



The Skidmore Community and Empowerment

Strategic Action Agenda: 2013-2014

We begin another academic year, our ninth, in which we will continue to implement our current *Strategic Plan*, even as we look ahead to developing the next one. Once again, we begin on a very strong footing:

- Coming off a record year in the number of admissions applications, we have enrolled another strong, diverse, and quite promising entering class. Pre-orientation and Orientation have gone smoothly, and our new students seem to be well launched into their Scribner Seminars and their Skidmore careers.
- With the completion of Sussman Village (replacing Scribner Village) and the renovation of Wiecking Hall, all our student housing now meets our standards.
- Planning for the new Center for Integrated Sciences complex and work on how best to support scientific literacy across our entire student population has continued apace. We are close to a final design for the building, which I expect the Board of Trustees to approve at their upcoming October meeting.

And, as always, we have a great deal of work – both continuing and planned – to engage us:

- A number of initiatives are under way in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs that promise to enhance our support for teaching and learning, as well as our co-curricular and residential life.
- We will continue work to improve our overall “yield” on admitted candidates.
- We need to continue our work aimed at constraining costs and allocating our resources (time, energy, and funds) in ways that advance our highest strategic priorities.
- We must continue to develop the resources (primarily Financial Aid) needed to offer to the broadest and most qualified student population access to a Skidmore education.
- We must continue to help our students to prepare effectively for their post-Skidmore lives and to articulate clearly the core elements of their liberal education.
- We need to continue our efforts to enhance the College’s reputation – especially its standing in the eyes of prospective students and their parents, high school guidance counselors, and potential donors.
- Under the aegis of IPPC, we will initiate an inclusive process this year to create our next *Strategic Plan*.
- We are planning our next comprehensive fundraising campaign to provide the resources needed to advance major strategic priorities.
- We are committed to both increasing our efforts in operating the College in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner and communicating more effectively the scope and progress of this work.

One of Skidmore’s greatest strengths is our sense of community, as understood in the context of our mission. This year, I ask that we give renewed attention to the meaning of *community* at Skidmore in the context of our fundamental commitment to liberal education; let us create together new ways to enhance these values upon which our ongoing life is based.

Values, Community, Climate, and Inclusion

What kind of community must we be to achieve our aspirations? A community can be simply a group of people living or working together – by choice or by chance. Indeed, all of us have been born into or otherwise randomly included in any number of communities across our lives. In a deeper or more ideal sense, however, a community is a group of people organized around a goal or a mission or a set of values. In such a community, the shared commitment to achieving a mission and living up to core values brings people together, helping to bridge differences that might otherwise drive them apart. Skidmore College is decidedly a community of this kind – the best kind of community.

We are a leading liberal arts college, a community dedicated to the education of our students as whole persons, a community of learners and teacher-scholars, an academic community. Such a college provides a special setting for teaching and learning, which we understand not as an impersonal transaction but rather as a relational activity that connects students deeply to the subjects they study, to other persons, and to themselves. And as such, we are decidedly a *community of choice*. Membership is a distinct privilege that needs to be earned through our actions day-to-day. Yet, insofar as we continue to earn the privilege of continued membership, we can lay claim to the promises represented in the values that define who we are.

At the root of the concept of *liberal education* is the Latin word ‘*liber*’: *free*. A liberal education is a course of study appropriate to a free person, someone whose life is not lived at the behest of another. At the same time, it is meant to be a *freeing* education – one that liberates the individual from the bonds of ignorance, ideology, and the undue influence of uninformed social pressure. Ultimately, the goal of liberal education is to empower our students both to be authentically who they are and to determine, for themselves, the kind of persons they want to become. In a word, to be truly *autonomous* – literally: *self-regulating* – human beings.

Human freedom is always “situated.” We always find ourselves in some context not of our own making. Moreover, the project of understanding individual autonomy within sometimes limiting social factors such as racism, classism, religious persecution, discrimination, and the like is complex, to say the least. Yet as self-aware human beings, we have the capacity to determine both the attitudes we take up and the actions we initiate in response to our circumstances. It is especially important that our students embrace this realization. Standing at the threshold of their adult lives and having been accepted into our educational community, they now have access to extraordinary educational resources that open for them horizons of limitless possibility. It is our mission to help our students envision those possibilities for themselves, acquire the intellectual and personal abilities needed to realize them, and begin charting the path toward the achievement of their goals. In doing so, we empower them to set the course of their lives and overcome whatever constraining factors might be associated with their personal circumstances. Wes Moore, the author of the 2013-14 First-Year Experience common reading, *The Other Wes Moore*, talks about the individuals who helped him achieve awareness of his own possibilities:

People who taught me that no accident of birth – not being black or relatively poor, being from Baltimore or the Bronx or fatherless – would ever define or limit me. In other words, they helped me to discover what it means to be free.¹

As we help our students cultivate a similar awareness for themselves, we also need to help them accept the responsibility that attends their personal freedom – a responsibility to determine what they think and how they act. It takes courage to face up to such profound responsibility, and we need to foster that virtue in our students as well. We do so, in part, by expecting such courage in ourselves and reinforcing this message of freedom and responsibility across all aspects of our community.

¹Wes Moore, *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* (New York: Spiegel & Grau Trade Paperbacks, 2011), pp. 179-80.

