

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (Our Common Future, 1987, World Commission on Environment and Development)

The Issue. According to a study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, humanity’s use of natural resources has exceed the regenerative capacity of the earth since the 1980’s. In 1961, human demand was about 70 percent of the earth’s regenerative capacity. By the 1980’s, demand had exceeded supply by at least 20 percent. Currently, it is estimated that it takes over fifteen months to renew what humanity uses in twelve.

Skidmore’s Commitment. The college community knows that the imbalance described above cannot continue. It recognizes that it exists as one of many interconnected communities and that all are affected by personal and institutional choices. Goal #3 of the College’s strategic plan, calls to “Develop, broaden, and deepen the College’s connections to the local community; enhance our ability to function as a socially and environmentally responsible corporate citizen.” Accordingly, it expresses a commitment to “Make the Skidmore campus an environmental laboratory, increase our emphasis on responsible planning for environmentally sustainable operation, and continue efforts to reduce the College’s “environmental footprint.” Promote a campus intellectual climate that supports these goals.”

Current Programs. Skidmore College has been concentrating on issues such as waste reduction, recycling, environmentally-preferable purchasing and energy conservation. In recent construction, the college has focused on sustainable site locations, water efficiency, energy renewal and conservation, indoor air quality, indigenous and low maintenance landscapes and sustainably harvested or recycled materials. Each of these issues can be a learning experience and students are eager to participate.

Programs to Consider. In looking to expand sustainability, the college must strive to find a balance between sound fiscal practices and environmental responsibility. For construction, the college should endeavor to design new buildings and renewing existing buildings to meet standards set by LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). The college should also consider monitoring other emerging national and international organizations, initiatives and standards, and their short and long term effects on campus.

In facilities operations, the college should consider alternative energy sources such as wind, geo-thermal and photovoltaics. It should document and monitor its carbon balance.

Creative thought may matter more here than any other issue the college faces. As a leader in its community, as a center of learning and scholarship, and as an institution with a very long time horizon, Skidmore has a responsibility to endeavor to do everything within its means to foster sustainability.



Drilling Geo-Thermal Wells,
Northwoods Village Apartments



Harvested wood trim;
Northwoods Village Apartments