

 GRAD AND PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS

Graduate Enrollment Management: Reflections and Development—A Decade In

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Enrollment management (EM) was established as an area of study about 50 years ago, yet the first definition of graduate enrollment management (GEM) only emerged in 2014. In the past decade, despite pressure to increase graduate enrollments to address institutions' budget challenges and impending undergraduate enrollment declines, few empirical studies focus solely on GEM. Institutions are starting to develop graduate strategic enrollment management (G-SEM) plans. This article highlights a qualitative case study of GEM practitioners that explored their experiences with GEM models and G-SEM planning. Although participants' institutions were in the early phases of G-SEM planning, their schools had not fully embraced any GEM model to support those efforts. Practitioners reported that this resulted in increased pressure to advocate for more intentional coordination across the graduate student life cycle and to build relationships to breakdown silos. Study participants stressed the continued significant role of faculty in graduate program structures and goals, discussed the importance of career outcomes, emphasized the need to use data to inform decisions, and highlighted the evolving relationship with external partners and central marketing offices. Higher education institutions face budget and enrollment challenges while there is increased scrutiny on the value of a degree. This study underscores the pressing need for ongoing empirical research that will guide institutions' G-SEM plans and investments in strategic GEM models.

Enrollment management (EM) at the undergraduate level has seen significant development in theories, models, and practice since its inception about 50 years ago, as evidenced by the many American Association of Collegiate Registrations and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) texts such as Bontrager, Ingersoll, and Ingersoll (2012). From EM, strategic enrollment management (SEM) was born (Henderson 2012), yet it was not explicitly extended to graduate education. The concept of graduate enrollment management (GEM) emerged about a decade ago. GEM has been a practitioner-oriented field over an empirical one, which has led to a gap in the formal grounding of GEM and no universal understanding of GEM models.

The dichotomy of the large body of research and literature on undergraduate over graduate EM development has meant GEM “is the much younger sibling of EM, without the academic literature base or formal examples in practice” (Balayan, Connor, LaFave 2022a, 35). GEM was formalized in a white paper a decade ago that grounded the field in an integrated interdependence model across the graduate student lifecycle. While this was a major step forward, few formal studies have explored this or other models, leaving a stagnated research landscape and stunted field.

Grounding GEM as an overarching concept for the graduate student lifecycle considers the awareness stage through graduation, including marketing, admissions, student services, enrollment operations, and more. Therefore, from the white paper, GEM was defined as “a comprehensive approach to the methods by which an institution recruits, admits, supports, retrains, and graduates postbaccalaureate students...includes codependent functions working congruently to manage overall enrollment levels and the students experience strategically” (Connor, LaFave and Balayan 2014, 9). All these elements can contribute to institutional strategy toward sustainable enrollment outcomes, a key concept in EM per Bontrager and Green (2012). Focusing on GEM, especially as high school and undergraduate enrollment wanes may support institutions’ future, which may necessitate a better understanding of GEM and graduate strategic enrollment management (G-SEM).

Overall, universities are facing lower enrollment and therefore revenue in recent years, especially from undergraduate tuition (Gardner 2023). This is only anticipated to increase in the next few years, with an impending enrollment cliff (Bauman 2024). Notably, this may shift institutions to rely even more on income from graduate tuition to boost fiscal health. Schools can prepare for an impending fiscal crisis by closing the gap in developing GEM models and structures to better understand the field and ultimately grow enrollment and revenue to best serve graduate students.

In consideration of the need for empirical research and GEM model development, a qualitative case study, with a focus group followed by one-on-one semi-structured interviews, was designed and executed to explore the experiences of GEM practitioners. The purpose of this study was to determine how individuals perceive their role in GEM and the models present on their campuses. The two researchers held an in-person focus group with eight GEM professionals from various experience levels at the 2023 NAGAP Annual Summit, and then conducted virtual one-on-one interviews with GEM leaders to understand their roles. This inquiry was examined through an eight person focus group representing public and private institutions across the United States, and then homed in on six GEM leaders’ lived experiences through interviews. The researchers were most interested in how focus group participants defined GEM, their exposure to the original white paper and model, and how GEM manifests in models and goal setting on their campus. For the individual interviews, questions centered on centralized versus decentralized and hybrid GEM models, SEM and G-SEM planning on their campus, and their relationship with support offices and external partners. This is the first known qualitative study focused on GEM practitioners’ experiences and beliefs, with the only other study the closed-ended empirical survey sponsored by NAGAP in 2013, that led to the white paper.

