

 THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Faculty Involvement in Strategic Enrollment Management at North American Postsecondary Educational Institutions

By Clayton Smith and Lisa Harris

This article explores the role of faculty members in developing and enhancing Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) on North American postsecondary educational institutions. Researchers use a qualitative research design in which nine faculty members and ten chief enrollment managers at nineteen postsecondary institutions participated in individual interviews. Primary findings, resulting from a qualitative research design, include: a) the primary role of faculty in SEM is to provide quality instruction, serve as a consultative partner with SEM administration, support marketing and student recruitment, support student recruitment and success, and share higher-educational trends; b) faculty are important in implementing SEM strategies in such areas as academic advising, academic infrastructure, academic program reviews, faculty development, individual student interventions, institutional effectiveness, new-student orientation, student engagement, student recruitment, and student retention; and c) one of the best ways to engage faculty is to build faculty relationships, share data extensively, focus on student retention, and be open to faculty initiatives. Study limitations, implications and recommendations for professional practice as well as suggestions for further research are presented.

Many have written about the importance of placing Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) in the institutional academic context (Dolence 1993; Henderson 2005; Kalsbeek 2007; Smith 2007) and building “strong faculty/staff coalitions” (Romano and Connell 2015) in order to achieve institutional enrollment goals. While it has now been more than 30 years since SEM emerged and the first American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) SEM conference was convened, it is time to take stock of how far we have come in putting SEM into the academic context and engaging the faculty in its planning and implementation.

This article will explore the role of the faculty in developing and enhancing SEM at North American postsecondary educational institutions. Our hope is that through the sharing of promising practices in this area, we will increase authentic faculty engagement in SEM. We also hope that our research will contribute to the development of new ways of coupling institutional effectiveness both inside and outside of the classroom, and to enhance collaboration between SEM professionals and faculty.

We seek to examine the promising practices for engaging faculty members in SEM. The following four research questions guided our study:

- What roles do faculty play in planning and implementing SEM at North American postsecondary educational institutions?
- What are the most effective practices in which faculty engage in to support the planning and implementation of SEM at North American postsecondary educational institutions?
- What is the future role for faculty in the SEM process?
- What should be the role of faculty involved in SEM at institutions just beginning to implement SEM?

Literature Review

Many have written about the importance of placing Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) in the institutional academic context (Dolence 1993; Henderson 2005; Kalsbeek 2007; Smith 2007). Dolence (1993) described SEM as a “comprehensive process designed to help an

institution achieve and maintain the optimum recruitment, retention, and graduation rates, where ‘optimum’ is defined in the academic context of the institution” (9). Henderson (2005) put it well when he suggested that by placing the focus back on the academic context of the institution and “making structure the servant rather than the master” of enrollment policy and strategy, SEM will touch every aspect of institutional function and culture and set the tone for a comprehensive approach” (5–6). Smith (2007) went further by suggesting that “enrollment management is impossible without strong and lasting relationships with faculty members; they are important to all aspects of enrollment management and essential at key points” (1).

Romano and Connell (2015) documented the experience of one institution, Romapo College, which over a three-year period worked to increase student success outcomes by enhancing collaborations and connections between its enrollment management and academic affairs divisions and faculty. This resulted in the implementation of a mandatory advisement system, expanded student-academic affairs partnerships in a first-year seminar course, and a new early alert program, while growing its enrollment and increasing the diversity of its first-year class.

Black (2010) calls for the creation of a retention culture that “focuses holistically on the developmental needs of students: intellectual, social, emotional, and physical” (2). By focusing on student development and educational success, institutions can develop a retention culture that achieves many SEM goals. Black identifies several strategies for success: create a learning environment that praises individual effort rather than performance; require students to show up; manage classroom behavior; provide early academic feedback; engage students with opportunities to practice; surround students with opportunities to practice; surround students with mentors; connect students with others in academic and social settings; ignite their passion; foster a sense of belonging; and deliver on institution promises and covenants with the students you serve. All these success strategies require strong collaboration between academic, enrollment, and student affairs staff, and the faculty.

While the early SEM literature (Hogan 1993; Hossler 1987; Kemerer, Baldrige and Green 1982; Muston 1985; Pollock 1987) focused on structure as the pathway to effective enrollment management, in recent years, we have learned that it is important to embrace a whole institutional approach, including staff, faculty, and students. Henderson (2005) called for adoption of an “EM Ethos,” which is an institution-wide strategy with shared responsibility, as a way for institutional SEM leadership to connect SEM with the work of each person in the institution. He suggested embracing enrollment management as a long-term strategy that: is rooted in the development of a shared responsibility, is integrated with institutional planning, focuses on service, and uses key enrollment performance indicators and research/evaluation plans. Henderson further suggested that SEM needs to move beyond structure, planning, and leadership in order to embrace a community outlook by building relationships within the institution.

