

RESEARCH PILOT REPORT · 2026

Suffolk Career Center Student Engagement and Career Outcomes

A two-year pilot linking international student engagement with the Career Center to documented post-graduation outcomes. The first attempt at the Center to study the relationship as a single connected dataset.

PILOT POPULATION

International Students
Class of 2024 & 2025

REACH

664 graduates studied
6,379 engagement touchpoints

PILOT LEAD

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For the first time, engagement and outcomes are studied together.

Suffolk's international student population graduates into a labor market shaped by visa timelines, employer hesitancy, and limited social capital. Until now, whether engagement with the Career Center correlates with post-graduation outcomes has been answered through assumption rather than evidence. This pilot connects two previously separate data streams, Career Center engagement and ISSO-reported outcomes, across four graduation cohorts.

84.2%

INTERNATIONAL
GRADUATES
ENGAGED

6,379

ENGAGEMENT
TOUCHPOINTS
RECORDED

+26.8_{pp}

EMPLOYMENT LIFT
FOR ENGAGED
STUDENTS

5

TIER DOSE-
RESPONSE
CURVE, MONOTONIC

STRATEGIC IMPLICATION

The Center has moved from activity tracking to outcome intelligence. *Engagement with the Career Center is associated with materially better employment outcomes for international students, and the relationship strengthens with each tier of engagement intensity.* The pilot establishes the methodological foundation for evidence-based resource allocation across the international student portfolio.

WHAT THIS REPORT COVERS

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Why this work, and why now.

Higher education's career success measurement model is in the middle of a documented shift. Traditional first-destination metrics are being challenged across the field as too narrow and too late to inform institutional decisions (Berwick et al., 2025). This pilot is Suffolk's response to that shift, focused on the population for whom the stakes of post-graduation outcomes are highest.

The case for measuring beyond placement is no longer contested. Traditional success metrics, primarily salary and first job, fail to capture the complexity of contemporary career trajectories and provide little actionable insight for institutions seeking to improve student preparedness (Berwick et al., 2025). Alumni who report high levels of career support from their institutions are 2.8 times more likely to view their degrees as worth the cost (Rossi Long, 2025). Career engagement is no longer treated in the literature as a soft service. It is treated as a measurable institutional variable that predicts how graduates value their education, advocate for the institution, and contribute as alumni (Rossi Long, 2025).

The construct itself has matured. Career engagement is defined as the general degree to which an individual proactively engages in diverse career behaviors, and this general engagement predicts vocational identity clarity, career self-efficacy, and downstream job satisfaction beyond any single behavior (Hirschi et al., 2014). The implication is direct: counting workshops attended is insufficient. The signal lives in the cumulative, cross-categorical pattern of engagement, which is what this pilot surfaces.

For international students, the stakes are concentrated. Visa timelines make every month of post-graduation job search load-bearing. Employer hesitancy on sponsorship narrows the field of viable opportunities. Limited domestic social capital amplifies the value of institutional networks. Whether the Career Center is reaching this population, and whether engagement is associated with outcomes that matter, is no longer a question Suffolk can leave to inference. This pilot answers it directly.

What was studied, and how.

The pilot links two datasets that have historically lived in separate systems. Career Center engagement records, captured per appointment, event, fair, and program touchpoint, are matched at the student-ID level to ISSO-reported post-graduation outcomes for four graduation cohorts driven by Suffolk's rolling enrollment cycle. The result is a single connected view of who engaged, how often, across which services, and what happened next.

POPULATION	International student graduates from four cohorts: Spring 2024, Fall 2024, Spring 2025, and Fall 2025, aggregated for analysis into Class of 2024 (n = 337) and Class of 2025 (n = 327). Total: 664 graduates.
ENGAGEMENT LAYER	Career Center engagement records covering 15 service categories: appointments, career fairs, classroom presentations, employer spotlights, equity and access advising, foundational and industry advising, international student career support, panels and networking, signature programs, technical training, and career closet, among others.
OUTCOMES LAYER	Post-graduation outcomes reported to the International Student Services Office (ISSO), capturing employment status, status update timing, and U.S. residence at time of latest update.
LINKAGE METHOD	Student records matched on Campus ID across both datasets. Engagement intensity computed as the sum of all touchpoints across the 15 service categories per student.
VALIDATED COHORT	Class of 2024 outcomes are substantially confirmed and serve as the validated cohort for engagement-to-outcome analysis. Class of 2025 outcomes remain in active reporting and are presented as engagement-only for this report.
ANALYTIC FRAME	Descriptive and associational. The pilot reports observed differences in employment rates between engagement strata. It does not claim causal inference.
PILOT TEAM	Aki Vivekanandan, Pilot Lead, Career Outcomes Research. Riddhi Patel, Data Analyst, responsible for dataset preparation, cohort reconciliation, and engagement-to-outcome linkage across the source systems.

