THE RESEARCH AGENDA

Yield Is Won After Admission: An Admit-to-Arrival Readiness Model for Global Graduate Enrollment

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As enrollment management enters its next half-century, the period between admission and arrival has emerged as an under-managed stage of global graduate enrollment. Drawing on a practice-based inquiry of 150 incoming graduate students, primarily Boston-bound and international, this article proposes an admit-to-arrival readiness model organized around three practical lock-in timelines: funding clarity, visa readiness, and off-campus living. Student responses identified these concerns as more immediate than academic preparation alone. The article argues that SEM's next phase should treat readiness indicators as yield indicators, offers a governance framework for external support partnerships, and discusses one operational practice model. A deposited student is not necessarily a ready student.

The Unfinished Middle of SEM

Over the past five decades, enrollment management has evolved from a set of recruitment and admissions practices into an integrated institutional strategy connecting enrollment planning, financial aid, retention, student success, and institutional mission. That evolution matters because it reminds the field that enrollment is not a single transaction; it is a coordinated lifecycle (Bontrager, Ingersoll, and Ingersoll 2012; Hossler 2014).

Yet one phase remains underdeveloped in many graduate enrollment models: the period after admission but before arrival. For international graduate students, this period is not an administrative dead space. It is where visa timing, funding confidence, off-campus housing, and early belonging determine whether an admitted student can realistically become an enrolled student. If enrollment management's first 50 years helped institutions coordinate the path to enrollment

and persistence, its next phase must include readiness infrastructure for the journey between offer and arrival.

This article argues that the next phase of SEM should include admit-to-arrival readiness as a formal enrollment management concern. In the graduate and international context, yield cannot be understood only as a decision event. It is also a readiness process. A deposited student is not necessarily a ready student. For globally mobile graduate students, readiness depends on whether the student can translate institutional admission into a viable path to arrival, enrollment, and early-term stability.

The argument is grounded in a practice-based inquiry involving 150 incoming students who engaged with CASA (Community as a Service, for All), a Boston-based, human-led student support company helping incoming graduate students navigate housing, arrival, and belonging from acceptance through their first year, through its admit-to-arrival intake and support process and were admitted to U.S. graduate programs between May 2025 and May 2026. Students participated in one-to-one, interview-style conversations and were asked an open-ended question: "What are the top three things you are stressed about when you receive the admission letter?" Approximately 135 of the 150 students were Boston-bound; approximately 120 were international students living outside the United States at the time of engagement; and approximately 105 were first-time U.S. students. Students represented Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, India, Nepal, the United States, Hong Kong, China, Italy, the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, and France, and were admitted primarily to master's-level graduate programs.

The responses reveal a consistent pattern: the most salient stressors were not academic readiness alone. They were practical readiness barriers: off-campus housing, roommate and living arrangement uncertainty, visa timing, funding clarity, and the broader work of finding home in the United States. These are not peripheral service issues. They are enrollment conditions. When they remain unresolved, an admitted student may be academically qualified and emotionally excited, but still vulnerable to delay, deferral, or melt.

The article proceeds in four steps. First, it situates admit-to-arrival readiness within the evolution of SEM and the emerging literature on graduate enrollment management (GEM). Second, it summarizes relevant international enrollment and transition evidence. Third, it presents findings from the 150-student inquiry. Finally, it proposes an admit-to-arrival readiness model that institutions can adapt, with CASA discussed as one practice-based example of an operational support layer.

SEM, GEM, and the Case for Admit-to-Arrival Readiness

Enrollment management emerged in the mid-1970s as institutions confronted demographic, financial, and organizational pressures that required more intentional management of enrollment. Over time, the field moved beyond admissions and recruitment toward a more integrated understanding of the student lifecycle, institutional health, and learner success (Bontrager, Ingersoll, and Ingersoll 2012; Hossler 2014). In Henderson's formulation, SEM performs a bridging and consensus-building role across institutional units and helps shape a coherent student journey (Henderson 2017).

