SEM AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

The Missing CEMO: Presidential Perspectives and Strategic Enrollment Management in the California Community Colleges

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Fifty years after enrollment management emerged as an organizing framework, this grounded-theory study examines why California community colleges rarely appoint chief enrollment management officers. Interviews with sixteen presidents identified limited role awareness, entrenched structures, distributed accountability, fiscal and governance concerns, and uncertain return on investment, revealing barriers to SEM's evolution.

This year marks 50 years since Jack Maguire coined the phrase "enrollment management" as the collaborative effort of an institution to "bring together often disparate functions having to do with recruiting, funding, tracking, retaining, and replacing students" (Maguire 1976, 6). As state (Johnson and Perez 2024), federal (NAFSSA 2026), and demographic variables (Johnson, Lafortune, and McGhee 2026) converge to threaten long-standing enrollment practices, this article explores the current organizational evolution within the California Community Colleges (CCC) system, the largest higher education system in the United States.

Auspicious anniversaries such as the 50th anniversary of enrollment management give time for reflection and ideation. This article considers the open-access history of the CCC system, its current state of enrollment management, and dives into the phenomenon of the missing chief enrollment management officer (CEMO) within the system. Its contribution is not to prove the requirement of a CEMO for an institution's SEM success. Rather, as higher education systems evolve and face barriers for attainment of enrollment goals, this article discusses the previously undocumented perspectives of California community college presidents on the role and responsibilities of the CEMO. In so doing, presidential perspectives give insight to the current systemic barriers within the CCC system to overcome to consider the CEMO role.

The CCC system is the largest higher education system in the United States, represented by 116 institutions