Literature Review

G-SEM mirrors SEM for undergraduate context, yet the research and practical focus has not been on strategic

planning for the graduate level. G-SEM is not a widely integrated concept and even newer than GEM. It was first defined by Connor, Balayan, and LaFave in 2022a as “the actualization of SEM in the graduate context, including the comprehensive evaluative process at the program/discipline level as it relates to institutional graduate enrollment planning, as well as the interplay of graduate and undergraduate enrollment in relation to university wide goals.” Ultimately, aligning the institutional strategic plan and G-SEM can lead to sustainable graduate enrollment outcomes, which harkens back to the foundation of SEM (Bontrager and Green 2012) and is supported by the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) (2019).

Recently, a foundational GEM publication highlighting research and practice was released (Paris and Kania 2024). This is significant as it is the first wide-reaching guide and only textbook devoted to GEM, albeit ten years after the white paper debuted. In partnership with the Association for Graduate Enrollment Management (NAGAP), the primary GEM professional organization, it covers seven major areas of GEM, from marketing and admission to student success. The text formalizes best practices as discussed by GEM practitioners.

The problem examined in this study was the lack of GEM models across institutional types, with no universal role identifications nor models beyond the original integrated interdependence one, which is not widely implemented. Given the increased focus on the growth of graduate programs, as institutional priorities and revenue generating sources as noted by participants, the results of the study could inform university leaders as to the ideal GEM structures and resources needed to meet enrollment and strategic goals.

The researchers operated with an assumption that study participants were familiar with the concept of GEM and had heard of integrated interdependence. In a small study such as this, even with two visits to the field with unique populations, there is a limited scope. Therefore, some themes may translate across GEM professionals and institutions, but the results are not necessarily representative to GEM as a whole. This study will inform university administrators and GEM leaders and practitioners to determine how to more intentionally

develop and plan for GEM structures and resources to support G-SEM goals. It contributes to the small body of work exclusively on GEM, toward the further formalization of the field. What follows is a literature review to ground the study in the few major publications devoted to GEM, a discussion of the results and findings, implications, and further directions for research.

Aligned with the nascency of GEM, there is far more academic literature on EM and SEM for the undergraduate context than graduate. NAGAP was founded as, and is still, grounded in admissions and recruitment over student affairs and other areas of the graduate student lifecycle. The above, in combination with NAGAP’s practitioner focus, has led to a lack of scholarly texts on GEM. NAGAP’s white paper on GEM from 2014 is the most formal text on the concept produced by the organization, yet it was not based in a true empirical study nor published in a peer reviewed journal.

Additionally, foundational peer reviewed sources on GEM as a concept have been lacking. The only peer reviewed article on it in the last five years was Balayan, Connor, and LaFave (2022a), through which G-SEM emerged. The article was informed by an AACRAO’s (2022) *60 Second Survey* and subsequent AACRAO 2021 SEM Conference presentation (Balayan Connor, and LaFave 2022b). The informal electronic survey yielded 340 responses from private and public-school AACRAO members, with 84 percent of respondents reporting they serve both graduate and undergraduate EM. This showed GEM does not have dedicated staffing in many cases. It supported the notion that there is no dominant model for GEM at most institutions, but some of the same issues, such as lack of staffing or budget, were seen in both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Just under half (44 percent) of respondents said they work in a centralized office over a GEM division (27 percent), academic unit (17 percent), or other (12 percent). Top issues in GEM were a lack of support and resources and lack of formal GEM model or G-SEM plan.

