

CHIEF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT OFFICER (CEMO)

2023 U.S. SURVEY SUMMARY *AACRAO CAREER PROFILE SERIES*



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Foreword

Reflecting on the rapid evolution of enrollment management, it's remarkable how this field has risen to prominence within institutional leadership in a relatively short time. Its path from nonexistence a few decades ago to a key role in the executive suite today is notable. Recent trends show a shift in the professional landscape, with a significant number of Chief Enrollment Management Officers (CEMOs) moving between institutions or rising through the ranks within their own institution. This suggests a developing trend of career progression within the field.

Our career-profile series adds a vital layer to the burgeoning history of the profession. It offers a comprehensive view of our professional backgrounds, career mobility, reporting structures, and other key metrics. This wealth of data will serve as a valuable resource for the next generation of Chief Enrollment Management Officers as they work to guide their institutional enrollment and learner success strategy in this dynamic and challenging environment.

We are grateful for the partnership of NACAC in supporting this research by enabling us to share the survey with their membership. We also extend our gratitude to the 205 CEMOs who participated in the 2023 survey. Their contributions have enabled this report to offer detailed insights into the roles, career progressions, and functions of a CEMO.

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Summary

This report examines the various roles of a Chief Enrollment Management Officer (CEMO) in the United States. It marks the fourth edition of AACRAO's Chief Admissions Officer career-profile survey, following its predecessors in 2014, 2017, and 2020. These reports are part of a series focusing on key roles in academia: Chief Enrollment Management Officers (CEMOs), Chief Admissions Officers (CAOs), and Registrars. There are two objectives of these reports:

- to chronicle the evolving career profiles and responsibilities of these positions over time
- to guide aspirants with insights into the typical career paths for these roles

The 2023 survey¹ explored various dimensions of the Chief Enrollment Management Officer position. The role and positioning of CEMOs within their institutions include:

- career pathways leading to current CEMO roles
- prospective career advancements
- current scope of responsibilities
- key skills and challenges associated with the role
- job-satisfaction levels
- demographic profiles
- advice for aspiring CEMOs

Results of the survey paint a comprehensive picture of the CEMO role in higher education in the United States, highlighting the challenges, responsibilities and aspirations associated with this pivotal position. Responses led to several key conclusions about the role and position of CEMOs including the following.

Central Role in Strategic Management

CEMOs are integral to the strategic management of institutions. They focus on critical areas, such as retention, recruitment, and admissions. This emphasizes the importance of their role in shaping the student body and contributing to the overall success of their institution. In addition, the data across the four surveys in the series shows the CEMO reporting more to the chief executive division over time. This trend aligns with the growing focus on enrollment management in higher education and appears to indicate an increasing organizational prominence of the CEMO role.

Varied Organizational Placement and Reporting

While a majority of institutions differentiate the CEMO role from the Chief Admissions Officer (CAO), many institutions combine these roles. This indicates variability in how institutions structure their enrollment management organization. Most CEMOs are key executive leadership members and typically report to the chief executive.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all responses included in this report are derived from the 2023 survey.

Substantial Experience and Advanced Education

CEMOs generally possess a wealth of experience in higher education, often exceeding two decades. Most are highly educated; many hold at least a master's degree. This reflects the complexity and seniority of the role, which requires extensive knowledge and expertise.

High Demands and Responsibilities

The role of a CEMO is demanding and encompasses a wide range of responsibilities—from setting enrollment goals to managing various aspects of student services. The workload is significant and often requires long hours and, in some cases, extensive travel.

Job Satisfaction and Career Trajectory

CEMOs generally feel valued and autonomous in their roles and find the position challenging and rewarding. They value work-life balance, fair compensation, and appreciation, which are crucial for job satisfaction. Many are considering future career moves within the field of higher education, indicating a dynamic career trajectory. Some are moving toward retirement and a few are considering leaving higher education.

Embrace Geographic and Position Mobility

CEMOs typically have a relatively short tenure in any CEMO position. Most change institutions several times along their career path. Some have held, or aspire to hold, a different CEMO position at another institution.

Lack of Demographic Diversity

The demographic profile of CEMOs has not changed over the years; there is a predominance of white males. Higher education institutions should focus on increasing diversity and inclusivity at the senior leadership level.

In summary, success in this position requires a diverse set of skills and extensive professional experience.

Approach

To identify AACRAO and NACAC members serving at institutions in the United States who probably serve as Chief Enrollment Management Officers (CEMOs), we used position titles as our primary selection criterion. To ensure the accuracy of our selection, the survey began with a critical question aimed at confirming a participant’s role as a CEMO.

The survey defined the chief-enrollment-management role as one accountable for developing and executing comprehensive strategies in various areas, such as retention, recruitment, and admissions. The role typically involves direct management and oversight of key enrollment departments and services. It focuses on strategies for retention, completion, recruitment, and student success.

Participants were asked, “Do you currently occupy the role of Chief Enrollment Management Officer (CEMO), as described above?” The role may be distinct from, or similar to, the Chief Admissions Officer (CAoO) at an institution. Respondents could answer either “Yes” or “No.” Only those who affirmed their position as CEMOs continued with the survey.

Over the continued development of this series of surveys, response options have been refined. Response choices incorporated insights from “other” responses and open-ended comments from previous surveys. The 2023 report includes select data from the three previous surveys. It is important to note percentages may not definitively reflect trends because respondent and institutional samples varied with each survey.

Characteristics of Current Position

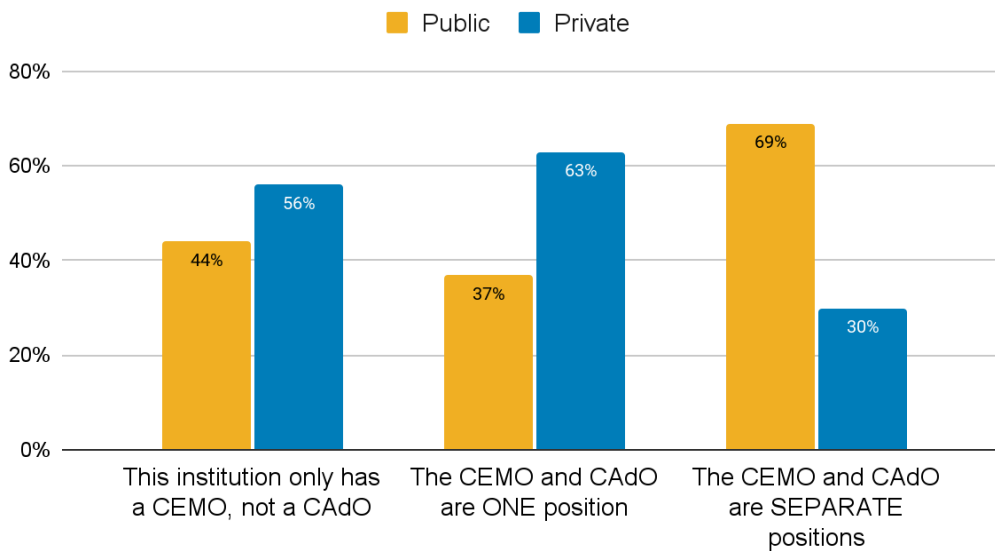
In our effort to understand the roles and interplay between Chief Enrollment Management Officers and Chief Admissions Officers, we queried respondents about the roles of CEMOs and CAoOs at their institutions. The 2023 survey revealed the following within various institutions:

- 56% distinguish between the roles of CEMOs and CAoOs
- 33% combine the roles of CEMO and CAoO into a single position
- 9% have a designated CEMO, without a separate CAoO role
- 2% report a configuration not listed

Public institutions were more likely than private ones to have both a CEMO and a CAoO. See Figure 1².

² Note: Throughout the report some totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.

Figure 1: Relationship between CEMO and CAo positions by institutional control



When examining student populations served by CEMOs, respondents were nearly evenly divided:

- 48% are responsible for undergraduate students only
- 48% oversee undergraduate and graduate students
- 4% cater exclusively to graduate and/or professional student bodies

Echoing previous survey results, 79% of CEMO positions in 2023 require a master's degree. Doctorates are necessary for 8% of these roles, while 12% require at least a bachelor's degree. One percent of the CEMO positions have a different educational-requirement level.

The five most prevalent job titles for CEMOs include:

- Vice President for Enrollment Management
- Dean of Enrollment Management
- Vice President for Enrollment
- Vice President of Enrollment Management
- Vice Provost for Enrollment Management

Organizational Structure

The survey inquired about the reporting hierarchy and division of the respondents. It was found that 74% of Chief Enrollment Management Officers hold positions within their institution's executive-leadership team. Data regarding the reporting structure of CEMOs across all four

survey iterations are represented in Figure 2. Figure 3 provides a breakdown of 2023 findings, categorized by respondents' type of institutional control.

