

## **COMMITTEE ON INTERCULTURAL AND GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING ANNUAL REPORT 2009-2010**

### **Committee Membership 2009-2010:**

- Lisa Aronson, Associate Professor of Art History (fall semester)
- Emma Blumer, Class of '10, SGA Vice President of Diversity Affairs
- Rochelle Calhoun, Dean of Student Affairs
- Herb Crossman, Assistant Director for EEO and Workforce Diversity
- Cori Filson, Director, Office of Off-Campus Study and Exchanges
- Winston Grady-Willis, Director of Intercultural Studies/Associate Professor of American Studies (committee chair)
- Margaret Hegener, Academic Advisor, Higher Education Opportunity Program
- Mary Jablonski, Assistant to the Director, Schick Art Gallery
- Barbara Krause, Executive Director, Office of the President
- Mariel Martin, Director, Office of Student Diversity Programs
- Peter McCarthy, Lecturer, Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work
- Dean Mendes, Assistant Director of Admissions
- Barry Pritzker, Director, Office of Foundation and Corporate Relations
- Julia Routbort, Director, Counseling Center

### **Committee Membership 2010-2011:**

- Rochelle Calhoun, Dean of Student Affairs
- Lauria Chin, Class of '12, Student Representative
- Herb Crossman, Assistant Director for EEO and Workforce Diversity
- J. Ginger Ertz, Museum Educator, Tang Teaching Museum/Art Gallery
- Cori Filson, Director, Office of Off-Campus Study and Exchanges (committee co-chair)
- Winston Grady-Willis, Director of Intercultural Studies/Associate Professor of American Studies (committee co-chair)
- Margaret Hegener, Coordinator for Students with Disabilities
- Barbara Krause, Executive Director, Office of the President
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- Barry Pritzker, Director, Office of Foundation and Corporate Relations
- Julia Routbort, Director, Counseling Center

### **Introduction**

In an effort to address the issue of substantive service demands for committee members, CIGU met nine times (for a minimum of 80 minutes per meeting) during the 2009-2010 academic year, including two meetings to conduct exit interviews with graduating students of color. The committee continues to work to define its role in conjunction with Goal Two of the Strategic Plan.

### **2008-2009 Recommendations: Follow-up in 2009-2010**

- In September 2009 the IPPC formally approved the Bias Response Protocol. With a formal protocol in place, the Bias Response Group (chaired by Dean of Student Affairs Rochelle Calhoun) initiated the use of Incident Alerts as a mechanism for informing the Skidmore community whenever the BRG concludes that an act involving bias may have occurred on campus.
- In November 2009 the IPPC endorsed “Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College” as a guiding document for measuring progress with respect to Goal Two initiatives. An important task for CIGU will be to enter into conversations with representatives from the various offices on campus responsible for such initiatives.
- Several faculty members, as well as relevant offices on campus, made an effort to address climate issues for international faculty, students and staff on campus. Professors Michael Arnush and Pushkala Prasad organized a roundtable discussion focusing on the issues in fall 2009, and several members from Student Academic Services and the Opportunity Program (Associate Dean of Student Affairs Susan Layden, Darren Drabek, Kathy Hemmingway Jones, and Lewis Rosengarten) presented data on international students to CIGU in spring 2010. Among other things, the panel noted that the College has different “pockets” of students that the international team serves, including those who are from the US living abroad, those from abroad who go to school in the US, etc. We also host several international exchange students through the Office of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges. Furthermore, the Opportunity Program serves some international students.

### **December Retreat**

This retreat marked a significant moment in the early history of CIGU in large part because the committee began to frame more explicitly its agenda. During a lengthy discussion about the IPPC’s charge to the subcommittee, some expressed concerns about the extent to which CIGU is an advisory group exclusively, or conversely, the extent to which CIGU is a flagship committee that can chart its own way. Although no consensus was reached in this regard, the group did identify three broad areas under which our work could be better understood and delivered: (1) assessment; (2) international concerns; and (3) privilege (later changed to climate/privilege).

The assessment subgroup (Meg Hegener, Mariel Martin and Julia Routbort) highlighted the need for a mixture of quantitative and qualitative assessments of the campus climate, and noted that such assessments involve not only students, but also, staff and faculty.

The international concerns subgroup (Lisa Aronson, Cori Filson and Dean Mendes) highlighted the need for more of a Website presence for international students, particularly via the Global Skidmore portal, and noted that doing so could make a substantive impact in terms of visibility.

