

Re-Imagining Strategic Enrollment Management in Higher Education

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Enrollment Challenge

Nationally, higher education institutions of all types are facing increasing challenges with reaching enrollment benchmarks. According to Inside Higher Education, (June 21, 2018), community college enrollments specifically will continue declining over the next several years.

This challenge is further complicated by declines in state funding and rising demands for improved performance outcomes, as well as projections that a lower number of traditional-age college students age 18 to 22 years old will be entering college beginning in 2025 due to lower birth rates during the recession.

The withdrawal of adult learners aged 25 and older who have typically enrolled at greater rates during weaker economic periods with high unemployment will also contribute to widening the gap in enrollments.

The conversion of all of these factors does present a critical challenge for colleges and universities. This is a challenge that will require an examination of institutional practices and the generation of innovative solutions. One such solution is the reimagining and expansion

of strategic enrollment management approaches to provide an answer, or, at the very least, lead institutions in the right direction.

Strategic Enrollment Management Solution

Placing renewed focus on comprehensive strategic enrollment management (C-SEM) can assist colleges with addressing ongoing enrollment challenges with clear goals targeted on the enrollment, retention and completion of students.

C-SEM is a term coined by the author to represent an approach that is intentional, comprehensive and integrated, requiring an examination of all institutional systems, processes, policies and procedures to determine their effectiveness in addressing SEM goals or if unintentional barriers exist and need to be adjusted.

A large number of students start college and do not finish, once enrolled. This represents another important element to the enrollment challenge. Research conducted by EAB found that out of 100 students who apply to a community college, 56 are lost during onboarding, 23 drop out and only five are still enrolled after six years. Furthermore, only nine of the 100 complete an associate degree and seven complete a bachelor's degree.

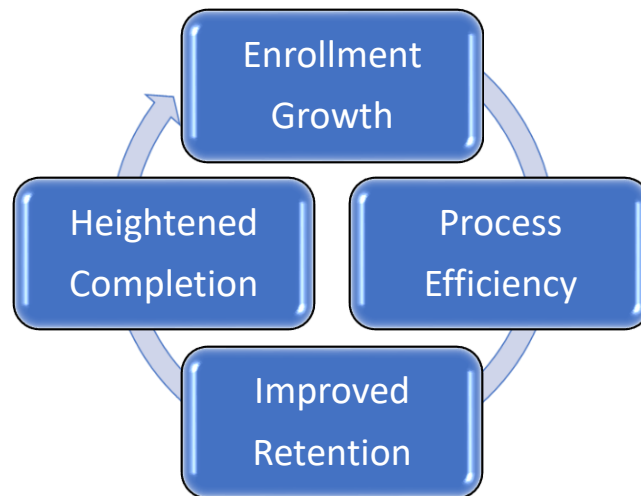
C-SEM strategies will improve outcomes in this area by helping institutions to conceptualize the onboarding process from the first contact with students, application completion, placement tests, financial aid and billing processes, completion of orientation, registration, retention and persistence measures, through graduation, and, to the ultimate cultivation of alumni.

Strategic Approach

The C-SEM approach should engage the total college community strategically in comprehensively addressing issues of enrollment, barriers to growth and continuous matriculation and potential challenges with institutional processes and systems, which impede retention and completion.

Diagram 1 details the four core objectives in C-SEM Planning. The standards integrate a focus on capacity building through enrollment and growth, a thorough examination of processes and system to evaluate efficiency in supporting institutional outcomes, and implementation and evaluation of retention strategies to increase graduation and completion rates.

Diagram 1



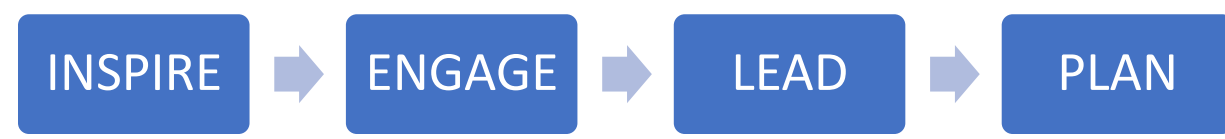
C-SEM Core Standards

The utilization of an Annual Cycle of Effectiveness process, designed to support strategic planning, can support the assessment of outcomes for C-SEM. It is important to view C-SEM

as a college-wide imperative and operationalized within environments which foster learner-centered approaches, where there is a shared responsibility for enrollment outcomes.

