

May 2026 Ethical Navigation: The Situation

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:

May 1 has passed, and the school counselor at *Uptown Funk School* can feel the energy in the school. The prom was just held over the past weekend and while some students are still anticipating possible waitlist news, the seniors and faculty can see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Unfortunately, there was an issue at the prom. One of the seniors, who is committed to *I Gotta Feeling* University, decided to *Party in the USA*. The result was that the student said *I Gotta a Feeling*, felt like they were *Levitating*, acted like a *Dancing Queen*, and saw the *Blinding Lights*.

Now, the counselor wants to *Shout!* Because of the student's actions, the school's administration has suspended the student until graduation.

The Conundrum:

There are many nuances and gray areas in this situation which might spur additional conversation; but, for this Ethical Navigation, let us focus on the fact that the student has withdrawn all other applications because it is after May 1.

The counselor has checked the Common Application, and the *I Gotta Feeling* supplement asked students to report any school discipline. Furthermore, the counselor is aware that the student agreed to the [Common Application affirmations](#) which includes, "I agree to notify the institutions to which I am applying immediately should there be any change to the information requested in this application."

Aside from informing the student to update the university, what else can the counselor do? What issues should the university consider? Does the timing of the incident influence the end results on either the secondary or post-secondary side of the desk? Does GEPCA provide any guidance to either the school counselor or the admission officers?

Possible Approach:

Typically, Ethical Navigations focus on one perspective. This month, we thought we would explore the situation from both the secondary and post-secondary lenses.

School Counselor Lens

NACAC's guide to Ethical Practices in College Admissions is built on seven guiding principles. Four of those principles—Professionalism, Collegiality, Collaboration and Trust—may influence how a counselor looks to move forward.

In addition, Article 1 A. 1 o) vi) states, “*Secondary schools should provide accurate, legible, and comprehensive transcripts and other school documents for all candidates for admission or scholarships. Secondary schools should: describe on their school’s transcript or school profile policies for reporting disciplinary infractions.*” Thus, the school counselor would want to be aware of and follow their school’s stated policy.

While the counselor might also discuss personal growth and responsibility in context of having more freedom in college, here are some possible pathways the counselor might consider given varying school policies:

- **School does not report discipline:** The counselor would want to advise the student to follow up with the college. The counselor should not contact the college directly because of school policy. To better understand the landscape, the counselor might choose to reach out to some admission officers at similar colleges to ask how they might look at a hypothetical incident similar to this situation. While every college might have their own individual approach, this insight might help the counselor provide perspective to the student.
- **School provides discipline records if asked:** In addition to the above, the counselor might want to confer with school administration about what they can or cannot say if asked.
- **School reports discipline:** While the student will be making a discipline statement, the counselor might choose to contact admissions directly to seek advice beforehand. By asking the college for general insight into how to proceed and what might happen, a counselor might be able to provide advice to the student. The counselor might want to work with their school administration to determine a timeline to follow which allows the student an opportunity to self-report their discipline and allows the counselor to follow school policy.

One of the stressful issues that a counselor might consider during this time period is whether *I Gotta Feeling* might rescind admissions. Discipline events which occurred earlier in a student’s high school career would have been reported on the application and might impact admission decisions differently at different colleges; the student would have a range of application decisions which allowed choices. Now, however, the student has deposited at one college. Thus, depending on the college’s decision, the counselor may need to be prepared to help a student consider new options.

While it may be stressful, the counselor will need to wait and be prepared to support the student. Luckily, in the worst-case scenario, there are resources, like the [College Openings Update - National Association for College Admission Counseling \(NACAC\)](#) if new opportunities need to be discussed.

College Admissions Lens

The guide also states in Article I. *The Ethical Core of College Admission A. Truthfulness and Transparency: Guiding Principles and Rationale Members should provide comprehensive, truthful, and factual information that will allow all parties to make informed decisions.*

In some ways, the university has hopefully already been truthful and transparent. For instance, because *I Gotta Feeling* University uses the Common App and has indicated in a supplement that they require students to notify them of any changes to school discipline, the student should promptly prepare a statement to send to the University. Furthermore, most college admission offers are not final, and this is discussed in the admission offer, which also includes *conditions* that the student must meet to enroll. Meeting certain behavioral and conduct requirements may be one of those conditions. Should the student choose to ignore the policy, they run the risk of the University finding out about transgression from a 3rd party. In these situations, repercussions can be more severe.

From a university perspective, admission officers at *I Gotta Feeling* University would want the student to be honest and factual. Specifically, they would like to know *what, where and when* the incident occurred, and what the outcome was. For example, “suspension until graduation.” If these are not covered, the university may reach out to the student for more details and may also reach out to the school counselor depending on the school policy.

Once the college receives the discipline notification, the specific process could include:

- Most colleges will have a process—whether it is a committee or a dedicated Admission professional-- who reviews discipline issues for that institution. Some colleges will list the infractions that they want to be made aware of; others keep it more open ended.
- In addition, whether the student’s status is applicant vs. enrolled may impact the process. For example, campus offices involved in reviewing infractions might change. Through acceptance, decisions might be focused in the admissions office; however, after enrollment, the Dean of Students' office, or a University Honor Council, might be included.
- What happens next will vary from college to college. While it is unusual for a college to rescind an offer of admission, it does happen, and many colleges have “non-negotiable offenses” that warrant it. These offenses might vary by college.
- In addition, if the discipline committee does not rescind admission, it is very possible that the student might need to meet with the Dean of Students to discuss a plan moving forward. For many colleges, the expectation is that an admitted student is bound by institutional values once the offer of admission is made.

While the final resolution will depend on the student’s and college’s decisions, the counselor and admission office should remember that one of GEPCA’s core values is Education “*about the transition to and within postsecondary education.*” Although this process will be stressful for all involved, hopefully the counselor can provide *Clarity* through informed advice, the student can avoid a *Cruel Summer* by writing the letter of explanation, and the admission office will have a *Celebration* that they do not have to rescind an offer to an enrolled student.

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.