

Strategic Plan  
for the College of Arts and Sciences  
Suffolk University  
**2005-2010**

DRAFT

## **Introduction**

Summoning the visionary and the practical, this strategic plan outlines our priorities for the next half decade and beyond. Here we summarize our concrete goals and probe our collective reflections on the College's mission and strategies in a period of rapid institutional change. We recognize that the College stands poised as never before to marry its historic commitment to opportunity to a vigorous embrace of excellence and diversity. This plan stands as blueprint and vow to make that union one that endures.

## **The Planning Process**

The 2005-2010 Strategic Plan took shape over a period of several years. Various committees, administrative and service offices, academic departments, and individuals in the College lent themselves to the collaborative process of thinking deeply about our institutional mission, goals, and identity. Wide-ranging discussions and summary reports of the CAS Strategic Planning Committee informed this process, as did the ongoing deliberations of the CAS committees on Undergraduate and Graduate Curriculum, Educational Policy, Faculty Life, and Promotion, Tenure, and Review. Concurrent strategic planning for the University influenced our thinking, while the University's 2002 self-study for the New England Association of Schools and Colleges provided invaluable data. NEASC's accreditation report to Suffolk University pointed us toward particular concerns, as well.

## **2005-2010: An Overview**

The Suffolk University of today is not the Suffolk University of a decade ago or even that of five years ago. For the College of Arts and Sciences, that statement holds truest of all. The College has changed dramatically. Historically an undergraduate commuter school serving students from the Boston area, the College today draws students from across the nation and around the globe. In fall 2004, 731 new freshmen entered the College, a 128% increase over the entering class of 1994. Eight departments in the College now offer graduate degrees. With campuses on three continents, articulation or exchange agreements with colleges around the world, and an expanding array of graduate programs and research institutes, the College has grown in size and changed in shape.

The College has sought to keep pace with its own momentum. We have built or acquired new buildings on Beacon Hill. We have hired new full-time faculty. We have increased library holdings and subscriptions, updated technology, and expanded student services. Yet throughout the College, at every level, the sheer scope of operations stretches the human and infrastructural resources available.

In the face of change, we continue to focus on our students as we augment our emphasis on excellent teaching. An ambitious undergraduate honors program initiative and a thoroughgoing undergraduate curriculum review reflect our ongoing commitment to deepened learning. As we add new campuses and graduate programs, as we heighten our expectations around faculty scholarship, indeed as we become a more complex institution, we also hold fast to our student-centered mission and traditions.

The moment seems propitious for taking stock of our priorities, capabilities, and dreams. Creative energy suffuses the College. A new Dean of the College has been appointed. An intensive self-study process and a favorable accreditation report from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges have helped us to identify areas of concern. Moreover, the University approaches its 2006 centennial, an occasion for internal and external reflection.

We approach the planning process with four overarching priorities:

- *to maintain fidelity to our mission and goals in a period of dramatic institutional change*
- *to stress student learning as the centerpiece of all of our programs and goals*
- *to hire, mentor, and retain outstanding faculty, and to offer them opportunities to teach creatively, research productively, and serve effectively in their department, the College, and the University at large*
- *to heighten the pursuit of academic excellence in the curriculum and among the students and faculty of the College*
- *to assess, at every level of operation, recent changes in the size and attributes of the College and to determine the optimal size of our undergraduate and graduate programs*

With these priorities as guideposts, we chart below a set of strategic directions.

## Strategic Directions for the College of Arts and Sciences: 2005-2010

### **I. Mission**

From its inception, Suffolk University has sought to offer a quality education to students who might not otherwise have access to higher education. Countering ethnic and class discrimination, Suffolk has been a school of “opportunity” in the broadest and best sense. We intend to preserve this mission by continuing to emphasize student-centered learning, accessibility, and diversity. We will:

- *continue to stress faculty-student interaction, small class size, and teaching excellence as central to our identity as a high-quality liberal arts and sciences college*
- *stay mindful of our historically cultivated undergraduate student base as we assess institutional growth, standards, and curriculum*

With regard to diversity in particular, the College embraces the spirit and letter of President Sargent’s mandate to increase the diversity of the University’s student body, personnel, and curricula. Toward this end, CAS will continue to utilize enrollment, hiring, and retention practices, along with curricular and co-curricular programming to reaffirm our commitment to diversity. We will:

- *implement wherever feasible the recommendations of the Dean’s Task Force on Diversity*
- *implement proactive enrollment, search, hiring, and retention procedures to increase the presence of AHANA faculty, staff, and students in the College*
- *participate in University-wide diversity efforts*
- *collaborate with other entities and offices in the University to provide diversity training to CAS employees and students*
- *strengthen relationships with the communities of Boston through service learning and other initiatives*

## **II. Image**

As the College makes sense internally of our recent growth, we also need to evaluate the identity we convey to our various publics. We need clear, consistent communications that give an up-to-date view of our institution to diverse constituencies and through multiple channels. We will:

