

 THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Canadian Enrollment Leaders' Reflections on the Effectiveness of SEM

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This article explores the perceptions of senior enrollment managers at Canadian colleges and universities regarding the effectiveness of using the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) model within the Canadian context. The research design consists of a qualitative approach involving 23 individual interviews. Research participants reflected on their SEM experiences over the past decade and whether SEM can still be a useful tool for the future. Key SEM issues and practices were identified that resonate with Canadian senior enrollment leaders. Recommendations for professional practice are discussed, along with potential areas for further research.

In their 2011 AACRAO-published book, *SEM in Canada: Promoting Student and Institutional Success in Canadian Colleges and Universities*, Gottheil and Smith wrote that “Shaping [enrollment] through a focused approach to student recruitment and retention is now acknowledged by many Canadian educators as an essential part of the higher education landscape” (3). They focused on the uniqueness of the Canadian context, and how the American-inspired SEM concept was altered and implemented in Canada. They also reflected on differing recruitment, admissions, financial aid, student affairs, student engagement, and retention practices in Canada, while engaging in an in-depth examination of specific groups of student learners, including Aboriginal, first-generation, Francophone, international, and transfer students. Looking to the future, they commented:

“A key lesson learned is that strategic [enrollment] management does not belong to one academic or administrative department or to one professional organization. If we are to address emergent issues in our colleges and universities, we must work together and break down institutional and disciplinary silos. The challenges facing SEM professionals in Canada may appear daunting; however, the rewards of collaborating with academic and administrative partners across our campuses and our country to help our students enter our doors and succeed are enormous” (344).

Most Canadian postsecondary educational institutions are now using some SEM concepts to support their enrollment planning activities and help organize functional enrollment management areas. It is thus timely to reflect on the overall effectiveness of SEM as it has

been applied in the Canadian context, and whether the SEM framework is something that institutional leaders should continue to embrace.

The following two research questions guided this study:

- What are the perspectives of senior enrollment leaders on the relative effectiveness of using SEM at Canadian colleges and universities during the past ten years to manage student enrollments?
- What are the perspectives of senior enrollment leaders on the relative effectiveness of using SEM at Canadian colleges and universities in the next decade to manage student enrollments?

The researchers are hopeful that the research findings will be useful to those engaged in planning or implementing SEM at Canadian postsecondary educational institutions, as well as for those who have yet to embrace SEM as a tool for managing student enrollments. They also hope that the experiences of Canadian SEM practitioners will be of use to American and other international colleagues to help guide SEM planning and implementation at postsecondary institutions globally.

This study is guided by the SEM theories and practices elaborated in Hossler and Bontrager's 2015 edited book, *Handbook of Strategic Enrollment Management*, which captures the origins of SEM, and presents informed discussions of each of the key functional areas (*e.g.*, choice, markets, and admissions; pricing and financial aid; student retention, persistence, and success; back-room operations; data, policy, and structures) as well as suggestions for putting the SEM pieces together. It is further guided by the work of the co-authors who contributed to the 2011 edited book, *SEM in Canada: Promoting Student and Institutional Success in Canadian Colleges and Universities*.

Literature Review

There have been relatively few published articles on SEM in Canada in recent years. Since the 2011, publication of the Gottheil and Smith (2011) book, the Canadian-published literature has focused on the following SEM topics: academic programs, enrollment forecasting, international-student success, marketing and recruit-

ment, organizational development, and SEM planning. Most studies have focused on the recruitment and success of international students, as well as SEM planning and organizational development. Below are some of the highlights from the literature:

- *Academic Programs*: description of declining enrollments in academic programs and strategies to increase recruitment and student success (Van Nuland 2011; Regehr 2013), and differences in student choice decision-making between male- and female-dominated business majors (Hunt and Song 2013).
- *Enrollment Forecasting*: development of a functional, automated enrollment-project-system methodology (Gasteiger 2011).
- *International-Student Success*: barriers of recruitment, English-language support, and professional development for faculty (Heringer 2020); high density of student population from one country impedes student integration on campus (Su and Harrison 2016); uneven provisions of immigration advising support (Bozheva 2020); marginalization caused by limited racial and ethnic diversity (Chira 2017); improving student success by understanding reasons for, and types of, stressors affecting Asian graduate students (Kim 2015); overview of best practices to support international student success (Smith 2016) and enhancement of international student support services (Smith, *et al.* 2013); effectiveness of transnational learning spaces for international students (Guo and Chase 2011); discussion of intercultural adaptation of international students (Liu 2016); and the use of possible self-analysis to explain student motivation (Pi-Ju Yang and Noels 2012).
- *Marketing and Recruitment*: innovative marketing strategies at for-profit career colleges (Milan and Quirke 2017); adoption of competitive marketing tools reflecting the use of a corporate model by higher educational institutions (Farhan 2017; Davidson 2015); increased use of social-media-marketing strategies (Belanger, Bali and Longden 2013); effect of personal interactions that occur abroad between campus-based recruitment staff, prospective students, and school counselors (Soltice 2016); ease of

obtaining a study visa on international student enrollment (Gopal 2016); impact of Canada's International Education Strategy on international student recruitment (Trilokekar and Masri 2016); and the impact of Canada's Express Entry immigration selection system on student recruitment (Creso and Sabzalieva 2018).

- *Organizational Development*: programs leading to professional certification in enrollment management (Tremblay 2015); differences between enrollment management and student affairs/services staff regarding transactional operations and transformational outcomes (Seifert, *et al.* 2017); and use of partnership building as a strategic tool contributing to student well-being and retention (Stanton, *et al.* 2017).
- *SEM Planning*: documentation of a SEM plan journey, along with steps to achieve success with the development of an enrollment plan that connects planning with the budget process and the overall integrated planning cycle (Baillie and Gordon 2017); introduction of the disruption continuum and new approaches for enrollment planning that are scenario-driven and focus on mitigating threats, investing in people, building distinctive brands, maintaining student supports, and aligning academic programs (Black n.d.); and the role of faculty in enrollment planning and implementation (Smith and Harris 2021).

Although the literature review has indicated that there is considerable interest in SEM in the Canadian context, there are several areas and issues that have not yet been explored. Gaps in the literature were found in the following four areas: (1) the effectiveness of SEM as an educational and managerial framework for managing student enrollments at Canadian institutions, (2) aspects of the American-inspired SEM framework that cannot, or should not, be implemented at Canadian institutions, (3) the effectiveness of SEM components (*e.g.*, branding, targets/student mix, data use, financial aid, student recruitment, student retention, partnership, and collaboration) in the Canadian context, and (4) the potential use of the SEM framework at Canadian institutions in the years ahead.

Methods

The research design consisted of a qualitative methodology that included individual interviews.

Participants

Eight of the 23 research participants are co-authors from the 2011 book and current-senior enrollment leaders at Canadian colleges or universities whereas, the remaining fifteen research participants are senior enrollment leaders at Canadian colleges or universities. Together, they represent eight Canadian provinces, nineteen universities, four polytechnic institutions, and three colleges.

