

Strategic Enrollment Management: Lessons from Hogwarts School

by

Kate Peterson, Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management

and

Tom Watts, Associate Registrar, Oregon State University

Abstract: Strategic enrollment management (SEM) may not be the enterprise or the area of academic study that brings magic to mind for everyone. However, in a whimsical look at Hogwarts, there are opportunities to explain some of the basic principles of SEM, using examples, illustrations, and comparisons from Harry Potter's magical educational realm.

SEM and Other Magical Realms

While it isn't necessary to explain that the primary appeal of the Harry Potter series is not that it provides excellent examples, albeit magical, of the tenets of strategic enrollment management (SEM), we can see certain parallels between the administration of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and American colleges and universities. While the connections are obviously whimsical (some might argue that the Hogwarts policies are to varying degrees less ethereal than some of the arcane models of higher education), we have taken the opportunity to attach ourselves to the coattails of an astonishing publishing phenomenon to help illustrate basic SEM principles.

For any member of a SEM organization, normally the first reaction – or even second or third – to reading the Harry Potter books is not how strongly Hogwarts conforms to SEM principles. Hogwarts, though, is central to Harry's life and adventures, and ... okay, here comes the stretch ... effective management and administration is central to Hogwarts (at least for all the administrators except Professor Umbridge). Helping students survive the chamber of secrets, goblet of fire, forbidden forest, dementors, and death eaters has its 21st century counterparts. Our first motivation for seeking clues from Hogwarts might be that an institution

steeped in several centuries of magic would have by now solved basic issues of admission, orientation, academic and co-curricular support, and degree and goal attainment. From first book to last, though, Hogwarts administration, faculty and staff deal with issues that have their analogues for the admission directors, registrars, financial aid staffs, and student support offices in the muggle domain. The challenges that we face today sometimes have administration, faculty, and students alike longing for magical resolutions to issues related to academic regulations, prerequisites, class scheduling, assessment, financial aid, and student progress and success.

In order to prove the seriousness of this endeavor (this is obviously unnecessary for aficionados of Harry Potter and his adventures), this article will briefly consider the central aims and characteristics of SEM, and take a look at the educational progress of Harry and his cohort, considering several areas where Hogwarts policies and practices are particularly apropos to SEM.

SEM, an Overview of Intent and Processes

Briefly stated, the definition of SEM is a process that has as a goal to fulfill the institutional mission and at the same time create a service environment that contributes to students' educational successes. "Strategic," as it pertains to enrollment management, refers to the comprehensive view of enrollment management, and the use of all EM resources to help ensure that students meet their educational goals, and that likewise the university achieves its objectives.

The strategic portion of SEM is important to an understanding of the difference between strategic enrollment management and traditional enrollment management. Strategically deployed enrollment management practices mean that the resources of enrollment management are used in an intentionally cohesive way, and that SEM units partner with and align their tasks and processes with the work of university departments and offices to help accomplish the goals of the institution. Characterizing traditional EM as tactical, rather than strategic, may be too simplistic, but traditional EM typically does not create the links and segues and connections among EM departments, and between EM units and departments across campus, that SEM does. While the departments and overall staff are not necessarily greater in SEM organizations than in traditional EM scenarios, SEM uses resources so that the collective effect and positive impact of the enrollment management units are greater than the sum of the effect of the units individually.

While traditional enrollment management has a similar goal of retaining students and guiding them to the achievement of their academic goals, the two differ fundamentally. The idea of a process being "strategic" imbues it with a significantly different aim. While traditional EM focuses on recruiting and retaining students, Strategic Enrollment Management considers both the intended direction of the institution – in terms of population, values, and character – and the integrative view of a student's education based on the principle that the student is best guided through an academic career by collaboration between various offices covering all aspects of the educational progress.

In accomplishing the goal of helping both the institution to meet its objectives and students succeed, strategic enrollment managers and staffs have adopted processes and met challenges that existed in the traditional model of enrollment management, but were handled much differently.