The “climate” of the Skidmore community establishes the overall context for our students’ educational journey – a context that can reinforce or impede their efforts, and ours. For our students also learn through the messages we send to one another by how we interact and function as a community. This is one reason why we place such emphasis on being a respectful, inclusive, and caring community. Through our ordinary interactions, all of us model the behavior we believe to be appropriate within our community. The good news is that even casual encounters at Skidmore tend to be marked by a noticeable spirit of friendliness and civility. Our alumni frequently comment on the importance of this aspect in their own experiences here, and they are gratified to know that the Skidmore of today continues to be a caring community in which personal relationships still matter. Visitors to campus (including prospective students and their families) and parents often report similar perceptions and sometimes contrast what they see here with what they have noticed at other colleges, reminding us that we must never take for granted the prevalence of such a positive climate within a college community. I believe that what could be discounted as merely a superficial display of manners, in fact, reflects a deeper commitment to the way we express our fundamental educational values in a context of respect for one another.

But we can afford neither to be self-congratulatory nor complacent, because, unfortunately, not everyone at the College experiences our community in these positive ways. Some of our students remind us that, for them, we have not yet become the fully inclusive and welcoming community that we aspire to be and that so many of our members do experience. Those students report occurrences in which student peers, staff members, members of the faculty, or persons in the larger Saratoga Springs area sometimes suggest to them directly or indirectly, through their words or actions, that our students’ participation in the life of the College is in question – that they are on the margins of the Skidmore community. Based on their own experience, members of different employee groups (faculty, staff, and administration) too have expressed concern that we sometimes fall short of meeting our high goals for inclusiveness and civility to one another. Both the meanings and implications of these concerns are themselves legitimate topics for critical inquiry. However, these sometimes-challenging conversations need to begin by acknowledging the reality of the reported experiences.

A liberal arts college is a community of discourse, a community of conversation. And our conversations frequently deal with controversial topics – both the “big” questions that have occupied thoughtful human beings for centuries and newer ones that have emerged with the development of our modern world. As an educational institution dedicated to fostering critical inquiry, we cannot assume that such questions are settled in advance – for example, the meanings of concepts such as *democracy, social justice, sustainability, freedom, humanity, human identity*, and even *liberal education* itself are fair game for critical analysis. Furthermore, we need to acknowledge that the notion of *critical dialog* itself can and should be an object of inquiry, discussion, and debate. But even though it is possible to analyze and challenge any of our ideas, it is not possible to place all of them in question at once. This means that even the most open of dialogs must balance commitment to accepted values and ideas with the capacity to explore and seriously consider multiple points of view. Our increasingly diverse academic community provides all of us – most especially our students – with opportunities to interact with and learn from people who may look at the world differently from themselves. To prepare our students to function effectively as both professionals and citizens in our increasingly complex world, we need to help them learn how to talk across lines of difference: political, religious, racial, socio-economic, gender, sexual orientation, national – however such differences of background, perspective, or opinion play out.

Such inquiry is (and should be!) difficult and demanding work. Our dedication to critical discourse means that at any given moment all of us – students, faculty members, staff members, administrators – should be prepared to experience the discomfort of having our ideas interrogated. Such discomfort goes hand-in-hand with intellectual and personal growth. So it is part of our educational mission to help our students embrace this process and become accustomed to living

with intellectual and personal discomfort. In other words, the very nature of the academic enterprise requires that we do not place too high a value on anyone's feeling "comfortable" – a term frequently invoked in discussions of community and inclusion. But we can ask students to participate actively and fully in the challenging work of liberal education only to the extent they are able to trust that, regardless of their identity or background, they truly are valued members of the community, that their participation matters. Alternatively put, students cannot embrace the (sometimes quite personal) risks involved in liberal learning if they feel that the conversation itself places in question their personal identity, status in a particular classroom, or standing in the larger community. Our institutional messages especially – both explicit and implicit – need to assure *all* of our students that they begin as full members of our community.

These considerations can appear abstract, but this line of reasoning speaks to concrete experiences all of us have in interacting with others. No matter who we are, it is difficult to engage authentically in dialog if one feels dismissed out of hand by other participants. Our *Strategic Plan* emphatically states our commitment both to challenging and supporting *all* our students in achieving the highest possible levels of academic excellence and personal development. This principle should frame everything each of us does, again no matter what position each of us holds within the College. ***But this means that our commitment to creating a community that supports our educational goals is only as strong as our commitment to creating a climate that is not only respectful but is truly inclusive.*** All of us within our community – and especially, all of our students – deserve to feel that we belong here, confident in our status of full membership in this community.

Especially in dealing with often emotionally charged questions regarding issues of identity and community, we must be intentional in creating safe spaces for individuals to bring their personal experiences to the conversation – to let others know how our community (or the world at large) feels from their perspective. After all, each of us has a fundamental right to be who one is and to express that identity in ways that do not impinge upon the rights of others. Moreover, personal narratives, both factual and fictional, play a central role in liberal education, and not just in literature and drama. Martha Nussbaum has argued that developing one's narrative imagination is crucial to discovering previously unrecognized connections with other human beings and, ultimately, to gaining greater awareness not only of others but also of oneself.² Personal narratives can also be central to discussions of religion, and many other areas as well.