A decade ago, Campbell and Smith (2014) noted there is a lack of GEM research, and until this study, there have been very little additions to official research on GEM roles and models. It is posited that taking a

scholar-practitioner approach, supported by Balayan, Connor and LaFave (2022a) will contribute to further formalization of GEM through empirical research, and determine models for best practice. A scholar-practitioner connects the academic and practical worlds, a missing link in GEM's existence thus far. This would be a shift from NAGAP's focus, through which many GEM practitioners engage, but could move the field forward toward an academic grounding that has been missing.

While the lack of empirical studies and seminal publications on GEM models, structures, and roles prevails, there has been development of specific topics in graduate education. One major area is holistic admissions, most notably in Posselt's work, including two major books and several articles. The books are *Inside Graduate Admissions* (2016) and *Equity in Science* (2020). The first examined admissions committees' practices on evaluation of graduate applicants with an equity lens. Posselt's ethnographic approach explored the internal procedures of social sciences, hard sciences, and humanities committees as they determined how merit is used to assess the preparedness of applicants. Posselt uncovered equities and implicit biases, supported in her second book, an ethnographic look focused on STEM disciplines. The charge is to ensure equity and inclusion, in every use of the terms, are at the forefront of evaluation practices.

In the same vein as Posselt's work, Paris and Winfield (2024) and Orlando (2021) explored holistic admissions in GEM. Holistic admissions takes an overarching view of applicant evaluation, considering cognitive variables such as GPA balanced with non-cognitive traits including lived experiences (Paris and Winfield). Orlando discussed holistic admissions in a review of the literature, as opposed to designing and executing a study. The article noted holistic review in GEM is less developed than its undergraduate counterpart, much like GEM and EM. Both sources suggested more research is needed on graduate admissions policies including holistic review.

Paris and Winfield (2024) conducted a mixed methods study of NAGAP members, with a quantitative survey followed by qualitative interviews of GEM professionals, resulting in a 44-person sample. While this is quite small given NAGAP's membership of 1,345 practitioners

(a 3.3 percent response rate), it provided insight into respondents' use of holistic admissions in GEM. Given this, results cannot be interpreted as representative of GEM overall, yet showed benefits of holistic application review such as "the flexibility to consider applicants' characteristics and backgrounds including their life circumstances, past experiences, and future goals and their alignment with institutional values" (46). Additionally, professionalism and integrity were the most sought-after qualities in graduate applicant evaluation.

While the pocket of work on holistic admissions is important, it is niche and has been done in the absence of larger GEM model development. Notably, a major GEM publication edited by Paris and Kania (2024), the first of its kind, came out this past year. It discusses elements across the graduate student lifecycle written by GEM leaders, yet it does not go beyond the integrated interdependence model. Some key topical areas included diversity recruitment and the admissions experience for graduate students, and the book delved deeper than any other previous GEM publication. Also included are informal case studies on topics such as test optional admissions and financial wellness planning. This is a seminal and important work to ground GEM and the only book, yet most is not based in empirical research.

Methodology

Since this study's participants were GEM practitioners from various institutional types and across the United States, there was no single site. There were two visits to the field, in the form of focus groups and semi-structured one-on-one interviews. The study employed purposive sampling, a technique noted by Creswell (2014) to align the sample with participants who will offer the most relevance to the study's purpose, which was to gather how individuals perceive their role in GEM and the models present on their campuses. Upon submitting to and receiving approval from the University of Kansas Institutional Review Board, the two researchers conducted the focus group first.

Instead of putting out a call to GEM practitioners through NAGAP, the researchers held an in-person one-hour focus group at the NAGAP Annual Summit in New

York City on Thursday April 13th, 2023. The session was titled “Current Research on GEM Models: Provide Your Feedback on Current and Best Practices.” It was a special interest forum that highlighted current research on GEM models and asked attendees to share feedback on GEM structures on their campuses. The description in the conference program noted a focus group would be held, inviting attendees to the session if they were interested in taking part. Therefore, the researchers intentionally did not know how many potential participants would attend, or details on their institutional makeup or background.