- *streamline our internal processes to facilitate communication among the constituent parts of an increasingly complex College and University*
- *define an accurate, current image of the College*
- *express our identity clearly and consistently through various media, including print materials and websites*
- *work through the academic departments, the Office of Advancement, and the CAS Dean's office to strengthen relationships with alumni*
- *build collaborative relationships with the various communities and institutions of Boston through service learning and other endeavors*
- *increase the visibility of the College by promoting scholarship, artistic production, and public presentations by members of the CAS community, and by inviting prominent intellectuals, artists, and public figures to campus in various capacities*

## **III. Curriculum, Programs, and Teaching**

### **Undergraduate**

Over the past three years, the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee has undertaken a comprehensive review of the core curriculum, with the aim of curtailing the general education requirements from 56 credits to 40-44 credits of the 122 credits required for graduation. We have scrutinized our educational goals and their curricular translation, drawing on various literatures of educational best practice and on the models of other universities. The committee has reaffirmed our commitment to a challenging, broad-based liberal arts and sciences curriculum. While each departmental major provides a measure of direct career preparation, the College curriculum as a whole seeks not only to teach specific competencies, but to enfold students in a culture of learning, inquiry, and expansive intellectual expectation.

To facilitate the kind of learning we value, we hope to introduce three new initiatives into our curriculum. First, the College is considering a shift to a 4-credit per course model, to allow students to focus more closely on fewer but deeper courses each semester. Second, we would like to introduce an academically-based Freshman Year Seminar, which will also serve as an advising and orientation venue. Finally, we have launched a comprehensive honors program to augment our current Archer Fellows program. Each of these efforts will invigorate our undergraduate programs, foster a culture of heightened expectations, and ultimately aid student retention.

We will:

- *reduce the core curriculum to roughly one third of the total credits needed for graduation*
- *shift, where possible in the College, to a norm of 4-credit courses, with a typical full-time student semester load of four courses*
- *develop and implement procedures for a changeover to 4-credit courses, including course-deepening measures and models in each affected department*
- *move to a 3/2 full-time faculty teaching load to accommodate the changeover to deepened, 4-credit courses*
- *establish a Freshman Year Seminar program, offering a wide array of content-based, writing-intensive courses taught by full-time faculty to incoming Freshman students*
- *establish a comprehensive undergraduate honors program, fully coordinated with departmental honors programs, and supervised by a faculty committee*
- *expand support for Academic Advising at a level commensurate with growth in the College*
- *continue to seek external or professional accreditation of CAS undergraduate programs where applicable (e.g., ABET accreditation)*
- *create systems for the consistent handling of interdepartmental and extra-departmental courses, programs, and research institutes and centers*
- *evaluate the viability of current intra-departmental and interdepartmental programs and tracks in terms of student enrollment, course rotation, and departmental priorities*

- *support active undergraduate research programs*
- *promote service learning initiatives and opportunities*
- *strengthen the Center for Teaching Excellence, the Writing Across the Curriculum program, and programs for quantitative skills development*
- *create an interdisciplinary science center*
- *establish standards and faculty training programs for online instruction and distance learning*
- *support study abroad opportunities for students from all of our campuses*
- *regularize remote campus operations, with attention to programs and program models, curriculum, instructional standards, faculty hiring and review, support services and personnel, facilities, equipment, budget, intercampus communication and procedures, and governance*
- *evaluate the CAPS and MAPS programs and assess the needs of continuing education students generally in the College*
- *support ongoing retention efforts, while developing and implementing new strategies to raise student retention and graduation rates*

### **Graduate**

Graduate programming has grown tremendously in the College over the past decade. Eight departments now offer master's degrees and two offer the Ph.D. As new program proposals continue to emerge, we need to take stock of our growth in this area. Specifically, we need to:

- *assess the current and likely future effects of graduate programming on undergraduate educational offerings and on our principal identity as an undergraduate liberal arts and sciences college*
- *assess the long-range implications of graduate program development for faculty hiring, research requirements, and teaching loads*
- *develop clear policy on graduate admissions, academic standing, program growth and funding, and on the governance and administration of graduate programming generally in the College*
- *support and strengthen viable existing graduate programs in the College*

- *continue to build the library resources necessary for graduate education*
- *consider developing new graduate programs in select areas, taking into account demonstrated demand, academic excellence, long-term benefits to Suffolk's reputation, and economic viability*
- *continue to secure the appropriate external accreditations of our graduate programs where applicable*
- *begin a process of internal program review for each of our graduate programs*
- *designate an Associate Dean for Graduate Programs who will provide coordination among graduate programs and serve as a liaison with the Dean*

#### **IV. Faculty: Governance, Hiring, Development, and Community**

With increases in undergraduate enrollments and the inauguration of many new graduate programs over the past ten years, the CAS faculty has changed as well. We now have 180 full-time faculty members and 330 adjuncts teaching in the College. Even so, we feel the strains of growth and must work hard to maintain small class sizes without relying too heavily on part-time instructors. We must engage in serious discussion about how large an institution we want to become, which areas we wish to prioritize for growth, and how we will retain our sense of community in a larger setting. Meanwhile, we must commit ourselves to hiring full-time, tenure track professors of the highest caliber to meet our current and well-planned future staffing needs.