Procedures

Participants for this study were recruited by email, with two reminder emails sent, to solicit their interest in participating in an individual interview. Interviews were held between October 2020 and February 2021. Interviews were transcribed using Descript audio to transcription software, with transcripts sent to those interviewed for member-checking. After the transcripts were finalized, they were analyzed using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software. No incentive was provided for participation.

Results

Enrollment management, a focused approach to student recruitment and retention in higher education, was a term that first emerged at Boston College in the United States in the early 1970s. By the 1990s, many American colleges and universities had formally adopted SEM as a concept or organizational structure to help manage and increase their enrollments. Over the past few decades, we have seen many Canadian educational institutions adapt some aspects of SEM.

This study set out to explore whether Canadian college and university enrollment practitioners have found strategic enrollment management (SEM) to be an effective tool in their work, and whether it should continue to be used in the future. The definition of enrollment management used in this study was first suggested by Hossler and Bean (1990):

Enrollment management can be defined as an organizational concept and a set of systematic activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments. Organized by strategic planning and supported by institutional research, enrollment management activities concern student college choice, transition to college, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes. (5)

Adopting SEM in Canada

All interviewees were aware of the concept of strategic enrollment management and felt that aspects of the “SEM toolbox” were important and applicable, to a certain degree, in the Canadian context.

Right off the bat, I knew it would be a valuable tool because it allowed us to be intentional, and to plan, and to be data informed. However, what I did learn early on was that there are real differences between the U.S. and Canada, not only in the culture, and environment, and student behaviour, as well as the terminology we use, but also the various components of our enrollment and academic systems which are very different.

One respondent noted that SEM “has not been as widely adopted in Canada as one might have expected.” As almost all practitioners agreed, the SEM model needs to be altered when applied in Canada:

I think of SEM like a jacket. This jacket was made for Americans; it works in the American context. However, when the Canadians came around to try on the jacket, they forgot to take it in to the tailor. And so, it's sometimes pretty ill-fitting, and Canadian institutions struggle with it.

Many of the differences between the American and Canadian educational policies and systems that were previously identified almost two decades ago (cited in Gottheil and Smith 2011) were again raised by those interviewed. Differences noted included:

- Responsibility for education in Canada is provincial/territorial; there is no central federal department of education.
- Canada’s postsecondary system is primarily public with few private institutions; many colleges and universities have mandates to serve their local/regional/provincial students.
- There is not as much difference between institutions and types of institutions in Canada as in the United States as “we don’t want the quality of educational programs to get too far apart, and we don’t want the student experience to get too far apart—the Canadian value system has a sense of equity.”
- Data collection and data analytics is more developed and sophisticated in the United States (there is no equivalent to the National Clearinghouse in Canada; Canadians do not “buy lists” from organizations such as SAT or ACT; and most Canadian institutions do not collect race/ethnicity/diversity indicators except for Indigenous students due to human rights and privacy legislation).
- Privacy legislation in Canada is more stringent; Canadians cannot collect and share data and other information without an individual’s consent.
- The lack of data prevents in-depth analytics in Canada to be used for recruitment and admissions decision-making (for example, who is more likely to enroll) and retention predictive modelling (who is most likely to succeed in a course or program) as in the United States.
- American institutions reach out to “prospects” at an earlier age group in the recruitment funnel.
- Admissions in Canada, with a very few institutional and program exceptions, is primarily grades-based, is not concerned with “creating a class,” and has no “legacy” admissions. There is less transfer mobility in Canada, and students tend to go to “local” institutions.
- U.S. institutions practice “financial aid leveraging” as a key component of SEM; Canadian institutions have only recently begun to bundle financial aid (e.g., scholarships, bursaries, work-study opportunities) together.
- The reliance on tuition for funding is more recent in Canada; it has taken Canadian institutions a while to understand the SEM connection to institutional financial well-being.

- There is less professionalization of enrollment managers in Canada.
- International student recruitment is stronger in Canada than in the United States due to different immigration policies; students come to study in Canada because it is “a foot in the door” for permanent residency (through the issuing of graduate work permits).

In summary, respondents felt that the SEM foundation they have acquired through American publications and at American conferences has been critical in raising awareness of the various components in the enrollment funnel. However, the different social, political, and educational environments that enrollment practitioners in Canada face mean that the challenges in Canada differ from those faced by colleagues south of the border, and some unique issues have emerged.

SEM Nomenclature

Many practitioners noted that although they feel they have been engaged in SEM planning and the SEM process at their institutions, they (or their institution) have chosen not to use the term “strategic enrollment management” because “it gets peoples’ backs up” and is viewed as just another “flavour of the month.” Each of the words in “SEM” has been identified as problematic. Enrollment professionals have felt under attack for being too tactical and not understanding the wider strategic institutional mission and environmental context.

One of the immediate reactions people had internally was, ‘Haven’t we always been doing that? There was a feeling of being insulted, because obviously enrollment planning has been happening for a long time. SEM seems to imply that it was never strategic until you started using the language.

Focusing on the term “enrollment” is seen as too narrow, being concerned with getting students through the front door, but not concerned with their experience, engagement, or success.

People tend to think that [enrollment] emphasizes the bums in seats.... Enrollment seems like a narrow part of

it, because it doesn’t have the retention part, and the support part and the sustaining part, and so, people focus on getting them there, but not necessarily on the quality of their experience. SEM would be enhanced if we could come up with a term that goes beyond enrollment.

Several respondents noted that the term “management” does not “fit” or “sit well” within the academic culture and value system of Canadian institutions. The term “management” riles the Canadian sensibility and has been interpreted as too business-like for the academic enterprise, and divorced from the core academic mission.

The way we perceive students, we don’t engage them as partners in the academic enterprise.... We’re not just managing them....How can we suggest that this is not something we do to students, but something that we engage in doing along with them.

Understanding the context and culture of the institution is considered key to enrollment planning, no matter what it is called. “What’s important is to understand the context of the institution, and be able to speak in language that moves people toward what you’re trying to achieve. It doesn’t work sometimes to actually say, ‘We’re going to make a SEM plan, and this is what the SEM plan is going to have in it.’ You have to figure out the language that works.”

I don’t think SEM can be adopted in the same way at different institutions.... I like the idea of a more organic, and appropriate, and authentic version of SEM that works at each particular institution. I think that as long as we understand what the key principles are what matter when you’re trying to work with your student populations..., and look after students in a way that supports the bottom line, and also supports their education....If you’re using those principles, I think you’re really using SEM principles.