The emphasis in SEM is on the continuum of processes from recruitment through registration and degree completion. In addition, collaboration and interaction with academic departments is a prerequisite, not a by-product. Recruiting and admissions, financial aid, registration and related processes are inextricably related, and recognizing that inter-connectedness and addressing it systematically and strategically creates a better environment for student success and a stronger working relationship between EM units and campus departments. By partnering closely with campus departments to provide students with useful information, by implementing well-defined online processes for as many tasks as possible, and by creating methods and opportunities to track academic progress, SEM contributes significantly to enhance students' experiences and, in the process, demonstrates the importance and value of our work.

Who are the SEM Players

Strategic enrollment management does not entail an invention of new offices, and in most cases, the players are well-known within the university. Admissions, orientation, financial aid, and registrar offices are the most recognizable players, and the most common.

In many SEM organizations, pre-college outreach departments and career services are included, and in some cases, student support offices, such as academic success centers, are part of SEM organizations.

Where the difference exists between the SEM and the traditional model is in how SEM players collaborate, how the functions and responsibilities of SEM offices hand off more successfully from one office to another, and how the SEM entities and the other departments across the campus interact.

The two differences that it is useful to identify at this point are the continuum versus silo approach, and the connection between SEM units and the rest of the university.

Connected Processes and Relationships

Perhaps the most fundamental difference in how responsibilities and functions are completed via SEM, as opposed to the traditional approach, is that SEM views the entirety of enrollment management responsibilities as a continuum.

Rather than cultivating silos of expertise, where a task is ended and students are handed off to, or they become the "responsibility" of, a new office, the

successful work of SEM units is conducted in a continuum of services to students.

The process begins with the university's first encounter with students and ends with the successful completion of their educational goals. Increasingly, SEM is concerned with ensuring that students know that higher education is a possibility, and that young students know of the resources they can use to help ensure they have access to a post-secondary education. Pre-college programs work with students as young as middle-school age, in order to keep college in sight for these students, some of whom will become the first in their families to attend college. As noted earlier, sometimes pre-college units are located within SEM. Regardless of the organizational arrangement, it is the collaboration, partnering and team approach between SEM and pre-college staffs that creates the success of the wide variety of programs and outreach, including summer programs and college visits, that attract, enthuse, and eventually bring the students to campus to pursue an undergraduate education.

The admissions office segues from recruitment, application, and completion of admission processing to a meaningful orientation that helps prepare students for the academic, administrative, and personal challenges they typically face in their first year. Again, whether the orientation staff is within the admissions office, or exists as a separate unit, it is the connection and the partnering that is important. Financial assistance and advice is crucial for the students' success, and the issues that often come up in advising and/or registration often have implications that impact their financial situations. Registrars are not only historians, record keepers, course schedulers, and clearing houses for all types of questions ranging from academic regulations to transcripts, but they also actively collaborate with other units. They work with departments on access to courses to facilitate degree completion within reasonable timeframes, and also work with academic colleges on issues as varied as academic advising, curriculum cataloging, degree audits, and effective student communication. Moreover, a central task of the Registrar's Office is to provide information relative to the entire enterprise of registration, including negotiating the student 'administrivia' of the university from first term through completion of graduation requirements and conferral of degree.

All SEM offices enjoy partnering with advisors and with college and departments to ensure that all information to students is accurate, timely, and useful. In the SEM scenario, the partnership and cooperation with campus departments is intentional and ongoing. Our work is enhanced by the collaboration with and understanding of the responsibilities of departments and colleges; similarly, and our work is made easier through an appreciation by the departments and colleges of all that is done within SEM. A strong connection between SEM units and campus departments, student support offices, and academic units ensures that students are given thorough

and accurate information for their educational success, and that conflicts and academic difficulties are mitigated or preempted.

In short, SEM seeks to ensure that students have the best chances to reap the benefits of an enrollment management strategy that strongly complements the academic programs of the university, and that creates an organizational ethos that supports the best university experience possible for each student.

SEM and Hogwarts - Hogwarts and SEM

The issues most illustrative of the connection between Hogwarts and SEM are:

- Recruitment and Admission
- Orientation and retention
- Communication
- Using technology
- Collaboration

In reading through Harry's adventures, we are eventually struck by the similarities to our own magical academies for wizards in various academic fields. Admitting students, seeking a diversified cohort of students, sorting and advising, ensuring a successful environment for academic enrichment and personal growth are all major parts of our work. Managing communications, albeit with portals, websites, and email rather than owls and howlers, is an issue that colleges and universities have in common with Hogwarts. In addition, while every manager in the fields of enrollment management and student services has a role model or mentor, Albus Dumbledore is arguably the model of reasonable, wise, stern when necessary, and always effective manager that would be the cornerstone of any enrollment management organization. It also doesn't hurt that when necessary, he can be the toughest wizard on the block.

