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SEM AS A CONNECTOR



Principles of Practice

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION *of* COLLEGIATE REGISTRARS *and* ADMISSIONS OFFICERS



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SEM from the Canadian Perspective

**Developing Relationships that
Enhance Belonging, Student
Persistence, and Student Success**

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SEM from the Canadian Perspective

Developing Relationships that Enhance Belonging, Student Persistence, and Student Success

This chapter explores the perceptions of Canadian enrolment⁴ leaders regarding the importance of collaboration, communication, and partnership of administration, faculty, staff, and students, as well as external communities, in the successful implementation of Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) and enhancing students' sense of belonging, student persistence, and student success. Twenty-three former and current enrolment administrators from Canadian colleges and universities were interviewed and asked to reflect on their experience with SEM over the last decade. Respondents were also asked about the usefulness of SEM over the next decade regarding their own experience and the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The chapter discusses the specific reflections of respondents on the importance of partnership and collaboration for successful institutional enrolment planning and student success. The researchers have identified the SEM practices that resonate with Canadian enrolment leaders. Recommendations for professional practice are discussed, along with potential areas for further research.

Achieving a sense of belonging is critical to the mission of teaching, research, and service that is core to the pursuits of most colleges and universities in the 21st century. This calls on each of the participants in the academy to connect with each other—be they students, faculty, staff, or administrators—and to foster and sustain a learning community built on, and benefiting from interpersonal relationships. While this has always been true, our mutual pandemic experience has taught us how valuable our social community is to the work that we do and to the people we touch each day in our professional practice.

Students are particularly affected by relationships. Many researchers have noted that students who feel connected in their interactions with faculty, support staff, and other students often persist and achieve student success in their post-secondary studies (Hoffman, *et al.* 2002; Hurtado and Carter 1997; Kember and Lenung 2004; Lee and Davis 2000; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Tinto 2012). Academic and social integration experiences have also been shown to impact student persistence (Zea, *et al.* 1997). Researchers also identified sense of belonging as an important contributor to student success for selected student populations, including first-gener-

⁴ Although some terms in this chapter are spelled differently in the U.S., this chapter was written by longtime practitioners of SEM in Canada, thus the spelling and terminology in this chapter reflect Canadian methodology.

ation students (Stephens, *et al.* 2014; Woosley and Shepler 2011) and students of colour (Hurtado and Carter 1997; Lee and Davis 2000; Lane 2016; Steele 1997). Moreover, a recent research study has shown that certain interventions—including holistic social courses, mentoring, and intentional engagement with campus activities—resulted in the improvement of students’ sense of belonging and their persistence (Jorgenson, *et al.* 2018). These and other studies clearly demonstrate the association between students’ sense of belonging and student persistence, as well as the importance of engaging in relationships throughout the student experience.

Henderson and Pollock (2021) endorse the notion that “relationships are essential to meeting the tapestry of student needs” (3) and suggest that Strategic Enrolment Management provides the framework for connecting students and institutions by supporting student recruitment and retention. In a study exploring the relationship between institutional enrolment performance and enrolment management factors, Smith (2000–2001) also found that participation and integration of members of the post-secondary community is related to enrolment performance. Institutions where participation of senior administration, academic governance, academic administration, faculty, and the persons responsible for strategy and tactic implementation is maximized are those that achieve more of their enrolment goals, resulting in student and institutional success. Thus, SEM can create the pathway toward developing relationships and sustaining community in our post-secondary educational institutions.

In this chapter, we will explore the perceptions of enrolment leaders at Canadian post-secondary educational institutions regarding the impact SEM has had on the development of institutional partnerships and collaboration which, in turn, has helped to sup-

port student success as well as broaden the concept of SEM. We will focus on how SEM planning and the SEM framework have helped connect students with their institutions, developed partnerships and enhanced collaboration within the institutions, and ensured that all students are being supported and served.

The chapter is based on a qualitative study we recently completed in which 23 enrolment leaders were interviewed. Eight of the research participants are co-authors from the AACRAO-published book *SEM in Canada: Promoting Student and Institutional Success in Canadian Colleges and Universities* (Gottheil and Smith 2011) and the remaining 15 research participants are senior enrolment leaders at Canadian colleges or universities. Together, they represent eight Canadian provinces, 19 universities, four polytechnics, and three colleges.

