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# Integrated Interdependence:

The Emergence of Graduate  
Enrollment Management (GEM)

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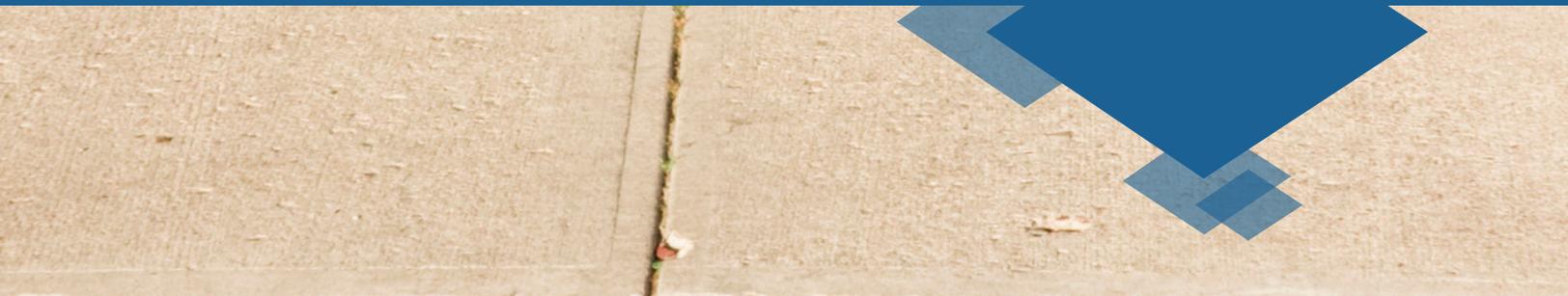
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**AS U.S. COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES** continue to grapple with rising tuition costs, increasing competition for scarce resources, and calls for more accountability (Selingo, 2013), institutions may look to strategically examine how to best recruit and retain students. At the forefront of enrollment is recruiting and admissions. At the graduate level, creating a full service graduate enrollment management (GEM) student lifecycle support operation with knowledge-based expertise in enrollment planning, data analytics, budgeting, advising, registering students, and financial aid is critical to both programmatic and institutional viability. The emerging concept of GEM may improve productivity, continuity and, above all else, create a differentiated student experience. This is especially challenging given that services for graduate students have been traditionally under-resourced as compared to undergraduate education and the GEM sector is only beginning to be formalized (Williams, 2008).



Specifically, as seen in the table below, graduate enrollment management (GEM) can be distinguished from undergraduate-focused enrollment management in that the structure of GEM is more intricate and obscure (decentralized, centralized, hybrid, etc.). Member surveys of NAGAP, the Association for Graduate Enrollment Management, revealed staffing levels are appreciably lower than undergraduate offices while role definitions at the graduate level are generally broader. GEM professionals may be asked to be cross-trained in multiple areas of the student lifecycle such as career counseling, academic advising, financial aid, and degree audits while strategically analyzing data on current, prospective, and developing markets.

Enrollment Management (Undergraduate)	Graduate Enrollment Management
Primarily centralized recruitment	Primarily decentralized recruitment
Coordinates all aspects of student lifecycle under one umbrella	Emergence from fractured/complex to coordinated and interdependent
Higher staff levels	Do more with fewer staff
Definitive starting and stopping points within primary responsibility (i.e., admissions handles admissions)	Evolution of staff roles beyond primary responsibilities (i.e., recruitment and retention services)
Campus leadership in tune with enrollment issues/needs	Perceived lack of knowledge and support from campus leadership
Academic quality = institutional	Academic quality = niche/program-based
Models based on enrollment management: enrollment committee, coordinator, matrix and enrollment management division	Models: Mostly admissions-based models centralized, decentralized, hybrid
Emerging Model: Building bridges to academic enterprise	Emerging Model: Service orientation and strengthening existing connection to faculty

**Understanding, Adapting, and Defining Graduate Enrollment Management (GEM)**

While there is a significant amount of literature on strategic enrollment management (SEM) or enrollment management in general (Bontrager, 2007; Henderson, 2012), there is an absence of academic literature on GEM. As a search term in an academic database, “graduate enrollment management” yields very few results, and only a few sources are directly related to graduate

education. While some SEM concepts can be applied to GEM, the researchers noted a need for attention to the specific needs of GEM offices. Therefore, NAGAP has established a mandate to ground the best practices of GEM in academic literature to formalize the GEM sector.

