

 VIEW FROM THE TOP

# SEM As a Connector: Building Relationships in a New Normal

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This article seeks to make the case for how relationships are essential to meeting the tapestry of student needs by examining experiences and challenges of several student threads in that tapestry, using both two-year and four-year institutional perspectives. How faculty, staff, and administrators respond—or don't—in building rapport and connections that help students feel they belong ultimately ensures institutional enrollment health, the core aim of SEM. This article also examines how the 2020 pandemic has disrupted our ability in the twin pillars of SEM—recruitment and retention—to meet student needs, not just with transactional services but with the deeper bonds of belonging.

We see a foundational value of strategic enrollment management (SEM) as a connector between students and institutions, both in recruitment and retention. Whether the toolset is data analytics to predict student persistence and prescribe interventions or the magic a faculty member spins in the classroom to engage her students one-on-one, we are about building relationships. The complexity of those relationships reflects the tapestry of our students' life experiences and aspirations. We no longer see traditional students as “normal” and non-traditional students as “the other.” The new normal is the diversity of the student threads in that tapestry of higher education.

In normal times, strategic enrollment management (SEM) has a full arsenal of tools to connect prospective

students to campuses and then form relationships for student success after enrollment. Institutions visit high schools, attend college fairs, hold open houses, and send mailings, emails and texts to students. Campuses try to engage parents and students. Students go through similar processes: recruitment, application, enrollment, orientation, financial aid, and advising. However, in the virtual space required by a global pandemic, students' only ties to their campuses have been through their computer screens. SEM professionals still need to build connections and relationships, but this is a new normal. How can we ensure that our students feel they belong and are engaged in the full education process?

We submit that, while the pandemic raises new issues, ensuring that students belong and engage is a

cornerstone of SEM in *any* setting or time. And that requires a clearer understanding of the relationship side of what we do in SEM. The rock-ribbed importance of data in SEM can sometimes mask the human nature of why students come and stay at college. Connections and relationships need to be the principle that keeps students at the center of what we do. We need to appreciate the process of connecting students to institutions and then using those connections to build relationships with faculty, staff, and other students. The sense of belonging that comes from that process can be a key factor in student success.

Between the two of us, we have worked at a wide range of colleges and universities in our careers—four-year and two-year, commuter and residential, urban and rural, private and public. Our lived experience has given us perspective on what challenges face students and what makes them feel they are part of the campus community, in or out of the classroom. Our commitment to SEM has given us tools to make connections and build relationships. Using our individual lenses, we focus on student groups with particular needs for connections, partnerships that help create relationships, and SEM tools that guide us.

## Isolation at College: A Need for Relationships

Students who attend both residential and commuter campuses, four-year universities, and community colleges express feelings of isolation, of not belonging in the midst of crowds of other students, faculty, and staff. “In a 2019 survey at the University of California, Davis, half of college freshmen said making friends was more difficult than they’d expected” (Murthy 2020, Section II, 3021–23). A 2014 University of Washington study found that 41 percent of students who transferred or left the university said their decision to leave was influenced by “feeling socially alone” (Murthy 2020, Section II, 3052). One student, who might speak for college students of all ages and circumstances, lamented, “If I left campus and never returned, there wouldn’t be anyone that I would miss, nor would I feel missed by others” (Murthy 2020, Section II, 3057).

A mid-Atlantic regional university, in surveying its freshmen and sophomores about their needs for reopening the campus after the pandemic, found that these younger students were adamant about wanting in-person classes. In an interview (Henderson 2020), the president said they felt that the pivot to online had robbed them of their ability to connect to the campus and feel that they belonged. “We need to belong to communities of people—neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and acquaintances—with whom we experience a sense of collective purpose and identity,” noted Murthy (2020, Section II, 3495–3496). Even encounters as seemingly inconsequential as “micro-moments” (Section II, 3692) and small, incidental interactions such as a “flicker of recognition and a welcoming smile” (Section II, 3622) encountered as one walks across a campus can connect a student to something larger than herself.

## The Role of SEM in Belonging: Data and Trust to Connect and Relate

What role can strategic enrollment management play in connecting students with an institution? The literature of SEM illustrates the essential elements of enrollment management as the three faces of SEM: structure, planning, and leadership (Smith and Kilgore 2006; Henderson and Yale 2008; Henderson 2012; 2017). “The successful enrollment management program integrates these three components—‘faces’—of SEM into something that is greater than the sum of its parts. Blending the three faces of SEM requires an understanding of the complex dynamics that shape the university’s enrollment environment” (Henderson 2012, 102). However, the blending of these three faces of SEM depends in large measure on a fourth face: the community face. It is quintessentially a human one, about building relationships: “Understanding how to create and then nurture relationships in the campus community—whether with faculty, staff, or students—will help the enrollment manager to structure, plan, and lead...on her campus. If she also ensures that she is serving not just the external markets of prospective students but also the internal campus community members, she can be assured of success” (Henderson 2012, 104).

A relationships emphasis to SEM gives it a more focused and prioritized role in collegiate institutions. “If we look at the Community Face of SEM as a way of integrating its separate elements by bringing them to bear on the success of individual students [using data as a toolset] through partnerships and collaborations, there is even more power in the SEM approach” (Henderson 2017, 145).

SEM, in a sense, uses all of its data and technology tool sets to connect students to campuses. However, successful recruitment goes further than just connections: it builds a relationship of trust, as exhibited in [this video](#) of Suzanne Lepley (2020), Kalamazoo College’s director of admissions. If a student feels she belongs before she is even on campus, the chances of her staying to graduate are significantly increased. Once she is on campus, the work of SEM is to connect her to support services and campus life by building relationships that go beyond involvement to true engagement in her learning in the curriculum and the co-curriculum (Henderson 2017).