The privilege subgroup (Herb Crossman, Barbara Krause and Mary Kathryn Jablonski) highlighted a possible panel series addressing class, gender, race and national identity organized in conjunction with Cornel West's visit next academic year, as well as the need for a regular discussion forum.

### **Exit Interviews**

Professor Joshua Woodfork launched such interviews four years ago with graduating students of color. At that time members of the Task Force for Intercultural and Global Understanding, joined by President Glotzbach and other Cabinet members, were present for the interviews. Students talked about their experiences—what worked for them and what did not, both inside and outside the classroom—in an effort to gather information. Confidentiality was stressed, and other than the notes being taken, no effort was made to publicly discuss the information.

In its April 2010 meeting CIGU voted to alter the structure of the interviews. As before, confidentiality would continue to be maintained. However, from this point forward data gathered from the interviews will be shared with both the larger faculty and staff communities. CIGU members also drafted a protocol to help guide and preserve the integrity of the interviews. Two exit interviews with graduating students of color were conducted in May. *Note: a thematic report of those interviews follows this annual report as an appendix.*

### **Conclusion**

CIGU members were encouraged by the extent to which the campus community responded to the committee's recommendations from the previous academic year. It is hoped that the 2010-2011 academic year will mark substantive progress in several areas: (a) working with groups such as the Assessment Steering Committee to assess both student learning outcomes and the overall climate for a broad range of constituencies relative to Goal Two of the Strategic Plan; (b) organizing with other groups a community-wide dialogue regarding issues of diversity and inclusion that will include a lecture by Cornel West; and (c) continuing to develop Skidmore's relationship to the larger world, both through

off-campus study opportunities and better recognition of the growing presence of international students, faculty and staff members at the College.

**APPENDIX:****EXIT INTERVIEWS WITH GRADUATING STUDENTS OF COLOR  
Intercultural Center, Skidmore College  
May 14, 2010****INTRODUCTION**

On May 14, 2010 members of CIGU conducted exit interviews with ten self-identified graduating students of color, with seven students participating in the first 90-minute session and three students participating in the second 90-minute session. In each case the students were asked the following questions:

1. Why did you decide to attend Skidmore College? What drew you here?
2. If you participated in the Discovery Tour, how was that experience for you? Did your impressions of Skidmore change once you arrived for classes, and if so, how?
3. Please speak to your first few days and weeks on campus. How was that experience for you?
4. Please speak to your experiences in the classroom. Specifically, how have these curricular experiences been helpful or a hindrance in terms of issues of diversity?
5. Please speak to your experiences outside the classroom. Specifically, how have these co-curricular experiences been helpful or a hindrance in terms of issues of diversity?
6. Have you witnessed changes here in terms of the way Skidmore approaches issues of diversity, and if so, what are they?
7. Please provide recommendations or suggestions on what, concretely, should change institutionally in terms of issues of diversity?
8. Would you now recommend Skidmore College to high school students?

The qualitative data provided here is by no means definitive; nevertheless, it is still significant, especially when viewed in conjunction with the quantitative data found in the CHAS and NSSE assessments. The ten seniors who participated in the interviews comprised roughly ten percent of all self-identified graduating students of color in 2010. However, if one accounts for the fact that, for a complex set of reasons, students of Asian descent have tended not to participate in these interviews, then those who did participate this year represent approximately 18 percent of those who have traditionally done so.

**Demographics**

Asian American: 1  
Asian Indian: 1  
Black: 4  
Latino/Latina: 4  
Women: 7

Men: 3

## FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Virtually everyone who participated in the exit interviews had positive initial impressions of Skidmore College after visiting for the first time. Someone who grew up in suburban Queens recalled that “I liked Skidmore’s tranquility, the beautiful town, and my TAP/financial aid package was pretty good. I went to a conservative/Catholic/all-boys high school. Skidmore was a nice change.” Another student from the New York City area was impressed as well. “I liked that Skidmore was a liberal arts school. I also visited Skidmore while still in high school. I liked the art building and the vibe was good. I enjoyed the very liberal and active space.” Again, the financial aid offer and support from the Opportunity Program (OP) office were pivotal for this student.

Several students who participated in the intensive OP bridge program recalled having mixed emotions about their experiences. One student spoke of the resentment she sensed in non-OP students in her Scribner Seminar. “Some folks think that you’re privileged because you had the summer reading two months prior to them,” she recalled. “Little do they know how hard it is to arrive at that point.” At the same time, two students remarked in hindsight that they felt as if they were in a precarious position while in the bridge program. According to these students, once they arrived for the summer program, OP staff members informed everyone that “they were not Skidmore students yet,” but that they could be via the bridge program. “There are two different levels of English/Math courses,” one student noted. “Basically you would have to do one semester’s worth of work in one month. There are ‘lower classes’ for no Skidmore credit and ‘higher classes’ for Skidmore credit.”

