Scenarios

Income from student tuition is an essential revenue stream at South Waterford State University. That means that significant dips in student enrollment can be catastrophic. The university saw one such dip after the Great Recession of 2008, when more potential students found jobs and elected to work rather than pursue their studies.

Beulah Rockingford, the new president of South Waterford, wants to do everything she can to help the university sustain its enrollment levels—and increase them if possible. Recognizing that past admissions practices won’t ensure future success, Rockingford is leading the university to adopt new, more strategic enrollment management strategies.

One principle is that enrollment management should engage students from when they first hear about the college through to the day they graduate. Adopting that principle has required a sea change in campus culture and operations. Rockingford appointed task forces that drew staff out of their silos in such areas as admissions, finance, the registrar’s office, academic affairs, student affairs, and IT. Rockingford insisted that staff collaborate to create better ways to support learners across the student life cycle.

Working with consultants in strategic enrollment management, or SEM, staff are starting to rethink fundamental strategies for recruiting students, including new ways to target adult and online learners. Processes for applying are being streamlined. Admissions, financial aid, the bursar, and related offices have adopted new software and are creating new workflows for onboarding new students. Strategies for retaining students are being redesigned around goals devoted to helping students succeed in their educational programs. South Waterford is building better analytics capabilities to help staff make decisions based on data.

As next steps in this ongoing process, Rockingford has started to frame new organizational structures for the university. She recently appointed the university’s first vice president for enrollment management to oversee undergraduate admissions, financial aid, the registrar, new-student services, and marketing and communications. South Waterford is investing significantly in CRM technologies to help integrate the functions under the enrollment management umbrella. And Rockingford herself is investing time in work with the faculty senate to help faculty members envision new roles for themselves in academic planning, online learning, and faculty development that will support the university’s enrollment management goals.

1. **What is it?**

   According to an article in *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly*, enrollment management is a comprehensive process for achieving optimal institutional outcomes for student recruitment, retention, and graduation. With responsibilities that go beyond transactions related to recruiting and admitting students, today’s enrollment managers are responsible for a complex spectrum of services that extend across the student life cycle. Models for enrollment management have evolved based on strategies derived from analysis of an institution’s mission, vision, and environment, enabling institutions to connect activities in student recruitment and marketing, admissions and enrollment, financial aid and scholarship administration, course registration, institutional planning and analytics, and student life and leadership.

   New approaches to enrollment management also reflect a growing expectation that enrollment managers contribute more directly and significantly to institutional efforts to fulfill academic missions, meet financial goals, sustain a diverse and successful student body, and increase access to education.

2. **How does it work?**

   For students, emerging models of enrollment management aim to provide a seamless experience for individuals who engage with the institution as a prospect, applicant, enrolled student, advisee, selector of an academic pathway, orientation participant, and completer of the first-year experience. In addition, enrollment management provides and aligns support to ensure learners’ ongoing academic progress through completion of a credential or other academic goal. Enrollment management coordinates campus functions that may once have been relatively unconnected or even in competition to work in sync in ways that advance the institution’s goals. As enrollment management has become more complex and multifaceted, enrollment managers have begun to draw on an increasingly sophisticated constellation of technology-based tools that track each contact with prospective and enrolled students, collect and analyze data related to student recruitment and enrollment, enable nuanced decisions about financial aid, and integrate new students into the life of the institution.

3. **Who’s doing it?**

   Examples of institutions that are developing their capacity to provide a holistic palette of enrollment management services
Enrollment Management

include Arizona State University, Boston University, and Seton Hall University, George Mason University, as another example, frames enrollment management as “exemplary service [for students] from recruitment through graduation.” Examples of innovation and excellence in particular dimensions of enrollment management include the use of an AI-based admissions chatbot called Pounce at Georgia State University; the University of Florida’s Data Dashboard; the “Student Central” center for student support at Indiana University; and work at St. Louis University in data analysis in support of strategic enrollment management (SEM). Graphics available at the University of Minnesota Duluth illustrate one institution’s approach to SEM.

4 Why is it significant?

Enrollment management benefits students by helping learners find the right schools and programs in which to enroll and investing those students with necessary tools and supports, including financial aid, to help them succeed in completing their studies. Enrollment management is also effective in helping students from historically underrepresented groups—including learners from minority groups, first-generation students, adult learners, and low-income students—find their path to and through college. Enrollment management benefits institutions by providing comprehensive channels for effectively and strategically blending campus operations that traditionally would likely have been conducted in relative isolation, helping the institution meet its academic and fiscal goals, optimize its stewardship of financial resources, and conduct its work more efficiently. It also allows for more effective resource planning, as enrollment levels become more predictable and reliable. SEM requires strong adherence to ethics, especially in areas of admission and financial aid policy, to ensure that student access, welfare, and success are at the forefront of decision-making.

5 What are the downsides?

Enrollment management done well has numerous moving parts and dimensions, and managing that complexity can challenge an institution’s operational agility. Adopting the cross-campus functionality of enrollment management practice will require some institutions, particularly those accustomed to conducting their work within organizational silos, to adopt new ways of working collaboratively. Some institutions may find it difficult to get administrators, faculty, and staff to fulfill their responsibilities for effective enrollment management. Implementing truly strategic, cross-institutional enrollment management practices can be expensive to implement and sustain.

6 Where is it going?

Adopting practices of strategic or holistic enrollment management will help institutions continue to redesign key business practices. From recruitment to graduation, students will benefit from improved services across their association with an institution. Improved processes will also position institutions to better serve adult students and other post-traditional learners. At the same time, institutions will benefit from restructuring fundamental business models in ways that will help ensure better collaboration across many critical campus functions and more efficient ways of conducting core business practices. Rethinking such processes will also create ways for staff to maximize their use of data and emerging technologies such as AI in support of better student services and improved operational efficiencies. As enrollment management continues to evolve, we can anticipate more sophisticated and capable software platforms that will be increasingly better integrated.

7 What are the implications for teaching and learning?

A more holistic approach to enrollment management will help prospective learners find a college or university that is right for them, and it will help students from backgrounds that might not be familiar with college to apply, find money for college, and enroll. Broader, more strategic approaches to enrollment management will help institutions find improved ways to help students once they are in college. Enrollment management can streamline basic services like enrolling in courses and paying tuition. It can improve how academic departments plan programs and courses and pinpoint those for which additional learning supports can increase student success. Perhaps most importantly, emerging thinking about enrollment management will help learners find academic programs that best match their interests, skills, and aspirations and will provide learners, faculty, and staff with a rich palette of tools that will help students persist to completion of a credential or related goal. With the capacity to improve access to higher education as well as student persistence toward a credential, new approaches to enrollment management offer significant potential for helping more learners graduate from college or otherwise achieve their academic goals.