

A photograph of a person riding a bicycle on a paved path through a forest of tall, thin trees. The person is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and purple patterned shorts. The trees have sparse, light-colored leaves, suggesting early spring or late autumn. The ground is covered in green grass. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

SKIDMORE  
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# Health & Wellness

A GUIDE FOR SKIDMORE FAMILIES

C R E A T I V E  
T H O U G H T  
M A T T E R S

# SKIDMORE

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September 2017

Welcome to Skidmore!

The adventure your student is about to embark on here at Skidmore is an opportunity and a challenge, both for them, and for you, as a family member. Life at Skidmore is intellectually stimulating, exhilarating and filled with change and growth. Staying healthy physically and psychologically helps students get the most out of their education.

This guide is co-written by Skidmore students and Health and Wellness staff for families as an introduction to some key wellness-related challenges students typically navigate during their time on campus. We hope it will provide you with knowledge about Skidmore resources as well as ideas about how to balance support, encouragement and stepping back so that your student can transition successfully and thrive in college.

Moving-in day is filled with excitement, anticipation, anxiety and some sadness (along with the inevitable confusion, sweat from hauling boxes and mini-fridges, and too much information from too many people to possibly remember). Please take this guide home with you, to review after you leave campus. If you have questions or concerns about your student's health and wellness, staff members at Health Services, the Counseling Center and Health Promotion are always happy to help families with information, support and options.

# \* | Student Tips

## THE FIRST TWO WEEKS

### **Don't overdo the phone calls/text messages**

We know you want to talk to us, but it can be stressful during the first couple of weeks when we are getting settled into social and academic life. Ask us what level of contact we want with home.

### **Be open to your student asking some serious questions.**

College is a time where a lot of people are trying new things, whether that be new courses or new relationships. If your student comes to you with some questions or comments about things they have been exploring, it really helps when parents have an open mind. We want your support, that is why we came to you to talk about it!

**Remember, some of us will tend to call when things aren't going well, but not as much when we are busy and happy.**

## **Connections:**

At Skidmore, students meet roommates, classmates, professors, advisors, Peer Mentors, Resident Assistants and staff members, all in their first few days on campus. Orientation has a mix of structured and unstructured time that will help build a sense of community and belonging for all our students, but it is not unusual for students to walk away from orientation feeling a bit overwhelmed and homesick. If your student is struggling initially, let them know they are definitely not alone. It takes time to put down roots. Encourage them to be patient and also to keep reaching out academically and socially. Over time, we know that students who are involved and connected to clubs, professors, and mentors on campus consistently report more rewarding experiences in college.

## **Living on Campus—Peer Resources:**

Skidmore has both an organized and an informal culture of students helping students. We want our students to learn from and teach each other and we work to create a community where all students feel comfortable asking for and giving help.

First year students live in triple and double rooms throughout the residence halls. Each floor has an RA (Resident Assistant), a highly trained student who can act as a peer role model and liaison between students and administrators. RAs are supervised by full-time, live-in professional staff members. RAs will help all first year students define their roommate expectations during the first few days on campus so that they can negotiate with each other about living preferences, expectations and priorities. Sometimes our students are paired with roommates who end up being close friends, but this doesn't always happen. If challenges arise, RAs are great resources. RAs will also host floor socials and other events to develop a floor community.

All first year students will also connect with a Peer Mentor (PM), who will be attached to their specific Scribner Seminar. Peer Mentors are trained to offer academic guidance and support as students transition to Skidmore. Some Peer Mentors have office hours, some organize field trips with their professor for students, and all of them will know about on-campus resources and how to encourage students to access them.

Finally, Peer Health Educators (PHEs) are available to talk with students in the Student Wellness Center on the third floor of Case Center. These students are trained to provide anonymous, peer-based support around a wide range of health related concerns, including sexual assault, drugs and alcohol, and stress management. The Wellness Center also hosts therapy dogs regularly throughout the week, so if your student is missing a cherished family pet, it is the perfect place to stop by for a visit.

## **Asking for Help:**

As family members, you are uniquely situated to encourage your student to reach out and connect with resources. Students do best when they take responsibility for their own health and wellness, but we know that can feel overwhelming at first (for students and for families).

Know where to direct your student for services and help, and know that they will need to ask for that help independently.

## **Getting Involved:**

Skidmore offers over 100 student clubs and organizations that cover a huge range of topics and interests. Most of our students are involved in something on campus in addition to their academics. Club Fair, on the first Friday after the start of classes, is a great opportunity for students to spend time learning about the wide variety of clubs, sign up for email lists and get information about upcoming events. There is also an online platform, SkidSync, that students can access at any time in order to join clubs and be informed about all the events and programs on campus.