In sum, in order to empower our students to participate freely and fully in challenging conversations that address basic questions of human nature, social identity, and the like, we first must create a climate of trust in which they can be confident that their personhood, identity, or humanity are not being placed in question. When this fundamental pedagogical condition is met, we open the door to inquiries in which personal, historical, and theoretical considerations can coexist and, indeed, inform one another – inquiries that ultimately lead to a more expansive view of both ourselves and the social and natural worlds we inhabit. Yet Skidmore has always aspired to educate both "mind and hand." Fulfilling this promise means that, at some point, the outcome of dialog needs to be not just understanding but conviction – a commitment to a set of beliefs or a course of action.

A Community of Communities

Though we are a "small" college, we encompass more than 2,400³ students and 900 (or so) people who work here – not to mention the thousands of alumni, parents, and friends who

²Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), Chapter 3. In describing his personal journey of self-discovery, Wes Moore said that he ultimately was able to know who *he* was only through coming to understand "the other Wes More" and his life.

³Technically, in the 2013-14 academic year the number is closer to 2,500, because the members of the class of 2014 (the largest class in our history) are back from studying away and are on campus. However, when this class graduates, our overall student population, for next year and successive years, will likely fall below 2,400.

constitute the extended Skidmore community. Because of this complexity, we are in effect a *community of communities*. Each of us is a member of multiple groups based on our interests, affinities, and our work. These groups overlap, intersect, and interact in myriad ways, and together they make up the College. Our students, however, sometimes express a longing for a stronger and more pervasive sense of campus unity: a personal experience of belonging to the greater whole that is Skidmore College. Wanting to feel a genuine sense of belonging and connection to the greater whole is both reasonable and laudable. Perhaps such a sense of connection is best achieved through understanding and valuing one's own contribution to our shared mission and internalizing our community's fundamental values. So this is one reason it is important for all of us to know just how what we do contributes to advancing the College's central mission and, ultimately, connects us to one another within the shared work of our academic community. I suspect, as well, that one feels more connected to the College as a whole to the extent that one personally invests in the community and takes pride in what we stand for and what we do for our students.

As a residential liberal arts college, we are, in effect, a “small city” that is organized around the idea that students learn best in close physical proximity to their professors and to one another. This principle is easily overlooked in our increasingly digital age. Certainly, the importance of electronic communication in our lives is beyond dispute. All of us today – and most especially our students – are connected to the world and to each other through any number of electronic pathways that we could scarcely have imagined just a few years ago. At the same time, electronic communication lacks many of the modalities that give dimension to unmediated personal interactions. At Skidmore, we establish a wide variety of “spaces” – most though not all *physical* spaces – in which ideas can be exchanged, discussed, debated, and critically evaluated. These settings are both intimate (such as classrooms, laboratories, and studios) and more public (lectures, performances, symposia, and meetings). We attach to work in these spaces a deep sense of purpose. In a physical classroom for example, professors who know and care directly for their students as individuals can help them establish connections with the subject matter of a course and with one another in ways not possible through electronic media. For this reason, the classroom, the laboratory, and the studio represent fundamental building blocks of the Skidmore educational community; but so do the dining hall, residence hall rooms, and other places on campus (and off) where students interact and learn from one another in unstructured settings.

In these various settings, some of us – members of the faculty, residence life staff, athletic department coaches, et al. – engage directly with students, shaping their educational experiences in immediate and personal ways, and those personal connections remain important to our graduates for a lifetime. Many members of the staff and administration also interact directly with students in other ways by providing a variety of important services, e.g., in the dining hall, in Student Health Services, in the Post Office, in the Library. Others of us influence our students' lives in more indirect ways, for example, by helping to keep our campus a beautiful place in which to study, learn, and work, making sure that financial aid awards are accurate, seeing to it that the Library provides great service to the entire community, or supporting the technological resources referenced above. So whether we are students, parents, faculty members, staff members, administrators, alumni, or members of the Board of Trustees – and even if our work itself is not specifically “academic” – each of us is a member of the Skidmore academic community, with a personal stake in seeing to it that the College functions in ways that enable us to achieve our overarching educational goals.

Structures and Principles of Operation

To create and sustain a community dedicated to the ideals described above – what former Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti characterized as a “free and ordered space”⁴ – a college or university requires appropriate institutional structures. And here we encounter a paradox: A

⁴A. Bartlett Giamatti, *A Free and Ordered Space: The Real World of the University* (1990).

college that is dedicated to preparing informed responsible citizens is not and indeed *cannot* be a perfect democracy. This is certainly true in the classroom. As experts and scholars in their fields, faculty members have final responsibility for deciding questions of both substance and process. Of course, many questions we explore in the context of liberal education remain contested ground, and on such questions reasonable people may responsibly disagree. Accordingly, we expect our faculty members to create the space for students to disagree with one another – and with the professor as well – in reaching their own conclusions on such matters. Indeed, the highest compliment a student can pay a professor is to progress so far in a field of knowledge to be able to challenge the teacher to reexamine the latter’s own views. But even so, it remains the faculty member’s responsibility to create the “safe” pedagogical spaces described above and then see to it that discussions of even complicated, controversial, or emotionally fraught topics proceed in a respectful and reasoned manner. In a parallel way, both the Board of Trustees and the Administration have special responsibilities to maintain the College’s integrity – both its fealty to its educational mission and values and also its capacity to function as a place where all voices can be heard.