With profound apologies to J. K. Rowling, and without encumbering the Harry Potter books with a purpose not central to the stories, our discussion on the lessons of Hogwarts to SEM will center on some of the fundamental issues of SEM, with illustrations of each with examples from Hogwarts and from the more recognizable world of higher education.

So, consider yourselves sorted into the Hogwarts house of your choice, grab your wands, and let the incantations and potions begin. As Harry Potter himself said, "All great wizards began as students."

Recruitment and Admission

Recruiting and admitting students is a complex endeavor for any college or university, and over the last ten years, the information and news related to admissions policies illustrates just how complex, and controversial, the issue is. Every university's intention is to make recruitment and admissions fair, to provide as much as information as possible to students so that their decision is informed and in their best interest, and to create a cohort of students that is academically strong, diverse, and committed to an energetic and enthusiastic experience at the university.

For the recruitment portion of the process, the two elements where muggle and non-muggle domains share concerns are, first, providing information in a useful and not overwhelming manner, and, second, choosing methods and strategies that promote the university and persuade students to attend.

As admission counselors and recruiters know well, recruiting is not always as straightforward as it seems. Interested students are sometimes overwhelmed by too frequent contacts and too much information, and other students may not be aware of the possibilities awaiting them if information is not disseminated broadly. Finally, the recruiting and admission processes are always most effective when the issues of orientation, advising, financial aid, and living arrangements are presented as part of the comprehensive information provided to prospective students.

Attracting the Best and the Brightest

Fortunately for Hogwarts, the recruitment process is generally not difficult. The prospective students are known to Hogwarts, and in many instances their interest is the result of family connections – the legacy phenomenon. There is interest among the general population of budding wizards, and apparently there are some alternatives, though for the aspiring British wizard, Hogwarts is the predominant choice. As we learn, there is a concerted effort to bring in new students, the muggle children who in some way or another have shown an inclination and a facility for the wizard way of life. In the case of Harry, he is the one wizard who has to be convinced – first, that such a thing as a school for wizards exists, and, second, that he should be one of its charges. He is actively and persistently sought by Hogwarts, with the intensity that some schools reserve for blue chip scholars and athletes.

Harry's uncle and aunt try to stop the communication from Hogwarts, although they find that nothing they can do, including sealing the mail slot, will stop Hogwarts from letting Harry know they are interested in him. For universities, the communication to prospective students is more delicate.

Competition for students is keen, and all colleges are interested in the best students. The communication plan has to be persistent, informative, and responsive to be effective; however, over-communicating can be problematic as well.

As noted earlier, pre-college units are also integral to the communication process with young students, with a general intent to inform students about college, to de-mystify the entire notion of higher education, and to make young students aware that a college education is within their grasp. In many instances, there is a benefit of attracting bright, pre-college students to a specific university or program, and students who have not given a lot of thought to post-secondary education are many times impressed by the schools that show an interest early on.

Showing interest without suffocating the student is a hard act to balance, and brochures, emails, portals, recruitment fairs and information sessions for parents and students are all part of the mix. Every university is looking for something as effective and as unique as an owl carrying a specialized message to individual students – magically produced letters in beautiful calligraphy, magically delivered to the correct address. That isn't currently possible, and until the time when the perfect message, perfectly delivered is available, universities will attempt to make their recruiting messages to prospective students as effective as possible using current muggle technology.

Hogwarts is a diverse place and efforts are made to attract all students – the sons and daughters of wizards, muggles, and students of all races and backgrounds. Hogwarts is also home to students like Harry Potter and Neville Longbottom, who are sons of famous wizarding families, but whose views of the wizard world are not bound by any exclusionary ideas. The books and the movies portray Hogwarts as a place where gender, skin color, and background are not uniform, and where the strength of the school collectively is measured by the strengths that all its individual students bring.

