

March 2024 Ethical Navigation: Implementing a Waitlist

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 scenario: Paddy Murphy, the Vice President of Enrollment at Leprechaun University (LU), is facing a dilemma. Put in a nutshell, the university expects the division to provide a pot of gold, a full freshman class which meets the net-tuition revenue goal. On the other hand, the university is at capacity in residential and classroom life; therefore, the enrollment division has been informed to not over-enroll.

In the face of this goal, the '23-24 admission process has been full of challenges which is making it very hard to trust historical yield models. LU has seen a significant (record!) increase in applications which may be due to the "Luck of the Irish" as the university received much publicity after the school's basketball team made a significant run at last year's March Madness tournament. Yet, deposit numbers compared year-to-date are down. Paddy believes this may be due to the delay in the FAFSA data and the ability of the university to provide finalized financial awards. Like many schools, LU has also extended the deposit deadline to May 15.

Given all of the unknowns, and the pressure to enroll the right class, Paddy has proposed and received the institutional approval, to operate a waitlist for the first time. The hope is to use the waitlist to build up enrolling numbers and possibly "shape" the class. As the university implements its first ever waitlist, what issues should Paddy consider?

Possible approaches: Article II, The Responsible Practice of College Admission, section B. discusses Waitlists including some suggested guidelines that colleges should try to follow. These guidelines are:

- a) Include the historical range in numbers or percentages of students offered admission from the waitlist and the availability of housing and financial aid with an initial wait list offer.
- b) Not require a deposit or set a fee for remaining on a waitlist.
- c) Allow students who are offered admission from the waitlist after May 1 at least 48 hours before requiring a verbal or written commitment to enroll.
- d) Notify students of the financial aid offer and availability of housing before requiring a commitment to enroll.
- e) Notify all waitlist candidates of the final decision no later than August 1.

While these specific suggestions offer a good foundation for considering how to implement a waitlist, Paddy should also consider the principles expressed in NACAC's Ethical Guide. Some questions that Paddy and the LU enrollment staff could consider:

- What is the right size and makeup of the waitlist? How does the waitlist offer the university flexibility but not unnecessarily drag out the process for hopeful students? Are there certain sub-groups (for example, majors) which need to be included/excluded?
- What information will students/families need? In which platforms and formats should communication to students occur? Letters? Phone calls? Portal announcements? Website?

- Does the university expect financial aid/scholarships will be available?
- Does the university expect housing to be available?
- Depending on orientation timelines, will a student have time to attend one?
- What timeline does the waitlist expect to follow? How soon should a student accept a position on the waitlist? When might the university start accepting students off the waitlist? When does the university expect to close the waitlist?
- Can students change programs to be reconsidered for admission verses staying on the waitlist?
- Is there an organization or priority to the waitlist? Is the waitlist ranked? What factors could influence waitlist admission?
- What additional information from students might the university need? How do students provide that information?
 - Will students have to choose to opt-in in order to remain on the waitlist?
 - Can students provide application updates/changes?
 - Will LU want a letter/statement of continued interest from students who are waitlisted?
- What is the plan for accepting students, if any, off the waitlist? How and when will students be released from the waitlist?
- After May 15, how will newly admitted students' information be shared with other campus offices already working with the incoming freshmen class? How does the university ensure all students admitted off the waitlist receive all the necessary information?

According to the guide, “Our work is guided by the principles of honesty, integrity, transparency, equity, and respect for students and fellow professionals.” Thus, Paddy should make the effort to be as transparent and honest as possible.

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.