
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Strategic Enrollment Management Update

Presentation By

Nathan S. Evans
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs
Chief Academic Officer

April Grommo
Assistant Vice Chancellor, Strategic Enrollment Management

Summary

Along with colleges and universities across the nation, the California State University (CSU) continues to encounter a variety of challenges that impact student enrollment. They include, among others:

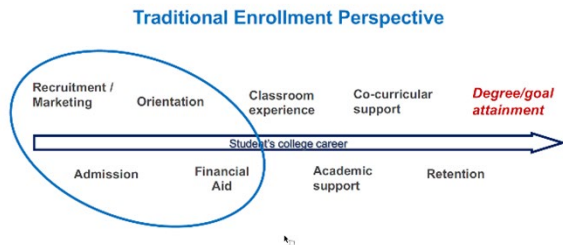
- Shifts in the public perception of the value of a college degree.
- Declining participation in higher education and the “demographic cliff.”
- The politicization of higher education policy.
- And continuing concerns regarding student readiness and well-being, post-pandemic.

These challenges are exacerbated by budgetary constraints at both the state level and those stemming from enrollment declines and increasing institutional costs. The challenges are evident, but so is the opportunity that lies ahead for the CSU. This is a rare, transformational moment in which the CSU can reimagine its future not just this year or next, but into the following decade, and chart a bold and innovative path forward.

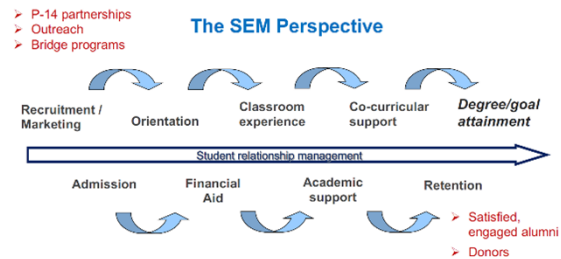
Historically, enrollment management at colleges and universities has primarily focused on marketing and recruiting new students. The CSU is taking a different and life-cycle approach and is committed to supporting students’ holistic experience—from early outreach through degree completion. Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) is a concept and process that enables the fulfillment of institutional mission and students’ educational goals. The California State University Office of the Chancellor (CSUCO) requires a systemwide strategic enrollment management plan, sufficiently responsive

to the growing complexities and demands generated by shifting demographics, the projected knowledge gap in California’s workforce and the lingering impacts of the pandemic.

Implications: Retention and Student Success



Implications: Retention and Student Success



The CSU is working with a full-service strategic planning firm with extensive expertise and experience in statewide or systemwide higher education strategic enrollment forecasting, modeling and planning. The selected firm is supporting the Chancellor’s Office in the development of a systemwide SEM model and plan. This plan will consider current best practices in SEM, as well as incorporating feedback and input gathered from various systemwide and external stakeholders. SEM efforts must take into consideration the system and campus characteristics and context. The systemwide efforts are in no way intended to supplant or contradict campus-based strategic enrollment planning efforts but to provide vision and support for those efforts. The SEM plan will also inform and shape academic planning by using and leveraging data.

Education Strategy Group

In May 2024, the CSUCO partnered with Education Strategy Group (ESG), a nationally engaged strategic partner organization for educational planning. ESG is also collaborating with The Burning Glass Institute, American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) Consulting and Yes& to develop a unified and cohesive vision for the CSU’s SEM plan. Collectively, this group is referred to as the SEM Partner Collaborative.

CSU System SEM Collaborative



The SEM Partner Collaborative and SEM Advisory Council will assist in developing a model and plan that will include, but is not limited to:

1. Setting forth a statewide, systemwide strategic vision from which regional and campus strategic enrollment planning and academic programming can take place.
2. Developing recommendations related to the role and resources for a systemwide SEM organizational infrastructure based on the unique needs of the CSU.
3. Analysis and recommendations on the external environment contributing to current challenges and that could lead to future enrollment challenges.
4. Evaluation of the state and regional postsecondary attainment, capacity and higher education landscape in California and recommendations to best compete.
5. Supporting a rigorous review of CSU's existing policies and practices relative to strategic enrollment management and recommendations for potential revisions.
6. Assessing current outreach, recruitment, admissions and financial aid efforts through the lens of various perspective student populations.
7. Providing recommendations for engagement of K-12 schools, college access and promise programs, community-based organizations (CBOs), California Community Colleges, adult learners, PK-14 students, parents, donors, alumni and other community partners.
8. Providing recommendations and guidance to align marketing and public relations initiatives with enrollment goals.
9. Recommending long-term data strategies and operations to support the CSUCO and our 23 universities in all aspects of the enrollment planning.
10. Assessing and providing recommendations on data and processes to better align academic program development with regional and state employment projections and workforce needs, including data needed to evaluate future programs.

