Some Reflections on SEM Structures and Strategies (Part Two)

This article is the second in a series of pre-conference papers prepared for participants at AACRAO’s Fifteenth Annual Strategic Enrollment Management Conference (SEM XV), held November 13–16, 2005 in Chicago, Illinois.

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Exploring the Heuristic Value of the Four Orientations: Applications to a Particular Enrollment Management Problem

The first of this three-part series of reflections began with the story of a meeting of (fictional) Alpha University officers and trustees discussing enrollment management. In that vignette, the perceptions, preoccupations, and preferences voiced by each participant reflected one of what were subsequently described as four broad orientations to Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM), each framing how SEM is conceived, defined, organized, implemented, and evaluated. These four orientations to enrollment management (EM) are:

- The Student-Focused Orientation
- The Administrative Orientation
- The Academic Orientation
- The Market-Centered Orientation

In this second article, we begin by asking: Is it possible to apply these four broad orientations to a specific enrollment-related challenge? Does this four-fold construct have heuristic utility, whereby each orientation frames our understanding of issues, challenges, opportunities, and strategies that otherwise might not surface? Does each of the alternative orientations challenge assumptions and spark new insights about how to address a particular EM challenge or opportunity? If, as has been suggested, each orientation focuses attention on some areas while diffusing focus on others, can a particular enrollment issue be conceptualized and assessed more comprehensively by deliberately comparing and contrasting how each of these four orientations would address that issue?

Let us revisit the president’s cabinet meeting. This time the problem presented to the leadership of Alpha University involves how to develop an institutional response to improving student persistence and graduation rates— in other words, to address retention.

Many institutions find it difficult to define, refine, and focus their retention strategy, as is often the case with outcomes conceived and described as “campus-wide responsibilities” (as retention so often is). Can a preferred institutional approach to retention strategy be developed by systematically and sequentially viewing retention through each of the four filters or orientations outlined in Part One?

STUDENT-FOCUSED

A student-focused approach to retention is common at American colleges and universities; many of the tactical approaches to improving student retention reflect this orientation. Such an approach often starts with the individual student’s profile—that is, by defining the ‘at-risk’ student, and recognizing that early identification of a dropout-prone student often allows for early intervention. Attrition is seen to be a function of the students’ personal characteristics that put them ‘at-risk.’ These may include their level of academic preparedness, financial status, some demographic attribute, or their career goals. Tinto’s early models of student attrition focus on the congruence of the individual student (background, aspirations, expectations, etc.) with the institutional environment, particularly its academic and social climate. When there is not sufficient fit or integration between the person and the environment, attrition is the outcome. The unique profile of the student thus is the starting point in the equation.

The student-centered orientation to SEM defines retention and attrition in terms of the individual student’s personal experiences, choices, and “fit,” and seeks to improve retention on a student-by-student basis. This is seen in student advocacy programs, personalized advising, and targeted outreach to students demonstrating attrition-prone behaviors (e.g., missing classes, dropping classes, failing courses, defaulting on payment plans, etc.). The retention focus is on the profile of the person.
Another approach to the retention challenge is to repair any core processes that contribute to attrition and to develop processes that encourage student persistence. The focus is not on individual students deemed “at risk” but rather on processes—specifically, creating opportunities for retention intervention through the on-going routine processes of student enrollment. Creation of a one-stop service center is a typical retention intervention reflecting an administrative orientation. It is designed not only to streamline certain processes for all students (and to create efficiencies for the institution), but also to create opportunities for effective retention intervention through the integration of processes and services.

For example, when registration, billing, and financial aid functions are housed at a single location, a student withdrawing for financial reasons from all his courses can be identified immediately and assisted by financial counselors in ways not possible when the registrar and aid functions and/or personnel are not in close physical proximity. The overarching premise of an administrative orientation to retention is that improving the processes that underlie every student’s experience removes barriers that may cause some students to drop out while improving students’ satisfaction.