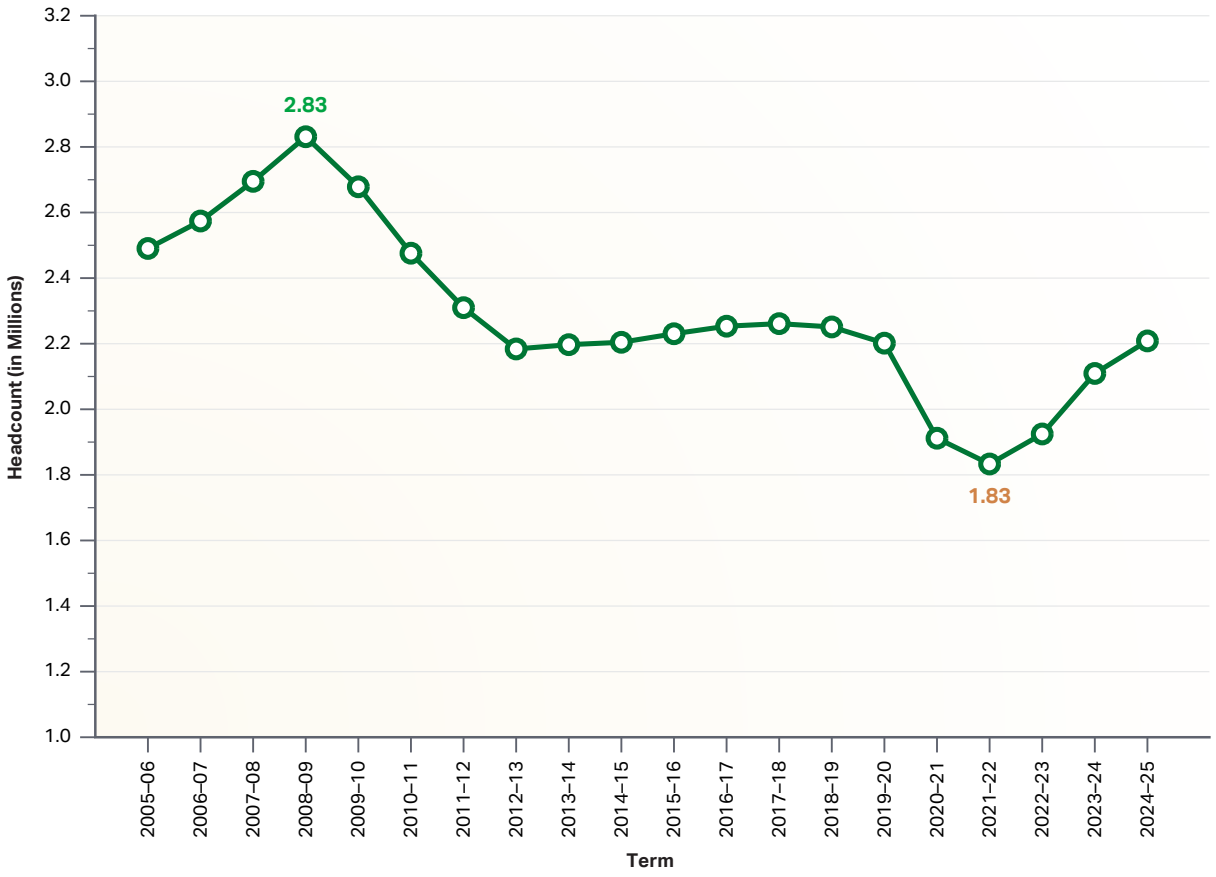


FIGURE 1 ➤ California Community Colleges Annual Student Headcount, 2005–06 to 2024–25

Source: CCCCO 2026a

and 73 community college districts. Nearly 2.2 million students attended California community colleges in the 2024–25 academic year (CCCCO 2025b, 6). There may be no better proving ground for both the theory and practice of strategic enrollment management (SEM) to exert influence over a community college system's enrollment than within the CCC system.

The CCC system has experienced fluctuations in student enrollment over the past 20 years between 2005–06 and 2024–25. Notably, total student headcount decreased by 25.5 percent between 2008–09 and 2023–24 (CCCCO 2026a). Although the COVID-19 pandemic further reduced the overall headcount within the CCC system by 13 percent (-289,000) from 2019–20 to 2020–21 (Weissman 2021), the pandemic alone could not explain the root cause of the precipitous reduction in systemwide enrollment.

While California community colleges operate as individual institutions led by chief executive officers/presidents (CEOs), the CCC system is guided by the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). The CCCCO provides system direction, creates and implements policy, and advances initiatives to increase student success, equity, and workforce outcomes. One such influential strategic plan is the CCCCO's new *Vision 2030: A Roadmap for California Community Colleges—The July 2025 Edition* (CCCCO 2025b).

Many California community colleges have largely adopted SEM as an operational tactic to meet the goals of *Vision 2030* and to achieve optimal fiscal ap-

portionment through the CCCCO's Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) (CCCCO 2026b). However, SEM decision-making is found predominantly within SEM committees relying upon career faculty, staff, and administrators to serve as SEM experts. As noted by Hossler, Kalsbeek, and Bontrager, vice presidents of instruction and/or student services may view themselves as "experts on enrollment issues" (2015, 33); however, the purview of these positions is focused more narrowly on the curricular and cocurricular, respectively, and not necessarily on comprehensive SEM leadership.

California community colleges continue to experience a lack of centralized SEM leadership without a CEMO who is the skilled professional that speaks "about enrollment management in ways that influence and shape institutional beliefs and understandings of enrollment management" (Snowden 2010, 151).

Problem and Purpose

The CCCCO's own publications such as *Vision 2030* and the 2017 *Vision for Success* identify the limited progress of individual California community colleges to achieve enrollment goals. The 2017 *Vision for Success* states: "the system's overall performance lags far behind what California needs for an educated workforce and future citizenry" (Foundation for California Community Colleges 2017, 9).

The CCCCO's system-wide guiding SEM document *A Roadmap for Strategic Enrollment Management Planning* gives limited consideration to the possible role of a CEMO in the California community colleges by stating: "There are several options for organizing the planning effort depending on the college's existing structure, and how the SEM plan will be linked to other plans including a district SEM plan...However, the more common option for community colleges currently is a SEM planning group or adding the SEM activities to the purview of an existing group (*e.g.*, college-wide planning committee, or college-wide success committee)" (Hasson 2019, 13). This observation indirectly influences the positioning of SEM within existing committee structures rather than as an institutional framework guided through the leadership of a CEMO.

Conversely, "when colleges and universities create a vice president or vice-provost for enrollment management, that officer will know very clearly that [their] responsibility is to ensure the appropriate primacy of enrollment issues" (Hossler, Kalsbeek, and Bontrager 2015, 33) at the convergence of instruction, student services, and financial affairs.

Unique institutional factors influence how organizations structure themselves. Within SEM, efficacy of structural alignment is evidenced by meeting key enrollment indicators. Within the CCC system, enrollment remains unstable due to institutional structural gaps, demographic shifts, and federal government changes to higher education financial aid (Andrade 2025). Time is of the essence for California community college presidents to question long-standing structural barriers limiting attainment of enrollment goals. As Bolman and Deal posited, "The price of stability is a structure that grows increasingly misaligned with the environment. Eventually, the gap gets so big that a major overhaul is inevitable" (2017, 87).