That bridging function is especially important in graduate education. The Association for Graduate Enrollment Management (NAGAP) defines GEM as a systematic approach to managing the graduate student lifecycle from initial awareness through alumni status, integrating recruitment, admission, support, retention, and graduation (NAGAP n.d.). Yet GEM literature repeatedly notes that graduate education is more decentralized and often less formally coordinated than undergraduate enrollment management. At many institutions, the graduate school serves as an administrative hub, while academic authority, faculty relationships, admissions decisions, funding commitments, and student communication remain distributed across individual schools, colleges, departments, and programs. Faculty and program leaders may not report through the graduate school even when the graduate school is expected to help coordinate the overall graduate student experience (Balayan, Connor, and LaFave 2022; Connor, LaFave, and Balayan 2015; Goff and Snowden 2014).

Graduate students also move through centralized institutional systems that may have been designed primarily around the undergraduate lifecycle. Functions such as the registrar, financial aid, student affairs, orientation, and housing may be organized around first-year undergraduate timelines and residential assumptions. Graduate students, by contrast, may enter through multiple academic calendars, receive funding decisions from different sources, live primarily off campus, and rely on a combination of departmental, institutional, and external support.

This decentralization creates a particular vulnerability in the post-admission period. Once an offer has been issued, admissions may assume the student has entered an onboarding pathway; international student services may focus appropriately on compliance and documentation; financial services may provide billing and aid information; and student affairs may prepare orientation. From the student's point of view, however, these steps can feel disconnected. The student's actual question is not which office owns which function. It is whether they can see a credible path from admission to arrival.

Understanding enrollment readiness through an international student lens is especially important because the post-admission period is often experienced as a cross-border coordination challenge rather than a single institutional onboarding process. International graduate students may need to align immigration documentation, visa appointment timing, proof-of-funds requirements, remote housing decisions, family financing conversations, travel planning, and local setup before they can fully translate admission into arrival. Goff and Snowden's discussion of emerging SEM organizations for graduate and international students reinforces the need for enrollment structures that account for these distinct pathways, decision pressures, and support needs (Goff and Snowden 2014).

Recent international enrollment data make this question more urgent. *Open Doors*, published annually by the Institute of International Education with support from the U.S. Department of State, is a long-standing, comprehensive data resource on international students and scholars in the United States. The 2025 *Open Doors* report indicated that the United States hosted 1,177,766 international students in 2024/25, up 5 percent year over year. At the same time, international graduate enrollment fell to 488,481, down 3 percent, and new international graduate enrollment fell by 15 percent (Institute of International Education 2025a). The *Fall 2025 Snapshot* further indicated that overall international enrollment was down 1 percent, while graduate enrollment was down 12 percent and new international enrollment was down 17 percent (Baer and Ekin 2025). These data should not be read as a simple collapse in demand. Rather, they point to a more uneven and volatile conversion environment, especially at the graduate level.

Visa timing is one example of that volatility. U.S. Department of State guidance notes that new F and M student visas—the principal visa classifications for academic and vocational study—may be issued up to 365 days before a program start date, while students may enter the United States no more than 30 days before that start date (U.S. Department of State n.d.). Students may also need to demonstrate their ability to pay educational, living, and travel costs. These processes affect undergraduate and graduate international students alike. In the graduate context, however, visa timing may intersect with decentralized admission and funding decisions, assistantship notifications, family financing, off-campus housing commitments, and program-specific start dates. These overlapping timelines can make uncertainty especially consequential during the graduate admit-to-arrival period.

The undergraduate summer melt literature offers a useful but incomplete parallel. Castleman and Page's work demonstrated that students may fail to matriculate even after intending to enroll, and that timely outreach and guidance can improve follow-through (Castleman and Page 2014, 2015). The graduate and international context differs. The barriers are often more cross-border and involve actors outside the institution, including consulates, lenders, landlords, and family sponsors. Still, the central insight travels well: post-admit follow-through is not administrative housekeeping. It is enrollment work.