SEM in the Canadian Context

Enrolment management, a focused approach to student recruitment and retention in higher education, was a term that first emerged at Boston College in the United States in the early 1970s. By the 1990s, many American colleges and universities had formally adopted SEM as a concept or organizational structure to help manage and increase their enrolments. It took another decade before Canadian practitioners and administrators recognized the potential efficacy of SEM as an enrolment planning tool. Initially, many colleges and universities focused on the “front-end” of the enrolment funnel (*e.g.*, recruitment, branding and marketing). Over the past few decades, several institutions expanded and modified SEM practices to include a focus on student success and reached out to, and supported, previously underserved student populations. The importance of communication,

collaboration, and partnership across the academy and to external communities has emerged as a theme across institutions to help develop and ensure a sense of belonging and success.

Interpretation and Usage

Our research study set out to explore whether Canadian college and university enrolment practitioners have found Strategic Enrolment Management (SEM) to be an effective tool in their work, and whether it should continue to be used in the future. The definition of enrolment management used in this study was first suggested by Hossler and Bean (1990):

Enrollment management can be defined as an organizational concept and a set of systematic activities designed to enable educational institutions to exert more influence over their student enrollments. Organized by strategic planning and supported by institutional research, enrollment management activities concern student college choice, transition to college, student attrition and retention, and student outcomes. (5)

Although respondents noted that SEM planning has been and remains a valuable tool, almost all practitioners agreed that SEM is not a concept that is widely understood by many senior academic administrators: “Because we all deal with students, we may have a false sense that we know what SEM is.” Nevertheless, enrolment management has been seen as a useful framework that helps “...sharpen the mind and focus of institutional leaders and practitioners” to achieve enrolment goals and objectives and to help teams align enrolment and strategic planning.

Right off the bat, I knew it would be a valuable tool because it allowed us to be intentional, and to plan, and to be data informed. However, what I did learn early on was that there are real differences between

the U.S. and Canada; not only in the culture, and environment, and student behavior, as well as the terminology we use, but also the various components of our enrolment and academic systems which are very different.

Several respondents agreed that SEM “has not been as widely adopted in Canada as one might have expected” and that the model needs to be altered when applied in Canada:

I think of SEM like a jacket. This jacket was made for Americans; it works in the American context. However, when the Canadians came around to try on the jacket, they forgot to take it in to the tailor. And so, it's sometimes pretty ill-fitting, and Canadian institutions struggle with it.

Many of the differences between the American and Canadian educational policies and systems that were previously identified over two decades ago (cited in Gottheil and Smith 2011) were again raised by those we interviewed. Some of these issues can impact the ability to attract and retain the “right” students to an institution and ensure a sense of belonging and “fit.”

Differences noted included:

- ◆ Responsibility for education in Canada is provincial/territorial; there is no central federal department of education
- ◆ Canada's post-secondary system is primarily public with few private institutions; many colleges and universities have mandates to serve their local/regional/provincial students
- ◆ There is not as much difference between institutions and types of institutions in Canada, as in the U.S., as “we don't want the quality of educational programs to get too far apart and we don't want the student experience to get too far apart—the Canadian value system has a sense of equity”

- ◆ Privacy and human rights legislation in Canada is more stringent; Canadians cannot collect and share data (including directory, race and ethnicity, and other information) without an individual's consent
- ◆ The lack of data prevents in-depth analytics in Canada to be used for recruitment and admissions decision-making (for example, who is more likely to enrol) and retention predictive modelling (who is most likely to succeed in a course or program), as in the U.S.
- ◆ American institutions reach out to prospects at an earlier age group in the recruitment funnel
- ◆ Admissions in Canada, with a very few institutional and program exceptions, is primarily grades-based and is not concerned with “creating a class”
- ◆ U.S. institutions practice financial aid leveraging as a key component of SEM; Canadian institutions have only recently begun to bundle financial aid (e.g., scholarships, bursaries, work-study opportunities) together
- ◆ The reliance on tuition for funding is more recent in Canada; it has taken Canadian institutions a while to understand the SEM connection to institutional financial well-being

Importantly, several respondents noted that SEM terminology itself does not appear to “fit” or “sit well” within the academic culture and value system of Canadian institutions. The language used to describe SEM, originating from a more American market-driven and “customer-service” orientation, riles the Canadian sensibility. Reaching out to attract students to, and engage students in, higher education is seen as a reciprocal rather than a business relationship that the term “management” implies.