Figure 2: CEMOs' Supervisor

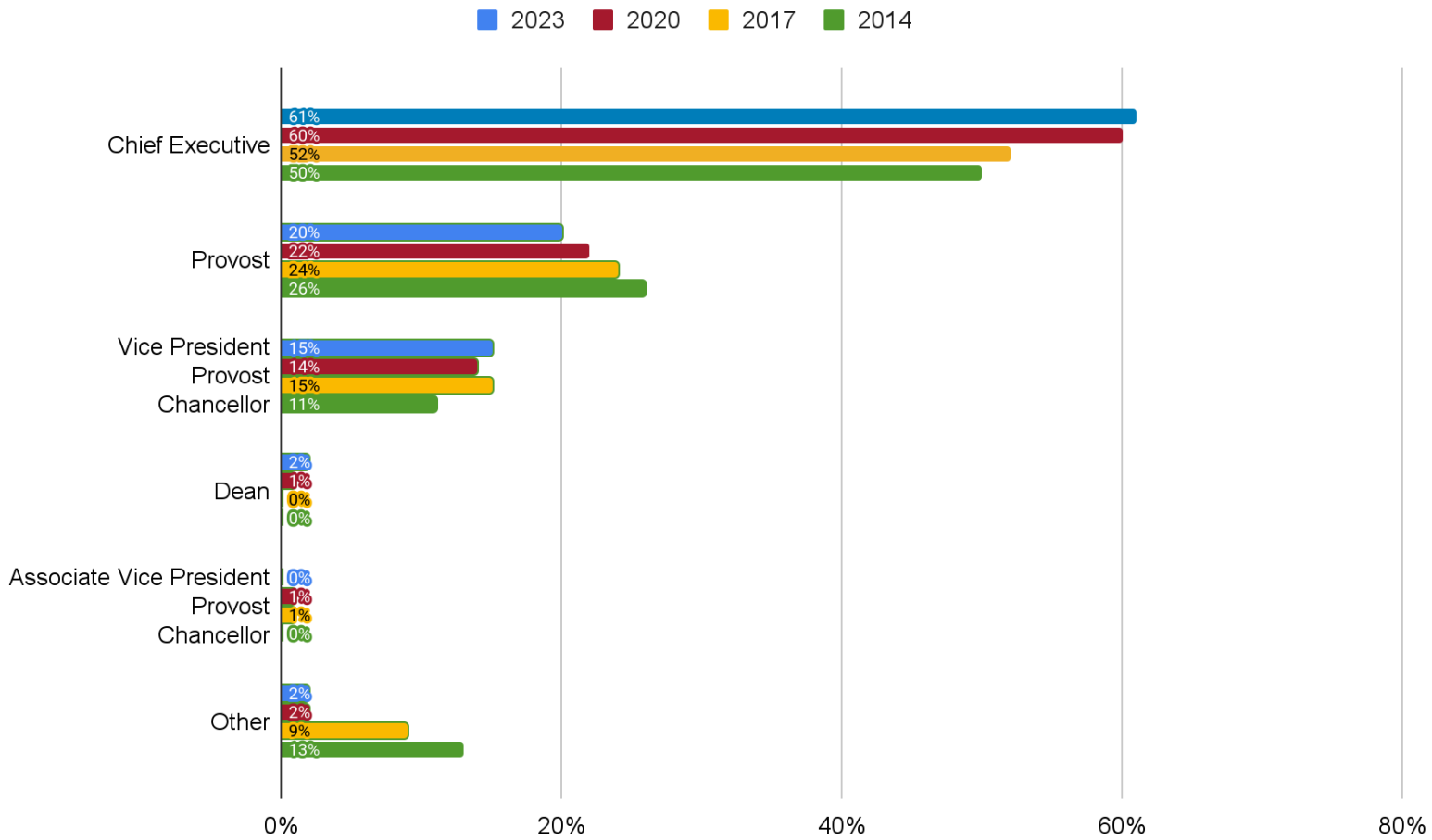
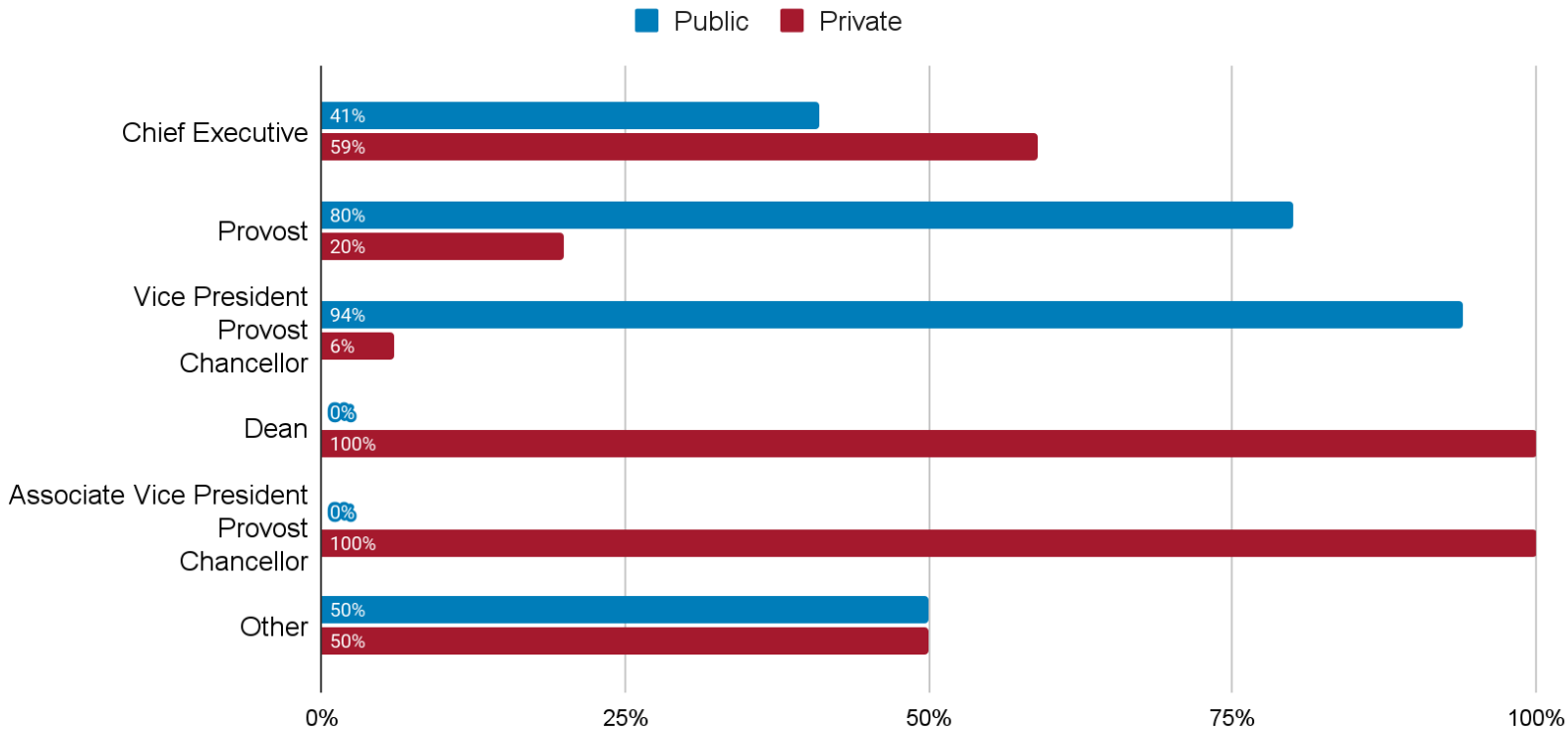


Figure 3: CEMO supervisor by institutional control



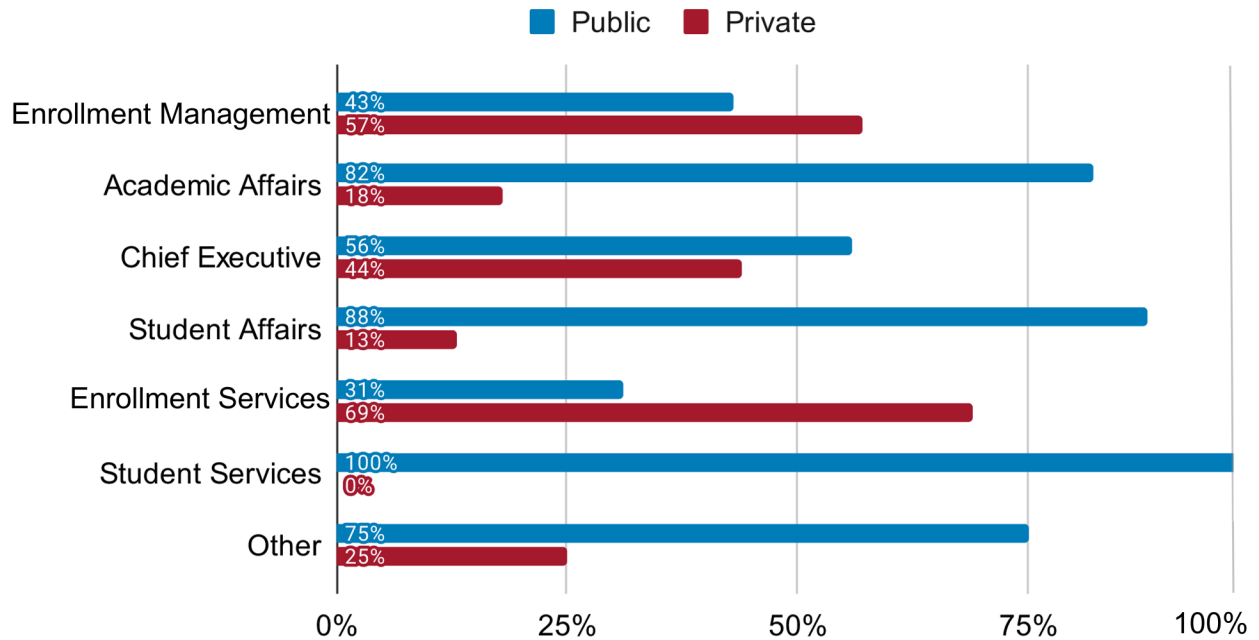
Respondents were queried about which division within an institution houses the CEMO.

