

## **A Model for an American University in West Africa: The Suffolk University Experience**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In 1999, at the invitation of the Senegalese Ministry of Education and with support from other African governments, the United Nations, and other agencies, Suffolk University, a private university in Boston, opened a branch campus in Dakar. Its mission is to provide high quality American higher education to qualified students from throughout Africa. Students complete two years of study in Dakar and then transfer to the Boston campus (or another American university), complete their degrees, and return to their home countries. Most students choose the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (with majors in finance, accounting, international business, marketing, information systems, or management), perhaps the discipline most likely to lead to productive employment and a real contribution to the development of the economies of African countries. Other students choose Bachelor of Science or Arts degrees, with programs in computer science, computer engineering, the sciences, economics, international relations, and other areas of study.

Following the American model of higher education, all students take a broad range of courses during their first two years of study, and then concentrate on courses in their major in the third and fourth years. Instruction in Dakar is done primarily by full-time, terminally qualified Boston campus professors. These courses are enhanced by the use of videoconferencing and Web-based technologies. Courses and curricula are identical to those offered at Suffolk's other campuses and accreditation standards are maintained. In addition to the degree programs described here, a comprehensive English Language for Internationals program and a Study Abroad program for American students are offered.

The success rate of Suffolk University Dakar's students is very high. Since 1999, students from 29 African countries have completed two years of study in Dakar, transferred to Suffolk's Boston campus or other American universities, and have demonstrated academic excellence. Students who have graduated have continued on to graduate studies, practical training, and productive employment throughout Africa. Suffolk University Dakar serves as a model for educating this generation of young Africans.

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### **Introduction**

Suffolk University is a private university whose main campus is on historic Beacon Hill in Boston, Massachusetts. Since its founding in 1906, it has had a mission to provide quality higher education to communities that were underserved (often excluded) by other institutions. Diversity is honored at Suffolk, and there is large minority representation among students, faculty, and staff. Further, there is a large number of international students at the Boston campus, from over 95 countries. Suffolk prides itself on its relationship with its students, especially undergraduates. Class size is kept small (under 35) and close student/faculty interaction is encouraged.

Over the past two decades, Suffolk University has grown in size and stature. It has earned various regional, national, and international accreditations. Its rating by Princeton Review, US News and World Report, and other university rating agencies has increased as well. The university is primarily “tuition driven”, meaning that the large percentage of its revenue is derived from student tuition, rather than grants, endowments, or government funding.

The School of Law, College of Arts and Sciences, and Sawyer School of Management have each contributed to the university’s growth and prestige. Satellite campuses have been opened regionally and internationally. Suffolk has a campus in

Madrid, Spain, offering degree programs and study abroad options. Further, Suffolk has developed programs that are offered in Asia, Europe, and South America. The Sawyer School of Management has identified appreciation of a global perspective as part of its mission, and the College of Arts and Sciences encourages all students to spend at least one semester abroad.

Suffolk University opened its campus in Dakar, Senegal, in 1999, at the invitation of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Senegal to meet the growing demand in West Africa for American-style undergraduate business education, intensive English language instruction, and corporate training. Suffolk University's Dakar Campus (SUDC) is an American-Senegalese cooperative venture blending the Senegalese government's need to advance its economy by providing qualified students access to an American system of higher education in English, with Suffolk University's mission of access, diversity and global perspective.

Initially, SUDC offered the first two years of coursework toward the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) degree, with the final two years to be completed at Suffolk's Boston Campus or other institutions of higher learning. Since 2002, in response to students' and employers' demands for training leading to additional career options, SUDC expanded its offerings to include the first two years of a Bachelor of Science (BS) and Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree, with majors such as computer science and engineering, international relations, journalism, science, and engineering. Specialized programs, including Study Abroad for American and international students, continuing education, and a two-year Diplôme program were also added. Qualified students are thus enrolled in a variety of degree programs and academic opportunities at SUDC. All

curricula are taught in English, and emphasize the critical link between theory and practice for students working in the global private and public sectors.