Thus, although they are engaging in enrollment planning using SEM principles, some institutions have chosen other descriptors to describe what they are engaged in. “People did bristle at the notion of calling it SEM. So, strategic enrollment planning is where we landed. You can call it whatever you want. We’re working on SEM [and have] the

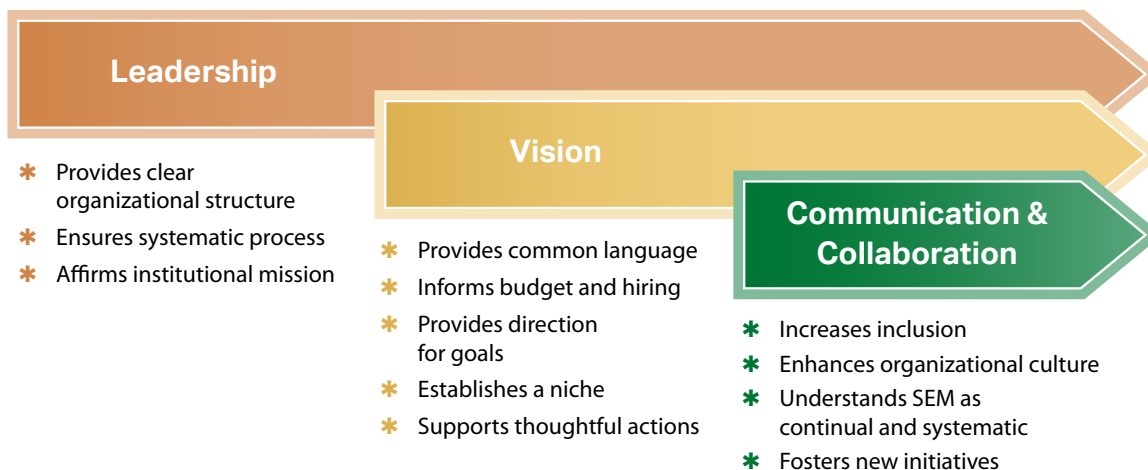


FIGURE 1 ► Key Elements in Successful Enrollment Planning

necessary players at the table with regular meetings and regular discussions.” This has resulted in SEM being referred to as enrollment planning, student success, student recruitment, student retention, along with enrollment management.

The Importance of Enrollment Planning

When enrollment planning is conducted in a way that allows it to flourish, it leads to student and institutional success. The following were identified as key in this regard: importance of strong institutional and enrollment leadership, a SEM planning framework, a strong mission and vision, and communication that supports partnership and collaboration. As Figure 1 shows, all these elements are interconnected.

Respondents noted that SEM planning is a valuable tool. It helps “...sharpen the mind and focus of institutional leaders and practitioners” to achieve enrollment goals and objectives, and to help teams align. And “the three Rs is what it’s about—recruitment, retention, reputation.” However, “you need to have the right environment and the right people at the table.” All respondents agreed that, at its core, SEM is about working towards common goals through a systematic process.

Everyone thinks they know what good planning is, and everyone thinks they understand it. And they all think of it slightly differently, and they all practice it differently. ...I think where SEM really helps is that it provides a common language...[and] help[s] us wade through all of the noise and use facts, not assumptions.

For many institutions, the impetus for SEM has been a response to both declining enrollment and declining revenue. “We were bleeding a lot of students and it was pretty easy to start feeling a sense of urgency....We started to realize [that] more and more of our revenues were shrinking on a steady basis.” Yet most practitioners felt that SEM planning was critical for all institutions, whether or not they are facing immediate enrollment or budgetary challenges: “Sometimes when enrollment is healthy, we can get complacent, and that complacency results in not being as strategic and tactical as you might be if you were having enrollment challenges. It can just happen over time.”

Respondents highlighted the importance of having a clear institutional mission and institutional strategic plan to provide direction for enrollment planning, and conversely, the importance of SEM in the broader planning initiatives.

One of the things that helped was a solid academic and strategic plan for the institution....There were seven or eight pillars, and the university made it very clear that moving forward, everything that we do has to fit into one of those pillars....And it has to be...different offices and aspects of the institution working together. So, when we did our SEM plan, we had a driver, a beacon of light to look towards, and say, "Okay, does this follow the strategic plan of the institution? Does it fit with the strategic vision?"

Yet, several respondents commented that they felt enrollment planning initiatives were not cohesive and collaborative, that the executive team had "little appetite to engage in a systematic planning process," and that "the link [between institutional, academic, and enrollment planning] has not been made very carefully and in a planned manner." This has been due to a variety of factors: new leadership, shifting internal and external environmental pressures, or the lack of priority to planning as institutions have responded to more immediate crises. "It was very much, 'What's the fire of the day and how do we deal with that?' It's not a systematic approach that says, 'Here's the process. Here's what we need to do, here's how we sit down and try to respond.'"

Engaging in an institutional strategic planning process will sometimes lead to a re-affirmation or re-visioning of the type of institution and/or institutional mission. "We wanted to look at our program mix and look at what that said about who we are...We need objective validation to allow us to talk about a differentiated approach from other colleges." Ensuring campus-wide involvement in discussions of mission and vision can shift organizational culture.

It was very valuable because there were a lot of places on campus working in silos and not necessarily on the same path. And so it was really important to set an overarching strategy, use data, use common vision and goals...to get us where we needed to go and to make sure the faculties were not working in isolation of one another.

However several institutions have seen their missions change quickly as provincial postsecondary systems have re-structured. Other institutions noted that a change in leadership (e.g., presidents, vice-presidents) can shift direction: "Depending on the leadership at the time,

we will have different opinions on what we should look like." "A big challenge that each of the institutions I've been at has been the revolving door of the executive. We've had people change out and then, all of a sudden, you've got a new person's perspective on things. Some of them who've never even heard of SEM."

In the absence of institutional direction, some enrollment practitioners have tried to initiate SEM discussions on their own.

The one question I asked when I first started at the institution was...what are our goals? I need to understand what we are actually striving for. And the response I got was "more." I didn't like that.... SEM allowed us to understand if we wanted more or fewer students, how we wanted to segment our markets, what our student success goals were, so we could then target our marketing initiatives accordingly.

Enrollment planning has often been seen by senior academic leaders and some practitioners as a short-term activity—getting "bums in seats" for programs or courses one year at a time—and not as a systematic continual process. "There isn't a good understanding of SEM amongst many people. Some, leaders included, often look at it as if it is only about enrollment numbers and the recruitment process."

Yet, as one respondent noted:

What happens when priorities shift on campus?...Sometimes you engage in efforts for one reason. For example, enrollments may be down, but then enrollments come up and people want to move on to different things. SEM is a process that you take to optimize enrollments rather than just to counteract one thing that might come your way one year.

Often, the chief enrollment officer is asked to develop a plan on their own within a short timeframe. "A little over a year ago, the VP came in and said, 'We need a SEM plan. You have until Friday.'" However, as another long-time practitioner commented, "If you're going to build something, you need the scaffolding. You need the design first, and then the scaffolding, before you can actually get to work."

The SEM planning process, done properly, can take a considerable amount of time.