Half of the exit interview participants used the term *segregation* in describing their pre-Orientation experiences. Although scholars connect the term to *de jure* and *de facto* institutional efforts to control space and other resources for specific populations in housing, employment, etc., students interviewed tended to link the term with voluntary social separation. One student asserted that the OP hiking experience “segregated kids by race and class,” reiterating that the trip “was consistent segregation.” Another senior noted that it seemed as if “the jocks and HEOP students already knew each other” when she arrived, asserting that they were “already segregated.” A third student asserted that “I definitely sense a lot of segregation, the students of color with the students of color, the art kids with the art kids, etc.” A third senior commented, “You definitely saw ‘the groups’: the theatre kids with the theatre kids, and so on.” At the same time, however, she recalled with pride the positive impact that such bonding had on her and her classmates. “You do form a family.”

As has been the case with earlier exit interviews, several students also commented on difficult experiences adjusting to a predominantly White college environment, including specific interactions with White students. “The first year was very tough for me,” one graduating senior recalled. “There’s definitely more diversity in New York City. I was feeling depressed because I felt like I did not

belong. Something was missing.” Another student asked, “How do you receive comments such as, ‘How could you be Spanish if you’re White?’ Or a comment like, ‘Your parents are going to cut my grass...’ Comments like these make students of color feel uncomfortable.” One student recalled one such interaction in one of the residence halls during her first month at Skidmore. “I still remember a drinking experience where a former Skidmore student mocked a so-called ‘Black kid laugh’ and would not apologize after I approached him about it.” These seniors insisted that such experiences were not limited to student-to-student interactions. One student recalled a time when someone from the Skidmore staff commented on how her hair was like “sporting a bird nest kind of thing.’ I was insulted, but did not let it bother me.”

### **CLASSROOM AND CURRICULUM**

Several students remarked at length about their experiences in Scribner Seminars or in gateway courses at the departmental level. “I very much enjoyed the summer reading and my Scribner Seminar,” a student recalled. However, she also remembered one class when the non-OP students’ “mouths were wide open” as she answered a question from the professor. “It was as if to say, ‘Wow, how could I have known that?’” This student asserted that this early encounter represented a “rude awakening” in terms of what she could expect over the course of the next four years in the classroom. Another senior remarked in some detail about the FYE reading selection, *Life on the Color Line* by Gregory Howard Williams, noting that several White students did not “appreciate” or enjoy either the book or his FYE lecture. According to this student, a White classmate said, “I did not come here to talk about race. I came here for a good GPA and to play sports.” One student noted that the issue of discussing race explicitly surfaced again during a peer-mentoring experience with 15 White students in conjunction with a Scribner Seminar. When the student moderated a discussion of Spike Lee’s documentary *When the Levees Broke*, some students commented that “Lee is a racist.” Another first-year student asked, “When Spike Lee refers to ‘we’ – who is ‘we’?”

Another senior recalled an MB107 Wal-Mart case discussion. “One-half or more of my classmates will be CEO’s of their families’ businesses. With that in mind, this particular conversation bothered me. The discussion was about why people would even need to shop at Wal-Mart, which is available for ‘low-class folks.’ I felt scared and uncomfortable but I had to speak up: ‘I like Wal-Mart; I don’t have a choice!’ The Professor approached me afterwards and congratulated me for speaking up because she said I brought an awareness of race and class to the discussion.”

Nearly half of those interviewed spoke explicitly of the need to reassess the CD/NW general education requirement. One student suggested that “we could use a “diversity seminar,” as well as offer more trans-gender talks. He asserted that doing so “would help decrease bias incidents” on campus. “How White kids react will determine a good experience at Skidmore,” one student contended. It was for this reason that the student suggested that every student

enroll in a “‘race’ class early on.” Contending that “we give of a false view of ‘diversity’ at Skidmore,” another student suggested that the College provide a mentorship opportunity for each student, as well as have a “‘fundamentals-type’ course on diversity.” Another graduating senior discussed the CD/NW requirement specifically. “I hate that so many students wait until senior year to take a Non-Western course. Why not earlier on?” she asked. A fellow senior mentioned to this student that if she had taken a particular CD/NW course earlier on, she would certainly have taken more. “Waiting until senior year makes it feel like it’s unimportant.”