COHORT NOTE

153 students across the four cohorts have no confirmed career outcome record at the time of analysis, primarily reflecting the natural reporting lag for the most recent graduates and outcomes such as graduate school or further education not yet captured in current ISSO reporting. Headline employment rates in this report are computed only on students with confirmed status.

The Center reaches the population it serves.

Before any engagement-to-outcome question can be asked, the precondition is reach. A study of impact on students the Center never touches is not possible. The pilot finds that across both cohorts, **559 of 664 international graduates, or 84.2%**, engaged with the Career Center at least once during their time at Suffolk.

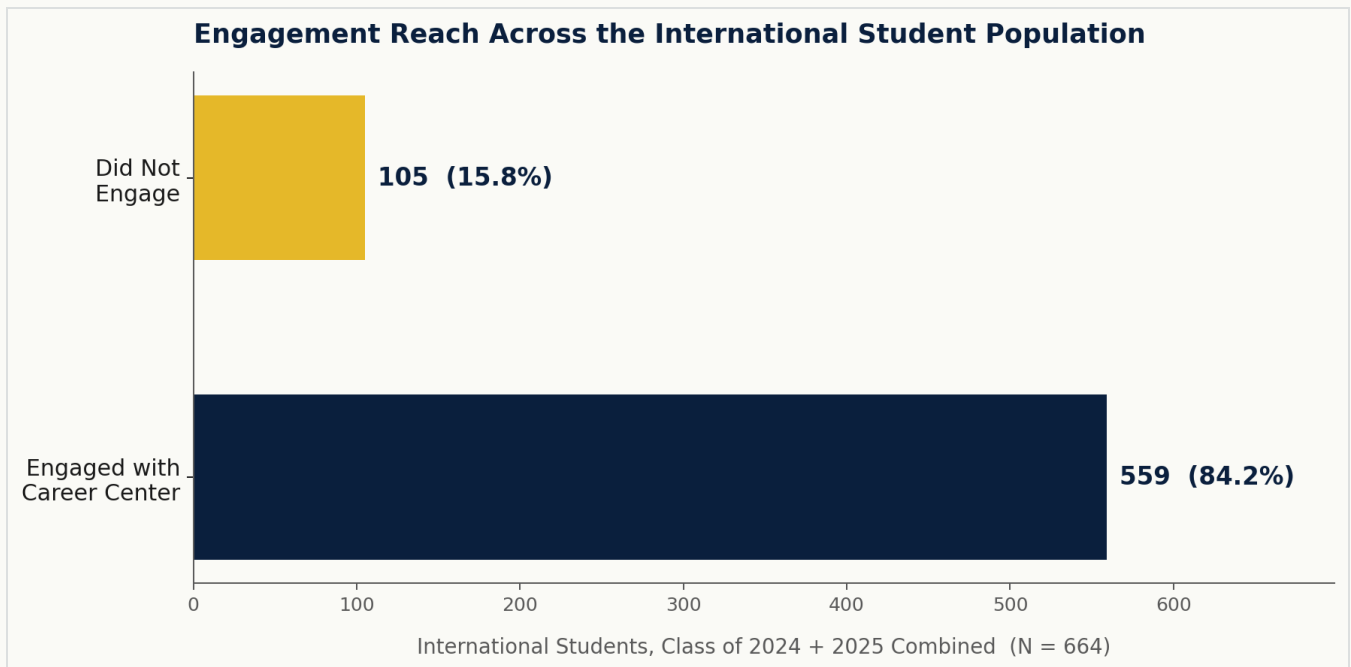


Figure 1. Engagement reach across the international student population, Class of 2024 and Class of 2025 combined. Engagement is defined as one or more recorded touchpoints across the 15 service categories tracked by the Center.

The 15.8% who did not engage are not noise. They are the population the Center has not yet reached, and they are part of the institutional question this report opens. The 84.2% saturation level positions the Center as institutional infrastructure rather than an optional service, and it is the precondition that makes the rest of this analysis possible.

