



National Association for  
College Admission Counseling

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# Statement of Principles of Good Practice

*Approved by the 2006 Assembly*

*Revisions effective for the enrollment cycle of 2008/2009 academic year.*

## **Introduction**

Ethical college admission is the cornerstone of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). Since its founding in 1937, when a select number of college and university professionals and high-school counselors came together to create a Code of Ethics within the admission-counseling profession, NACAC has striven to ensure principled conduct among professionals in the recruitment of students and the transition to postsecondary education.

This code of conduct is known today as the Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP).

Historically, NACAC added principles to the SPGP cumulatively, as ethical issues arose each year. In more recent years, however, the application process has become increasingly influenced by marketplace forces that raise new and complex ethical questions. In this rapidly-changing admission landscape, it is imperative for NACAC to maintain a document that includes practices and policies reflecting these new concerns for the ethical treatment of students in the admission process. As the recognized leader in college admission counseling, NACAC willingly carries the responsibility of being the only association that protects students' rights in the transition to postsecondary education process, through monitoring and enforcing ethical standards and practices.

Member schools, colleges and universities, as well as other institutions, organizations and individuals dedicated to the pursuit of higher education, believe in the dignity, worth and potential of each and every student. To enable all students to make the dream of higher education a reality, these institutions and individuals develop and provide programs and services in postsecondary counseling, admission and financial aid. They strive to eliminate bias within the education system based on ethnicity, creed, gender, sexual orientation, age, political affiliation, national origin, and disability. They understand and value the importance of college counseling and view it as a fundamental aspect of their job as educators.

They support, therefore, the following Statement of Principles of Good Practice of the National Association for College Admission Counseling.

## Statement of Principles of Good Practice Introduction

### Core Values

Core Values represent statements of the association's vision and beliefs and are the purview of the Board of Directors.

#### **Professionalism**

We believe our work in counseling, admission and enrollment management is professional only to the extent that we subscribe to and practice ethical behavior, as stated in our Member Conventions. We are responsible for the integrity of our actions and, insofar as we can affect them, the actions of our member institutions and organizations.

#### **Collaboration**

We believe the effectiveness of our profession, college counseling, admission and enrollment management is enhanced when we work together to promote and protect students and their best interests.

#### **Trust**

We believe our profession, college counseling, admission and enrollment management is based upon trust, mutual respect and honesty, with one another and with students.

#### **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.

#### **Fairness and Equity**

We believe our members have a responsibility to treat one another and students in a fundamentally fair and equitable manner.

#### **Social Responsibility**

We believe we have a duty to serve students responsibly, by safeguarding their rights and their access to and within postsecondary education.

### Member Conventions

Member conventions represent a set of understandings or agreements to frame our code of ethics. These statements are the purview of the Board of Directors.

All members of NACAC agree to abide by the following:

1. Members will make protecting the best interests of all students a primary concern in the admission process.
2. Members will evaluate students on the basis of their individual qualifications and strive for inclusion of all members of society in the admission process.
3. Members will provide accurate admission and financial aid information to students, empowering all participants in the process to act responsibly.
4. Members will honor students' decisions regarding where they apply and choose to enroll.
5. Members will be ethical and respectful in their counseling, recruiting and enrollment practices.
6. Members will strive to provide equal access for qualified students through education about financial aid processes and institutional financial aid policies.
7. Members will abide by local, state and federal laws regarding the treatment of students and confidential information.
8. Members will support a common set of admission-related definitions and deadlines.
9. Members will support and enforce the Statement of Principles of Good Practice.

# Statement of Principles of Good Practice

## *Mandatory Practices*

(\* Refers the reader to *Interpretations of Mandatory Practices*, pages 6 – 11, for an expanded clarification)

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### **I. All Members—Mandatory Practices**

#### **A. Promotion and Recruitment**

##### **Members agree that they will:**

- \* 1. accurately represent and promote their schools, institutions, organizations, and services;
- 2. not use disparaging comparisons of secondary or postsecondary institutions;
- \* 3. not offer or accept any reward or remuneration from a secondary school, college, university, agency, or organization for placement or recruitment of students;
- \* 4. be responsible for compliance with applicable laws and regulations with respect to the students' rights to privacy.