Students whose first language is not English are offered a curriculum in English Language for Internationals (ELI), a comprehensive program designed to provide students with the vital language and academic skills to succeed as university degree candidates. Students whose English proficiency is deemed at collegiate level (based on testing), and who meet other admissions criteria, are eligible for immediate enrollment in courses carrying academic credit (degree granting credit).

Since 1999, the number of degree-seeking students has grown to approximately 100 per year. These students come from over 25 different countries in Africa. Annually, more than 200 students are admitted to the ELI program. During fall 2004, eighty-nine students were enrolled in degree programs, and 253 students enrolled in the ELI program. Many of the students who began in the ELI program continued their studies in a degree program. The following table illustrates the enrollment numbers for the past three fall terms.

	Degree Seeking Students	ELI Students	Study Abroad	Total
Fall 2002	101	245	0	346
Fall 2003	62	199	0	261
Fall 2004	89	253	34	376

Projections for the 2005-2006 academic year are for 110 degree-seeking students, 300 ELI students, and 40 Study Abroad students. It is anticipated that enrollment will increase annually to 200 degree students within five years.

Despite financial and visa issues, SUDC students have demonstrated their capability to make a successful transition from Dakar and complete an undergraduate

degree. More than 84% have continued their studies in Boston. More than 62% of the students who have continued at SUBC have graduated with a Bachelor's degree and more than 26% are currently enrolled. Their success demonstrates the excellent qualifications and preparation received by these students at SUDC, and is a measure of the students' ability to meet academic requirements and complete quality degree programs beyond SUDC<sup>1</sup>.

A unique feature of American higher education is that students in all disciplines are required to study a large number of "general education" courses. During the first two years of study, virtually all students, no matter what their majors, take courses in humanities, sciences, and mathematics. Further, Suffolk requires all students to take courses focusing on diversity, ethics, and communications. It is during the third and fourth years of study that students focus on their major area of study. For the Dakar campus, this is intended to be accomplished at the Boston campus, where a larger variety of courses is offered.

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<sup>1</sup> We are currently evaluating the number of students who are committed to returning to their home countries to utilize their education for professional advancement and assistance in these developing economies.

## **Resources<sup>2</sup>**

The infrastructure of the Dakar campus includes resources comparable to those found at any American university. Suffolk Dakar has two computer laboratories for student use, featuring almost one hundred state-of-the-art desktop workstations, ports for laptops, and high speed Internet connectivity throughout the campus (including student residence rooms). SUDC also has videoconferencing capabilities, via a Tandberg 5000™ system, allowing effortless connection with both the Boston and Madrid campuses as well as other locations throughout the world. Videoconference classes are held on a daily basis, as a supplement for live classroom sessions. This technology is also used for administrative meetings between campuses.

Dakar Campus students have access to the most extensive array of on-line subscription databases available anywhere in Africa. The Dakar campus has access to all of the Web-based databases provided to students on the Boston campus through its Mildred F. Sawyer Library. The Sawyer Library provides Dakar's range of IP addresses to the information vendors when it licenses (subscribes) to book and journal databases; therefore, the students and faculty in Dakar have "on-campus" access as if they were on the Boston campus. Students on the Dakar campus use the same Web page maintained by the Sawyer Library for on-campus database access as used by students on the Boston campus. The databases provided through the Sawyer Library include full text and index/abstract databases arranged for access by "Business and Management," "Social

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<sup>2</sup> Parts of this and the next sections have been excerpted by a recent report to the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) for accreditation purposes. In addition to this author, others at Suffolk University.

Sciences," "Sciences," "Literature, Art & Humanities," and "General Resources." The Sawyer Library currently licenses content for 68 databases from 42 information vendors.

In addition to classroom, office space, meeting rooms, and student lounge, Suffolk also has three student residence halls, with capacity for over 80 students, and a cafeteria serving three meals daily. Recently a football pitch and basketball court were erected. These are used on a daily basis by Suffolk students and staff, and inter-school competitions occur regularly.