## Stan Henderson’s Perspective

### *Building Community: From Flickers of Recognition to Engagement*

*When I first became vice chancellor at the University of Michigan-Dearborn, I noticed a campus “vibe” that struck me as different from the usual institution of higher education. It was a warmer, more engaging place where one might get Murthy’s “flicker of recognition” walking across campus. I decided this was not an institution of higher education but a community of higher education. I started to use the language of community to introduce the university to prospective students and families and then to describe us whenever I spoke on campus. I used it to talk about participation and contribution, about how to act on campus—“Take those stupid buds out of your ears and LOOK at people and say ‘Hello’ when you walk across campus!” It resonated, and soon students were quoting me—“As Vice Chancellor Henderson says, we are a community of higher education.” One of my happiest moments was the first time a student, instead of quoting me, said,*

*“At UM-Dearborn, we are a community.” They had internalized the concept and would pass it on to others without it being driven by me (Stan Henderson).*

The concept of a university as a community gives a powerful tool for building relationships with prospective students—and their parents. You welcome students into a place where they can see themselves as members, participants expected to contribute and make a difference. If they will be members of a community, they will belong—and the community will look out for them. When I told parents that we expected their students to be members of the campus community and to contribute, they looked knowingly at their spouses and nodded: it was the kind of place they wanted their students to be. “We talk about differentiators in SEM. Here is a quintessential one. The power of language cannot be dismissed, and the images that the word ‘community’ brings to mind give an identity to our campus that reinforces what faculty want to emphasize in terms of engagement in the classroom. In a community you do not just sit in class without engaging with the professor and classmates. You participate, contribute—and without knowing it, you belong!” (Henderson 2017, 152).

Community as a concept goes beyond recruitment to become a hallmark of persistence and student success. Students connect to the university through community behavior. They contribute to the academic community through engagement in the classroom, thereby investing in their success. And they participate outside of class in on-campus jobs or student organizations and build their sense of belonging. At the University of Michigan-Dearborn, that expectation was set at orientation by telling students they had a *community* obligation to engage with faculty—and even to greet people on the sidewalk as they walked across campus.

### *In SEM, Each Has a Role*

The essence of enrollment is the relationships we develop with those who would be, or already are, our students. The tools we have to take the first steps to build those relationships are the data that tell us who those students are: their backgrounds, their preparation, their

successes, and their missteps. The data help to connect students to resources, and the resources—and the faculty and staff who deliver them—move the connections into relationships.

SEM should be instrumental in determining which messages will connect prospective students to campus and build ongoing relationships with them once they enroll. Part of the SEM role is, in and of itself, building collaborative relationships with faculty, staff, and administrators to identify messages and services, build consensus around them, and instill them into everyone's vocabulary and actions. If everybody—faculty, staff members, and administrators—can articulate these kinds of consensus messages and deliver targeted services, the campus takes on more coherence and consistency. This, in turn, models what students will soon realize is a common bond that ties them to the university. It gives a foundation for engagement, which leads to persistence and success (Henderson 2016).

Each of us in a SEM environment has a role in building relationships—a role of action, of walking the talk around the culture of our campuses.

*Faculty* teach, mentor, and advocate for students.

*One day while I was vice chancellor for enrollment management and student life, a faculty member with a particularly crusty disposition, known especially for his love of students and for never having met an administrator he liked, came to see me unannounced. He sat in my office and said, almost accusingly, "My students tell me they like you. Why is that?" His experience didn't suggest that students would, or should, like administrators, and he wanted to see for himself who I was, in case he had to warn them not to be conned by another administrator on the dark side. I must have convinced him I was genuinely on the students' side: when a student who did NOT like me sent a nasty message to the world pillorying me, this faculty member sent me an email, "I have seen the latest missive about you. It would appear that you are either the anti-Christ or a man wronged. I doubt it is the former" (Stan Henderson).*

*Staff* serve and develop students—and not just those in so-called "professional" roles. On one of my campuses, a

family was on their way from the parking structure to an admissions appointment. They stopped at a campus map to check their bearings close to where a groundskeeper was mowing. The staff person stopped his mower and came over to the family, greeted them, and asked if he could help them find where they were going. Having someone who mows lawns show interest in you is the stuff an admissions director's dreams are made of.

On one campus, a veteran ID checker at the dining hall has more visibility and affection than the president: "Chip" greets each student with a warm remark or a menu tip of the day, accompanied with enthusiastic good humor. Her simple relationship building shows the university's students—especially first generation students—the campus is not just people with multiple degrees and titles, but also folks just like their own families, making it a familiar place where they can belong.

These examples put the lie to the bias that line staff "just stay in their lane," maintaining the transactional nature of their jobs without thinking about how they can develop relationships with students and make them feel a part of the campus community.

*Administrators* serve and facilitate. Enterprise leaders can sometimes be isolated from student relationships by bureaucracy and the corporatization of higher education. However, leadership also requires a focus on the well-being of students. Developing services that support and ensure processes are pathways, not barriers, should be administrators' enterprise contribution to relationship building. Administrators can also build students' sense of belonging by being visible. A president who uses a Segway to move across campus, a vice chancellor who is a cheerleader for student achievement, and a dean who attends student organization meetings model how *everyone* should behave in a community.

### ***In the Beginning: Parents as Partners in Relationships***

Ninety-six percent of parents in one survey singled out the development of strong moral character as a priority for college. Yet, in a study of their students, two-thirds believed that their parents would rank academic success over empathy for others. There is a gap between what

parents appear to value and what their students think they do (Murthy 2020, Section II, 3949). Enrollment professionals can be instrumental in narrowing that gap.

*This meshed with my experiences when I talked about “Roots and Wings” with parents of incoming students. I would ask a room of 200 parents, “How many of you expect your student to have all As after the first term?” Maybe a half dozen hands would go up. “But,” I would say, “When I ask your students that question, probably 30% would raise their hands.” How can that miscommunication happen? Well, how do we often talk about grades with our children? “Your mother and I only want you to do your best.” Many incoming freshmen were high achieving students in high school; they know if they do their very best, they can get all As. Ergo, Mom and Dad must expect all As.*

*I would then suggest how parents might talk with their students about the realities of grades in the first term of college: “You know, I heard at orientation that grades tend to fall in the first term. Have you thought about what you might do to reduce that drop?” These kinds of interactions were intended to develop connections and arm our parent partners with resources to help their students be successful. Four years (or more) later at graduation, parents would remind me of the insights they took away from those orientation discussions (Stan Henderson).*

## Residential Living and Belonging

Relationships abound on residential campuses. Tinto (1993) writes that “residence halls help newcomers to find an early physical, social, and academic anchor during the transition to college life” (125). Erb, *et al.* (2015) demonstrate how student identity is strengthened by hall symbols and competitions while interactions are enhanced by signature events, and professional support staff and living learning communities build solidarity.

J. K. Rowling’s creation of the wizarding world culture at Harry Potter’s Hogwarts with its houses and their trappings (including a house ghost), Quidditch matches, and engaged staff such as Hagrid the groundskeeper brilliantly illustrates the concept. All of these elements improve students’ sense of belonging,

integrating them into a community of support through relationships. Their integrated experiences lead the students to a sense of solidarity and ties to the school, “fostering the persistence of individual first-year students” (Erb, *et al.* 2015, 4).