The way we perceive students, we don't engage them as partners in the academic enterprise.... We're not just managing them.... How can we suggest that this is not something we do to students, but something that we engage in doing along with them?

Thus, several Canadian practitioners noted that although they feel that they have been engaged in SEM planning and implementation at their institutions, the term “strategic enrolment management” is not used because it “it gets peoples backs up.” Some feel that the term “enrolment” is too narrow, being concerned with getting students through the front door but not concerned with their experience, engagement or success.

I think the initial thought was that it was really about marketing, branding and recruitment. And so, the academic side said “that's not what we do over here”.... So, calling it something different... and finding ways to message it to join with the academic side, has been helpful.

In advocating for a different nomenclature (such as “student engagement” or “student success”) several practitioners also noted that the term “strategic enrolment management” does not capture the shift, over the past decade, to a focus on student success rather than just the “top” of the enrolment funnel.

People tend to think that [enrolment] emphasizes the bums in seats.... Enrolment seems like a narrow part of it because it doesn't have the retention part and the support part and the sustaining part. And so, people focus on getting them there, but not necessarily on the quality of their experience. SEM would be enhanced if we could come up with a term that goes beyond enrolment.

A few respondents have called for a more “organic” approach to enrolment planning.

The experience of learners and the retention of learners needs to be a continual area of focus regardless of what we call it. But I think that there's still so much work to be done, and it has to be a partnership between the academic areas, the administrative areas and the interconnected areas of the larger community, because that's part of that organic SEM approach.

Understanding the context and culture of the institution is key to enrolment planning, no matter what it is called.

What's important is to understand the context of the institution and be able to speak in language that moves people towards what you're trying to achieve. It doesn't work sometimes to actually say we're going to make a SEM plan, and this is what the SEM plan is going to have in it.... You have to figure out the language that works.

The Importance of Cross-Organizational Collaboration in Enrollment Planning

SEM professionals note the importance of engaging key players together—deans, student affairs, teaching and learning professionals, the registrar, marketing and communications teams, and international services—to address strategic and tactical issues that impact enrolment. “We’re not going to get anywhere, unless we take an integrated approach.”

One of the things I love about SEM is that when it's working the way it should work, you've got all different sectors of the university administrative and academic areas working together. I love how it brings discussions together, and a lot of times that wouldn't necessarily happen.

SEM is about finding the best and most effective ways for faculty, staff, and administrators to work

together to ensure student and institutional success. This is often achieved where collaboration and cooperation are present.

One of the things that helped was a solid academic and strategic plan for the institution.... There were seven or eight pillars and the university made it very clear that moving forward everything that we do has to fit into one of those pillars.... And it has to be... different offices and aspects of the institution working together. So, when we did our SEM plan, we had a driver, a beacon of light to look towards and say, okay, does this follow the strategic plan of the institution? Does it fit with the strategic vision?

At its core, SEM is about working towards common goals through a systematic process.

It was very valuable because there were a lot of places on campus working in silos and not necessarily on the same path. And so, it was really important to set an overarching strategy, use data, use common vision and goals... to get us where we needed to go and to make sure the faculties were not working in isolation of one another.

When enrolment planning is conducted in a way that allows it to flourish, it leads to student and institutional success. The importance of strong institutional and enrolment leadership, a SEM planning organization and framework, and communication that supports partnership and collaboration, were identified as key in this regard.

Although several practitioners underscored that formal strategic planning initiatives, which reaffirm institutional mission and values, can lead to building a culture of partnership and collaboration and lay the groundwork for SEM, not everyone agrees.

If you were to ask our registrar, perhaps a couple of our deans, they would say. “It's not SEM, but

academic planning that's pushing the collegiality and collaboration." It depends on how deep[ly] you want to look into the definition of SEM. I think that academic planning is inherently a part of SEM. ... It's where we're going to have students studying, versus where we won't.

Although collaboration and communication across an organization is the ideal, in many institutions, multiple silos exist which "are not always easy to break down. ... Enrolment success cannot be done in silos, and requires all to be coordinated and working together." To be successful "you need to have the right environment and the right people at the table." The ideal of collaboration and partnership, that "we're all in this together," can quickly erode if enrolment targets are not met, or a particular initiative goes off-course, or is not successful.