Considering organizational structure overhaul, this study had two aims: first, to understand the phenomenon of California community colleges lacking a CEMO and, second, to develop a model from grounded data of how a California community college CEO could add a CEMO to their executive cabinet. The theoretical model will be discussed in further publications.

This article focuses on why California community colleges have largely not adopted the CEMO position, and what organizational, professional, governance, fiscal, and knowledge conditions shape presidents' consideration of the role.

Brief Review of the Literature

Maguire, a former faculty member at Boston College, introduced the world of higher education to the new and comprehensive term "enrollment management" (1976, 6). This new organizational paradigm could transform an institution beyond passive operations to intentional strategy to meet enrollment goals. Combining admissions, marketing, institutional research, and registrar

functions, a college could organizationally influence the flow of students to and from the institution.

The rise of enrollment management strategies stretched nationwide from the 1970s through the 1990s. As Hossler (2015) succinctly documented the origins of enrollment management, institutions looked to use rapid technological growth (Bryant and Crockett 1993), attract as many eighteen- to 22-year-old students as possible, and develop greater predictability and stability of annual finances (Romano and Palmer 2016). Hossler further described the evolution of enrollment management into SEM, noting: "enrollment management is the integration of administrative processes to shape an institution," while SEM "is a process that has organizational implications and often requires structural change" (2015, 8).

Extant literature advises that an institution's SEM structure is organizationally specific and contextually dependent (Gordon and Wankel 2023). Sigler further expressed that SEM is not just a structure; rather, "while important to SEM success, organizational structure is a means to an end that supports the achievement of an institution's mission and student success" (2017, 3).

Myriad definitions of SEM exist. Dolence's (1993, 4) SEM definition captures the brevity, breadth, and specificity needed to encapsulate it as an operational framework. "SEM is a comprehensive process designed to help an institution achieve and maintain optimum enrollment, where optimum is defined with the academic context of the institution. It's a concept and process that enables the fulfillment of the institutional mission and students' educational goals."

Bontrager's (2004a) critical analysis of enrollment management structures serves as seminal literature discussing the four often-referenced structural SEM operation models presented by Kemerer, Baldridge, and Green (1982). These SEM operation models include: (a) the enrollment management committee, (b) the enrollment management coordinator model, (c) the enrollment management matrix model, and (d) the enrollment management division. The enrollment management division is the "model reflecting the highest degree of institutional commitment to influence enrollments" (Bontrager 2004b, 14) with departments reporting to an executive-level administrator (Booze 2019).

Although C-level positions are common throughout the CCC system, each institution organizes those positions according to its strategic goals. As Sigler (2017) conveyed, forming a SEM organizational structure is secondary to the production of results from a successful SEM plan's implementation. Hierarchy and control, by themselves, are antithetical to SEM best practices which rely upon an institution's employees to collectively *add in* a SEM framework to their daily responsibilities (Gordon and Howard 2022). Although the California community colleges have developed institution-level SEM plans, they have largely not restructured under the SEM division framework proposed by Kemerer, *et al.* (1982). Further, a review of their organizational charts revealed that none utilize the role of the chief enrollment management officer.

Historical knowledge of the CCC system strengthens the context and framing of this study. The California Department of Education's canonical *A Master Plan of Higher Education: 1960–1975* (Coons, *et al.* 1960) moved to only allow for the University of California to admit the top one-eighth of California high school graduates; broadened only slightly were the admission standards for the California State University system to admit the top one-third of high school seniors. Because of these new criteria, the California community colleges would accept the remaining matriculants, thus reinforcing the perpetual role of the CCC system to "protect the universities and to allow them to be more selective in their admissions policies" (Boggs 2021, 31).

The California community colleges, with their open admission criteria, suffer from the historical narrative that those who are academically deficient are those students who should choose to attend a California community college (Marcus 2023). Moreover, due to open admission guidelines, some administrators describe open-access institutions as having limited influence over the composition of future matriculants, potentially undercutting the efficacy of SEM as a framework for ensuring enrollment goals are achieved. As CCC system-wide enrollment continues to fluctuate, California

community college presidents may find alignment of institutional operations to achieve enrollment metrics best guided through the leadership of the CEMO.