Engaged students were employed at substantially higher rates.

Among Class of 2024 international graduates, those who engaged with the Career Center had a **64.6% employment rate**. Those who did not engage had a **37.8% employment rate**. The gap is 26.8 percentage points. Stated differently, engaged students were 1.7 times more likely to be employed than non-engaged peers.

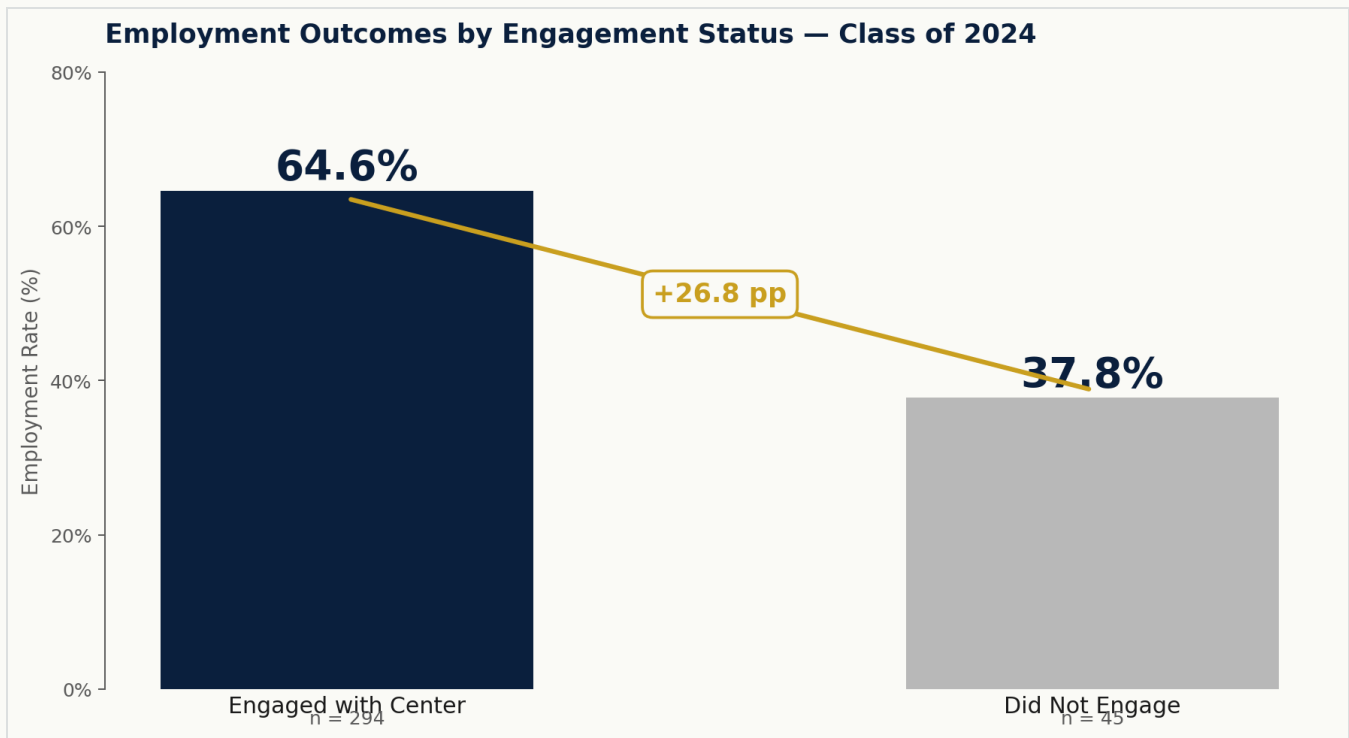


Figure 2. Employment rate by engagement status, Class of 2024 (validated cohort). Engaged: n = 294. Did Not Engage: n = 45. Employment status drawn from ISSO post-graduation reporting.

The size of the gap is meaningful but the size alone is not what makes the finding defensible. The non-engaged group is small (n = 45), which is itself a function of the Center's reach. The interpretation that follows in the next section, the dose-response curve across engagement intensity, is what allows the finding to stand as more than a binary comparison.

Employment rates rise with engagement intensity, monotonically.

The strongest pattern in the pilot is not the binary engaged-versus-not comparison. It is the curve that emerges when the engaged population is stratified by intensity. Across five tiers from zero to sixteen-plus touchpoints, employment rates rise at every step. There is no dip, no reversal, no noise. Random variation rarely produces this shape.