Significantly, Braxton, Hirschy, and McClendon (2004) note that residence halls will not provide this function as effectively for students whose “cultures of origin do not resemble the dominant culture of the social communities of their college or university” (33). Student success professionals will need to provide services outside residence halls that can provide an anchor for students such as underrepresented minorities or those who are first in their families to attend college. Building connections for specific students in multiple spaces will extend the impact of residence halls in connections and relationships.

## Faculty Engaging with Students

Research shows that “student–faculty relationships are the most crucial connection within a collegiate community” (Duberstein 2009). Students with “strong connectedness with college instructors reap many benefits, including: better persistence, engagement, and effort.” (Brown and Starrett 2017). Students who feel connected to faculty can have increased motivation and investment and feel a sense of security and comfort (Brown and Starrett 2017). However, research also suggests that only slightly more than 50 percent of students report rapport with faculty (Buskist and Savile 2001). Parks and Taylor (2020) find that only 19 percent of students are confident that they will have quality education or relationships in the online environment of the pandemic.

*At one campus, while I was assisting with developing strategic enrollment planning, a college dean asked me to do a workshop with his faculty to develop better rapport with their students. During a student focus group before the workshop, I asked what students needed from their professors. The ensuing discussion was revealing: “Some students are resistant to reaching out for help—they’re overwhelmed, but they won’t seek help for fear of seeming dumb,” said student A. Student B continued, “There needs*

*to be an ability to see that not everybody is getting it. Too often, professors look around from the board, say, ‘Everybody got it?’ and turn immediately back to the board to go on.” “Yeah,” said Student C, “don’t just plow ahead; stop and back up to try another angle!” (Stan Henderson).*

To address concerns during the pandemic, the registrar’s office provides Elon University faculty with student data that alerts them to aggregate characteristics of the students in front of them. Data dashboards for each class lay out the profile of students enrolled: the average and median GPA; home regions; distribution of academic majors; and aggregate counts of those with leadership, service, internship, research, and other types of engagement experiences. Faculty can use the student data to highlight potential student interest in the subject matter based on their experiences as well as anticipate and respond to challenges students may have in the class. The data are a toolset for building classroom rapport (Parks and Taylor 2020).

On some campuses, faculty benefit from partnerships with student service units in building positive relationships and engagement in the classroom. The Simon Fraser University’s (2020) Health Promotion department and the university’s Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) initiated a project on creating conditions for well-being in learning environments. Literature and evidence relating to the impact of well-being on academic success formed the foundation of the project. This built buy-in among faculty.

Faculty, staff, and students developed ten conditions for well-being in learning environments:

- Social Connection
- Optimal Challenge
- Civic Engagement
- Instructor Support
- Inclusivity
- Personal Development
- Services and Supports
- Positive Classroom Culture
- Flexibility
- Real Life Learning

Student recommendations identified faculty champions to provide examples already being used in SFU classes for each of the conditions. Significantly, “The focus on well-being was not an add-on to faculty members’ already heavy workload, but rather something that could complement their existing goals” (Stanton, *et al.* 2017, 158). More than 100 faculty have become involved in the project.

### *Different Threads in the Same Tapestry*

Doug Shapiro, the director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, laments that the mainstream media focuses on students at elite campuses while ignoring the students and institutions that are home to the vast majority of American higher education (Shapiro 2020). Indeed, first generation students, Pell eligible students, students of color, and adult students have long since moved from being “the other” to being the mainstream. Our campuses now deal with a tapestry of students who require approaches to building connections that help them find their sense of belonging. “One size fits nobody,” Laura Wankel (2020) said in describing the future of higher education. Looking at *all* of the students in front of us in four-year institutions gets us to a better understanding of how to build relationships.

One example of looking at *all* students focuses on those who are first generation, defined as neither parent has graduated from college. They are a significant population throughout American higher education. Fifty-eight percent of American undergraduate students’ parents do not have a bachelor’s degree. Twenty percent of those first generation students who begin college will earn a baccalaureate degree. For continuing-generation students, the figure is 42 percent. Fifty-two percent of first generation students choose community colleges; but 40 percent attend four-year campuses, and 34 percent choose moderately to less selective institutions (Redford and Hoyer 2017). Besides often being under-prepared academically and under-resourced financially, these students may also have cultural and social hurdles to clear in order to make the connections that will help them feel they belong on this unfamiliar turf.

We sometimes fail to understand these students, even in our recruitment of them, with the “academic-ese” we use on our admissions websites. A study of admissions language on website pages regarding high impact practices (HIPS) shows that first generation students actually see a disconnect to programs that are ideally suited to connect them to campus and help them succeed (Thurmer 2020). The study’s analysis showed that institutions tended to position HIPS as happening outside the classroom, often in places where students might expect to need transportation to reach—something first generation students could see as a barrier. HIPS were described as happening in “real life,” visually represented as the corporate spaces of internships, not the familiar working class locations that first generation students often inhabit. The study found that visual design choices erased identity by blurring faces, removing the opportunity for students to see if students experiencing HIPS look like them. The research suggests that universities in the study were not meeting first generation students where they are, or we might go further to say SEM professionals are unsure *how to find* where they are. In fact, the web pages might be deterring these students from pursuing HIPS because, as presented, they would deter the students from choosing to participate.

Culturally, first generation parents lack “college knowledge” (Selby-Theut n.d.). Not only are their parents unable to help them navigate the college environment (Vargas 2004), only 50 percent of first generation students say their parents are supportive of the decision to attend college. These students “[live] simultaneously in two vastly different worlds while being fully accepted in neither” (Selby-Theut n.d.). In short, they may not be able to rely on family and friends for guidance during their time at college.

Socially, first generation students are less engaged on campus; they are more likely to live off-campus and are less likely to value or engage in co-curricular clubs and activities (Pike and Kuh 2005). Strikingly, they identify their best friends as full-time employees—the people with whom they work—rather than the college students with whom they sit in class. They are more likely to identify themselves as isolated and objects of dis-

crimination, and they see faculty as aloof, unconcerned with them as individuals (Selby-Theut n.d.; Mahan, *et al.* 2014).

First generation students’ disconnect from faculty puts added emphasis on the need for building rapport in the classroom to establish relationships. These students need to see faculty as interested in them, as approachable, as committed to their success as students, as being human. The campus relationships that are more likely to engage—and satisfy—first generation students are those with their faculty and the advisors, tutors, and academic coaches who support their academic work.