One of our fundamental principles impels us to maximize participation and hear the broadest possible range of opinions on questions that are important to our community. We do this first of all through our system of shared governance, which introduces elements of democracy into our operations. This might complicate (and sometimes slow) decision-making, but we are committed to fostering such participation because of the overriding values it helps to realize – taking full advantage of our community’s collective intelligence and wisdom, broadening support for decisions, and strengthening the bonds of community by letting all of us understand that we truly have a constructive role to play. But since not every member of our community has a formal opportunity to participate directly in shared governance, we also must create additional informal occasions to encourage broad discussion and solicit opinions across the community. The process of crafting our new *Strategic Plan* this year, under the guidance of the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC), will provide multiple occasions to make good on this promise.

From both these structural considerations and the basic elements in our educational mission, it follows that preserving the capacity for genuine dialog must rank as one of our highest priorities. This is not just an abstract issue. It became all too concrete for us on several occasions in the 2012-13 academic year when our community confronted strong differences of opinion regarding the choice of an honorary degree recipient, other issues relating to our support for environmental sustainability, and the question of whether we really are the kind of inclusive community described above. These instances helped raise awareness of the sense of urgency felt by some members of our community around the issues under discussion and, in fact, led to important follow-up conversations. They also raised significant questions of process. The discussions that began last year need to continue, and we are seeing an encouraging increase in interest among our students in addressing important societal issues. For example, a number of students have called for the College to adopt a “responsible investing” posture for managing our endowment portfolio; a petition was presented to the administration and Board of Trustees last spring; and the SGA Senate unanimously passed a resolution in support of this initiative. This is a legitimate topic of conversation relating to institutional policy. It is also a conversation that will unfold in the context of a national political movement that has taken highly disruptive forms at some other schools. Addressing this and other challenging topics will provide us an important opportunity as a community to ensure that all interested parties are engaged and that all perspectives receive due consideration. But at the same time, the right to have one’s voice heard as part of a deliberative process does not imply a right to have one’s views ultimately prevail.

Furthermore, because of the central role in our community of dialog, argument, and persuasion, we must understand that any act of silencing any voice within our community is inconsistent with our fundamental values. In our classrooms, professors need to be constantly

vigilant to ensure that they are bringing every student into the conversation and they are not, inadvertently, signaling to some that their voices are less valued than others. The same expectation also extends to public settings, where the act of silencing voices can take overt and more obvious forms, including intimidation or the threat of disruption. Political action and even protest certainly can – and, no doubt, should – have a place in our institutional life. But one implication of the principles articulated above is that, typically, political protests should take place in different times and “spaces” from those devoted to inquiry, deliberation, or decision-making. At the same time, we must acknowledge that, for better or worse, it is exactly these times and spaces that historically have been the target of activism and disruption.

To create and sustain the kind of inclusive and high-performing community we seek to be, we need to be intolerant of behaviors that undermine our shared goals. For example, the kinds of acts that are described in Bias Incident Reports that diminish our inclusivity by signaling to some members of our community that they do not belong here cannot be regarded as acceptable behavior. Those aspects of our student culture – and, indeed, of the national college and university culture – that would portray drug and alcohol abuse (including the use of drugs intended to improve academic performance) as “normal,” as well as the “hook-up culture” in which alcohol abuse all too often leads to student sexual misconduct are also antithetical to our goals and values. They affect not only students’ interactions in the social spheres of the College but also their ability to participate fully in their academic work. Other violations of the Honor Code – especially, violations of academic integrity – deserve mention as well. All these unfortunate aspects of contemporary college life need to be seen for what they are: as challenges to the integrity of our community and as undermining our educational mission. And although we have specific structures in place to address them as violations of formal codes of conduct, each of us in the Skidmore community can have a role in making a difference in the moment, if we witness such behaviors. We need to be more intentional in helping one another develop such capacities and in encouraging one another to be courageous in speaking out in defense of our community when we are challenged to do so.⁵ It is also the case that one’s sense of belonging to a community is often proportional to the personal investment one has made in it.

So our challenge is to do the collective work necessary to create opportunities for all perspectives to be heard, to provide appropriate avenues for all individuals and groups to speak passionately and persuasively and, through that expression, to attempt to change other minds or influence College policy, while still maintaining our fundamental capacity to engage in meaningful dialog. In fact, this deep commitment to respectful discourse safeguards *everyone’s* right to speak and be heard. Those who, on one occasion, would silence or refuse to hear the voices of others ultimately place *their own* participation in our community conversations equally at risk. For it is quite possible that, on a later occasion, they too may need and want to claim protection from precisely the kind of activity in which they previously were engaged. It is the responsibility, first, of the administration but, ultimately, of all members of the Skidmore community to affirm through their words and actions the fundamental principles that enable us to function as the academic community we are and aim to be.

Aspiration and Reality

These reflections about academic community express an idealized version of what we can and should be as a leading liberal arts college. But this is as it should be. An academic community creates meaning by pursuing such high ideals, even on those occasions where it falls short of attaining them.

⁵On August 27th, for example, more than three hundred students completed a program entitled, “Everyday Leadership” training. This is the third year we have offered this program, which empowers students as individuals by giving them skills to help them intervene in situations when someone is acting in violation of the College’s norms.

