

 SEMQ REVIEW

Higher Education on the Brink: Reimagining Strategic Enrollment Management in Colleges and Universities

HARVEY-SMITH, A. B. 2022. LANHAM, MD: ROWAN & LITTLEFIELD. 140 PP.

Reviewed by Jennifer L. McClure

As higher education continues to be under assault from multiple fronts, *Higher Education on the Brink* is a quick read and critical addition to the practitioner toolbox. Author Dr. Alicia B. Harvey-Smith, president and CEO of Pittsburgh Technical College, presents a comprehensive discussion of the urgency for colleges and universities to be bold and address the need for changes that have been advocated for decades and are now critical to the survival of higher education institutions given the strain on funding, shift in demographics and student demands, and public skepticism of the value of higher education.

Starting with the grim realities facing today's institutions, Dr. Harvey-Smith summarizes the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on already-stretched resources and offers clear ideas on what institutions can do to ensure student success and longevity. Examples include staying connected to students and supporting

online instruction, ensuring programs can be completed fully online, recording all lectures for students who may miss class, holding virtual study halls and open houses, and creating a strategic enrollment management (SEM) plan. For those not as steeped in the field of SEM, Dr. Harvey-Smith provides a comprehensive discussion on the key elements—ensuring programs meet the community needs, utilizing financial aid and resources to support students most in need to ensure retention and completion, tracking student progress, intentionally removing barriers, enlisting the entire college in brand awareness and communication, and implementing frequent student research and analysis to identify and respond to issues affecting retention and completion. For those who are familiar with SEM, the concepts of converting applicants, reducing stop outs, redesign of programs and services, rethinking

scheduling, and creating procedures and processes that proactively support students should be familiar. What is unique is the way the essential elements are presented to provide concrete examples as well as the focus on intentionality of shaping the student experience.

As an experienced enrollment manager, I found the sections on how to weave the concepts of SEM into the strategic planning process to be most helpful. These sections describe how to create a culture where “everyone in our village matters” by: creating human connections so the campus feels empowered to participate in the process; involving all areas of the college in understanding their role in student success; and having a smaller group keeping tabs on current trends, progress, and recommended strategies. Also included is ensuring that the strategic plan has measurable goals and objectives that are aligned with institutional priorities. The author states, “Incorporating enrollment planning within the institution’s strategic planning process will enable colleges and universities to build and sustain a SEM culture.” I applaud the blueprint on how to incorporate the entire community into the strategic planning process to build a sense of ownership amongst the entire college.

Specific case studies with details of various approaches provide options for adoption. In her chapter, *The Village Approach*, Harvey-Smith reinforces the need to be, “academically driven and student centered”—a concept that has eluded many institutions up until now. Highlighting the approach used at Pittsburgh Technical College (PTC), the book describes how the college marketed their core values of excellence and accountability using the motto of a “Higher Standard” and the tagline of “Where knowledge meets know-how” (44). In addition, PTC’s schools offered varied modalities, stackable credentials, and degrees leading to immediate employment; diversified their enrollment to reach predominately underserved and underrepresented students as well as online, adult, and veterans; redirected resources to hire staff to grow these enrollments; and launched new revenue streams through contract training.

Another critical component of this book is the chapter on change management frameworks. I have been a champion of change management and found her em-

phasis on how managing change essential to transformation refreshing. Change management is systematic, and institutions must understand and utilize change management to transform. As Heather Ash Amara states, “Change is inevitable, but transformation is by conscious choice” (63). The book explores three popular models and provides an original model to consider.

The first model, Kotter’s change management model, consists of eight stages: create a sense of urgency; build a guiding coalition; form a strategic vision and initiatives; enlist a volunteer army; enable action by removing barriers; generate short-term wins; sustain acceleration; and institute change. Kotter’s model is commonly used and can be summarized in three phases—responding to change, preparing for change, and implementing change.

The second model presented is McKinsey 7-S change management model. This model focuses on a variety of factors with shared values at the core. The other elements are structure, systems, style, staff, skills, and strategy. McKinsey 7-S is considered one of the longest lasting change management models.

The third model, Lewin’s change management theory, is the most simplistic using three stages—pre-change, change, and post-change. During the pre-change stage, the goal is to identify resistance to the planned change and prepare the culture for the shift. The change stage is when implementation occurs and new processes and systems are put in place. The post-change stage consists of acceptance and setting new expectations. Throughout the model, leadership and communication are critical.

The last model presented is the Harvey-Smith three-stage—ten step change model. Based on research, the three stages are: prepare, innovate, and sustain. The ten steps include: assess the current state; leverage dissatisfaction to ignite innovation; examine models to inform change; reduce complexity to defuse resistance; align structures and resources to shape a solution; examine and redefine roles to support realignment; adapt change to existing culture; invest and educate to accelerate change; design and evaluate seamlessly integrated systems; and cultivate organizational responsiveness to change and learning. Regardless of the model chosen, the adoption

of a change management model affects the rate of change. As the author states, “The ability to respond and adapt to change quickly is essential and a matter of urgency for colleges and universities as higher education continues to adjust to current and future disruptions.”

Finally, the one thread that stood out to me is the intentionality and focus on how to create inclusive spaces for students, staff, and faculty while addressing institutional strategic priorities. Utilizing tactics such as hosting town halls, holding focus groups, intentionally inviting anyone to participate in strategic planning, and having staff figure out the “how” are examples that can lead to creating and nurturing an organizational culture that is open to change and willing to learn. I think this is an important element in today’s landscape that is often overlooked or given lip service. As Dr. Kenneth Hartman states in the Epilogue, “The time has come for institutional stakeholders to lead an open and honest conversation on their campuses, where all academic

policies, producers, and requirements are questioned with boldness.” Walking the talk of inclusiveness and being confident enough in your leadership to allow for diverse opinions and ensuring all voices are heard is critical to not only reimagining SEM, but also attracting and retaining top talent to do the work.

Overall, I found the book provides a balance of theory and practical examples that can be considered and adopted by colleges and universities to stabilize enrollment. The chapters provide an overview of SEM, integration in strategic planning, and change management models that are critical to transformation. The writing style is informative and includes reflection and theories. Enrollment practitioners and other higher education leaders would benefit from this book. Using as a text for president cabinets or other leadership circles would provide a common language and ideas to explore as institutions formulate their trajectory as they transform post-COVID.

About the Author



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Jennifer L. McClure, Ph.D., is the University Registrar at Dominican University in River Forest, Illinois. Her 30 years of diverse higher education experience span two-year

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