Faculty who take the time to understand these students’ circumstances, to appreciate the competing forces in their lives that can pull them away from their academic work, and who work to draw them into the passion of the academy will help them form connections and relationships for success. Academic programs with well-articulated learning outcomes and guideposts that point the way to the final goal will tie the first generation student to the institution and the degree and contribute to their sense of belonging. Accessible academic support services well-integrated into the curriculum meet the needs of students who often work sixteen or more hours per week (often off-campus) and live off-campus. If they joined co-curricular activities, they would be more likely to choose programs such as faculty-led learning communities offered through academic departments (Mahan, *et al.* 2014).

Additional programming to build a sense of belonging might include programs that would connect first generation students with faculty and staff on campus who were themselves the first in their families to attend college. Seeing role models of first generation students who are now successful professionals connects students to people who understand their challenges and helps them feel they can belong in college. Western Washington University (n.d.) posts photos and information on first generation faculty and staff. Wichita State University (n.d.) solicits First Gen Forerunners (faculty and staff who were first generation) and Supporters (those who want to connect with first generation students to help them be successful) to create a sense of commu-

nity. Florida Atlantic University (n.d.) has an Office of First Generation Student Success that supports a structured co-curricular program to engage these students in a community environment around high impact practices and extracurricular opportunities.

### **Connections to Attack Inequity: “Piecemeal Doesn’t Work”**

There are many inequities in higher education; one of the most significant is the discrepancy between graduation rates of Pell eligible (often those from first generation and/or underrepresented minority groups as well as from lower socio-economic levels) and non-Pell eligible students at four-year institutions. A 2015 study conducted by the Education Trust of over three-quarters of public and nonprofit bachelor’s institutions showed that Pell students had a 51 percent graduation rate compared to 65 percent for non-Pell students. Forty-five percent of institutions studied had a gap of more than 10 percentage points; 96 had gaps greater than 20 percentage points. One institution had a gap of 61 percentage points between its Pell and non-Pell students (Nichols 2015).

There is no silver bullet in determining how to improve graduation rates of Pell students—or other groups of students—at four-year colleges. However, reports suggest that there are some commonalities of practice at institutions that are making a difference in closing the graduation gaps. One of the most significant is a commitment to make student success an institutional priority from the groundskeepers to the front-line staff to faculty to the administration. Then, into this sense of community, this we’re-all-in-this-together-for-the-students ethos, they introduce intentional use of data—collection, analysis, and application—to identify at-risk students. And they use the data to design personalized interventions that enhance the ability to succeed in academics, the social environment of the campus, and with finances. “In short: leadership, data, and targeted supports” (Whistle and Hiler 2018) that connect and build relationships are provided.

The Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (APLU) honored the University of California, Riverside with its 2016 Degree Project Completion Award

(Grant 2016). In accepting the award the provost of UC Riverside at the time credited a campus task force for driving the significant improvement in Pell student (and overall) graduation rates. As described by the chair of the initiative, “The task force focused on providing the right number and distribution of seats in classes, the creation of structured course plans, investment in academic support programs that work, and changing the three-courses per term norm among students” (Grant 2016). UC Riverside’s chancellor, Kim Wilcox, championed the *integration* of the university’s portfolio of support programs. He described a “network connecting programs and the students in those programs across the academic, the social, the cultural” (Hebel 2014). Too often, he says, “we take these small pieces for this group of students we think are at risk or these students in this situation, and think that will fix the problem when all we’re doing is trying to help them with a much bigger environment that exists. ... We have to think in a much more integrated and integral fashion across all the dimensions” (quoted in Hebel). In other words, piecemeal doesn’t work.

Georgia State University (n.d.), in its equally successful work to improve graduation rates and student success generally (the university is a 2013 APLU winner), employs “a consistent, evidenced-based strategy based on...student-centered initiatives” (Georgia State University n.d.). These begin by addressing common barriers, such as missing financial aid verification forms and failure to sign-up for orientation, that keep admitted students from enrolling in college. Once the students are enrolled, the Georgia State LIFT (Learning, Income, and Family Transformation) program, focused on combining data-driven academic advisement with scholarships, employment opportunities, and leadership training to make early connections. LIFT uses more than 800 analytics-based alerts to track undergraduates daily, identify at-risk behaviors, and have advisors intervene.

To build on these data-driven *connections*, GSU facilitates the development of actual *relationships* through freshmen learning communities and meta majors. Eighty percent of GSU freshmen engage with small cohorts organized around these “meta majors,” group-



ings of academic interests, instead of specific majors, to help students find their own communities and explore academically in GSU's embedded career/graduate school planning initiative, College to Career.

### ***SEM and the Strategic Building of Best Practices: A Cautionary Note***

The considered issues and experienced solutions mentioned above should not be taken as templates that can be laid down on any campus and moved into positive outcomes. The normal reaction, when anyone in academia considers issues and challenges, is to go straight to solutions, into the weeds chasing shiny objects and squirrels. "We can do XYZ. Or this could work. We need ABC." In a way, it is human nature, but it is exacerbated in higher education because of how faculty, particularly, are trained. Doctoral programs teach students to do research to solve problems. Instinctively, academics go for the solutions.

That, in turn, leads to the search for "best practices," the quintessential shiny objects. "Just tell us what has worked someplace else, and we can get started implementing it here." However, there is no set of best practices from another institution that can be laid over a campus and solve all of the issues that need to be addressed to help students make connections and succeed.

Best practices are contextual. What works on one campus, even one similarly sized and situated, might not work at another. When recruiting a student, admissions officers will tell her that she needs to look for the best match between her personality and the personality of the various schools she is considering. That college personality, the institutional culture and history, is a paramount influencer of which SEM program or organizational structure will work. That is not to say that culture and the influence of history preclude any action or change, but they can either impede change if ignored or accelerate action if harnessed. And they will shape both change *and* action regardless.

A successful blueprint for SEM planning argues for starting with the institutional strategic plan. Grounding what happens in SEM with what the institution establishes as guiding principles and priorities in the

strategic plan, will inform practice in SEM. In a very real sense, it will allow a university or college to build its own best practices in enrollment because the strategic alignment will prioritize and focus actions. An institutional strategic alignment focused on success of first generation students will recognize and seek to emulate the efforts of Chip, the dining hall checker, with other university staff such as residence hall custodians, expanding a sense of belonging among students. What is chosen as the final organization of programs, initiatives, and structure for SEM, in conjunction with the institutional strategic plan, will show results and be recognized by other campuses as best practices they will hold up to emulate.

