

Suffolk University

Applied Bachelor's Degree in Healthcare Administration and Innovation

94-Credit Pilot Baccalaureate Degree — Executive Summary for Public Comment

May 2026

Overview and Purpose

Suffolk University proposes an Applied Bachelor's Degree in Healthcare Administration and Innovation, a 94-credit pilot applied baccalaureate program submitted to the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) under 610 CMR 16.00, the Degree Granting Regulations for Pilot Proposals on Innovation. This proposal requests a waiver of the Massachusetts 120-credit minimum for baccalaureate degrees.

This is a purposefully designed reduced-credit degree that seeks to maintain rigorous academic standards and learning outcomes comparable to Suffolk's existing Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA). It is designed to expand access to high-quality undergraduate education for students who face financial or time barriers, and to respond to demonstrated workforce demand for skilled healthcare administrators. The proposal also seeks to address concerns around the increasing cost of higher education and the burden of student loan debt, which have led to a decline in public confidence in the value of a bachelor's degree. These concerns have made it imperative for universities to offer more flexible and affordable educational pathways. In terms of Suffolk's student demographic, a recent review of student withdrawal forms reveals that 25% of students cite financial reasons for withdrawal and 45% cite personal reasons (internal Suffolk data). A 94-credit degree program can help address these challenges by providing a faster route to graduation and reducing student debt.

Suffolk University is a 120-year-old private, nonprofit institution continuously accredited by the New England Commission of Higher Education (NECHE) without sanction or public notation. The University meets all the eligibility criteria under BHE's pilot proposal regulations: sustained Massachusetts presence and accreditation; consistent governance under the same Board of Trustees; and no active investigations by the Commonwealth, federal government, or relevant oversight bodies. Pursuant to its Policy on Innovation, NECHE approved the proposal, contingent upon final approval from the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education.

Institutional Context and Market Rationale

A growing number of New England institutions are developing or launching reduced-credit baccalaureate programs. Suffolk's specific proposal seeks to leverage their location in the heart of the Commonwealth's healthcare ecosystem. Suffolk draws approximately two-thirds of its undergraduate students from Massachusetts, and 60% of those graduates remain in the greater Boston area for employment or further study, making this program a direct investment in the Massachusetts healthcare management pipeline.

Growing employer demand for skills-aligned, workforce-ready graduates is validated by national surveys, federal policy, and healthcare industry feedback. This supports a rigorous curriculum designed around demonstrated competencies rather than credit accumulation, positioning graduates to enter a high-demand field a year sooner, without sacrificing educational quality. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects Medical and Health Services Managers (SOC 11-9111) will be among the eight fastest-growing occupations requiring a bachelor's degree in the country. Massachusetts is one of the most concentrated markets in the country for healthcare

management professionals, employing more than 17,000 medical and health services managers. Massachusetts state-level projections show this administrative occupation growing 30% between 2022 and 2032. Suffolk's recent Master's in Healthcare Administration program re-design yielded insights related to what employers need given the current industry climate. The revision was informed by 16 semi-structured employer and alumni interviews and 33 survey responses from largely local participants. Aspects from the data that are relevant to the undergraduate program include the curriculum's emphasis on data analytics, AI, operational improvement, health equity, and leadership.

Suffolk's PILOT (Pioneering Innovations in Learning Outcomes and Teaching) initiative, established under the University's Suffolk Forward Strategic Plan, provided the governance framework for this proposal.

Program of Study and Credit Breakdown

The Applied Bachelor's in Healthcare Administration and Innovation is a structured, three-year degree program totaling 94 credits. The curriculum is jointly developed across three of Suffolk's schools—the College of Arts & Sciences (CAS), Sawyer Business School (SBS), and Law School—and integrates general education, business fundamentals, and healthcare-specific coursework. Students in this program will fulfill all learning outcomes required of the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) core curriculum, with targeted course substitutions in a small number of areas.

Credit Breakdown

The shared general education component (30 credits) includes coursework in writing, mathematics and statistics, social/cultural/global perspectives, science/technology/engineering, and creativity and innovation, consistent with requirements for all Suffolk undergraduates. The business core (30 credits) provides a foundation in economics, accounting, management, finance, operations, information systems, ethics, and strategy, meeting BSBA learning outcomes. The 25-credit healthcare facet of the major integrates existing and newly developed courses in healthcare systems, operations, quality, law and policy, and innovative care models, culminating in a required internship and capstone course. The students will have the option to take one free elective course per year (9 credits total).

Internship Requirement

All students are required to complete HLTH-300: Healthcare Administration Internship, a 3-credit course requiring a minimum of 120 supervised hours in an approved healthcare setting. Placements span hospitals, community health centers, public health departments, behavioral health organizations, healthcare consulting firms, and biotech startups, among others. Students have flexibility to complete the internship any time after their first year. They are anticipated to be paid internships. Students who are unable to secure a paid internship experience may be advised to leverage Suffolk's Summer Career Development Stipend, which provides a \$3500 stipend for qualifying experiences.

Program Learning Objectives and Outcomes

Program Learning Objectives: Graduates of the Applied Bachelor's in Healthcare Administration and Innovation will demonstrate mastery across six integrated competency areas:

- **Understand the Structure and Dynamics of the U.S. Healthcare System:** Students will be able to compare the foundations of U.S. healthcare organization, financing, and delivery to international systems.