The Role of the CEMO

The American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) serves as the most recognized national organization for SEM training and research. AACRAO's 2023 career profile of the CEMO defines the position as "responsible for developing and implementing comprehensive strategic enrollment management efforts focused on retention, recruitment, and admissions. The position often has direct managerial responsibility and oversight for key enrollment units and enrollment services of the institution and is responsible for strategies that focus on retention and completion, recruitment, and student success" (Kilgore 2023, 3).

The CEMO most often reports directly to the CEO of an institution, with their primary responsibility to center the achievement of an institution's enrollment goals at the convergence of academic affairs, student affairs, and financial affairs while serving as a member of a CEO's executive cabinet (AACRAO 2020; Hinojosa, Luff, and Woolston 2023; Hossler, Kalsbeek, and Bontrager 2015; Kilgore 2023; Stewart 2004). As the CEMO leads the implementation and long-term mobilization of SEM, the CEMO must understand the institution's academic ethos and desired student makeup.

The CEMO works in tandem with other members of the CEO's team and can serve as a transformational leader who breaks "down the existing knowledge framework of a traditional college student and rebuilds a new model that supports adult learners, first generation students, refugees, and other types of nontraditional students" (Emery 2020, 8). As California community colleges work to rebuild decades of lost enrollment, the responsibilities of the CEMO align with goals of the CCCCO in Vision 2030 "to expand access to every Californian by supporting colleges to shift from passive enrollment practices to active outreach, bringing colleges to communities" (CCCCO 2025b, 12).

Research Methodology and Framework

This qualitative, grounded-theory study examined the phenomenon of why California community colleges lack CEMOs and assessed the external and internal factors a California community college CEO would consider to add this position. Purposeful sampling was used to invite two presidents from each of eight California regions to participate in interviews to answer the following two research questions:

- **Question 1:** From the perspective of a California community college CEO, should California community colleges consider incorporating the role of a chief enrollment management officer to guide institutional enrollment management?
- **Question 2:** What external and internal factors would a California community college CEO consider if they were to establish a chief enrollment management officer position at their institution?

Participants were not provided with prior information about the chief enrollment management officer role before the interviews, allowing the study to capture the presidents' existing knowledge and candid perspectives.

Participant criteria included: (a) the institutions with the greatest and least full-time equivalent students (FTES) produced in the academic year of 2022–23 and (b) presidents who had served at their institutions at least one calendar year. Purposeful sampling, as aligned with the methodological approach of grounded theory, required the sampled individuals to have direct knowledge or experience of the phenomenon to create a theoretical model based on the gathered data (Creswell 2015).

Data saturation was noted when repeated similar statements emerged pertaining to the central phenomenon and the solution-oriented purpose of this study.

The interview protocol was built around the study's two central research questions and integrated the epistemological paradigm of pragmatism and Kalsbeek's "SEM Administrative Orientation" (2007, 6).

Pragmatism at its core (a) centers the functionality of completing research through both a means of critical inquiry or "self-conscious decision making" (Morgan 2014, 1046) and through a research methodology that best addresses the research questions; (b) produces practical solutions to real-world problems; and (c) contextualizes the phenomenon and solutions within a hyper-specific and bounded scenario that has importance to the individuals within the study because of the researcher and the research participants' beliefs associated with the phenomenon (Kelly and Cordeiro 2020). Furthermore, as a research ideology, pragmatism questions previous solutions to problems and the structures built to sustain those solutions. As pragmatism posits, solutions to problems are temporary and are formed through the beliefs, values, and experiences of those whose responsibility it is to solve the problem (Morgan 2014).

The Administrative Orientation to SEM within the college setting prioritizes the systematic centralization and integration of college-wide operations and enrollment management departments to achieve replicable, efficient, and productive results. Roles and responsibilities at the institutions are defined clearly as the administrative orientation results in "quantification, reliability, precision, accuracy, clarity, and consistency [by] improving the efficient management of impersonal processes and functions" (Kalsbeek 2007, 6). The Administrative Orientation further asserts that the coordination of all enrollment management processes produces efficient and improved systems that achieve enrollment management goals.

Research Findings

This study's findings provide essential insight into the largely unexplored reasons why presidents do not use a CEMO role within the California community college system. Three themes emerged through the qualitative grounded-theory methodology and data analysis from the president interviews to identify presidents' concerns about adding the role.