The academic perspective on EM defines retention as academic progress. Cliff Adelman’s research has called attention to the often-overlooked fact that most retention studies focus on measuring persistence over time rather than progress toward degree. Adelman calls upon EM leaders to recognize that students who persist into a second year but who fail to make satisfactory progress toward a degree have gained little and in fact may have lost a great deal in opportunity costs, aid eligibility, and so on. Nevertheless, such students are counted by most institutions as a retention success, because the traditional retention metric is term-by-term persistence, not progress. If the academic goal is degree completion, then an academic orientation to retention focuses attention primarily on ensuring students’ academic progress. Strategies include broad educational planning that integrates students’ academic, career, and financial plans into a comprehensive, sequential path to graduation. An academic orientation thus supports the development of specific programs and interventions that facilitate all students’ pursuit of a degree.

Supplemental instruction (SI) is another example of a retention-focused tactic for ensuring students’ academic progress; the objective is to improve students’ grades in ‘high-risk’ courses. There is a non-trivial distinction between focusing on ‘high-risk’ courses versus ‘at-risk’ students, as in the student-focused orientation. An academic orientation focused on degree completion also would investigate curricular and course scheduling alternatives that would facilitate students’ optimal progress, to include developing solutions for students proceeding at a pace inadequate for timely degree completion.

Finally, a market-centered approach to retention strategy offers a very different (and two-fold) perspective. First, it orients institutional attention to the inherent predictability of retention and graduation rates as a function of the institution’s market profile and market position. If, as is the case, an institution’s retention and graduation rates can be predicted precisely by factors related to its enrollment and academic and financial profile, then any discussion of retention strategy must be framed within the boundaries of the institution’s market position and profile. Robert Zemsky, for example, captures in a convenient shorthand the dramatic differences between institutions which, in his scheme, range from national, prestigious medallion institutions to local, accessible, convenience institutions. Retention and graduation rates are seen as institutional attributes rather than as an achievement; they are both a function and a reflection of the institution’s academic, financial, and enrollment profile; as such, they are highly predictable.

Every EM leader can recount discussions with board members, presidents, deans, and faculty about how their institution’s retention and graduation rates fail to compare favorably with another institution’s, even as they fail to account for wide-ranging differences in student and institutional profile that, in effect, determine those retention rates. Alexander Astin has pointed out that the key to assessing an institution’s retention success is not its simple rates of persistence and completion, but rather the “value-added” performance in achieving success rates above what would be predicted for that institution given its market profile. Astin’s view reflects a market-centered orientation.

Second, the market-centered perspective provides insight into the brand promise. In both the student-focused and administrative orientations, the focus tends to be on improving retention by increasing each individual student’s satisfaction. A market-centered orientation identifies the gap between the brand promise and the student experience as the key to retention. A market-centered perspective affirms that students enroll with a sense of the institution’s brand promise—that their enrollment is a function of their assessment, however accurate or sophisticated, of how that brand promise meshes with their own goals, values, and aspiration. Understanding, clarifying, differentiating, and ultimately delivering that brand promise together constitute the marketing agenda. Even as Tinto suggests that retention is the outcome of an alignment of student expectations and aspirations with the academic and social environment of an institution, so a market-centered perspective focuses on how the reality of student experience aligns with the institution’s brand. The student/environment “fit” described in Tinto’s theory thus can be understood as realizing the institution’s brand promise.
SUMMARY

Using each of these four orientations to frame an institution’s retention strategy brings alternative issues and insights to the surface, defines the nature of the challenge in distinct ways, and provokes thinking about a range of possible responses and solutions; therein lies their heuristic value. A student-centered perspective may focus on interventions designed to support the individual person who is at risk of attrition. An administrative orientation focuses more on improving and integrating the general processes that often hinder student persistence. An academic orientation focuses on academic progress rather than persistence, developing systemic solutions that support student learning and timely degree completion. Finally, a market-centered orientation starts with the reality that the institution’s profile is predictive of retention and graduation rates; any strategy for improving those rates must begin with an understanding of how they relate to and reflect certain core, elemental attributes of the institution. A market-centered orientation also shifts the retention dialogue to one of ensuring that each student’s experience is consonant with the institution’s brand and so realizes the brand promise.