I think it was a big reason why we had three failed SEM plans. I think they jumped from point A to C, and they for-

got the critical component, which is getting buy-in from the top and then all the way down through the organization.

We engaged in a nine-month process to develop a plan in consultation with our dean's group and our senior leaders from across student services, and facilities, and finance, and other administrative areas, and then engaged people in a number of ways throughout the campus, so, faculty, and staff, and students had involvement in its development.

Many institutions have found that engaging the entire campus community can be an even longer process. *"I spent probably the first year just trying to come to some agreement on definitions, come to some common understandings, starting to look at our data."*

Building a formal SEM structure is not always necessary to building a SEM ethos and culture on a campus. *"There's the underground SEM movement at the university...I've been taking committees that exist, and bringing SEM into them."* However, building a "community of trust" with collaboration, communication, and respectful relationships are seen as essential, no matter how SEM is approached.

When questioned whether the SEM framework is sustainable, respondents were optimistic that SEM can thrive if it is adapted to institutional culture, if effective leadership is in place, and if silos are broken down to ensure integration and coordination across the institution. *"If the leadership really understands SEM, then you can have SEM working at the institution. If they don't, you can try really hard, and you can build some SEM-like things that you're doing, but you don't actually have a SEM culture."*

Several practitioners noted that having a continual revolving door of executives can negatively impact SEM implementation because it can halt momentum and/or shift priorities in a different direction:

"It is important to have leadership onside and everybody in agreement that SEM is going to be a lens that we will view things with. Leadership helps to get people to feel committed."

Having a SEM leader who can work on socializing the concept of SEM across a campus, and develop collaborative partnerships was seen by many enrollment practitioners as critical. *"There was an individual who worked*

really hard to drive SEM, and bring it to the forefront of the institution, and I can see how that really added value in terms of aligning: bringing the players together to align the academic and the strategic plan."

Responsibility for SEM may be delegated to the registrar or a director. However it is important to have people in executive positions who help to support and drive SEM initiatives:

I think if you have the right people in the job, and you have the will to get it done, then it can be really good. In terms of getting the wheels in motion, not necessarily...I think you're turning the ship two or three degrees. It takes a long time to resist the momentum [and] or change...move off in another direction.

If there is no clarity on who "owns" the SEM plan and planning process, challenges arise. The SEM plan is then regarded as "x's plan," as opposed to the plan of the overall institution. The authority to enact change is not clear. There needs to be someone accountable for the work to result in the accomplishment of goals:

One of the reasons for fits and starts in the plan itself was where responsibility and accountability landed.... I believe in the U.S. context there is a fairly significant position that is charged with enrollment management, not coupled with a day job, like being a registrar...a title added to an existing portfolio.

When SEM is seen as the responsibility and "special project" of only one person or when a leadership change occurs, SEM planning and the sustainability of SEM is greatly at risk: *"When you lose the champions, the resistance takes over and the SEM plan will die a quick death."* Having to convince new leaders (such as a president, provost, SEM leader, or registrar) to support and understand SEM poses additional challenges if *"SEM has not been internalized broadly enough to have been able to realize its potential impact."*

Several respondents stated that having deans involved in the enrollment planning process was helpful and helped create a SEM ethos on their campus:

Four of us from the provost's office meet individually with the deans and associate deans of every faculty.... I think

initially, they thought they were being called in to get in trouble for something, but it was more..., to start talking about SEM, to talk about their faculty-specific goals. We did that for three straight years. By the second year, you already saw a shift in culture. They came to these meetings realizing they weren't getting in trouble. It became more of a dialogue and an exchange of ideas.... The deans got a better understanding of what SEM was, how they fit into the plan, [and] how they could contribute to our SEM goals...I think that was critical in becoming SEM-focused.

Some practitioners reported that their work with deans and department chairs was often more immediate and practical:

The academic and the service units work together to look at things at a nitty-gritty level from a tactics' perspective, like fill rates in any given term for example..., and whether we need to add or cancel sections in order to manage enrollment appropriately.... We've looked at this more collaboratively than we used to. I think those things kind of just used to happen in the dean's office (or didn't).

While faculties and service areas in some institutions appear to have “bought-in” to the SEM concept, and have even developed their own mini-SEM plans, many practitioners caution that units must still feed into a wider institutional plan, and not operate in silos or pockets, duplicating services and programs.

Table 1 (on page 56) provides a summary of respondents' comments regarding the challenges to SEM planning and implementation.

Key SEM Issues in Canada

Respondents noted several key SEM issues that are prevalent in Canada that fall under six broad categories, including the importance of collaboration, working with faculty, data, student success, diverse student populations, and international students.

Importance of Collaboration

SEM professionals note the importance of engaging key players together—deans, student affairs staff, teaching and learning centres, the registrar's office, marketing

and communications, and international offices—to successfully address strategic and tactical issues that impact enrollment.

One of the things I love about SEM is that when it's working the way it should work, you've got all different sectors of the university administrative and academic areas working together. I love how it brings discussions together, and a lot of times that wouldn't necessarily happen.

Developing a common language and framework to discuss enrollment planning was seen by several practitioners as key to getting the campus buy-in to develop a more structured and formal SEM plan. This “socialization of SEM” across the campus, although time-consuming, was viewed as an essential step in helping to break down silos and enhance communication. “It's not about the plan itself. It's about the process, and the journey, to get to that plan” and “The only way you can build partnerships is to do them.”

Although collaboration can be fostered through formal SEM planning committees, respondents found that reaching out to colleagues across campus in other ways to share data and to solicit input on strategies and new programs that are essential to SEM success, helps to create a SEM culture or ethos across the organization. “SEM is not going to work if this integrated approach is not there.”

I've met with student affairs officials. I met with academic advisors. I met with senior administrative officers because they handle budgets and faculty workloads. I met with a suite of people to get their insights into what was important to them, with respect to retaining students. I gathered the information and learned what data I needed and could collect, and I learned what we could collect in our system.... You may recognize the importance of retention data and creating the reports, but having stakeholders involved...helps to create an environment where they are more likely to be interested in working with you.

The ideal of collaboration, that “we're all in this together,” can break down if enrollment targets are not met, or a particular initiative goes off-course, or is not successful.