Suffolk University has outgrown its initial format of bringing Boston-based faculty to teach courses in two-week or three-week modules, supplemented by additional videoconference sessions and Internet resources. Beginning in the 2005-2006 academic year, full-time resident faculty have been hired and courses will be taught on a semester-long sequence, as in most American universities. Virtually all faculty have terminal qualifications (Ph.D.) in their field, extensive teaching experience at Suffolk-Boston or another American university, and a commitment to excellence in the classroom. Faculty also maintain a rigorous schedule of scholarly research and university and community service activities.

Courses taught in Suffolk follow exactly those taught at the Boston or Madrid campuses, in compliance with all accreditation standards and under supervision by the resident Academic Director and department chairpersons at the Boston campus. Significant efforts at evaluation and assessment have been implemented to demonstrate efficacy of learning objectives, measured against comparable offerings in Boston.

## **Programs**

SUDC offers a variety of programs that may lead to a degree in a recognized field of study, study abroad opportunities, short-term corporate and contract training programs, and English Language development. The campus offers courses leading to the BSBA, BS and BA degrees, as well as an English language training program both for preparation to enter the University's degree programs or transfer, and for the improvement of English. New initiatives include a study abroad program and other exchange programs are being offered. Outreach to the business community and world organizations has resulted in short-term training programs. Recently, a diploma (Diplôme) program was implemented to meet the needs of students who intend to complete only two years of study on the Dakar campus then seek employment opportunities in their countries of origin.

Approximately twenty, three-credit courses are taken in the two years of study at SUDC, out of a total possible curriculum of 122 credits (forty three-credit courses plus two credits of lab science) required to obtain a bachelor's degree. English is the primary language of instruction for all students.

### **1. Four Year Degrees**

#### ***a. Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) Degree***

The BSBA degree program follows the Boston campus American-style, undergraduate business curriculum, and has been updated to prepare students to meet the challenges of today's global business world and the demands of evolving technology. Students complete the same curriculum as students on the Boston campus providing seamless transition to SUBC. The first two years of coursework include general

education, liberal arts electives, and business foundation and core courses. This combination of liberal arts and business subjects is a unique characteristic of United States education, and it provides African students with the broad background and diverse perspectives so desired by today's multinational corporations and government agencies. This perspective is enhanced for business students through interdisciplinary courses in Business Organization and Leadership, Computer Literacy, Ethical Responsibility, and International Business. Students complete a course in American business law and contracts.

***b. Bachelor of Science (BS) Degree and Bachelor of Arts (BA) Degree***

The Dakar Campus offers students a four-year Bachelor degree with two years in Senegal and two years in the United States focusing primarily on the sciences, computer engineering, and the humanities. The curricula for BS and BA students at the Dakar Campus are consistent with SUBC and follow an American-style undergraduate curriculum that prepares students by offering a variety of liberal arts courses as well as core courses in various subjects – a unique characteristic of education that provides them with a broad background and diverse perspectives. Students generally choose a major area of study by the end of their sophomore year. Major course requirements are offered during the Junior and Senior years at SUBC.

**2. English Language for Internationals (ELI) Program**

The English Language for Internationals Program (ELI) is an intensive, full-time curriculum of written and spoken American English. The program consists of a series of language skills classes meant to aid students in improving their English proficiency to the level required for enrollment in an American college/university. The language skills

courses are complemented by an ongoing orientation to the academic, social, and cultural aspects of life in the United States. Small classes with highly qualified instructors ensure that students have the necessary attention and structure to prepare for degree-level studies. Options include successive nine-week intensive day classes, eight-week evening classes, Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and GMAT preparation, specialized private tutorials, and corporate English language classes. Instruction is provided at the following levels:

- Low Intermediate,
- High Intermediate,
- Low Advanced, and
- High Advanced.

Placement into and progression through each level is determined through a variety of assessment tools, including classroom performance, institutional TOEFL tests, and writing samples.

### **3. Other Programs**

#### ***a. Study Abroad***

In 2002, SUDC offered the first of several semester-long and summer study abroad programs for American university students in African/Senegalese culture, literature, environment, history, politics and economics. SUDC has attempted to create and run its own study abroad programs. Financially, those efforts have not drawn sufficient enrollment to cover costs and have contributed to budget deficits.