#### **B. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

##### **Members agree that they will:**

- 1. not publicly announce the amount of need-based aid awarded to any student without his/her permission;
- 2. not guarantee admission or specific college placement or make guarantees of any financial aid or scholarship awards prior to an application being submitted, except when pre-existing criteria are stated in official publications;
- \* 3. not make unethical or unprofessional requests of other admission counseling professionals;
- \* 4. send and receive information about candidates in confidence;
- 5. consider transcripts official only when transmitted in a confidential manner, from the secondary or postsecondary institution(s) attended by the applicant;
- \* 6. not use minimum test scores as the sole criterion for admission, advising or for the awarding of financial aid;
- 7. be responsible for ensuring the accurate representation and promotion of their institutions in recruitment materials, presentations, and scholarship materials;
- 8. provide, in a timely manner, accurate, legible and complete transcripts for transfer students for admission or scholarships;
- \* 9. counsel students to abide by the application requirements and restrictions when they file;
- 10. permit pending Early Action, Restrictive Early Action and Early Decision candidates to initiate any Regular or Rolling Decision applications.

### **II. Postsecondary Members—Mandatory Practices**

#### **A. Promotion and Recruitment**

##### **Postsecondary members agree that they will:**

- \* 1. state clearly the requirements for the first-year and transfer admission and enrollment processes, including secondary school preparation, standardized testing, financial aid, housing and notification deadlines, and refund procedures;

## Statement of Principles of Good Practice *Mandatory Practices*

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2. not knowingly recruit students who are enrolled, registered, have initiated deferred admission, or have declared their intent, or submitted contractual deposits to other institutions unless the students initiate inquiries themselves or unless cooperation is sought from institutions that provide transfer programs.

### **B. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

#### **Postsecondary members agree that they will:**

1. accept full responsibility for admission and financial aid decisions and for proper notification of those decisions to candidates;
2. not require candidates or the secondary schools to indicate the order of the candidates' college or university preferences, except under Early Decision plans;
- \* 3. permit first-year candidates for fall admission to choose, without penalty, among offers of admission and financial aid until May 1. (Candidates admitted under an Early Decision program are a recognized exception to this provision);
- \* 4. not offer exclusive incentives that provide opportunities for students applying or admitted Early Decision that are not available to students admitted under other admission options;
5. work with their institutions' senior administrative officers to ensure that financial aid and scholarship offers and housing options are not used to manipulate commitments prior to May 1;
- \* 6. establish wait list procedures that ensure that no student on any wait list is asked for a deposit in order to remain on the wait list or for a commitment to enroll prior to receiving an official written offer of admission;
- \* 7. state the specific relationship among admission and financial aid practices and policies;
8. notify accepted aid applicants of financial aid decisions before the enrollment confirmation deadline, assuming all requested application forms are received on time;
9. clearly state policies on renewal of financial aid that will typically include a review of students' current financial circumstances;
- \* 10. not knowingly offer financial aid packages to students who are committed to attend other institutions, unless the students initiate such inquiries. Athletic scholarships, which adhere to nationally-established signing periods, are a recognized exception to this provision;
- \* 11. initially report on all first-year admitted or enrolled students, including special subgroups in the reporting of test scores. If data on subgroup populations are also provided, clear explanations of who is included in the subgroup population will be made;
- \* 12. not establish any application deadlines for first-year candidates for fall admission prior to October 15 and will give equal consideration to all applications received by that date;
- \* 13. not notify first-year candidates for fall admission prior to September 15 of the senior year.

## Statement of Principles of Good Practice *Mandatory Practices*

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### **III. Counseling Members—Mandatory Practices**

#### **A. Promotion and Recruitment**

**Counseling members agree that they will:**

- \* 1. establish a policy for the release of students' names and other confidential information consistent with applicable laws and regulations.

