CAMPUS SHIFTS CORE

Suffolk University moving from Beacon Hill closer to downtown with $62m complex

By Casey Ross
GLOBE STAFF

Suffolk University, long a controversial neighbor on Beacon Hill, will shift its campus closer to Boston's downtown and build a $62 million classroom complex that will modernize its academic programs and facilities, university officials said Tuesday.

The real estate moves will result in the sale of two of Suffolk's buildings on Beacon Hill and remove the noisy student traffic that has often put the university at odds with its residential neighbors. Two other classroom buildings in the neighborhood will be converted into administrative offices.

Meanwhile, Suffolk will build a new, eight-story classroom complex a couple blocks away, at 20 Somerset St., where it will also create a public park on what is now a windswept, empty lot. The location currently hosts an old government office building that will be demolished next year.

"We want this building to make clear that we are committed to providing state-of-the-art facilities for all our students," said James McCarthy, who took over as Suffolk's president in February. "It will be designed in a way that is flexible and allows us to react to changes we cannot even imagine right now."

Although its classrooms are only moving a few blocks, Suffolk's shift will center the campus more firmly in the city's downtown, where the university houses most of its students and its law school.

McCarthy said Tuesday that Suffolk will continue to scout locations for new student residences downtown.

The new building at 20 Somerset will be a sea change for Suffolk's undergraduates, who now study in 50-plus-year-old buildings that were designed long before the advent of personal computers and online learning.

The new building, designed by the architecture firm Chan Krieger Sieniewicz, will be glass and stone and contain a new dining hall and about 1,300 classrooms.

The classrooms, to be fitted with new digital equipment and other technology, will be used for science courses and for general academic purposes.

Plans for the building were approved by the Boston Redevelopment Authority in 2009, but the project has remained on hold during a leadership change that resulted in the departure of longtime president David Sargent.

Officials said plans for the building have changed very little, although it will no longer house the New England School of Art and Design as originally planned. That program will remain at 75 Arlington St.

Beacon Hill neighborhood representatives on Tuesday applauded the university's plan to move its campus.

"This is good news for Suffolk's students and it's certainly good news for the residents of Beacon Hill," said Steve Young, chairman of the Beacon Hill Civic Association.

The uncomfortable relationship between the school and neighborhood has become more tenuous in recent years, as Suffolk's enrollment growth added more noise and foot traffic to the area. The university's enrollment has jumped about 23 percent over the last decade, to 9,192 in the current academic year.

"For the residents in the area, it's become the equivalent of living on a college campus," said State Representative Martha Walz, a Boston Democrat whose district includes Beacon Hill. "Suffolk's decision to pull back from the area will improve the quality of life for residents and create a better campus environment for students."

The university, which has committed to keep its enrollment at current levels, will sell the Fenton building on Derne Street and the Ridgeway building on Cambridge Street. The future use of those buildings remains uncertain, but some area residents have been looking for locations for an elementary school to serve the neighborhood.

Suffolk will convert portions of the nearby Archer and Donahue buildings into administrative offices, but the buildings will no longer host classes, thus eliminating daily student traffic.

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STEVE YOUNG
Chairman of the Beacon Hill Civic Association
SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY CAMPUS AROUND BEACON HILL

1. Rosalie K. Stahl Center
2. One Beacon Street
3. Nathan R. Miller Residence Hall
4. Frank Sawyer Building
5. 20 Ashburton Place
6. John E. Fonten Building & Annex
7. Gleason L. & H.J. Archer Building
8. C. Walsh Theatre
9. Frank J. Donovan Building
10. Ridgeway Building
11. One Bowdoin Place
12. 40 Court Street
13. 45 Bornfield Street
14. David J. Sargent Hall
15. Residence Hall
16. Residence Hall
17. The New England School of Art & Design at Suffolk University
18. New classroom building

SOURCES: Boston Redevelopment Authority, Suffolk University
Suffolk University will build an eight-story complex on Somerset Street and create a public park.
Suffolk to stress career learning

New president aims to keep tuition low, promote civic ties

By Martine Powers
GLOBE STAFF

Suffolk University president James McCarthy will unveil a new vision for the school Tuesday that seeks to transform the 106-year-old university into a leader in tech-savvy, career-oriented learning while keeping tuition costs down.