Housing within an institution included the following:

- 56% in the enrollment management division
- 14% in academic affairs
- 8% in the chief executive division
- 8% in student affairs
- 6% in enrollment services
- 3% in student services
- 6% in other divisions

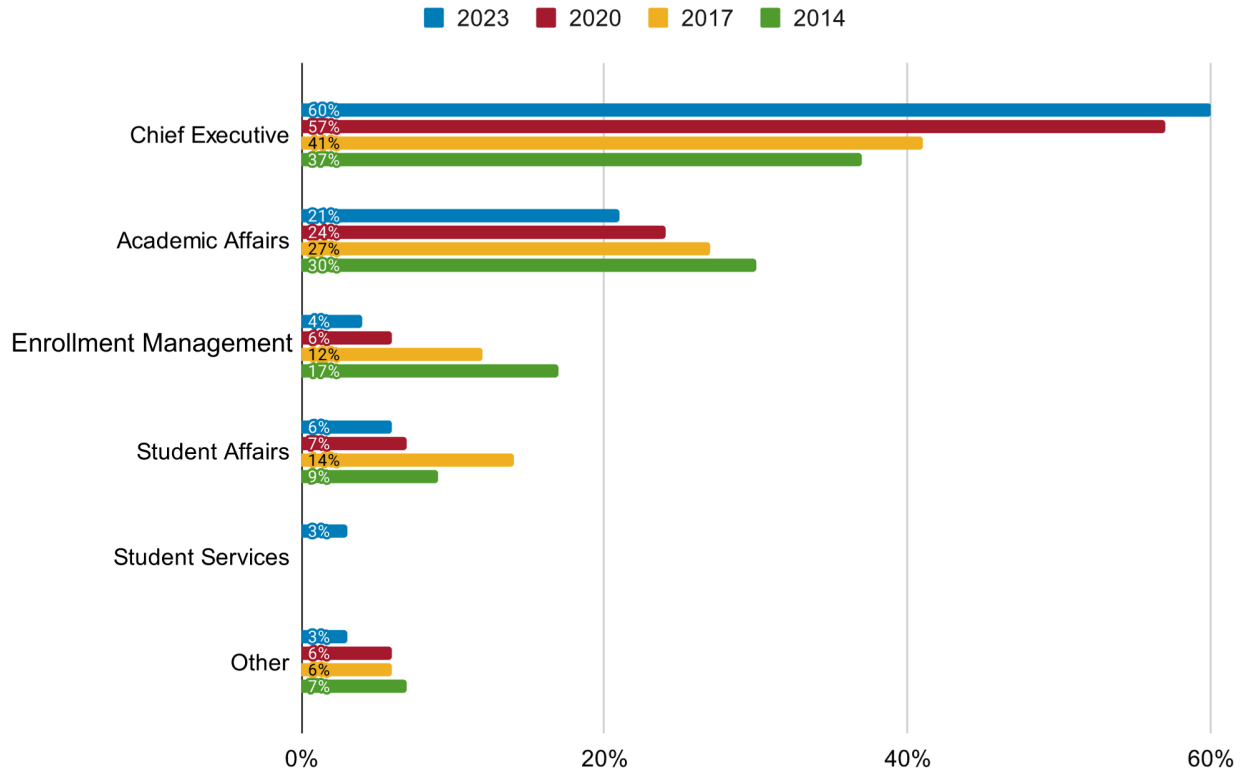
See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Division in which CEMO is housed by institutional control



The survey also explored to which division CEMOs typically report. The predominant reporting line was to the chief executive division. Figure 5 highlights a trend toward the increasing organizational prominence of the CEMO role. This aligns with the growing focus on enrollment management in higher education. While these findings suggest a significant shift, a more detailed, institution-specific longitudinal analysis is necessary to confirm this trend.

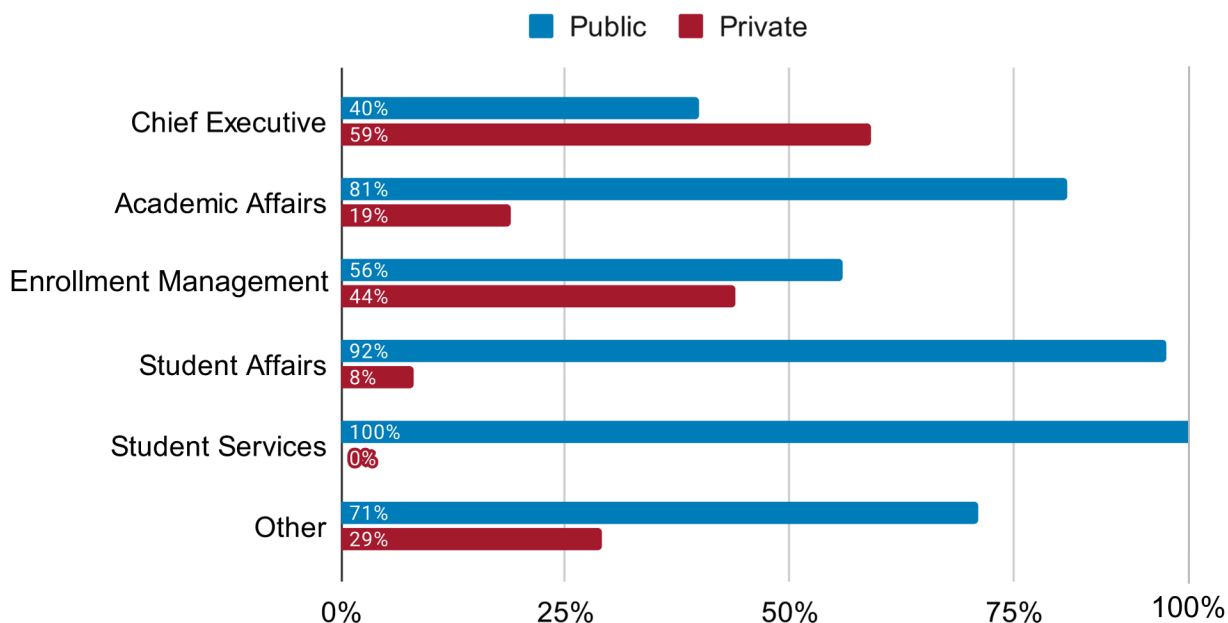
Figure 5: CEMO reporting division



(Student services was added as a response choice in 2023)

Figure 6 categorizes this information according to the control type of the respondents' institutions.

Figure 6: CEMO reporting division by institutional control



In addition to data represented in Figures 5 and 6, one respondent from a public institution indicated they report to the enrollment services division, and one respondent from a private institution reports to business affairs.

Experience and Education

The survey asked CEMOs to detail the duration of their careers in higher education. It included questions on:

- their prior positions
- the number of institutions at which they have worked
- whether they have switched institutional types, control, or size
- if their current role is their first in higher education

Responses suggest CEMO positions typically do not see long tenures. CEMOs report the following time in their current position:

- 58% less than 5 years
- 31% for 5 to 10 years
- 7% for 10 to 15 years
- 3% for 15 to 20 years
- 1% for 20 years or more

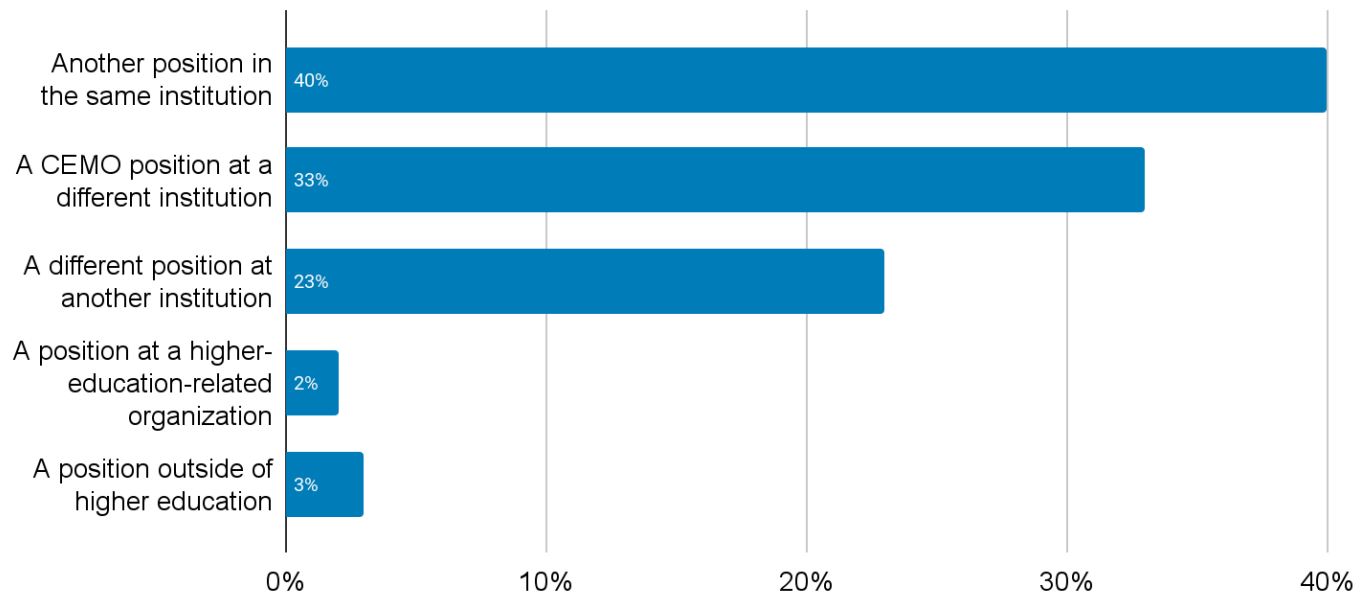
On the other hand, given the seniority of the CEMO role and the tendency for appointees to come from within higher education, 72% of respondents have over 20 years of experience in higher education. Within the sample, 47% have over 25 years of experience, while 7% have less than 10 years. The data also reveals a trend of mobility among CEMOs, with 65% having worked at three or more institutions. In more detail, 14% have worked at just one institution, 21% at two, 22% at three, 14% at four, and 29% at five or more.

To gauge career mobility among CEMOs, we posed three questions focusing on the differences in institutional characteristics. Results indicate that CEMOs tend to exhibit similar levels of mobility across various institutional sizes, types, and controls. Among those who *have worked at more than one institution*, 89% have worked at institutional types other than their current institution; 85% have worked at an institution with a different control than their current institution, and 99% have worked at institutions of a different size than their current institution.

Eighty percent of Chief Enrollment Management Officers have dedicated their entire professional career to higher education. Eighteen percent have transitioned in and out of the sector, and 2% embarked on their higher education career with their current CEMO role.

