

March 2025 Ethical Navigation: A March Challenge

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 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:

Caesar, the Vice President of Enrollment at Et Tu University, is faced with a challenge. Despite meeting their enrollment goals last year, the institution's administration is nervous about the changing landscape and wants Caesar to do anything and everything possible to confirm the class as quickly as possible. Due to this heightened interest in guaranteeing net tuition revenue, various administrators have made ongoing suggestions for enrollment strategies. Some of the suggestions--implementing Early Action, offering scholarships for early commitments, extending admission deadlines, and pushing decisions out quicker than ever--have proven successful despite taxing Caesar's admissions team. With these changes, the class seems to be taking shape as May 1 approaches.

Now, however, the Director of the Honors Program, Brutus, has asked to meet. Caesar is happy to do so because Brutus has typically provided thoughtful council regarding the challenging problems which have impacted the university and the admissions process. However, when they meet, Brutus demands an admissions change. With Honors deposits running ahead of previous years, Brutus wants to implement an April 15 deposit requirement effective immediately to make sure the program does not over-enroll. In addition, Brutus also believes the earlier deposit would help yield students from the waitlist before those students commit to rival institutions such as Pompey College by May 1, if necessary.

Caesar feels this is one more challenge to a process which has radically evolved in the past years. He is not sure that he, or his admissions team, can manage another change. What can he do? Does GEPCA provide any advice?

Possible approach:

While making this short-term decision to support the Honors Program at Et Tu U might seem easy, there are additional considerations which the Guide suggests that Caesar could consider.

First is that NACAC identifies a Core Value to be Truth, stating, "*We believe our profession is based upon trust and honesty with one another and with students.*" Furthermore, Article I A. reads, "*Truthfulness and transparency: Members should provide comprehensive, truthful, and factual information that will all parties to make informed decisions.*" This statement is supported by 1. A. e), "*Colleges should make publicly available comprehensive, accurate, and current information concerning: all deadlines including admission, scholarships, financial aid, and housing.*"

Because the communication with students, families, counselors, and others in the admissions cycle begins more than a year before May 1, Caesar should encourage a conversation discussing whether announcing change in March regarding a new deadline for April 15 allows Et Tu to be truthful to constituents.

In addition, Caesar could discuss specific GEPCA Best Practices included in Article II. The Responsible Practice of College Admissions. Section II. A. 1. b) read, *“National Candidates Reply Date: Colleges should use the widely recognized date of May 1 as the earliest enrollment commitment deadline. Before being asked to make an enrollment decision and to commit to an institution, students should have time to hear from each school that admitted them.”* Furthermore, section c) continues, *“Members are encouraged to work with other campus officers 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.”*

In pointing out these Best Practices, Caesar could encourage Brutus to realize that pushing the deadline forward could have adverse impacts ranging from students not trusting the program to families feeling compelled to deposit early which might result in larger summer melt.

As specific programs, and colleges, seek to adapt to changing demands, there are countless pressure points being applied to admission systems. GEPCA can provide a beacon which can lead the way to make it through the Ides of March.

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.