Handbook of Strategic Enrollment Management
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The field of Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) is arguably the newest major administrative function to emerge at the senior levels of college and university administration. The confluence of competition for students, competition for the prestige associated with college rankings such as the “Best Colleges” rankings published by US News & World Report, as well as concerns about retention and graduation rates, and growing investments in campus-based institutional aid to achieve enrollment goals, have resulted in the growing importance of new organizations created with titles such as Enrollment Services, Enrollment Management, Enrollment Management and Student Affairs, and so on. Since the 1970s, there has been an exponential increase in research on the topics of student college choice, student retention, and the effects of financial aid on student enrollment behavior.

Part of this evolutionary process has been the naming of this new enterprise. As originally conceived, facing a projected decrease in the number of high school graduates in the mid-1970s, forward-thinking college admissions officers coined the term “enrollment management” to describe a new approach to maintaining the number of new students they enrolled as demand decreased. Early on, the “managing” of enrollments involved examining demographic data, segmenting target groups of students, and ramping up marketing efforts to prospective students in new, more intensive ways. Through the 1980s, enrollment management grew to include other enrollment service functions that proved critical to attracting students, such as financial aid, registration, student
records, and fee payment. It grew conceptually as well to focus not just on the number of new students enrolled, but also retention and graduation rates, creating direct ties between institutions’ academic and enrollment management efforts. With this comprehensive view of enrollment came more sophisticated financial modeling that linked recruitment and retention rates with institutional revenues. By the late 1980s, the scope of enrollment management had grown into a major strategic component of institutional operations; hence the emergence of the term “Strategic Enrollment Management.” It is this comprehensive, advanced understanding of original enrollment management thinking that forms the basis of this book.

As SEM has emerged and grown, what has been lacking is a comprehensive sourcebook on this important administrative function within postsecondary education. Several books and reports have been published on this topic—see, for example, Enrollment Management: An Integrated Approach (1984), Creating Effective Enrollment Management Systems (1986), The Strategic Management of College Enrollments (1990), Strategic Enrollment Management: Transforming Higher Education (2012), SEM in Canada: Promoting Student and Institutional Success in Canadian Colleges and Universities (2011), The Strategic Management of College Enrollments (1990), Enrollment Management for the 21st Century: Delivering Institutional Goals, Accountability, and Fiscal Responsibility (1999), and A Practical Guide to Strategic Enrollment Management Planning in Higher Education (2007). None of these publications, however, attempts to provide a comprehensive treatment of relevant research that can inform SEM practices and a thoughtful discussion of the intersection of the economics and finance of higher education and SEM, and none attempts to delineate the leading strategies and administrative functions that define effective SEM organizations. This volume expressly intends to address that void.


We hope that this book will be judged useful by the worlds of both practice and research. In this seven-part volume, thirty chapters focus heavily on relevant research, on topics ranging from student college choice, to higher education finance, to considerations regarding how offices such as the registrar or
financial aid contribute to SEM. We seek to examine both the what and the why of SEM. Some practitioners in the field of Strategic Enrollment Management fail to recognize the importance of how research (the why) can inform current practices and provide insights into future directions of the field.

Postsecondary educational institutions find themselves in an era of evidenced-based decision-making. Senior campus policy makers are being asked to demonstrate that they are using research and data to make the best decisions for their institutions. Thus, the increasingly large body of research on topics ranging from the mobility patterns for transfer students, to studies of the effects of campus-based financial aid on access and retention, to research on how colleges organize themselves to increase graduation rates provide a foundation for evidenced-based decision-making. Successful SEM organizations, however, rely not only on evidenced-based decision-making, but they also require successful planning processes, and they need business practices in offices such as admissions, financial aid, and registration and records that use technology to make timely decisions, to support student enrollment patterns, to facilitate access to a range of majors with a myriad of prerequisites, and to identify students whose course-taking patterns might suggest that they are at risk of not graduating. Senior enrollment officers need access to published research, as well as to campus-based SEM-oriented research, in addition to insights into leading practices in SEM organizations that can bolster their requests for resources, the enrollment plans that they implement, and/or the need to reorganize structures within SEM units.

This handbook comprises seven parts and thirty chapters. The seven parts cover the following topical areas.

Part I provides a brief history of the field of Strategic Enrollment Management, as well as an overview of the factors that have shaped the structure of SEM organizations. This is important background, especially for aspiring enrollment managers and other senior campus administrators including provosts, CFOs, student affairs staff, and the president. Having a sense of the history and current structure of SEM units can help inform their thinking of the best ways to structure their Strategic Enrollment Management organization and provides a perspective on what they can expect of SEM units.

