Enrollment Management and Managing Enrollments: Revisiting the Context for Institutional Strategy

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Introduction

In this inaugural issue of the new SEM Quarterly, the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) has asked us to provide an update on the first essay we authored in a series on strategic enrollment management (SEM) for College and University from 2008 through 2010. That essay was titled “Enrollment Management and Managing Enrollments: Setting the Context for Dialogue.” In this updated essay, we have two goals: (1) to once again attempt to locate SEM and provide a context for enrollment management strategy and (2) to explore changes that have taken place in the last five years that we anticipate will significantly shape the future of SEM. In this essay, you will find much from our original article, as well as some updates, because in just five short years, much has changed.

In the 1980s, the College Board and Loyola University of Chicago sponsored the first national conferences on enrollment management (EM). Attendance at these early conferences was not robust, as the concept was still embryonic. Even then, however, several core principles were crystallizing. They included the following:

1. There was consensus that EM involved a marketing orientation toward student recruitment and admission.
2. There was an understanding that student retention is as important a part of enrollment efforts as student recruitment.
3. There was an emerging realization that campus-based financial aid could be used in a systematic fashion to achieve multiple enrollment goals.
4. The process of enrollment management depends heavily upon strategic and empirical research and data analysis to guide its efforts.
5. Enrollment management is a process that has organizational implications; effectively managing enrollments likely requires structural change in how various university functions are integrated and organized.

In 1991, AACRAO held the first annual SEM Conference, and by 2012, this annual conference drew 727 registrants from 300 institutions in nine countries, including Canada, Korea, Mexico,
and Saudi Arabia. While attendees at the early conferences were mostly from tuition-dependent, private, not-for-profit colleges and universities, the attendance now includes flagship and regional public universities, two-year institutions, and a growing international representation. Senior university officers with enrollment management titles and responsibilities are now commonplace. References to enrollment management and strategic enrollment management—used interchangeably in this essay—are now common throughout both scholarly and professional publications in the field of higher education. Graduate courses and degrees in enrollment management are found in higher education curricula. This rapid expansion and evolution is well documented elsewhere (Hossler 2011), and there is little doubt that enrollment management is now, and will continue to be, a fixture and a key function within higher education administration. Yet that permanency in no way implies common definition, consistent practice, or organizational models—or even comprehensive acceptance.

Locating SEM and Setting the Context

There is also no question that the goals and practices of SEM are often criticized, at times sharply, by thoughtful observers of higher education. Critics have described enrollment management as part of the hyper-competitive “winner-takes-all” orientation that has a negative influence upon access and equity and that diminishes the underlying values of a postsecondary education. These observers have argued that SEM strategies focus too much on increasing selectivity, optimizing net revenue, promoting the financial aid merit arms race, and the pervasive pursuing of prestige in American higher education—and these are fair criticisms. Too often enrollment management tools, techniques, and tactics have been used in ways that constrain equity outcomes for students from low-income and first-generation backgrounds.

In our original essay, however, we advanced the contrary argument that a SEM perspective is necessary to help balance and manage the inevitable trade-offs between access and other institutional goals such as the pursuit of prestige or net tuition revenue. Enrollment management strategies can and do bring a calculated, empirical perspective and market orientation to the real costs and consequences of espoused values such as increasing diversity and access or the pursuit of selectivity and prestige. And over the past five years, the stakes for achieving this balance and managing these trade-offs have only gotten higher. In fact, as will be evident in this essay, they have also become more complicated.

In 2013, we again ask the same question we raised in 2008: if enrollment management, as is argued by its critics, has such a negative impact on students and institutions and the social good, what is the alternative? Should institutions not attempt to plan for and manage their enrollments? Should colleges and universities just let their enrollments happen? Would this automatically result in a substantive increase of access for low-income students, and more equitable outcomes as defined by student success and graduation rates? Many of the critics of enrollment management hint at bygone days where institutional enrollment practices exhibited greater integrity and reflected some higher-order values. One only needs to read John Thelin's (1982) historical discussion on college admission or Jerome Karabel's (2006) The Chosen, with its stark historical analysis of the politics and one-upmanship of the admissions practices of Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, or Rupert Wilkinson's (2008) comprehensive history of campus-based financial aid in the United States to know that there was never such a “golden era.” As Clark
Kerr provocatively noted, higher education began in the *agora*, not the *acropolis*—in the marketplace, not the temple (Zemsky, Wegner and Massy 2005).