Understanding how to create and then nurture relationships in the campus community—whether with faculty, staff, or students—will help the enrollment manager to structure, plan, and lead...on her campus. If she also ensures that she is serving not just the external markets or prospective students but also the internal campus community members, she can be assured of success (Henderson 2012, 104).

Wallace-Hulecki (2007), in her study of medium-sized research-focused universities, identified ten questions to help enrollment managers “reframe the SEM process from the academic lens.”

- Have the academic leaders (*i.e.*, president, provost) of the institution characterized the importance of enrollment as vital to the academic well-being of the institution?
- Is there a sense of urgency underlying the enrollment planning process that resonates with the academic values of the institution?
- Are research and data effectively used to substantiate the case for change?
- Is there a willingness among the academic community to consider change?
- Are the enrollment planning, implementation, and decision processes designed to be highly interactive and participatory?
- Are academic leaders at the level of the dean engaged at critical decision points in the enrollment planning process?
- What fora are in place to engage academic leaders at the level of the dean in discussion and decision processes?
- What lateral and horizontal communication structures are in place to extend the discussions into the academic units?
- What incentives and with what consequences are in place to encourage change?
- Is there collaborative leadership between the chief academic officer and the CEMO (chief enrollment management officer) in the process? (9)

A key reason why institutions should place SEM within the institutional academic context was revealed by Smith (2001) who found that “participation and integration” is the enrollment management factor with the strongest statistically significant relationship with enrollment manager perceptions of enrollment performance. Participation and integration is defined as participation of “senior administration, academic governance, academic administration, faculty, and the persons responsible for strategy and tactic implementation” (369). After all, faculty are involved in enrollment management planning, new program development, student recruitment, admission-yield activities, new-student orientation, academic advising, and co-curricular activities.

Methods

Participants

Research participants are faculty members and chief enrollment managers who are employed at a wide array of North American (Canada, Mexico, and the United States) postsecondary educational institutions (four-year public and private institutions, and two-year community colleges). Nine faculty members and ten chief

enrollment managers participated in the study. Only one research participant was selected from each participating institution.

Procedures

A pilot study was conducted to achieve internal validity. A panel of ten faculty members from the researchers' home institutions reviewed the interview questions to ensure that they matched their intended use. Modifications to the questions were subsequently made.

Participants were recruited by the following methods:

- An introductory email was sent to American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admission Officers' (AACRAO) principal members inviting them to self-identify if they believed their institution engaged faculty members in SEM planning and implementation.
- The researchers sent a follow-up email to the self-identified AACRAO principal members requesting that they forward an email describing the project to the chief enrollment officer and faculty members they believe are engaged in SEM planning and implementation. This email included a link to the project letter of information and asked recipients to indicate their interest in participating in the study by responding affirmatively by email to the researchers.
- Faculty participants who attended the Academic Leadership and Faculty Forum at the 2019 AACRAO Strategic Enrollment Management Conference were provided with information on the study and encouraged to self-identify if they wished to participate in the study.
- Research participants were then sent an email that included the consent-to-participate-in-research-form and requested a return email indicating their consent.
- Telephone or in-person interviews were scheduled at a convenient time for each research participant.

Findings

Respondents identified five primary faculty roles in developing and enhancing SEM. They include: provides quality instruction, serves as a consultative partner with SEM administration, supports marketing and student recruitment, supports student recruitment and success, and shares higher-education trends. While both chief enrollment managers and faculty members agree on most of these roles (only faculty members cited shared higher-education trends), chief enrollment managers are looking for help with SEM administrative matters, and faculty see their role as more connected with the delivery of the curriculum and ensuring a quality academic experience for students. Both chief enrollment managers and faculty members identified supporting student retention and success as important roles for faculty. One faculty member described the different roles faculty play at different points in their career, suggesting the trajectory is like a Russian doll, with young faculty, mid-career faculty, and senior faculty becoming progressively more involved with SEM over time. Table 1 (on page 27) presents a summary of the comments made by chief enrollment managers and faculty members on the faculty role in developing and enhancing SEM.

