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## Introduction

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American higher education faces unprecedented challenges. The broad and complex scope of demographic, social, economic, and competitive forces make this a time unlike others that have gone before. Most of the major analyses of higher education in recent years have concluded that the number of Americans attaining a higher education credential will need to increase dramatically, with the largest increase needed among lower-income and underprepared students who are least likely to get such an education now. If ever there was a need to shift paradigms in the delivery of higher education, this is it.

It is the central thesis of this book that strategic enrollment management (SEM) offers a useful and unique conceptual framework for meeting today's challenges at the institutional level. By promoting clarity of institutional mission from the perspective of student access and success, SEM provides a paradigm for cutting through the clutter of competing priorities to focus on what will best serve student needs and support their educational attainment. The resulting alignment of institutional mission, enrollment goals, targeted investments, and budget outcomes enables planning that is more strategic, in turn leading to improved outcomes for the institution as a whole, as well as individual departments. But the potential benefits of SEM extend beyond institutions themselves. Because it operates from a student-centric mindset and directly affects enrollment patterns, SEM can and does play an important role in promoting student access and success, thereby addressing issues that are pertinent to American education as a whole.

The practice of SEM is not without controversy. As SEM practice has emerged and evolved over the past thirty years, the profession has experienced the growing pains inherent to any new endeavor. There have been a variety of definitions and manifestations of SEM practice that have led to a muddled understanding of what SEM actually is. Some observers have noted negative consequences resulting from

specific SEM tactics, leading to criticism of the very concept of SEM. The purposes of this book are to:

- Describe the current financial and enrollment challenges facing American higher education
- Provide a definition and context for current SEM practice
- Offer new perspectives on the interplay of SEM and institutional finance
- Provide a SEM planning model that will enable institutions to concurrently improve mission, enrollment, and financial outcomes
- Promote the use of SEM concepts to improve student access and success

Ultimately, this book is part of the ongoing dialogue regarding the opportunities and challenges that accrue to higher education in the United States. The authors welcome comments and suggestions as we collectively seek more effective ways of meeting the needs of the students we serve.

Bob Bontrager  
Corvallis, Oregon  
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