We suggest that few presidents or boards of trustees or faculty would be willing to take a laissez-faire attitude with student enrollment, to be undisciplined and unintentional in the functions and processes that have such a powerful impact on the mission, health, and vitality of an institution. The consequences are too great not to be as planful, as knowledgeable, as intentional, and as effective as possible in the pursuit of an institution's desired strategic enrollment goals. If the stakes were too high in 2008 for senior campus policymakers to simply *let enrollments happen*, the stakes are even higher now. But if managing enrollments is a natural and necessary process with no viable or sustainable alternatives, why is the practice of enrollment management seen as so problematic? Considering that question prompts us to reflect on how to *locate* the concepts and practices of enrollment management in the institutional context, and how to situate both the practice of enrollment management and the tensions associated with managing enrollments as campuses attempt to achieve important societal and institutional goals.

**Enrollment Management—Revisited**

Enrollment management strategies enable institutions to pursue their strategic goals in informed, intentional, and integrated ways. At its core, enrollment management uses a wide range of applied social science research methods and models of strategic planning and analysis to achieve its enrollment goals. This includes research that measures an institution's competitive market position relative to other institutions, that assesses how a campus is perceived by prospective students, that explores why students do or do not matriculate, and that seeks to understand why and how students progress to graduation, drop out, or transfer. EM strategies employ financial and econometric modeling to understand the role price and financial aid play in influencing students’ decisions to enroll and to persist and to explore how changes in price and aid can shape a wide range of enrollment outcomes, including increasing net tuition revenue, enhancing the academic profile, and achieving diversity and access. SEM uses marketing research methods to identify opportunities for expanded outreach and market position and for assessing an institution's brand image; it uses business modeling to understand enrollment capacities or the costs and benefits of enrollment growth in specific programs. Findings from these kinds of applied studies are then used to enable colleges and universities to deliberately segment student markets and execute appropriate marketing, recruitment, and retention activities in order to enroll and graduate the desired number, profile, and mix of students.

There is nothing inherently pernicious or even inappropriate in these activities. The key question for institutions of higher education is not whether or not to apply enrollment management strategies and techniques; rather, the real questions that all institutions need to ask include the following: What are the institution's goals and aspirations that guide the enrollment management practice? How are those goals established and evaluated and prioritized, and are they consistent with the espoused mission of the institution? How does the institution's investment in financial and human resources to achieve those goals and aspirations reflect its priorities? To what extent do the costs of these goals place the pursuit of prestige above the primary goal of any postsecondary institution (which should be providing a high-quality education for its students)? Or to what extent does the pursuit of revenue outstrip concerns for providing access and a
reasonable chance of success for all students? And how adequately do relevant research, analysis, and modeling guide the planning process wherein these trade-offs are evaluated?

We noted in our original essay five years ago that senior campus policymakers, particularly those in the nonprofit sector that receive direct subsidies or those that receive indirect subsidies because they are tax-exempt, should examine how their decisions about student enrollments help to achieve broader societal goals. With the rise of the for-profit sector during the past five years, a sector that often receives nearly 90 percent of all its funding from federal or state student financial aid, these questions about social benefits realized from the public investment are arguably even more compelling than in the nonprofit sector.

The enrollment goals of today's colleges and universities are almost always multifaceted and complex; they are also almost always in conflict with one another. Moreover, the relative priority given to multiple enrollment goals tends to vary between campus constituencies in predictable ways; those of the faculty often vary from those of financial officers, for example. These multiple goals can range from attracting more students to under-enrolled majors to increasing the numbers of national merit scholars; they can include increasing graduation rates and increasing enrollment of students from out of state. Generally, though, we find the following overarching goals at most campuses: improving market position and market demand, enhancing the academic profile of the student body, ensuring affordability and the economic diversity of the student body, ensuring racial/ethnic diversity, improving persistence and graduation rates, and increasing net tuition revenue. And we now find these goals expanding to include career and employment outcomes, debt obligations, and other post-enrollment metrics.

The pursuit of each of these goals requires different patterns of marketing investments and expenditures, alternative staffing patterns, varied admission and recruitment strategies, different pricing and financial aid strategies, and a wide range of focused campus programmatic initiatives. As such, each goal is in competition with the others for money, staff time, and institutional attention. That's always the case in institutions of higher education—multiple and varied goals always vie for position and priority in the allocation of scarce resources. But at the crux of the strategic nature of enrollment management goals is the fact that the simultaneous pursuit of all of these goals requires a difficult balancing act not only of resources but of competing outcomes; it requires the management of multiple trade-offs since in many ways these enrollment goals are in conflict and are often mutually incompatible. It is in the process of helping senior campus administrators and boards of trustees to define, prioritize, and balance these institutional goals that we locate the heart and soul of enrollment management.

