

July 2026 Ethical Navigation: The Conversation About Earlier Applications

The Potomac and Chesapeake Association for College Admission Counseling (PCACAC) Admission Practices Committee is proud to present *Ethical Navigations (EN)*, an educational effort to 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](#) (GEPCA) 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:

It's May 15th and Dr. Zayd Procopio, VP of Enrollment Management at Progressive University (affectionately known as "PU"), is reviewing his enrollment numbers from the past several years. With a noticeable decline in enrollment, Dr. Procopio gathers his admissions team asking for new and innovative ideas to boost enrollment.

After weeks of discussions and research, PU's admissions team thinks it would be a good idea to market PU's programs and scholarship opportunities earlier to high school students so "we can get on their radar early" as research has shown that the earlier students engage with colleges and universities, the more likely they are to apply and subsequently enroll. The team also believes that the more time students have to make a college decision, the less stress they will feel.

Thus, Dr. Procopio and his team come up with "The Plan." The following spring, PU plans to begin sending admissions and marketing materials to high school juniors, encouraging them to apply before the end of their junior year and offering an admissions decision by July 10th. They even develop a flyer:

Progressive University

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH US

APPLICATIONS ARE OPEN

PU Cheetahs are faster than the competition!!

We see the potential in you. Progressive University is here to help you develop into the best version of yourself.

- ✓ Academic Excellence
- ✓ Outstanding Faculty
- ✓ Scholarships & Financial Aid
- ✓ Industry Partnerships & Career Support
- ✓ Modern & Supportive Learning Environment

Early Application Period: June 1-30, 2027
Notification date: July 10

www.fakeuniv.edu +123-456-7890 123 Anywhere St., Any City

As he prepares to implement The Plan, Dr. Procopio sets up a meeting with his College Counselor Advisory Board to introduce this exciting and innovative opportunity to their high school partners. His hopes are dashed when the advisory board offers these counter viewpoints to this plan:

- The students are still completing their junior year, including taking AP and IB exams along with final exams and projects. Asking students to complete applications at this time adds stress to the students and doesn't allow them to give their best effort as they are wrapping up their school year.
- The counselors suggest that they need time to wrap up the year with seniors, as well. They need to get seniors through exams, send final transcripts to colleges and more.
- Additionally, the counselors point out that most teachers and some counselors are contracted as 10-month employees. Students don't necessarily have the same access to their counselors and teachers over the summer as they do during the school year.
- Finally, counselors and teachers haven't written letters of recommendation yet and transcripts including senior courses won't be ready possibly until late August.

Overall, the advisory board strongly asks PU to not ask the high school side to provide these documents so early!

Dr. Procopio is unsure what to do. What direction might NACAC's GEPCA provide?

The Conundrum:

With declining enrollment, the enrollment team at Progressive University is under pressure. Thus, they are looking to change the game. In this case, they want to make a change to the process which would allow them to increase enrollment. They have come up with an idea, but like many new ideas or changes, that initiative meets resistance. Should Dr. Procopio move forward with the idea, adapt it, or search for new efforts?

Possible Approach:

In one sense, Dr. Procopio and his team at Progressive University are engaging in good ethical practices. By having and approaching an advisory board of counselors, the institution is following NACAC's Core Values outlined in GEPCA, including:

- *Education: We believe in and are committed to educating students, their families, the public, fellow educational professionals, and ourselves about the transition to and within postsecondary education.*
- *Collegiality: We believe members should conduct dialogue with openness to differences, listening to various perspectives from a place of support and understanding. Members should strive to disagree without being abusive or demeaning.*
- *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.*

Furthermore, by producing clear communication as provided in the sample flyer, the team is following Article 1, A. 1., which states, “Colleges should make publicly available comprehensive, accurate, and current information concerning: f) all deadlines including admission, scholarship, financial aid, and housing.”

However, in Article II, A GEPCA also states, “NACAC members believe that college choices should be informed, well-considered, and free of coercion...Students benefit if they have organized and developmentally appropriate schedule that allows a reasonable amount of time to identify their college choices; submit applications for admission, financial aid and scholarships...” Furthermore,

in section 1. a), GEPCA continues, “*Recommended dates and deadlines: Application deadline: October 15 should be the earliest application deadline colleges set for first-year candidates in applying for admission.*”

To balance the pressures at Progressive University with the feedback from counselors and GEPCA’s best practices, Dr. Procopio and the enrollment team might consider whether they want to continue with or modify this initiative. If they decide to move forward with earlier outreach, some ideas they might want to consider:

- Is it best to offer an earlier application process? Or, would there be an option to engage younger students another way? Examples might include special/targeted visit programs, possible scholarship consideration, the opportunity to open an applicant file, etc.
- Consider the implied message of the policy. Specifically, are there any benefits, including possible easier admission, to having an earlier “deadline” than October 15? If none, to reduce pressure on students and counselors, could the policy/flyer clearly state that the only benefit is early notification?
- Instead of an “Early Application period from June 1-30”, could the university announce the opening of the application for Fall of 2027 without a stated deadline?
- Could the policy explain what information is needed/not needed for an early review (for example, are teacher recs, counselor recs, etc. required or optional)?
- Might PU consider letting students know they will still have until May 1 to make a final decision?
- Should PU move forward with implementing a form of this initiative, should they consider a comprehensive plan to collect data to see how well this plan impacts enrollment and retention?

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.