

In September of 2024, I had the incredible opportunity to attend the NACAC (National Association for College Admission Counseling) National Conference, thanks to a generous grant from NEACAC and the Make a Difference Fund that allowed me to participate. As a high school counselor, I am deeply appreciative of this support, which made it possible for me to engage with colleagues, attend informative sessions, and gain invaluable insights into the evolving landscape of college admissions.

One of the highlights of the conference was the Vendor Fair, where I was able to explore a vast array of educational resources, tools, and technologies aimed at improving the college admissions process. The fair offered a chance to connect with companies and organizations that provide everything from application management systems to college preparation programs. I was especially intrigued by the emerging trends in AI and how these innovations are being integrated into the admissions process. As a counselor, staying up-to-date with the latest tools and technologies is essential, and the Vendor Fair provided a comprehensive look at the resources available to both students and admissions professionals.

Another unforgettable experience at the conference was the keynote address by Magic Johnson, the legendary basketball player and businessman. His speech was not only inspiring but also deeply personal. Magic spoke candidly about the importance of mentorship and the profound impact that his teachers and mentors had on his life. He reflected on how their guidance, encouragement, and belief in him shaped his journey from a young boy in Michigan to becoming a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist. His message resonated with me as a counselor, emphasizing the importance of building strong relationships with students and supporting their growth, both academically and personally. His story reminded me of the immense value that mentorship holds in the lives of young people, and it reaffirmed my commitment to guiding students as they navigate their educational journeys.

In addition to the keynote, the conference offered a wide range of workshops, many of which focused on the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) in college admissions. As a veteran counselor, I've had the privilege of attending numerous professional development events, but each time I participate in a national conference like this, I am reminded that there is always something new to learn. This year, I was particularly interested in sessions exploring how AI is transforming the way colleges approach admissions, particularly in the areas of essay writing and letter of recommendation writing.

As AI continues to advance, it's becoming increasingly common for students to use software to help refine their writing, enhance their vocabulary, and even generate ideas. While AI can certainly be a valuable tool, the workshops also emphasized the importance of ensuring that the student's authentic voice is not lost in the process. This was a crucial reminder for me as a counselor, as I work to help students maintain their individuality while navigating the college application process.

The workshops also covered the growing use of AI in drafting letters of recommendation. I was particularly interested in discussions about how AI can assist counselors in drafting more

personalized and thoughtful letters, drawing from data points such as students' academic achievements, extracurricular activities, and personal qualities. While AI can certainly streamline the process, it's important to remember that these letters must still reflect a genuine understanding of the student's character and potential. I came away from these sessions with a renewed understanding of how technology can both enhance and challenge the admissions process.

As a veteran counselor, it's easy to fall into the routine of providing the same advice year after year. However, attending national conferences like NACAC always serves as a reminder that there is always room to grow. Each session, keynote, and conversation with colleagues offers fresh perspectives and insights that I can apply directly to my practice. The opportunity to interact with professionals from across the country, share experiences, and learn from their expertise is truly invaluable.

I am grateful for the opportunity to attend the NACAC National Conference in 2024 and for NEACAC grant that made it possible. The experiences, lessons, and connections I gained during the event will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on my work as a counselor. As I return to my school, I am energized and motivated to continue supporting my students and guiding them through the college admissions process with the knowledge and tools I've gained from this enriching experience.

To highlight my new use of and understanding of AI and how it can assist counselors in "working smarter, not harder", I utilized AI to write this reflection. In inputting my original thoughts and ideas and areas that I wanted to concentrate on, this reflection was the result. It is amazing to me to see how a simple tool if given the correct amount of data can generate a summary so reflective of my experience. I am choosing to submit this to showcase one of the major take aways from attending NACAC this year.

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