McCarthy, who will be inaugurated as Suffolk's ninth president Tuesday, also said he wants to build on the Beacon Hill school's prime location to bolster its civic engagement with Boston.

"How will Suffolk be different? In very important ways," McCarthy said, speaking in a recent interview in his top-floor office on Tremont Street, which offered sweeping views of downtown and beyond. "A Suffolk student graduating in 2018 will come through a Suffolk that's much more focused, that has greater depth."

McCarthy, who joined Suffolk in February after serving as a provost at Baruch College in New York City, will be officially installed as president in a Fenway Hall ceremony. One of his first orders of business, he said, is funneling resources into career-oriented academic programs such as public policy, entrepreneurship, global business, innovation, and intellectual property.

McCarthy says he wants Suffolk, which enrolls about 9,500 students, to distinguish itself from peer institutions in the city and region that pursue a jack-of-all-trades approach to academic offerings. The university, which began as a law school taught out of a professor's home in 1906, must reclaim its "unashamedly career-focused" mission in order to succeed, McCarthy said.

"That's a niche that we've had from the beginning," he said.

McCarthy will also advocate for online learning, pushing for a hybrid approach that would couple Web instruction with smaller in-person sections and discussion groups led by faculty to review the class content. Five years from now, he said, at least 20 percent of an average student's classes will be taught partially online.

Online instruction, he said, will better equip students for a workplace where employees are expected to quickly digest and communicate information using technology.

His goals for e-learning, he acknowledged, will also function as a key cost-saving measure, important to a university that, McCarthy said, has increased tuition each year by what he called unsustainable rates. Suffolk charges about $44,000 per year for undergraduates who live on campus. In coming years, he said, he hopes to curb cost increases.

The university currently relies almost exclusively on student tuition plus room and board to fund its operations, making it more difficult to plan for the long term.

McCarthy says he is pursuing partnerships with local businesses for outside funding. He recently appointed a vice president for university advancement to focus on fundraising. And then, he said, there are good old-fashioned alumni donations.

"Some of it means just getting money from people other than students," he said. "Students and their families are paying a lot, and in some cases borrowing, to go to school here. And that's a situation we have to address."

The university has made plans to sell two of its Beacon Hill buildings, a move lauded by neighbors irked by noisy student traffic, and will open a $62 million classroom complex two blocks away at 20 Somerset St.

Financially, McCarthy said, the school is headed toward solid footing. Suffolk has an $11 million operating surplus this year, he said. And for the first time in the school's history, all members of the board of trustees have donated to the school, a sign, he said, of growing interest within the alumni community of supporting the school.

In recent years, a modest 5 percent of alumni have donated to the school. McCarthy wants to bring that rate up to 15 percent, helping to grow the endowment that stands at $129 million, smaller than many institutions of comparable size.

But the bright future that McCarthy outlines may well bring drawbacks: Last year, the university laid off 20 administrators. McCarthy did not rule out the possibility that more staff cuts may occur in coming years.

"Inevitably, there will be difficult decisions that will have to be made," McCarthy said. "... That's in all spheres of what we do. We have to make the difficult decisions because we want..."
to become excellent.”

McCarthy’s appointment followed years in which the school was widely criticized by alumni and faculty as complacent and antiquated. In 2009, a Suffolk trustee told the Globe he bemoaned that Suffolk had become “a third-tier university.”

That same year, the acceptance rate for undergraduate applicants was nearly 85 percent. (That number has decreased; in 2012, the acceptance rate was 78 percent.)

The school also had faced criticism over McCarthy’s predecessor, David Sargent, who resigned in 2010 amid an outcry over his salary, which was one of the highest among college presidents nationwide.

David Yamada, a professor at Suffolk University Law School, said the strategic plan passed by the president and the trustees, which outlines the sweeping changes, falls short of providing a realistic assessment of how the university will function in the future.

The plan “provides a framework for planning, but doesn’t answer the critical question of whether university leadership will raise money sufficient to put Suffolk on a more secure financial footing, without more tuition hikes, layoffs, and pay freezes,” Yamada said.

One other professor, meanwhile, worried that the cost-cutting measures would diminish the quality of academic instruction.

Gazing out from a 13th-floor corner office with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Boston Common and parts of Suffolk’s campus, McCarthy said he believes the institution is destined for great things.