We are all inherently fallible beings. In conjunction with our fundamental commitment to the values of critical thought, inclusiveness, openness, and respect in our discourse, this realization assigns responsibilities to all participants. Each of us needs to bring to our conversations the intellectual humility to realize that one's initial position on any topic is likely incomplete and possibly quite wrongheaded – that additional facts or arguments could and, in some cases should, lead one to revise it. Accordingly, we should always be able to answer the question, “What would it take to change your mind?” And we need to be willing to acknowledge those instances in which we have altered our position, based on the persuasive arguments of others or our own further reflections. In our teaching, we should place the highest priority on modeling such an attitude of intellectual openness and fostering it in our students. More generally, all of us – most especially members of the faculty and administration – should exhibit these values in our interactions with one another, with our students, and with other members of our community. And we should be sufficiently self-critical and self-aware to acknowledge those instances in which we fail to do so. Furthermore, our awareness of our own imperfections should help us to be more understanding in regard to the failings of others – an attitude conducive to breaking down the dichotomy of self and “other” that must be overcome if we are truly committed to building community.

Toward the end of his book, Wes Moore writes about the time he spent in South Africa as a student, where he first encountered the term

‘ubuntu’ – the Xhosa word for humanity – and the power of authentic leadership as exhibited by giants like Nelson Mandela and a thousand other self-sacrificing visionaries who had managed the unforeseen transition from apartheid to democracy without a bloodbath.⁶

Reflecting on the notion of *ubuntu* in the context of his interactions with people who had suffered personally under apartheid but who nevertheless had forsaken revenge in favor of building a new nation that would embrace all segments of its population, Moore concludes that

the common bond of humanity and decency that we share is stronger than any conflict, any adversity, any challenge. Fighting for your convictions is important. But finding peace is paramount. Knowing when to fight and when to seek peace is wisdom. *Ubuntu* was right.⁷

These passages should serve to remind us of the ideals that give meaning to our common enterprise at Skidmore. We want to be a genuinely humane academic community in which to live and work: a community truly at peace with itself, one in which people treat one another with respect and care about one another's welfare. At the same time, being “at peace” does not in any way mean being “at rest.” We seek to cultivate in our students both the will and the ability to make change. To do so, we must always be a community that expresses its caring and respect through ongoing critical dialog – a dynamic community that empowers all its members, and most especially our students, to sustain vigorous (and sometimes uncomfortable) conversations about important issues aimed at improving both the College and the world beyond. We owe it to ourselves to strive continually to live up to these ideals – and, in both our successes and failures, to acknowledge our interconnectedness, reaffirm our commitment to our educational mission, and celebrate our common humanity.

Philip A. Glotzbach
President
23 September 2013

⁶Moore, p. 167.

⁷Moore, p. 168.

Following are some of the opportunities that are already present to build community at Skidmore, as well as some of the initiatives included in the 2013-14 “Action Agenda” that speak directly to the themes developed above:

- The strategic planning process that begins this year in earnest will engage the entire Skidmore community.
- Founder’s Day: we will plan to reinstitute a community-wide event that brings everyone on campus together for fellowship and fun.
- We will institute monthly breakfasts in the dining hall that will bring together all segments of the Skidmore community.
- We will create a weekly “coffee hour” in the Spa to enable people to come together informally.
- Presidential Fireside Chats and Community Meetings will continue as in the past.
- The President’s Office will institution monthly Open Office Hours – available to any member of our community.
- The “HR Listens” program will continue.
- We will continue to sponsor events at Scribner House that bring the community together (e.g., the Opening Reception, the Holiday Open House, and other targeted receptions and dinners throughout the year).
- Faculty Learning Communities will continue this year.
- Pedagogy workshops for faculty members focused on the multicultural classroom will continue.
- Institute a “Respectful Workplace” program for members of the staff and administration.
- Faculty Interest Groups (FIGs) will continue, with some new topics included in the mix.
- Planning for the upcoming Middle States Accreditation Review will engage members of the community broadly.
- The “Classless Society” exhibit at the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery will provide many opportunities for dialog about the role of economic and social class in community.
- The many artistic performances, lectures, symposia, and athletic events held throughout the year represent opportunities for community interaction and fellowship.
- The IGR program (which is now a minor) will continue to build competence in inter-group dialog and interaction for members of the student body and the larger community.
- An “Academic Summit” will be held again this year.
- We will continue to create opportunities for Trustee-Student interaction.
- The New-Faculty Learning Community will continue, and we will initiate a Second-Year Faculty Learning Community.
- The Academic Festival will again provide an opportunity for our community to gather and celebrate the academic and artistic accomplishments of our students.
- Admissions Open Houses and the Discovery Program represent opportunities for broad community participation in the crucial function of recruiting next year’s entering class.
- Expanded summer collaborative research opportunities, SEE-BEYOND awards, etc., and the ensuing presentations, along with many other opportunities for research presentations throughout the year represent opportunities to come together to celebrate the work of our students.

Strategic Action Agenda Items 2013-14

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the expected date of completion for each of the following projects is June 1, 2014.

Goal I – Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

We will challenge every Skidmore student to achieve academic excellence through full engagement with our rich and rigorous educational experience.