Expanding the Heuristic Value of the Four Orientations: Further Comparisons and Contrasts

Part One of this series offered a brief description and comparison of each of these four basic orientations to SEM. It was suggested earlier in the text that each orientation may be defined and differentiated further by exploring the distinctive ways in which each addresses and illuminates a particular issue. Retention strategy thus was used to help clarify and contrast the various orientations to SEM.

In the section that follows, four additional elements of any SEM effort are used to compare and contrast the four orientations:

- What are the intended outcomes of an SEM strategy?
- How does SEM view the student?
- What functions should be in the SEM organizational structure?
- What is the SEM research agenda?

WHAT ARE THE INTENDED OUTCOMES OF AN SEM STRATEGY?

One defining characteristic of SEM is that it is inherently goal-oriented. A hallmark of SEM’s evolution is the ever-broadening range of goals and objectives it is expected to achieve and balance. Does each of the four orientations frame the primary outcomes of successful SEM differently? Does each define and delineate outcomes according to its unique emphases and priorities?

Student-focused

Twenty years ago, the primary outcome of a student-focused strategy might have been student satisfaction. Assessed through surveys, that satisfaction ultimately would be reflected in measures such as higher retention rates and greater institutional affinity of alumni. Yet even as the processes encompassed by and integrated within the administrative orientation to SEM have broadened over the years, so the elements of the student experience addressed through a student-focused orientation have broadened. For example, student outcomes now include the “quality of student engagement in learning.” The emergence of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) for assessing the nature of the student experience is evidence of the value educators find in better understanding students’ behaviors and activities as well as the quality and quantity of student experiences. Student engagement (from initial contact through recruitment and admissions, orientation, career and academic planning, extracurricular involvement, and persistence to degree) and student satisfaction are the essential outcomes of a student-focused orientation to SEM.

Administrative

An administrative orientation is the most internally-focused of the four SEM orientations. It is concerned primarily with the processes and functions managed by the institution to effect enrollment goals. Even regarding those processes that deal with external audiences (e.g., student recruitment, marketing communications), an administrative orientation focuses attention on the institution’s management and integration of those processes and on achieving optimal returns on investment in those activities. Consequently, the primary outcomes valued by this orientation are the efficiencies and effectiveness of the university’s enrollment-related processes; primary focus accordingly will be given to return on investment (ROI) measures, performance ratios, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and process metrics.

Academic

For this orientation, the intended outcome of SEM is enriching the academic experiences of faculty and students alike, through shaping the overall student profile, the level of student preparedness, the degree of student progress, and the outcomes of student learning. More broadly, an academic orientation to SEM defines its outcomes in terms of enriching the educational contributions of higher learning to a community, region, industry, profession, or society. Unlike administrative and student-centered approaches, an academic orientation focuses on a broadly defined ‘greater good’ and the outcomes of SEM are framed in terms of very broad academic aspirations. The focus of an academic orientation is not solely on the enrichment of student learning; rather, it extends to include the enrichment of the academic environment and academic programs—in short, the entire academic experience—through enrollment strategies that shape the profile, the process, and the product of the academic programs of an institution or a system.
Market-centered

In this orientation, the overarching purposes of EM strategy are realized in terms of institutional market position. The most externally-focused of the four EM orientations, the outcomes are similarly externally oriented, and include, among other things, market position, market share, market presence, and perceived market value. This orientation affirms that traditional definitions of EM’s goals (e.g., selectivity, access, diversity, quality, net revenue, etc.) are not so much goals in themselves as they are the reflection of the institution’s competitive market position and profile. EM goals and outcomes are linked primarily to elevating and enhancing the institution’s market position and leveraging its brand.

How does EM view the student?

It seems odd to explicitly consider alternative views of the student, given that EM is fundamentally about the enrollment of students. But much of the prevailing critique of contemporary higher education implies that the emergence of EM is one indication of how educators have lost their focus on students. Because each orientation approaches EM from a distinctly different point of view, there is value in considering how their fundamental biases and preferences frame in distinct ways the basic role of the student in the EM strategy.