The easy thing to do is to say, 'I guess we had the wrong people or the wrong structure doing the job. Let's start again.' ... I would suggest there hasn't been enough consensus around what we're doing, why we're doing it... we are not going back to basics regarding who we are and who we should be so we can see if we have the right tactics and strategies and resources to get the job done... It probably [is] not always creating a certain collaboration that I suggest would have been healthier.

Developing a common language and framework to discuss enrolment planning was seen by several institutions as key to getting the buy-in to develop a more structured and formal SEM plan.

One of the things that SEM has helped is create a common understanding of who our students are and who we want our students to be, whether it's place of origin or what discipline they are studying.

We didn't have a good understanding of where our students were coming from or how long they were sticking around, in which program versus another.

SEM can help us wade through all of the noise and use facts, not assumptions, in identifying the student body we want to see at our institution.

This "socialization of SEM" across the campus, although time-consuming, is seen as an essential step in helping to break down silos and enhance communication. "It's not about the plan itself. It's about the process, and the journey, to get to that plan." Although collaboration can be fostered through formal SEM planning committees, respondents found that by reaching out to colleagues across campus in other ways to share data, and to solicit input on strategies and new programs that are essential to SEM success, helps to create a SEM culture or ethos across the organization.

I've met with student affairs officials. I met with academic advisors. I met with senior administrative officers because they handle budgets and faculty workloads. I met with a suite of people to get their insights into what was important to them, with respect to retaining students. I gathered the information and learned what data I needed and could collect, and I learned what we could collect in our system... Having stakeholders involved... helps to create an environment where they are more likely to be interested in working with you.

Several respondents stated that having deans involved in the enrolment planning process was essential "...to help us understand and know who our students were, to be thoughtful about how we were managing them, and to be thoughtful about how we were going to use resources." For a number

of practitioners, this helped to create a SEM ethos on their campus:

Four of us from the provost's office meet individually with the deans and associate deans of every faculty.... I think initially, they thought they were being called in to get in trouble for something, but it was more... to start talking about SEM, to talk about their faculty-specific goals. We did that for three straight years. By the second year, you already saw a shift in culture. They came to these meetings realizing they weren't getting in trouble. It became more of a dialogue and an exchange of ideas.... The deans got a better understanding of what SEM was, how they fit into the plan, [and] how they could contribute to our SEM goals.... I think that was critical in becoming SEM-focused.

Other practitioners reported that their work with deans and department chairs was often more immediate and practical:

The academic and the service units work together to look at things at a nitty-gritty level from a tactics' perspective, like fill rates in any given term for example..., and whether we need to add or cancel sections in order to manage enrolment appropriately.... We've looked at this more collaboratively than we used to. I think those things kind of just used to happen in the dean's office (or didn't).

Thus, having a SEM leader who can spend the time talking to people across the organization, work on socializing the concept of SEM across a campus, and develop collaborative partnerships was seen by many enrolment practitioners as critical for SEM success, planning, and implementation.

We engaged in a nine-month process to develop a plan in consultation with our Dean's group and

our senior leaders from across student services and facilities and finance and other administrative areas, and then engaged people in a number of ways throughout the campus. So, faculty and staff and students had involvement in its development.

The SEM planning process, done properly, can and should take a considerable amount of time.

However new leadership, shifting internal and external environmental pressures, and/or the need to respond to more immediate crises can impact SEM planning implementation. "A little over a year ago the VP came in and said: 'We need a SEM plan. You have until Friday.'"

Connecting Students with their Institutions

Canadian enrolment leaders recognized that there is a role for SEM in coordinating colleagues across the institution to help students make informed decisions regarding their choice of institution.

I think it has helped us become much more formal and purposeful about what recruitment is, what institutional brands are, what we are to a student, why they would come here so that we can talk with students and their families about what the institution is.

Recruitment (and retention) tactics and activities that are built from institutional values can help students to connect with their institutions. Understanding the institution's mission not only builds an institutional "brand" but helps to identify the types of students the institution should attract—those who will "fit in," develop a sense of belonging, and be successful in their educational journey. "It's difficult to build a strong and succinct brand when you're trying to be everything to everyone...."

The SEM planning process can help build a common vision of where the institution is headed and what needs to be done to get there.

