

## June 2025 Ethical Navigation: Net Price Questions Heat Up Summer

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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 Kathleen Voss, PCACAC Admissions Practices Committee Chair and Regional Director of Admission for the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, Georgia.

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 Solstice is an admission representative for Northern Hemisphere University. While it has been a long day Summer still finds the time to review a few emails before heading home. One in particular catches her eye.

A prospective student has inquired about NHU's net price calculator (NPC). The email reads; "Hello, I am trying to get a handle on cost expectations. When I entered my information into your net price calculator, the tuition and fees were from last year. When will you be updating your calculator to reflect this year's costs?"

Summer is surprised that the net price calculator has not been updated. She was under the impression that these updates happened routinely and seamlessly. Hoping to shine a light on the question, Summer reaches out to NHU's new Director of Financial Aid, Celeste Equator. Celeste provides her with helpful information pertaining to NHU's calculator and NPCs as a whole.

- Celeste belongs to [NASFAA](#) (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators). Like NACAC, NASFAA provides training, professional development and resources while promoting ethical behavior and professional standards. NASFAA does not have binding rules regarding net price calculators. However, they do recommend that colleges update the calculator each year as best practice.
- While the federal government requires colleges to offer an NPC, there is not an exact update schedule for schools to follow. While NHU may update on the Fall Equinox, another college may update their calculator on the first day of winter.
- Celeste tells Summer that while some colleges like NHU use the government template, others customize their own NPC and still others pay to use a 3rd party calculator. All require a manual update of new data. These updates require coordination between multiple campus offices.
- In the past, NHU has tried to update their NPC over the summer but this year due to new hires in both the Office of Financial Aid and Office of Information Technology, as well as delays in finalizing tuition and fees, they probably will not have the calculator updated until the new year.
- Celeste tells Summer that she would very much like to provide students with a more tailored estimate, incorporating NHU's merit scholarship options into the formula, something the current NPC does not do. That would mean hiring a 3rd party vendor or customizing a new calculator in-house. Celeste does not think NHU is ready to assume those costs, nor does the school have the time and staff to devote to such a project.

- Even with the older data, Celeste offers that the current NPC at Northern Hemisphere University is still a helpful tool in reducing sticker shock and giving students an idea of potential out of pocket costs.

***The Conundrum:***

Summer wants to provide prospective students with the most precise information possible but recognizes Northern Hemisphere University’s calculator does not reflect this year’s tuition and fees. With the information Celeste has provided, Summer now understands that net price calculators often use past data and offer estimates that may not reflect current methodology. While a helpful tool, accuracy can vary from year to year and from institution to institution. In addition, making changes can take time depending on the type of calculator being used (Federal, in-house, 3<sup>rd</sup> party) and may have limitations. How can Summer keep prospective students out of the dark?

***Possible approach:***

Summer remembers the admission practice session at her regional conference and looks at [GEPCA](#) for reference. Article 1, A, it states that, “*Colleges should make publicly available comprehensive, accurate and current information concerning: f) factors considered in making admission, financial aid, and scholarship decisions and j) Costs of attendance and types of scholarships and other financial aid.*”

Summer also takes the time to research NASFAA and finds that according to their [statement of ethical principles](#); financial aid administrators shall, “*Strive for transparency and clarity, provide students and parents with the information they need to make good decisions about attending and paying for college.*”

Summer knows that her institution works very hard to provide the most current and up to date information on all fronts, but she also recognizes that just like the earth’s orbit around the sun, things take time and there could be multiple reasons for issues including delays in finalizing policy, personnel changes, or changing the type of calculator being used. In the meantime, Summer can;

- Work with the Office of Admission and the Office of Financial Aid to make sure that the current NPC is easily found on the college website and clearly indicates if the costs are based on a historical snapshot or based on the current year’s tuition and fees.
- Suggest to her administration that a disclaimer be added to the website indicating that costs are estimated and may not reflect a student’s balance at the time of enrollment.
- Provide other proven, free alternative estimators if needed.
- Encourage students to contact the Office of Financial Aid directly, with questions pertaining to costs.

*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.*