A few of the graduating seniors remarked that their own search for a more diverse environment complicated their experiences with a given major or minor. One senior noted that her major field classes “often made me feel disconnected, and I did not feel engaged.” This student remarked that there are few places outside of American Studies where faculty diversity is reflected in tangible ways. “This was a hindrance for me, because I felt more connected to the American Studies faculty than those in my major.”

Without question, though, the pilot Intergroup Relations (IGR) program was the curricular issue that generated the most discussion during the exit interviews. At least seven of the ten students had participated in IGR in some way: some had enrolled in Race and Power or Racial Identity: Theory and Praxis; others had been facilitators of or participants in one of the one-credit dialogues; a few participated in IGR forums. With one exception, students had positive overall assessments of the program, even if they had concerns with specific aspects of it. Most concurred with the view offered by one senior who “really enjoyed the experience.” Two students remarked, however, that they did not think that Skidmore students were as open and honest in the dialogues as they could have been. One senior said, “I felt that you could not really share your ideas/thoughts completely.” Although very positive about IGR, another student was concerned that Skidmore students are “a bit too laid back” to make the most of the dialogues. This student suggested that this reflected a larger absence of social engagement at Skidmore. “I saw how Howard and Georgetown students are active; Skidmore students are not nearly as politically active.”

Another student was not convinced that IGR fulfills students’ expectations. While in class, this student felt a sense of dissatisfaction. “The IGR program has the potential, but it should be reevaluated; it won’t work in the same way at Skidmore that it has worked at the University of Michigan.” A third student maintained that the key issue was institutional buy-in from faculty and administrators. “IGR has to get the support it needs.” Other students sounded a familiar refrain regarding the larger student body. “It seems as if the same group of folks are attending explicit race/diversity classes, or other courses that make students confront issues of race,” one senior commented. “Kids who need to be talked to about the issues on race are not attending.” Another student echoed these sentiments: “Only those who want to come participate in IGR. Those who need it, don’t come, and Skidmore needs to find a way to change that.”

In response, another senior argued that a key issue concerns who is recruited to facilitate the class, and stressed that IGR is most effective when

students are introduced to the program early in their Skidmore experience. “It takes a long time to get to the issues,” she noted. This student co-facilitated a class, and it took a while for students to really dialogue. “In the end, the IGR program teaches you to look at folks differently—in a good sense—to complicate our understandings beyond what first meets the eye.” Another student remarked that there are “a few more people in positions of power here who stress being ‘active listeners.’ IGR is the best example of that. Dialogue stops people from talking at each other and instead allows us to talk with each other.” Another student spoke to the value of IGR from a different perspective. “One of the best things about my Skidmore experience, especially IGR, was in learning to be an ally. We will be able to use what we learned and apply it to life after Skidmore.”

### **OSDP CLUBS AND CAMPUS ACTIVISM**

A student who served for several years on the executive board of the OSDP club Raices commented that “Whites think that they don’t belong” in these clubs. “Do you dilute the club’s mission to allow for White students? If so, does it create any barriers?” This student later asked, “Why does Skidmore preach and teach racial equality if we offer diversity groups?” The student contended that the OSDP clubs “foster self-segregating units. If we had a White nationalist group on campus, it would get attacked from all sides. Freshmen are becoming disillusioned, and it hurts them socially. A student of color who feels that if you choose to get involved in an OSDP club, you have to end up having to explain yourself. You are made to feel like you have to defend it.”

Another graduating senior expressed the view that OSDP clubs are very worthwhile, but agreed that members of Asian Cultural Awareness (ACA) often felt as if they had to “defend” their reasons for joining the club. “Joining a club is a face for folks who need it,” who might associate being a club member with a broader co-curricular learning experience. This student appreciated the support from OSDP in helping students identify issues of concern. “Yes, there are times when some of the clubs were on their islands instead of calling for unity,” this student asserted, noting that active faculty involvement could help break down some of these barriers.

A third student noted that a specific concern for her was the negative perception of OSDP clubs by some in the larger campus community. “What’s a hindrance to me is what people think of the cultural clubs. A Skidmore student wrote a part of their senior capstone project that argued against the need for diversity clubs because people ‘isolate themselves.’ The student noted that the students of color often use the ICC and claim it as ‘their’ room.” This student remarked that as a result of such thinking, Whites passing by the Intercultural Center “have even been told, ‘Take off your jewelry...’” However, involvement in OSDP clubs was not always determined by external factors. A student who wondered how joining OSDP clubs affects current first-year students socially noted that she intentionally chose not to join such clubs because she felt that she did not need to be in them to have a sense of self.