Researchers explored the role of faculty for each of the SEM planning framework components, which include:

- aligning the institutional strategic plan with broad enrollment targets and a desired mix of students;
- achieving an institutional culture of partnership and collaboration, including leadership, participation, and buy-in;
- establishing clear five- to ten-year enrollment indicator targets for the number and types of students needed to fulfill the institutional mission;
- creating a data-rich environment to inform decisions and evaluate strategies;
- developing an enrollment infrastructure sufficient to achieve enrollment targets;

TABLE 1 ► Summary of Comments Made by Chief Enrollment Managers and Faculty Members on the Faculty Role in Developing and Enhancing SEM

Role	Chief Enrollment Managers	Faculty Members
Provides Quality Instruction	► Integrates SEM concepts into the curriculum ► Participates in program assessment discussions	► Delivers the curriculum ► Provides a quality academic experience for students ► Develops marketable and quality academic program(s) ► Participates in academic program review discussions ► Participates in institutional effectiveness discussions ► Participates in faculty development as a collaborative activity with educational developers
Serves as a Consultative Partner With the SEM Administration	► Serves on institutional SEM committee ► Supports SEM ► Faculty sometimes stops the development of institutional SEM ► Helps to set enrollment targets, mostly one-year targets	► Serves in administrative roles, with many having multiple roles ► Serves on institutional SEM committee in an advisory capacity ► Brings a faculty perspective to SEM ► Supports SEM ► Provides the cover (due to tenure status) for the challenging aspects of change management ► Participates minimally in setting broad enrollment targets ► Participates in setting diversity and international student enrollment targets
Supports Marketing and Student Recruitment	► Supports student recruitment, but it is uneven and program dependent ► Provides marketing support (e.g., marketing ideas, marketing online programs)	► Chooses future students for own academic program(s) ► Provides marketing support (e.g., marketing ideas, marketing online programs) ► Provides quality faculty, which result in attracting students to enroll ► Advocates for the institution and its academic programs ► Supports student recruitment, but it is uneven and program dependent
Supports Student Retention and Success	► Gets students through the progression process to graduation ► Serves as the delivery of student success ► Engages students actively ► Supports student retention, but it is uneven and program dependent ► Provides academic advising	► Notices that something is going on with students in the classroom ► Monitors student classroom behaviour and reports trends to administration ► Provides academic advising, mostly at the upper-undergraduate level ► Provides individual student interventions, primarily at the first-year level in barrier courses ► Participates in co-curricular activities
Shares Higher Education Trends		► Discusses what is seen in classrooms, from students, in research, etc. ► Shares front-line experiences regarding changing roles and needs of students

- enabling effective financial planning and generating added net revenue for the institution;
- developing strategies for achieving key enrollment targets;
- implementing tactics for success in enrollment-related strategies; and achieving sustainable institutional SEM (Bontrager and Green 2015).

Table 2 (on page 28) identifies the most effective SEM planning framework practices, according to chief enrollment manager and faculty respondents, that faculty engage in to support the planning and implementation of SEM in each of these areas.

Some of the responses received that related to SEM planning components included:

TABLE 2 ► The Most Effective Practices that Faculty Engage in to Support the Planning and Implementation of SEM by Key SEM Components

SEM Component	Practices
Strategic Plan	► Upper administration consults with faculty on strategic-plan development ► Faculty help to set broad enrollment targets ► Faculty help to set enrollment targets for a mix of students ► Faculty engage in change management associated with the strategic plan
Culture of Partnership and Collaboration	► Collaboration between faculty and administration to create a culture of student success ► Collaboration within academic units between academic administration and faculty to focus on program enrollment management goals
Enrollment Indicator Targets	► Involve faculty in setting one-year program-specific enrollment targets ► Faculty participate in setting diversity enrollment goals ► Provide information to faculty on how enrollment targets are established
Data-Rich Environment	► Provide aggregate data, as well as enrollment trend data, to faculty to create enhanced transparency ► Engage faculty with analyzing enrollment data consistent with their area(s) of expertise
Enrollment Infrastructure	► Involve faculty in academic-related technology and academic infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, laboratories) decision-making
Financial Planning and Net Revenue	► Involve faculty in decision-making related to opening class spaces for additional students ► Engage faculty in setting budget targets ► Plan curriculum to facilitate financial aid ► Develop course-based international student-serving graduate programs
Strategies	► Involve faculty in marketing and student recruitment activities ► Involve faculty in student retention initiatives
Tactics	► Involve faculty in academic program student recruitment activities ► Engage faculty in enrollment-related activities that overlap with their academic responsibilities, including academic advising, individual student interventions, and co-curricular activities ► Engage faculty in academic program review and institutional effectiveness ► Support faculty development to enhance teaching excellence
Sustainable SEM	► Engage faculty in supporting SEM consistent with their differing career stages ► Continue development of new academic programs ► Keep current majors relevant ► Provide professional development to faculty regarding SEM

► “Very involved with developing the strategic plan, but less so with the SEM plan (too many statistics and data).”