In Part II we take a close look at college admissions and recruitment from multiple perspectives. It begins with a research-based examination of what we know about the factors that influence students’ enrollment decisions. This is an important contextual chapter that informs and/or influences all of the activities of the remaining chapters in Part II. Other chapters discuss the structure of postsecondary markets in the United States, how institutions market themselves to recruit new students, what enrollment managers should know about transfer students and articulation policies, and how institutions with different missions decide who they will admit.
Moving from admissions and recruitment, Part III takes a closer look at the connections between higher education finance and SEM, including topics of tuition pricing and the economics of using campus-based aid to achieve enrollment goals. These areas have become some of the most important underpinnings of SEM. Indeed, we would argue that a deep understanding of the intersection between higher education finance, tuition pricing, and campus-based financial aid has become one of the most important areas of expertise for senior enrollment professionals. Chapter 11 closely examines the analytical approaches SEM organizations employ to maximize the impact of campus-based aid on achieving institutional enrollment goals.

Part IV moves on to the topic of student retention, persistence, and graduation. Along with college admissions, the topic of student retention and graduation has received a great deal of attention from both researchers and practitioners. This body of literature is so robust that we have organized it around the following themes: theoretical models of student persistence, an overview of the new public policy agenda that considers both retention and persistence as separate outcomes along with graduation, a review of research on traditional age students and the implications for SEM organizations, an overview of what we know about enhancing persistence among students of color, and separate chapters on research on the retention of nontraditional students and students in need of remediation. Part IV ends with a discussion of an understudied area: What do we know about what institutions are doing to enhance student persistence and graduation?

In Part V, we look at an important element of any successful SEM organization: what takes place in the back offices in units such as admissions, financial aid, and the registrar, and the closely associated role of technology. The chapters in Part V are more practice-based than research-based and address functional issues that often are an afterthought in SEM planning, when in fact they are critical to improving recruitment and retention rates. We sought out some of the leading practitioners to provide input on these key areas, and they have delivered thoughtful analyses of intentional structures they have employed.

Part VI addresses several of the strategic areas of SEM, beginning with a discussion of the research structures and data required for effective SEM practices. Chapter 24 links campus-based SEM efforts with policy issues at the state and national levels, recognizing that the achievement of public policy goals ultimately relies on changes at the institutional level. We close this part of the book with two chapters that focus on strategic thinking and planning, offering thoughts and guideposts for transitioning institutions to become more SEM-oriented.

In the final part of this volume, we consider new organizational models for SEM. In Chapter 27, we look at SEM issues and structures for the recruitment of international students and SEM organizations for graduate and professional
schools. This is followed by chapters on current trends in SEM and another discussing ethics. We close the final chapter with a summary of the most important topics covered in this volume and recommendations for the future of SEM efforts.

In summary, *Handbook of Strategic Enrollment Management* provides the most complete treatment of SEM that has been attempted. It can be used to help improve the planning and future directions of SEM organizations, and it can help guide future research on various topics related to postsecondary access and success, better to understand the range of postsecondary institutions and to help enhance the health and vitality of colleges and universities.
ABOUT THE EDITORS
AND CONTRIBUTORS

Matt Birnbaum is an associate professor, chair of the Department of Leadership, Policy and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education at the University of Northern Colorado. He teaches courses on enrollment management, law, public policy, and research design.

Bob Bontrager is Senior Director of Consulting and Strategic Enrollment Management Initiatives for AACRAO and is Editor in Chief of Wiley’s SEM Quarterly journal. He has written and presented in more than a dozen countries on Strategic Enrollment Management and related topics.

John M. Braxton is a professor of education in Higher Education Leadership at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. His research centers on the college student experience in general and college student persistence in particular.

Stephen H. Brooks holds a PhD in economics and is the founding president of SHBrooks. He specializes in enrollment management and is one of the nation’s foremost experts in applying econometric models to predict and analyze student enrollment.

Guilbert Brown is Vice President for Finance and Administration at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, serving previously in business officer roles at both public and private universities. He has written and presented internationally on budget models and integrating academic, enrollment, and budget planning.

Marc M. Camille is the Vice President for Enrollment Management and Communications at Loyola University Maryland. He has presented frequently at
AMA’s Symposium for the Marketing of Higher Education and AACRAO’s Strategic Enrollment Management Conference.

