



March 18, 2024

Dr. Marisa J. Kelly  
President  
Suffolk University  
73 Tremont Street, 13th Floor  
Boston, MA 02108-2770

Dear President Kelly:

I am pleased to inform you that at its meeting on February 29, 2024, the New England Commission of Higher Education took the following action with respect to Suffolk University:

that Suffolk University be continued in accreditation;

that the institution be asked to submit a report by January 15, 2026, for consideration in Spring 2026, that gives emphasis to the institution's success in achieving its financial and enrollment goals;

that the institution submit an interim (fifth-year) report by August 15, 2028, for consideration in Fall 2028;

that, in addition to the information included in all interim reports, the institution give emphasis to its success in:

- 1) achieving its financial and enrollment goals;
- 2) continuing to evaluate and address gaps in faculty and staff salaries;
- 3) addressing student housing shortages on campus;

that the next comprehensive evaluation be scheduled for Fall 2032.

The Commission gives the following reasons for its action.

Suffolk University is continued in accreditation because the Commission finds the institution to be in compliance with the *Standards for Accreditation*.

The Commission joins the visiting team in commending Suffolk University (Suffolk) for preparing an excellent self-study that highlights its accomplishments over the last decade. We appreciate learning of the campus-wide strategic planning process that culminated in the University's Board-approved Suffolk

2025 Strategic Plan and understand the campus community is now engaged in developing the Suffolk 2030 Strategic Plan. The institution's use of data and analysis as a means of informing the planning process along with the development of metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of its plans is noted with approval. According to the visiting team, changes to the Board in recent years have significantly improved the culture on campus; communication between the Board Chair and Suffolk's President is much improved; and the implementation of the 2021 Board evaluation process has contributed to the "evolution of a highly supportive and well-managed governance body." Also impressive is the strong leadership team and dedicated faculty and staff that shepherded the university through COVID, achieved major advances in key strategic areas, led the institution to increased enrollments post-pandemic, and lifted the reputation of the institution. In addition, Suffolk has increased its capacity across the institution through significant investments in technology systems and the hiring of staff to support the expansion of departments (e.g., the Career Center and the Office of Institutional Research). We are further gratified to learn that the role of the Faculty Senate has "evolved" and that Suffolk is committed to exploring "more informal opportunities for increased faculty and staff engagement...and increasing the collaboration between schools." Although Suffolk is "winding down" its Madrid, Spain campus operations, the University is working on plans to expand its short-term global experiences and study abroad options to make them accessible to more students. With the continued commitment of Suffolk's Board and leadership team, combined with the dedication of its well-qualified faculty and staff, Suffolk is well positioned to continue to provide its students with "experiential and transformational learning opportunities that begin in the center of Boston, reach across the globe, and lead to extraordinary outcomes for [its] graduates" well into the future.

The item the institution is asked to report on in Spring 2026 is related to our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources*.

While, as noted positively above, the initiatives set forth in Suffolk's 2025 Strategic Plan are well funded, we also note that the University increased its annual endowment draw from the standard 5% to "roughly 10%" over the last two years, and the Board has approved a FY2024 budget deficit of some \$11.5 million. In addition, as documented in its self-study, Suffolk established (in April 2023) a \$20 million line of credit to "smooth variability in operating cash resources." As noted in the report of the visiting team, the endowment drawdown will end in FY2025, and the University expects to balance its budget by FY2027 predicated on significant enrollment growth, philanthropic increases, and new revenue streams such as adult learning programs. As the visiting team asserts, and we concur, these are bold aspirations for the institution, and if these projected growth scenarios do not materialize, the institution's financial challenges will persist. We also support Suffolk University's candid acknowledgement that "a continued plan for close budget monitoring, cost containment and revenue diversification" will continue to be important to the institution's long-term financial strategy. Accordingly, we ask that the Spring 2026 report provide an update on Suffolk's success in achieving its financial and enrollment goals as evidence that "the institution sets and achieves realistic goals to enroll students who are broadly representative of the population the institution wishes to serve" (*Students*, Statement of the Standard). Our standard on *Institutional Resources* is also relevant here:

The institution preserves and enhances available financial resources sufficient to support its mission. It manages its financial resources and allocates them in a way that reflects its mission and purposes. It demonstrates the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances (7.4).

The institution's multi-year financial planning is realistic and reflects the capacity of the institution to depend on identified sources of revenue and ensure the advancement of educational quality and services for students (7.6)

The institution's financial planning, including contingency planning, is integrated with overall planning and evaluation processes. The institution demonstrates its ability to analyze its financial condition and understand the opportunities and constraints that will influence its financial condition and acts accordingly. It reallocates resources as necessary to achieve its purposes and objectives. The institution implements a realistic plan for addressing issues raised by the existence of any operating deficit (7.14).