To that end, NAGAP's Research and Global Issues Committee is conducting a multi-layered research study to discover, clarify, and record themes regarding GEM practitioners' perception of GEM and how GEM fits within their institutions' SEM systems. The researchers believe identifying best practices for GEM may be beneficial in creating visibility with senior leadership and facilitating knowledge of the similarities and differences in enrollment management at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Having a clear, consistent, and commonly accepted understanding of GEM can provide insights to inform institutions' strategic planning processes.

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Given the size and complexity of this research project, the Research and Global Issues Committee identified five key phases for data collection, discussion, reflection, and reporting. In January of 2013, Phase I was launched, with focus groups of attendees at the NAGAP advanced winter professional development institute. In addition, some of the data from the most recent salary survey provided insights into the changing roles that GEM professionals are experiencing.

## Research Plan

One goal of this project was to identify trends and seek out models that integrate synchronous service delivery, and then create comparisons across enrollment management structures. Additionally, the focus groups illuminated distinguishable differences between undergraduate and graduate SEM models. This project has provided new levels of understanding to pave the way for standard best practices in GEM, and enable GEM professionals to provide innovative leadership on their campuses.

- Phase I: Focus groups with attendees at the winter institute in January 2013
- Phase II: Focus groups at NAGAP's annual conference in April 2013
- Phase III: Focus groups at the summer institute for new professionals and state chapters in July 2013
- Phase IV: Comprehensive quantitative survey distributed to NAGAP membership to collect data on a larger scale in winter 2014
- Phase V: A publication of findings, usable best practices, and an understanding of graduate enrollment management for today's professionals in winter 2015

## Findings of Phases I-III

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Phases I-III of the research study took place in various focus group sessions across the U.S. Specifically, the questions centered on members' perceptions of an assortment of topics such as organizational structures and process ownership related to GEM. In addition to focus group questions, a small data card was presented to begin documenting some of the key responsibilities members have now, which they may not have had when they first began in their position.

Out of the attendees, 74% submitted data cards. Of those respondents, 80% reported that their roles had changed from a sole emphasis on recruitment/admissions. Responsibilities reported include:

- Academic Planning/Program Development
- Advising/Counseling
- Alumni Relations/Development
- Budgeting
- Contracts and Grants
- Financial Aid/Scholarships/Fellowships
- Institutional SEM Strategic Planning Committees
- Orientation and New Student Services
- Registrar Functions
- Student Services
- Technology Implementation
- Transfer Process/Policy

## Additional Focus Group Generalized Outcomes

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Below are some overarching statements that capture a summary of the focus group responses:

- » Several questions related to communication within and across offices associated with the student lifecycle. With one being poor and five being excellent, the average response was 2.75.
- » A consistent concern existed around the "hand-off" from recruitment/admissions to new student services. Questions about collaboration between offices versus comprehensive services in a single office indicated a perception of an established continuum of services.
- » Within areas such as alumni engagement, mentoring, and other functions of enrollment management, respondents reported that many services were geared toward the undergraduate population. Participants noted the need to integrate graduate enrollment management within these

areas, or else independent efforts would be necessary.