Project/Action Steps

➤ *Enhance institutional structure to support academic excellence.*

1. **Develop activities to realize the potential value of consortial relationships.**
 - Implement ongoing plans for Connect NY.
 - Implement Teagle grant on blended learning.
 - Coordinate with NY Six on Mellon grant proposal.
 - Discuss possibilities for collaboration with NY Six around inclusive hiring.
 - Explore NY Six collaborative search for a desktop web-conferencing tool.
 - Complete implementation of NY Six MediaShare, streamlining media solutions for sharing digital video across institutions.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

2. **Enhance faculty resources to deliver the academic program.**
 - Recruit 14 tenure-track faculty members with a continued emphasis on increasing the diversity of the faculty.
 - Review the use of faculty in contingent appointments.
 - Continue to address the concerns of faculty in contingent appointments.
 - Operationalize the new “Dean’s Card Evaluation Form.”
 - Hold a second “Academic Summit” in January.
 - Initiate Second-Year Faculty Learning Community.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

3. **Develop curriculum and academic programs.**
 - Review current general education curriculum through Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP).
 - Continue to support course development opportunities around Goal II.
 - Study recommendations of Course Cap Subcommittee of CEPP and Curriculum Committee; plan for possible phased implementation of reduced caps.
 - Implement ICARUS/HELIOS program and identify funding for it.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

4. Review Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) Program.

- Complete a plan to restructure the MALS program.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Special Programs.

5. Enhance Skidmore's capacity for academic assessment.

- Present Assessment Subcommittee (AS) report and list of recommendations for improving climate for faculty and students to the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC).
- Collaborate with CEPP to formulate a plan for assessment of general education (the GSLD).
- Design and implement a pilot assessment of students' visual communication across the disciplines, with the additional goal of building a consensus among faculty on the role, importance, and sites of our students' learning about visual communication.
- Work with chairs on departmental assessments to ensure 100% of departments are continuing to progress through the assessment cycle, with an emphasis on direct assessments of departmental goals, making use of information gained from assessments, and integrating departmental goals and assessments with the GSLD as appropriate.
- Begin assessment outside of departments and programs, starting with Study Abroad.
- Work with an appropriate faculty member or group (CEPP) to design assessment of quantitative reasoning and science literacy.
- Continue efforts to pilot e-portfolios.
- Begin preparation for the Middle States self-study.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

➤ *Increase support for research and creative activity across the faculty career.*

6. Coordinate support of faculty development.

- Establish Chairs/Program Directors' Workshops.
- Continue offering workshops on "Teaching in the Multicultural Classroom."
- Continue to integrate/acclurate a new generation of faculty into habits of collaboration with the Tang; complete fundraising and continue implementing Mellon grant.
- Establish a program of support for mid-career faculty.
- Support faculty retirees through the American Council on Education (ACE)/Sloan grant, and explore possibility of providing additional resources from other sources.
- Implement programming for faculty approaching late stages of career.
- Engage in conversation about e-learning.
- Complete Visual Literacy proposal to Mellon Foundation and refine thinking about the "idea lab" in the Center for Integrated Sciences.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

- *Strengthen our system of shared governance and our capacity for developing leadership throughout the College.*

7. Continue a community conversation about our goals for shared governance and the effectiveness of our current structures and procedures.

- Cultivate leadership skills and provide leadership development for institutional academic leaders, including department chairs, program directors, and other academic professionals.
- Address revisions to Faculty Handbook, especially to increase clarity regarding standards for reappointment, tenure, and promotion.
- Support the work of the Faculty Workload Working Group.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

- *Enhance intellectual life for the faculty, students, and others who comprise the extended Skidmore community.*

8. Increase internal and external visibility of our programs.

- Support the Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding's (CIGU) implementation of *Exploring Identities* program.
- Increase visibility of Tang Museum exhibitions as they tour.
- Add video features of current students and exhibiting artists working at the Tang to the Tang's website to extend the Museum's activities to wider audiences; Create an Innovative Content Fund to support these initiatives.
- Enhance attention to diversity at the Tang Museum including exhibitions, guest artists, lectures, and publications of complex cultural realities.
- Enhance "town square" activities at the Tang Museum that invite students to engage with community groups in programming of all sorts, such as *We The People* show.
- Enhance activities to build the Museum's role as a daily teaching resource, reaching more and diverse students and faculty.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

9. Improve reporting structures throughout the College.

- Establish plan for document imaging and paperless workflow associated with student academic records.
- Establish best-practices and policy pertaining to the access, display, validation, and maintenance of student academic records.
- Complete Banner upgrade, especially as it relates to generating reports.
- Develop comprehensive data-management policies and procedures from applicants to alumni.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Vice President for Advancement.

- *Strengthen the natural sciences to increase the number of science majors and enhance the science literacy of all Skidmore students.*

10. Continue implementation of Science Plan.

- Complete Schematic Design Phase of Science Facilities Project based on evaluation of existing science facilities and program planning for enhanced science pedagogy; secure approval from Board of Trustees for design.
- Launch Design Development Phase.
- Continue with CEPP and Scientific Literacy Faculty Interest Group (FIG) to develop approaches to enhance scientific literacy.
- Institutionalize the Scientific Literacy Program, such as the Apocalypse and Monsters Projects.
- Develop fundraising plan for science initiatives.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Vice President for Advancement.

- *Increase our effectiveness in helping our graduates plan and prepare for their post-Skidmore lives.*

11. Enhance opportunities for students to apply or deepen their understanding of their primary academic interests through summer study.

- Increase number of faculty-student summer research opportunities supported by the Faculty Development Committee (FDC).
- Institutionalize SEE-Beyond initiative and increase number of awards from 20 to 40.
- Continue to study and address issues of access and participation by men, students of color, and those with high financial need.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

12. Enhance ability of students and faculty to access information on summer and academic-year opportunities for engagement and experiential learning, in the major/minor and beyond.