Student-focused

Embracing students in all of their individuality is the defining feature of the student-focused orientation. The student is not defined merely through her enrollment transactions, nor solely in terms of her academic learning outcomes. Rather, the student is considered holistically, as having a complex, particular, uniquely individual range of personal needs, characteristics, aspirations, qualities, etc. Hence the concern with a wide range of services, all in response to students’ highly individualized needs.

Administrative

Because the primary focus in this orientation is on managing the processes of student enrollment, students are likely to be defined as the customers to be served and supported by its various processes. If EM is viewed, as Maguire suggested in the earliest definition of EM, as managing students’ movement to, through, and out of the institution, then the student is defined via those processes and transitions—for example, as information seekers, campus visitors, admission applicants, placement testers, course registrants, book purchasers, grade recipients, need-based aid recipients, bill recipients, accounts receivable, transcript requestors, loan defaulters, degree audits, etc.

Academic

The academic orientation focuses primarily on the student as a learner—as a student—rather than as a consumer or as a recipient of services. Attention to student services focuses on those that support the learning process. Everything is secondary to academic success, student learning, and enriching the academic experience for all who study and teach at the institution. As a result, the student is the beneficiary of the academic product and learning process.

An alternate perspective suggested by the academic orientation is that the student is not the beneficiary but in fact is himself the product of the educational process. Unlike administrative and student-centered perspectives, the academic orientation shifts attention to educational outcomes provided for the benefit of specific industries and employers, local communities, regions, states, and society at large. Academic institutions create knowledge and provide an educated citizenry and workforce for an increasingly knowledge-based economy. In such a perspective, the educated student is the product of the enrollment management process.

Market-centered

In traditional marketing efforts, students are often defined as consumers, confronting various options as to how to meet their needs for higher education and career advancement, and being the target of a barrage of institutional marketing tactics. But a market-centered approach brings a broader perspective, with the student as a representative of an audience or a market segment that the institution seeks to reach, penetrate, and influence. In that sense, as Zemsky’s typology clearly outlines, the attributes of the collective student body constitute the defining metrics of market position. Measures of the quality, diversity, affluence, characteristics, and success of an institution’s students are the industry shorthand for institutional quality and prestige.

More broadly still, the student is the embodiment of the brand, with the distinct qualities, aspirations, values, and outcomes of students and alumni constituting the institution’s brand manifest. The student’s choice as to where to enroll reflects the perceived values and promise of the brand; the collective profile of the student population further defines the brand and positions it in the market.

What functions should be in the EM organizational structure?

This series of reflection papers was prepared in response to a question about alternative approaches to organizing for SEM. While there is no uniformly adopted organizational model for SEM, the differences that exist between and among structural models are illustrative of distinctive orientations to SEM; conversely, fundamental orientations may lead to preferences for certain organizational structures.

Student-focused

When EM focuses on the student experience, the structures that result seek to build organizations that integrate all the institution does in the care and support of the individual. The range of traditional EM functions that would be part of such an agenda—admissions, financial aid and registrar—would be aligned with a wide array of student services; the goal would
be an integration of the student experience rather than an integration of enrollment processes per se. The functions in a student-centered structure likely would include student orientation, advising, financial planning and counseling, health services, counseling services, career development, campus ministry, residence life, student organizations, and campus activities. This orientation focuses in a highly individualized way on the idiosyncratic needs of students and highly particularized student groups. While an administrative orientation is concerned with organizing the enrollment processes (registration, billing) for all students, a student-centered orientation tends to organize in a way that differentiates services by student characteristics. The structure of the organization may be distinguished by an array of special services developed for international students, minority students, commuter students, adult students, disabled students, athletes, freshmen, transfer students, and so on.

Many institutions have successfully developed an EM structure and strategy that reflects a student-centered orientation. For example, Northeastern University has merged traditional divisions of student affairs and enrollment management into a strategically integrated and student-centered SEM effort.