We must also undertake a thoroughgoing review of our expectations of and support for faculty in CAS. The Promotion, Tenure, and Review Committee has gradually raised the bar on promotions, particularly from the Associate to the Full Professor level. We need to clarify our expectations regarding research, teaching, and service and to support faculty in attaining the high levels of excellence we demand in each of these areas.

Specifically, we will:

- *assess the current requirements and procedures for tenure and promotion*
- *institute a measured, farsighted plan for hiring new full-time faculty, giving consideration to recent institutional growth and priorities and to actual student/teaching faculty ratios*

- *develop a long-term plan for reducing our dependence on adjunct faculty while improving the working conditions for the adjuncts we continue to employ*
- *initiate programs to orient and mentor new full-time and adjunct faculty to the educational goals of individual departments, the College, and the University*
- *support research and scholarship efforts by expanding and diversifying faculty development initiatives, including sabbatical leaves, pre-sabbatical leaves for junior faculty, course load reductions, faculty exchange programs with other colleges and universities, technical support staff, physical space for on-campus research, and additional travel funds*
- *strengthen teaching development and assessment efforts*
- *work to raise CAS faculty salaries to the level of those of faculty at comparable institutions of higher education in the Boston area*
- *create opportunities for faculty from disciplines across the University to meet with each other in collaborative ways*

#### **V. Assessment**

The assessment of learning outcomes and overall institutional effectiveness plays an important role in any meaningful educational enterprise. We can plan only by knowing what we now do effectively and what we must do better in order to meet our goals and deliver what we promise to our students. While we have many assessment measures in place already, we need to systematize them to avoid duplicative efforts, augment them to generate meaningful and comprehensive data, and de-stigmatize them to develop a robust climate supportive of high expectations in the College. We will:

- *build department-level planning and assessment efforts, including published strategic plans that define educational objectives, set implementation schedules for those objectives, and detail methods of assessment*
- *devise and utilize inter-departmental measures of curricular effectiveness and student learning outcomes*
- *conduct multivariate studies of student retention and graduation rates*
- *establish procedures for collecting assessment data on curricular effectiveness, student learning outcomes, and student retention*

- *provide various assessment data to students, faculty, departments, programs, support services, and administrative offices in the College for their use in program improvement*

## **VI. Finances**

Historically a primarily tuition-driven institution, Suffolk University has striven in recent years to deepen and diversify its financial resources. CAS participates in University-wide advancement efforts and also pursues its own development agendas. We must continue to bolster our financial strength to support our increasingly complex educational and infrastructural needs. We will:

- *work with the Alumni Office to strengthen ties to CAS alumni*
- *work with the Advancement Office to nurture relationships with key stakeholders in the community*
- *identify criteria relating to the fundraising responsibilities of the Office of the Dean, the Department Chairs, and the faculty*
- *encourage faculty members to work collaboratively with their departments, the Office of the Dean, and the Advancement Office to secure external funding, including grants, major gifts, contract research, and in-kind gifts*
- *review the long-term cost-effectiveness of each undergraduate and graduate program of the College, bearing in mind the complex definition of “value” to an institution of higher education*

## **VII. Infrastructure: Facilities, Services, and Technology**

Many offices and departments across the University manage the facilities, services, and technology used by CAS. Thus the University Strategic Plan presents a much fuller picture of the long-range plans in these areas. There are several areas of concern that impinge directly on the College’s functioning. In the next five years, the University must:

- *augment the Sawyer Library's physical space, holdings, subscriptions, software, and equipment to meet the needs of a growing and changing undergraduate and graduate student population*
- *provide adequate space for academic departments, including offices for full-time faculty, shared offices for adjunct faculty, and shared conference areas*

- *increase the number of classrooms available for CAS classes*
- *improve and increase the number of specialized facilities, including science, computer, and language laboratories, studios, media centers, "smart classrooms," and distance education classrooms*
- *improve the upkeep and security of classrooms and laboratories*
- *ensure the accessibility of CAS facilities and services*
- *provide appropriate hardware, software, training, and technical assistance to support teaching and learning at the College*
- *improve and upgrade facilities (e.g., labs, classrooms, common spaces) on the remote campuses and/or arrange to share the facilities of other local education providers*
- *bring the technical standards and procedures at the remote campuses to a level consistent with those on the Boston campus*
- *assess the impact of institutional growth on student services (e.g., academic support programs, Counseling Services, Health Services, Office of Diversity Services) and support those service departments adequately*