“You look around. There’s the gold dome out there. Everything’s within two blocks of here, really,” McCarthy said, gesturing at the State House. “That’s a place advantage over wonderful institutions that happen to be on the opposite side of the river, or wonderful institutions that are many, many, many stops on the Green Line out that way.

“For us,” he said, “place is big.”

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‘Students and their families are paying a lot, and in some cases borrowing, to go to school here. And that’s a situation we have to address.’

JAMES McCARTHY
Suffolk University president
Online classes gain acceptance, and colleges need to adapt

SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY came into being more than a century ago as an unconventional law school for non-traditional students. So it will be fitting—and helpful to other institutions—if the school can position itself now as a leader in adapting to deep changes in American higher education, especially the dramatic expansion of online learning.

Like many universities, here and elsewhere in the country, Suffolk started with a narrow mission—to be an evening law school for students with day jobs—and expanded its offerings over time to replicate more of the undergraduate and graduate programs at more established institutions. Now, that era of rapid institutional growth at universities seems to be ending, especially for schools that, like Suffolk, rely heavily on tuition rather than research grant revenues or vast endowments for their funding. In response, Suffolk’s newly inaugurated president, James McCarthy, is moving away from an all-things-to-everyone approach. Instead, the university’s new strategic plan focuses on academic areas where the school has been strongest and those that lead most directly to careers. It also vows to use more online instruction, in part to keep tuition costs down.

Some students and faculty might see the plan as limiting Suffolk’s horizons. Despite compelling research suggesting that students can learn well from courses combining online lessons with face-to-face teaching, implementing this approach on a large scale would require changes in how Suffolk deploys personnel—and risks the perception the school is trying to educate students at a discount.

Yet most other universities will have to reassess their priorities in coming years, too. Just as the advent of the Internet has transformed the media landscape, it’s likely that future students will see a substantial amount of online instruction as an acceptable part of a college education. Future employers are bound to follow suit.

Many big-name research universities believe that online courses create opportunities to extend their reach; MIT and Harvard, for example, are leading an initiative called edX, whose offerings have attracted thousands of enrollees. For less renowned universities, the potential disruption is greater, as students are drawn to cheaper online alternatives.

Last week, the Chronicle of Higher Education noted a move by a group of public universities, mainly in the South and West, to issue credits for students who take open online courses.

The health of the Boston economy will depend in part on whether local universities make the right bets about how best to incorporate Internet-based instruction—and whether they can bring their faculties along. According to the Babson Survey Research Group, university administrators report that faculty acceptance of the value and legitimacy of online education has leveled off—and by some measures actually dropped—in the last several years. One faculty member quoted in a recent Globe article urged Suffolk’s leadership to commit to raising more outside money and avoid tuition hikes, layoffs, and pay freezes. Suffolk should tap any reasonable funding source it can identify. But it’s not at all clear that universities of tomorrow will be organized—and require the same mix of employees—in precisely the same way as those of today.

The Babson Survey Research Group report also indicates that students in online
courses, a type of instruction that barely existed a decade and a half ago, now make up a third of total college enrollment. Suffolk is wise to try to get ahead of the changes. Other institutions must consider how to follow suit.

Suffolk vows to use more online instruction, in part to keep tuition costs down.
Town-gown peace
Suffolk University brokers peace deal with historic neighborhood

By Lawrence Harmon | GLOBE STAFF | MARCH 02, 2013

The modern look of Suffolk University’s planned classroom building contrasts with Beacon Hill’s historic style.

BEACON HILL is ideal terrain for town-gown battles. Foot-loose students from Suffolk University and no-nonsense homeowners are pressed tightly together. The university needs elbow room but receives little quarter from the historic preservationists who pop
up from behind every bush or the Beacon Hill Civic Association — the Special Forces of Boston’s community groups.

Yet peace reigns on Beacon Hill while the fight over institutional development intensifies in other parts of the city, including neighborhoods bordered by Harvard and Northeastern universities. So how did Suffolk, which didn’t open an office of community relations until 2006, become such a symbol of contentment?