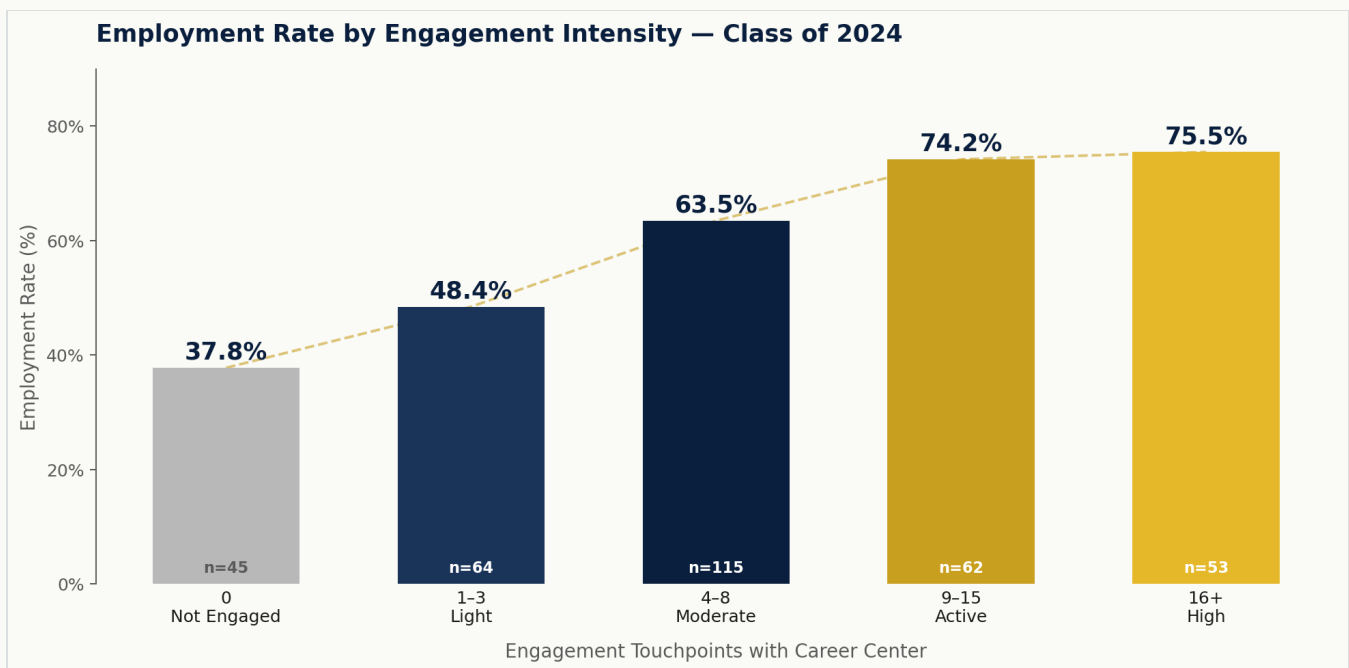


Figure 3. Employment rate by engagement intensity, Class of 2024. Tiers represent total touchpoints across the 15 service categories. Trend line shown for visual reference.

From **37.8%** at zero touchpoints, the curve climbs to **48.4%** at light engagement (one to three touchpoints), to **63.5%** at moderate engagement (four to eight), to **74.2%** at active engagement (nine to fifteen), and plateaus at **75.5%** at high engagement (sixteen-plus). The plateau at the top is itself informative. Returns to additional engagement diminish past a threshold, which is the kind of pattern that suggests a real underlying relationship rather than artifact. The pilot does not claim to know what produces the relationship. It claims that the relationship is present, monotonic, and consistent with what the career engagement literature predicts (Hirschi et al., 2014).

Where the engagement actually happens.

The 6,379 engagement touchpoints are not evenly distributed across the Center's services. The top five categories account for 62% of all engagement, with Industry Advising leading at 14.3%, followed closely by Career Fair, International Student Career Support, Employer Spotlights and Coffee Chats, and Career Readiness Workshops. The mix tells executives where the operational weight of the international student portfolio actually sits.