**Administrative**

In the administrative orientation, SEM seeks to develop structures and strategies that achieve greater integration and intentionality in the processes that directly shape an institution’s enrollment. The overarching purpose is to deliver optimal efficiencies and effectiveness—for the student as well as for the institution. Toward that end, the functional alignments characteristic of an administrative orientation to an EM organization naturally include processes related to recruitment and admissions, financial aid and bursar functions, campus bookstores, course registration, interinstitutional transfer, registrar functions (such as grading, verification, and transcripts), ID centers, one-stop service centers, international student services, classroom management, and course assignment systems. The management focus is on achieving optimal levels of integration—on overcoming traditional administrative “silos” that partition and segregate processes and departments that should be organized as a more seamless whole.

Many institutional examples of EM structures reflect this administrative orientation. For years, Boston College’s innovations in bringing together previously fragmented functions and processes have been heralded as a best practice model of organizing for EM through administrative integration. As noted earlier in this paper, the emergence of one-stop service models exemplifies an administrative orientation to SEM focused on integrating traditional structures and functions in order to realize institutional benefits in efficiency and effectiveness in enrollment processes as well as to improve student service.

**Academic**

Several distinct elements of an EM organizational structure would characterize an academic orientation.

- **Academic Support**: An academic orientation elevates attention to various learning support functions as integral parts of the EM effort. Functions such as tutoring services, writing and math labs, supplemental instruction programs, bridge programs for academically under-prepared students, and honors programs for advanced students all can be part of the EM organization; typically such functions are closely aligned with faculty and academic departments.

- **Academic Transitions**: Ensuring smooth academic and educational transitions from admission to matriculation leads to the inclusion of student orientation programs in the EM agenda; organizationally such programs are typically integrated with admissions. Course placement processes also are included to ensure appropriate matching of students’ academic preparation with the level of challenge of their coursework; testing and assessment functions become important parts of the admissions and orientation process. The EM organization would include functions for managing those course articulations that undergird the student transfer process between colleges and universities. Traditional registrar functions thus expand beyond service delivery and records management to include academic policy development, review, and oversight.

  One core function that emerges as an essential EM strategy when viewed through an academic orientation is advising. Traditionally conceived, academic advising is tied primarily to the process of ensuring that students’ course enrollments meet the institution’s degree requirements as well as the students’ goals, objectives, and needs. SEM framed by an academic orientation broadens this concept of advising to include, among other things, career advising. The emergence of “financial literacy” as an important learning goal and its integration with academic advising introduces the concept of student financial planning that is integral to a broadly-defined approach to educational planning. Aligning advising with EM turns attention to academic program or curriculum planning, using data on student enrollment trends and demand to optimize course offerings and scheduling to meet student needs.

- **Academic Program Development**: At many institutions, developing new academic programs is a faculty-centered process that engages the enrollment management team only tangentially, if at all. The 2003 American Marketing Association Symposium on Marketing in Higher Education featured a workshop on how EM discipline and expertise can be brought to bear on academic program development in order to ensure the program’s optimal success (e.g., sufficient market demand, competitiveness, brand relevance, appropriate pricing, enrollment volume sufficient for financial viability, academic distinctiveness, etc). That workshop highlighted approaches at Tulane and DePaul for ensuring the active, regular, even routinized involvement of EM in the planning, development,
and implementation of new curricula. These processes exemplify an academic orientation to SEM.

Curricular and Co-curricular Integration: The EM agenda can extend to include the deliberate integration of traditional classroom instruction or curricula with so-called co-curricular learning. The development and management of residential learning communities at a growing number of institutions exemplify how an academic orientation to an enrollment management challenge (e.g., high attrition or underutilized housing capacity) can lead to structural and strategic innovations in pursuit of a more holistic learning experience. Experiential learning opportunities (such as traditional internship and co-op programs) and service-learning programs are examples of EM initiatives that broaden the concept of student learning by marrying academic programs and out-of-class experiences.

Market-centered

Virtually all EM efforts have a marketing component (typically geared to student recruitment) that includes publications, direct mail, advertising, and Web development. A market-centered SEM perspective highlights the broader and natural linkages between traditional EM functions and various university activities such as university communications, media and public relations, university-wide advertising, and alumni relations. The types of alignments sought in an organizational structure with a market-centered orientation are designed to ensure a consistency of marketing strategy, marketing message, and brand integration, all in service of how the institution presents itself to all external constituencies.