The first theme introduces and explores the way presidents of California community colleges contribute to and make meaning of the structures that propagate uniformity of positions and processes. The second theme centers SEM as a catalyst and refiner of individual roles within an institution. The third and final theme highlights apprehensions presidents of California community colleges expressed about the role of the CEMO.

Theme 1: Structural Replication and Systemwide Norms

Nearly all presidents indicated they had not heard of a chief enrollment management officer largely due to its absence within the CCC system's vocabulary. As one president stated, "So we've never had that [CEMO]. I've never worked at a campus where that was outside the umbrella of just one of the vice presidents, usually academic affairs." Another president stated: "I've heard various terms bantered about, but I don't know if I ever met anybody that said, this [the CEMO] is my job." During the interviews one president indicated they completed an internet search prior to the interview to inquire about the existence of the role.

Of the sixteen California community college presidents interviewed, fourteen moved into the presidency role from a vice president or vice chancellor role within the CCC system, though all presidents had previously worked within the CCC system. President perspectives were largely informed by how to run institutions based on how California community colleges have been historically organized.

Two presidents shared the composite narrative that the CCCCO creates system-wide messaging and conferences for: chief executive officers, chief instructional officers, chief business officers, and chief student services officers; there is no CEMO-related messaging or a CEMO professional development conference within the California community colleges.

During the interviews, presidents noted their institutions had experienced enrollment declines. While presidents indicated they send cross-functional teams to the annual SEM professional development offered by the Chancellor's Office, presidents indicated that SEM strategy largely falls on their own shoulders and, in some cases, presidents see themselves as the de facto CEMOs. One president indicated, "So I can see how that

can play out when you have a small institution, and the president is really just driving the enrollments perspective. But I think as the institution gets larger and more complicated, it needs some other person doing it." Nevertheless, the majority of presidents resonated with the idea of the CEO as the CEMO due to the structural absence of the CEMO role within the CCC system.

Theme 2: Distribution, Assumption, and Accountability of SEM Responsibility

In the absence of a CEMO, California community college presidents adapt to the system's common organizational structures and find solutions to still enact SEM. Varied definitions of SEM factored into how presidents viewed integration of SEM into an institution's ethos. Presidents' definitions of SEM included creating student-focused scheduling and creating communication tactics to attract and retain students. Other presidents indicated their view of SEM was comprehensive in nature where each system and experience within the college was to positively interact with and support students. President SEM knowledge was largely developed and influenced through the governance branch in which the president rose to their CEO position, whether rising through the ranks of student services, business, or instruction.

Presidents consistently stated enrollment management is the responsibility of everyone at their institutions. However, when asked how they viewed enrollment management as a factor in the distribution of roles and responsibilities, presidents had difficulty articulating how they hold an entire campus accountable for enrollment management. When asked to consider how presidents address global accountability, participants refined their perspective, stating they hold themselves and their cabinets responsible for affecting institutional systems and processes influencing student progression.

Many presidents responded by rejecting the idea that a single individual should hold responsibility for SEM. As one president noted:

> *I'm very skeptical of saying we need a person to do X; that not only removes some of the work from other people but removes the responsibility. So I would have to really be convinced that we needed someone whose job it was to be the chief enrollment management officer, because that's everybody's job. Why would we put it over there? We're going to say, "Okay, well, never mind, it's just going to be your job." And we kind of let the deans off the hook that way. It's the same thing with the chief diversity officer, we don't have a chief diversity officer, that's everybody's job.*

Presidents seemed to view SEM leadership as a fundamentally distributed model, even when presidents saw themselves as the de facto CEMO if necessary. Rebutting a CEMO model included phrases that SEM could not be one person's responsibility because the responsibilities of SEM are too broad; conversely, other presidents indicated a CEMO position could not be considered because an individual who was *just* doing SEM would not have enough work to warrant a position.

Many presidents stated they do not see how a CEMO could cut across an organizational structure when other vice presidents already do SEM work; adding a CEMO could result in cabinet members experiencing a sense of loss of authority through the president reassigning work to the new CEMO. Presidents hypothesized their vice presidents would react negatively when potentially denied resources due to the additional salary and modification of resources needed for a CEMO. Presidents demonstrated care to question how adding a CEMO might affect their cabinet, with some deciding against adding the position due to the potential challenges of redistributing or consolidating responsibilities from multiple vice presidents into a new position.