Beforehand, the researchers developed focus group questions, and once the summit ended, turned the attention to the individual interviews. Following the focus groups, the researchers analyzed the focus group data and conducted the second phase of the study, individual virtual semi-structured interviews. Participants were garnered using direct email outreach, with convenience sampling over the purposive approach of the focus groups (Creswell 2014). In an intentional departure from the generalization of focus group participants’ career level, the interview subjects were all GEM leaders at their respective institutions.

A semi-structured interview approach was taken, consistent with Creswell and Guetterman’s (2019) notion that open-ended questions allow researchers to gain an understanding of the study topic. Questions, noted in Appendix A, were asked on items such as whether one has a centralized, decentralized, or mixed graduate education support model, what formal relationships may exist to support graduate students, and familiarity with the integrated interdependence model of GEM. Interviews were all conducted via Zoom, an online video platform, and recorded. They were conducted by one of the two researchers who shared the duties among them, were about an hour long each, and held in a private home or workspace.

Prior to starting the focus group, participants were given an informed consent statement to review, and the researchers were available for any questions before, during, or after the session. Steps were taken to ensure participants’ anonymity such as not disclosing names,

institutions, or other identifying details of any focus group participant or interviewee. Interviewees were informed their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time. All data, including Zoom interview recordings and transcripts, were collected, and stored on password protected computers that will be destroyed three years after the study was conducted. No audio or video recordings were taken of the focus groups.

A major limitation of the study was the sample size, especially for the interviews. As Creswell and Guetterman (2019) supported, a small sample may not be representative of NAGAP’s membership or the larger GEM field. That is likely the case, since all institutional types, backgrounds, and experiences of GEM professionals could not have been captured in the interviews or focus group. Ethically, it must be noted that researcher bias may have been present in the process, since both researchers are GEM practitioners with a wide network. While they acted neutrally through the process, the possibility for unintentional bias must be acknowledged.

Once the data were collected, field notes from the focus group and Zoom transcripts from the interviews were analyzed and coded for common themes. The researchers analyzed the data from their own interviews, three each. A combination of hand coding and AI software was used to distill themes. Then, they came together to explore where the data overlapped and to draw conclusions on these GEM practitioners’ experiences with their roles and structures on campus.

Results

The study included a focus group with GEM practitioners and semi-structured interviews of high-level administrators in the GEM field. Questions focused on the problem of a lack of GEM models across institutional types, with no universal role identifications regardless of one’s job level, nor models beyond the original integrated interdependence one. The researchers were most interested in how focus group participants defined GEM, their exposure to the original white paper and model, and how GEM manifests in models and goal setting on their campus. For the individual interviews, questions centered on centralized versus decentralized and hybrid GEM models,

G-SEM planning on their campus, and their relationship with support offices and external partners.

Focus Group

Eight GEM professionals participated in a focus group at the NAGAP Annual Summit in April 2023. Participants' experiences and roles represented a variety of institutions, including public, private, and research-intensive, with locations spanning from the East Coast, Midwest, and West Coast. Focus group participants were asked how they defined GEM, their thoughts on the concepts in NAGAP's original white paper (Connor, LaFave and Balayan 2014), how GEM goals were established at their institutions, and how GEM models affected G-SEM planning.

Themes emerged around central marketing support, growth in GEM as a concept, the need to focus on the importance of faculty, role of external partners, relationship building, career development, and student outcomes. While participants generally agreed that the nexus model of integrated interdependence should be held up as one model, none could say their institutions had fully embraced it nor set up structures to provide support for it. At the same time, many participants indicated their institutions placed pressure on graduate programs to increase enrollment and revenues, during a period when many schools were experiencing declines in undergraduate enrollment. This lack of coordination and a universal GEM model affected the leaders' ability to participate in intentional and long-term G-SEM planning at the institution, school, or program-levels.