TABLE 1 ► Challenges to SEM Planning and Implementation

General Areas	Responses
Collaboration	► Not having the right people in the right positions ► Not having/building a “community of trust” (communication and building relationships) ► Experiencing resistance to change ► Failing to communicate across and throughout the organization ► Not knowing who to collaborate with
Context	► Campus culture is unwelcoming to SEM thinking ↳ SEM has not been internalized broadly enough to achieve its potential ↳ Lack of understanding of SEM as a systematic and continual process ↳ Lack of a sense of urgency ↳ SEM is seen as just one more thing to do ↳ The organizational culture has not been prepared for SEM ► SEM is being done in only parts of the institution ► Difficulties figuring out how to implement SEM in different types of institutions (e.g., large vs. small, simple vs. complex, regional vs. national/international, etc.) ► Multi-campus institutions: ↳ Competition between campuses ↳ Not having similar policies (admissions, residence) and practices across campuses ↳ One campus having a better reputation than another ↳ Programs oversubscribed on one campus, undersubscribed at another
COVID	► Took momentum away, had to put things on hold
Enrollment Planning	► Seeing the SEM plan as “x’s plan” and not an institutional plan ► Alignment/non-alignment of SEM with other institutional plans ► Not having the authority to enact changes
Leadership	► Lack of clarity on institutional mission, identity, “brand” ► No mandate to implement SEM campus-wide ► Change in campus leadership (president, provost, SEM leader, registrar) impacts implementation momentum ► Lack of leadership support or understanding of SEM
Operations	► Lack of strong operational foundations and structures

The easy thing to do is to say, ‘I guess we had the wrong people or the wrong structure doing the job. Let’s start again.’ And there’s a bit of a tendency to start over and to change. There’s nothing wrong with innovation, but not going back to basics, regarding who we are and who we should be.... [It] is probably not always creating a certain collaboration that I suggest would have been healthier.

Working with Faculty

When engaging in SEM, one respondent commented that it was important to remember that “students are coming to an institution. That’s true, but they are coming to a program, and in a sense, that’s truer.” Thus, many Canadian

practitioners stressed that developing partnerships with faculty colleagues was essential to addressing student success and enhancing the student experience. Yet,

SEM suffers a poor reputation.... Faculty say all the administrators care about is recruiting more students, whether they’re any good or not.... We certainly aren’t taking an integrated approach when our faculty members feel that [recruiters]...are working at cross-purposes with the ambitions of excellence in a given faculty.

Building trust with faculty colleagues can often be difficult. Explaining why SEM is relevant and beneficial in language they understand can be helpful.

[There was faculty resistance]. I asked questions like, ‘Do you care if your student is successful in your class? Do you care how many students are in your classroom? Do you care about whether or not your students get a job afterwards? Do you care what they talk about when they leave?’ So, we started talking about recruitment, retention, [and] how we could use that to help our budget or budgeting process.

Attending faculty committee meetings and retreats, presenting data, and facilitating conversations often leads to “aha” moments and encourages reflection on the student experience in the classroom.

The retention data has caused them to reflect on their role in retaining the students.... I’ve tried to do it in a non-threatening way...and invite them to help unpack the trend or data. Why are we seeing high attrition in this course versus this course? I help the faculty think about what they could do as a department, or as a faculty to improve retention. I invite them to consider shifting, or changing, some processes or policies within their own department that can improve student retention.

Academic-based initiatives that complement SEM are now more common. For example: “We’ve had a group of faculty who are looking at pedagogy and how we’re presenting our courses and programs....I don’t think it necessarily came from SEM, but it certainly supports SEM very well.” At a few institutions, faculty have been examining dropped/failed/withdrawal rates which has prompted them to look at, and revise, curriculum. They have “recognized that by introducing a change to some specific course requirements, they could achieve a higher retention rate. The change has also led to significant improvement in the grades of their students.”

Data

Historically, Canadian enrollment managers often complained that they did not have any, or enough, access to data, and that this was a barrier to developing strategic recruitment and retention plans as well as understanding how enrollment targets could be best achieved.

Registrars have a set of data. Institutional research has a set of data. They sit in different divisions, and you can’t get a number that everyone will agree to, nor...come up with a number that everyone can use.

Another common complaint in the past was that the data was “not clean” due to inputting errors and lack of consistency. It was thus difficult to rely on the data that was available. Although some of these complaints are still heard (especially in smaller institutions), and information gaps still exist, certainly at a national level, most colleges and universities now have institutional research offices that provide enrollment data to senior administrators. This has led to a closer collaboration between the chief enrollment officer and the institutional research office to analyze the available information, ensure that data is consistent, and produce enrollment reports that use common definitions and terminology. Data is often provided publicly on institutional websites and to academic administrators through data dashboards.

SEM has definitely driven us to become a more data-rich environment. We are sharing more data across the institution, creating more dashboards, making sure that data is more fully distributed, and at people’s fingertips, to help make some decisions.

The complaint about data has shifted over the past decade. Many respondents suggest that we do not have a lack of data at our disposal, rather, we have too much:

We are swimming in so much data [that] we don’t know what to do with everything that we have access to.... We can’t see the forest for the trees because it’s so crowded. Has it been helpful in assessing any of our strategies or helping to make people more accountable? In many cases, I don’t think there’s been any monumental shift in the way we do business.

Many practitioners note that an important part of their role is to sift through the voluminous amounts of data and to make sense of the information that is available in order to understand “the story that it tells us, and what we can learn from that.”

And then, when you show that picture to people, and it's different from what they thought, it pulls them in, [and] engages them in the conversation. It's been helpful in getting people on board and to pay attention.... It's the knowledge that we were putting in front of them, rather than just information.

The importance of environmental scanning was stressed by all respondents. Several practitioners commented that they were surprised by the assumptions their colleagues were making about students and the student experience. One practitioner noted that “[w]hen I arrived, we started looking at the data, and it was really crazy. People actually thought we were graduating students at a significantly higher level than we actually were.... People’s heads are so down and focused on what they’re doing that they don’t step back and look at the macro level.” Another practitioner explained that “[o]ur community has a high demographic of Indigenous students, yet the Indigenous population of students was under 2 percent. The data challenged our thinking on why we didn’t have Indigenous students on campus, and then we set a very specific target.” The data discussions in these examples were key to shaping SEM goals, strategies, and tactics.

Yet, having data readily available has not necessarily led institutions to utilize that information for strategic decision-making. In fact, some practitioners claim that many administrators still are “making a lot of decisions on hunches.”

They do projections based off [of] the numbers that somebody made up seven [or] eight years ago, and they still use them.... They’ll say, “We should get a hundred students in this course, and we say, ‘You haven’t had a hundred students in that course in five years.’”

As practitioners implement and improve programs and services, they have realized the importance of demonstrating the effectiveness of these initiatives through metrics and accountability mechanisms:

We always measured what we were doing.... We were wanting to show trends, and effectiveness, and efficiency. I had IR [Institutional Research] create evaluative measures and metrics for all of our programs and interventions. It was

useful that they measured and reported them out, so it wasn’t me saying [that] this program is working.... It was also helpful at budget time. I could go to the budget table and present IR’s report on a gaps’ analysis or utilization rates, or on program initiatives and program success.

Yet, one respondent felt that many practitioners still often fail to identify key metrics: “Do the people who are working on the efforts truly understand the measures of success and what it is they’re trying to achieve? I’m not sure.... If you don’t understand what you’re trying to achieve in terms of success, you’ll never understand the data that you need.”