President responses identified structural and perspective barriers for the creation of the CEMO role within the California community colleges. Presidents distributed the responsibility of SEM to each college employee noting the expectation that everyone has an equal role in ensuring students enter, attend, and complete their goals. However, presidents could not define how they hold the entire campus responsible for meeting enrollment goals. Distribution and delegation of SEM operations and strategies were similarly placed under well-defined silos of existing vice pres-

ident positions, which together formed the executive cabinet to which the president looked to ensure enrollment management metrics were met. Conversely, some presidents assumed the responsibilities of a de facto CEMO choosing to take on the responsibility for all outcomes of the college, including enrollment management. Given presidents' varied definitions of SEM, their limited awareness of the CEMO role, and their difficulty holding others accountable, presidents had difficulty describing a path to initiate a discussion with their cabinet to create a CEMO role.

Theme 3: Envisioning the CEMO Role Within the CCC Structure

Due to the factors uncovered within the interviews and a near-universal initial reluctance to consider hiring a CEMO, presidents were asked to respond to the hypothetical situation in which they were instructed to hire a CEMO by either their chancellor or board of trustees and then to elaborate on what information they would need to make the best hiring decision.

Nearly all presidents indicated they would need to understand the role, responsibilities, and cost of the position. "I'd want to understand what that looks like, what their scope is, what their role is. And, you know, from that lens, if I understood the question of what impact did they make, and if I understood the resources that they needed, then it would strictly come down to: 'so how much does this cost me?'," stated one participant.

This response from presidents suggests limited familiarity with SEM organizational structures outside of the CCC system. Presidents noted the specific desire for the CEMO to have metrics which could be evaluated and not solely be a figurehead of SEM. As one president stated:

> *I would not want this person to be just sort of a theorist at the top of things, you know. I would want there to be some very specific things that this person would be involved in leading and in terms of controlling enrollment. So you know, that really does kind of go across areas, again, both in instruction and student services.*

This perspective was furthered when presidents noted that SEM tactics within their institutions were largely disparate without a single person to hold accountable for the enrollment goals of the institution. When presidents reflected on the idea of a CEMO, many found that having a person to whom they could look directly for an increase in institutional enrollment could be a positive outcome. Accordingly, the tension within president responses illuminated the difficulty presidents have with holding a campus or multiple vice presidents accountable for SEM; this research outcome demonstrated presidents could posit and explain the need for a CEMO with further prompting and clear definitions of job responsibilities. Nevertheless, presidents unanimously stated a need to further understand the role and to see if an enrollment return on investment (ROI) was generated through the creation of a CEMO role.

ROI was a recurring theme within presidents' responses. If a CEMO were hired, presidents noted the CEMO would be required to be the glue that connects campus-wide SEM tactics. Additionally, the CEMO would ensure all aspects of a SEM plan were implemented, evaluated, and processed within a continuous quality improvement perspective. The CEMO would be expected to maximize potential financial apportionment through California's Student Centered Funding Formula (SCFF) as well. Presidents saw the CEMO's role as working with other cabinet members to influence institutional systems and expectations to increase institutional funding. Framed within this context, presidents supported adding a CEMO who would facilitate college operations from student inquiry to student completion and, by doing so, improve student outcomes and increase institutional financial stability.

Presidents did not consistently identify student-equity outcomes as part of the CEMO role until the interview protocol introduced the topic. Presidents were asked to consider how a CEMO's role would align with equity outcomes institutions are expected to achieve in their student equity plans. Interestingly, when framed within the concept of helping an institution achieve student equity outcomes, presidents considered the CEMO role as a means to an end in meeting equity goals. Framing the CEMO position around equity outcomes may influence how institutional stakeholders evaluate the proposal.

Lastly, presidents expected that the creation of a CEMO would be tied to participatory governance commitment and agreement, especially around salary costs for the position. "California Code of Regulations title 5, section 59204–59214, requires community college districts allocate at least 50 percent of their annual Current Expense of Education (CEE) to the salaries and benefits of classroom instructors" (CCCCO 2025a, 1). Executive-level positions come at a high salary cost, requiring delicate balance to ensure legally required expenditures while creating leadership positions to move the institution forward. Presidents noted the navigational complexity of expressing an ROI-focused, outcomes-first approach with academic and classified collective bargaining units while there is limited research to prove a measurable correlation between a CEMO and increased enrollment. Presidents described difficulty speaking about the mission-aligned reasons for potentially hiring a CEMO when faculty discourse has frequently expressed concern about administrative growth and the addition of executive-level positions. Presidents must be prepared to describe to faculty how the leadership of a CEMO could potentially produce a positive return on investment for their specific institution within the academic context. While ROI may be subjectively interpreted at each institution, it remains critical to again consider Dolence's advice that SEM most effectively operates when focused on achieving the academic goals of the institution (1993).