### ***Recognizing the Changing SEM Blueprint for Different Institutions***

Consider that SEM planning is a blueprint that, many times, has to be continually adjusted to the ever-evolving campuses, and world around us. The onset of the pandemic showed institutions where they were solid, where they were weak, and where they were simply covering known issues. Each campus is reacting in its own way to the new normal, and adjustments on campuses continue. In this vein, we should pause and remind that much of the first part of our article primarily dealt with four-year institutions. Many ideas and concepts found in the first section also apply to two-year institutions. However, two-year institutions have their own unique issues and challenges. These campuses also have to deal with a new normal, and we will now present a look at some of two-year institutions' unique characteristics and challenges.

### ***Kevin Pollock's Perspective***

*I have been fortunate to have worked at four-year private and public universities, as well as several community colleges, providing insight into similarities and differences between the types of institutions. One of the most notable differences lies in the recruitment and service area of the two-year institutions, as they traditionally recruit a majority of their students within their districts, as opposed to the*

*four-year institutions who cast a wider net for students. For example, while I was a vice president at a small, rural, community college in Michigan, our entire service area, while over two counties wide, only had around a dozen high schools, many with small student enrollments from which we could recruit students. While this can limit potential student enrollment, it also allows for a better connection with the local communities. After all, the word community is in our name. This word should not just represent our connection with our physical community, but also represent our need and desire to connect students with our campus community. With this in mind, in this section of our article, I am going to present the unique challenges facing the two-year colleges and their students (Kevin Pollock).*

### ***Diversity of Students, Diversity of Challenges***

Like their four-year counterparts, community colleges have a desire to find better methods to connect students to their campuses. The bulk of four-year institution students come directly from high school and are considered “traditional.” Besides enrolling these traditional students, community colleges have students who are older, have been away from academic settings longer, and come from lower socioeconomic settings. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) recognizes nontraditional students as those who identify with at least one of the following criteria: “be at least 25 years old, attend school part-time, work full-time, be a veteran, have children, wait at least one year after have school before entering college, have a GED instead of a high school diploma, be a first-generation student, enroll in a non-degree program, or reenter a college program.” (MacDonald 2018).

A look at the 2019–2020 American Association of Community College’s Fast Facts sheet (AACC 2020) can show the diverse nature of the community college student body. Community college students represent 41 percent of all college undergraduates, and their average age is 28. The demographics show that 45 percent of students are White; 26 percent are Hispanic; and 13 percent are Black. Nearly 30 percent of students are first generation; 57 percent are women; and nearly two-thirds are

attending classes on a part-time basis. Sixty-two percent of full-time students work, while 72 percent of part-time students work while attending classes. Nearly 60 percent of students are receiving some sort of financial aid, with 33 percent of students receiving Pell Grant assistance (AACC 2020). When one compares the NCES definition of nontraditional with the AACC Fast Facts data, it is easy to see that the definition of “nontraditional” student is essentially a “traditional” student at a community college. With 67 percent of nontraditional students dropping out of college before receiving a degree (MacDonald 2018), it is critical to connect these students with the campus at the earliest possible moment.

These students have special challenges, such as difficulty in finding a niche, knowing how to find assistance, having competing allegiances such as family and friends, and balancing finances. Low-income students are “significantly overrepresented at community colleges, and most need to strengthen both academic and nonacademic skills” (Bailey 2017). Community college students have a longer completion time for a degree, have a higher probability of being underprepared academically, and have a higher chance of enrolling in at least one developmental class. In addition, community college students may not have a singular goal of graduating with a two-year degree. Many take classes that will transfer to a four-year program, while others take classes to upgrade skills, fulfill a work requirement, or solely for the purpose of personal pleasure (Bontrager and Pollock 2009).

### ***The Challenges of Connecting with Students***

With such a unique student population, connecting students to a campus is challenging on many levels. When one understands that nontraditional students may “lack a sense of familiarity or belonging on campus, which makes it more difficult to ask for help,” how can a campus reach those students (Miller, Blakeslee and Hope 2018). There are additional challenges facing community college students. Food and housing insecurities, or an unexpected expense such as a car repair, complicate a student’s attempts at an education and can disconnect a student from a campus (Schwartz 2019).

The organizational structure of community colleges may also be an unintended hindrance to the success of attending students. “The traditional community college employs a ‘cafeteria-style’ or ‘self-service’ model. This cafeteria organization creates problems in three areas: the structure of college-level programs, the intake process and student support, and developmental education” (Bailey 2017). Community colleges must look at their organizations and determine if they are running in the best interest of their students and change accordingly.

Community college enrollments peaked in fall 2010 and have declined since. Even with projected increases starting this decade, numbers will still not reach those attained in 2010 and 2011 (Jozzkiewicz 2019). There are many reasons why students leave community colleges. These include cost, competing demands on student’s time, wasted credits, various life issues, transportation problems, childcare difficulties, work and family responsibilities, and a lack of a sense of belonging (Mintz 2019). With students finding it easy to stop and start their programs and return when it is convenient, it is critical for community colleges to find ways to strengthen the connections between students and campuses, particularly before students start classes and during their first few months.

It is imperative that community colleges connect students to faculty, support services, and the campus as early as possible. As noted in “A Matter of Degrees,” (Center for Community College Student Engagement 2012) no matter what programs or practices a college implements, there is likely to be a greater impact on student success if the design incorporates some of these multiple principles:

- A strong start, focusing on the front door, and ensuring that students’ earliest contacts and first weeks incorporate experiences that foster personal connections and enhance their chances of success.
- Clear coherent pathways that help students move through an engaging collegiate experience.
- Integrated support in recognizing time is a resource, effectively connecting students in the classroom and building support in skills develop-

ment and supplemental instruction into coursework, rather than referring students to services.

- Intensive promotion of student engagement, making it inescapable for students during their time in college (Center for Community College Student Engagement 2012).

Building upon this, community colleges can begin connecting students to the campus long before they set foot in a classroom. However, to be effective, a campus must have a solid student success plan and have campus community members know their roles and be on board with that plan. Only then can a campus efficiently contact students and begin guiding them through the various college processes.

*An excellent example of early connections with potential students can be found at St. Clair County Community College, an institution where I was honored to be president. A focus on creating a college-going culture in the service area, combined with early outreach efforts by staff and faculty, showcased multiple successful efforts to reach students. Each year, every eighth grade student in the service area toured the campus, allowing the students to experience a college but also allowing the college to make early connections and impressions on the students. The college created one of the first early colleges, allowing high school students to begin their college career while still in high school. To better connect the college to the community, the college partnered with the city where it sits and took over and renovated a junior ice arena into a premier college fieldhouse. Since that time, the college has hosted several state championship games in volleyball, basketball, and softball. These events have allowed potential students to come to the campus, while also providing a boost to the local economy (Kevin Pollock).*

### **Faculty as Connectors and Relationship Builders**

Faculty can connect with students before they ever start classes by assisting in various recruitment efforts. Faculty can visit high schools, place calls to prospective students interested in their respective programs, and attend

open houses and admissions receptions. In addition, faculty can be part of the admissions efforts by serving on enrollment committees and providing input on admissions literature pieces. Faculty are particularly interested in recruitment and retention efforts that affect their departmental enrollment as well as opportunities to share information about their programs. Therefore, care should be taken to utilize faculty assistance that helps impact department and programs (Pollock 2004). Community colleges that have early college programs with local high schools also provide faculty with an excellent chance to connect with future students.