Institutions will need to commit to an in-depth organizational examination and to sound strategic enrollment management practices and standards, which build community by inspiring, engaging, leading and planning, as shown in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2



Effective Strategic Enrollment Management Planning should inspire a college-wide focus on the full student experience. A high-performing enrollment organization cultivates student relationships from the initial point of contact throughout the student life cycle.

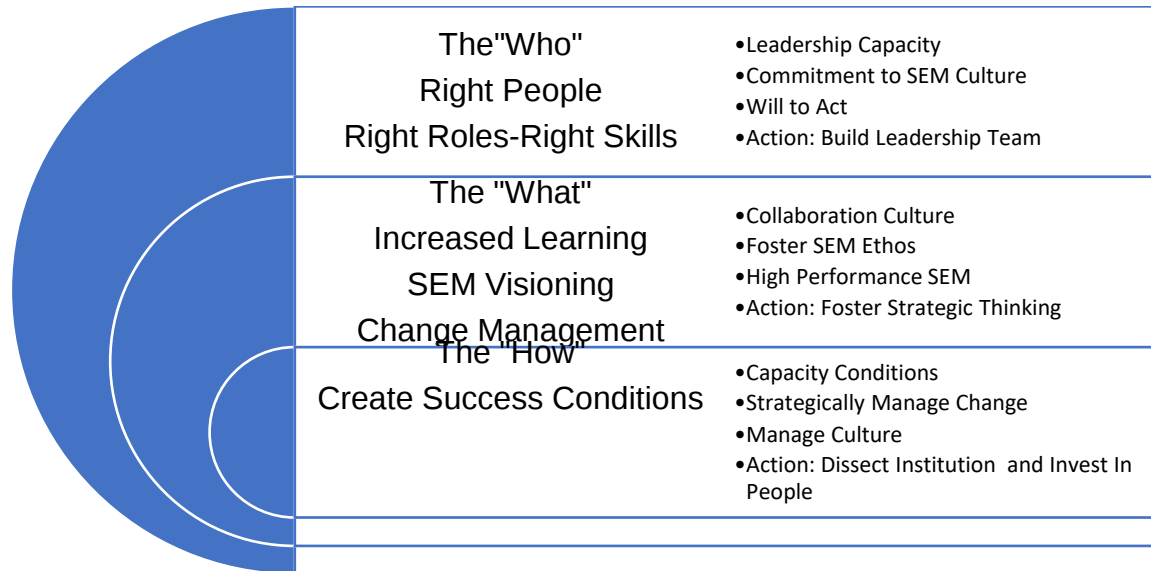
The active and ongoing engagement of faculty in SEM planning is essential. As institutions reimagine these processes, they should actively engage the academic community in SEM planning, decision-making and strategic change.

It is important to note that a common focus on student learning helps to anchor the enrollment management effort to improve all aspects of the student experience, inside and outside the classroom.

The most important aspect of effective Strategic Enrollment Management planning and execution is leadership. Institutional leaders must lead the charge. Visible support, engagement and collaboration of institutional leaders at all levels is critical in the SEM process. Laying the foundation for an extensive planning process is important. Colleges must

determine leadership capacity to enact change, foster a culture of collaboration and establish the conditions needed to manage change. Diagram 3 Depicts the Who, What and How of Comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management.

Diagram 3



C-SEM Infrastructure

Comprehensive Strategic Enrollment Management Planning should be an integrated process, embracing a college-wide perspective, in order to develop and manage a systemic set of activities designed to intentionally attract, recruit, enroll, retain and graduate students, and ultimately engage them as alumni. It requires a laser-like focus on student matriculation and successful completion.