On Valentine’s Day, city officials approved Suffolk’s plan to demolish a building on Somerset Street on the edge of Beacon Hill and build in its place a 10-story academic building with classrooms for 1,200 students. The project got the blessing of its Beacon Hill neighbors partly because of its sharp contrast with Suffolk’s original proposal — an out-of-scale 31-story dorm. But the project also benefitted greatly from Suffolk’s efforts over the past few years to genuinely listen to the concerns of neighbors, leading to a “non-expansion” pact on residential Beacon Hill. Suffolk opted instead to branch out into Downtown Crossing, where it has built new dorms and renovated a historic theater.

John Nucci, Suffolk’s vice president for community affairs, led the peace-making efforts. The campus and student body are small compared with other universities in Boston. Still, the success is so great that Suffolk deserves to be a case study in town-gown relations.

“I treated it like a political campaign, walking the streets and listening to people,” said Nucci, a former Boston city councilor. “I realized that this job is about earning trust and credibility. You can’t go to neighborhoods only when you are looking for something.”

Ears should be burning at Harvard University, where long-range plans to expand into Allston stalled along with the economy in 2010. Now the university is eager to move ahead with plans for everything from an enormous science center to a residential and retail complex along Western Avenue. But the university’s relations with its Allston neighbors have hit the skids. In January, the Harvard Allston Task Force — a group of local leaders who advocate for the neighborhood — complained to city officials that Harvard was taking a “piecemeal” approach to planning as well as backing away from specific commitments, including the construction of a three-acre park.

“Until Harvard has agreed with the community on an Allston/Brighton Community Master Plan,” they wrote, “we intend to oppose all other Harvard projects and zoning requests.”
Harvard officials predict the resumption of a healthy dialogue with their neighbors as early as next week. They point to Harvard’s inclusion of community members on the committee that chose a developer for a residential and retail complex at the intersection of North Harvard Street and Western Avenue. But task force member Harry Mattison said that the imbalance of power is omnipresent.

“Everything Harvard wants speeds along at 70 miles per hour,” said Mattison. “Everything the community wants gets stuck in a ditch.”

Across town, several elected officials, including city councilors Tito Jackson and Michael Ross, are charging that Northeastern University has abandoned its commitment to house its undergraduates on campus. That leaves working families in the Fenway and Mission Hill areas at a disadvantage when trying to compete for apartments. In a recent letter to the city’s planning agency, the politicians charged that “the number of undergraduates living in these neighborhoods is at an all-time high.” Now the signers are refusing to support the filing of the university’s master plan.

Northeastern officials cite plans to add 720 new dorm beds next year. They argue that the university can’t concentrate solely on new dorms when the campus requires new recreational facilities for students already living on campus. But it is the communication breakdown — not the arguments and counterarguments — that leaps out in this case, especially at a university that cultivates a close relationship with City Hall.

Northeastern officials, said Ross, “ought to have their ears to the ground.”

University officials actually do a lot of listening. But what they hear rarely leads to deep changes in university development plans. Neighbors, meanwhile, say they are sick of scraps. And that’s why Suffolk University stands out. For once, neighbors actually sat down at a university’s table and came away full.

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All MOOCs are not the same

By James McCarthy | JULY 27, 2013

THE TECHNOLOGICAL revolution sweeping higher education at warp speed has been met with reactions that range from high praise to deep concern. Massive open online courses, or MOOCs, and other intensive uses of technology in support of learning are being praised as vehicles that will improve the quality of higher education and expand its reach, while at the same time reducing costs. But they are also criticized as mechanisms that might consolidate knowledge transmission. One fear is that these courses concentrate the role of teaching in the hands of fewer players, often star professors at highly selective institutions who deliver their lectures online, inevitably reducing the variety of voices that are heard.

This technological revolution will affect all colleges, universities, and students, but in very different ways. Students in the nation’s highly selective colleges and universities most certainly will encounter advanced technology that is infused into the courses they take. Still, those courses will continue to be taught by full-time faculty at residential colleges and universities that provide students with the full college experience.

The revolution will play out quite differently for those who are enrolled in regional private and public colleges and universities, and in community colleges. In these academic settings, which are facing far greater economic and demographic challenges than highly selective private schools, the pressures for more widespread adoption of fully online courses, including MOOCs, are greatest. Students will find that a much larger share of their learning will take place either in fully online or hybrid formats.