Some examples may illustrate this point. Increasingly, institutions seek to grow the enrollment of low-income and/or first-generation students in order to fulfill missions of access and educational opportunity. This typically requires special recruitment and student support programs along with new staff and services; it also requires more campus-funded, need-based aid. Simultaneously, improving the academic profile of the student body, a persistent goal and aspiration at most institutions, may also require new targeted marketing efforts, perhaps new academic programs such as Honors Colleges, and at many campuses requires increases in campus-funded, merit-based aid. In addition, budgetary requirements to increase net tuition revenue not only drives annual tuition-pricing increments, but it often also requires campuses to provide scholarships to
students not otherwise eligible for either need-based or merit-based aid and who can afford to pay most or all of the costs of attendance but may be unwilling to do so without some grant or scholarship (an outcome of the analytic process referred to as financial aid leveraging). Most institutions seek to improve their performance in all three of these areas—in short, they want it all.

Ultimately, however, these goals compete with each other both in the allocation and reallocation of budgeted resources required to achieve them as well as in the balancing of the conflicting outcomes (e.g., more merit scholarships to improve the academic profile reduces net tuition revenue; or increasing access of low-income students often adversely affects some traditional measures of the class academic profile). And the responsibility for setting these priorities does not rest solely with the senior enrollment officer; indeed, it rests primarily with the institution's executive leadership and the board of trustees. We posit that, too often, boards of trustees (and sometimes members of the president's cabinet as well) are not sufficiently aware of the complexities of these interrelated enrollment dynamics and the implications of their desires and decisions. Too often, board members and members of the president's senior cabinet are not fully aware of the interdependencies of merit- and need-based aid strategies, for example, or how increasingly the distinctions between the two are so blurred as to lose all meaning. The role of the enrollment management officer increasingly is an educational one, helping to clarify the likely outcomes of choices considered.

As another example, many campus policymakers find themselves in complex trade-offs when they attempt to improve graduation rates as they simultaneously pursue goals of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity. Research clearly demonstrates that for many reasons, low-income, first-generation, African-American, and/or Latino students are at greater risk of dropping out. Comparative data are almost painfully compelling in illustrating the correlations between institutions’ diversity and graduation rates. In a public policy environment where graduation rates are being used increasingly (and too simplistically) as an institutional accountability measure, this creates powerful disincentives to enroll larger numbers of students who will in all likelihood depress overall graduation rates. This is not to suggest that campuses can do nothing to improve success for these students; in fact, the range of targeted retention programs and strategies continues to expand on most campuses. However, this requires substantial investments in student support programs because disproportionately more of these students lack adequate academic preparation, previous positive experiences in educational environments, and sufficient financial resources to sustain academic progress toward degree completion. While colleges and universities can help students to overcome their disadvantages, experience and evidence suggests that they cannot be completely overcome—thereby creating yet another difficult trade-off in institutional priorities and goals.

Similar trade-offs will increasingly require careful monitoring as a result of the new federal three-year cohort student loan default measures. Students who are first-generation, nonwhite, and from low-income backgrounds are more likely to default on their loans (Dynarski 1994; Gross et al. 2009; Volkwein and Cabrera 1998; Volkwein et al. 1998). Community colleges, four-year urban commuting institutions that are open admission, historically black colleges and universities, and many for-profit institutions are going to have to monitor how many students they admit who have attributes of students who are at greater risk of defaulting on their loans.
Given the demographic and socioeconomic profile of tomorrow's student population, this will become an increasingly complex task that will require careful analyses of institutional data and tough policy decisions at senior levels of many colleges and universities.

These simple examples illustrate the scope and complexity of the enrollment management agenda at many institutions and, more importantly, demonstrate the difficult institutional decisions the leadership of many colleges and universities confronts. Ultimately, these are not solely enrollment management issues; they are issues of institutional mission, campus aspirations, and the extent to which policymakers choose to emphasize their public service roles.

**How Then Should Enrollment Management Organizations Be Structured?**

From the earliest discussions of enrollment management, there has been a strong interest in defining the optimal organizational structures to achieve enrollment objectives—and that discussion continues. Which functions or units should be organized together as part of an enrollment management effort, and then how should that enrollment management effort itself be structured within the unique characteristics of individual colleges or universities? The first question asks if offices such as registration and records, orientation, career planning, academic advising, and marketing should be included with admissions and financial aid as part of the enrollment management effort. The second asks if these enrollment management units should be aligned with existing, traditional structures, such as student affairs or academic affairs, or instead be an entirely separate organization within a college that is led by its own senior campus leader, such as a vice president or associate provost for enrollment management.

Since we first wrote this essay, little has changed in our thinking regarding the structure of enrollment management organizations. As we seek to locate enrollment management, these are interesting and important questions but they are difficult to answer for several reasons. Primarily, the structural question presupposes that we can answer the basic question, what works best? To date, we have no empirical evidence as to whether the structure and composition of enrollment units influences their effectiveness. There are ample examples of successful enrollment management outcomes achieved with radically different organizational models and reporting structures. We believe that if enrollment management is to be fully reflective of the way by which an institution realizes its mission and its academic and business goals, then structure should follow strategy and also be reflective of the particular and idiosyncratic institutional culture, climate, and character.