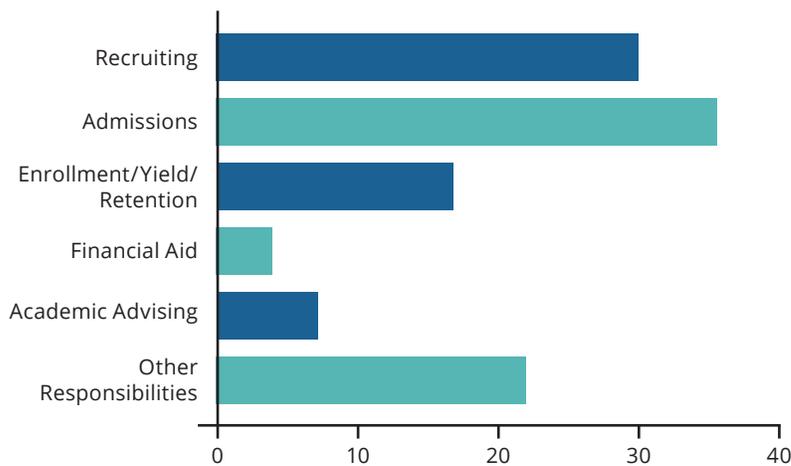
- » Respondents answered questions centered on the differences between undergraduate and graduate enrollment management. A statement was made that undergraduate is more focused on the student experience with extensive student services; at the graduate level, the tradition has been to focus on the academic program. Themes around a departure of this framework were discussed.
- » Questions about strategic alignment of GEM by institutions' senior leadership revealed a disconnect, and that strategic enrollment management tends to remain at the dean's level. Higher-level involvement was typically reserved for headcount issues or specific short-term situations.

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Select questions from the 2013 NAGAP salary survey served to compare position responsibilities, illuminate the changing composition of GEM positions, and determine how much time is devoted to each major area. Respondents were asked to break down their overall responsibilities by percentage of time spent in each of the primary GEM function areas. As revealed in the graph below, the diversification of the GEM professional is evident across student services.

### Salary Survey Findings Related to GEM Research

**For your current position, estimate the amount of time you spend on the areas listed below (should total 100%):**



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Much of GEM operates in one direction, which can vary by institution size. The first diagram below depicts an interdependent model with collaboration by necessity in support of the student lifecycle. However, this workflow continues with elements of "silo'ing," with interdepartmental collaboration a direct function of day-to-day operations. The silo represents detachment and sequestration from other student affairs offices (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014).

### Integrated Interdependence Model of GEM: Hypothesis and Assumptions

This is manifested in GEM as individual departments operating within their previously prescribed parameters (i.e., admissions, financial aid) instead of a fully integrated model.



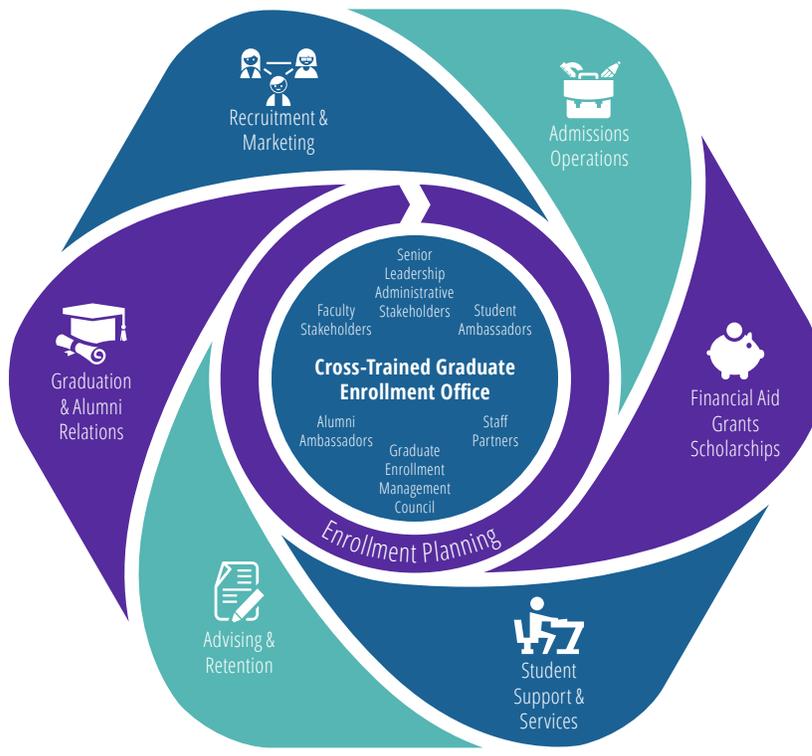
As institutions look for ways to provide a differentiated level of service while reducing costs, leaders can examine which strategic decisions could be made to develop a GEM model with the potential to accomplish increased efficacy in operations and services while realizing significant savings in personnel and other costs.