- **Apply Interdisciplinary Knowledge to Healthcare Challenges:** Students will integrate concepts from healthcare management, sociology, operations, policy, and ethics to develop innovative solutions addressing access, quality, and equity.
- **Drive Operational and Systems Improvement:** Using performance improvement methods (including Lean and Six Sigma), data analytics, and emerging technologies such as AI, students will make recommendations to transform service delivery and healthcare operations.
- **Navigate Legal, Regulatory, and Policy Environments:** Students will apply legal and compliance frameworks—including HIPAA, fraud and abuse statutes, and informed consent—to ensure ethical and accountable healthcare practice.
- **Advance Patient-Centered and Equitable Care Models:** Students will apply the Quintuple Aim framework to co-create care models that advance equity and health outcomes across diverse populations.
- **Communicate, Collaborate, and Lead for Impact:** Students will demonstrate strong communication, teamwork, and leadership through interdisciplinary projects that produce measurable impact for healthcare partners.

Program Learning Outcomes: By the end of the program, students will be able to:

1. **Describe and compare healthcare systems and delivery models** in the U.S. and globally, with attention to structure, outcomes, and opportunities for innovation.
2. **Analyze healthcare challenges using data, systems thinking, and improvement tools** to identify inefficiencies and develop solutions that enhance performance and patient outcomes.
3. **Apply operational and technological innovations** (such as Lean, Six Sigma, AI, and care redesign) to improve patient flow, resource use, and clinical decision-making.
4. **Evaluate and design care models that address health inequities and social determinants of health**, and propose novel, sustainable approaches aligned with the Quintuple Aim.
5. **Interpret and apply regulatory frameworks** to ensure compliance while supporting innovative practices in healthcare organizations, research, and community settings.
6. **Lead consulting or applied projects with healthcare partners**, generating actionable, evidence-based recommendations through interdisciplinary teamwork and stakeholder engagement.

Assessment Plan

Suffolk University asserts it is committed to ensuring educational effectiveness that is comparable to its traditional 120-credit programs.

Internship and Capstone Assessment

The required internship is assessed through three instruments: (1) a supervisor evaluation using the Suitable/ National Association of Colleges and Employers Career Readiness Competency framework; (2) a student self-evaluation aligned to the same competencies; and (3) a post-internship reflection essay in which students connect academic learning to real-world practice.

The capstone course (HLTH-401) is assessed through formal presentations to healthcare partner organizations and a written consulting report evaluated against a faculty rubric aligned to program learning outcomes.

Program-Level Assessment Benchmarks

The Advisory Board will meet each semester to review the following key performance indicators:

- **Retention and Persistence:** First-to-second year retention within 5 percentage points of the University average for traditional undergraduates (currently 78%).
- **Graduation Rates:** Three-year graduation rates within 5 percentage points of the four-year graduation rate for traditional undergraduates; four-year rates within 5 percentage points of the six-year traditional rate.
- **Internship Success:** 100% of eligible students placed in approved internships; at least 90% receiving satisfactory or higher supervisor evaluations.
- **Post-Graduate Outcomes:** At least 80% of graduates employed full-time, enrolled in graduate school, or participating in a service program within six months of graduation.
- **Student Satisfaction:** Exit survey satisfaction rate of 85% or higher regarding academic quality, advising, and career preparation.
- **Federal Earnings Benchmark:** Graduate median earnings at 2 and 4 years post-enrollment meet or exceed the federal minimum earnings threshold under the U.S. Department of Education's financial value transparency framework as measured through the College Scorecard or successor federal reporting tool.

Assessment will also include curriculum mapping reviews, comparison of traditional and program cohort performance in general education outcomes, employer testimonials, alumni outcome surveys, and eventual integration into Suffolk's Periodic Academic Program Review process.

Transparency and Consumer Protections

As part of the admissions process, students will be required to acknowledge that they are participating in a pilot program offered under Massachusetts Board of Higher Education's Degree Regulations for Pilot Proposals on Innovation. Suffolk will adopt the "Applied Bachelor's" degree title to clearly distinguish this credential from traditional 120-credit baccalaureate degrees, consistent with NECHE guidance. NECHE recently updated their guidance to institutions proposing reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees, requiring the following disclosure text:

Reduced-Credit baccalaureate degrees are eligible for Title IV federal financial aid. However, students who complete a reduced-credit baccalaureate degree and choose to then complete either a traditional baccalaureate or other undergraduate certificates or programs may not be eligible for federal financial aid.

Reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees may not be sufficient for admission into graduate level programs and may not be considered equivalent to a traditional 120-credit bachelor's degree by some employers.

The norm for a baccalaureate degree remains 120 credits. Reduced-credit baccalaureate degrees will be highly structured with limited elective credits.

NECHE requires the disclosure language above to appear in all marketing, admissions, and advising materials. In addition, students in Suffolk's Applied Bachelor's in Healthcare

Administration and Innovation will be required to affirm, either electronically or in writing, that they understand this is not a traditional program when they are enrolling and declaring the major. These materials will address the following points:

- The norm for a bachelor's degree remains four years and 120 credits; some employers and graduate programs may not consider this program to be the equivalent to a traditional 120-credit program.
- The program is best suited for students with defined career goals and a commitment to entering healthcare administration.
- The program is eligible for Title IV federal financial aid; however, students who return to pursue additional undergraduate credits post-graduation will not be eligible for federal grant aid and may have limited eligibility for other federal aid programs.
- Students may transition to a traditional 124-credit BSBA at any time, including post-graduation, with all prior Suffolk coursework applied toward Suffolk's residency requirements.

The institution's application (Letter of Intent) submitted to the BHE pursuant to 610 CMR 16.00, including the **curriculum, course and learning outcomes** for the proposed pilot degree program, may be accessed through the following link:

[Suffolk University's Letter of Intent to Offer a 94 Credit Applied Bachelor's Degree in Healthcare Administration May 2026](#)