#### **B. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

**Counseling members agree that they will:**

1. provide colleges and universities with a description of the school's marking system that, if available, will provide some indication of grade distribution that may include the rank in class and/or grade point average;
2. provide, as permissible by law, accurate descriptions of the candidates' personal qualities that are relevant to the admission process;
3. sign only one pending Early Decision or restricted Early Action agreement, when applicable, for any student;
4. follow, when applicable, the process used by the candidates' high schools for filing college applications;
5. not reveal, unless authorized, candidates' college or university preferences;
6. work with school officials and other relevant individuals to keep test results confidential as governed by law and local regulations;
7. report on all students within a distinct class (e.g., freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior) and subgroups, including non-native speakers, in the reporting of standardized test scores.

# Statement of Principles of Good Practice

## *Interpretations of Mandatory Practices*

*The following statements correspond with the same statement number in the Mandatory Practices section.*

### **I. All Members—Interpretations and Monitoring**

#### **A. Promotion and Recruitment**

**All members agree that they will:**

1. Accurately represent and promote their schools, institutions or services by:
  - a. providing precise information about their academic majors and degree programs. Such information shall include a factual and accurate description of majors, minors, concentrations, and/or interdisciplinary offerings that apply toward the completion of the undergraduate degree;
  - b. describing in detail any special programs, including overseas study, credit by examination or advanced placement.
  
3. Not offer or accept any reward or remuneration from a college, university, agency, or organization for placement or recruitment of students. Members:
  - a. will be compensated in the form of a fixed salary, rather than commissions or bonuses based on the number of students recruited;
  - b. will not contract with secondary school personnel for remunerations for referred students.
  
4. Be responsible for compliance with applicable laws and regulations with respect to the students' rights to privacy by:
  - a. establishing policies with respect to secondary school and college and university representatives for the release of students' names. Any policy that authorizes the release of students' names should indicate that the release be made only with the students' permission and be consistent with applicable laws and regulations;
  - b. understanding that permission may take the form of a general consent to any release of the students' names;
  - c. abiding by regulations in the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA).

#### **B. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

**All members agree that they will:**

3. not make unethical or unprofessional requests of other admission counseling professionals. Examples of unprofessional or unethical requests could include:
  - a. making disparaging remarks about the services of school-based counselors or independent counselors when responding to requests from parents or students;
  - b. independent counselors contacting school officials directly, instead of working through their clients for academic or personal information.

## Statement of Principles of Good Practice *Interpretations of Mandatory Practices*

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- c. coercing or demeaning postsecondary institutional representatives if such institutions are unable to participate or attend local school events;
  - d. offering favors in return for counselors' listing of their best or strongest students for recruitment purposes;
  - e. creating an expectation of entitlement with regard to admission to specific institutions.
4. send and receive information about candidates in confidence by honoring all applicable laws and regulations with respect to the confidential nature of such data. Examples include:
  - a. admission officers not revealing the admission or denial status of applicants when using Web site or group email announcements;
  - b. secondary school personnel should not post lists of admitted students to specific colleges when doing so reveals applicants who were denied admission.
6. Financial aid is defined as grants, loans, work-study and scholarships. This practice does not apply to scholarship and financial aid programs that fall under state mandates.
9. counsel students to abide by the application requirements and restrictions when they file.

The use of multiple admission plans by colleges and universities often results in confusion among students, parents and college admission counseling professionals. NACAC believes institutions must clearly state policies, and counselors are advised to assist students with their understanding of the various admission decision options. The following outlines agreed-upon definitions and conditions.

**Non-Restrictive Application Plans:** All of these plans allow students to wait until May 1 to confirm enrollment.

- **Regular Decision** is the application process in which a student submits an application to an institution by a specified date and receives a decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time. A student may apply to other institutions without restriction.
- **Rolling Admission** is the application process in which an institution reviews applications as they are completed and renders admission decisions to students throughout the admission cycle. A student may apply to other institutions without restriction.
- **Early Action (EA)** is the application process in which students apply to an

## Statement of Principles of Good Practice *Interpretations of Mandatory Practices*

institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date. Students who are admitted under Early Action are not obligated to accept the institution's offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1. Under non-restrictive Early Action, a student may apply to other colleges.

**Restrictive Application Plans:** These are plans that allow institutions to limit students from applying to other early plans.