Almost all practitioners signaled the importance of collecting better data in the future “to be better informed of students throughout the student funnel and overall student-life-cycle. We need better data; from the time we first start interacting with prospective students until they become our students and graduate. We know the data we collect will continue to help us with our enrollment planning and overall success.”

Although Canadian institutions now have more data available for decision-making than a decade ago, respondents noted that we still have difficulties defining and identifying underserved students. Due to human rights and privacy legislation, Canadians still do not collect data on specific segments of the student population (e.g., by race/ethnicity) apart from Indigenous student populations. Respondents noted that it is important for postsecondary institutions to work together to identify a way to collect this type of information, and discuss how such data can, and should be, used.

Student Success

Practitioners involved in early SEM efforts in Canada were often primarily concerned with marketing and recruitment “but didn’t put similar effort into retaining the students.” As practitioners began to examine institutional enrollment data in greater depth, there was a realization that, “We were just front-loading everyone into year one and hoping they stay.” Thus, many institutions over the past decade have begun to ask, “What can we do to support students while they’re at our institution?” They have shifted their focus to examining the entire student-life cycle and the holistic student experience rather than just

marketing and recruitment. *“Some people look at it [SEM] in a very simple way. They think that SEM is about bringing in money and bringing in more students, and it’s not. That’s the hardest part to get people to understand that it’s really driven by student success. We just can’t recruit and retain more. We have to be honoring our vision, and values, and mandate, and make sure those students are succeeding.”*

For many campuses, focusing on student success has now become an integral driver of SEM on campus as institutions have realized the importance of investing in the students they have spent time and effort recruiting: *“...we realized we have been doing very well recruiting students here, but students are spinning their wheels and they’re not succeeding.... We created a business case for how much money we were losing, because we weren’t doing a great job at engaging and retaining our students. They weren’t having as positive an experience as they should have had.”*

Yet, as several respondents noted, *“student success means different things to different people”* and respondents felt that the term needs discussion and clarification. *“How do we know what the outcomes are that students are going to achieve? Just because they’re getting a credential...doesn’t mean they’re achieving the outcomes that they want to achieve, which may be more about career outcomes.... I think much of the early days of SEM success was being defined by the institution, and now, more and more, success is being defined by the student.”*

Whatever the internal discussions around student success may be, many respondents noted that external drivers are pressuring institutions to utilize narrower definitions than some might like. Provincial performance-based funding models are *“going to put more pressure on us, as institutions, to improve graduation rates and to see students be successful, so that it doesn’t impact your funding.”*

It has also been difficult for some institutions to understand how student success might be achieved. Many enrollment practitioners see SEM as a tool to focus on student success in an intentional, structured way. *“Student success is the overall goal, but I think student success has to be backed up with structures, resources, and intention, and I think that’s the kind of stuff that you get out of a SEM plan.”*

Respondents noted the importance of first gathering and analyzing data to understand the complexities around the issues of student persistence and retention.

I went and talked to the head of institutional research and asked, ‘Can you tell me about student retention?’ She looked at me as though I was crazy. She said, ‘We’re not responsible for data on student retention.’ And it turned out that nobody was, no one had ever run the data.... There was this mythology that [students] just come to us for two years and then go somewhere else.

Gathering and analyzing data has helped to demonstrate where gaps and challenges lie.

Without our data and without our SEM planning, it would have just been anecdotal, and we couldn’t prove there were problems. We can now show [that] our first-to-second year persistence rates are good, our recruiting numbers are good, our conversion numbers are okay...but we have problems getting people through that middle part of the SEM funnel...so, now we have the data, we can ask, ‘what is the problem and what are the supports we need?’

Many early efforts to enhance student engagement and retention focused on student orientation and the first-year experience. However, in retrospect, one respondent felt that *“the effectiveness of some of these programs is lost, or it’s close to nil, or [we] just don’t know.”* The need to assess and evaluate the strategies and tactics implemented is essential.

I think that so many people try to build these models that no longer work, and don’t ask what is in it for the learners that are changing in the diverse populations that the institution has and wants to attract and retain. Instead, people are trying to tweak these decade old models of orientation, etc., and what has come to be part of first-year experience and other somewhat tired programs..., and so, when you look at the effectiveness of some of this programming, I would question if it has really reached the level that can be more impactful.

Focusing on the transition into institutions is not sufficient. Over the past decade, Canadian colleges and universities have developed and invested in teaching and learning and academic success centres, renewed academic advising, and implemented early alert programs.

Diverse Student Populations

Striving to achieve a diverse student population has been important to Canadian enrollment practitioners as they have engaged in focused enrollment planning and initiatives. SEM has been used as a tool to address broader issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

With each new strategy plan at every college and university, diversity and inclusion have become part of the lingo, as it should. The SEM Framework has helped us to build a structure around equity, diversity and inclusion.

Although interview respondents focused their comments on three diverse student populations—Indigenous students, students of colour, and international students—the definition of diversity has differed between types of institutions and across the geographical expanse of the country. Over the past decade, colleges and universities have also focused on rural, low-income, first-generation, adult, youth-in-care, and French-speaking students, as well as students with disabilities.

The data analysis that has been a part of SEM planning has enabled institutions to understand that there are underlying systemic issues for many specific student populations:

For instance, we know that many Black and Indigenous students were entering with similar grades, but a semester later they were dropping out at greater rates, and their GPAs were 10% lower. So, whatever is happening is within our institution. How do we start to acknowledge our part in that?

Yet, there has still been a reluctance by some to establish enrollment targets or goals for specific demographics of students as it is seen as divisive. “There’s a hesitancy to do that because of a feeling that a student is a student and as long as we’re here for all students, then they will just come to us.” As one respondent noted, “When it’s convenient, we focus on [equity, diversity and inclusion], but it’s not integrated into our strategic thinking...”

However, a shift in attitude has occurred more recently with attention focused on Indigenous and Black student populations. Many colleges and universities have appointed senior administrative and advisory po-

sitions to coordinate and lead diversity and/or Indigenous affairs initiatives. Institutions have committed to meeting the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and are responding to the traumas residential schools have left on generations of Indigenous families and their communities.

Although not all institutions have set specific enrollment targets for Indigenous student populations, all have recognized that enrollment in their institutions has not mirrored the Indigenous population of their domestic catchment pools. Although many provinces have seen an increase in Indigenous high-school completion rates, colleges have tended to see a higher proportion of Indigenous students enroll than universities.

The importance of looking at all aspects of the enrollment funnel to address issues of enrollment representation for underserved student populations was acknowledged by respondents, starting with outreach to younger school-age students, summer bridging and upgrading programs, and building on-going relationships with Indigenous and newcomer communities. Alternative admissions policies and processes are being examined and Indigenous ways-of-knowing are being incorporated into prior learning, assessment, and recognition (PLAR) assessments. Donors and provincial governments have responded with targeted financial-aid programs for Indigenous and Black student populations. Indigenous student advisors work to help students transition into, and be successful in, academic institutions. “Our goals are designed to ensure that, yes, we attract Indigenous students to our university, but that we have the supports and programs in place to see them succeed.”