Orientation - Welcome and Transition

Once students are admitted and have made the commitment to attend, the next step is to welcome them and provide an orientation that helps them to adjust to their academic home.

The best example of the orientation at Hogwarts is, of course, the Sorting Hat. The hat is put on a student's head and by a magical process, it discerns the character and qualities of the student and places the student in the residential house best suited for the student. Fellow students with the same qualities, and a faculty mentor who can provide for the best support system, are the elements that the Sorting Hat tries to provide.

At most universities, the equivalent to the Sorting Hat is an orientation office that tries to give students a realistic view of the university experience and a segue to coursework, extra-curricular activities, and adjustment issues. Orientation services at most universities cover the widest possible spectrum of topics that will have an impact on student success during the first year. Those topics typically include

advising and registration; financial aid, scholarships and other opportunities for paying for college; and the myriad of life-style adjustments, from time management and negotiating deadlines, to prioritizing commitments and ensuring that new-found freedom does not negatively impact academic success.

At universities, the options are far more elaborate than Hogwarts' decision of which of the four houses a budding wizard should be placed in. Living arrangements, academic major, number of credits, work obligations, homesickness, new friends, new relationships, and a thousand other concerns are typically in competition in the minds of first-year students and their parents. Orientation offices try to account for as many of the competing interests as they possibly can, and offer strategies and support to students for sorting and dealing with those priorities.

Retention - Keeping the Best and the Brightest

Retention and progress to graduation are two of the critical items for every student, and are issues that also create some of the greatest challenges to the energy and collaborative spirit of universities and colleges, including the SEM offices on every campus.

Retention is an effort that is addressed by everyone at the university, from individual faculty who develop students' academic interests and show them where those interests can have fuller potential for growth, to advisors and administrators who try to ensure that every student has the best chance for full academic and personal development. SEM offices play a pivotal role in the academic arena, and they also play more than just tangential roles in helping students with rounding out their college experience with full knowledge of all the opportunities that are available at the university.

At Hogwarts, the students are given much to do in a variety of theory and hands-on classes. Students perform there in the traditional fashion, having good classes, less-interesting classes, easy and difficult classes. Each student has a different view of what constitutes "good," "interesting," "easy," and "difficult," and at one point or another every student finds themselves over-worked and at the breaking point. Hogwarts relies on students' initiative and interests, with positive intervention from a variety of Hogwarts staff, to keep them at the school.

The positive reinforcement and encouragement comes from favorite faculty, parents, and peers. Students new to Hogwarts have the watchful eye and giant presence of Hagrid, who is huge, friendly, and well-intentioned, but who does not always employ best practices. Returning students are under the more-or-less personal tutelage of a faculty member -- sometimes the seemingly omniscient Albus Dumbledore, sometimes the benevolent Minerva McGonagall, sometimes the imposing Severus Snape, and sometimes the peculiar but well-intentioned Mad-Eye Moody. Haphazard and bizarre as it appears, retention at Hogwarts is successful. In only one instance that we know of does Hogwarts lose students -- the intrepid, rebellious, and entrepreneurial Weasley brothers leave Hogwarts to form a company specializing in all kinds of magical jokes and pranks. All-in-all, it is not a

bad record, although it may be that retention is due not so much to the effectiveness of administration, but to the idiosyncrasies of Hogwarts: the magical feasts; the Quidditch games and intramural activities; and the academic activities and curriculum of Hogwarts designed to keep students on task and discourage them from spending excessive time at The Three Broomsticks.

Retention efforts at a university with upwards of 15,000 students are not always as personalized and never involve teams of athletes on flying brooms. But students at our universities do have access to support services that are designed to make success at college more likely. In our world, retention is more intentional than at Hogwarts. Retention is typically a collaborative effort with advisors, colleges, and student affairs offices, and it is most successful when the SEM offices are recognized by the university as more than admission conduits and class schedulers.

For “veteran” students, the key to retention is not very different from the services and information that attracted the students in the first place. Equity and access to classes is critical, of course, as students do have goals that mean moving beyond the baccalaureate level. Useful information on financial opportunities, progress toward degrees, advising, and special opportunities, such as internships, foreign study, research opportunities, etc., are also what enriches the experience for any student.