International student transition literature also supports this claim. Ammigan and Jones emphasize that international students evaluate their experience across arrival, living, learning, and support services, not only academics (Ammigan and Jones 2018). Madden-Dent, Wood, and Roskina's inventory of international student services at 200 U.S. universities and colleges documents the importance of both pre-departure and post-arrival support in institutional international student infrastructure (Madden-Dent, Wood, and Roskina 2019). Practice guidance from NAFSA: Association of International Educators similarly positions international student and scholar services as a partner in enrollment follow-through through pre-arrival communication, I-20 and visa process support, housing assistance, peer mentorship, and regular check-ins (NAFSA n.d.). Sharma's recent work on initial arrival and transition highlights housing, food, transportation, staff recognition, and peer relationships as central to adjustment (Sharma 2026). In other words, the conditions that shape student confidence are often practical and relational. For international graduate students, those conditions begin before the student arrives.

Practice-Based Inquiry: Method and Boundaries

This article draws on a practice-based inquiry of 150 incoming students who engaged with CASA's admit-to-arrival intake and support process and were admitted to U.S. graduate programs between May 2025 and May 2026. The inquiry was not designed as a nationally representative survey or causal evaluation. It was designed as a structured practitioner inquiry into the stressors students named in the admit-to-arrival window. The sample is best understood as Boston-weighted: approximately 135 of the 150 students were Boston-bound, making the findings especially relevant to urban graduate markets where off-campus housing is competitive, local knowledge is unevenly distributed, and many institutions enroll students who must secure housing outside university-managed systems.

Students participated in one-to-one, interview-style conversations. Each student was asked the same open-ended question: "What are the top three things you are stressed about when you receive the admission letter?" Although the prompt used the language of stress, responses were coded and analyzed as indicators of admit-to-arrival readiness because the concerns students named centered on practical barriers to arriving, enrolling, and beginning successfully. Responses were anonymized and reviewed in aggregate before analysis; no personally identifiable student information is reported in this article. The inquiry intentionally focused on issues that institutions can influence directly or through governed support pathways, such as communication, housing education, visa process guidance, funding clarity, roommate support, and arrival logistics. It was not designed to measure geopolitical attitudes, labor-market expectations, or long-term career decision-making, though those topics may affect global enrollment more broadly.

The sample was heavily oriented toward U.S.-bound graduate mobility. Approximately 120 of the 150 students were international students living outside the United States at the time of engagement, and approximately 105 were first-time U.S. students. Countries and regions represented included Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, India, Nepal, the United States, Hong Kong, China, Italy, the United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, and France. The students were admitted primarily to master's-level graduate programs.

Because students were asked to name up to three stressors, the data can be understood both at the student level and at the stressor-mention level. In aggregate review, visa stress, off-campus housing, roommate and living arrangement uncertainty, and funding concerns formed the dominant stress pattern. This article reports those findings as practice-based evidence, not as generalizable national prevalence estimates. The inquiry intentionally focused on readiness factors institutions and their partners can reasonably influence: housing navigation, roommate alignment, visa process support, funding clarity, and arrival logistics. It did not ask students to assess broader geopolitical uncertainty or long-term employment outcomes, which, while important, sit outside the immediate operational focus of this article. (*See* Table 1, on page 119.)

Findings: The Stressors Students Named After Admission

The inquiry surfaced a simple but important pattern: students did not describe the post-admit period primarily in terms of brand preference, academic excitement, or long-term aspiration. They described it in terms of executable next steps. Their most common questions were practical and immediate: Where will I live? Who will I live with? Will my visa be approved in time? How will I pay? How do I arrive and begin without feeling lost?