Sometimes recruitment teams get questioned on why numbers are where they are. Enrolment issues involve all of us working together. It can't be seen as individual pieces removed from one another. We all have a role to play. And, with limited resources, we need to be more coordinated to ensure efficiencies and overall effectiveness in our enrolment efforts. This is where SEM can help.

Yet when engaging in recruitment and marketing activities it is important to remember that “students are coming to an institution. That’s true, but they are coming to a program, and in a sense, that’s truer.”

SEM suffers a poor reputation.... Faculty say all the administrators care about is recruiting more students, whether they're any good or not.... We certainly aren't taking an integrated approach when our faculty members feel that [recruiters]... are working at cross-purposes with the ambitions of excellence in a given faculty.

It is therefore imperative that student recruiters work closely with academic colleagues to understand the nature of academic programs and disciplines, communicate the foundational skills and knowledge needed to be successful in specific academic programs, and explain the student and academic support programs that exist to help students persist through their studies. This also ensures consistent brand messaging across the institution, uses limited resources wisely, and creates greater awareness across and within the organization.

We started to look at what we were spending on marketing... recognizing that money was being spent in a decentralized way without awareness from other

faculties or the center. We [used our SEM structure] to have that conversation in a centralized way. This has taken some strong messaging from the vice-president academic... to set the expectation that collaboration is required.... That frees up resources to do things more centrally and to become more efficient at telling the institutional story. It's not a story of independent faculties within an institution.

Supporting Student Success

Learning from American-based conferences, publications, and consultant-practitioners involved in early SEM efforts in Canada were often primarily concerned with marketing and recruitment. “We thought about the recruitment side of things but didn’t put similar effort into retaining the students...” As practitioners began to examine institutional enrolment data in greater depth there was a realization that “we were just front-loading everyone into year one and hoping they stay.” Thus, many institutions over the past decade have begun to ask “what can we do to support students while they’re at our institution?” and have shifted their SEM focus to examining the entire student life cycle and the holistic student experience rather than just marketing and recruitment.

For many campuses, in both Canada and the United States, focusing on student success has now become an integral driver of SEM on campus as institutions have realized the importance of investing in the students they have spent time and effort recruiting: “...we realized we have been doing very well recruiting students here, but students are spinning their wheels and they’re not succeeding.... We created a business case for how much money we were losing, because we weren’t doing a great job at engaging and retaining our students. They weren’t having as positive an experience as they should have had.”

Gathering and analyzing data has helped to demonstrate where gaps and challenges lie.

Without our data and without our SEM planning it would have just been anecdotal and we couldn't prove there were problems. We can now show our first to second year persistence rates are good, our recruiting numbers are good. Our conversion numbers are okay.... But we have problems getting people through that middle part of the SEM funnel.... So now we have the data we can ask what is the problem and what are the supports we need?

Students come to our colleges and universities to learn. It is the classroom experience and the connections that students make with their instructors, and other students, that defines their post-secondary experience and satisfaction. One of our faculty respondents succinctly summarized why supporting faculty in the classroom is important to both students and faculty: "If I don't have a rapport with my students, they aren't going to listen to what I have to say.... Students won't care what you have to say until they realize that you care about them."

Hence, the importance of working with faculty as a SEM practitioner was stressed by respondents.

One of the most important things is to ensure that students have a positive experience in the classroom. That's how they identify with the institution. Maybe faculty members aren't as knowledgeable about SEM, but many of them have bought into the importance of the student experience in the classroom.

Reaching out to faculty to talk about their own experiences with students in the classroom can also help develop a wider support for SEM within the institution:

I think collaboration to me is one of the real selling features of the SEM initiative. You can develop it because it's something we all understand a piece of.

Faculty understand if there's all of a sudden 90% of the students in the first-year class, all from India, who don't speak English. You know, it's pretty visceral. So, we all understand pieces of the puzzle. I think it's actually a really good way to engage your community in working more collaboratively and effectively together.

Yet, as several respondents noted, "student success means different things to different people" and it has been difficult for some institutions to understand how student success might be achieved. Many believe that SEM can be used as a tool to focus on student success in an intentional, structured way. "Student success is the overall goal, but I think student success has to be backed up with structures, resources, and intention, and I think that's the kind of stuff that you get out of a SEM plan."