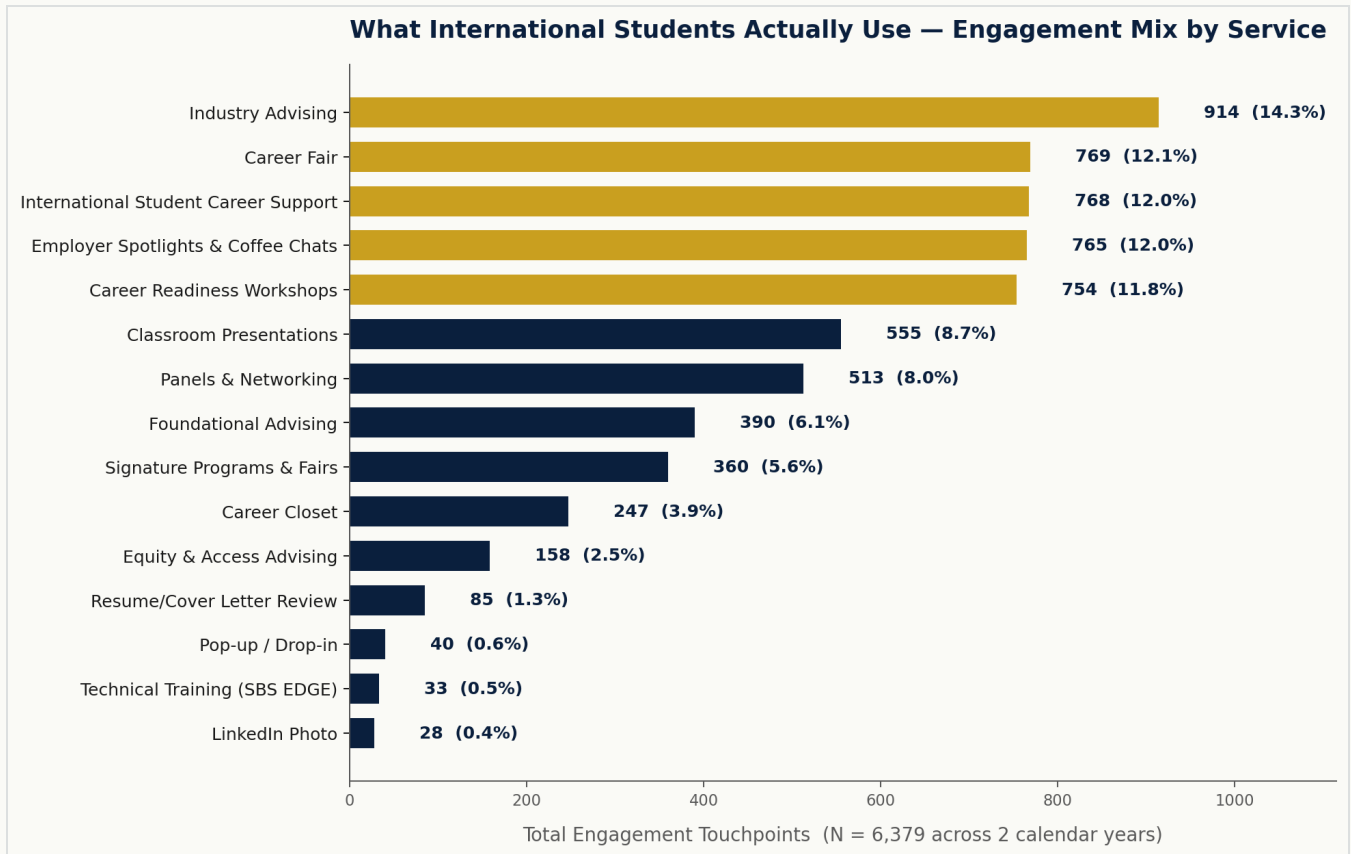


Figure 4. Engagement touchpoints by service category, Class of 2024 and Class of 2025 combined. Top five categories highlighted. Total: 6,379 touchpoints across two calendar years.

What this pilot can and cannot claim.

A pilot earns credibility by being honest about its boundaries. The findings in this report are associational. They are not causal. Establishing what is and is not a defensible claim is part of the pilot's value to the institution.

What the pilot can claim. Among Class of 2024 international graduates, employment rates differ by engagement status, and the difference is large. The relationship is monotonic across five tiers of engagement intensity, consistent with the predictions of the career engagement construct (Hirschi et al., 2014). The Center reaches 84.2% of its target population. Suffolk has, for the first time, a connected view of engagement and outcomes for its international student population.