This newer attention on enrollment in graduate programs resulted in some participants having the opportunity to work with a central marketing office or an external enrollment marketing partner. Many shared their appreciation to have this resource, but also noted the challenges of working with marketing offices that had spent years investing in expertise to promote undergraduate programs. This resulted in materials and plans that did not fit with the needs of graduate students and an assumption that communication plans could be built with a standard or central response, neither of which aligned with the needs of graduate students or struc-

tures at their institutions. This dictates the need for a shift to ensure marketing for graduate students is as much at the forefront as its undergraduate counterpart.

Some participants also shared experiences working with external partners to promote or support their graduate programs. The marketing experience was usually better in these partnerships, but only a small number of their programs received this support since it is often quite costly and is frequently for programs that are fully online. Other participants shared experiences with external partners for digital advertising or centralized application systems across professional programs. These participants appreciated the centralized application's ease of use for applicants and program's access to broader applicant data across the discipline.

While external partners and central marketing support were newer areas discussed within GEM, the need for coordination across institutions was consistent with the results from the decade-old white paper study. All participants noted that they viewed their role as a relationship builder, whether with recruitment, admissions, funding, advising, career planning, or other general support for graduate students, with a particular emphasis on promoting accurate outcomes and providing career services support.

Interviews

The focus group themes provided the foundation for six in-depth interviews of high-level GEM professionals, which took place in November and December 2023. Interviewees held titles of director or higher and worked an average of fifteen years in GEM. Their responsibilities included overseeing graduate enrollment efforts for their institutions, and some had a broader focus to lead all enrollment management responsibilities for their schools. All have engaged with NAGAP, many of them volunteering on committees or serving in leadership roles for the organization. They worked across a variety of institutional types, including medical, research, technical, private, and public, ranging from small to large student populations. Interviewees worked in institutions with a centralized or hybrid model for graduate education aligned with CGS (2019) definitions, many

TABLE 1 ► Interview Participants by Institutional Type and Graduate School Structure

Interviewee	Title	Institutional Control/ Affiliation	Carnegie Classification	Graduate School Structure
One	VP Enrollment Management and Marketing	Private Not-for-Profit	Master's Colleges and Universities: Medium Programs	Hybrid
Two	VP Enrollment Management and Marketing	Private Not-for-Profit	Master's Colleges and Universities: Larger Programs	Hybrid
Three	Executive Director of Graduate Enrollment	Public	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity	Hybrid
Four	Director of Enrollment and Records	Independent Non-Profit Institute	n/a	Centralized
Five	AVP/Dean of Graduate Enrollment	Private Not-for-Profit	Master's Colleges and Universities: Small Programs	Hybrid
Six	Dean, Graduate School	Public	Doctoral Universities: High Research Activity	Hybrid

noting that there is a trend towards centralization of resources. Table 1 summarizes the participants by institutional type, Carnegie Classification (ACE 2024), and CGS' model for graduate education. Individuals were asked about their responsibilities and institution's structure for graduate education, G-SEM planning, role of external partners, central marketing offices, how they fulfill their responsibilities, faculty roles in GEM, and the integrated interdependence model.

All interviewees discussed their broad role to support graduate education, sharing ways they support each phase of the integrated interdependence model. They commonly spoke about a newfound attention on graduate programs, but all shared the continued need to invest in graduate programs and the institutional structures and resources necessary to meet institutional goals, develop, and/or implement a G-SEM plan. They unanimously highlighted the importance of building relationships to break down silos at their institutions. This included collaboration with academic deans, student engagement or service teams, faculty, staff, marketing offices, career offices, and other support services that enhance the graduate student experience. They emphasized the importance of strong partnerships across departments and campus offices to ensure alignment and support for graduate students.

While all saw their role to support graduate students, many shared challenges with institution-wide strategic planning, G-SEM planning specifically, and setting enrollment goals for graduate programs. Interviewees were at various phases in this process, with some just starting and others in the second or third year of implementation. All noted the importance of using data to inform recruitment, admissions, marketing, and related decisions and collaborating with campus stakeholders, including program directors, enrollment management and student services teams, and campus leadership. All also highlighted the need for continuous improvement and to adapt strategies based on ever-changing needs.