TABLE 1 ➤ Practice-Based Inquiry Sample Profile

Sample Attribute	Description
Participants	150 incoming students admitted to U.S. graduate programs
Timeframe	May 2025 to May 2026
Method	One-to-one, interview-style conversations
Core Prompt	"What are the top three things you are stressed about when you receive the admission letter?"
Program Level	Primarily master's-level graduate programs
Destination	U.S.-bound; approximately 135 of 150 students Boston-bound
International Status	Approximately 120 of 150 students were international students living outside the United States at time of engagement
First-Time U.S. Status	Approximately 105 of 150 students were first-time U.S. students
Geographic Representation	Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Chile, India, Nepal, United States, Hong Kong, China, Italy, United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, France

Off-Campus Housing and Living Arrangement Uncertainty

The strongest theme was off-campus housing, often inseparable from roommate uncertainty. Students were not only looking for an apartment. They were trying to understand neighborhoods, commute patterns, lease terms, broker fees, documentation requirements, move-in timing, and whether they could trust a remote housing process. In the Boston-bound context, this concern is intensified by a competitive rental cycle and limited ability to view housing in person. The challenge is not simply one of English-language proficiency. Rental systems can differ substantially across countries and cities, including how properties are advertised, whether brokers or agents are involved, which documents are required, how deposits and advance payments are handled, and how quickly applicants are expected to commit. A student may communicate fluently in English and still lack the local market knowledge needed to assess a remote listing, understand a lease process, or distinguish a legitimate transaction from an unrealistic or questionable one. For enrollment leaders, this distinction matters because housing uncertainty may reflect unfamiliarity with the local system rather than a lack of preparation or commitment.

The repeated student question, in different words, was: "Where will I stay, and who will I stay with?" This is both logistical and emotional. Housing gives the student a physical plan. Roommate alignment gives the student a social anchor. Without either, the student's academic decision remains unstable because the basic conditions of arrival remain unresolved.

For SEM practitioners, the implication is that off-campus living should not be treated as a separate consumer problem. In graduate enrollment, especially in cities where on-campus graduate housing is limited, off-campus living becomes part of the yield environment. Institutions do not need to become landlords or brokers, but they do need to recognize that housing uncertainty can shape enrollment confidence.

Visa Timing and Arrival Feasibility

Visa stress was another dominant theme. Students often understood that admission was academically meaningful, but not practically sufficient. Until they received immigration documentation, booked an ap-

pointment, completed required forms, and received approval, they could not fully commit to leases, flights, or family travel plans. This creates a sequencing problem: housing, funding, travel, and visa steps are separate processes, but students experience them as one compressed timeline.

The institutional risk is not simply that a student feels anxious. The risk is that uncertainty cascades. A student waiting for visa clarity may delay signing a lease. A student delaying a lease may lose housing options. A student without housing may delay travel or consider deferral. The admit-to-arrival window therefore requires coordinated visibility, not just separate checklist completion.

Funding Stress and Affordability Confidence

Funding concerns were also central. Students raised questions about loans, proof of funds, family contributions, tuition and fee clarity, scholarships, assistantships, and timing of payments. For international students, funding is not only a private affordability issue. It is often tied to visa readiness, family confidence, and the student's ability to make irreversible decisions before arrival.

Graduate funding timelines can add another layer of uncertainty. Admission decisions, merit awards, assistantships, departmental funding, external loans, and family contributions may be communicated through different offices and on different schedules, even within the same institution. A student may therefore receive an admission offer before understanding the complete financial picture. For an international student, this uncertainty can also affect proof-of-funds documentation, visa planning, housing commitments, and the family's confidence in proceeding.

The inquiry suggests that institutions should distinguish between financial information and financial clarity. A student may receive a tuition estimate, scholarship note, or billing communication and still be unclear about the actual path to payment. The readiness question is not only whether information exists. It is whether the student can translate that information into a plan.

Transition Stress and the Work of Finding Home

A smaller but meaningful set of responses focused on transition stress: finding home in the United States, settling into a new city, navigating basic systems, and managing first-week logistics. Students mentioned arrival, local transportation, phone setup, banking, furnishing, groceries, health insurance, and the emotional weight of beginning in a new country without a local network.

