

Sample Ethical Dilemmas

International ACAC Admissions Practices Committee

Dilemma 1: A British student is admitted Early Decision at your university and has accepted the offer. After IB results are released in July, the student cancels their enrollment, and you learn from the counselor that they have elected to attend a university in the UK because they received the appropriate IB results and the cost of attendance will be significantly less than your university. The counselor was likely aware that the student elected to not withdraw their UCAS application after depositing at your school.

- Response/location in Guide: Section III, part A (page 12):
 - Early Decision (ED): Students commit to a first-choice college at the time of application and, if admitted, agree to enroll and withdraw their other college applications. Colleges may offer ED I or II with different deadlines. Students may be required to accept a college's offer of admission and submit a deposit prior to May 1.
 - Of course, the school cannot force a student to enroll, but a phone call to the high school counselor would be warranted in this case. It is possible that the counselor did not know that the student kept their UCAS application active and is as surprised as you, but it would be wise to ensure they are aware that this behavior goes against the Guide to Ethical Practice and to do their best to ensure students admitted via Early Decision withdraw all applications, including to international universities, if they are admitted.
 - The committee does not recommend that universities allow one-off cases like this to impact future decisions from the high schools.
 - To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should:
 - Provide guidance and information to help students determine their best academic, personal, and financial college match.
 - Educate students and families of their ethical responsibilities in the admission process, including counseling students that it is unethical to apply Early Decision I, be admitted, and not withdraw all other applications after submitting a deposit.

Dilemma 2: You learn that a student admitted to your school Early Decision I (who deposited) kept their Early Decision II application active and was also admitted to that school.

- Response/location in Guide: Section III, part A (page 12):

- Early Decision (ED): Students commit to a first-choice college at the time of application and, if admitted, agree to enroll and withdraw their other college applications. Colleges may offer ED I or II with different deadlines. Students may be required to accept a college's offer of admission and submit a deposit prior to May 1.
- In a case like this where the Early Decision I and II schools learn of the indiscretion, they may act ethically by revoking a student's admission if they learn this was done in direct violation of the Guide to Ethical Practice.
- To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should:
 - Provide guidance and information to help students determine their best academic, personal, and financial college match.
 - Educate students and families of their ethical responsibilities in the admission process, including counseling students that it is unethical to have more than one pending Early Decision application.

Dilemma 3: You learn that one of your students, who has been interviewed by an alumni interviewer at SATU (Southern Alaska Technical University), has been asked why they elected to not send SAT scores, even though the university is test optional. The student is understandably uncomfortable but shares that they were not pleased with their final score and found that it would not showcase their academic talents. They are now distraught and feel as though this will negatively impact their decision.

- Response/location in Guide: Section I, part A (page 3):
 - Members should ensure that alumni/ae representatives and interviewers, third party agents, vendors and other representatives working on their behalf follow the ethical best practices of the profession. This involves proper training and ensuring that all outside professionals are standardized and understand the expectations of the role.
 - The committee recommends that the counselor reaches out to their territory representative to share information on the student's experience. Hopefully the school will relay the feedback to the interviewer and reiterate the school's testing policy and how their question and behavior was inappropriate.

Dilemma 4: You learn that one of your counselees has used an unscrupulous agent who, in the past, has encouraged other students to submit essays they did not write or embellish their activities section. You do not have proof that this specific student has cheated on their application, but have significant concerns.

- Response/location in Guide: Section I, part B: To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should: Educate students and families of their ethical responsibilities in the admission process, including counseling students that it is unethical to submit false, plagiarized, or fraudulent statements on applications or other documents.
- The committee recommends that you speak with the student to reiterate the student's ethical responsibilities, and share any relevant fraud-related statements on websites of schools that the student applied to. Even without firm evidence, it is still recommended that you reach out to the schools the student applied to and share your concerns - they will be able to move forward how they best see fit.

Dilemma 5: You receive an email on August 1 from a student who has already submitted their Common Application to X University. X University is asking for their application to be completed by August 15th for priority admission and scholarship consideration.

- Response/location in Guide: Section II Part A (page 7):
 - Application Deadline: October 15 should be the earliest application deadline colleges set for first-year candidates applying for fall admission.
 - The committee recommends you reach out to the school to reiterate the Guide to Ethical Practice states that October 15 should be the earliest application deadline. Hopefully they will change their practice, but in the meantime, if you are able to provide the necessary documents by the date they have recommended, it would be in your student's best interest to do so.

Dilemma 6: One of your students was admitted to a US university after submitting predicted A-Levels. Their acceptance is later revoked for not receiving final exam results that matched their predictions. The school did not give a specific requirement for the final A-Levels and you feel that this practice is unfair.

- Response/location in Guide: The guide does not have specifications for how to handle predictions of international exams within US universities. However, in this case, the committee recommends you reach out to the university for more information so you can better prepare future applicants to the school and see if there is any flexibility with the applicant this year.

Dilemma 7: You receive an email from an anonymous tipster complaining that their peer has cheated on the SAT and TOEFL. This is becoming a pattern of behavior from a specific school in your territory.

- Response/location in Guide: Section I, part B: To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should: Educate students and families of their ethical responsibilities in the admission process, including

counseling students that it is unethical to submit false, plagiarized, or fraudulent statements on applications or other documents.

- The committee recommends that the impacted university reach out to the high school directly to learn more about the allegations and share their concerns. Universities should remind counselors of the Guide to Ethical Practice so they can continue to reiterate the importance of application authenticity with their students.
- Universities are welcome to start their own investigations with ETS, College Board, ACT, etc and if they decide to revoke admission or withdraw an application, allow the student the opportunity to appeal and explain their situation.

Questions from counselors

1. A student has not heard by the enrollment deadline if they have a scholarship. In this situation, is it ethical to hold more than one offer within the same system outside the US; multiple systems including one US?
 - a. Section II A: “students should not be required to submit an enrollment confirmation until the institution has notified them of all offers of financial aid and scholarships” ; Section I B Professional Conduct : “it is unethical to maintain an active enrollment deposit or the equivalent at more than one US college.

2. Is a counselor ethically obligated to inform a university of a student’s disciplinary record if that university doesn’t ask for that information in the application and the school disciplinary policy does not require disclosing? Are disciplinary suspensions framed as mental health cases ethical; are they expulsions in all but name?
 - a. Per Section I A: “Members should share information about students that is relevant to the college admissions process as well as accurate, up to date, and free from misinformation of fact or material omission.”

3. A student is admitted ED but stops attending classes due to mental health condition, with plans to sit final exams and enroll at the university. Is a counselor obligated to inform this university about the situation?
 - a. Per Section I A: “Members should share information about students that is relevant to the college admissions process as well as accurate, up to date, and free from misinformation of fact or material omission.”

4. A student claims they started their own NGO, or created a company or engaged in a research project but cannot really produce the proof that they have done these activities.
 - a. Per Section 1 B: To provide college admission counseling in the best interest of students, members should educate students and families of their ethical responsibilities in the admission process, including counseling students that it is

unethical to submit false, plagiarized, or fraudulent statements on applications or other documents.

5. To what extent can students' individual college application status/admission, enrolment etc. be shared within a school's administration (including Head of School) without direct student permission of the student?
6.
 - Section 1 C: Members should: send and receive information about candidates in confidence and protect the confidentiality of all information that is shared, adhere to their institution's policies for confidentiality, not divulge an individual student's college application status, admission, enrollment, or financial aid and scholarship offers without express permission from the student.