Nevertheless, in lieu of evidence that leads to a prescriptive view of organizational structure, we offer the following brief thoughts:

1. Campuses benefit from having a knowledgeable senior enrollment officer who can sit at the table with other senior policymakers and bring an enrollment management perspective to policy decisions related to student enrollment and academic and financial planning.
2. To whom that enrollment officer reports is not as important as ensuring that the president, the chief academic and the chief financial officers, and governing boards develop and share a well-informed understanding of student enrollment issues, strategies, outcomes,
challenges, and opportunities. Whoever the enrollment management officer reports to needs to be someone who will keep enrollment matters at the forefront of institutional planning and policy. When existing vice presidents cannot or will not do this, institutions benefit by creating a vice president or vice provost for enrollment management who reports directly to the president and provost. One thing is certain: when colleges and universities create a vice president or vice provost for enrollment management, that officer will know very clearly that his or her responsibility is to ensure the appropriate primacy of enrollment issues in institutional planning and decision making.

3. Broad organizational alignments matter; structure and strategy exist and evolve in a continuously, mutually reinforcing process. Therefore, when enrollment management functions are organizationally or structurally integrated with student affairs, they often have different orientations, approaches, and priorities than those that are integrated with academic affairs, for example. The pros and cons of various structures are many, and the differences are predictable. What matters most is the intentionality of the alignment and its fit with the particular institutional context and character, which will dictate how that alignment will function and evolve over time.

4. There are many variations on the types of units and functions that compose enrollment management organizations, and there is no one model that would serve as a prescriptive template for every college or university. Typically, admissions and financial aid offices are brought together into enrollment management units; increasingly we find offices managing records and registration, orientation and course placement, student accounts and financial services, advising and student support units, and career services integrated into enrollment management functions. The specific functions that are included is less important than is the fact that they are clustered with an organizational framework defined by EM principles and purposes; it’s the overarching EM perspective that integrates these units, frames their goals, and orients their priorities that makes the difference.

What is more important than the particular units that compose an organizational cluster called enrollment management are the fundamental skill sets and capacities that the enrollment management organization needs to have in order to be successful. We offer just three examples.

1. Enrollment management is fueled by a comprehensive research agenda and a need for ongoing “action research” that often is not adequately met by traditional institutional research units. An effective enrollment management organization needs the capacity to conduct ongoing studies and analysis of the admission process, of the effects of financial aid on matriculation, of student retention, and so on. One of the defining characteristics of enrollment management is that it is a data-driven, research-dependent process, and every successful enrollment management organization has committed resources to supporting that research agenda—either with dedicated research staff or the support of knowledgeable consulting firms.

2. Enrollment management is increasingly dependent upon information systems and technologies; it is very much a technology-intensive process and enterprise, and the development and management of student data systems is a pivotal part of any enrollment management effort. The enrollment management organization must therefore have the capacity to partner with campus IT divisions in developing, implementing, and managing
integrated data systems and web-based strategies and services—and prioritizing among the many competing demands for systems development. The emergence and refinement of data warehouses and data-mining strategies that enable deeper and more complex explorations of the nature of institutional enrollment dynamics goes hand in hand with the importance of the research agenda noted above. Because virtually all large-scale student information systems link data and services from admission, financial aid, registration and records, academic advising, and the bursar, many institutions have discovered that there are economies of scale for institutions with respect to staffing and support of these systems if all of these administrative activities are located within a single organizational structure.

3. The enrollment management organization needs the capacity to both guide and support institutional marketing strategy and tactics. Enrollment management has always employed marketing strategy as part of student recruitment, but increasingly, especially at institutions that are highly tuition-dependent, the overall institutional marketing strategy has to be completely in sync with enrollment goals and objectives. As marketing evolves to include brand marketing, one-to-one relationship marketing, social media marketing, and word-of-mouth marketing, and as institutional visibility, recognition, brand identity, and competitive market position play an increasingly prevalent role in enrollment success. The institutional marketing strategy needs to be fully integrated with its core enrollment strategy and vice versa. At a growing number of institutions, the chief enrollment management officer is also the chief marketing officer. The alignment of marketing with EM rather than advancement is becoming more common; since the single largest source of revenue at both public and private four-year institutions is student tuition, there is strategic and pragmatic value to this approach.

Lest we appear like EMpire builders, what effective enrollment management requires more than a prescribed, comprehensive organizational structure is an institutional culture and climate characterized as an open systems environment. The reality is that the factors that influence student enrollment outcomes are too complex for any one administrative unit to actually control and manage. It is a truism that all offices and functions can and do influence student enrollment in some way, from the campus marketing and branding efforts to the range of academic offerings to the quality of student life to the ease of online billing transactions. Since no one individual or single organizational unit can wholly manage enrollments, effective enrollment management organizations develop processes that enable other academic and student service units to partner with EM in exploring enrollment opportunities, clarifying and defining enrollment capacities and constraints, and achieving enrollment goals. Open systems environments encourage such broad sharing of information and collaborative decision making and discourage the creation of organizational silos that operate independently from one another.