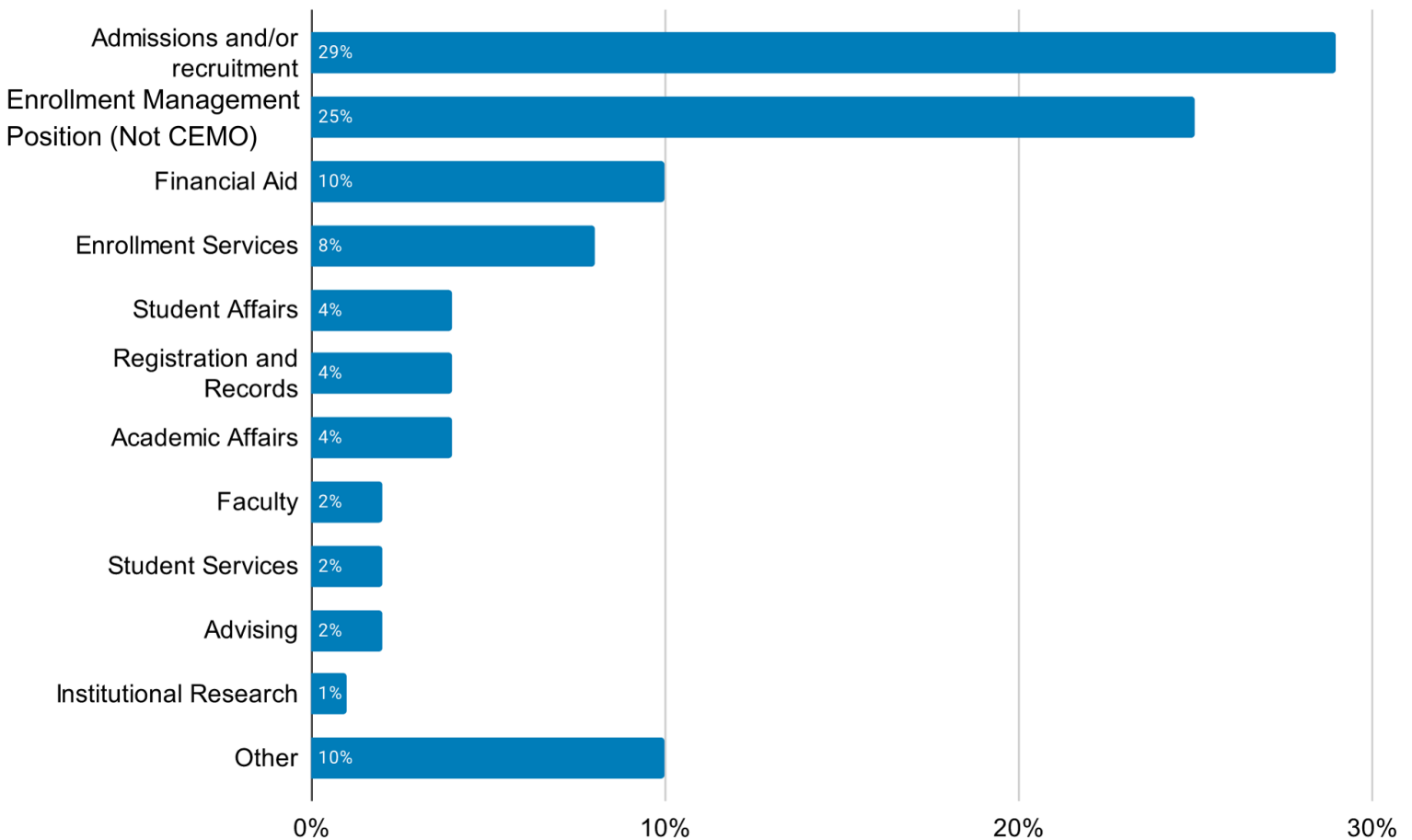
Twenty-three percent of respondents were hired into their current role from another CEMO position at a different institution. Forty percent assumed their current CEMO position from another position within the same institution. See Figure 7.

Figure 7: Location of position immediately prior to current CEMO position



Among those new to the CEMO role, 33% previously worked in admissions and/or recruitment, as shown in Figure 8. Previous employment included continuing education, marketing, project management, human resources, executive assistant to the president, and assessment and planning.

Figure 8: Area of previous employment among those who did not come from another CEMO position



Portfolio of Responsibilities

Questions were included about the CEMO portfolio of responsibilities and committee work. Figure 9 summarizes committee responsibilities. Some CEMOs reported also serving on committees, such as those dealing with community engagement, data governance, athletics, residency appeals, and diversity.

Figure 9: Regular Committee Responsibilities

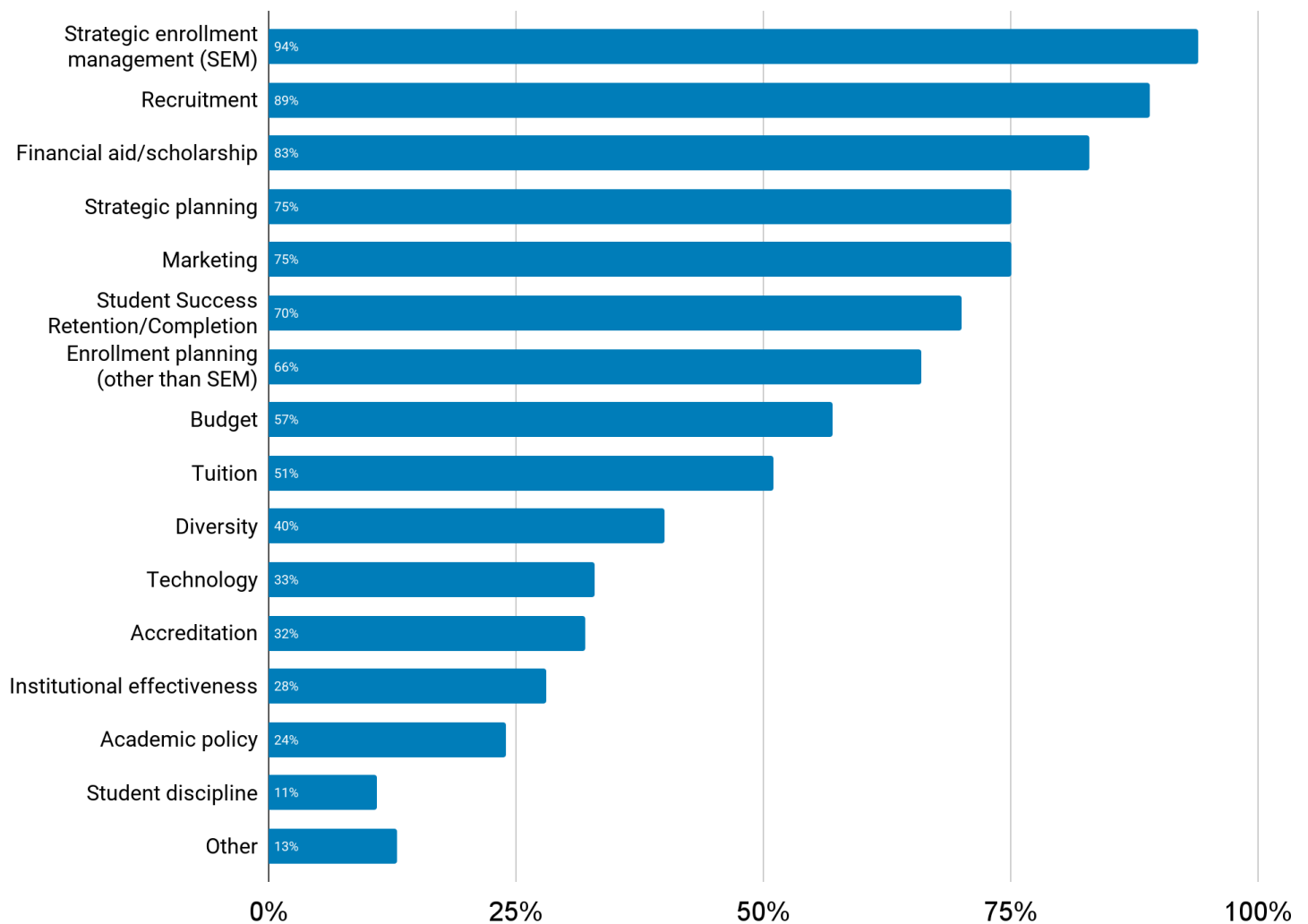


Table 1 represents a portfolio of responsibilities typical to the CEMO position. Each column category was defined as follows for survey participants.

- **Responsible:** I perform this myself. I do not delegate the activity or responsibility.
- **Supervise:** I have responsibility, but I have delegated the performance of this activity, and I supervise it.
- **Participate:** I neither delegate nor supervise this activity, but I influence decisions related to that function.
- **Inform:** I have no authority or responsibility for this activity, but I inform others about this function.
- **N/A:** none of the above

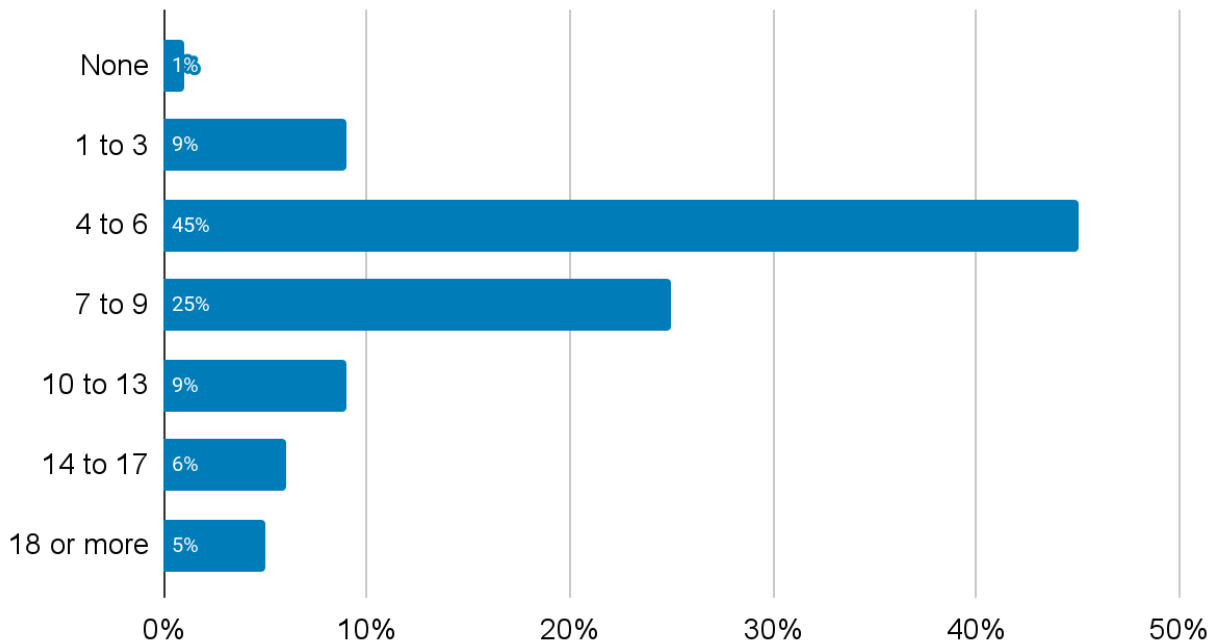
Table 1: Portfolio of Responsibilities	Responsible	Supervise	Participate	Inform	N/A
Academic advising	0%	17%	22%	43%	18%
Academic planning	1%	3%	46%	36%	14%
Academic skill support (e.g., tutoring)	0%	11%	15%	34%	40%
Accreditation	3%	4%	51%	30%	12%
Admissions processing	8%	81%	8%	3%	0%
Career services	1%	12%	11%	37%	39%
Evaluation and analysis of marketing and recruitment effectiveness	39%	35%	22%	4%	1%
Financial aid	6%	79%	11%	3%	2%
Identifying academic college/department enrollment goals	31%	16%	38%	10%	5%
Identifying institutional enrollment goals	78%	14%	8%	1%	0%
Institutional marketing	11%	23%	55%	10%	1%
Institutional research	2%	4%	59%	27%	8%
International admission	12%	66%	12%	2%	8%
International recruitment	10%	64%	13%	5%	8%
International student services (current students)	2%	29%	27%	26%	17%
Managing technology solutions	16%	47%	26%	8%	3%
New student recruitment	12%	83%	4%	1%	0%
Records and registration	3%	49%	23%	17%	8%
Retention/student success/completion	5%	30%	50%	12%	4%
Target market identification	39%	44%	13%	2%	2%
Territory management	8%	77%	8%	2%	5%
Veterans education certification and reporting	2%	43%	19%	17%	19%