There are two student groups specifically dedicated to health and well-being that we want families to know about:

- **The SOURCE:** One of the biggest challenges your student will face in college is finding a group of friends who share their values and interests. The purpose of the SOURCE is to connect students who share similar interests, by creating communities for students who are substance-free, or who are looking for alternatives to the stereotypical college party scene. The SOURCE keeps students informed about events and activities both on and off campus, and hosts SOURCE-specific events and gatherings several times a year. Students can sign up at [www.theskidmoresource.com](http://www.theskidmoresource.com).
- **Peer Health Education:** Skidmore's Peer Health Educators (PHEs) serve as resources, referral agents, and role models for their peers. They provide positive, interactive, fun, non-judgmental programming aimed at empowering Skidmore students to make healthy, informed decisions about their physical and emotional well-being. If your student is interested in learning more about how to become a PHE, encourage them to reach out to the Office of Health Promotion on the first floor of Wiecking Hall. The training program is competitive and applications are accepted every semester.

## \* | Student Tips

### **Sign up for BikeMore**

If you want to travel downtown, sign up for BikeMore on campus to borrow a bike for free. It's a great way to see the city and it is a fun, healthy alternative to using the bus!

### **Use your resources.**

Connect with a trained peer to get extra support during the first semester. I loved my Peer Mentor and she really helped me figure out where to study and how to balance my time. She had just come back from studying abroad and helped me think ahead about where I might want to go in my junior year. I have a friend who got really close to her RA, who helped her with a challenging roommate situation.

### **Get involved.**

Skidmore is a small and pretty friendly campus. Some of my best friends turned out to be people I met kind of randomly, in line at Club Fair and at the bookstore. I was pretty homesick, but I pushed myself to go to club meetings and events and it really did help.

### **Sign up for The SOURCE ([www.theskidmoresource.com](http://www.theskidmoresource.com)).**

I knew I didn't want to make drinking a focus of my social life, so it was great to start college knowing other people who felt the same way.

## **Balance:**

The new living situation and schedule that come with college can change students' eating, sleeping and exercise routines, sometimes in extreme ways. As family members, you can encourage students to pay attention to how they are balancing classes, activities, relationships and their emotional and physical well-being. If a student gets sick, feels overly stressed or would like peer support and guidance related to health and wellness topics like nutrition, exercise or sexual health, Skidmore has excellent resources available right on campus.

### **Counseling Center (Jonsson Tower, 1st Floor. 518-580-5555)**

Offers short-term individual therapy, tailored referrals, consultation, group therapy, and emergency services to almost 550 Skidmore students annually. Forty-five percent of the class of the graduating class of 2017 came to the Counseling Center at some point in their time at Skidmore. Making a first appointment is easy. Skidmore students can walk in during business hours and fill out a brief assessment in order to be screened and scheduled for an appropriate appointment.

### **Health Services (Jonsson Tower, 1st Floor. 518-580-5550)**

Provides primary health care, travel medicine, sports physicals, immunizations and referrals for a wide variety of physical health issues. For urgent concerns, students are welcome to walk in to be seen by a clinician. For specific health needs (annual exams, travel medicine, chronic health issues), students are encouraged to make appointments.

### **Health Promotion (Wiecking, 1st Floor. 518-580-5684)**

Provides campus-wide programming, alcohol and other drug related education, victim advocacy services and oversees the Student Wellness Center with a student staff of over 60 trained Peer Health Educators. Students are welcome to stop by or call to make an appointment to learn more.

## **Choices:**

The choices students make during the first weeks on campus set the stage for their college career. At Skidmore, we encourage students to make healthy and responsible decisions for themselves and for our community. Inclusion, sustainability, affirmative consent and bystander intervention matter here on campus in ways both big and small. Students will learn from their first day on campus that they are part of a community where their actions impact everyone. Skidmore expects students to take responsibility for their choices and to learn from any mistakes they make along the way.

Skidmore shapes our campus community so that healthy and responsible choices are part of the environment available to all our students. Examples of this culture of health and wellness include our 2017 “It’s on Us” student-athlete campaign combating campus sexual violence, sustainable and local food in our dining hall, the community garden, substance-free housing, prayer, yoga and meditation offerings in Wilson Chapel, and access to the CDTA bus service from campus. Skidmore students care about their campus and many play a large and active role in improving it.

## **About Drugs and Alcohol:**

Forty-eight percent of our students arrive on campus as non-drinkers who want to seek out social events that don’t involve alcohol. We also know that our students have some misconceptions about their peers’ use of alcohol and other drugs and that those misconceptions can sometimes shape their behavior in negative ways. During the first few weeks on campus, your student will receive information about Skidmore’s alcohol and other drug policy as well as education about social norms and protective strategies.