This category matters because it connects pre-arrival support to retention and belonging. The student who arrives housed, funded, and visa-ready still needs to feel oriented enough to begin. The arrival experience can either confirm the student's decision or deepen the sense of distance between institutional promise and lived reality. (*See* Table 2, on page 121.)

An Admit-to-Arrival Readiness Model

The findings point toward a readiness model built around three lock-in timelines: funding, visa, and off-campus living. These timelines are distinct, but mutually dependent. A student may need proof of funding for visa purposes, visa timing for housing decisions, and housing confidence before travel. The task for SEM is not to collapse these functions into one office. It is to ensure that no one assumes another office owns the full student experience.

The first lock-in is funding. Students need enough clarity to understand cost, payment timing, proof-of-funds expectations, family or sponsor commitments, loan possibilities, and the relationship between funding and immigration documentation. Institutions may not provide individualized financial advice beyond their role, but they can improve transparency, timing, and referral pathways.

The second lock-in is visa readiness. This includes immigration documentation, steps related to the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), visa application timing, interview preparation at a general educational level, and contingency planning when appointments or approvals are delayed. International student services remain the regulatory experts, but ad-

TABLE 2 ➤ Directional Stressor Themes and Readiness Domains

Student Stressor Theme	Readiness Domain	Why It Matters for Yield/ Initial Enrollment	Institutional Response Opportunity
Off-Campus Housing	Off-campus living lock-in	Students may hesitate to commit if they cannot see a realistic housing path	Provide early housing education, curated resources, local market context, documentation guidance, and referral pathways
Roommate/Living Arrangement	Off-campus living lock-in and belonging	Roommate uncertainty affects affordability, comfort, and first social connection	Support lawful roommate matching based on lifestyle/logistical criteria, not protected-class preferences
Visa Stress	Visa lock-in	Visa delays can affect leases, flights, arrival timing, and deferral risk	Coordinate I-20 timing, appointment reminders, process education, and escalation for document issues
Funding Stress	Funding lock-in	Unclear payment pathways can delay confidence and visa documentation	Clarify cost, billing, proof-of-funds requirements, payment plans, and referral pathways where appropriate
Transition Logistics	Arrival readiness	Practical uncertainty can weaken confidence even after academic commitment	Offer arrival checklists, local setup guidance, peer connection, and first-week support

missions and graduate enrollment teams should understand visa milestones as yield milestones.

The third lock-in is off-campus living. For many graduate students, especially in urban markets, housing is not a campus amenity but an enrollment condition. Students need to understand local rental timelines, documentation, budget tradeoffs, roommate formation, lease timing, and move-in logistics. Institutions do not need to guarantee housing or assume brokerage functions. They do need to help students navigate legitimate pathways with realistic expectations.

Belonging and transition confidence operate across all three lock-ins. A student who has a roommate, a move-in plan, a clear funding pathway, and someone to ask practical questions is more likely to experience admission as a beginning rather than a burden. Readiness is therefore both operational and relational.

The issue is not that institutions do not care. It is that the student's lived arrival process often crosses too many offices, vendors, systems, and timelines for any one team to see clearly. (*See* Tables 3 and 4, on page 122.)

CASA as a Practice-Based Example

CASA is included here as a practice-based example of an admit-to-arrival support model. Based in Boston, CASA works with incoming graduate students through opt-in support that focuses on off-campus housing navigation, roommate alignment, arrival logistics, and connections to relevant visa, funding, banking, and local setup resources. In the model discussed here, CASA does not replace admissions, international student services, financial aid, student affairs, or licensed third-party providers. Rather, it functions as a coordinating support layer for practical questions that often sit between institutional offices and the student's lived arrival experience.