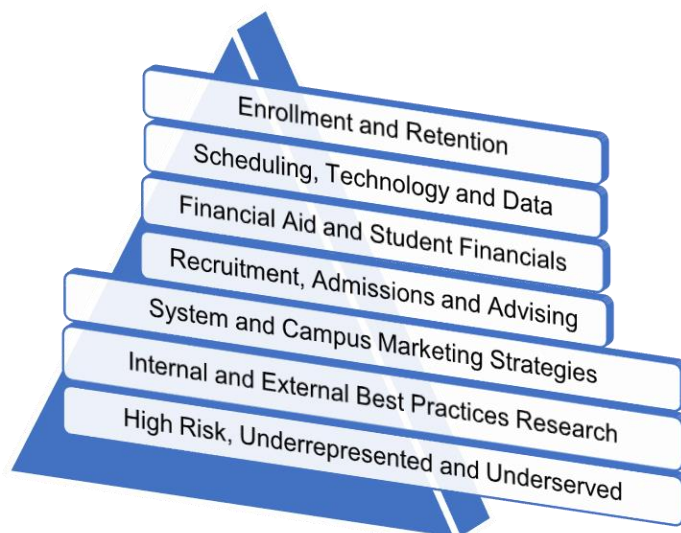
This article summarizes the purpose and work conducted by Lone Star College's (LSC) first Strategic Enrollment Management Council, as well as its recommendations. The Council launched February 2017 to explore current enrollment patterns, practices and processes across six campuses, eight satellite centers and two university centers.

Lone Star College's Strategic Enrollment Management Council is comprised of a diverse and talented team of faculty, staff and administrators from campuses, centers and system office, allowing for broad input and feedback.

Supporting the work of the Council are campus-based SEM teams, whose primary task was to develop localized plans supporting the overall system goals and seven designated SEM subcommittees with college-wide and interdisciplinary participation focused on examining and developing innovative strategies.

Diagram 4 lists the SEM subcommittees established to support the charge and examined the internal processes affecting their area of focus and promising practices to make formal strategic recommendations.

Diagram 4



The Charge

The charged of the SEM Council was to develop a comprehensive and integrated strategic enrollment management model.

The model included the recommendation of goals and strategies for college-wide processes, systems, and assessment measures supporting recruitment, retention, persistence and completion in credit, non-credit, workforce development and training programs.

The process in Diagram 5 enabled the development of a solid SEM infrastructure and recommended measures for assessing its progress.

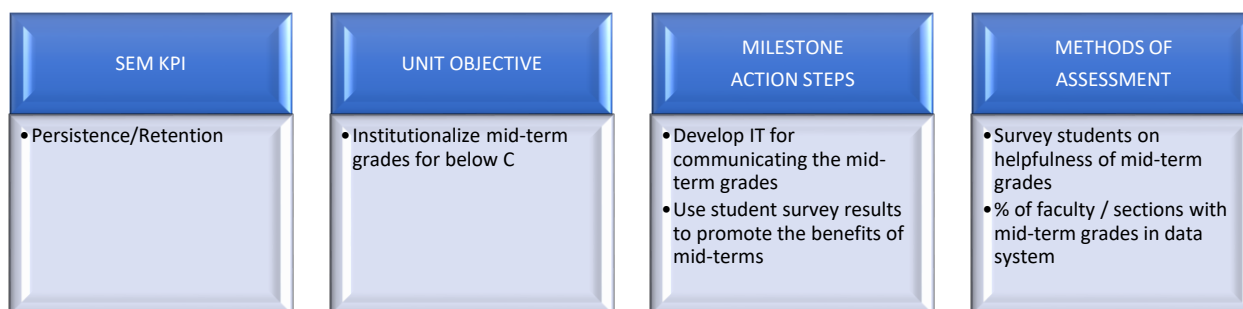
Diagram 5



Process Overview

Lone Star College’s Strategic Enrollment Management process is divided into stages of activity progressing from assessing the current state, identifying and planning the future state, executing an action plan to reach the future state, assessing the future state for goal attainment, and finally, to a continued process for quality improvement and assessing the “Vision - Planning – Action – Future State” cycle. Diagram 6 provides sample High-Impact - Long-Term Strategies used in the plan. The Unit Objective in this diagram provides an example of an ‘early warning’ system for low grades to provide an intervention measure.