American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Washington D.C.

Workload and Supervisory Responsibility

The CEMO role is characterized by its demanding schedule, including long work hours, numerous meetings, travel commitments and managing several direct reports. Seventy percent of CEMOs oversee between four and nine direct reports; 5% manage 18 or more. See Figure 10.

Figure 10: Number of direct reports managed by CEMO's



The daily meeting schedule for CEMOs is likely to be full. The breakdown of the data includes:

- 19% attend more than five meetings
- 23% attend five meetings
- 30% have four meetings
- 20% participate in three meetings
- 7% are involved in two meetings
- 1% have just one meeting per day

In terms of weekly work hours, 27% of CEMOs report working between 50 and 54 hours each week. Twenty percent work 55 hours or more; one individual clocks in 70 hours in an average week. The mean number of hours in the group who reported working more than 55 hours a week is 61 hours. Additionally, 37% work between 45 and 49 hours, and 9% work between 41 and 44 hours. Only 5% work a standard 40-hour week. One respondent reported working less than 40 hours, on average.

Travel is another aspect of the CEMO role; 55% travel for work, excluding trips related to professional conferences or developmental activities. Among those who travel, 24% are away for more than 20 business days a year, 20% for 16 to 20 days, 23% for 11 to 15 days, 24% for 6 to 10 days, and 10% for 5 days or less. Among those reporting more than 20 business days of travel a year, the mean is 43 days. The maximum number of travel days reported was 100.

Personal Perspectives on the CEMO Position

From a list provided, respondents identified the top five roles/responsibilities and the top five skills/attributes they believe are most important for the CEMO position. See Table 2.

Table 2. Top 5 roles/responsibilities, skill/attributes, and challenges for the CEMO position

	Roles Responsibilities	Skills Attributes	Challenges
First	Enrollment management/meeting enrollment goals	Leadership and management	Enough time to get things done
Second	SEM leadership	Enrollment management	Budget limitations
Third	Data analytics	Communication	Personnel management
Fourth	Staffing leadership	Problem solving	Meeting enrollment goals
Fifth	Change management	Collaborative decision making and consensus building	Relationships with other departments

Decision-Making Environment

New to the 2023 survey was a question about the institutional decision-making model a CEMO must navigate. Participants were given the following definitions.

Fully collaborative decision making: A traditional approach that some might call a "collegial model" of governance. The faculty and administration make decisions jointly; consensus is the goal.

Distributed decision-making: Decisions are made by discrete groups responsible for specific issues. The understanding is faculty makes decisions in certain areas, and the administration and board of trustees make decisions in other areas.

Consultative decision-making: A more communicative model in which faculty opinion and advice are sought, but authority remains with the senior administration and the board of trustees. Although many individuals and groups are brought into the decision-making process, the model revolves around information sharing and discussion, rather than joint decision making.³

Current CEMOs report working within either a consultative or distributed decision-making model.

- 41% selected consultative decision-making
- 39% selected distributed decision-making
- 15% selected fully collaborative decision-making
- 4% stated none of the choices closely reflected the governance model at their institution

Job Satisfaction and Factors for Retention

Respondents were asked to react to descriptive statements in the survey about their CEMO experience. Statements focused on factors key to retaining CEMOs in their positions, along with other aspects of job satisfaction.

While CEMOs generally feel valued and autonomous in their roles, they also face pressures related to performance, resource constraints and achievement of enrollment goals.

Keys to CEMO Retention A work-life balance is the most important factor in retaining CEMOs in 2023. This is followed by fair compensation, appreciation, professional development opportunities, and an increased responsibility and/or an enlarged professional portfolio.

Importance of Role in Institutional Governance Mixed responses about the effectiveness of the CEMO role in institutional governance/decision making suggest a significant number of CEMOs feel they are effectively engaged in decision-making at their institution. However, there is still a substantial percentage who find this aspect is lacking in their CEMO position.

Overall Job Satisfaction The majority of CEMOs express satisfaction with their current position, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. This indicates a general contentment with their roles but also highlights areas that could be improved for enhanced job satisfaction.

³ The definitions are from a 2015 OSU webinar Shared Governance: Moving Forward Together by Adrianna Kezar from the University of Southern California.

Recognition of Skills A majority of CEMOs believe their professional and personal skills are appreciated in their institution. This sense of appreciation is vital for job fulfillment and motivation.

Challenges with Enrollment Goals There is division among CEMOs as to whether enrollment goals at their institution are reasonable and achievable with available resources. This points to potential challenges in resource allocation and goal setting at some institutions.

Autonomy in the Role Many CEMOs agree they have considerable freedom in their job. This suggests the role typically comes with a high degree of autonomy, which is essential for effective leadership and decision-making.

Support for Professional Development Most CEMOs feel they are supported in their professional development activities, although a small percentage feel this support could be improved. Continuous professional growth is important to maintain the effectiveness and relevance of CEMOs in their evolving roles.

Pressure to Perform Most CEMOs feel constant or frequent pressure in their demanding role. Continual expectations to deliver results can be stressful and may impact job satisfaction. It may also be a cause for the relatively short tenure many CEMOs have in the position.

Career Aspirations, Preparation, and Challenges

Respondents were asked about their next career move and 83% had a plan. The other 17% are undecided. Among the 83% who have a plan for their next career move,

- 38% intend to stay in their current position for the foreseeable future
- 17% intend to retire from their current position
- 11% intend to seek a different position at a different institution
- 6% intend to seek another CEMO position at a different institution
- 6% intend to stay at their current institution but seek a different position
- 3% intend to seek a position outside of an institution but still in higher education
- 2% intend to seek a position outside of higher education

Among those who seek a different position in higher education as their next career move, 46% intend to pursue the chief executive position, 26% will seek a different administrative position, 9% intend to transition to faculty, 3% intend to seek another higher education position not listed in the survey and 17% are undecided.

Forty percent plan to make their next career move in three years or less, pointing to many opportunities for aspiring CEMOs to have the opportunity to advance in the near future. An

additional 29% plan to move to another position in four years or longer. Thirty percent are undecided.

Preparation for Next Career Move

Open-ended responses to a query about how current CEMOs are preparing for their next career move were analyzed for common themes. Each theme represents a strategic approach toward career advancement.

Continued Education and Professional Development Many respondents are focusing on furthering their education, such as completing or pursuing a doctorate, engaging in professional development programs, or acquiring specific certifications.

Networking and Relationship Building A significant number of respondents are actively building professional networks and establishing relationships within, and outside of, their current institution. This includes connecting with colleagues, participating in leadership groups, and engaging with industry professionals across various sectors.

Gaining Diverse Experience Some respondents are broadening their experience by taking on different roles or responsibilities to bolster their expertise beyond their current specialization. This approach includes expanding their knowledge base in various areas, such as finance, student affairs, and academic administration.

Leadership and Strategic Planning Respondents are focusing on honing leadership skills and strategic planning abilities. This includes participating in leadership development programs, working on major campus projects, and taking leadership roles on committees or other institutional initiatives.

Career Transition Preparation This group includes different career paths, such as consulting, and those preparing for retirement. Respondents are planning financially, exploring part-time work options, and considering interim roles or assignments.

Performance in Their Current Role Some respondents emphasize excelling in their current position as a key strategy. They believe doing well in their present role will create future opportunities that demonstrate their capability for greater responsibility.

Personal and Professional Reflection Some individuals are reflecting on their career aspirations and aligning their actions accordingly. This includes being transparent about career goals, seeking mentorship, and participating in programs that align with future ambitions.

Institutional Involvement and Innovation A few respondents are actively involved in their current institution's strategic planning and innovation initiatives. They are focusing on contributing to significant institutional changes and keeping up with industry trends and challenges.

Challenges to Making Their Next Career Move

Similar to the question about preparing for a career move, respondents were asked about perceived challenges associated with their desired future career move, including retirement. A few remarked that they did not perceive any challenges, while the majority of those who opted to answer the question listed one or more challenges.

Educational Advancement and Credentialing Many respondents see completing advanced degrees (especially doctoral programs) and obtaining specific certifications as a key challenge to advancing their careers.

Demographic and Personal Challenges Various issues, such as age, family responsibilities, and geographical constraints, are seen as significant hurdles. Aging out of the workforce, caring for aging parents, and spousal employment are specific concerns.

Institutional and Market Dynamics Respondents cite critical obstacles as understanding the nuances of different institutions, grappling with declining college-aged student demographics, and navigating market trends and financial challenges in higher education.

