparency, equity, and the respect for all students and fellow professionals”* Furthermore, the Core Values include, *“Education: We believe in and are committed to educating students, their families, the public, fellow education professionals, and ourselves about the transition to and within postsecondary education.”*

Knowing and believing in these principles and core values, Mr. Beach wants to help Summer. He understands that the student wants a simple answer including a clear path to follow to be considered for the Computer Science major at Earlyon. He knows the student is feeling pressured because Earlyon has a strong program and may reject many more applicants than they admit, as is common among selective colleges.

Earlyon doesn’t have to wait for qualified applicants to fill their class and is acting ethically in forewarning prospective applicants to apply early to have the best chance of admission: in Article 1, Section A of NACAC’s Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admissions reads: *“..Members (colleges/universities) should provide comprehensive, truthful, and factual information that will allow all parties to make informed decisions.”* Yet, the teachers are on vacation as they are 10-month employees, and the main office will not confirm senior schedules until August.

However, Mr. Beach feels the push to have applications submitted as early as possible might conflict with Article II A, which states: *“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.”* To this end, Article II. A. 1, provides, *“Recommended dates and deadlines: a) Application Deadline: October 15 should be the earliest application deadline colleges set for first-year candidates applying for all admission.”*

Even though the college has stated that all materials can be submitted later, Mr. Beach feels that his letter and the teacher’s recommendations will enhance Summer’s application. While he has considered calling Earlyon University to ask them to stop pressuring the students to “submit now,” he is also concerned about how this might impact Summer’s (and future students’) decisions at Earlyon. Mr. Beach also knows that if he gets all the supplemental materials submitted for Summer, this action could set an unattainable and tricky precedent for future requests.

How could Mr. Beach proceed?

Possible approach:

Another Core Value listed in GEPCA 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.”* With this in mind, Mr. Beach could:

- Suggest to Summer and her father that they call Earlyon University and explain the situation. However, when he suggests this approach, Summer expresses concern – she doesn’t want to look like she’s making excuses about her application but she also wants to explain why her application may not have all the materials submitted immediately. Summer wants to demonstrate to Earlyon that she is thorough and on top of her college process. She’s worried that a phone call or email could look like she’s making excuses and might negatively impact her image to Earlyon.
- Given Summer’s concern, Mr. Beach could consider contacting Earlyon’s admission office without using the student’s name to explain the situation and ask for clarity. While he might consider pursuing this conversation by phone, Mr. Beach might want to use email as he would be able to forward any reply to Summer and her father. In this communication, he could:
 - Explain that official transcripts and recommendations will not be ready until early fall
 - Ask for clarity on timing for the submission of supporting materials and the college’s timeline for decisions
 - Clarify which supporting documents are required (i.e. transcript, counselor report, and/or recommendations)
 - Consider suggesting to Earlyon University that the institution use unofficial transcripts early in the process, with a later request for all official documents. In line with this suggestion, Mr. Beach could work with his school to make sure that students have access to unofficial transcripts if not already provided.

Mr. Beach’s communication may offer an opportunity for Earlyon to understand the predicament students and counselors might encounter with the offer to apply early. Potentially, understanding that some strong and responsible students have little to no control over when their official academic materials are submitted might allow Earlyon to clarify their message beyond “supporting documents can be submitted later.”

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.