Particularly important to adult students is feedback from instructors, especially for those students who have been away from the classroom for a few years or had difficulty in prior learning experiences. Many lack confidence in their academic abilities, do not have support outside the college, and need reassurance. These students want stronger connections with faculty and more feedback than just that of graded assignments. They want clear expectations. Adult students do not want “busy work;” they want to know that what they are learning is related to the course material and their outside lives. “Instructors who can articulate the learning outcomes of their courses and relate them to broader degree program objectives are typically very respected by adult learners (Berling 2013).

Nontraditional students may also face problems with notetaking, test taking, reading textbooks, time management, and teacher expectations (MacDonald 2018). These issues can lead to an additional problem, as many students “perceive seeking help as an admission that they are not ‘cut out’ for college, and still others seek it out too late in the semester to turn their grades around” (ideas42 n.d.). As such, they may face an additional burden of finding a support network of mentors, role models, and advisors on their own. Without these connections, these students may make decisions that adversely affect their education (Fishman Ludgate, and Tutak 2017). In addition, evidence shows that “students may underestimate the amount of study time needed to pass classes and have difficulty balancing their schoolwork with everyday obligations like work, family, and friendships.”

Faculty interaction with students can come in many forms. Faculty want to get to know students, and student office visits are among the most positive of student behaviors. Even a consistent faculty presence and participation online are important to online students (Duberstein 2009). “Studies have shown significant effects on non-traditional learners that positive, frequent involvement from instructors and advisors has on student efficacy, perception, satisfaction, motivation to learn, and thus retention” (MacDonald 2018).

### *Missed Connections*

Even the best laid plans to connect students and faculty can face setbacks, but these issues can be addressed to better support students. Building connections to college services will help ease student reluctance to seek help. A 2006 NISOD Innovation Abstract found faculty members at Austin Community College (ACC) reporting they were unaware of available student services even though the services had been promoted via multiple means, including departmental websites, emails, and newsletters. As a result, ACC Library Services “decided to promote existing student resources to faculty consistently and comprehensively in one online location” (Jones 2016). The focus was to help faculty embrace available resources to help students clear fail points, and a “Faculty Teaching Toolbox” was created to list available resources for faculty. Eventually, a “Student Learning Success Toolbox” was created to help to link services such as counseling, Blackboard, tutoring, library, and the like. Additional platforms helped with goal setting, time management, notetaking, and more (Jones 2016).

*We can believe we are reaching out to students yet can still improve our work. While I was a vice president at a small community college, we created a Women’s Resource Center, in recognition not only of the percentage of women attending classes but also to address the unique challenges many of them face while in college. During one semester, our director told me she had gotten to know a student who often came to the center for encouragement and support. The student was an adult single mom who had made the decision to attempt college later in her life.*

*She was apprehensive and decided to take a single class in her first semester to see if she was able to be successful in her endeavor. She came to the center several times over the course of the semester, filling the director in on her progress. At the end of the semester, she came in and proudly declared that she had passed her class with a C and knew she could be successful in college. She then made a statement that stunned our director. “You know, I think if I could have afforded the book for my class, I think I could have gotten a B” (Kevin Pollock).*

A major difficulty facing community colleges is their inability to provide comprehensive advising for all students. There are, at times, hundreds of students for every advisor or counselor. According to Bailey (2017): “college intake and advising often consist of a brief face-to-face or online orientation and a short meeting (not always mandatory) with an advisor, focused on registering for the first semester’s courses. Most colleges do not provide an organized process to help students form long-term goals and design an academic program to achieve those goals” (4). Community college students increasingly have shifting educational goals, the ability to stop out, and often enroll part-time; therefore, it understandable that colleges may have difficulty trying to monitor the progress of these students. Community colleges must find a way to address advising issues as they build student success plans to consistently and more effectively reach students.

### **Good Beginnings**

Campus tours and open houses provide students with the ability to get comfortable with a college campus, explore their passions, start plotting career paths, learn about financial aid, check out student organizations, and perhaps meet faculty and alumni. They can get a real feel for the college and the campus and start to make initial connections that can help them after they start classes. For the college, it is a chance to impress the student, not only with their facilities, but with their people. Friendly and caring staff and faculty can make students feel supported, and they can be the initial connections for many who might have issues and concerns later.

Connections need to go beyond the traditional methods of gathering information and sending letters and information to students to attract them to a college. Phone calls, texts, and emails are nice, but it is important to lead students to a specific outcome and put them on a pathway at the college. These connections need to be part of a strongly organized plan that continually finds ways to connect the student to the campus. They must engage and make the student feel welcome and a viable part of the campus community. The opportunities to make mundane touch points special are everywhere: open houses, placement testing, and, especially, orientations and advising appointments. As noted by Fishman, Ludgate and Tutak (2017), “Registering for courses, securing financial aid, developing study skills, mastering difficult course material, students must overcome a wide variety of obstacles on the path to graduation. Student services that are effectively targeted and delivered in a timely fashion can do much to help students along and produce better outcomes” (8).

Orientation is an excellent opportunity to connect students and their families to the campus, faculty, and support services. “Research shows that orientation services lead to higher student satisfaction, greater use of student support services, and improved retention of at-risk students” (Center for Community College Student Engagement 2012). A solid orientation provides a student with an introduction to the college’s support services, the college’s academic support network, and the utilization of additional services, such as the library. Orientation usually also connects a student with an advisor, who helps them select their initial courses and sets them on the path toward their long-term plans. Orientation should be mandatory, and, if possible, be held on the college campus. Due to COVID-19, this is not always possible. While it is difficult to replicate the on-campus experience when orientation is hosted virtually, there are still ways to engage students.