For example, enrollment management officers need to partner with faculty and academic deans in planning the development of new curricula and new academic programs in ways that respond to market realities. Enrollment units can provide market intelligence regarding the demand for new degree programs, career outcomes of program graduates, possible needs for revising existing programs, and optimal time, location, and instructional delivery methods—all of which can and should inform curricular decisions. Yet too often, the development of new academic programs and the review and revision of current programs is a process on many campuses that
does not allow this kind of consultative collaboration between EM and the faculty. As a result, new programs often experience a less-than-optimal launch, current program review misses out on critical market-based input, and ongoing program delivery suffers. An open systems approach invites an enrollment management perspective into the curricular planning process and encourages the use of enrollment and market data in decision making about the curricular program portfolio. This type of process is how enrollment management leaders can exert significant influence in areas they do not directly manage, and is the key to effective enrollment management.

The Changing Context for Strategic Enrollment Management

Although much of our thinking about the need for and nature of SEM remains unchanged, there have been important societal, demographic, and public policy changes, as well as developments in educational delivery systems over the past five years that already have or will change the focus and priorities for SEM organizations. The strategic nature of EM, by definition, requires that it be responsive to the rapidly changing external environment, and the shifting contemporary landscape for postsecondary education naturally forces institutional adaptation in EM strategies. We'll address just a few of the issues that are now at the forefront of SEM at the institutional level.

Affordability and Costs

In the last five years, every college and university has had to respond to the consequences of the financial upheaval in 2008 and a sustained, significant recessionary environment—both of which have had profound effects upon the context for enrollment management. College affordability is nothing new as an enrollment management challenge, but most observers of today's economic realities agree that a convergence of factors has intensified the affordability crisis to unprecedented levels. First, postsecondary institutions now find themselves in an even more difficult position in responding to the price sensitivity of students and families. While family income after inflation has remained stagnant for many years at the same time tuition prices and family financial need has escalated, the impact of the 2008 financial crisis brought into even sharper relief the challenge of college affordability across the full spectrum of student income ranges. Levels of student debt and student financial obligation upon degree completion have risen to levels most financial experts say are unmanageable.

In addition, many states have reduced subsidies to public institutions and reduced funding for state financial aid programs, adversely affecting all sectors of postsecondary education. Most educational observers also believe that political negotiations around the federal deficit will ultimately result in both the restructuring of Pell Grants and the reduction of funding for Pell and other federal aid programs. Increasingly, institutional leaders see reliance on federal and state financial aid as a strategic risk, matched by the risk entailed by the growing share of tuition funded through student borrowing. The changes in cohort default rate calculations and the pressures for institutional accountability for these rates will impact how institutions choose to sustain their commitments to serving populations of students who tend to have higher default rates. All of these factors are straining the efficacy of enrollment management strategies that
seek to balance goals of increasing affordability and opportunity with goals of net tuition revenue.

As a result, the discount rates at many public and private institutions are increasing over what were already rates that at many institutions economists believe were unsustainable. This question of the sustainability of the dominant “high tuition/high aid” pricing model is surfacing in board of trustees meetings coast to coast, and is increasingly on the agenda of public universities as they become more tuition-dependent as a result of declining state subsidies. Many colleges and universities are faced with the following conundrum with, at best, only a hazy crystal ball to guide them: Should we maintain higher discount rates to retain our market profile until the economy returns to normal, or is this the permanent new normal that will require fundamental changes in institutional pricing and aid strategies?

Organizations ranging from the National Association of College and University Business Officers to Association of Governing Boards (AGB) to Council of Independent Colleges (CIC), along with many foundations, and critics of higher educational policies, are increasingly calling for reductions in the so-called merit aid arms race. Senior enrollment leaders are increasingly realizing that financial aid strategy is easily replicated, and as aid-leveraging strategies become more broadly employed across public and private institutions alike, the efficacy and competitive advantage afforded any one institution diminishes. This is leading some higher education observers to suggest that EM is entering a “post-discount epoch” (R. Zemsky, personal communication 2012), and recent evidence suggests that colleges and universities are, in fact, seeing diminishing returns from their investments in merit aid (Blumenstyk 2013). Nevertheless, a key public and institutional policy challenge will continue to be how to fund the need-based aid that will be required to help support the student population that is our future; knowing how merit-based aid and aid-leveraging strategies can either help or hinder the response to that affordability challenge will define the success of tomorrow’s SEM leaders.