Connecting with Diverse Student Populations

Almost all respondents identified several specific "diverse" or "under-represented" student populations they are recruiting and supporting throughout the student experience, although in some cases this has been an initiative that was independent of a SEM plan. The definition of diversity has differed between types of institutions and across the geographical expanse of Canada, and has included rural, low-income, first-generation, adult, youth-in-care, and Francophone (French-language speaking) students, as well as students with disabilities. Most recently, widespread efforts have concentrated on Indigenous student populations, as institutions have committed to meeting the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Sinclair, *et al.* 2015). Over the past few years, special attention has also been paid to the experience of Black students. For reasons related to both diversity and tuition

income, international students have also been a focus for most Canadian institutions.

Data analysis has enabled institutions to understand that there are underlying systemic issues:

For instance, we know that many Black and Indigenous students were entering with similar grades, but a semester later they were dropping out at greater rates and their GPAs were 10 percent lower. So, whatever is happening is within our institution. How do we start to acknowledge our part in that?

Colleges and universities have set up new taskforces and committees and some have appointed leads in equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

We have an EDI Taskforce.... They have started to lead a lot of conversations, both about the success of various groups and what we should be doing to increase that success, access, all of those pieces. ... How do we marry that conversation to SEM? It's not up to the EDI Taskforce to recruit students or decide on proportions of students from various groups that will be part of the enrolment plan. It needs to be part of the conversations about marketing, recruitment and conversion, as well as student success and retention.

As institutions have placed more focus on recruiting a more diverse student body, specialized student services have been developed to help provide a welcoming environment, and ensure the success of an increasingly diverse population. Wrap-around support programs have been implemented to ensure previously underserved populations are successful in their studies.

Indigenous Learners: Committing to Reconciliation and Partnership

Although not all Canadian colleges and universities have set specific enrolment targets for Indigenous

student populations, all have recognized that enrolment in their institutions has not mirrored the Indigenous population of their domestic catchment pools. Although many provinces have seen an increase in Indigenous high school completion rates, colleges have tended to see a higher proportion of Indigenous students enroll than universities.

The importance of looking at all aspects of the enrolment funnel to address issues of enrolment representation of Indigenous learners was acknowledged by respondents, starting with outreach to younger school-age students, summer bridging and upgrading programs, and building on-going relationships with Indigenous communities. Alternative admissions policies and processes are being examined and Indigenous ways of knowing are being incorporated into prior learning assessment and recognition assessments.

We generated a lot of data on these programs and it demonstrated that students who were admitted through the supportive admissions program or pathways program became well-performing students and their attrition rates and progression rates were exactly the same as undergraduates who were admitted to our regular admissions process.

Donors and provincial governments have responded with targeted financial aid programs. Indigenous student advisors work to help students transition into, and be successful in, academic institutions. "Our goals are designed to ensure that, yes, we attract Indigenous students to our university, but that we have the supports and programs in place to see them succeed."

The recent attention to Indigenous reconciliation and responding to the TRC recommendations has led faculty not only to commit to developing heightened cultural awareness but also a willingness to review and revise curriculum and incorporate land-based instruction (an Indigenous teaching method recognizing the

deep mental, physical, and spiritual connection to the land in Indigenous culture that leads to an environmental approach to learning and that encourages learning practical skills relevant to an academic discipline). “If our instructors are aware, they’re more understanding to some of the barriers and situations that Aboriginal [sic] students face. Students will be more comfortable in their class. There’s a correlation to success for Aboriginal students if they’re in a safe environment.” Some institutions have hired Indigenous teaching and learning specialists to help faculty re-assess curriculum, pedagogy and new modes of delivery.

Importantly, most Canadian colleges and universities have established Indigenous centres which have been instrumental in providing safe spaces and the cultural support of elders and knowledge keepers for Indigenous learners. Yet barriers to access and success remain—insufficient band funding, intergenerational trauma, affordable and culturally appropriate housing and childcare, and academic preparation.

Recommendations for Practice

While we have attempted to chronicle the way SEM is being deployed at Canadian postsecondary educational institutions, we also want to share the recommendations that flowed from our discussions with Canadian enrolment leaders. Table 7 (on page 98) shows a summary of the recommendations we identified during our interviews that relate to collaboration and partnership and supporting students as learners and members of the academic community.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the perceptions of Canadian enrolment leaders regarding the ways in which SEM

is being used to create connections between administration, faculty, staff, and students at Canadian post-secondary educational institutions that contribute to enhancing students’ sense of belonging, student persistence, and student success. Respondents were asked to reflect on their SEM experience over the last decade, and forward over the next decade. Recommendations for practice were shared that may help institutions create stronger connections for students, as well as faculty, staff, and administration.