Navigational Challenges in Career Advancement Challenges to qualifying for future positions include affiliating with new institutions, finding opportunities in a saturated market, and demonstrating success in their current roles.

Diversity and Inclusion Barriers Professionals of color specifically mention trepidation about being hired in leadership roles at predominantly white institutions.

Financial Constraints and Retirement Planning Some respondents are focused on financial planning for retirement or future career moves, including personal savings and managing personal debt.

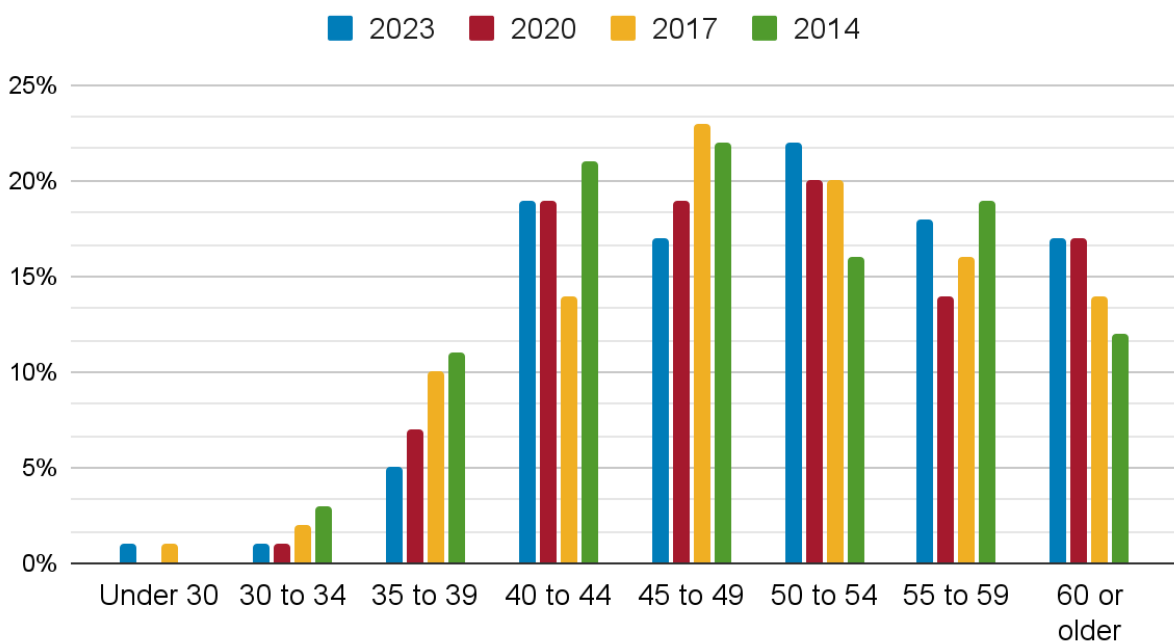
Career Transition to Different Sectors Transitioning from higher education to consulting or other industries is seen as a challenge, particularly in terms of articulating transferable skills and finding the best opportunities.

Personal Well-Being and Work-Life Balance Challenges in managing stress, maintaining health and wellness, and achieving a satisfactory work-life balance are highlighted, particularly in the context of high-pressure roles.

Demographics

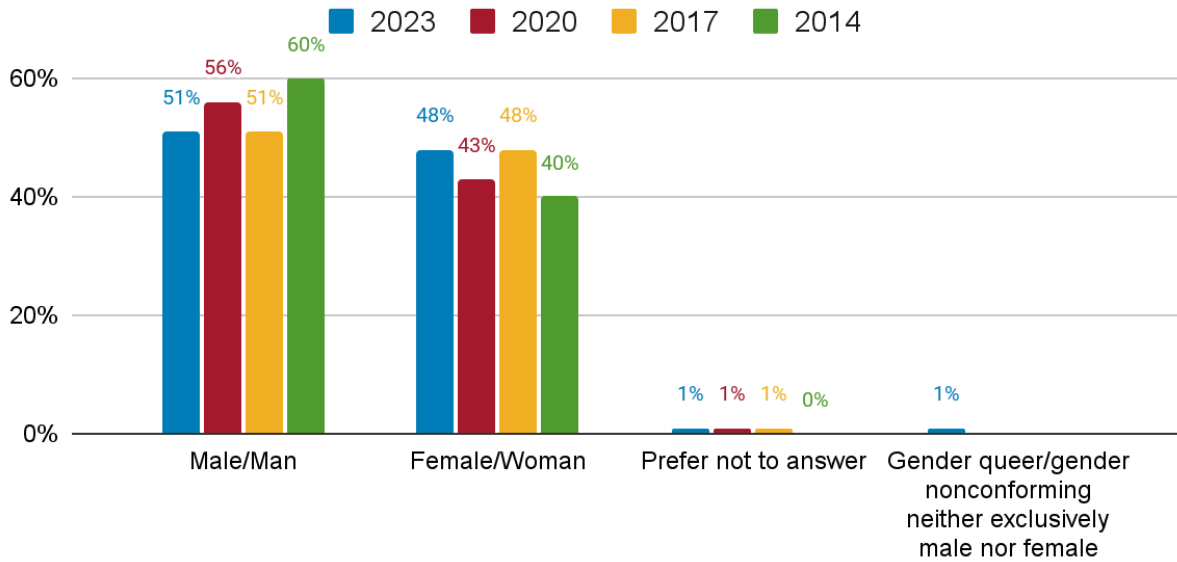
Age data remains consistent, underscoring the seniority of the CEMO position. See Figure 11.

Figure 11: Age of respondents 2014 -2023



When examining diversity in the CEMO role, the data reveal no significant changes over the four surveys in participation rates based on race, ethnicity, or gender, despite the high turnover rate in these positions. Gender-identity response choices were updated for the 2023 survey. There is no statistical difference in gender representation in the CEMO role by institutional control, type, or size. See Figure 12.

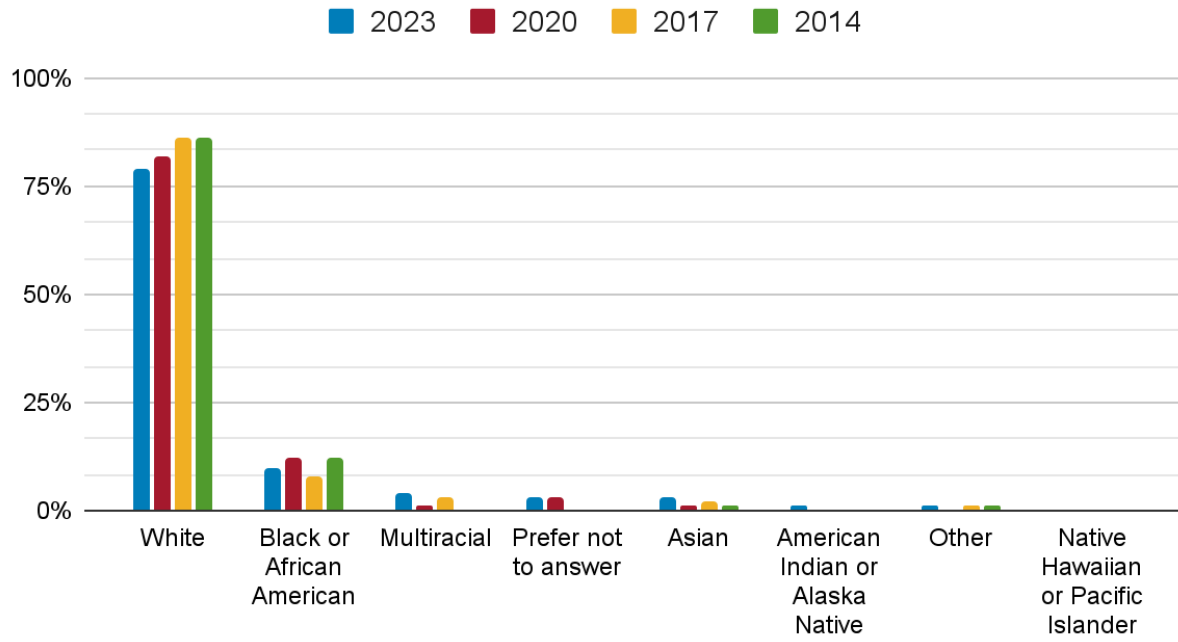
Figure 12: Gender identity 2014 to 2023



Response choices for 2023 are adapted from U.S.CDC guidance for SO/GI survey

Self-reported race and ethnicity data have remained largely consistent across all four cohorts. See Figure 13. In the 2023 data, 5% of respondents identify as Hispanic or Latino, which is consistent with previous data points. There is no statistical difference in race representation in the CEMO role by institutional control, type, or size.

Figure 13: Race 2014 to 2023



Words of Wisdom

Participants were given the opportunity to provide their own “words of wisdom,” and comments were evaluated for common themes. Responses offer many insights and sage advice for individuals in the CEMO role or for those aspiring to such a position in higher education. Several common themes were identified and are shared below.

Professional Growth and Networking

- Networking is crucial, both within and outside of one's institution.
- It is important to mentor and sponsor others.
- Continuous professional development and keeping abreast of current trends are necessary tasks.

Passion and Mission

- A genuine passion for the work is vital.
- Understanding and believing in the institution's mission are critical.

Adaptability and Flexibility

- One needs to be nimble and adaptable in a constantly changing environment.
- A CEMO must have the ability to handle ambiguity and be able to pivot strategies when necessary.

Data-Informed Decision Making

- It is necessary to understand, interpret, and use data effectively and to be able to use it in decision-making and strategy formulation.

Relationship Building and Collaboration

- It is important to collaborate across various departments of an institution.
- Building consensus and gaining support from diverse stakeholders is essential.
- Maintaining and fostering professional relationships and networks is valuable.

Student-Centric Approach

- One must always remember the primary mission – to serve students.
- It is necessary to understand the impact of the CEMO's work on students' lives.

Leadership and Management

- It is important to have a good team and to delegate effectively.
- A CEMO must be able to balance strategic vision with hands-on management.
- Managing relationships, especially with upper administration, is an important aspect of the position.

Work-Life Balance:

- There should be an emphasis on personal well-being and a balance between work and personal life.

Integrity and Values

- All decisions and actions must be handled with integrity.
- Knowing one's value and standing firm in one's beliefs is vital.

