November 2024 Ethical Navigation: AI Generated Essay

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 he did not use artificial intelligence for any part.

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:
Having made it through the onslaught of November 1, Tom from the Independent Educational Consultant Agency Cranberry Associates is feeling thankful that the workload is evening out. Instead of panicked late-night e-mails about impending Early Decision and Early Action deadlines demanding immediate answers, Tom now finds the workload calming down as students are taking a break before regular decision.

Feeling slightly refreshed thanks to the hour gained from falling back with Daylight Saving Time, Tom opens his e-mail to find a supplemental essay draft from a student with whom he has been working. He immediately feels elated as this student had barely met EA/ED deadlines at the last minute. Now, the student seems to be working ahead. Then, he opens the document.

Having assisted the student before, Tom sees several inconsistencies in the student's attempt to answer the prompt, "Why Fall Foliage University (500 words)?" While the student's discussion of the pros and cons of rice vs. stuffing provides an interesting metaphor, some of the issues Tom notices include:

- lack of specific context about Fall Foliage and some vague descriptions
- less grammar and spelling mistakes than expected
- a 5-paragraph approach with introduction, three supporting paragraphs, and conclusion in exactly 500 words
- some long, complicated sentences
- common word use- like delve, augment, and optimize (which today's teenagers tend not to use)
- logical conclusion statements- made with words like hence, arguably, and moreover (which do not make sense)

Based on a quick reading, and some internet searches exploring common mistakes in AI writing, Tom is concerned that the student has used a chatbot to help produce this first draft. What can Tom do? Does NACAC's GEPCA provide any advice?

Possible approach:
While NACAC does not provide specific advice about artificial intelligence in GEPCA, the guide does provide principles and core values which can help Tom. First, the guide is written to support professionals, not students. Thus, any direction is suggested towards Tom but could influence the advice he provides the student. For example, in the preamble, GEPCA notes, "Our work is guided by principles of honesty, integrity, transparency, equity, and respect for students and fellow

professionals. These values guide us in our service to students and families, our institutions, society and each other."

Furthermore, three of the core values might influence Tom's thoughts:

- Education: We believe in and are committed to educating students, their families, the public, fellow education professionals, and ourselves about the transition to and within postsecondary education.
- Professionalism: We believe that ethical behavior is the foundation of the counseling, admission, and enrollment management profession. We are responsible for the integrity of our actions and, insofar as we can affect them, the actions of our member institutions, organizations, and individuals.
- Trust: We believe our profession is based upon trust, and honesty with one another and with students.

Thus, using these principles and values, Tom could inquire whether the student used artificial intelligence to help on the essay. While doing so, Tom could point out the importance of students providing their own work. In addition, assuming the student is using the Common Application, Tom could reference the first affirmation a student needs to agree to, which states, *"I certify that all information submitted in the admission process — including this application and any other supporting materials — is my own work, factually true, and honestly presented, and that these documents will become the property of the institution to which I am applying and will not be returned to me. I understand that I may be subject to a range of possible disciplinary actions, including admission revocation, expulsion, or revocation of course credit, grades, and degree should the information I have certified be false."*

If you are interested in learning more about AI and college admissions, please see the article, "Artificial Intelligence Comes to College Admission" in the Summer 2023 edition of *[The Journal of College Admissions](). **Also, PCACAC's Leadership Education Webinar Certificate series is discussing ethics this year. A recording of the first webinar, hosted on October 31, explored Artificial Intelligence and can be found at* https://www.pcacac.org/webinars

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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.