Diagram 6



Assessment plays a critical role in implementing a successful C-SEM Plan. Equally as important is a thorough evaluation of the current state of the institution through Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOTs) and other data analysis. This examination should also include a review of technology, marketing and all institutional processes.

Effective research allows the framing of the institution's desired future state, through the evaluation of best and promising practices and the removal of identified barriers to the enrollment and retention processes. Institutions should take time to explore the identification of resources and strategies for improvement as a new vision for the future state is established. It is also imperative to continue to rally and engage stakeholders, as well as implement and evaluate stated goals and objectives through clear action steps and stakeholder ownership throughout the process.

To support and sustain SEM planning, monitoring and assessment, Lone Star College imbedded the process into its Annual Cycle of Effectiveness (ACE) framework. This framework establishes that all LSC units engage in a process that involves developing and implementing plans for improvement and assessing the outcomes and effectiveness.

The framework prescribes that plans be identified, implemented, and evaluated. For SEM, this entails planning, identifying goals, objectives and targets and the identification of action steps, ownership of activities, timelines, and outcome measures (KPIs), implementing action steps, monitoring the progress of activities, evaluating, and assessing the impact of activities on outcome measures.

Accountability

Understanding the comprehensive nature of Strategic Enrollment Management, the System Office and college campuses commit to owning parts of this robust process. The System Office provides overall leadership in three distinct areas, including the planning process, support in prospect and applicant yield and identifying enrollment opportunities, and the development of SEM related dashboards that allow campuses to monitor and evaluate effectiveness. The System Office utilizes data analytics, coordinates comprehensive outreach to Pell Recipients, conducts marketing, and aligns SEM with LSC's Annual Cycle of Assessment.

Lone Star College campuses are accountable for Section Management, development of comprehensive enrollment and retention efforts, development, implementation and evaluation of campus recruitment strategies, coordination with Independent School Districts, development of conversion strategies, adherence to Annual Cycle of Effectiveness and establishing a SEM plan that aligns with the SEM Framework.

SEM Council Outcomes

The SEM Council successfully completed 15 core outcomes. In addition to the regularly scheduled meetings, additional meetings with the subcommittees, subcommittee chairs, LSC campuses and systems office teams conducted and reviewed research and analysis to determine specific outcomes as identified below.

1. Conducted SWOT(s) across the institution to identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats in business processes, systems, outreach, recruitment, enrollment, registration, retention efforts and identified potential solutions.
2. Identified best practices in enrollment and retention at LSC campuses that can be replicated and scaled across the college.
3. Examined IT infrastructure and resources available to support and enhance enrollment and retention efforts.
4. Identified unique challenges for at-risk populations and used proven best practices to recommend interventions and supports.
5. Based on current research, identified which systems and processes might benefit by improved standardization and coordination, to yield greater impact on student success, retention and completion across campuses.

6. Identified college-wide processes that will support and improve effective compliance with requirements of both the Department of Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
7. Identified and reinforced college and campus marketing strategies to support improvements in awareness, engagement and enrollment.
8. Proposed a college communication and engagement process that integrated C-SEM strategies and proposed the utilization of the standardized council structures to ensure broad and efficient communication on campuses.
9. Proposed strategies to eliminate barriers to LSC's enrollment and retention processes to ensure student systems (i.e. recruiting, admissions, financial aid, advising, registration, billing and payments, scheduling and student support operations) are efficient and student-centered.
10. Recommended proven academic and social integration strategies and systems that support retention throughout the student life cycle.
11. Recommended tools to capture student feedback related to strategies, initiatives, and the overall student experience.