► “You have to approach faculty if you want them to collaborate.”

► [Faculty] “provide the cover for the challenging aspects of change management.”

► “Faculty have as much involvement as they would like.”

► “Faculty are not in the lead of this process. They do not have that initiative, but they collaborate.”

► “Everyone is interested in a culture of success. The caveat is how that is imparted to students.”

► “Knowing who to ask, and want to ask for, became much clearer when we began participating on SEM teams.”

► “Faculty could be involved in stopping the development of institutional SEM.”

When asked about the faculty role in achieving sustainable institutional SEM, two responses summarize points made during the interviews:

I think it is the processes we initiate on our campuses. The SEM team that has been developed for our campus has brought everyone to the table, not just administrators, deans, staff, etc., to work on something, but have brought everyone to the table to work on this. Along with the original folks whose job it is to know about enrollment, many have been brought to the table to see it from different perspectives. The representation will help us look at this from many views. The gap analysis will help us understand where to focus our efforts. The tactics will help us. Voice and presence will help it be sustainable. Being able to understand other perspectives gives more chances to have the synergy to develop a more visionary perspective and to drill down and do the tactics. To understand and see how the big picture fits helps the university put the whole big picture together and saves time. The overall product is extremely powerful. (faculty member comment)

[Achieving sustainable SEM] is all about building relationships by keeping channels open (especially informal), reaching out, talking to people, getting out there and talking, and over communicating. (chief enrollment manager comment)

Looking to the future, most respondents see faculty being more engaged in SEM at their institutions, with some seeing little or no change. For those who see faculty being more engaged with SEM, areas mentioned include: enrollment management at the discipline level, new student recruitment, online learning, SEM committee service, streamlining the general education/core curricula, student retention, and supporting international students. In order to achieve more faculty involvement, one respondent suggested the need for administrators to be more open to faculty initiatives. Several respondents suggested faculty-focused professional development in SEM. One faculty member described the importance of transparency and collaboration by commenting:

I think it goes back to the tools. I think it's about access and information transparency. I think when faculty have access to those pieces and to a process and working in specific areas, working on these goals and these tactics, then that is the piece that faculty will be helpful in providing

data and information [in] the future. This will be helpful for the whole institution to understand where we are focusing efforts, and this is what we will do in the next few years.

When asked for advice for involving faculty at institutions just beginning SEM, all respondents suggested focusing on building relationships with faculty members. This could include various types of communications, such as extensive sharing of data and ideas, creating space where there is opportunity to get to know people engaged in SEM and where faculty are supported, widening committee participation so that faculty with related expertise can participate in SEM decision-making, and keeping communication channels open, especially informal channels. Others suggested focusing on student retention, working with faculty to start pilot projects in areas of interest, and developing initiatives to educate faculty on SEM.

One faculty member suggested:

I would tell administration to open up these committees to help support the overall mission of letting faculty work in areas that interest them, where they have expertise: getting the information where everyone can access it, knowing how to put these committees together, focusing on the work, even through the messy [parts], and keeping lines of communication open. Knowing what my role is as a faculty member was intimidating, but [it] was okay to go forward because I understood the process. Some decisions have been made by people who can make decisions, and that has helped us move forward.

Conclusion, Implications, and Further Research

The primary role of faculty in SEM is to provide quality instruction, serve as a consultative partner with SEM administration, support marketing and student recruitment, sustain student retention and success, and share higher education trends. Faculty are important in implementing SEM strategies in such areas as academic advising, academic infrastructure, academic program reviews, faculty development, individual student interventions, institutional effectiveness, new student orientation, student engagement, student recruitment,

and student retention. Faculty are also key to the development of an institutional culture of collaboration and student success. In the future, faculty will be more exposed to the idea of SEM and how it influences professional practice, especially at the academic discipline/department level, and in such areas as online learning, curriculum planning, and supporting international students. One of the best ways to engage faculty is to build faculty relationships, share data extensively, focus on student retention, and be open to faculty initiatives.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Implications

One of the key take-aways from this study is that we should respect the primary roles each of us has been tasked to carry out in our respective institutions. For the most part, SEM practitioners should pay attention to their enrollment-related, administrative tasks, while faculty members should focus on delivering the curriculum and ensuring a quality academic experience for students. In this way, each will benefit from their specialized skills and knowledge to optimize their contributions, thus creating the best possibilities for sustaining SEM on their campuses.