Evolving relationships included those with external partners or central marketing offices. Individuals underscored the need to partner with external agencies to develop marketing expertise, with a focus to later build the knowledge and expertise in-house; however, most shared they expected to continue to outsource digital marketing due to the need to quickly adapt to changes in the market and reliance on experts in external partners. Many participants also discussed their newer collaborations with central marketing offices at their institutions, noting their appreciation for the partnership but the need for more targeted graduate program promotion in addition to institution-level

marketing. Some leaders started to address this by creating a marketing recruitment division within their areas, sometimes moving the overall institution's marketing function into an enrollment management unit.

Faculty play an important role in the recruitment and admission process of graduate students, some of whom collaborate closely with central marketing or admissions offices, others—often those situated in research-intensive programs—may perform these functions separately. Similarly, interviewees shared that faculty often had high levels of involvement with the admissions process, but it was dependent on the program; most had competing priorities; and many desired more intentional ways to work with faculty on best practices for both recruitment and admissions. Similarly, interviewees discussed the importance of funding, which is often managed by the program's faculty or administrators and described the role of central units as twofold: 1) to accurately describe the funding process to prospective or current graduate students and 2) connect programs and students with the variety of offices involved with graduate student funding (*e.g.*, financial aid, human resources, etc.).

Faculty members also heavily influence graduate students' retention and success, which is expected given the close advising relationship, often small graduate student cohorts, and specific plans of study tailored to graduate students. Some interviewees, however, indicated that they see a shift in priorities for institutions to support graduate student retention more broadly. They are starting to see institutions recognize the need to invest in additional staffing and resources to support graduate students, closer to the attention institutions have allocated for undergraduate students over the years. They are witnessing this advocacy on their campuses, with a focus on more advising models and support for graduate students, especially those who take leaves of absence or withdraw.

While none of the interviewees could say that their campuses fully embraced the integrated interdependence model, all viewed their role as one to advocate for graduate programs, their students, faculty, and staff. They noted that part of advocacy is a continued ne-

cessity to educate leaders about the needs of graduate students and importance of development of GEM and G-SEM to improve planning, processes, and outcomes. While the GEM leaders were excited about the focus on graduate education, they were also all hopeful to spend less time educating campus stakeholders about the fundamentals of GEM and more time in the future on planning and implementing G-SEM across their campuses and programs.

The interviewees highlighted the importance of more intentional and clearer handoffs between units as part of G-SEM planning. They noted that the close relationship between a graduate student and their academic program necessitates a more organized transition process to ensure comprehensive support throughout the graduate student lifecycle—this effort avoids oversight of support and decreases redundancies that are inefficient or cause confusion (*e.g.*, a program shares funding information with graduate students that does not include the information sent by the financial aid office).

Table 2 (on page 51), which notes the predominantly decentralized approach of graduate student recruitment, underscores the importance of this deliberate effort to transfer support across units. The first two columns of the table are sourced from Connor, *et al.*'s (2014) white paper defining GEM, and the last column shows results from this study compared to concepts from the original paper. While recruitment is generally decentralized, more schools are working toward providing more central support for recruitment, marketing, advising, retention, graduation, career outcomes, and alumni relations. Some interviewees were housed in an enrollment management unit, likely contributing to emerging models for more centralized support for the graduate student lifecycle. This structured approach enables leaders to develop and implement G-SEM plans based on best practices in GEM.

Figures 1 and 2 are based on the original integrated interdependence model of GEM. Figure 1 (on page 52) denotes the importance of career outcomes at the end of the graduate student life cycle between graduation and alumni relations. It also shows the addition of G-SEM to the model. Figure 2 (on page 53) highlights the

TABLE 2 ► Understanding, Defining, and Adapting Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM)