Emily Chung is the Program Director for the USC Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice at the University of Southern California. She is currently a doctoral student at the USC Rossier School of Education, specializing in higher education administration.

Bruce Clemetsen is Vice President for Student Affairs at Linn-Benton Community College. He has practiced, written, presented, and consulted extensively on Strategic Enrollment Management, student transfer, and institutional partnerships.

Jennifer DeHaemers is Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs and Enrollment Management at the University of Missouri – Kansas City. She has practiced, written, and presented in the areas of Strategic Enrollment Management at two- and four-year institutions.

Afet Dundar is Associate Director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. She plays a leading role in producing the Research Center’s Signature Report series of national reports on student access and success and helps to develop the center’s research agenda.

Lee Furbeck is the Director of Undergraduate Admissions and Student Transition at Cleveland State University and directs AACRAO’s Transfer Conference. She has written and presented extensively on transfer-related topics and student access and equity.

Brent A. Gage is the Associate Provost for Enrollment Management at the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). He is an expert in transforming enrollment management processes.

Tom Green is the Director of Technology Solutions and a Managing Consultant at the AACRAO. He has practiced and published on SEM in the United States and abroad for nearly thirty years.

Jacob P. K. Gross is an assistant professor of Higher Education Administration at the University of Louisville. He works on education policy, particularly policies pertaining to financial aid and finance. His work focuses on educational access and equity for underrepresented students.

Jay W. Goff is Vice President of Enrollment and Retention Management at Saint Louis University. He an author and presenter on Strategic Enrollment Management and has served in advisory roles for ACT, AACRAO’s SEM Conference, and the National Student Clearinghouse.

Harold V. Hartley III is Senior Vice President of the Council of Independent Colleges, where he has lead responsibility for CIC’s Presidents Institute. He provides leadership for CIC’s research and assessment initiatives.
Tom Hayes is chair and professor of Marketing at Xavier University, where he also served as the Director of Institutional Advancement. He has received both CASE’s Crystal Apple and Alice Beeman awards for outstanding work in the area of marketing of higher education.

Adam J. Herman is a doctoral student in Higher Education and Student Affairs at Indiana University in Bloomington. His research interests include admissions, marketing, and strategic planning.

Amy S. Hirschy, PhD, is an assistant professor at the University of Louisville. Her research interests focus on theories of college student persistence, organizations, and college student development to identify institutional factors that promote and hinder student learning and success.

Don Hossler is the former Vice-Chancellor of Enrollment Services and currently serves as a professor of higher education at Indiana University Bloomington. He has conducted research and written on college choice, enrollment management, student persistence, and financial aid.

Mary Hutchens is a doctoral candidate at Vanderbilt University, studying Higher Education Leadership and Policy. Her research interests focus on enrollment management and nontraditional students.

Willis A. Jones is an assistant professor of higher education at the University of Kentucky. His research examines various areas related to the study of higher education, including intercollegiate athletic policy, institutional diversity, college student retention, and university prestige.

David Kalsbeek is the Senior Vice President for Enrollment Management and Marketing at DePaul University in Illinois. He has written extensively and given more than 100 presentations and consulted widely on issues related to Strategic Enrollment Management.

Wendy Kilgore is Director of Research and Managing Consultant for the AACRAO. She has more than fifteen years of experience as a higher education administrator and consultant in the United States and Canada.

Jerry Lucido is the Executive Director of the Center for Enrollment Research, Policy, and Practice. He has undertaken research to design and execute effective and principled college admission and enrollment management.

Dawn Lyken-Segosebe is a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies program at Vanderbilt University. Her research focuses on faculty (codes of conduct, scholarship, and interaction with students) and the college outcomes of commuter students.

Alicia Moore is Dean of Student and Enrollment Services for Central Oregon Community College. She has presented and written extensively on community colleges, Strategic Enrollment Management, admissions and registrar practices, process redesign, and diversity.
Michelle Mott is Associate Director of Government Relations and Communications at the AACRAO. She also serves as editor of and contributor to the AACRAO Transcript e-newsletter.

Eunkyoung Park is an associate research fellow at Korean Educational Development Institute (KEDI). Her research interests include college choice, higher education access and success, quantitative research methods, community colleges, and equity.

Mike Reilly joined AACRAO as Executive Director on June 1, 2012. Prior to coming to AACRAO he served as the Executive Director for the Council of Presidents, an association of the six public baccalaureate degree granting institutions in Washington state.