A second key take-away is that there is plenty of opportunity for collaboration and cooperation between enrollment staff and faculty members. While the first take away speaks to respecting specializations, it is well-known that most of what we do in higher education requires what Smith (2000–2001) called participation and integration, which is defined as participation of “senior administration, academic governance, academic administration, faculty, and the persons responsible for strategy and tactic implementation” (369). SEM success

requires strong collaboration between academic, enrollment and student affairs staff, and the faculty. The key is to find balance between operating in different areas of specialization while collaborating between academic and non-academic spheres. In the next section, we offer recommendations for practice that present some ways for achieving balance between these two approaches to higher educational administration.

Recommendations for Practice

Some specific recommendations for professional practice flow from a thematic review of the individual interview transcripts. They are grouped into eight areas, including: organization, SEM ethos, collaboration and relationship-building, curriculum and instructional support, student recruitment, student retention, data availability and analysis, and finance-related decision-making. Table 3 (on page 31) provides recommendations for professional practice by topic.

Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study explored the role of faculty in developing and enhancing SEM at North American postsecondary educational institutions. Since interviews took place at only nineteen postsecondary educational institutions, our findings cannot be used to generalize broadly about faculty involvement in SEM at North American institutions. They do, however, provide an explanation of how faculty are engaged in SEM at institutions that engaged faculty members in SEM planning and implementation. Further research is needed to determine the extent of these practices and how they differ at various institutional types, in different countries, and in terms of enrollment challenges faced by institutions.

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TABLE 3 ► Recommendations for Professional Practice by Topic

Topic	Recommendation
Organization	► Place SEM firmly in the institution's academic context by ensuring that SEM is within the portfolio of academic affairs. ► Bring a faculty perspective to SEM by encouraging faculty to serve as consultative partners on institutional SEM committees.
SEM Ethos (institution-wide strategy with shared responsibility)	► Adopt a SEM ethos as a way for institutional SEM leadership to connect SEM with the work of each person in the institution. ► Adopt a comprehensive, whole-institution view of SEM, taking the broadest view of how the institution affects the student life cycle. ► Create a culture of student success that focuses holistically on the developmental needs of students. ► Ensure participation and integration by involving senior administration, academic governance, academic administration, faculty, and the persons responsible for strategy and tactical implementation. ► Provide professional development to faculty regarding SEM.
Collaboration and Relationship-Building	► Enhance collaborations and connections between enrollment management and academic affairs divisions, and faculty. ► Involve faculty with setting aggregate, program-specific, diversity, and international student enrollment targets. ► Consult with faculty on SEM planning, implementation, and evaluation. ► Build relationships with faculty by keeping channels open (especially informal), reach out, talk to people, get out there and talk: over communicate. ► Engage faculty with SEM at the discipline level ► Be more open to faculty initiatives ► Engage faculty in supporting SEM consistent with their differing career stages
Curriculum and Instructional Support	► Support faculty and academic administrators to provide quality instruction. ► Engage faculty in academic program review and institutional effectiveness. ► Support faculty development to enhance teaching excellence. ► Continue development of new academic programs. ► Keep current majors relevant. ► Streamline general education/core curricula. ► Involve faculty in academic-related technology and academic infrastructure (e.g., classrooms, laboratories) decision-making
Student Recruitment	► Involve faculty in academic program student recruitment activities that leverages their areas of expertise.
Student Retention	► Provide faculty with student support services' information so that support can be provided to students through referrals. ► Encourage faculty to share their front-line experiences regarding changing roles and needs of students. ► Engage faculty in enrollment-related activities that overlap with their academic responsibilities, including academic advising, individual student interventions, and co-curricular activities. ► Provide support for international students so that they can be fully involved in classroom learning. ► Support faculty-developed retention pilot projects.
Data Availability and Analysis	► Provide aggregate data, as well as enrollment trend data, to faculty to create enhanced transparency. ► Engage faculty with analyzing enrollment data consistent with their area(s) of expertise.
Finance-Related Decision-Making	► Involve faculty in decision-making related to opening class spaces for additional students. ► Engage faculty in setting budget targets. ► Encourage faculty to plan curriculum to facilitate financial aid. ► Support the development of course-based international student-serving graduate programs.

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