- **Early Decision (ED)** is the application process in which students make a commitment to a first-choice institution where, if admitted, they definitely will enroll. While pursuing admission under an Early Decision plan, students may apply to other institutions, but may have only one Early Decision application pending at any time. Should a student who applies for financial aid not be offered an award that makes attendance possible, the student may decline the offer of admission and be released from the Early Decision commitment. The institution must notify the applicant of the decision within a reasonable and clearly stated period of time after the Early Decision deadline. Usually, a nonrefundable deposit must be made well in advance of May 1. The institution will respond to an application for financial aid at or near the time of an offer of admission.

Institutions with Early Decision plans may restrict students from applying to other early plans. Institutions will clearly articulate their specific policies in their Early Decision agreement.

- **Restrictive Early Action (REA)** is the application process in which students make application to an institution of preference and receive a decision well in advance of the institution's regular response date. Institutions with Restrictive Early Action plans place restrictions on student applications to other early plans. Institutions will clearly articulate these restrictions in their Early Action policies and agreements with students. Students who are admitted under Restrictive Early Action are not obligated to accept the institution's offer of admission or to submit a deposit prior to May 1.

## II. Postsecondary Members—Interpretations and Monitoring

### A. Promotion and Recruitment

**All postsecondary members agree that they will:**

1. state clearly the requirements for the first-year and transfer admission and enrollment processes, including secondary school preparation, standardized testing, financial aid, housing and notification deadlines, and refund procedures by:
  - a. being responsible for the accurate representation and promotion of their admission calendar, academic offerings, housing application and deposit deadlines; and campus and community descriptions; written and electronic



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- communications; and presentations for students, parents and counseling personnel;
- b. being responsible for the development of publications, written communications presentations, i.e., college nights, college days and college fairs, used for their institution's promotional and recruitment activity;
- c. stating clearly and precisely the requirements for secondary preparation, admission tests and transfer student admission;
- d. providing students, families and secondary schools with the most comprehensive information about costs of attendance and opportunities for all types of financial aid, and state the specific relationship between and among admission and financial aid practices and policies;
- e. providing accurate information about opportunities/selection for institutional housing, deadline dates for housing deposits, housing deposit refunds, and describing policies for renewal availability of such institutional housing;
- f. speaking forthrightly, accurately and comprehensively in presenting their institutions to counseling personnel, prospective students and their families;
- g. identifying the source and year of study when institutional publications and/or media communications cite published academic programs, academic rigor or reputations, or athletic rankings;
- h. providing accurate and specific descriptions of any special programs or support services available to students with handicapping conditions, physical and/or learning disabilities and/or other special needs;
- i. clearly stating all deadlines for application, notification, housing, and candidates' reply requirements for both admission and financial aid;
- j. clearly publicizing policies relating to placement by tests, awarding of credit and other policies based on test results.

### **B. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

#### **All postsecondary members agree that they will:**

- 3. permit first-year candidates for fall admission to choose, without penalty, among offers of admission and financial aid until May 1. Candidates admitted under an Early Decision program are a recognized exception to this provision.
  - a. It is understood that May 1 will be viewed as the postmark date and/or the receipt date for electronic submissions. Colleges that solicit commitments to offers of admission and/or financial assistance prior to May 1 may do so provided those offers include a clear statement in the original offer that written requests for extensions and admission deposit refunds until May 1 will be granted, and that such requests will not jeopardize a student's status for admission or financial aid;
  - b. When May 1 falls on a Sunday or holiday, May 2 becomes the recognized date.
- 4. not offer exclusive incentives that provide opportunities for students applying or admitted Early Decision that are not available to students admitted under other