Michele Sandlin is a Managing Consultant for AACRAO. She has written and presented frequently in the areas of holistic admissions, admissions operations, student transfer, and international admissions.

Dave Sauter is University Registrar at his alma mater, Miami University, having served in similar capacities at two other institutions during a thirty-year career. His contributions to the registrar profession include several AACRAO publications and numerous presentations on a range of topics.

Gabriel Serna is an assistant professor at the University of Northern Colorado. His research interests lie in the areas of higher education economics and finance, enrollment management, and applied econometrics and research design.

Howard Shanken is a Senior Consultant with AACRAO Consulting. He has reviewed policies and processes at a broad spectrum of institutions, including national, international, public, and private universities and colleges.

Douglas T. Shapiro is Executive Research Director at the National Student Clearinghouse. He has fifteen years of experience in research with student-level data at the institutional, state, and national levels.

Monique L. Snowden is the Vice President for Academic and Enrollment Services at Fielding Graduate University. She is a frequent presenter and has conducted research on Strategic Enrollment Management.

Vasti Torres is Dean of the College of Education at the University of South Florida in Tampa. She has worked on community college initiatives including Achieving the Dream, Rural Community College Initiative, and Building Engagement and Attainment for Minority Students.

Darin Wohlgemuth is the Director of Enrollment Research at Iowa State University and leads the university’s Enrollment and Research team. He previously served as Director of Budget Research and Analysis in the Provost’s office. He contributes often to the SEM profession as an author and presenter.
Mary Ziskin is an assistant professor of educational leadership at the University of Dayton. She conducts research on the enrollment pathways of adult learners and working college students, stratification in postsecondary educational opportunity, and critical research methodologies.

Brian Zucker is the founding director of Human Capital Research Corporation, a higher education research consultancy based in Evanston, Illinois. For nearly three decades, he has served as an economist and policy analyst to industry, government, and the non-profit sector.
The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, founded in 1910, is a nonprofit, voluntary, professional association of more than 11,000 higher education administrators who represent more than 2,600 institutions and agencies in the United States and in forty countries around the world. From its offices in Washington, DC, AACRAO initiates, interprets, and implements policies and practices for the global educational community. This is accomplished by identifying and promoting standards and leading practices in strategic enrollment management, student services, instructional management, and deployment of information technology. Among its many publications and periodicals, AACRAO produces the *SEM Quarterly* journal published by the Wiley Online Library.

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers  
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 520  
Washington, DC 20036–1135  
Tel: (202) 293–9161  
Fax: (202) 872–8857  
www.aacrao.org

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Handbook of Strategic Enrollment Management
Part I provides an introduction to Strategic Enrollment Management. Chapter 1 defines SEM and offers a brief history of its emergence and evolution. The chapter discusses several definitions of SEM that collectively point both to organizational structures and research that inform SEM policies and practices. Drawing upon discussions of public management’s theory of new managerialism, which focuses on the growing use of for-profit business practices in non-profit and public organizations such as postsecondary educational institutions, this chapter helps to frame the rise of SEM in a wider context. It also examines how the combination of demographic trends, public policy shifts, and the emergence of the “Best Colleges” rankings published by US News & World Report, plus a growing focus on institutional prestige, has contributed to the attention SEM has garnered from public policy makers and critics of postsecondary education practices.

Chapter 2 more closely examines how public policy shifts toward viewing postsecondary education as a private good has resulted in both public and private postsecondary institutions competing for students in a market model. This, in turn, has resulted in colleges and universities focusing more attention and resources on their ability to attract a sufficient number of tuition-paying students. This chapter also looks at how the changing demographics of traditional-aged students are altering the competitive landscape faced by all postsecondary sectors.

Chapter 3 considers the structure of SEM organizations. The authors examine the variety of university executives to whom senior enrollment officers report and the importance of their ability to work effectively with all senior members of the president’s cabinet, particularly the chief financial officer (CFO). The discussion moves on to the importance of campus-based, enrollment-related research and a strong technology infrastructure. Administrative units such as admissions, financial aid, orientation, and others often included within SEM
organizations are discussed. The authors also note the dearth of research on the efficacy of different organizational structures for SEM units. This is because success is often dependent upon a complex array of factors that are based on institutional culture, institutional wealth, and the location of the campus, for example. Nevertheless, Chapter 3 helps to establish a common understanding of SEM units.