12. Produced reports and dashboards that help the committee easily digest complex data and inform data-driven decision-making.
13. Implemented an assessment cycle for the strategic enrollment management plan that monitors implementation of tasks, reviews the assessment of activities for continuous improvement and utilizes analyses for planning future enrollment cycles.
14. Developed and implemented marketing strategies and technology enhancements that support the SEM implementation.
15. Researched, developed and implemented SEM framework, with the goals of championing the development and alignment of campus plans, reinforcing enrollment and retention and leveraging the data, analysis, strategies, and lessons learned from the Pathways Project.
16. Completed College-wide SEM Framework - fall 2017 – fall 2020, which aligned key metrics by area and includes a Success Metrics Score Card to track progress.
17. Created resource repository, website, SharePoint, toolkit, data tools, dashboards, increased awareness, and better communication and workflow plans.

18. Enhanced student portal to include payment calculator to support flexible billing and payment plans and expanded outreach and communication to high schools and parents, and faculty engagement in re-enrollment efforts.

Results

Lone Star College achieved a yield of 52%, 50% and 20%, respectively, from the implementation of SEM strategies such as its Student Fast Pass, Targeted Recruitment, Re-enrollment and SEM New Student Campaigns, representing the enrollment of 3860 additional students and resulting in \$15,440,000 of new revenue for spring 2018. LSC also increased online enrollment by 14% since spring 2017.

Reimagining and implementing a comprehensive strategic enrollment management will pay significant dividends in supporting the enrollment, retention and graduation of students. It also builds a cohesive community committed to addressing current and projected enrollment challenges.

A Living Document

In response to increasing competition, student diversity and the desire to improve retention, persistence, completion and student success, it is imperative that colleges direct attention to shaping the entire student experience. Strategic Enrollment Management is a vehicle to examine all facets of the institution and their impact on student success.

The experience must be intentional and shaped to yield improved outcomes, from converting applicants to registrants, reducing the numbers of students dropping out from one semester to the next, creating processes and procedures that support payment, and redesigning programs, to establishing services that are more responsive.

Finally, the Strategic Enrollment Management plan is a living document that must be responsive to the needs of students and to changes in environmental factors, such as funding, demographic shifts, internal and external influences or unanticipated enrollment fluctuations.

About the Author

Alicia B. Harvey-Smith, Ph.D. is currently the President/CEO of Pittsburgh Technical College in Oakdale, PA. Previously, she served as Executive Vice Chancellor at Lone Star College, in Texas, one of the nation's largest colleges and President/CEO of River Valley Community College in NH.

She earned a Ph.D. from University of Maryland-College Park, M.S. from The Johns Hopkins University, B.S. from Morgan State University and completed Harvard's Graduate School of Education: Institutes of Higher Education for College/University Presidents.

Dr. Harvey-Smith is finalizing a new book entitled: *A New Imagining – Strategic Enrollment Management and Diversifying Revenue Generation: A Winning Combination*, published by Rowman & Littlefield. Her research is cited in *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success*, published by the Harvard University Press, supporting the fundamental redesign of educational practices. Other publications include: *The Seventh Learning College Principle: A Framework for Transformational Change*; *Partnering for Success: How to Build Strong Internal Collaborations in Higher Education* and *Eclectic Insights Part 1: A Composition of Poetry and Essays on Varying Thoughts and Differing Opinions (Volume 1)*

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About Pittsburgh Technical College

Pittsburgh Technical College, is a private, non-profit, regionally accredited institution situated on a picturesque 180 acres in Oakdale, PA, operating nine schools with more than thirty programs, serving Western Pennsylvania and surrounding states since 1946. PTC offers a heads in, hands-on, skills-based education, tailored to the needs of students and industry. The college awards certificate, associate and bachelor's degrees. 100% of PTC's degree seeking students receive internships and the college has one of the nation's highest in-field placement rates of 97%. For more information about Pittsburgh Technical College, visit www.ptcollege.edu.