But the consistency and integration of a brand strategy are not to be realized only through communications. A university “lives its brand” in large part through the types of experiences it ensures its students have. A market-centered EM organization certainly could embrace a wide range of functions typically associated with student affairs, but it would align them in such a way to ensure that the student experience was congruent with the institution’s brand promise and market position.

Organizational structures for market-centered SEM would include functions directly related to pricing and product development. Traditional EM organizations typically shape net revenue and net price to students through extensive and complex financial aid strategies, though they sometimes have little influence over tuition pricing decisions. Likewise, while many EM organizations are responsible for achieving enrollment goals in specific academic programs, they have little influence over how academic programs are designed, differentiated, and delivered. A market-centered SEM effort is integrally
involved in pricing decisions, in the development of new academic programs, and in the assessment and continuous improvement of existing programs.

Of the four orientations to SEM described in this paper, none is more naturally and necessarily aligned with strategic planning and institutional research than the market-centered orientation. The scope of the planning and research agenda is broadest within a market-centered orientation and suggests a structural alignment of EM with institutional planning and research.

Consider DePaul University, which has embraced a market-centered approach to EM. The university’s Division of Enrollment Management begins its statement of purpose as follows: “The mission of the division is to improve the market position and prominence of the university….” Its organizational structure includes university marketing functions such as media relations, university communications, university marketing strategy, and market research.

WHAT IS THE EM RESEARCH AGENDA?
Other hallmarks of EM are the primacy of research in guiding strategy, the importance of data-based decision-making, and the critical role of analysis and evaluation in the planning and implementation of EM efforts. All research is guided by the core assumptions and biases—predispositions, even—of those who pose the questions, frame the hypotheses, and design the analyses. Is it possible that each of these four broad orientations could formulate an EM research agenda reflecting its unique character?

Student-focused
The EM research agenda is focused on individual students: their backgrounds, needs, expectations, abilities, experiences, and satisfaction. Measured outcomes might include developmental measures, career outcomes, student satisfaction, and student engagement. This orientation leads to a research agenda dominated by student-centered methodologies. For example:

- Surveys intended to gather information from individual students, including:
  - Assessments of entire student populations, such as the national CIRP survey of American college freshmen.
  - Surveys using sampling techniques that allow generalized conclusions for an entire student population to be made by surveying a randomly selected subset of individual students.
  - Surveys of targeted populations of students (such as residence hall populations, program participants, adult students, minority students, etc.) designed to compare one group’s responses with other targeted groups or the student population as a whole.

Administrative
The research agenda characteristic of this orientation to SEM seeks to understand the quality, effectiveness, and interrelatedness of various enrollment processes. Examples include:

- Student satisfaction surveys designed to identify opportunities for process improvements in registration, billing, or advising to include, for example, comparative studies of the effectiveness of in-person versus online services, or alternative service delivery models. This could include the emerging area of “usability studies” of students’ use of Internet services and Web-delivered functions.
- Retention studies focused on understanding, developing, and improving enrollment-related processes in order to achieve streamlined, seamless integration.
- Admissions analyses known as predictive modeling and demographic targeting that are designed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of student recruitment activities.
- Financial aid leveraging analysis typically is undertaken in order to optimize university resources and gain the most efficient and effective enrollment impact for the investment in financial aid. The concept of analyzing “tuition discount” is grounded in assumptions about optimizing enrollment outcomes and achieving efficiency in using resources.
- Focus groups are methods for exploring and discovering issues in a format less quantifiable than survey methods. Whereas surveys presume a certain level of understanding of an issue in order for the researcher to frame the questions, focus groups are designed to elicit student experiences, opinions, and perceptions in students’ own words. Focus groups thereby facilitate understanding the student reality in students’ terms; they are a common methodology highly reflective of the student-focused orientation. Similarly, one-on-one student interviews as a research method certainly reflect the preoccupation of this orientation with the needs of the individual.

Ethnographic methodologies dig deep into the student culture, exploring the student reality in more direct ways than other research methods. A Margaret Mead of the student experience, Rebekah Nathan’s (her pseudonym) controversial qualitative research into the student experience (My Freshman Year: What a Professor Learned by Becoming a Student) recently brought this method of inquiry to the attention of a wide audience. Perhaps the best known example is Michael Moffatt’s Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture.

