

 SEM Q REVIEW

SEM in Action: Implementing and Sustaining Your Plan

GORDON, J., AND L. WANKEL. 2023. WASHINGTON, D.C.: AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS AND ADMISSIONS OFFICERS. 164 PP.

Reviewed by Christopher W. Tremblay

Sometimes the right book comes along at the right time. For me, that book was *SEM in Action*, AACRAO's newest publication for SEM practitioners. It was the right time because I had just informed my dean that it was time for our academic college to embark on writing our first SEM plan. Reading the book inspired me to launch our process and set the stage for how to best prepare for the implementation phase.

Among the book's ten chapters, there are five featured case studies along with four introduction chapters and one chapter on the evolution of SEM. Overall, this book is a straightforward read written by practitioners, for practitioners. As a result of this, all chief enrollment officers will find value in this text.

The foreword is authored by SEM guru and legend, Stanley E. Henderson. In typical Henderson voice, he reminds us that SEM must be an "add in" (vs. "add on") in the world of higher education. He introduces one of the suggested practices from the book called "LinkEx," a concept in which SEM becomes the link to multiple existing and emerging campus initiatives for full integration and reducing "initiative fatigue." This was the first I had heard of this concept. The second part of Henderson's foreword emphasizes the importance of integrating SEM into what he calls the "campus vernacular." In wrapping up his introduction, Henderson gives us a taste of the five case studies and reminds us

of the leadership role that AACRAO has played in SEM planning throughout the profession.

In chapter one, Gordon and Wankel provide some foundational definitions and brief history on SEM, reminding us of the core concepts and practices that guide SEM plans. They specifically state that this book is to "provide SEM leaders with actionable steps when facing the starting line rather than the finishing line, with their SEM plans" (6). Like Henderson, they also preview the five case studies.

Chapter two is singularly focused on explaining "LinkEx" by dedicating space to discussing the importance of linking, integrating, and extending. I found this content extremely valuable. Gordon and Wankel highlight examples of LinkEx as observed at Northeast State College (TN), Roane State Community College (TN), Minnesota community colleges, and California state community colleges.

Chapter three introduces the characteristics of SEM work, how to transition from planning to implementation, the role of data, the role of communication, and implementation of best practices. I appreciated the examples from a variety of colleges and universities.

Chapter four, titled "Maintaining Momentum," is laser focused on assessment and the building blocks for success. This chapter includes a list of ten common barriers and obstacles to sustaining SEM plans.

Overviews of the Five Case Studies

The greatest value of *SEM in Action* is the inclusion of five case studies. These provide a nice refresh of AACRAO's 2004 SEM case studies book, *Essentials of Strategic Enrollment Management: Cases in the Field*. About 70 percent of this new book is dedicated to these case studies from Central Oregon Community College, Wichita State University, Missouri State University, Gemological Institute of America, and SUNY Fredonia. Each, while unique, offers insights about process, practices, challenges, opportunities, disruption, lessons learned, messaging, and leadership. These case studies are the real asset of this publication. Perhaps most eye opening for me was learning about SEM in action within the jewelry industry. That was an institutional type that was new to me. It showcased how SEM is applied in a variety of contexts. Not disclosed in the book was how these case studies were selected and/or what made them compelling enough to share with readers. Including that information would have been helpful to set the stage and enhance credibility.

Other Features and Favorites

One of my favorite features of the book were the graphics and layout designs. The book includes more than 20

figures and tables that are full color and designed with an incredible professionalism. These graphics are at the same level of the quality of the text and are featured throughout the entire book. The color schemes are rich and effective at communicating the intended messages. The graphics draw readers into the storytelling.

The book is also rich in metaphors. Examples include "To some, SEM looks like an effort akin to climbing Mt. Everest" (14) and "SEM...can be the umbrella for: linking the data and the learning from these various initiatives; seeing ways to integrate and coordinate efforts instead of maintaining separate efforts; and extending the vision of current efforts toward a coordinated and comprehensive view of enrollment goals and strategies" (20). Metaphors are helpful for describing the complex field of SEM to others who are new to this work.

Overall, *SEM in Action* is definitely a book that every SEM leader must have in their library. It's a straightforward read with real-world examples for other campuses to see how SEM can succeed. It provides a roadmap for implementing and sustaining strategic enrollment management plans. Your next action? Pick up a copy of this book today.

About the Author



Christopher W. Tremblay

Christopher W. Tremblay, Ed.D., is Editor-in-Chief of C&U as well as Executive Director of Enrollment Management and Student Affairs at the University of Michigan's Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning. He also serves as Director of AACRAO's Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM)

Endorsement Program. Tremblay has nearly 30 years of experience in college admissions and enrollment management, having served as vice chancellor for enrollment management at the University of Wisconsin-Superior, associate provost for enrollment management at Western Michigan University, and assistant vice chancellor for enrollment

management at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, among other positions. Tremblay earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees from Western Michigan University. He has a post-master's certificate in enrollment management from Capella University, and doctorate of education in educational leadership from the University of Michigan-Dearborn.