It’s true that enhanced technology can improve the quality of learning in all settings and also reduce costs at most institutions. However, the colleges and universities that...
selective institutions. If that comes about, we will have lost something very important. Many of the nation’s leading experts on promoting effective learning — learning that is specific to the colleges and universities that educate the considerable majority of American students — are in fact those faculty already teaching in regional colleges and universities and community colleges.

It is imperative that these expert educators become deeply involved in the design and creation of the technology-enhanced teaching and learning now being developed. American society has benefited greatly from the vast array of choices in college and university education that exist in this country. For the ongoing technological revolution to truly benefit the full range of students, the institutions where these diverse students learn and the faculty who teach them should be among the leaders of this revolution.

However, MOOCs are expensive to produce. So it’s not at all surprising that most MOOCs are taught by faculty affiliated with highly selective colleges and universities (typically those with substantial endowments) and offered on platforms run by a few groups with substantial capital, provided either by private equity or university endowments.

Still, in spite of the high costs for early adopters of this new technology, regional colleges and universities should not let costs deter us from becoming full participants in these developments. The consequences of not participating are too great. When regional colleges and universities take their place among the producers of hybrid and fully online courses that incorporate the latest instructional technology and delivery systems — including MOOCs — American society will continue to benefit from a system of higher education that preserves both institutional variety and variety in the voices that guide student learning. Students in all colleges and universities will benefit from the improvements in learning that will result from enhanced technology; and those colleges and universities facing the most serious financial pressures will experience some relief. When this happens, we all come out ahead.

James McCarthy is president of Suffolk University.
Executive Profile — James McCarthy of Suffolk University

Suffolk University President James McCarthy says he feels like he’s already been on the job forever. Considering everything he’s set in motion since he took over as Suffolk’s president in February 2012, it’s little wonder time has flown.

McCarthy’s agenda includes streamlining the school’s academic course selection, bolstering its online teaching, and focusing on what he believes is Suffolk University’s historic strength.

“People come to Suffolk to get jobs,” said McCarthy, who previously served as provost at Baruch College in New York City.

Some new college presidents just worry about matching the accomplishments of their predecessors, but that wasn’t McCarthy’s only challenge. McCarthy replaced David Sargent, who resigned in October 2010 after an uproar over his $1.5 million compensation. (A Suffolk spokesman declined to divulge McCarthy’s salary). In addition to the flap over Sargent’s salary, McCarthy also needed to manage Suffolk’s sizeable debt. Suffolk has more than $350 million in debt, and he vowed in a recent interview that the university would not be taking on any more debt in the foreseeable future.

One of McCarthy’s first priorities is to narrow Suffolk University’s academic offerings so the school is not “all things for all people,” he said. That has included closing certain classes and areas of study, including some education programs, such as teacher training, a doctorate program in economics and some courses offered at Cape Cod Community College. He is also attempting to create closer connections with Boston’s business and civic communities.

The construction of a new 112,000-square-foot academic building at 20 Somerset St., which
was under way when McCarthy joined Suffolk, will help the university’s academic profile, McCarthy said.

Suffolk is already on its way to developing a stronger reputation, a change that started before McCarthy but has continued since his hiring, said James Samels, president and CEO of Natick-based The Education Alliance, a higher education consulting firm. “They were seen as a poor man’s intermediate-tier metropolitan university,” Samels said. “Now they’re more of a national player when you combine them with their law school recognition.”

McCarthy also is focused on improving Suffolk’s career services center. The university has brought its academic advising, academic support, career services center and similar disciplines into one physical location to make it easier for students to access services. “We want to coordinate it and make sure that advising and career services are part of the same team, speaking the same language and are trained in the same way,” McCarthy said.

Online learning also is part of his vision. His five-year plan is for 20 percent of undergraduate courses to be taught in a hybrid format — online and in person — and he plans to engage Suffolk in massive open online courses, known as MOOCs. Suffolk will launch its first such course in January, he said. At the heart of what McCarthy is trying to promote about Suffolk is the university’s value proposition to students and their parents. At $46,260, Suffolk’s tuition for the new academic year has risen 2.3 percent over last year — slightly more than the 2.1 percent national rate of inflation.

McCarthy acknowledged that Suffolk was shy of reaching his goal of staying below inflation. But he said Suffolk got closer than other schools in Boston, and will continue to work on it: “Every university needs to be clear about what it does and doesn’t do. We’re getting that clarity.”