Enrollment Management in 2013		Enrollment Management in 2023
Undergraduate	Graduate	Graduate
Primarily centralized recruitment	Primarily decentralized recruitment	Primarily decentralized recruitment, with models emerging to support marketing and academic program recruitment efforts
Coordinates all aspects of student lifecycle under one umbrella	Emergence from fractured/ complex to coordinated and interdependent	Recognition of the need for a coordinated and independent model
Higher staff levels	Do more with fewer staff	Do more with fewer staff
Definitive starting and stopping points within primary responsibility (<i>i.e.</i> , admissions handles admissions)	Evolution of staff roles beyond primary responsibilities (<i>i.e.</i> , recruitment and retention services)	Multiple GEM structures exist, with some staff supporting full student life cycle, and others focused on only recruitment/ admissions or student support
Campus leadership in tune with enrollment issues/needs	Perceived lack of knowledge and support from campus leadership	Emergence of G-SEM planning with support from campus leadership, often employing consultants
Academic quality = institutional	Academic quality = niche/program-based	Academic quality = niche/program-based
Models based on enrollment management: enrollment committee, coordinator, matrix and enrollment management division	Models: Mostly admissions-based models centralized, decentralized, hybrid	Models: Mostly admissions-based models centralized, decentralized, hybrid with models emerging in advising and retention and graduation and career outcomes
Emerging Model: Building bridges to academic enterprise	Emerging Model: Service orientation and strengthening existing connection to faculty	Emerging Model: Graduate Admissions Offices in Enrollment Management division

importance of G-SEM among the multiple units that support the graduate student life cycle.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

G-SEM planning is essential as institutions address the pending undergraduate enrollment cliff and less positive views on the value of a college degree overall (Gardiner 2024; Grawe 2018; Nguyen, Fischman, and Cheche 2023), yet is not widely practiced on campuses. Given the impending smaller pool of prospective graduate students, schools will need to offer programs that meet employer demand and student interest while focusing recruitment efforts on populations that are the best fit and most interested in their programs. Since 2019, graduate enrollment saw a very slight increase of 0.6 percent between fall 2022 and fall 2023 (NSCRC

2024). CGS's ten-year analysis of graduate enrollment and degrees compared Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data with degrees in certain fields and found that there was a shortage of about 25,000 graduate degree holders in the educational counseling field and another 4,000 for educational administrators (McKenzie, Zhou, and Regio 2023). These are two areas schools could then concentrate efforts and get ahead of the projected drop of student numbers.

Higher education institutions will need to target their recruitment efforts to meet the current shortages identified by the BLS and focus recruitment efforts on more diverse populations. The CGS (2023) report showed that while first-time graduate enrollment for international students rose by more than 10 percent between fall 2021 and fall 2022, first-time domestic student enrollment dropped by almost 5 percent. The