Irrespective of individual commitments to OSDP groups, several of the graduating seniors spoke of a sense of fatigue when serving as advocates on behalf of inclusion. “I honestly don’t give a shit,” one senior remarked. “Students need to learn, and our education here is a tool—not to be full-time activists.” Another senior echoed those sentiments, noting that educating the campus community about diversity has “become a job for minority kids while at Skidmore.” Several students remained positive about the presence of OSDP clubs. “There is more support available now for OSDP and diversity clubs, which is good,” one senior remarked. “I also hope that IGR continues to grow. Lastly, I think Rochelle Calhoun has been really helpful, especially with regards to the work of the Bias Response Group.” Another senior referenced activism on campus three years ago around Goal Two. “It feels like only the seniors know about the list of eleven demands that Phred Braunstein gave to Mariel [Martin] so that things could be followed-up on and get implemented. Being open to dialogue is important, and I think there is a more supportive atmosphere at Skidmore—more folks are willing to speak up, listen to concerns from the Bias Response Group.”

### **STUDY ABROAD**

One senior remarked about a study abroad experience in Italy that was complicated by the perception that “I looked like an immigrant and felt ethnically ambiguous” while away. Ironically, that study abroad experience reminded the student of a summer work experience back in the U.S. in which a customer continually remarked, “how well you speak the English language,” steadily inquiring of her, “Where do you come from?” Another senior recalled her semester studying in Spain. Spanish was not the student’s native language; nevertheless, it was a profound experience, in part because of similar definitional ambiguities. This student noted that she “blended in well,” and felt that she had an advantage because “I looked like some of the people there.”

### **LGBTQ CONCERNS**

One graduating senior spoke at some length about life at Skidmore for LGBTQ students of color. This student spoke of Skidmore as being a safe space for the most part, but also noted being the target of homophobic epithets on campus. It was downtown, however, where this senior had been threatened both racially and especially because this student is openly LGBTQ. “I’ve been called a ‘faggot’ both at Skidmore and downtown. But it was downtown that I experienced physical violence. I was walking down Broadway with my partner and someone kept making homophobic remarks. When I told this guy’s friends to keep in line, they just laughed, and he threw snowballs at me. Next thing I know we’re in a fistfight. It’s really painful, but I have to stand up for myself.”

### **FACULTY/STAFF DIVERSITY**

The discussion of faculty and staff diversity figured prominently in both exit interview sessions. One senior remarked, "I would love to see more openly gay faculty, as well as persons of color and those who have children, especially if they are willing to offer their research and personal perspectives on life to students." Several of these graduating seniors remarked that certain White faculty members have played an important role in their intellectual development. "Professor Pat Ferraioli is a great role model for me. Skidmore offers very few classes that offer a sense of different aspects of life," one student observed, noting that her "courses help students learn to relate."

Most of the seniors focused their attention on the relative absence of faculty and staff of color. One student stated the issue this way: "We need more faculty of color! Hiring more diverse faculty helps students because they can serve as role models and mentors. There are presently only a few diverse staff, and that's ridiculous! We do this huge push to admit a more diverse population of students; how about the same effort in recruiting more diverse faculty and staff?" According to two seniors, the resignation of the former OSDP interim director (in the wake of a bias incident involving anti-Muslim prejudice in Orlando and its aftermath) "definitely" affected students. One student contended that Skidmore "did not do enough to support its own Skidmore employee. Yes it happened during 'off-work' hours; nonetheless, you have to support your employees!" The other student echoed these sentiments, contending that Skidmore "doesn't seem to support its diverse staff."

Several students contended that faculty of color made a difference for them in terms of specific contributions to the curriculum. "I found the Hip Hop culture class taught by Lei Bryant and Joshua Woodfork to be the most diverse class I've ever attended while at Skidmore," one senior remarked. "Please continue to teach it in the future."

## **CONCLUSION**

These graduates were by no means monolithic; yet, it is precisely for this reason that it is worth noting the extent to which they shared common ground on several key issues, among them the importance of the pilot IGR program and the need to press for increased faculty and staff diversity. With two exceptions, the seniors who participated in the exit interviews provided affirmative answers to the question, "Would you recommend Skidmore College to others?" In part, that response speaks to the ways in which their experiences at this institution have helped give meaning to their lives.