Academic
The EM research agenda may be focused in large part on student learning outcomes. As Pat Hutchins outlined years ago in her provocative paper Behind Outcomes, it is impossible to understand, much less improve, student learning outcomes without first fully exploring and understanding a number of basic, foundational questions related to the factors that contribute to those learning outcomes. The nine questions she outlined as critical for such inquiry are listed below. In a 1999 presentation at the annual American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) Forum, I suggested that these questions constitute an EM research agenda and that they illustrate how EM is tied inextricably to student learning outcomes. In that
sense, Hutchins’s nine questions reflect an academic orientation to EM research.

- What do we know about students who enter our institution?
- How are course-taking patterns related to outcomes?
- How do students experience the institution?
- What is the student’s contribution to learning?
- What do students learn over time in a program of study?
- How do out-of-class experiences contribute to learning?
- What are students able to do with what they know?
- What patterns characterize students’ movement through the institution?
- What judgments can students make about their learning?

An academic orientation also would focus research on identifying predictors of academic success and determining the validity of admissions criteria in ensuring student preparedness to meet an institution’s academic demands. It would include assessing the quality of the teaching/learning process as well as other dimensions of the student experience through use of the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), for example.

EM practiced with an academic orientation seeks to ensure the viability and vitality of academic programs; consequently it focuses its research agenda on trends related to the demand for academic programs. It includes deliberate and ongoing analysis of enrollment patterns by academic discipline. It includes analysis of each program’s student profile as well as the pipeline of students moving to, through, and out of each program. It also assesses trends that shape interest in and outcomes of specific academic programs as well as emerging educational needs in the local region or in particular professions or industries.

**Market-centered**

The primary research agenda in this orientation to SEM is the full range of market research. Examples include:

- **Institutional analysis** focused on the competitive market position of the institution and its academic programs, to include comprehensive monitoring of competitor overlap, competitor mix, and market share.

- **Tuition pricing studies** as a reflection and function of the institution’s competitive position. Because the price point particular students are able and willing to pay for particular programs is a function of market position, financial aid leveraging research is part of an assessment of market realities, not just a means of optimizing institutional resources.

- **Predictive modeling**, described above as exemplifying analyses designed to optimize resource allocations and efficiencies, is also an example of an analytic approach grounded in market realities. In this orientation, the core outcome of predictive modeling is not the streamlining of direct mail and communications strategies but rather the understanding of the breadth and depth of the institution’s reach, the power of its identity, and its position among certain market segments.

- A market-centered orientation also includes a comprehensive approach to **brand research**. This includes understanding what attributes key constituencies, stakeholders, or audiences most clearly associate with the institution. It also includes what promises students believe the institution makes through its brand identity and assessments of the gaps between the brand promise and the actual student experience.

- A market-centered perspective will broaden EM’s research agenda to include assessments of market and economic trends that shape the institution’s future. Demographic analyses and projections will be a prominent part of the research program, as will economic, workforce, and industry trends that affect the institution, its academic offerings, and the outcomes of its graduates.

**Conclusion**

This second article of the three-part series has sought to further define, delineate, and differentiate four broad orientations to SEM by illustrating how each frames SEM according to particular preferences, priorities, and predispositions. Considering each orientation independently helps cultivate appreciation for the natural variety apparent in EM practice.

Part Two also has suggested that there may be value in an approach wherein a particular EM issue or topic (e.g., retention, research, organizational alignments) is evaluated through the distinct perspective of each orientation. Because each orientation represents a different set of core assumptions and presumptions about the nature of EM, the result of a review of an issue from multiple perspectives is likely to be a more robust and complete understanding of that issue. If, for example, I hold a market-centered perspective on SEM, I stand to gain greater insight into alternative approaches to retention strategy if I deliberately explore questions of retention through the lens of other orientations. Only by doing so can I hope to escape the limiting constraints of my own natural predisposition. Such a process can generate valuable insights and new understandings of the concept and practice of SEM.

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