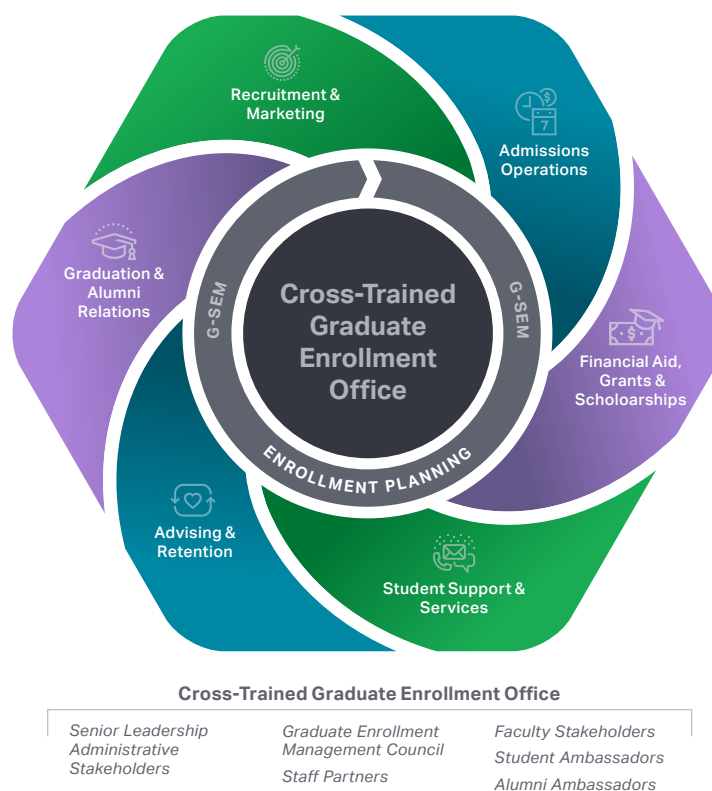


FIGURE 1 ➤ G-SEM Integrated Interdependence Model

same report also highlighted data for a ten-year period: between fall 2012 and fall 2022, applications to master's programs grew an average of 4.2 percent, with very modest enrollment growth of 0.6 percent annually from white students, which are the largest percentage of domestic graduate students. Latinx students had the highest enrollment growth of all groups at 6.6 percent during this time, but there was only a 1 percent annual enrollment growth for Black/African American students, and 1.2 percent average decline for American Indian/Alaskan Native. Furthermore, the proportion of underrepresented minorities among U.S. citizens and permanent residents in total graduate enrollment continues to be significantly low.

University leaders have employed the services of higher education consultants to tackle these obstacles, often turning to organizations such as AACRAO, RNL, and EAB for assistance in SEM planning. These groups

support the institution's initial analysis and planning, a place where many institutions currently find themselves with G-SEM plans. They also share best practices, including highlighting where institutions fall short with practices in GEM. For example, RNL's 2023 *Graduate Marketing and Recruitment Practices Report* indicated that nearly a quarter of schools do not use dashboards to analyze marketing efforts (RNL 2023).

It will be important for institutions to employ better practices to support the entire graduate student life cycle and to act on their G-SEM plans—and to do so quickly. Many institutions already face budget challenges, and with the pending enrollment cliff and changing public perceptions of the value of a degree, the schools that find ways to offer graduate programs that meet employer and student demand along with providing structures that support the graduate student lifecycle, will be best set up for long-term sustainability.



FIGURE 2 ► G-SEM Nexus Model of Integrated Interdependence

The development and urgency for G-SEM plans supports the continued need for research studies on GEM as a profession, GEM structures, and G-SEM itself. The fast pace at which institutions must address chal-

lenges in higher education, along with rapid changes in technology (*i.e.*, artificial intelligence), necessitate that scholars provide regular research on GEM models that practitioners can utilize for G-SEM planning.

Appendix

Focus Group Questions

- How do you define Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM)?
- Based on the models listed in the 2014 NAGAP white paper, what GEM structure do you have in your program and/or at your institution? How does your role fit (or not fit) into this?
- Based on your experience in GEM, what is missing from the 2014 white paper definition?
- How are GEM goals established in your program and/or at your institution? How does the GEM model of your program and/or institution affect the establishment of GEM goals and/or plans?

Interview Questions

- Describe your role, including specific aspects you support or oversee related to graduate enrollment management. How long have you been in your position? How long have you been in the GEM field?
- Do you have a centralized, decentralized, or mixed model to support graduate education? How so?
 - What types of graduate programs do you support in your role (*e.g.*, master's, doctoral, professional, research, specialized)?
- Does your institution have a strategic graduate enrollment management plan? If so, who leads the process and how is it implemented?
- Does your unit focus on transactions and/or more strategic items?
- Are there formal relationships to support graduate students with support offices? If so, which offices and how so?
 - Possible follow ups, depending on answer:
 - ★ Are the relationships supported with service-level agreements?
 - ★ Are the relationships integrated into a graduate program unit?
- Do external partners play a role in recruiting and/or providing support (companies that recruit and/or provide support for online students)?
 - If this exists with a third party, does your institution have a long-term plan to build expertise in house?
- Does your institution have a central Marketing Office or is this function managed elsewhere?
 - If your institution has a central Marketing office, how might they be integrated into graduate recruitment, support, and other functions?
- If they are involved, what are faculty members' roles in recruitment and admissions for graduate students at your institution?
- What do you need to do to ensure you are meeting the responsibilities of your position (*e.g.*, what relationships do you need to develop)?
- If you haven't discussed in your answers, are you familiar with the integrated interdependence model? (If not, explain). Does this apply to your institution?

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