

November 2025 Ethical Navigation: Thankfulness

[The Potomac and Chesapeake Association for College Admission Counseling \(PCACAC\) Admission Practices Committee](#) is excited to present *Ethical Navigations (EN)*, an educational effort to proactively explore issues that might face professionals involved in the college admissions process. This month's EN was submitted by the PCACAC Admissions Practices Committee as a group effort.

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, the committee wanted to take a different approach. As it is the season to be Thankful, we wanted to take a moment to acknowledge actions we have encountered that made us appreciate colleague's ethical actions. Thus, committee members were asked to describe a real situation where they appreciated a professional or institution acting in an ethical way similar to what is encouraged in GEPCA. Committee members were specifically asked to refrain from providing specific names, but we will mention the part of the Guide which applies.

Thank you, members, for your efforts to provide ethically based college advice!

Thankful Scenario 1:

I am thankful to my school counseling colleagues in the public schools in my district. Every year, even with a 250 to one student-to-counselor ratio, they put together exceptional college search and outreach events for their students in the high schools. It is time consuming and sometimes underappreciated by the community, but they keep trying and motivating. The effort is seen and appreciated!

This hard work represents all the core values outlined in GEPCA: Education, Access and Equity, Professionalism, Collegiality, Collaboration, Trust and Social Responsibility. In addition, these efforts address Article 1. The Ethical Core of College Admission Section B. Professional Conduct: Guiding Principle and Rationale 1. To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should: a) Provide guidance, information, and exposure to help students determine their best academic, personal, and financial college match."

Thankful Scenario 2:

I am thankful to my college admissions colleagues who are willing to step up to be a guest speaker to talk about the Admissions Process at our College Guidance 11th Grade family event. And especially thankful that when plans changed and they were no longer able to make it, they arranged for one of their team members to take their place.

While this scenario pulls from several of GEPCA's Core Values including Education, Collegiality, and Professionalism, the value of Collaboration is highlighted. "Collaboration: We believe the effectiveness of our profession- college counseling, admission, and enrollment management- is enhanced when we work together to advocate for students and their best interests."

Thankful Scenario 3:

As a college admission professional, I often review applications from a wide range of schools, each with its own grading scale and rigor. I was especially appreciative of a high school counselor who included a grade distribution chart in their school profile. This simple addition provided valuable context, helping us understand a student's academic performance within their own environment

rather than in isolation. It demonstrated a commitment to transparency and equity in the review process—ensuring that each student is represented accurately and fairly.

GEPCA Article 1. The Ethical Core of College Admissions A reads: “Truthfulness and Transparency: Guiding Principles and Rationale. Members should provide comprehensive, truthful, and factual information that will allow all parties to make informed decisions.”

Thankful Scenario 4:

Discovering that a senior, admitted through an Early Decision I plan, had a remarkable grade drop in multiple core classes in their final semester is a counselor’s worst fear. Compounded by the fact that the admitting institution met the full financial need of the student, the counselor knows that both the admission and aid offer may be revoked by the college upon receipt of the final transcript. But what happens when you learn about the student’s challenging life experience in the months between acceptance and the end of high school? I will always be grateful for the college admissions team who took the time to listen and learn about my student’s struggles before making a life-altering decision. They respected the extraordinary hardships the student faced and maintained confidentiality through the process. As their college counselor, I am also grateful to the student for being transparent about their situation and addressing it quickly and honestly.

GEPCA Article I. The Ethical Core of College Admissions C. I a) states, “Confidentiality: The college admissions and counseling community depends on trust. An important component in building this trust is maintaining confidentiality. Members should: Send and receive information about candidates in confidence and protect the confidentiality of all information that is shared.”

Thankful Scenario 5:

As a college counselor, I often advise students about whether to apply test optional or not and I like to use real data to help my suggestion. Unfortunately, finding relevant information can be difficult. While the common data set describes the percent of enrolling students from two years ago who applied with testing, that information does not present the full picture and might be outdated as school policies change. Thus, I was pleased to see a college present three sets of numbers- the percent of applicants applying, percent admitted and percent enrolling who provided testing for the most recent class- on their college profile, which is easy to find on their website. Thank you to the college for transparency!

GEPCA Article 1. The Ethical Core of College Admissions A reads, “Truthfulness and Transparency: Guiding Principles and Rationale. Members should provide comprehensive, truthful, and factual information that will allow all parties to make informed decisions.”

Thankful Scenario 6:

I love it when admissions reps are honest about what their school is and what their school isn't. For example, a rep from large, flagship college saying that they offer a "big school atmosphere" and that the student needs to be prepared and independent enough to manage a freshman writing class of 400 students in a lecture hall. Or, when a small college school says, "We can't offer you football games on Saturday afternoons but we can offer you the opportunity to cheer on your friends who are playing in a Tuesday afternoon soccer game that is right in front of your dorm.”

While this situation is similar to Scenario 1 in reflecting Article 1, B. I a, the college officers described also respected the concluding statement of 1. B. I, which states, “To maintain a culture of collaboration and collegiality, members should not disseminate inaccurate, misleading, or disparaging information about other secondary schools, colleges, organizations, or individual professionals.”

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.