The example is useful not because it should be replicated exactly, but because it illustrates the operating logic of admit-to-arrival readiness: early intake, student-level triage, practical milestone tracking, human follow-up, referral pathways, and aggregate visibility into recurring student concerns. Any institution adopting a similar model, whether internally or with an external partner, should establish clear governance around student consent, privacy, non-endorsement, fair hous-

TABLE 3 ➤ Admit-to-Arrival Readiness Window

Admission Offer	Intent/Deposit	Lock-in Timelines	Arrival Planning	Initial Enrollment With Readiness
Student receives offer and begins decision process	Student signals intent, but readiness remains incomplete	Funding, visa, and off-campus living timelines must stabilize	Travel, move-in, orientation, and local setup become executable	Student begins with greater practical and emotional stability

TABLE 4 ➤ Admit-to-Arrival Readiness Operating Model

Milestone	Primary Owner	Support Partners	Escalation Trigger	Readiness Indicator
Admission to Intent	Graduate enrollment/ admissions	Program staff, student affairs	Student accepts but does not engage with next steps	Intake completed or support pathway declined
Funding Clarity	Student financial services/ graduate enrollment	External funding partners where appropriate	Student lacks payment plan, proof of funds, or cost clarity	Funding pathway identified and documented
Visa Readiness	International student and scholar services (ISSS)/international student office	Admissions, program staff, student support layer	Document delay, appointment delay, arrival uncertainty	Visa steps understood; appointment or plan in place
Off-Campus Living	Student affairs/off-campus resources	Licensed housing partners, student support layer	No housing plan close to start date; unrealistic budget or documentation gap	Housing path identified; roommate needs addressed
Arrival and Local Setup	Student affairs/ international office	Program staff, peer mentors, community partners, support layer	Student arrives without move-in, transit, phone, banking, or essentials plan	Arrival checklist completed; first-week support mapped

ing, immigration boundaries, financial guidance, and conflict-of-interest management. The broader lesson for SEM is that service delivery can be distributed, but ownership cannot be absent.

Governance and Ethical Guardrails

Admit-to-arrival support becomes more powerful when it is governed. This is especially important when institutions work with external partners or when support touches housing, visa, funding, or student data. Governance should begin with student agency: participation should be optional, consent-based, and clear about who is providing what type of support.

Privacy and data sharing require particular care. Guidance under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) allows outside parties to perform institutional functions involving education records only under appropriate conditions, including institutional control over the use and maintenance of records and limits on redisclosure (U.S. Department of Education 2025). EDUCAUSE guidance on third-party integrations and third-party risk management similarly emphasizes formal approval processes, standardized contract terms, data security expectations, and institutional oversight (Dameron, *et al*. 2024; Muscanell 2024).

For admit-to-arrival readiness, a practical governance checklist should include five elements. First, define the support scope clearly: education, coordination, referral, or regulated professional service. Second, minimize data sharing to what is needed. Third, pre-

serve student choice and avoid mandatory use of any vendor or service provider. Fourth, disclose conflicts and commercial relationships where relevant. Fifth, use aggregate reporting wherever possible to give institutions insight into student friction without unnecessary personally identifiable data. Roommate matching must comply with applicable fair housing law; institutions and external partners should ensure that matching criteria are based on student-stated lifestyle and logistical preferences rather than protected characteristics, and that students retain full choice throughout the process.

These guardrails make the model more credible, not less. The post-admit period sits close to sensitive domains: immigration, finances, housing, family decision-making, and student anxiety. A readiness model that ignores risk will not earn institutional trust. A readiness model that defines boundaries can extend institutional care without overpromising outcomes.

Implications for SEM's Next 50 Years

If enrollment management's first 50 years moved the field from recruitment management toward lifecycle strategy, its next phase should include readiness infrastructure. This does not mean expanding SEM endlessly into every student's needs. It means recognizing the enrollment significance of the period between admission and arrival, especially for global graduate populations.

Three implications follow. First, institutions should treat readiness indicators as yield indicators. Has the student clarified funding? Has the student received immigration documentation and booked required steps? Does the student understand realistic housing options? Does the student have a move-in plan? These indicators may be more operational than traditional funnel metrics, but they are closer to the student's real decision environment.