- Institutionalize the *Exploremore Skidmore* majors/minors program to support second-semester first-year students and sophomores in contemplating potential majors and minors and pathways for engagement.
- Develop on-line portal that will consolidate information and opportunities available to students.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

13. Refine recruiting and support structures for national and international post-graduate scholarships to increase the number of students with successful applications.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

14. Partner with the Associate Director of pre-professional and graduate study in the Career Development Center to support student preparation for graduate and professional school.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

15. Support the development and implementation of the sophomore program.

- Work with campus partners to articulate a comprehensive sophomore program based on the success of several events piloted in 2012-2013.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

16. Recruit and hire a new director of the Career Development Center.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

Goal II – Intercultural and Global Understanding

We will challenge every Skidmore student to develop the intercultural understanding and global awareness necessary to thrive in the complex and increasingly interconnected world of the 21st Century.

Projects/Action Steps

- *Increase global awareness across the community in order to sensitize all Skidmore students to a complex, diverse, and interdependent world.*

17. Increase interaction and engagement between students.

- Host small dinners designed to encourage cross-group interaction.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

- *Renew the conversation about diversity both within the Skidmore faculty and broadly across the campus community; building upon the work of the Middle States review and other past efforts, establish clear educational objectives relating to this Goal and develop shared expertise in achieving them.*

18. Implement recommendations from the April 2013 Student Climate Survey.

- Develop, with CIGU, plans and timeline to address concerns identified in the survey results.
- Share findings, recommendations, and plans with the Skidmore community.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

- *Enhance the diversity of our student populations while providing the resources necessary to support all of our students in meeting our educational objectives.*

19. Continue efforts to recruit and enroll applicants who strengthen the diversity of our student population and to support the students once they arrive on campus.

- Enroll an incoming class that is at least 20-24% domestic students of color and at least 7-9% international students.
- Continue recruitment travel to high schools and community-based organizations (CBO's) serving diverse student populations.
- Collaborate recruitment activities when possible with non-admissions college personnel traveling internationally.
- Increase percentage of full-pay international students.
- Continue alumni programming in Hong Kong and London.
- Conduct a series of student focus groups to reassess the needs of students of color, international, and first-generation students.
 - Use data collected from Spring 2013 Student Climate Survey to inform focus group discussion.
- Strengthen programs that address the needs of students of color, international, and first-generation students.
- Revitalize the administrative working group reviewing and responding to the needs of our growing international student population.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, and Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

- *Enhance the diversity of our faculty and other employee populations and enhance their skills that relate to achieving this Goal.*

20. Continue efforts to attract, recruit, and retain candidates for faculty and staff positions who will add to the diversity of our employee populations.

- Continue *Just In Time* workshops facilitated by Romney Associates, Human Resources, and Academic Affairs for recruitment and retention of faculty and staff of color.
- Support affinity groups such as International faculty, Black Faculty and Staff Group, through CIGU.
- Review Faculty Climate Survey and COACHE data and implement recommendations.

Administrative Responsibility: President, Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Vice President for Finance and Administration.

21. Enhance Study Abroad programs.

- Explore the possibility of partnering with members of the NY Six to offer joint semester and short-term study abroad programs.
- Explore and implement targeted student exchange or hosting arrangements in order to foster global and intercultural understanding and advance key strategic initiatives.
- Develop and implement the *MATRIX Project*, an effort to streamline the articulation of coursework taken abroad through approved programs.

- Refocus travel seminars around student interests to better attract under-represented groups and infuse intercultural understanding and engagement across the curriculum.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

22. Enhance educational and peer mentoring programs regarding diversity for all employees.

- Continue diversity and inclusion training for members of the campus working with Romney Associates to institute a “Respectful Workplace Program.”

Administrative Responsibility: President’s Cabinet.

Goal III – Informed, Responsible Citizenship

We will prepare every Skidmore student to make the choices required of an informed, responsible citizen at home and in the world.

Projects/Action Steps

- *Foster pedagogical innovation relating to responsible citizenship; support campus initiatives that teach and exemplify this value.*

23. Address infrastructure needs associated with civic engagement, allowing faculty to incorporate service learning and community-based research into their courses and access off-campus sites and populations with their students.

- Coordinate and support the development and maintenance of Skidmore/community partnerships in Saratoga Springs and the Capital Region.
- Continue to develop leadership capacity among peer mentors with respect to strategic goals: volunteerism, civic engagement, working/relating across difference.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs.

- *Increase support for athletics, fitness, and wellness.*

24. Implement action plan to address alcohol and other drug policies, programs and prevention strategies based on the Alcohol Prevention Council comprehensive review recommendations.

- Establish Alcohol and Other Drug Task Force reporting to the Student Affairs Subcommittee of IPPC.
- Explore best practices at other college campuses to inform the work of the Task Force.
- Create 2-year strategic plan with clear benchmarks and goals to address alcohol and other drug issues on the Skidmore campus.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

- *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.*

25. Advance the work of the Community Dialogs project.

- Provide leadership for the planning of additional community dialogues to be held in 2013-14.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

Goal IV – Independence and Resources

We will preserve Skidmore's independence by developing the resources required to realize our aspirations.