The key for SEM units is to determine, in collaboration with the appropriate university entities, the most effective way to impart the information. Notifying students of priority registration schedules, deadlines of all sorts, degree audit and progress reports, and other more-or-less recurring information is important. Notifying students of exceptions – for example, academic standing warnings, degree completion obstacles, academic progress warnings from the financial aid office – is critical and results in the most difficult issues if the information is somehow not received.

Finding the most effective vehicles for that communication is as important for the established students as it is for newly-recruited students. Emails are effective for some, and others will look for information on SEM web sites, college sites, or through word-of-mouth. As noted below, blogs and online chats are increasingly useful means of communication to some students.

Communication, Technology and Collaboration

As noted in the opening section on admissions and retention, communication with students before and after matriculation is one of the key constructs of SEM. It commences with initial student interest in our schools, and then helps create an environment where students can thrive.

Meeting the institutional objectives and at the same time creating a service environment that helps students achieve their educational goals is a complex task that has to maximize efficiencies and effectiveness. Where the Hogwarts scenario

can rely on potions, spells, enchantments, and the latest version of wizard technologies, our task is bound more tightly by muggle reality. However, that is not to say that magic doesn't occur, it's just less spectacular than what is typical in the adventures that Harry and his friends typically face.

Owls, Howlers and Enchantments versus Portals, Web Sites, Email, Blogs, and Chat

It is not easy for a Hogwarts student to ignore a message brought to his or her attention by a loyal and unerring owl. It is *impossible* to ignore the occasional howler. The other means of communications, from magical announcements to newspapers that include animated photos and text, also make it relatively easy for Hogwarts to get and attract the attention of students.

The matter of communicating with students is a little more daunting for us. Currently, the issue is not that communication avenues don't exist, it is that so many types of communication are available that it is frequently difficult to find the one that is most effective. The answer in most instances is that one medium or type of communication is usually never the most effective model. So, while Hogwarts typically relies on staid and conventional communication models like owls, the floo network, and newspapers that have the equivalent of streaming video on the pages, in some instances there is no alternative but to use the attention-grabbing howler. Even the most oblivious student has no choice but to pay attention when parents or Hogwarts send a howler.

Not too long ago, email was the surest way to contact the modern student, though in the last few years even email has been augmented with portals, with communication prompted by specific events (for example, applications for graduations), and with communication intended to alert students when difficulties arise, such as academic warning, probation, and suspension, financial aid issues, and registration holds that prevent students from enrolling in future terms.

Blogs are popular, not just in the general online environment as a means to post commentary on current events and facilitate debate, but they are also increasingly useful as a way to address the registration-related and general administrative issues that students bring up. In addition, blogs can provide information that deals with the specific questions or concerns that students have, at the time the concern is voiced. The OSU Admissions Office employs a blog that addresses topics as varied as voting reminders, campus activities, and specific OSU-related subjects, such as new academic programs, the new emergency alert system, and other areas that students often find at the top of their interest level. The information is timely, specific, and often provides avenues for students to widen their own investigation of related questions.

Similarly, “live” chat is one customer service component that in some instances is the preferred means of communications. SEM offices at OSU are experimenting with live chat communication with students. The chat topics are nearly always specific, and because of that, the pathway for students to initiate a live chat with a member of the registrar’s or admission’s staff is tailored to try to provide much of the information to students before they need to ask a question. The feature is a customized communication strategy, and it sometimes occurs that the chat leads to a phone call to resolve the question. It may not be “instant” information gratification, but even in those instances, the addition to the ways by which we communicate with students is a plus.

For every message to students, it is the content and clarity that are critical. All SEM units are sensitive to the idea that students are not steeped in the terminology and background of registrar offices, financial aid, and admissions. Similarly, ensuring that the message is received by the student is essential, with portals, targeted email, population selection programs for specific sets of student, and, increasingly, blogs and live chat being used to target the students with helpful information.

The challenge to communication is significant, and creating foolproof communication – in content and delivery – may never actually happen. But using an array of communication vehicles and collaborating with appropriate offices so that useful and timely information is sent to students will ensure that communication is as effective as possible for the largest number of students.