Please upload the requested report by January 15, 2026, using the S2026 Progress Report review.

Commission policy requires an interim (fifth-year) report of all institutions on a decennial evaluation cycle. Its purpose is to provide the Commission an opportunity to appraise the institution's current status in keeping with the Policy on Periodic Review. In addition to the information included in all interim reports the University is asked, in Fall 2028, to report on three matters related to our standards on *Students*; *Institutional Resources*; and *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship*.

As noted positively above, the Commission acknowledges that the initiatives specified in Suffolk's 2025 Strategic Plan are well-resourced. In support of the University's financial and enrollment goals, for example, the University has invested in marketing, experiential learning, and career development initiatives, and the position of Assistant Vice Provost for Retention was established to advance retention and graduation outcomes for Pell-eligible, first generation, out of state, commuter, and under-represented student groups. We also recognize that it will take time to realize the impact of these initiatives on the institution's financial and enrollment goals; therefore, we look forward, through the Fall 2028 interim report, to being apprised of the institution's continued success in this area. We refer you here to our standards on *Students* and *Institutional Resources* (both cited above).

As documented in Suffolk University's self-study, "the tight labor market has created challenges for recruiting and retaining staff positions," and the cost of living in the Greater Boston area has further exacerbated this problem. To address this matter, Suffolk began a thorough salary benchmarking study in FY 2023 to "examine how faculty and staff salaries compare with levels at peer institutions for their specific disciplines and fields of practice." Although some progress has been made in this regard, the University also acknowledges that additional work is required "across the board" before short-term and long-term plans can be developed to address the findings of the benchmarking study. In the Fall 2028 interim report, we welcome an update on this matter as informed by our standards on *Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship* and *Institutional Resources*:

Salaries and benefits are set at levels that ensure the institution's continued ability to attract and retain appropriately qualified faculty and academic staff whose profiles are consistent with the institution's mission and purposes. Faculty and academic staff are provided with substantial opportunities for continued professional development throughout their careers (6.6).

Terms of employment are clear, and compensation is adequate to ensure that the institution can attract and retain qualified administrators, faculty, and staff. The institution employs effective procedures for the regular evaluation of all personnel. The institution ensures sufficient opportunities for professional development for administrators, faculty, and staff (7.3).

Similarly, we recognize that the cost of housing in the Boston area has increased significantly in recent years, and, as a result, students can no longer afford to rent apartments off campus and therefore are seeking on-campus housing. As a short-term solution, Suffolk is renting rooms in a nearby hotel which is not optimal, and the institution is also well-aware that the demand for student

housing will increase commensurate with enrollment growth. While solving the housing problem is a top priority, and it is the University's goal to remedy the situation as quickly as possible, a long-term solution has not yet been identified. In keeping with our standard on *Institutional Resources*, we will appreciate receiving an update on this matter in the Fall 2028 interim report as evidence that Suffolk University "has sufficient and appropriate... physical...resources necessary for the achievement of its purposes wherever and however its academic programs are offered" (7.21).

The scheduling of a comprehensive evaluation in Fall 2032 is consistent with Commission policy requiring each accredited institution to undergo a comprehensive evaluation at least once every ten years. Because the University delayed its comprehensive evaluation for one year, scheduling the next visit in Fall 2032 returns the institution to its original evaluation cycle.

You will note that the Commission has specified no length or term of accreditation. Accreditation is a continuing relationship that is reconsidered when necessary. Thus, while the Commission has indicated the timing of the next comprehensive evaluation, the schedule should not be unduly emphasized because it is subject to change.

The Commission expressed appreciation for the self-study prepared by Suffolk University and for the report submitted by the visiting team. The Commission also welcomed the opportunity to meet with you, Robert C. Lamb, Jr., Chair of the Board of Trustees, and Julie Sandell, Provost, during its deliberations.

You are encouraged to share this letter with all the institution's constituencies. It is Commission policy to inform the chairperson of the institution's governing board of action on its accreditation status. In a few days we will be sending a copy of this letter to Robert C. Lamb, Jr. The institution is free to release information about the evaluation and the Commission's action to others, in accordance with the enclosed policy on Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions.

The Commission hopes that the evaluation process has contributed to institutional improvement. It appreciates your cooperation with the effort to provide public assurance of the quality of higher education.

If you have any questions about the Commission's action, please contact Lawrence M. Schall, President of the Commission.

Sincerely,



Michael Whelan

MW/sjp

cc: Robert C. Lamb, Jr.  
Visiting team

Enclosure: Public Disclosure of Information about Affiliated Institutions