

October 2023 Ethical Navigation: Advising Student Recruited at Struggling College

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 navigation is submitted by Jake Talmage, College Counseling Director at St. Paul's School for Boys.

This month's scenario: Elli, an independent educational counselor, has been working with a senior, Key H.S. Player, for the past two years as the student and the family try to navigate college admissions and athletic recruiting. The process has been arduous as Key has not received much coach interest. As senior year has started, Key excitedly calls Elli to report that the coach from Tenuous College (TC), a small local institution, has offered a spot on their NCAA Division 3 team.

While Elli is excited for Key, the counselor is also worried. TC seems to have been struggling the last few years including well publicized budget cuts, dropping enrollment, and other negative news. Having seen the [Higher Ed Dive site tracking college closers/mergers](#), Elli is very aware that many colleges throughout the country have closed or merged in the past 7 years and wants to make sure Key is not just pursuing a possible team. How might Elli advise Key about their concerns?

Possible approaches: As covered in the September Ethical Navigation, NACAC's [Guide to Ethical Practice in College Admission](#) (Article I, Section B. Professional Conduct: Guiding Principles and Rationale), 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." Thus, to try to follow the best practices suggested in the ethical guide, Elli would not want to say anything negative about Tenuous College. Yet, Elli should also, "Provide guidance, information, and exposure to help students determine their best academic, personal, and financial college match" (NACAC Ethical Guide, Article 1, Section B.1.a).

So how can Elli follow these guidelines? One approach would be for Elli to help Key and their family research some topics. For example, here are some possible approaches:

- Use formal tools like the Common Data Set (available on many college websites) to look up enrollment changes over the past decade.
- Find published articles naming the institution by doing targeted internet searches on topics like, "Moody's credit rating Tenuous College."
- Encourage Key to visit the campus to take a formal tour and talk to students, professors and staff beyond the coach.
- Use questions to build upon relationships in the profession by reaching across the desk to an admissions director or other contact to ask how Tenuous College is moving forward in light of recent cuts.

In researching this information and suggesting Key consider all the information, Elli can have important conversations with Key and the family about the potential fit at Tenuous College. In the end, maybe Key will choose to attend TC for the team opportunity, or maybe not. The important thing is for the counselor to educate the student and family about the transition to postsecondary education, one of seven Core Values in NACAC's guide.

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.