To define a true GEM model, on an operational and strategic level, GEM is both integrated and interdependent:

- GEM should be integrated in the sense that each aspect of enrollment management is in sync with the student lifecycle.
- GEM is interdependent in that when there are multiple areas of GEM, they need to rely on each other, in some cases sequentially, to support the student.

When these concepts are put together, GEM can take the form of an efficient one-stop shop with an integration of each interdependent aspect culminating in a model that serves a student from initial awareness and recruitment, through enrollment and advising, to graduation and beyond. In this model, the one-stop shop is then amplified by the way in which responsibilities are assigned and the operations of the office are implemented. Staff members are cross-trained on the traditional interdependent functions in GEM. There are primary areas in which an individual team member would specialize; however, each person would be able to step in and support students from before they apply until after they graduate. Daily operations, physical layout, and professional training are all examples of components to consider when moving toward an integrated interdependent GEM office.

Campus stakeholders in graduate education, such as upper administration and faculty, can become strategic partners in this model. Specific functions and tasks of GEM are illustrated further in the integrated interdependence model below, with an integrated interdependent cycle that is fluid and moves with students from initial awareness to alumni.



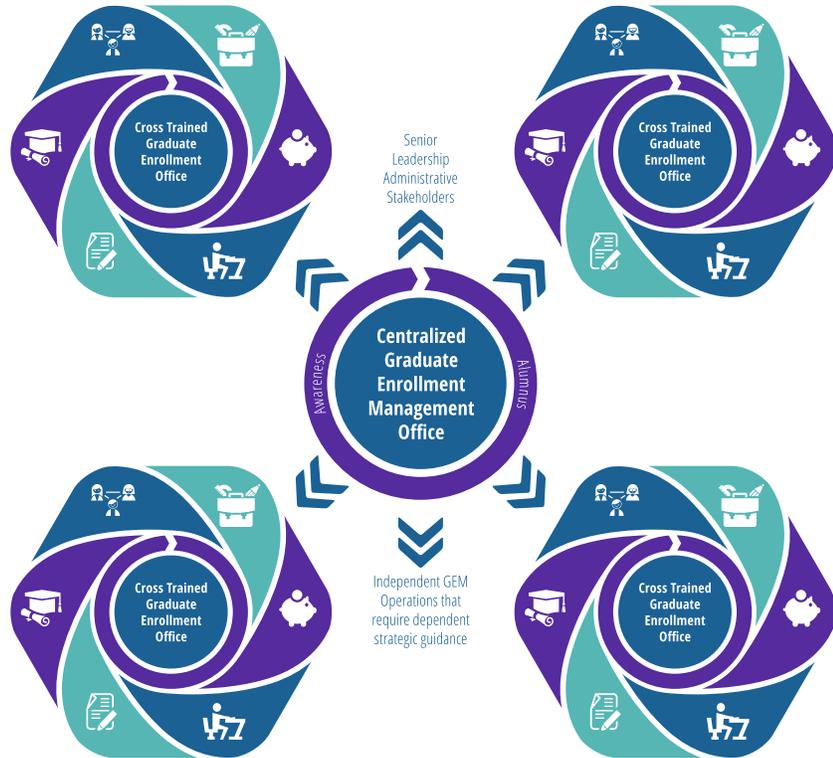
Phase IV of the research study consisted of a survey distributed to members of NAGAP and other organizations such as the National Association for Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA) Administrators in Graduate and Professional Student Services (AGAPSS). The strategic value for NASPA was that as traditional functions within the graduate student lifecycle are changing, membership within the related professional organizations is also shifting.

#### Phase IV

The survey questions centered on the members' involvement in GEM on their respective campuses, as well as their perception of topics such as organizational structures and models process ownership related to graduate enrollment management as a whole.