Most importantly, what can be done to address the underlying financial cost structures of our institutions that are relentlessly pushing prices higher? Robert Martin's The College Cost Disease (2011) documents the continual upward spiral of college costs primarily driven by the rapid expansion of administrative staff, arguing that the ratio of full-time professional staff to students has risen at a much higher rate than the ratio of faculty to students. And we would note that if enrollment managers are honest with themselves, the costs of SEM are part of the problem; many institutions have invested heavily in larger admissions staffs, expensive customer relationship management products, expansive recruitment marketing efforts to drive application volume, and, of course, the costs of institutional aid, especially for colleges and universities that are heavily invested in the merit aid game.

To focus on these costs alone, however, overlooks another major—perhaps the major—cost driver for many colleges and universities. Colleges and universities are much better at adding new academic programs than looking carefully at existing ones and asking hard questions about whether student demand justifies sustaining chronically under-enrolled academic programs. And many are unwilling to closely examine the teaching productivity of faculty as another important factor driving cost and revenue. Regardless of whether the primary contributing factors to rising costs are academic or administrative, it is against this backdrop of the cost disease that many
institutions are increasingly looking to enrollment management leaders to respond by relentlessly increasing net tuition revenue. In fact, many of the negative attributes associated with SEM are simply the natural result of institutional leaders forcing the primacy of revenue outcomes over all other enrollment goals, often because of their inability or reluctance to address the underlying causes of ever-rising institutional costs.

### Access

In addition to affordability issues, the closely related demographic changes facing colleges and universities are well documented, increasingly affirmed as strategic challenges, and presenting themselves to SEM planners as powerful drivers of demand and enrollment potential. The broad national trends affect all, but the demographic dynamics impacting most institutions are highly localized, particular to the limited geographic footprint that defines most institutions’ primary markets. It is the significant gain in the proportion of the college-age population that is from non-college-educated families and lower-income and particularly Hispanic/Latino background that now fundamentally affects the enrollment strategies at nearly all colleges and universities, though the particularized consequences vary considerably by region.

These challenges relate not only to affordability issues, although affordability and access issues are inseparable. The access challenge is grounded in the complex and knotty public policy and social issues surrounding the quality and outcomes of K–12 education that directly impact the capacity of enrollment management strategies to achieve not only each institution's particular goals and objectives but their broader social purposes as well. Given this context, a growing EM challenge is gauging adequate academic preparation for collegiate work. In response, SEM leaders are increasingly developing admissions strategies that embrace emerging nontraditional indicators of students’ ability to succeed in college—affirming the adverse consequences of over-reliance on standardized testing and institutional obsessions with traditional measures of quality and levels of selectivity. The inherent trade-offs between access/diversity goals and academic quality goals that EM has always worked to balance have become increasingly problematic and visible, requiring more candid and critical advocacy by EM leaders in the public policy and institutional dialogue.

### Attainment

Another public challenge facing postsecondary institutions is the College Completion Agenda (The College Board 2011; National Conference of State Legislators n.d.). All institutions—public and private alike—are under increasing pressures from many directions to improve graduation rates. We have years of accumulated knowledge about what works in improving student success and more recent research can guide institutional efforts to improve completion rates (Habley, Robbins and Bloom 2012; Hossler et al. 2011; Kalsbeek 2013; Tinto 2012). Nevertheless, as some have noted (Hossler et al. 2011), many institutions are still making limited investments in the programs and support mechanisms required to make substantial improvements in student persistence and graduation rates.

Five years ago, we each had a less prescriptive view regarding how best to organize institutional efforts to enhance rates of student retention, persistence, and graduation. From an organizational
perspective, responsibilities for addressing these outcomes certainly can be and have been centered in academic affairs or in student affairs. But while retention requires active engagement with faculty, advisors, and classroom instruction, centering retention in academic affairs often suffers because there are simply too few professional incentives for senior academic officers to focus on enhancing student graduation rates as a priority over the many other academic issues on their agenda. Few associate vice presidents of academic affairs move up into provost positions based on their work in the area of student success, retention, and graduation. And in many student affairs organizations, student retention and persistence efforts too often focus on interventionist approaches attending to the special needs of the small targeted groups of students, rather than developing institution-wide strategies and policies that impact large numbers of students to enhance degree completion. One key missing ingredient in either of these traditional organizational alignments is the accountability for setting and achieving enrollment-related goals.

Since writing that original essay in 2008, we've come to see that locating these responsibilities within enrollment organizations helps advance the retention agenda and make a demonstrable difference. Enrollment management divisions will always understand what it means to be responsible and accountable for achieving specific enrollment goals—either among new or continuing students. Student retention is less likely to be relegated to secondary importance if placed squarely within the goals and accountabilities of a multidimensional enrollment management strategy. To achieve institutional improvement, retention and completion rates should be defined as enrollment outcomes to be managed and balanced in concert with all other enrollment metrics that SEM strategies are designed to achieve, such as diversity rates, admissions rates, yield rates, discount rates, net tuition rates, default rates, and so on.