The themes that emerged from interview respondents point to the evolution of SEM as a profession since its beginnings nearly 50 years ago and challenge all SEM practitioners—worldwide—to not be complacent in our rapidly changing post-secondary environment. Colleges and universities will be challenged in a post-COVID world to re-think how we deliver our programs and services, online, in person, or through hybrid means. Building relationships with students before they enrol and engaging them throughout their studies will continue to be all-important. SEM, as a planning and organizational tool, can focus and sharpen planning efforts, increase collaboration and communication across organizations, and link disparate staff and faculty colleagues to work with students to help them achieve their goals.

The SEM practitioner’s leadership role in “socializing” the concept of SEM and building buy-in with faculty and staff colleagues remains ever critical. As a profession we must continue to ensure that “enrolment planning” extends beyond outreach and recruitment into the classroom and that it is a framework that encompasses student engagement and success. SEM must adapt to different institutional cultures and be “organic.” The nomenclature does not matter as much as the partnerships we establish.

There is a continuing need to further assess whether SEM is an effective educational and managerial frame-

TABLE 7

Recommendations for Practice

Area	Recommendations
Before Enrolment Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Develop a clear institutional mission, strategic plan, and academic plan to provide direction and priorities for enrolment planning ◆ Identify a SEM leader who can work on socializing the concept of SEM across the campus, and develop collaborative partnerships, especially with the academic areas ◆ Ensure the nomenclature attached to the planning process resonates with colleagues across the institution
Enrolment Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Have the right people at the SEM planning table by adopting a SEM planning organizational structure that supports wide faculty, administration, staff, and student participation ◆ Ensure sufficient time is allotted to develop the SEM plan ◆ Ensure coordination, collaboration, and communication throughout the enrolment planning process
Student Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ensure student recruitment supports student success ◆ Make use of the student recruitment process to build a relationship between prospective students and faculty and staff ◆ Build relationships between prospective students during the student recruitment process ◆ Focus on institutional values and priorities when recruiting new students
Student Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Create a definition for student success ◆ Invest in the academic success of students (e.g., academic advising, early alerts) both in and outside of the classroom ◆ Revisit academic policies to ensure they support student success ◆ Develop wrap-around supports for underserved student populations (e.g., Indigenous learners, students of color, additional language learners, first-generation students) and international students ◆ Ensure course delivery matches the needs of current and future students
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Develop a renewal and accountability process ◆ Prepare for future challenges (e.g., next pandemic or natural disaster)

work for managing student enrolments at Canadian institutions, along with the effectiveness of specific SEM components (e.g., branding, targets/student mix, data use, financial aid, student recruitment, student retention, partnership, and collaboration).

This study had limitations that need to be acknowledged, which may limit generalization of the results:

- ◆ It relied on the perspectives of book co-authors who were senior SEM leaders in 2010–11 or are current senior enrolment leaders, the majority of whom were based at universities in Ontario and

British Columbia. A wider national and institutional type perspective would provide a more thorough view on this topic.

- ◆ The interviewees were all familiar with SEM as a planning and management framework. They had attended SEM conferences and workshops, and many had been involved in SEM planning and/or writing SEM plans at their own institutions. As there are enrolment managers at a number of Canadian colleges and universities who are unaware of SEM as a concept and/or have not been involved

in SEM planning or implementation, it would be instructive to solicit their views of enrolment and SEM in contrast to the group we have studied.

- ◆ The study was completed at one point in time when the global COVID-19 pandemic caused upheaval in post-secondary institutions (and elsewhere) globally. This influenced interviewees perspectives. There is a need to continue to follow the thinking of senior enrolment managers over a period to determine how SEM planning and implementation enhances or detracts from institutions achieving enrolment performance and effectiveness.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study demonstrates that SEM is seen by Canadian enrolment leaders as important to achieving enrolment health and performance and creating connections at Canadian post-secondary educational institutions between administration, faculty, staff, and students that contribute to enhancing students' sense of belonging, student persistence, and student success.



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