Projects/Action Steps

- *Develop and enhance our key financial resources and our capacity to manage them.*

26. Continue to review and enhance Special Programs.

- Improve summer programs 2014 financial results compared with 2013.
- Identify new outside sources of funds to support growth and financial aid in Summer Arts Institutes.
- Evaluate the potential for Zankel Music Center's Ladd Hall to generate a positive financial contribution to the College.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Special Programs.

27. Continue to review and enhance Admissions and Financial Aid policies and practices in support of enrollment goals, which include academic excellence, diversity, and with targeted budget.

- Maintain applicant pool of more than 7,000 applications supported by continued expanded outreach to prospects and inquiries.
Lead campus Enrollment Management Committee to explore, analyze, and propose strategic solutions to address admissions, retention, and enrollment profiles.
- Forward to the IPPC the recommendations of the 2012-13 Subcommittee on Admissions and Financial Aid that this Subcommittee be eliminated following the creation of the Enrollment Management Committee.
- Continue to monitor and discuss in the Enrollment Management Committee our standardized testing policy.
- Analyze 2013 applicant pool after administration of the Admitted Student Questionnaire to determine the changes/trends supporting the 45% spike in applications.
- Develop epidemiological model to improve spring yield through analysis of data to predict likelihood of enrollment.
- Research different Customer Relations Management (CRM) products for purchase and implementation in 2013-14 recruitment cycle.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid.

28. Complete Sussman Village Project (formerly Scribner Village).

- Complete the construction of Phase II.
Administrative Responsibility: Vice President for Finance and Administration.

29. Complete review of Case Center and create long-range plan for space usage and improvement.

- Review architectural building concept design.
- Create long-range plan for space usage and improvements.
Administrative Responsibility: Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs.

30. Seek to identify new sources of revenue, particularly additional endowment, as part of the new Comprehensive Campaign to support operations.

- Set campaign goal for \$50-60 million in new endowment for financial aid, internships, and research collaborations.
Administrative Responsibility: President, Vice President for Advancement, and President's Cabinet.

31. Prepare for next Comprehensive Campaign.

- Complete recruitment of campaign committee.
- Complete campaign plan including goals, timelines, structure, communications plan, and policies.
- Seek formal Board vote to enter into a campaign.
- Develop key communications for first year including campaign name, logo, and look and materials for Center for Integrated Sciences, Financial Aid, Annual Fund, and Transitions and Transformations-related goals.
Administrative Responsibility: President, Vice President for Advancement.

32. Identify areas for potential cost containment within each division and develop plan for implementation.

Administrative Responsibility: President's Cabinet.

➤ *Develop and enhance our capacity to manage our physical resources.*

33. Continue to address facilities planning for academic space.

- Plan for classroom, research, and office space for next three to five years.
- Coordinate Campus Plan with Academic Plan.
Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Vice President for Finance and Administration.

34. Engage the Skidmore community in a comprehensive effort to develop the Sustainability Strategic Plan.

- Complete Campus Sustainability Strategic Plan.
Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, and Vice President for Finance and Administration.

35. Continue implementation of the Science Plan.

- Finalize program, concept, schematic design, and phasing plan.
- Finalize “business plan” for funding Science building project.
- Launch fundraising program of \$100 million with goal to complete by 2016.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of the Faculty/Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President for Advancement, Vice President for Finance and Administration, with support from President and President’s Cabinet.

36. Saisselin Art Building renovation.

- Complete phased construction renovation of Saisselin Art Building.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President for Finance and Administration.

37. Address Admissions facilities needs.

- Develop both building and financing plans for re-location of Admissions and Financial Aid offices to a new facility on the west side of North Broadway.
- Present updated plans to the Board of Trustees for approval by May Board meeting.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Vice President for Advancement.

38. Develop the planning for Phase I of the Athletic Master Plan.

- Complete work to identify the space availability and needs for a new cardio/weight room and additional locker room space located in the Williamson Sports Center.
- Complete programming and concept design for the Tennis Center.
- Identify the costs to accomplish these facility additions and improvements.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Finance and Administration.

39. Complete planning for renovations for Health and Counseling Center renovations in Jonsson Tower.

- Propose capital budget items to fund the completion of the renovations.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs, and Vice President for Finance and Administration.

40. Complete final fundraising for the Valentine Boathouse.

- Advance the Valentine Boathouse project to the permitting phase.
- Raise a minimum of \$275,000 to complete Phase I, \$600,000 to complete Phase II, or \$910,000 to complete the project.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students/Vice President for Student Affairs, Vice President for Finance and Administration, and Vice President of Advancement.

➤ *Develop and enhance relationships essential to the Skidmore community.*

41. Engage the Skidmore community in a comprehensive effort to develop the next *Strategic Plan*.

- Gather community input, with objective of creating draft plan by May.

Administrative Responsibility: President, President's Cabinet, and IPPC.

42. Continue participation in the NY Six Consortium to explore partnerships and collaborations with Colgate University, Hamilton College, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, St. Lawrence University, and Union College.

- Explore potential areas of collaboration, including: information technology, acquisition of goods and services, sustainability, student engagement, faculty and staff development, intercultural literacy, health and wellness programs, and study abroad.

Administrative Responsibility: President, and President's Cabinet.

43. Complete development and implementation of new admissions recruiting materials.

- Complete development of new *Viewbook* and related materials.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid, and Vice President for Advancement.

44. Develop mechanisms for managing the College's brand.

- Brand audit and development of metrics.
- SkidGenuity.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President for Advancement.