Technology - Self-Service, Online Processes and Customer Service

In addition to the communication technology, there are the online processes that make it easier for students to complete the administrative tasks they have to do. From applying for admission, to applying for and managing financial aid and scholarship items, to registering for classes and applying for graduation, online processes have been designed to allow students to conduct this business on their own and with great flexibility.

In this respect, it may be that universities and colleges have some advantages over the Hogwarts model. Hogwarts students, for example, seem to be registered using a block registration model. Students have little say in who their instructors are or when they are in class, and their electives conform to a rather esoteric wizarding view of general education requirements. Customer service at Hogwarts also seems to depend on the general emotional state of Hagrid, Argus Filch (the Hogwarts caretaker whose mean and nasty demeanor sometimes rises to mere unpleasantness), or any of the other faculty who students might happen across.

The self-service tools that universities and colleges have developed are designed to create efficiencies wherever possible, yet never preclude a

specific, personal response to questions of all types. Online processes and self-service capabilities are always created with an eye toward allowing students to conduct as much of their own business as possible, as successfully as possible.

The Registrar's Office at OSU has implemented a series of online, video tutorials that augment the online processes. The tutorials provide short, step-by-step instructions for online registration, wait-list registration, ordering transcripts, and other online tasks. These informational presentations both increase the success of students with the online processes, and decrease the number of questions that come to the staff. The student and advisor feedback to the tutorials has been very positive, and plans call for more of the tutorials for specific tasks, including faculty online processes.

Finally, every SEM staff member also recognizes that there are instances where no amount of online flexibility will allow every student to find the answer to every question or complete every transaction without assistance. For those instances, personal interaction is always available.

Collaboration - SEM and the Campus Community

Hogwarts has, to all appearances, a tradition of fits and starts when it comes to collaboration. There are the four houses, whose friendly competition turns from time to time to fiercer and less friendly terms. Instructors and administrators compete for time and attention, and regardless of the similarity to real campus politics, they are primarily reminders of what the campus should never become. There are no real student support offices, while the offices that do impact the students' progress – for example, the Ministry of Magic – are often at odds with the faculty and administration of Hogwarts.

Universities and colleges are often in much better circumstances at almost every level when it comes to collaboration. SEM units can find willing partners in student support offices, advising offices, and department schedulers. Not all SEM units are organizationally structured within student affairs; however, an organizational structure that locates SEM offices in student affairs or in academic affairs is not an impediment to collaboration.

At OSU, SEM units are located within the Division of Student Affairs, and each SEM office works in tandem with academic units on everything from recruiting, to advising and orientation, to scheduling and access to courses, to helping students manage their progress to degree completion.

The Division of Student Affairs has adopted a theme of “student health” for our offices, and that theme has helped to focus the efforts of all Student Affairs offices, including SEM, on improving the student experience and creating an atmosphere where students can make healthy choices in all aspects of their university experience.

Summary - It's Magic

Actually, it's not magic. However, the work of SEM units is often as successful as the most effective potion or incantation. Hogwarts is magical and definitely enchanting, and the comparisons from the wizard academy to the hard and complex work of SEM organizations are tenuous at best. The objectives, though, are the same: student success and improved student experience, and independence and empowerment for all students.

The outcomes that SEM looks to are primarily the realization by students of their educational goals. The personal development that complements the achievement of academic goals is inextricable, and an optimal university experience is exactly what SEM tries to contribute to for each individual student. The work of strategic enrollment management offices cannot be individualized for every student, but the tools that are available and the strategies that can be employed by these offices do often make an enormous difference in the university experience for students – a difference that goes far beyond admission, registration, and financial aid. It is that intent that is one of the defining characteristics of strategic enrollment management.

About the authors: Kate Peterson is the Assistant Provost for Enrollment Management at Oregon State University. Prior to her work as Assistant Provost, Kate was the Director of the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships at OSU. Tom Watts is an Associate Registrar at Oregon State University, where he has worked in the Registrar's Office since 2001. This article was strengthened by the careful editing and valuable comments of Sonia Caamano, Associate Registrar at the University of San Francisco, and with reference to much of the work done by all staff in the EM units at Oregon State. Email addresses: kate.peterson@oregonstate.edu and tom.watts@oregonstate.edu