Summary

While the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office continues to guide the community colleges with new initiatives to bolster enrollment, it is incumbent on California community college presidents to also consider new operational structures to achieve institutional enrollment goals. This article identifies the reasons and conditions shaping why California community college presidents are reluctant to hire a CEMO even when facing historical policy and demographic changes.

The following nine findings summarize why CCC presidents may not consider adding a CEMO to their executive teams.

- Most participating presidents reported limited familiarity with the CEMO position or its responsibilities.
- Presidents consider themselves to be the de facto CEMOs in the absence of a formal CEMO position thereby shouldering the overall accountability for the institution's achievements.
- Presidents rely on, yet have difficulty holding accountable, already established SEM committees to lead and integrate enrollment management throughout the institution.
- Presidents view their cabinets as fully intact with limited, if any, gaps that might negatively affect the student lifecycle.
- Presidents view SEM as the responsibility of all employees and believe having a CEMO would remove campus-wide accountability from employees because they would look to place all SEM responsibility on the CEMO.
- Presidents believe there would be significant resistance by academic and classified employees and their unions against adding any additional executive-level managers due to a perception of administrative bloat and excess oversight.
- Presidents viewed the Fifty Percent Law and the cost of an additional executive position as complicating the fiscal justification for hiring a CEMO from general funds.
- residents expressed concern that adding a CEMO could reduce existing cabinet members' responsibilities or authority and affect the morale of those current executive team members.
- Presidents are focused on closing equity gaps within their institutions but do not consistently identify closing student equity gaps as a function of the CEMO role.

Collectively, these findings indicate that the absence of CEMOs within the CCC system is not attributable to a single fiscal, organizational, or philosophical barrier. Presidents operate within historically replicated Cali-

fornia community college cabinet structures, possess limited exposure to the CEMO role, and generally favor distributed responsibility for SEM. However, presidents also described difficulty establishing accountability across that distributed structure, with some assuming the responsibilities of a de facto CEMO themselves. When the interviews explored role clarity, measurable outcomes, institutional coordination, and return on investment, presidents were better able to identify potential value in the position.

Consideration of the CEMO role therefore depends on more than presidential willingness to restructure. It requires a clearly defined organizational purpose, evidence of institutional value, a defined scope of responsibility, and a governance process capable of addressing fiscal and cabinet-level concerns. Although California community college presidents expressed reluctance to hire a CEMO, greater awareness of the role and its responsibilities may increase its potential adoption. As California community college presidents look to organize their institutions to meet current and future enrollment challenges, adding a chief enrollment management officer may provide the centralized guidance institutions need to achieve their SEM goals. After all, in the words of Jack Maguire, "to the organized go the students" (Maguire 1976, 16).

Conclusion

The CEMO is a near-ubiquitous role throughout United States higher education. Its absence in the CCC system is both a systemic aberration and a historical marker not yet achieved within the history of enrollment management within the CCC system. For 50 years, enrollment management's ongoing purpose has been to structurally enhance an institution by coalescing processes to achieve an institution's goals. Though facing current and future enrollment challenges, the California community colleges continue to choose distributed leadership to enact SEM strategies rather than using a CEMO. The defining marker of SEM's historical evolution and the evaluation of its efficacy is how institutions adapt to changing student demands, workforce readiness, and financial goals. As California community colleges consider their own future-oriented organizational adaptions to meet declining population increases, changes in financial aid offerings, and workforce needs, California community college presidents can take note of this peer-informed study and in so doing influence the CCC system's not-yet-written SEM history.

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About the Author



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Dan Predoehl, Ed.D., is a higher education leader whose work sits at the intersection of strategic enrollment management, student success, equity, and institutional design. He earned a Doctorate of Education in Community College Educational Leadership from San Diego State University, a Master of Education in College Student Affairs, and a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish and International Studies. With more than 20 years of experience across public and private higher education, Dr. Predoehl brings a practitioner-scholar perspective to enrollment leadership in community colleges. His current research focuses on how effective SEM leadership can strengthen enrollment performance, improve equity outcomes, and align institutional structures to achieve student and institutional success.