What the pilot cannot claim. The pilot cannot establish that engagement caused better employment outcomes. Students who engage with the Career Center may differ from those who do not in ways that independently predict employment, including motivation, English fluency, professional networks, and program of study. Selection effects of this kind are inherent to any observational study of voluntary services and are not resolved by this dataset alone.

What the data is missing. 153 students across the four cohorts have no confirmed career outcome record, primarily reflecting reporting lag for the most recent graduates and outcomes such as graduate school not yet captured in current ISSO reporting. The 2025 cohort is reported as engagement-only for the same reason. Closing this gap is the most important next step.

What the pilot establishes. The methodological foundation now exists. Engagement and outcomes can be linked at the student-ID level, stratified by intensity, segmented by service, and reported with enough integrity to inform decisions. Future iterations can extend the population, add longitudinal follow-up, and layer in subjective measures of career success in line with the holistic frame proposed by Berwick et al. (2025).

BOTTOM LINE FOR THE INSTITUTION

The pilot reframes what the Center can be held accountable for. *Suffolk now has the data architecture to ask whether engagement is reaching the right students at the right intensity, in the right mix of services, with the right downstream outcomes.* Each future iteration of this report sharpens the answer.

From a pilot to a permanent capability.

This pilot was built to answer one question and to make the next set of questions answerable. The findings are strong enough to inform decisions and honest enough about their boundaries to warrant continued investment. The path from here is structural, not conceptual.

PILLAR 01 · CLOSE THE OUTCOME GAP

Confirm what 153 students did next.

The most consequential next step is closing the outcome reporting gap, particularly for the Class of 2025 cohort. Coordinated follow-up between the Center and ISSO, expanded to capture graduate school and further education, will produce the second validated cohort and turn the dose-response signal into a two-year confirmed trend.

PILLAR 02 · EXPAND THE POPULATION

From international to comparative.

The pilot was scoped to international students because the stakes are concentrated and the data was achievable. The same methodology applied across the broader graduating class would let Suffolk compare engagement-to-outcome relationships across populations, which is where resource allocation decisions actually live.

PILLAR 03 · LONGITUDINAL FOLLOW-UP

Beyond first destination.

First-destination metrics are too narrow to inform institutional strategy (Berwick et al., 2025). A longitudinal extension at one and three years post-graduation, capturing job changes, further education, and subjective career satisfaction, would build the holistic measurement system the field is moving toward.

PILLAR 04 · PUBLISH AND POSITION

External legibility.

The methodology piloted here is publishable. External legibility through conference presentation and peer-reviewed publication positions Suffolk as a contributor to the national conversation on international student outcomes, not only a consumer of it.

What was previously inferred is now measured. *The Center has the data, the method, and the institutional positioning to make engagement-to-outcome reporting a permanent feature of how Suffolk understands its international student work.* The case for that permanence is what the next cohort of this report will carry.

Literature anchoring this pilot.

This pilot draws on three peer-reviewed sources that together establish the conceptual frame: the construct of career engagement as a measurable behavior, the case for moving beyond first-destination metrics, and the institutional value of meaningful career readiness measurement.

- Berwick, R., Blesso, A. C., Lelenta, F., Miller, W., & Yousey-Elsener, K. (2025). Redefining measures of career success: A holistic view of post-graduation success. *Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry, Improvement, and Impact*, 8(1), 29–50.
- Hirschi, A., Freund, P. A., & Herrmann, A. (2014). The Career Engagement Scale: Development and validation of a measure of proactive career behaviors. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 22(4), 575–594.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1069072713514813>
- Rossi Long, J. (2025). Developing and assessing meaningful career readiness metrics. *Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry, Improvement, and Impact*, 8(1), 133–148.
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SOURCE DATASETS

Career Center engagement records, Suffolk University Center for Career Equity, Development & Success (Class of 2024 and Class of 2025 cohorts). Post-graduation outcome records, Suffolk University International Student Services Office (ISSO).

PREPARED BY

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A note from the pilot lead.

This pilot exists because Suffolk's international student work generates the kind of data that, when connected, can answer questions the Center has been asked to answer for years. What you have read in these pages is the first attempt at that answer, built honestly, scoped tightly, and presented with the boundaries of what it can and cannot claim left visible on the page.

The pilot is the foundation, not the conclusion. The next iteration of this report will close the outcome gap for the 2025 cohort, extend the methodology to additional populations, and begin the longitudinal work the field is calling for. The institutional value of the pilot is that the path from here is now operational, not hypothetical.

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————— *Career Outcomes Research Pilot* —————

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