Orientation can be a single event that lasts for a couple of hours, or it can be built into a student success course that lasts an entire semester. This type of course “helps students build knowledge and skills essential in college, from study and time management skills to

awareness of campus facilities and support services. Research indicates that students who complete these courses are more likely to complete other courses, earn better grades, have higher overall GPAs and obtain degrees.” In addition, students who participate in first-year experience programs “demonstrate more positive relationships with faculty, greater knowledge and use of campus resources, more involvement in campus activities, and better time management skills” than those non-participating students (Center for Community College Student Engagement 2012). According to MacDonald (2018): “Mandatory freshman seminar courses have been on the rise because of their success. Approximately 94 percent of all postsecondary schools offer a seminar course.”

### **Connections to Relationships**

There are other methods to connect faculty and staff to students. A Project Futures research student at Portland State University and local community colleges (Miller, Blakeslee, and Hope 2018) tested evidence-based mentoring strategies with underserved students. To better connect students, Project Futures introduced Campus Champions, which combined peer mentoring plus access to trained faculty and staff, providing a “uniquely accessible network of support” for students. Campus Champions are motivated faculty and staff who volunteered as point people to provide support to under-represented students, especially those who lacked a sense of familiarity or belonging on campus. Students were better connected to tutoring and homework help, academic advising, financial aid, student groups such as LGBTQ and cultural centers, disability services, and counseling (Miller, Blakeslee, and Hope 2018).

There are numerous other methods to build an engaged campus and connect students to the community college. According to Campus Compact (2018), “[S]ervice-learning is identified as one of six high impact activities that promote deep/integrative learning and personal development among both first-year students and seniors. Engagement during the first year yields especially powerful benefits for historically underserved students.” In addition, “[O]ne of the most consistent pre-

dictors of persistence, self-reported learning gains, and GPA is ‘Active Collaborative Learning,’ which includes community-based projects as part of a regular course” (2). However, as noted earlier, Thurmer (2020) points out that the language used to introduce students to these demonstrated HIP benefits can actually disincline them to participate. SEM recruitment must be able to position these benefits in ways that speak to students where they are.

Students can be actively connected through joining clubs and campus organizations. Such participation allows students to find others with similar interests, common causes, or courses of study. Involvement in these groups allows students to create collaborative work experiences, plan activities, and perform community services, all while creating deeper connections to the campus (College of St. Scholastica 2017).

Additional methods of connecting students could be through: special orientations for transfer students; organizing and supporting student interest groups; summer bridge programs and boot camps; peer-led study groups; increased opportunities for mentoring; and creating one-stop access assistance with finances, registration, and other support services (Mintz 2019).

If community colleges want to make students feel more welcome and supported, while potentially increasing student success and completion rates, they must continually find ways to connect students to the campus. Community colleges can continue to grow, adapt, learn from best practices, and find new methods to connect with students. The benefits to those students will last a lifetime.

### **Relationships in a New Normal**

Wankel (2020) asserts that “we do traditional learners well.” However, she asks, “What about the non-traditional learners, the new normal in higher education?” The academy has historically dictated the terms of college programs—the requirements, the deadlines, the use of the credit hour and the semester. What we have enshrined in the academy may no longer meet the needs of students with multiple lives outside their educational programs. The pendulum may be shifting to the students who make up the increasingly diverse tapestry

of our collegiate institutions to determine what their education will look like. Wankel says students are increasingly declaring that what they want is, “Just in time. Just enough. Just for me.” Flexible scheduling, “bite-size” credentials, such as badges and stackable certificates that build toward a degree, fit those phrases. These approaches were around before the pandemic, but COVID-19 may be accelerating their adoption as much as it is disrupting what we’ve always done.

In many respects, COVID-19 has certainly accelerated what was already happening in instruction. Higher education responded with remarkable speed and efficiency in the face of a global pandemic, pivoting to fully online education—something the academy would never have envisioned possible in January 2020. Students on many campuses—especially those with lives beyond college—have long clamored for online programs, while institutions have cited challenges—and costs—of technology and training faculty. Faculty have too often been a major source of the resistance, and that has often stymied online program development. Still, before the pandemic, online education had been making headway on many campuses—even flagship campuses—and some undergraduate and graduate programs are being offered entirely online.

Although there were technology and faculty training issues evident in the spring of 2020, institutions—and faculty—can no longer claim that online is too difficult or too expensive or not good enough. Online opportunities will only grow moving forward. Scott Galloway, a Stern School professor at New York University, said, “Now everyone’s learning what tools, technologies, and tricks work. You need to be more animated online. You need to force the students to turn on their cameras; you need to see their faces more; you need to hold them accountable.... There’s going to be a better variety of tools... Zoom times ten” (Walsh 2020).

While faculty concentrated on improving Zoom techniques, colleges and universities, in their rush to bring students back to campus, may have given more emphasis to the tools of teaching and less to the importance of relationships. “Community is what students seek when they attend college in person” (Gessen 2020).

In that spirit of community, colleges and universities should be actively involving students to ensure they are safe and have the connections that will help them feel they belong. “Instead, they are treating them alternately as clients and as children, people to be pleased or managed” (Gessen 2020). Wayne Frederick, president of Howard University, agreed: “We have to involve and engage them in the process” (Harris 2020).

However, when the University of North Carolina’s flagship campus in Chapel Hill abruptly pivoted to online-only classes eight days after reopening, student leaders expressed dismay that administrators had ignored the concerns they had raised repeatedly through four months of planning meetings. “There was a consensus among all student leaders who were involved... that remote learning was the best and only option,” a senior student leader told *NBC News* (Wong 2020).

This experience and those on other campuses whose reopening plans were upended with early COVID-19 outbreak clusters suggest that campus leaders ignored some significant tenets that should guide enrollment planning. We sometimes say that data tell stories that raise issues that need solutions. Data in a pandemic certainly raise issues, but the solutions chosen to meet them may not have been the best for a “new normal.” The leadership of campuses in crisis may need to consider the role of the SEM community face: it puts students at the forefront (as all of these leaders have professed they do) but also suggests that in building relationships, students themselves may have new solutions to suggest.

Our backgrounds and experiences have a major impact on how we as faculty, staff, and administrators build connections and form relationships with our students. Unless those backgrounds and experiences are continually refreshed with information about our students’ circumstances, they can become biases that build barriers to understanding.