The concept of the integrated interdependence model may be an easier fit for a small institution as more complexities may arise in applying a one-size-fits-all approach in a larger institution. For example, larger institutions may be comprised of dozens of independent entities within a single university that have vastly different infrastructures and resources in place to support their students, faculty, and staff. Specifically, a school of business may have recruitment and retention strategies already in place to

## Nexus Model of Integrated Interdependence

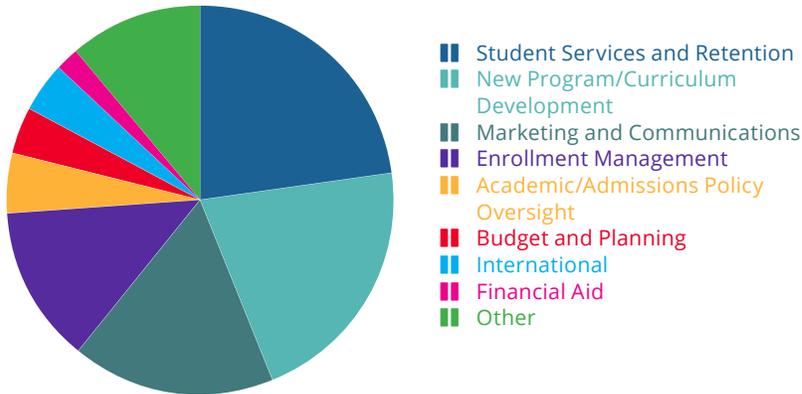


support their students, while a college of arts and sciences may not have developed similar services for their students.

A well-established integrated interdependence model for a large institution can serve several key functions. As seen in the nexus model of integrated interdependence below, a centralized GEM office could serve in a coordination role as the nexus between academic units and an institution’s leadership, while improving the visibility of graduate education. It could also encourage collaboration, information sharing, and partnerships among academic units (i.e., new program development, shared services, etc.). In addition, a nexus model could provide central support to students, faculty, and staff in areas where there may be an absence of services. For example, a central GEM services office could provide recruitment and student success/retention services to students enrolled in graduate programs from all schools across a college or all colleges across a university.

## The Evolution of the GEM Professional

Based on the results of the survey, the chart below shows the shifting landscape of GEM positions, since admissions/recruitment is no longer the primary focus of GEM professionals’ roles. Instead, the role of the GEM practitioner has expanded beyond the traditional interpretation of admissions/recruitment to involve all aspects of the student lifecycle and the enrollment management continuum.



Based upon the survey results, NAGAP has developed the following definition of GEM: Graduate enrollment management (GEM) is a comprehensive approach to the methods by which an institution recruits, admits, supports, retains, and graduates post-baccalaureate students in their respective degree programs. This dynamic paradigm includes codependent functions working congruently to strategically manage overall enrollment levels and the student experience. Elements of the student experience include enrollment planning, marketing, recruitment and admissions, academic advising, financial aid, student services, retention, and alumni relations.

### Definition of GEM

Regardless of staffing levels, utilizing an integrated interdependence model in GEM may create an environment whereby cross-trained professionals from a graduate office are able to support a student throughout their time at the institution. This approach creates an environment that sustains differentiated student experiences.

As supported by Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2014), all institutions do not fit into one model of student affairs practice. This is seen in GEM organizational structures, with models that range from decentralized to centralized, including a number of hybrid models, such as a centralized GEM office that works collaboratively with other decentralized departments. Two emerging concepts support institutional priorities that address budgetary constraints and structure/staffing limitations, while simultaneously focusing on the student experience and institution's competitive advantage.

As a profession, GEM continues to develop and the assumptions within each functional area of enrollment management and student services are being tested. As seen in the NAGAP member surveys, pressures on institutions caused by environmental factors such as economic hardship have created an atmosphere

### Next Step: Case Study Analysis and Establishing Best Practice Models

where “doing more with less” is the new normal. The integrated interdependent model is rooted in the adaptability of GEM practitioners while sustaining the importance of providing students with a differentiated experience. By learning from colleagues how GEM manifests at their institutions, professionals may be able to more fully understand and define this profession, which is complex, filled with numerous idiosyncrasies, and critical to the success of an institution.

As a next step, several institutions will participate in qualitative case studies, which will better align differences in size and organizational structures to establish common metrics leading to concrete outcomes. Participating institutions will range from large to small, both private and public. This will allow for a full scale view of the scope of GEM at various institutions. Institutional representatives are working with NAGAP to develop case studies designed to illustrate some of the ways they have moved in the direction of graduate enrollment management.

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