Interestingly, while the professional EM literature has affirmed retention as a critical component and defining feature of enrollment management strategy, the converse is not the case. In the most prominent recent texts on student retention (Habley et al. 2012; Tinto 2012), there is only passing reference to the connection of enrollment management strategy to campus retention efforts. Part of this is due to the legacy of retention strategy being conceived with an interventionist orientation operating on the institutional margins (Kalsbeek 2013). This is perhaps why so little has changed in institutional retention rates over many decades, despite significant institutional rhetoric and posturing about its importance. In today's environment, explicitly centering retention in an enrollment management organization is likely to become more commonplace as the pressure mounts for demonstrable progress in completion rates and attainment goals.

Student Swirl and Persistence Anywhere

From many perspectives, institutional boundaries are blurring, making traditional concepts of the linear college matriculation process increasingly irrelevant for enrollment management and planning. Grounded in Adelman's pioneering studies of student migration patterns (2006, 2007) and Borden's descriptions of student “swirl” (Borden 2004), college and university leaders are now more fully understanding the increasingly porous and permeable boundaries between and among various educational providers, and how that impacts not only academic standards and curricular cohesion, but enrollment management as well. For example, while curricular
relationships between two-year and four-year institutions have long been adequately framed via familiar 2+2 articulation agreements, we now find 3+1 agreements, reverse articulations, community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees, five-year hybrid baccalaureate-master's programs, and so on. As such arrangements blossom and proliferate, the EM agenda becomes far more complex.

Because increasing numbers of students attend multiple institutions on the path to graduation, the traditional Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System definitions of six-year graduation rates (that are calculated only for students who start at an institution of origin as first-time first-year students) do a disservice to both the students who attend multiple institutions and the campuses that serve these students. We concur with the recent work of Hossler, Dundar, and Shapiro (in press) that suggests that both public and institutional policymakers embrace two separate metrics of student enrollment patterns. The first would define retention as students who remain enrolled at the same institution at which they began—the institution of origin. The second would define persistence, by expanding the notion of retention to include students who leave their original institution and transfer to another; in other words, students who continue their enrollment anywhere within postsecondary education. Because it requires tracking student information across institutions, Hossler et al. suggest persistence is more appropriately considered a student measure than an institutional measure.

What is increasingly clear is that at two-year and four-year colleges that serve large numbers of mobile students, where swirling and multiple enrollments are common, enrollment management leaders will be called upon to provide data that make the case for the role that multiple institutions play in helping a student complete a degree, even if the student does not graduate from their particular college or university. This will be a new challenge, both in gathering the necessary data to track persistence outcomes (as opposed to retention at the institution of origin), as well as developing new types of benchmarking reports for both institutional and public policymakers. Indeed, senior enrollment officers at institutions that serve large numbers of transfer students need to begin experimenting now with new approaches to measuring both retention at the institution of origin and persistence anywhere. While it is not yet clear what kinds of new measures the US Department of Education will adopt, it is clear that new measures will be put in place and every enrollment management leader needs to prepare accordingly, anticipating what such new metrics will likely say about their institution, its impact, and outcomes.

Challenges like this one, new cohort default metrics, and gainful employment statistics are all good examples of how ever-broadening metrics of institutional success and performance will affect the evaluation of enrollment management goals and outcomes and will, arguably, present some of the greatest challenges to enrollment management leaders. In addition, while the sweeping, existential impact of massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other online course providers remains uncertain, and their business model is not yet clear, it is not difficult to envision how they will expand the options and alternatives available to students for meeting degree requirements; they will further diffuse and disintegrate the traditional educational process and thereby the enrollment process. The process of assessing prior learning and granting credit for non-classroom learning is nothing new, and has historically been within the purview of adult education programs. But increasingly, the management of college enrollments will require for
more and more entering students an assessment process of prior learning accomplished through nontraditional learning modalities—including through MOOCs; this is a rapidly emerging topic more expansive than we can address here.

**Regulatory Context**

In a prescient essay over a decade ago, Art Levine (2001) noted that as higher education evolved from being a growth industry to a mature industry, the agenda for institutional leaders would increasingly be consumed with accountability, quality assurance, regulatory controls, and the like. That cogent essay describes precisely what many enrollment management leaders find is increasingly the defining nature of their attention and activity and resource commitment. While a complex and burdensome regulatory and compliance environment is nothing new in the worlds of financial aid and student records, the enrollment management agenda is now teeming with requirements for net price calculators, requirements for publishing placement rates and gainful employment statistics, growing accountabilities for loan default rates, and so on. While much of the attention being generated by government interest is the result of efforts to curtail questionable practice in the for-profit sector, the regulatory consequence is an equal-opportunity burden affecting the not-for-profit sector as well. And the recent highly publicized instances of institutions misreporting enrollment statistics to external audiences—even to those with no regulatory authority, such as *U.S. News & World Report*—illustrate a brave new world of accountabilities and consequences that increasingly define the role of the senior enrollment management officer.