Resilience and Thick Skin

- A CEMO must be prepared for criticism and challenges.
- One must not take things personally to be able to weather tough situations.
- A broad understanding of higher education is necessary.
- An in-depth understanding of how higher education institutions function as a whole, beyond just enrollment, is essential.

Communication

- Effective and clear communication skills are crucial, both with the team and within the institution.

Personal Fulfillment and Reward

- Despite myriad challenges, the CEMO role can be personally and professionally rewarding.

The themes derived from these words of wisdom underscore the multifaceted nature of the Chief Enrollment Management Officer role. To be a successful CEMO requires a blend of technical skills, interpersonal skills, leadership, and a deep commitment to an institution's mission and its students.

Their Personal Stories

Belmont University, Nashville, Tennessee

The Most Rewarding Part of My Job Is . . .

Chris Gage

Vice President for Enrollment Services

The most rewarding aspect of my role as Vice President for Enrollment Services at Belmont University is the opportunity to shape the future of the institution by strategically increasing enrollment. I feel blessed to have this unique chance to make a significant impact on Belmont's growth and success. Like most colleagues in this profession, I initially embarked on this meaningful work to help prospective students discover their postsecondary paths. My responsibilities have evolved over time. However, at the core of my work, what drives me in this profession is helping students achieve their educational goals and ensuring they have access to quality education.

Challenges abound, and the daily rhythms of work can overshadow successes and overwhelm project management. However, the following key success factors define my leadership focus, enhancing the fulfillment I receive from my work in higher-education enrollment management.

Impact on Student Lives My work can profoundly impact students' lives. By ensuring Belmont attracts, enrolls and graduates a diverse, qualified student body, I assist in providing opportunities for individuals to pursue their dreams and aspirations. Along with colleagues across campus, I collaborate to empower students who might not have had access to Belmont, enabling them to gain knowledge, skills and experiences that may transform their lives.

University Growth Belmont's growth is intrinsically linked to my work—this is both a challenge and a reward. At times, the work is pressure-packed and stressful, as colleagues across campus look to the enrollment team to ensure the university's fiscal success. At the same time, enrollment does not occur in a vacuum.

I have the unique opportunity to collaborate with colleagues across campus to meet the academic and administrative needs of the university. This work allows me to contribute to Belmont's expansion in multiple ways, including enhancing Belmont's reputation, improving its financial resources, expanding its cultural diversity, and providing increased opportunities for engagement in the Nashville community.

Innovation and Strategic Enrollment Management Higher education today is a dynamic field. Complacency and the status quo will not carry an organization forward. Innovation and strategic planning are critically important to help Belmont thrive. This aspect of my work allows me to brainstorm creatively and collaborate with colleagues outside of enrollment management.

I find inspiration in reading about other industries and change agents in the field of disruptive innovation. At Belmont, I am empowered to explore and implement cutting-edge enrollment strategies. This framework allows the enrollment leadership team to adapt to meet student needs, execute data-driven decisions, leverage technology to maximize our assets and engage in creative problem-solving to tackle complex challenges with innovative solutions.

Team Leadership Leading a team dedicated to Belmont's enrollment success allows me to mentor and guide professionals in the field.

In the end, for me, it is all about witnessing students' growth and success. It's an honor and privilege to contribute to creating an environment where Belmont students can learn, explore and develop into informed, capable, responsible, diverse leaders of character and wisdom who lead extraordinary lives of purpose.

Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington Illinois

My Journey to the CEMO Position

LeAnn Hughes, M.A.

Vice President of Enrollment and Marketing

When I was 17, my mom asked a local psychologist and career counselor to help me identify potential careers and college majors. He administered a series of tests, including the Myers-Briggs and the Campbell Strong Inventory™, then generated a report that included majors, careers, average salaries, etc. Becoming a CEMO for a college or university wasn't mentioned in any of them. I suspect this is because working in this industry isn't something kids typically think about doing while growing up. I had no idea this job even existed then, and I wonder if the psychologist did either.

The experience did show I should consider majoring in Communications or Marketing. So, of course, I ignored that sage advice and majored in English, intending to become a college English professor. I was so convinced this was my career path, that I doubled down after graduating, despite the oversaturated market, and got a Master's in English. Then life happened (there was a boy, then heartbreak).

Instead of going for my Ph.D., I took a job teaching end-user computer software to corporations, thinking this would be a gap year before continuing school. My experience as a graduate assistant teaching English Comp 101 somehow convinced this company I could teach Microsoft Excel. For someone who saved the chapters of her master's thesis as separate files because she was terrified that combining them into one document would somehow destroy them and life as she knew it, this was a leap into the absurd.

It turned out that the pressure of explaining a pivot table to a group of research chemists is a great motivator. The impostor syndrome was real until it wasn't. Even better, my bosses recognized my writing skills and put me in charge of marketing, a fact my mother kindly reminds me of to this day. Then came a full-time marketing job, then another, this time with PR also in the title.

Then I found a job posting that combined my love for higher education with my newly developed appreciation for marketing and communications—the director of marketing at a small, private regional college near my hometown. I wore lots of hats there—moving from director to associate VP, to VP for Advancement, and at one point, VP for Development *and* Enrollment Management, which also included my beloved marketing and communications. Small colleges sometimes allow for more career exploration, or at least they did at the time.

I am forever grateful to the President of that small, private regional college for putting me in a metaphorical race car with way too big an engine for me to drive and telling me to win the race.

Overall, it was a great experience and we won some big races. Yes, there were crashes and bumps in the road, and the occasional drive off into a canyon, but the experience taught me a great deal. Having a spirit of adventure, a solution mindset, presidential trust and just working really, really, REALLY hard goes a long way. Now, I am at my third institution, which I love, and I can't imagine doing anything else with my life.

Maybe you took a test in high school that did say you should be a CEMO, or maybe you've landed in the industry and aspire to be one. Whatever the case, here's what I've learned.

- To be successful, you need to spend as much energy educating others about what you do as managing your own staff. Presidents, CFOs, Trustees, Deans—they each see you through different lenses. At the end of the day, they all want the right headcount, high academic quality, and low discount. The more they understand the complicated nature of the field, the better they can, and will, support you in the tougher years. Unless you're fortunate enough to work for an institution that is immune to the onslaught of external and internal factors negatively impacting enrollment nationwide, you are going to have some tough years.
- Hang on loosely, but don't let go. If you don't take time for yourself to reset, or if you sweat every single detail of every single obstacle daily and respond with emotion, the stress will overwhelm you. After all, you have chosen a career in which your success is dependent on the whims of 17-year-olds. We had a student tell us once they chose us because they liked the kind of soft drinks we served in the cafeteria. When I start feeling too confident in a good year, or too negative in a tough one, I try to remind myself there's not a great deal of difference between the attention span of my 18-year-old son and that of my 7-year-old Springer Spaniel.
- Do the basics well. Don't ignore the challenges, but do pace yourself. Find mentors, build a team you can trust but also inspect, research, use data to make informed decisions, have the hard conversations when needed, and make sure your team is executing to the best of their abilities. Do that, and it will keep you out of campus politics and gossip, and in the work you love.

Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky

My Journey to the CEMO Position

Michael J. Marshall, Ed.D.

Vice President for Enrollment, Marketing and Communication

My path to the chief enrollment management officer role (CEMO) was far from linear. It was a path marked by highs and lows that taught me the importance of taking calculated risks, embracing change, and having faith that intentional action will yield positive outcomes. As I reflect on my journey, I've learned invaluable lessons to share with anyone aspiring to become a CEMO.

I embarked on my professional journey to become a Dean of Admissions in a conventional fashion, beginning as an admissions counselor and gradually advancing to become an Assistant Director then an Associate Director. These were early steps on my path toward the role of Dean of Admissions. However, my path took an unexpected turn when I was presented with the opportunity to serve as the Chancellor's Leadership Intern, a program modeled after the American Council on Education's (ACE) Fellows program.

When I was offered this opportunity, I faced skepticism from a couple of colleagues who questioned whether taking this detour was wise. They cautioned me that becoming the Chancellor's Leadership Intern might be "career suicide" vis-à-vis my aspirations to become a Dean of Admissions. In spite of these concerns, I opted to take a leap of faith and accepted the role as the Chancellor's Leadership Intern, leaving my full-time position as associate director. This decision changed the trajectory of my career in higher education.

During my time as the Chancellor's Leadership Intern, I had the privilege of shadowing and learning from the university's chancellor (chief executive officer). Additionally, I had the honor of serving as a member of the Chancellor's cabinet, as well as collaborating with academic leaders on a range of strategic and campus-wide initiatives. This experience opened doors for me and accelerated my learning curve, ultimately leading to my role as the Chief Governmental Relations Officer and an opportunity to pursue my doctorate in Higher-Education Leadership.

As the Chief Governmental Affairs Officer, I advocated for, and represented, the university on key legislative and policy issues at the federal, state, and local levels. Simultaneously, I was able to apply classroom theory from my higher-education-leadership doctoral program to my professional position. My research interests in inter-institutional collaboration and public-private partnerships aligned beautifully with my work in the enrollment space.

These experiences culminated in my first CEMO position (at a different institution). Ironically, I originally only aspired to serve in the Dean of Admissions role. Today, I proudly serve as Vice President for Enrollment, Marketing and Communication (at another institution). My journey is

a testament to the importance of taking calculated risks, even when others voice doubts or express skepticism.

Looking back on the advice I received about "career suicide," I am reminded of the intersection between faith and action. Success requires taking the initiative while maintaining confidence that, in due time, your efforts will yield positive results. I firmly believe to reach a CEMO position, you must keep an open mind, anticipate necessary changes, take calculated risks, and embrace lifelong learning. In addition, having mentors, advisers, and sponsors is essential. They can open doors you might not have found otherwise. Specific to my journey, my sponsor played a pivotal role by opening the door to the Chancellor's Leadership Internship and the Chief Governmental Relations Officer position.

In closing, I offer this piece of advice to those aspiring to become CEMOs: Pay it forward. Clear the path for those who follow in your footsteps, and offer guidance to those who seek to reach the same heights. As you pursue your own journey to the CEMO role, I encourage you to embrace change, take calculated risks and continue learning throughout your career. Godspeed.