Second, graduate enrollment teams should build cross-functional routines around the admit-to-arrival period. A readiness meeting, dashboard, or case review cadence during the months before arrival can help admissions, international services, financial services, student affairs, and graduate programs see the same student journey. The goal is not to create more meetings. It is to prevent invisible friction from becoming late-stage melt.

Third, institutions should approach external partnerships as governed capacity, not informal outsourcing. In domains such as housing, local arrival logistics, banking, and student services, external partners may have expertise institutions do not want to build in-house. But those partnerships should be evaluated through mission alignment, transparency, data protection, student choice, and clear scope boundaries.

For global graduate enrollment, the strongest yield strategy may not be another message persuading students to choose the institution. It may be a system that helps students and families act on the choice they have already made. As student decision-making becomes more practical, comparative, and family-informed, institutions will need clearer communication, stronger partner ecosystems, and a sharper focus on what comes next after admission.

Limitations and Future Research

This article has several limitations. The inquiry is practice-based and based on students who engaged with CASA's admit-to-arrival intake and support process; it is not nationally representative and does not claim causality. The sample is heavily Boston-bound and primarily master's-level. That geographic concentration limits generalizability, but it also sharpens the article's central point: in high-pressure destination markets where many graduate students must secure off-campus housing, practical readiness is not peripheral to yield; it is part of yield protection. The data are self-reported and based on student concerns named in interview-style conversations, not on matched institutional outcome records.

The inquiry also focuses intentionally on post-admission stressors institutions can influence directly or through governed support pathways. It does not attempt to measure all factors affecting global graduate decision-making, including geopolitics, labor-market expectations, family migration strategy, or long-term career outcomes. Future research should test whether readiness indicators such as funding clarity, visa milestone completion, and housing confidence predict initial en-

rollment or reduce melt across multiple institutions and regions.

The author is affiliated with CASA, the organization through which the practice-based inquiry was conducted and which is discussed as one operational example. The article reports anonymized, aggregate observations, does not compare CASA with alternative providers, and does not claim causal outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the inquiry offers a clear contribution. It names a recurring operational pattern in the student experience and translates it into a model enrollment leaders can evaluate, adapt, and measure.

Conclusion

As SEM enters its next half-century, the expectations surrounding graduate enrollment are shifting. Globally mobile students and their families are not evaluating institutions only by academic reputation, scholarship offers, or rankings. They are also evaluating whether the path from admission to arrival feels navigable. Can the student secure housing? Can the family understand the funding pathway? Can the visa process be managed with confidence? Can the student imagine not only enrolling, but living, settling, and beginning well?

These questions do not sit neatly inside one office. They cut across admissions, international student services, financial aid, student affairs, housing ecosystems, external partners, families, and the students themselves. That is why the admit-to-arrival window deserves a more intentional place in SEM practice.

The next evolution of enrollment management will require institutions to pair strategy with readiness: clearer communication, earlier signals, stronger cross-functional ownership, and carefully governed partnerships that extend support beyond the formal boundaries of campus. The goal is not to remove every uncertainty from a student's journey. It is to ensure that avoidable friction does not quietly become melt.

A deposited student is not necessarily a ready student. For SEM's next 50 years, one of the field's most important responsibilities will be helping admitted students become ready enough to arrive, begin, and belong.

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About the Author



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Aditya Pathak brings a practitioner perspective shaped by work across U.S. and Indian higher education systems. He spent five years at Babson College in roles spanning innovation, university partnerships, and India relations, where he worked closely with graduate education, international engagement, and cross-border institutional strategy. His subsequent advisory work has focused on U.S.-India higher education partnerships, global graduate enrollment pathways, and student transition infrastructure. This article draws on that cross-system perspective, along with anonymized practice-based insights from structured conversations with incoming graduate students, to examine how the admit-to-arrival window is becoming a critical frontier for strategic enrollment management.