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- admission options. Examples of exclusive incentives include special dorms for ED admits; honors programs only for ED admits; full, need-based financial aid packages for ED admits only; special scholarships for ED admits only; or any promise of an advantage in the admission process if student(s) convert from Regular Admission to Early Decision.
6. establish wait list procedures that ensure that no student on any wait list is asked for a deposit in order to remain on the wait list or for a commitment to enroll prior to receiving an official written offer of admission.
    - a. wait list is an admission decision option utilized by institutions to protect against shortfalls in enrollment, in light of fluctuations in yields. By placing a student on the wait list, an institution does not initially offer or deny admission, but extends to the candidate the possibility of admission not later than August 1.
  7. state the specific relationship among admission and financial aid practices and policies. Colleges and universities may apply enrollment strategies to decisions to admit, wait list or deny students on the basis of stated or unstated financial need. Examples include:
    - a. colleges that might prioritize wait lists by students' level of financial need;
    - b. institutions that employ "need aware" admission for the bottom 10 percent of the class.
  10. not knowingly offer financial aid packages to students who are committed to attend other institutions, unless the students initiate such inquiries. Athletic scholarships, which adhere to nationally-established signing periods, are a recognized exception. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has established bylaws, operational manuals and legislative directives guiding Division I, II, and III sports for men and women. Each NCAA division has its own set of rules and bylaws that govern intercollegiate athletics. In addition to divisional regulations, there are playing rules committees that set rules for specific sports. Each sport includes calendars regulating quiet periods, dead periods, evaluation periods, contact periods, and eventually, National Letter of Intent signing dates that occur in November, February and April. All such dates are in advance of May 1, the National Candidates Reply Date for admission. NACAC will continue to work with the NCAA to recognize May 1 as a critical date on the admission calendar. For more information on NCAA deadlines, dates and requirements, visit [www.NCAA.org](http://www.NCAA.org).
  11. initially report on all first-year admitted or enrolled students, including subgroups in the reporting of test scores. If data on subgroup populations are also provided, clear explanations of who is included in the subgroup population will be made.

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- a. Postsecondary members will furnish data describing the currently enrolled freshman class and will describe in published profiles all members of the enrolling freshman class;
  - b. Subgroups within the profile may be presented separately because of their unique character or special circumstances.
12. Colleges and universities may welcome the initiation of applications from first-year students prior to the notification date and earliest application deadlines. The Earliest Application Deadline does not apply to juniors who have completed their requirements for high school graduation and are seeking early admission or joint opportunities to attend high school and community or postsecondary institutions. Admission officers should advise secondary school counselors of their policies to ensure compliance.
13. Colleges and universities may welcome the initiation of applications from first-year students prior to the notification date and earliest deadlines. The Earliest Notification Deadline does not apply to juniors who have completed their requirements for high school graduation and are seeking early admission or joint opportunities to attend high school and community or postsecondary institutions. Admission officers should advise secondary school counselors of their policies to ensure compliance.

### **III. Counseling Members—Interpretations and Monitoring**

#### **A. Promotion and Recruitment**

##### **Counseling members agree that they will:**

1. establish a policy for the release of students' names and other confidential information, consistent with applicable laws and regulations.
  - a. Permission may be a general consent to any release of the students' names;
  - b. Secondary school members should be sensitive to the students' academic, athletic or other abilities, when releasing students' names.

# Statement of Principles of Good Practice

## *Best Practices*

### **I. All Members—Best Practices**

#### **All members should:**

- A. indicate that their institution is a NACAC member and has endorsed the principles contained in the association’s Statement of Principles of Good Practice (SPGP);
- B. inform those involved in counseling students in the postsecondary process about the content of the SPGP;
- C. be sensitive to students applying for admission to postsecondary institutions in other countries that may have different deadlines and timelines than those in the United States.

### **II. Postsecondary Members—Best Practices**

#### **A. Promotion and Recruitment**

##### **All postsecondary members should:**

1. exercise appropriate responsibility for all people whom the institution involves in admission, promotional and recruitment activities (including alumni, coaches, students, faculty, and other institutional representatives);
2. be responsible for assuring that admission consulting or management firms engaged by the institution adhere to the principles of the SPGP;