11. Completing an analysis and providing recommendations on opportunities for the creation of multi-campus development and delivery of academic programs, including online programs.
12. Incorporating current and future CSU efforts such as Graduation Initiative 2025 and Black Student Success into the SEM model and plan.
13. Providing recommendations on best practices for iterating, implementing and monitoring strategic enrollment management efforts, both tactical and strategic.
14. Recommendations for system and university resources that will be needed to sustain focused and disciplined SEM efforts.
15. Providing a detailed implementation outline.

SEM Partner Collaborative

The CSU's team of partners have already launched work on foundational elements of this project. Their milestones include:

- Understanding and connecting the strategic enrollment management project to other CSU initiatives underway.
- Developing the draft Theory of Change to articulate envisioned outcomes and to identify inputs, activities and intermediate outcomes. The Theory of Change provides a useful resource to ensure that discussions and decisions tie in with expected outcomes.
- Developing a plan for engaging stakeholders across the CSU system to inform recommendations.
- Completing desk research, initial data analysis and landscape mapping to identify best practices across other systems, and to provide examples of the kind of information that the CSUCO might consider.

CSU SEM Advisory Council

The newly formed CSU SEM Advisory Council will contribute ideas and perspectives to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive SEM plan for the entire CSU system. The advisory council—led by co-chairs CSU Trustee Christopher J. Steinhauser and California State University San Marcos President Ellen J. Neufeldt—consists of representatives from the CSU, K-12, nonprofits and community colleges. They are:

- Ellen Neufeldt, President, CSU San Marcos & Advisory Council Co-Chair, CSU
- Christopher Steinhauser, Trustee & Advisory Council Co-Chair, CSU

- Elizabeth "Betsy" Boyd, Professor, Chico State, College of Agriculture
- Lisa Cardoza, President, American River College
- Tyler Coari, Student, Cal State Student Association, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo
- Keith Curry, President, Compton College
- Michael Davies-Hughes, Superintendent, Humboldt County Office of Education

- Nathan Evans, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic and Student Affairs and Chief Academic Officer, California State University Chancellor's Office
- Christina Gonzales, Vice President for Student Affairs, Cal Poly Pomona
- April Grommo, Assistant Vice Chancellor for Strategic Enrollment Management, California State University Chancellor's Office
- Arwa Hammad, Student, Cal State LA
- Sacha Maria Joseph-Mathews, Vice President and Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer, Stanislaus State
- Jill Leafstedt, Dean, Extended University, CSU Channel Islands
- Kenyatta Lovett, Principal, ESG
- Edward Mills, Vice President for Strategic Enrollment, Sonoma State
- Beth Steffel, Associate Professor, Art and Design, Cal State San Bernardino
- Amy Sueyoshi, Provost, San Francisco State
- Ashish Vaidya, President and CEO, Growing Inland Achievement

The council began meeting in July 2024. In her remarks to the advisory council, CSU Chancellor Mildred García reiterated their charge:

- Reviewing current enrollment trends, demographics and workforce data and projections across the nation, state and campuses to identify opportunities for the CSU to meet those realities.
- Identifying thematic barriers and opportunities systemwide that call for new strategies that optimize enrollment, retention, completion and economic mobility.
- Providing input and reflections on strategies and initiatives to attract and retain diverse student populations and address identified barriers to enrollment and retention.
- Reviewing campus and community leaders' feedback regarding the potential of the CSU system to improve its standing as a leading option for higher education and a primary driver of economic mobility.
- Recommending opportunities that can facilitate the strategic enrollment plan implementation at the system and university levels.

Harnessing the CSU's "Systemness"

Developing a systemwide strategic enrollment management plan will complement the CSU's broader long-term planning. Working with higher education consultant SOVA, the CSU kicked off a year-long effort to develop a three-year systemwide strategic plan, the first in more than a decade. This plan will offer a guiding framework for alignment across campus-level plans while allowing universities to address their unique needs and serve their communities. It will define the CSU's overarching vision—providing clarity and ensuring that all constituents and stakeholders understand the CSU's identity, values and strategic priorities, as well as how we intend to advance those priorities.