Illif School of Theology, Denver, Colorado
My Journey to the CEMO Position
Stephanie Krusemark
Vice President of Enrollment Management

My path to becoming a Chief Enrollment Officer began in 2006 with a conversation I had with my late mentor, the Vice President of Student Affairs, Dr. Eva Krebs, at Pacific University, Forest Grove, Oregon. Dr. Krebs advised me that if my dream was to become a CEMO, I needed to go back to school to obtain either a Ph.D. or a J.D. Taking her wisdom to heart, I started searching for Ph.D. programs in higher education administration.

I was working in my first admissions role as an Assistant Director of Graduate Admissions and Professional Programs at Pacific University. During my search, I met the Dean of Admissions for the Morgridge College of Education at the University of Denver, in Denver, Colorado, at a recruitment fair. The Dean impressed upon me that I could get a Harvard-quality education at DU because the Chair of the Department was a Harvard alum. She asked, “Why would you pay for a Harvard education when you can get one at a DU price?”

In the spring of 2007, I was admitted to the Ph.D. program in higher education at DU. Excited and nervous, I realized I was about to embark on a new chapter in my educational life, a decade after completing my master’s degree. I also battled impostor syndrome, questioning whether I was smart enough for a Ph.D. program. However, after speaking with the Department Chair who would become my advisor, I believed this was the best path to achieve my dream of becoming a CEMO because the program focused on the historic and contemporary models of higher-education institutions through critical-race and inclusive-excellence lenses.

The Provost of Pacific University also gave me valuable advice. After obtaining my Ph.D., I should gain work experience in all time zones and on both coasts to build a strong institutional knowledge base. I followed his advice, starting my first leadership role as Assistant Director of Graduate Admissions and Assistant Dean of Multicultural Recruitment at Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado.

About 18 months later, I advanced to an Assistant Dean of Marketing and Enrollment role for the School of Counseling and Education at Santa Clara University in Santa Clara, California. A year and a half later, I pursued an Assistant Vice President of Enrollment Management position at Trinity Washington University located in Washington, D.C. I was promoted to Vice President of Enrollment Management 6 weeks after my arrival! This role was a significant learning experience, offering the largest staff and budget I had managed to date.

About 2½ years later, I served as the Chief Enrollment Management and Marketing Officer for Prescott College in Prescott, Arizona for just over 2 years. Following my tenure at Prescott

College, I took a brief hiatus from higher education to become the first Vice President of University Relations for Mentor Collective, an ed-tech firm based in Boston, Massachusetts. After 18 months with Mentor Collective, I returned to campus life, taking on my current role as the Vice President of Enrollment Management at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, where I've been for 3½ years.

Some may wonder why I've worked at so many institutions in such a short time. I felt the best way to reach the CEMO level and develop as a well-rounded enrollment-management professional was to take leadership positions in a diverse array of environments.

I share these educational and professional twists and turns in my journey to become a CEMO with the understanding that “it’s not always about the destination; it's about the journey.” My advice for those aspiring to become a CEMO is to make your goals known to those around you, seek out informational interviews with CEMOs in the field, be willing to move across the country at a moment's notice, and never stop pursuing your dream because it will become a reality.

What’s next for me? My ultimate goal is to serve as a college president for a private, liberal-arts institution one day. I believe the emphasis on enrollment in colleges and universities worldwide provides new opportunities to promote CEMOs to lead institutions into the future.

Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia

My Path to the CEMO Position

Jerry Ross, Ed.D.

Vice President for Enrollment Management

One of the aspects I love about Enrollment Management is the multitude of paths leading to a CEMO position. Like many in this field, my path exposed me to the necessary skills I would need and experiences that would benefit a CEMO. This role wasn't my initial career goal, but I am grateful every day to have found this profession. How many jobs allow you to change lives daily?

I began my professional career outside higher education, spending 6 years working in public policy in Washington, D.C. Initially, I thought I'd do this for a few years, then return for a doctorate and eventually become a professor. Along the way, I did some adjunct work at a local community college. Eventually, I found my way back to my alma mater in an entry-level staff role to work full-time with distance students and later with traditional students. While working, I earned a doctorate, taking advantage of a tuition benefit. This is something you should do if you have the opportunity.

I worked my way up to a staff assistant dean in an academic college, facing limited advancement opportunities because I wasn't faculty. My role covered all student-related activities, supporting the entire student life cycle. This led me to reflect on my next steps because I still had much of my career ahead.

Moving to a registrar's office made sense based on my experience, and I was fortunate to become an associate registrar at West Virginia University. This role provided valuable experience in major campus initiatives, project management, strategic planning, collaborative decision-making, data analysis, and more. These skills led to University Registrar positions at Syracuse University and then Purdue University.

Along the way, I began contemplating what it would take to move into a CEMO role. Despite my experience, I knew I might need to pivot to gain additional experience in other enrollment management areas. So I started looking at roles that would provide this opportunity. A position at the University of Florida working with online programs allowed me to gain experience in strategic planning, data analysis, marketing, and communications. It provided an entrepreneurial approach to building the admissions funnel. It also brought me back to a passion area: working with access-oriented programs.

From there, I moved into my first CEMO role at California State University, Chico, as Associate Vice President for Enrollment Management. The role at an access-focused institution offered significant opportunities to build a new, data-informed enrollment-management organization, with a strategic focus. After a few successful years, during which we reversed a multiyear

decline in new-student enrollment, I moved to my current position at Marshall University as Vice President for Enrollment Management.

This cabinet-level CEMO role perfectly aligns my experience with the institution's goals. It's refreshing to have a CEMO at the cabinet table, ensuring enrollment is a top priority. My journey is illustrative of the myriad ways people reach CEMO roles. If you decide to pursue a CEMO role, know that it is both challenging and rewarding, and one of the most important roles on any campus.



Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

A View from the Hot Seat

Kris Wong Davis, Ed.D.

Vice Provost for Enrollment Management and Dean of Admission

When you're a young professional aspiring to the CEMO role, it seems like a powerful and significant position. However, understanding what it truly means to be in that seat is crucial, including the realization that power may not be what you expect. This doesn't mean you shouldn't pursue this role, but rather, it's hard to grasp the full meaning of the role until you're actually in it.

I've heard important quotes from colleagues about the role: "Don't expect to have friends." "Everyone wants something from you, and no one is ever happy with what they get." "Just make everyone equally unhappy, but no one more unhappy than another." "You're second only to the AD in criticism and backseat quarterbacking." "You're second only to the AD in job turnover." I believe this last comment has recently been usurped by the rapid turnover of president and provost roles. Sadly, these quotes do resonate with what the role can be like.

My journey involved spending time in college access work, fueled by a deep passion for giving back. Without a champion in my corner, I may never have enrolled or succeeded in college, let alone gone on to earn a once-unthinkable doctorate degree. My family scarcely understands what I do, which only deepens the impostor syndrome every time I go home. Yet, this also fuels my need to contribute to the enrollment landscape in higher education. We need more CEMOs who understand the perspective of students who were told they were not college material or for whom rigorous courses were inaccessible because they belonged to the wrong demographic. Reframing our work, even at the most prestigious institutions, is essential to ensuring access for all in higher education.

This is not to say the work is easy. It becomes far harder when you sit in the seat and do not represent the majority. Your expertise, knowledge, and credibility will constantly be questioned. You must not let that unnerve you or react to it because it will undermine your authority.

This leads me to mention that power in this role often lies in the responsibility but not always in the authority. I often hear young people say, "I can't wait to be the person making the decisions," or "It will be good to tell people what to do." That's not what this role entails. You will be informing, influencing, collaborating, and partnering. Most important, you will be asking many questions—hard questions with many possible paths to answers and questions that lead to no final solution, but rather a way forward that will continue to evolve over time. Become an expert at being humble, influencing, and questioning in a thoughtful, non-threatening way.

I worry about the future of the profession. It's not an easy role, and I fear many great professionals will opt out when they realize the value of serving lies in making a difference, even when the environment is challenging. Our students need us; they depend on our creativity, ingenuity, advocacy, and dedication. Without us giving voice to strategies that enable institutions to go beyond traditional pipelines, the future of our country's leaders and thinkers will be far too homogeneous to represent the population.

Being a CEMO means sitting in the hot seat, but it also allows us to set the world on fire by educating some exciting young minds.



Conclusion

Chief Enrollment Management Officers play a critical, strategic role in higher education institutions. Their work is pivotal in shaping institutional success through enrollment strategies, but it comes with great demands and responsibilities. The position requires a blend of extensive experience, advanced education, and personal attributes that enable one to navigate complex, dynamic environments. Despite the challenges, CEMOs generally report high job satisfaction, although there is room for improvement in terms of demographic diversity in this key leadership role.

From these data, we can draw the following conclusions:

- Most CEMOs are part of their institution's executive leadership and mainly report to the chief executive division.
- The majority of CEMO roles are within an enrollment management division.
- Most CEMOs have over 20 years of experience in higher education.
- CEMOs show mobility across institutions.
- A significant majority have dedicated their entire careers to higher education.
- CEMOs have extensive responsibilities, including setting enrollment goals and overseeing marketing, recruitment, and student success.
- They manage demanding schedules, often overseeing large teams and attending multiple meetings daily.
- Work exceeds 50 hours per week for nearly half of CEMOs, with many also undertaking travel duties.
- Work-life balance and fair compensation are top priorities for job satisfaction.
- CEMOs generally feel appreciated and enjoy autonomy but face challenges in meeting enrollment goals and managing workloads.
- Many CEMOs are planning career moves, seeking advancement or retirement, with half expecting to change positions within three years.
- There has been no significant shift in the demographic composition of CEMOs over nine years, with a majority identifying as white men.
- Data indicate there are likely to be several hundred CEMO openings in the United States in the next three years.

CEMO Career Track Resources

AACRAO has several resources that can help you prepare for your first CEMO position including the following:

- SEM-Endorsement **Program**
- SEM professional **proficiencies**
- Essentials of SEM **online course**
- **Core Concepts of SEM** book
- **Handbook of SEM**
- **SEM as a Connector** book
- **SEM in Action** book
- SEM **Quarterly**
- SEM **Conference**
- ASCEND **Leadership Development Program**