#### **B. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

##### **All postsecondary members should:**

1. provide in the notification letter of those applicants offered a place on the wait list a history that describes the number of students offered places on the wait lists, the number accepting places, the number offered admission, and the availability of financial aid and housing;
2. make applicants aware, in official communications, of summer or mid-year admission if such programs are available;
3. not apply newly-revised requirements to the disadvantage of a candidate whose secondary school courses were established in accordance with earlier requirements;
4. not discriminate in the admission selection process against applicants based on the particular application form that an applicant uses, provided that the college or university has agreed explicitly, as in COMMON APPLICATION™ membership, or implicitly, as in online or other computer-based technology, to accept the particular version of the application;
5. admit candidates on the basis of academic and personal criteria rather than financial need. This provision does not apply to international students ineligible for federal student assistance;
6. educate staff in understanding the concepts of test measurement, test interpretation and test use so they make informed admission decisions about the test data;

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7. conduct institutional research to inquire into the most effective use of tests for admission decisions;
8. refrain from the public reporting of mean and median admission test scores and, instead, report scores by the middle 50 percent of the scores of all first-year applicants, admitted and/or enrolled students;
9. view financial aid as supplementary to the efforts of students' families when students are not self-supporting;
10. meet the full need of accepted students to the extent possible, within the institutions' capabilities;
11. refrain from asking students where else they have applied;
12. utilize an equitable process of needs analysis methodology in making expected estimates or awards of the amount of financial aid that may be available to students after documentation is provided;
13. notify accepted aid applicants of financial aid decisions as soon as possible before the enrollment notification deadline date, assuming all requested application forms are received on time;
14. include a current and accurate admission calendar in publications and Web sites. If the institution offers special admission options, such as Early Admission, Early Action, Early Decision, wait lists, Restrictive Early Admission or Early Admission, the publication should define these programs and state deadline dates, notification dates, required deposits, refund policies, and the date when the candidates must reply;
15. notify secondary schools, when possible, of admission decisions in a timely and proper manner;
16. report test scores for special subgroups that may include athletes or non-native speakers. Universities with more than one undergraduate division may report first by division and then by special subgroups within divisions. Clear explanations of who is included in the subgroup should be made. Those institutions that do not require tests or for which tests are optional will only report scores if the institution clearly and emphatically states the limits of the scores being reported;
17. clearly publicize policies, such as placement and awarding of credit, that are based on test results;
18. issue a statement of disclosure as to how demonstration of student interest is used in the application process. Demonstration of student interest includes such measures as evaluating students on whether they visited campus, contacted admission representatives before or during a school visit, or the frequency of email or mail contacts initiated by the students.

**III. Counseling Members—Best Practices**

**A. Admission, Financial Aid and Testing Policies and Procedures**

**Counseling members should:**

1. provide a program of counseling that introduces a broad range of postsecondary opportunities to students;
2. encourage students and their families to take the initiative in learning about colleges and universities;
3. provide information about opportunities and requirements for financial aid;
4. provide accurate descriptions of the candidate's personal qualities that are relevant to the admission process;
5. urge students to understand and discharge their responsibilities in the admission process in a timely manner;
6. counsel students and their families to notify and withdraw applications from other institutions when they have accepted an admission offer;
7. encourage students to be the sole authors of their applications and essays and counsel against inappropriate assistance on the parts of others;
8. report any significant change in a candidate's academic status or qualifications, including personal school conduct record between the time of recommendation and graduation, where permitted by applicable law;
9. establish a written policy on disclosure of disciplinary infractions in their communications to colleges;
10. provide a school profile, when applicable, that clearly describes special curricular opportunities (e.g., honors, advanced placement courses, seminars) and a comprehensive listing of all courses with an explanation of unusual abbreviations and any information required for proper understanding;
11. inform students about the tests needed for admission, where students may take them, how to interpret the results, and how test results are used for admission;
12. report, in the case of secondary schools, the middle 50 percent of all students tested by discrete grade level;
13. refrain from encouraging students to apply to particular colleges and universities to enhance the high schools' statistical records regarding the number or amount of scholarship awards received;
14. counsel students not to submit more than one admission deposit, which indicates their intent to enroll in more than one institution;
15. work with school officials and other relevant individuals to keep test results in perspective;
16. counsel students to comply with requests for information in a timely manner;
17. counsel students who have deferred admission that they should follow any conditions imposed by the deferring institution.



*Guiding the way to higher education*

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