*When I do workshops for faculty on connecting with students, I focus on challenges that first generation students face in college: Without family “college knowledge,” they have no reference for navigating social and cultural issues of college, let alone financial and academic ones. During*

*one of these workshops, a faculty member put up his hand and asked, “Do we have a lot of these students?” I turned to the dean, who was in the audience, and said, “Well, Dean, I think the figure for first gen students is about 40%.” “That’s right,” he confirmed. “Oh, my gosh,” cried the professor, “I’m going to have to change everything about how I teach!” When I told my campus liaisons about this, they were dismissive of the faculty member: “Oh, we know who that was.” I had to interrupt: “Wait a minute. He came up to me after the workshop and told me he had been a fifth generation college student, and this had been a revelation to him. He genuinely was interested in changing his approach. The university needs to support this self-recognition of bias by better communication and even education of faculty about who your students are. Without that information, he will fall back on his own experience and biases” (Stan Henderson).*

The process of “continually refreshing” our own experiences with new information leads to more creative approaches to solving problems. SEM’s community face of connections and relationships is a tool that invites students to bring fresh eyes to challenges every day. Could more reliance on relations with student leaders have led to more creative approaches to safe re-openings beyond just including them in meetings? Could students who wanted to be in “bubbles” of safe practice have helped to expand learning communities beyond a residential experience into academic engagement with “pods” that offered classes in smaller segments than the traditional sixteen week semester? Would a sense of belonging, as well as the practice of safety, have developed more readily if students were living with the same students they were taking classes with? This could have given the campus more flexibility in scheduling for safety of students in the pods if infections spiked in other parts of campus. And more flexible curricular choices such as badges, the “bite-size” academic units that can be stacked to form programs, could have given students more academic options in the COVID-19 world. This could be seen as somewhat analogous to Colorado College’s (n.d.) well-established “block” approach.

The power of community as a provider of connections and builder of relationships fosters the collab-

orative nature of SEM. As the University of Michigan planned for partial reopening, administrators at the Dearborn and Flint campuses asked their students for help in achieving a safe environment. Students, in turn, created a student pledge built around mask wearing, social/physical distancing, and practicing good hygiene. It ended with a call to all students to engage in something larger than themselves, modeling what one does in a community: “For Me, For You, Go Safe, Go Blue.” (University of Michigan-Dearborn 2020). This may have contributed to positive enrollment outcomes in the fall semester; the Dearborn campus managed to maintain flat freshman enrollment, while the state’s fifteen public universities’ overall freshman numbers declined an average 7.4 percent (French 2020).

The pandemic could actually strengthen the role of relationships in SEM. In doing so, SEM professionals will be increasingly positioned as enterprise leaders with the responsibility of bringing data to the table to support creative solutions of scheduling, curriculum, and support that will connect students to the campus—virtual or otherwise.

Colleges and universities, Vowell (2020) writes, are where “large quantities of random adults are thrown together and made to coexist for years on end: the budget-minded, the lightly parented, the formerly incarcerated, the downsized, the underestimated, veterans, refugees, late bloomers, single moms, divorced dads, Bible thumpers, empty nesters, your swankier hicks, Mormons who didn’t get into Brigham Young University and a hodgepodge of souls who are working toward...a fair chance at a decent life.” This is the tapestry of American higher education today—the new normal is already reflected in who our students are. As SEM professionals we have a responsibility to these students to think beyond mere transactional services to develop connections to our campuses that, in turn, will develop into relationships to support their success. We must listen to what they tell us about their needs and be willing to design new ways of doing old jobs in partnership with them. As one wise student said of the future of higher education in the summer of 2020, “[W]hy try to make things as they were before when the world isn’t as it was before?” (Gessen 2020).



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## About the Authors



### Stanley E. Henderson

Stanley E. Henderson retired from the University of Michigan-Dearborn where he served

as Vice Chancellor for Enrollment Management and Student Life from 2005–2015. In that role, he provided leadership to campus enrollment efforts that resulted in record enrollment and championed a spirit of community to grow student engagement to new levels.

Henderson has long been a national leader in developing new models for universities to better recruit and retain students. His leadership in designing an enrollment facility at the University of Cincinnati helped to create a widely studied model of one-stop service and integrated recruitment and retention delivery.

He served as associate provost for enrollment management at the Univer-

sity of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign from 2003–2005 and as associate vice president for enrollment management at the University of Cincinnati from 1995 to 2003. Previously, he was director of enrollment management and admissions at Western Michigan University and director of admissions at Wichita State University. His roots in enrollment began as an admissions counselor at Michigan State University in 1970–1971.

He also has been deeply involved at the national level of AACRAO, where he served as the association's first vice president for enrollment management in 1991–93 and as president in 1995–96. He was a founder of the association's national SEM Conference, now in its 30th year. He is a frequent contributor to AACRAO publications, including the first history of enrollment management, as well as a frequent

presenter at state, regional, and national levels. He is also a recipient of the Distinguished Service Award and the Founders Award for Leadership. In 2014, AACRAO presented Henderson a Lifetime Achievement Award for "Outstanding Leadership in the SEM Profession" and awarded him Honorary Membership in 2015. He continues to serve the association as a senior consultant for AACRAO Consulting.

Henderson earned his bachelor's degree in political science from Michigan State University in 1969 as a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and a master's degree in government from Cornell University in 1971. He also completed course work in the doctoral program at the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign.



### Kevin Pollock

Kevin Pollock, Ph.D., is President at Central Carolina Technical College and an AACRAO Senior

Consultant. Prior to these roles, he served as the fifth president of Montgomery County Community College. Dr. Pollock has more than 38 years of education experience at four-year private and public colleges as well as community colleges. His diverse roles include college administration, strategic planning, leadership,

and enrollment management. He is a national expert on student success models, a frequent national speaker who has spoken more than 130 times at conferences and colleges, and has authored more than 20 book chapters and articles.

At Montgomery County Community College, Dr. Pollock where he oversaw the implementation of a new core curriculum and the creation of pathways for all college programs. During his tenure, the college created a new vision, mission, and

strategic plan, and updated its brand and marketing strategies. The college implemented an integrated holistic advising approach, developed through the Gates Foundation iPass grants. In addition, the college enhanced its student success models by creating short-term enrollment goals, moving to a virtual bookstore platform, and creating a 24 x 7 tutoring model.

Before arriving at Montgomery County Community College, Dr. Pollock served as president of St. Clair County Com-

munity College in Port Huron, Michigan, from 2009–2016. During his tenure, the institution experienced record enrollment, embarked on new student success initiatives, created early and middle college programs, increased its grant funding, became a leader in green initiatives, and strengthened its connections with the community. The institution

also adopted a new vision, mission and data informed strategic plan, that was tied to national best practices.

Prior to assuming a presidential role, he spent nine years as vice president of student services at West Shore Community College in Scottville, Michigan. He also held a number of leadership roles in admissions and

recruitment, and he taught middle and high school English early in his career.

Dr. Pollock holds a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education from Michigan State University and a Master of Arts in Education and Bachelor of Science in Education from Central Michigan University.