**An Expanding Portfolio**

Finally, we also note that while the primary focus of EM was the traditional, full-time undergraduate student population, SEM is continuing to evolve, expand, and be adapted in many new ways. The focus of EM has broadened as the enrollment mix at nearly all institutions has become more multifaceted in recent years to include adult undergraduates and online undergraduate programs, for example. As institutions grapple with today's pressing demographic, economic, and competitive challenges in the traditional parts of their academic portfolio, they increasingly are developing new markets for their current academic programs and new academic programs for their current markets. EM's role in partnering with faculty in developing and launching new, market-responsive academic programs and developing new markets for institutional expansion is a growing area of emphasis, responsibility, and leadership.

In addition, there is rapid expansion of EM practices and perspectives into the management of graduate and professional programs such as MBA programs, law, and medicine. This is all stretching our definitions of the nature of EM, the range of SEM strategy and tactics, and the underlying metrics of EM success. More and more comprehensive universities are broadening the scope of the EM organization to bring SEM concepts and strategies to a wider share of the institution's total enrollment portfolio, well beyond the traditional undergraduate segment where EM has its roots.
Conclusion

Enrollment management is a set of strategies, practices, and perspectives that can help an institution more effectively achieve its mission and goals. Enrollment management strategies and practices can be used to increase socioeconomic diversity or to enhance institutional prestige, to optimize enrollment capacity or to elevate academic profile, and to balance complex cross-subsidies between and among different populations of students or between and among different academic programs. That was our perspective in 2008, and nothing has changed since then in that regard.

What has changed—and changed dramatically—in the past five years is the external environment within which enrollment management leaders are called to steer their institution's enrollment strategy. The stakes are now higher than ever for doing so effectively. Because of these new challenges, SEM leaders are increasingly being asked to speak to the sustainability of the institution's enrollment strategy, which includes the viability of pricing and discount strategies, the high reliance on federal and state aid, the rising levels of student debt burdens and default rates, demographic shifts in the institution's primary market, its rates of student success and completion, the competitiveness of its market position, and so on. In response to the pressing financial constraints elevated by the ongoing recession, concerns about sustainable strategy increasingly extend to the market viability of the institution's portfolio of academic programs and the adequacy of current delivery models for courses and programs (e.g., how the time and place courses are offered or how alternative modes of delivery such as online or blended/hybrid models might make a program more desirable or profitable; how the growing use of adjuncts impacts academic costs and quality; and so on). While these are, by definition and by necessity, academic responsibilities, they are key drivers of the growing pressure on senior enrollment officers to create a sustainable enrollment strategy, one that in fact may better be described as a sustainable revenue strategy. In fact, we'd suggest that after five years of responding to the triggering events of 2008, the S in SEM may more appropriately now stand for sustainable rather than strategic (Kalsbeek and Zucker 2012). Answering the call for a sustainable enrollment strategy will be the most pressing obligation and opportunity for tomorrow's enrollment management leader.

As we noted in 2008, it ultimately falls to the board of trustees, executive administrators, and governance structures to set appropriate priorities and directions to ensure that both short- and long-term institutional and societal goals are effectively kept in balance. Senior enrollment management leaders have the opportunity and the obligation to help those senior policymakers understand the tensions and trade-offs and the context and consequence of the decisions they make. Having a disciplined and intentional process and an organizational structure for effectively managing the pursuit of multiple—and often competing—enrollment goals is increasingly critical to institutional viability and vitality. It is in that institutional process of framing an informed view of enrollment challenges and opportunities that we believe we locate the core purposes and function of strategic and sustainable enrollment management.
REFERENCES


Biographies

Don Hossler, Ph.D., is a Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Indiana University Bloomington. Hossler has served as the Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Services for Indiana University Bloomington and the Associate Vice President for Enrollment Services for the seven campuses of the Indiana University system, the Executive Associate Dean for the School of Education, and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Studies. He is the founding Executive Director of the Research Center of the National Student Clearinghouse. His areas of specialization include: college choice, student persistence, student financial aid policy, and enrollment management. Hossler has consulted with more than 45 colleges, universities, and related educational organizations, including The College Board, Educational Testing Services, the University of Cincinnati, Inter-American University of Puerto Rico, the Pew Charitable Trust, the University of Missouri, Colorado State University, the University of Alabama, and the General Accounting Office of the US government. He has presented more than 130 scholarly papers and invited lectures, and is the author, or co-author, of 12 books and monographs and more than 80 articles and book chapters. Hossler has directed projects funded by The College Board, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Lumina Found for Education, The Lilly Endowment, and the Spencer Foundation. He has received national awards for his research and scholarship from the American College Personnel Association and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.

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