We encourage you to have conversations with your student that include asking them about their choices regarding drug and/or alcohol use. If you are concerned that your student’s substance use is negatively impacting them, please know you are welcome to reach out to professional staff at the Counseling Center and/or Health Services for consultation.

Health Promotion offers a program called BASICS (Brief Alcohol Screening and Intervention for College Students) which is a two session educational intervention designed to help students take a closer look at their own substance use and how it is affecting their lives. Students can contact the office to schedule an initial BASICS session. Some students will be required to complete BASICS as an educational sanction following a policy violation. Regardless of their level of alcohol or drug use, students report BASICS is a positive experience for them. We know from our own research that a majority of students will alter their use in healthy ways after completing BASICS.



# \* | Student Tips

**If your student is finding a class particularly challenging, encourage them to:**

- ask the professor to meet with you and go over material (use those office hours!)
- get a tutor from Student Academic Services
- form a study group with fellow classmates
- make sure everything is organized prior to class

I totally overcommitted my first year at Skidmore. Encourage your student to build some relaxation time into their schedule.

If you feel as though things are getting to be too much and you don't know how to get yourself situated, the Counseling Center is a great option. Their services are included in tuition, so you don't have to worry about using insurance.

During times of high stress and low sleep, aka college, the chances of getting sick are high. Health Services sponsors flu shot clinics each Fall.

## **About Affirmative Consent:**

If students choose to engage in sexual behavior (and we know that most of them do at some point in their time at Skidmore), we expect them to be guided by the core principle of affirmative consent. New York State law and college policy require that the initiator of any sexual behavior is responsible for obtaining affirmative consent for each sexual activity desired. Sexual consent is communicated either verbally and/or through actions, and can be withdrawn at any time. It must be mutually understandable and clear. Silence is not affirmative consent. Someone who is incapacitated (lacks the ability to knowingly engage in sexual behavior) cannot give affirmative consent.

The overwhelming majority, 98%, of our students tell us that they prioritize affirmative consent in their personal lives. Skidmore students will have sustained education about the college's expectations around affirmative consent, beginning with the online education they completed prior to coming to campus, followed up with programming during orientation and continuing with activities, poster campaigns, workshops and peer led discussions throughout the year.

## Communication:

### With Families

Expect your student to change. After all, that is why they, (and you), chose Skidmore. All of the challenge, upheaval and disruption college fosters is typically a very good thing. As family members, keeping lines of communication as open as possible means that your student will be able to use you as a source of support, advice, and guidance during happy and stressful times ahead.

## \* | Student Tips

**The less judgment, the more students will want to talk about how to avoid unsafe decisions—whether it's about sex, alcohol, drugs or other risky behaviors.**

Consider Asking-

- How are your values lining up with life at Skidmore?
- What worries you about college life? How do you plan on handling alcohol? drugs?
- What are you hoping to achieve this semester socially? academically?
- What will you do if you find yourself in an uncomfortable situation?

### With Health Services and the Counseling Center

While Health Services and the Counseling Center welcome questions and concerns from family members, their clinical interactions with students are confidential and, as such, are guided by professional ethical standards and state and federal law. Confidentiality means that staff at the Counseling Center and at Health Services cannot share specific information (including whether a student has been seen or not) about any clinical contact without a release of information from that student.

### With Professors

At Skidmore, students have the opportunity to consistently engage with faculty members, both in and out of the classroom. Their Scribner Seminar faculty will serve as their advisor, typically until they choose an advisor in their academic major. Academic advisors help students navigate course selection, suggest resources and opportunities and help students explore topics of interest to them. Faculty members make the final decision about academic standards, grading and class expectations.

The Office of Academic Advising oversees Skidmore's faculty advising system and can assist students who are experiencing significant stressors that are affecting their academic life.

# \* | Student Tips

I wish I had connected with Student Academic Services in Starbuck Center earlier! They helped me so much, with peer tutoring, time management coaching and study groups. They also have late hours, so it was a great place to study when I was sick of being in the library.

Professors have office hours, so use those to your advantage any time you have questions or feel lost. Coming up to professors after class or getting in touch with them via e-mail may also be helpful depending on the professor. As long as you deal with your issues in an open and responsible way, they will always help. They're not just here to pass on their wisdom but also to help when you need it!

## Resources

Office of Health Promotion .....518-580-5684  
Wiecking Hall, 1st Floor

Health Services .....518-580-5550  
Jonsson Tower, 1st Floor

The Counseling Center .....518-580-5555  
Jonsson Tower, 1st Floor

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*With special thanks to Madison Lyman ('18) and Anya Goodman ('18) for their contributions to this guide.*

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