SUDC acknowledges this challenge and sought to find a solution that would meet students' needs for a semester or academic year abroad, in keeping with the University mission. Thus, a partnership was developed with the Council for International

Educational Exchange (CIEE). Three years ago, CIEE, through its Africa-Middle East Program, began a study abroad program in Dakar. As it outgrew its space, CIEE and SUDC entered into a rental agreement allowing CIEE to hold its academic classes on the SUDC campus, utilize the dormitory and cafeteria for its orientation program, and access office space, library and computer labs. The arrangement has benefited both CIEE's American and SUDC's African students. Courses in the degree program for African students and the Study Abroad program for American students are now cross-listed, allowing students from either group to take courses in another program. Interaction socially, culturally and educationally has been virtually automatic, enriching cross-cultural experiences for both groups.

***b. Diplôme Program***

While the original concept of offering the BSBA program at SUDC was to have Francophone and Anglophone African students complete the first two years of a degree in Dakar, and then continue their studies at SUBC or another American university, this was not practical for all students. The primary reasons SUDC students did not continue beyond the two years were:

- Visa restrictions;
- Financial limitations; and
- Family considerations

As a result, about one-third of SUDC students earned up to sixty credits toward a BSBA, BS, or BA and made no further plans to continue their education. Without a degree, and with limited employment prospects in their home countries that would utilize

their Suffolk education, these students were unable to progress toward their educational and personal goals.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of students' feedback, in fall 2003, SUDC proposed the development of a Diplôme Program to satisfy the needs of students who could not or choose not to continue with their studies in Boston or elsewhere. The program design is to provide students training, credentials recognized within Dakar and other African countries, and prepare students for entry level business jobs with opportunities for advancement in their home countries<sup>4</sup>.

The Diplôme was created to reflect similar Diplôme programs in Africa. Each track requires that students complete at least 54 credits toward the BSBA at SUDC. Currently undergraduates at Suffolk University must complete fifty-four credits to achieve junior standing, and obtain sufficient knowledge recognized by potential employers. At SUDC students must also complete a seminar series on Professional Development, and the additional course modules in either Accounting or Computer Networking. Upon completion of all requirements for the Diplôme, students will be awarded an official certificate from Suffolk University, with the seal affixed and signed by the President of Suffolk University.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that unemployment is quite high in virtually all countries from which our students originate. To encourage students the new Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade spoke at SUDC's commencement in June 2004 regarding the African centrality on financial and global businesses and the need to persevere despite unemployment obstacles. President Wade's appearance increased the recognition of SUDC, and two students were subsequently invited to accompany him on a trip to Paris to accept an award.

<sup>4</sup> The Sawyer School currently does not offer Associate Degrees, and a decision was made to explore other credentials that would be recognized in African countries. We learned that unlike institutions in the United States in which the Associate Degree would serve as the academic credential for such programs, an Associate's Degree does not carry the same prestige or recognition on the African continent. It was determined that the "Diplôme" should be awarded instead because of the prestige it carries in Africa.

## **Conclusion**

In response to calls for alternative higher education options in Sub-Saharan Africa, Suffolk University, a private American institution, opened a campus in Dakar, Senegal, West Africa, in Fall of 1999. The educational model is that of the typical university in the United States. It mirrors that provided at Suffolk University's main campus in Boston, taught by terminally qualified, full-time American faculty, utilizing resources and infrastructure comparable to that available in the United States. The goal of this initiative is to provide high quality American-style undergraduate education to outstanding youth from throughout the continent, thus providing them access to career opportunities in the global marketplace.

Since its inception, students from over 25 countries in Africa have completed two years of study in Dakar, completed their degrees at Suffolk University in Boston (and in some cases, other American universities), continued on to graduate studies, practical training in the United States, and are returning to their home countries in hopes of utilizing their education to begin high level careers in commerce, science, education, and other areas.

Suffolk University's initiative in Dakar, Senegal, serves as a model of higher education for the African continent. It accomplishes this by providing youth in Africa the tools to allow them to increase intellectual and economic opportunities for themselves, their families, and the well-being and economic development of their countries.