Some institutions have also hired Indigenous teaching and learning specialists to help faculty re-assess curriculum, pedagogy, and new modes of delivery. Importantly, Indigenous student centres have been established where cultural practices can be shared, and the support of elders and knowledge keepers provided to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. Yet barriers to access and success remain, such as insufficient band funding, intergenerational trauma, affordable and culturally appropriate housing and childcare, academic preparation, and a lack of Indigenous and Black instructors.

International Students

Over the past decade, colleges and universities across Canada have witnessed an exponential growth in international student enrollment.

By the time our first SEM plan got approved, we had already exceeded...our enrollment goals for international students...so we had to figure out how to manage that, but then also how to manage supports for this growing population.... That continues to be a challenge for us.

This growth has been fueled by several factors: institutional revenue generation in an era of provincial funding restraints and deregulation of international student fees, governmental support (both at the federal and provincial levels) to attract future immigrants who are well-educated and can contribute to the needs of a growing economy, and an interest in preparing domestic students to work in a global economy. Although international students have been seen as a panacea for increasing enrollment in under-filled programs, student interest has been primarily in STEM and professional disciplines.

The rapid and unplanned increase in international enrollment became a problem for some colleges and universities “...because the money and the revenue became the driver instead of a solid strategy.”

It got away on us. At that time, we weren't having integrated conversations. International was given an edict to go and increase international enrollments. They weren't given a specific target, it was just “more is better,” so, it was easy to open the door and bring in as many as possible.... The deans didn't have a sense of how quickly they were coming in, how these students needed to be supported to be retained.

In some institutions, international recruitment and admissions reports through a separate division than domestic recruitment and admissions, and this has sometimes led to inefficiencies. Communication and collaboration are thus essential in ensuring appropriate planning for international student enrollment.

Respondents reported that the SEM process and committee structure was helpful, not only to discuss

the optimum numbers of international students but because it also

...allowed us to hear from deans and associate deans how international students were doing and where supports were needed to retain those students.... For example, people had lots of concerns about English-language proficiency, and the ability of the students to work in groups, and they were looking for supports that would remedy some of those concerns.... Advising supports and academic supports were crucial in order to retain these students, and international students have particular mental health and other health needs that are difficult to serve.

Recently, the pandemic's effect on international enrollment has been an opportunity to pause and rethink international enrollment strategy: “because everything that we predicted is coming true; don't rely too much on your core budget being funded by international students, because something could happen.” Although most respondents felt that there will still be a heavy reliance on international students in the future, one practitioner felt that the conversation on why we need international students' needs to change: “It has to be globalization and diversity, as opposed to bringing them in for money and increasing the coffers.”

Institutions that were engaged in SEM planning prior to the pandemic feel those discussions will serve them well. “Everyone is looking around saying, ‘How do we recover?’ And that's part of the SEM Plan—here's what we're going to do to recover international enrollment, here's how long we think it will take, here's what is important to us as we recover.” Many institutions have now realized the importance of not “putting all your eggs all in one basket” in recruiting international students and ensuring that the institution is not relying on one country or geographic region “...so that if something happens, or a decision is made, or something out of our control were to happen, it would have minimum impact.”

The Future of SEM in Canada

Respondents were asked whether SEM is, or can still be, a useful framework for Canadian institutions looking forward over the next decade and, if so, how it might evolve. Although most respondents acknowledged that

the immediate need of pivoting “into survival mode” during a pandemic has delayed or paused SEM planning, many practitioners prefaced their observations on what SEM might look like in the future by referring to the COVID pandemic.

I think it's more important than ever, because being able to plan and manage one's enrollments is [sic] going to be critical to the survival of postsecondary institutions in Canada. I think those institutions that have chaotic enrollments, and don't understand the planning and predicting pieces, are going to be in real trouble from the perspective of what [the] government's expectations are, what the expectations of their students and staff are.

The importance of clarifying and identifying institutional mission, engaging in strategic planning, utilizing data-based decision-making, developing internal and community partnerships and collaboration, broadening diversity, and ensuring student success (focusing on retention and not just recruitment) were all thought to be essential for a future that, from a 2021 vantage point, appears unpredictable.

SEM gives us the tools.... Whether we call it SEM, or we call it something else, as long as we're...being strategic about how we're using our resources to ensure that students are succeeding.... The real challenge will be that the environment will begin to move so quickly that some of our SEM tools will have to be updated, and we'll have to figure out new ways to use them.

Several respondents commented that one of the silver linings of COVID “is that maybe it will convince people that they have to be more able to adapt quickly” and that “if we hadn't had a crisis like this, we might not have been prompted to think of something so wildly different as the potential for every course virtually.” Recruitment strategies, retention support, and program delivery all needed to quickly change when the pandemic hit in the fall of 2019. Yet one respondent noted that “while the faculties are now more prepared, we haven't actually provided the support to the student,” and this has affected student engagement and academic success.

The increase of online teaching is going to change the nature of our relationships with students.... The onus is on us to adapt in a way that will not only continue to engage students, but establish relationships with them.... I think we will be challenged...to engage students in ways that face-to-face learning can perhaps do a little more effectively.

Although some practitioners are hopeful that in the future institutions will build on the pandemic experience to permanently provide a hybrid, high flex mode of delivery that considers universal design principles, and expands accessibility, others believe we need to be careful:

I think one of the risks of being nimble is that you can chase the shiny object that might not be the one you want to chase, and you don't find out until it's too late, or you've gotten yourself really down the path.... But the question I have is just because you can, just because you want to, does that mean you should?.... There's going to be a reckoning around online education one way or the other, where we're going and how we measure the impact and success of that.

Respondents suggested that the pandemic might be helpful, and force institutions to re-focus and re-examine their missions as they plan for the future: “Are we clear on who we are and what our mission is? One of the things I regret most in Canadian universities is that there's too much of a tendency to try to be all things to all people, rather than to find a niche and really concentrate on that, and develop a new identity.” Another respondent suggested, “We need to be more introspective. We need to know more about ourselves and what we value, what we want out of enrollment in order to navigate these changes, with values and a vision at the heart of it.”

How do you make choices about how big you let faculties or programs be? How do you make choices about how you are going to market and recruit to programs that are undersubscribed? A role for SEM going forward could be helping to answer these questions if institutions are astute enough. To mitigate financial risk, you need to have students in particular programs. You need to know how big your graduate students' population is, compared to your undergraduate student population. You need to right size

programs. You need a way to think about these things and to make decisions based on data. That is SEM.