Supporting and woven throughout the overarching strategic plan will be the numerous initiatives the CSU has launched to harness the talents, strengths and most promising practices of our 23 universities—and to capitalize on our "systemness." These current efforts include:

- The Graduation Initiative 2025 Year of Engagement;
- The Financial Aid Strategic Workgroup;
- The *Finish Strong* Community of Practice;
- The *Second Start* Community of Practice;
- PACE workforce initiatives;
- Information technology strategic planning; and
- Multi-University Collaborations.

Strategic enrollment planning will also be essential to this larger strategic planning effort. This is an opportunity:

- To lean into our mission, and to seek out spaces where there is still opportunity to grow, innovate, create efficiencies and target our resources for maximum success.
- To consider students who we're not serving today, as well as those we do—and to meet them where they are in every way.
- To take a holistic view of student recruitment, retention, graduation and career success, including how we plan our academic programs, how we build relationships with employers and intersegmental partners, what's happening with our state's and nation's demographics, and the changing marketplace of alternate educational opportunities that are becoming increasingly available to our potential students.
- To align with national conversations around degree attainment, the value of a college degree and the power of higher education to meet evolving workforce demands and ensure economic mobility for all.

Key Themes for Strategic Enrollment Planning

Trustee Steinhauser, Chancellor García and President Neufeldt provided four key themes that will guide to the advisory council and consultants in addressing all aspects of the plan.

1. The current approaches to enrollment management call for maximizing enrollment streams and prioritizing student populations critical to the long-term success of the CSU system. This means optimizing traditional student enrollment streams in collaboration with our K-12 and community college partners. And it also means developing effective strategies to meet the needs of adult and working learners by maximizing non-credit, online and other opportunities.
2. The positive impact and contribution of the CSU system are often unclear to many Californians. This requires the development of clear and compelling value statements to highlight the value of the CSU system as a primary driver and opportunity for economic mobility.
3. To take enrollment efforts to the next level, the CSUCO will need to expand support to its 23 universities in building capacity, expediting bureaucratic processes and coordinating resources.
4. To ensure that our universities are able to collectively make progress toward enrollment goals, our final plan must include well-structured building blocks for feasible and effective action.

Timeline for the SEM Plan

The CSU and ESG intend to complete the systemwide SEM plan by fall 2025. At the same time, ESG is proposing a complementary timeline for the recommendation development, review and approval process that includes three major milestones.

Throughout the first two quarters of 2025, ESG will complete all the foundational activities of the project that center on desk research, analysis and stakeholder feedback. These learnings will inform, guide and support the draft set of recommendations. At the same time, ESG will begin working with CSUCO leadership, the CSU SEM Advisory Council and other critical stakeholders to iterate and refine the list of recommendations that will be part of the final CSU SEM Plan.

1. By June 30, 2025: Share draft recommendations with the Leadership Team and Advisory Council Co-Chairs.
2. August 2025: Review, revise draft recommendations and prepare materials to present to Chancellor Garcia.
3. September 2025: Prepare a final presentation to the CSU Board of Trustees.

Conclusion

The CSU is developing a SEM plan to address current and challenges such as declining PK-12 and community college enrollment, shifting perceptions of higher education and budget constraints. The SEM plan aims to optimize enrollment opportunities, support diverse student populations and support the alignment of academic programs with workforce needs in California and throughout the nation. In collaboration with ESG, the plan will consider best practices, stakeholder input and data-driven strategies across the nation and around the world. Key components of the plan include developing a systemwide vision, assessing current enrollment efforts, engaging educational and community partners and refining outreach and recruitment strategies. The newly formed CSU SEM Advisory Council will guide the process, providing input on strategies to improve enrollment, retention and economic mobility.

Four guiding themes for the plan include maximizing enrollment streams, clarifying the value of CSU for economic mobility, expanding support for campuses and ensuring actionable progress toward enrollment goals. The final SEM plan, expected in fall 2025, will align with broader CSU initiatives and enhance its role as a leader in higher education and economic opportunity. The CSU will provide more detailed updates with the Board as work progresses toward this final plan.