Increasing governmental direction and regulation in areas such as program development, tuition, and performance-based funding were mentioned by practitioners from coast to coast as important to SEM planning, both now and in the future. This was not always seen as negative. One respondent stated that *“holding the institution accountable to achieving the priorities that they have identified”* was important. Respondents felt that some of the challenges faced by institutions over the past decade, such as fiscal restraints, will continue in the future, and will be important for enrollment planning discussions. *“One of the emerging issues is alignment with the financial processes of the institution. In certain times you could probably do SEM without necessarily having your finance people at the table. I don’t think that’s true in difficult times or probably in the future.”*

“Organic SEM”: The Need for Flexibility

The importance of developing a broader and deeper understanding of SEM that is flexible, organic, and authentic was stressed by several respondents. Every institution has its own culture and organizational structure: *“...you can know that in the back of your mind, but it’s not really until you get into an[other] organization that you realize the depth of differences.”*

Several respondents told the interviewers that because of institutional differences and cultures, the traditional SEM planning framework is perhaps too rigid for the future, and a more flexible approach is needed. *“There’s always a fear when you put a plan in place, talking about three years, never mind five, that you’re going to stop being nimble and responsive to industry and career opportunities, and how things are evolving”.*

Thus a number of practitioners have called for a more “organic” approach to enrollment planning. *“I think we should bend the SEM methodologies to our needs as an institution; we shouldn’t try too hard to bend our needs to fit the SEM methodology.... We’re trying to run a university, and we’re just trying to use the tools of SEM to support us in our work.”*

Recommendations for Professional Practice

During our study, respondents identified recommendations for improving SEM practice at Canadian postsecondary educational institutions. Table 2 (on page 64) provides a list of the major recommendations.

Conclusion

This article explored the perceptions of senior enrollment managers at Canadian colleges and universities regarding the effectiveness of using the Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) model within the Canadian context. Researchers identified the SEM practices that resonate with Canadian senior enrollment leaders and presented recommendations for professional practice.

Much of the prior literature on SEM in Canada is descriptive and limited to studies on academic programs, enrollment forecasting, international student success, marketing and recruitment, organizational development, and SEM planning. This study filled some of the literature gaps by presenting enrollment leader perceptions of the effectiveness of SEM as an educational and managerial framework for managing student enrollments at Canadian institutions, how SEM in Canada differs from U.S.-based practices, and its potential use by Canadian institutions in the future.

In response to the first research question, Canadian enrollment leaders’ perceptions of SEM were chronicled regarding adoption of SEM in Canada, use of the SEM nomenclature, and the importance of enrollment planning. Perceptions about several key SEM issues were also explored, including the importance of collaboration, working with faculty, use of data, student success, diverse student populations, and international students.

In response to the second research question, researchers learned about the views of Canadian enrollment leaders on the future of SEM in Canada, with most suggesting that SEM will be needed to address the enrollment challenges of the next decade. A key issue identified was flexibility, including the development of organic approaches to SEM. Most respondents mentioned how important it will be for each institution to define and implement its own SEM pathway.

TABLE 2 ► Recommendations

Topic	Recommendation
Collaboration	► Develop a culture of partnership and collaboration on campus to increase SEM adoption and implementation ► Develop a SEM organizational framework to support cross-campus collaboration ► Create close working relationships with academic units
Communication	► Develop comprehensive and coordinated communications to support understanding and implementation of the SEM plan ► Meet with each decanal leader to increase understanding of enrollment issues at the faculty level
Data	► Explore ways to conduct in-depth student population analysis, especially related to underserved student populations ► Develop a more thorough understanding of students and their needs ► Ensure “clean” data ► Transition data from reports to stories, issue statements, and actionable goals ► Continually refine the enrollment-oriented environmental scan ► Establish enrollment-related metrics and accountability mechanisms ► Ensure data is shared with all who can benefit from it
Enrollment Planning	► Ensure the “right” people (e.g., decanal academic leaders, enrollment leaders, student affairs and budget staff) are engaged in enrollment planning to ensure institutional buy-in ► Develop a SEM plan that identifies the institution’s major enrollment goals ► Develop a link between institutional, academic, and enrollment planning ► Shift thinking from short-term planning to the development of a systematic process of enrollment planning for the entire student lifecycle
Leadership	► Garner on-going executive leadership support ► Support the development of a SEM champion/leader
Marketing & Student Recruitment	► Establish a strong brand to focus institutional marketing
Modifying SEM	► Alter implementation of SEM to fit the Canadian higher education landscape, and recognize Canadian values and differing social and political systems
Nomenclature	► Determine what to call SEM at the institutional level that takes into consideration organizational culture and values
Program Development	► Ensure a program mix that matches strategic planning priorities ► Consider the development of new delivery methods of academic programs (e.g., micro-credentialing, course laddering/bundling) ► Ensure strong connections between programs and labour market demand
SEM Understanding	► Increase SEM understanding by senior academic administrators ► Increase professionalization/training of enrollment managers ► Build a SEM ethos on campus
Strategic Planning	► Develop a clear institutional mission and institutional strategic plan through campus-wide involvement to provide direction for enrollment planning
Student Success	► Develop an institutional definition of student success ► Achieve understanding as to what is related to student persistence ► Put in place the socio-cultural and academic supports ► Revisit academic policies to enhance student success ► Address the unique learning and psycho-social needs of diverse student populations (e.g., Black, Indigenous, International students) ► Explore ways to support online students

As further research is contemplated, there is a need to learn about the perspectives of Canadian senior enrollment leaders on the effectiveness of individual SEM practices. Some topics, suggested by this study, include:

- the effectiveness of SEM as an educational and managerial framework for managing student enrollments at Canadian institutions, including aspects of the SEM framework that cannot, or should not, be implemented at Canadian institutions, and the effectiveness of specific SEM components (*e.g.*, branding, targets/student mix, data use, financial aid, student recruitment, student retention, partnership, and collaboration) in the Canadian context; and
- the application of the SEM framework to enhance the connections between administration, faculty, staff, and students at Canadian postsecondary educational institutions.

This study had limitations that need to be acknowledged, which may limit generalization of the results.

- It relied on the perspectives of book co-authors who were senior SEM leaders in 2010–11 and current senior enrollment leaders, the majority of whom were based at universities in Ontario and British Columbia. A wider national and institutional type perspective would provide a more thorough view on this topic.

■ The interviewees were all familiar with SEM as a planning and management framework. They had attended SEM conferences and workshops, and many had been involved in SEM planning and/or writing SEM plans at their own institutions. As there are enrollment managers at some Canadian colleges and universities who are unaware of SEM as a concept and/or have not been involved in SEM planning or implementation, it would be instructive to solicit their views of enrollment and SEM in contrast to the group we have studied.

■ The study was completed at one point in time when the global COVID-19 pandemic caused upheaval in postsecondary institutions (and elsewhere) globally. This influenced interviewees' perspectives. There is a need to continue to follow the thinking of senior enrollment managers to determine how SEM planning and implementation enhances or detracts from achieving institutional enrollment performance and effectiveness.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study demonstrates that SEM is seen by senior enrollment leaders as important to achieving enrollment health and performance at Canadian postsecondary educational institutions.

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