



In It Together

Strategic Action Agenda: 2014-2015

This document marks the tenth and final “Strategic Action Agenda” (SAA) of the current *Strategic Plan*. In the months ahead, we will develop and seek approval of our next *Plan*. That work is well under way, as are other important (and related) projects, such as preparing for Middle States reaccreditation and reviewing the General Education Curriculum. In detailing how we want the College to develop over the next ten years, our new *Strategic Plan* must carry forward our history of setting ambitious goals in the areas of curriculum, co-curricular life, strategic use of resources, and in making our case for both the value of Skidmore College and the importance of liberal education to a broader audience. The new *Strategic Plan* will build upon our past planning and the community discussions we held last academic year. It will take account of the challenging environment in which we are operating and the continuing need to control our costs. Certainly the next *Plan* will also give further attention to building the kind of campus community that best reflects our values, a theme that I again want to emphasize this year and will return to below.

But even as we look forward, let us pause to acknowledge that in working together under the guidance of our current *Plan*, which we created collaboratively and then collectively embraced, we have achieved what clearly can be described as ten years of remarkable progress across many dimensions of the College:

- **notable curricular innovation** – the First-Year Experience, several new majors and minors, a new awareness of the importance of the physical and life sciences, and the full integration of the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery into the academic and co-curricular life of the College;
- **transformation of the campus physical plant** – from new and renovated residence facilities, the reimagined Murray-Aikins dining hall, new classroom and lab spaces, new and refurbished athletic facilities, to the Arthur Zankel Music Center, the Northwoods Apartments, and Sussman Village – all with major design features that have significantly improved the energy efficiency of the campus;
- **remarkable improvements in the academic strength and diversity of our applicant pools and entering classes** – supported by substantial investments in *need-based financial aid* and new ways of providing academic assistance where required;
- **successful planning for science education** – led by our faculty in the physical and life sciences, this work has produced a vision of science education at Skidmore to meet the needs of all our students, as well as those of our science majors, and it has given rise to plans for an ambitious new building project: the Center for Integrated Sciences;
- **enhanced study-away opportunities for students** – on average, 60 percent of our students now study abroad, many of them supported by financial aid that “travels” and so makes it possible for all our students to consider these life-altering experiences;
- **new programs that help our students take best advantage of their liberal education as they transition to their post-Skidmore lives** – from increased research opportunities and access to internships to “A Brand Called Me” and a revamped and reenergized Career Development Center;
- **enhanced support for our faculty** – new tenure-track faculty lines, a demonstrable commitment to increasing the diversity of our faculty, and enhanced resources for faculty development (including the recently established Center for Leadership in Teaching and Learning);

- **continued financial strength** – we weathered the worst economic recession since the Depression, doubled our endowment, continued to implement the Comprehensive Compensation Framework, maintained a strong benefits program for our employees, and retained our Moody’s Rating Service A-1 bond rating (with a “stable outlook”);
- **a substantial increase in fundraising** – we have significantly increased both the Annual Fund and capital gifts, completed the highly successful *Creative Thought. Bold Promise* fundraising Campaign, and have embarked on the “silent” phase of the *Creating Our Future* Campaign; and
- **increased reputational recognition both within the higher education community and beyond** – evidenced through our successes in admissions and hiring, in various “ratings” of colleges and universities, and in the experience of our graduates as they present their credentials professionally.

Each of these achievements reflects an objective identified in the *Strategic Plan*. Yet it is arguable that the most important changes over this period are less tangible ones. Today, we are a much more self-confident College. We celebrate our robust curriculum that begins with strength across the traditional liberal arts and is distinctive in its breadth – including selected pre-professional programs not always found in peer institutions. We continue to encourage our students to pursue their individual and eclectic interests, insisting that *there is no one privileged way to define oneself as a Skidmore student*. We have become much more effective in our shared governance; specifically, we have learned to work together more collegially, collaboratively, and therefore productively than in the recent past.

At the same time, our accomplishments have brought with them new and sometimes daunting challenges. As our student, faculty, and staff populations have become more diverse and as we have continued to emphasize the value of being an inclusive and welcoming community, those instances where we fall short of this ideal stand out in even greater contrast than in the past. This is especially true when students and other community members who are members of historically underrepresented groups experience either overt bias incidents that manifest active hostility or thoughtless microaggressions¹ – social exchanges that send an exclusionary message by suggesting to people that, because of their social identities, they somehow lack full membership in our community. Our sense of community is equally challenged when our students experience sexual or gender-based misconduct. In both cases, in contrast to our fundamental values, we fail to provide for our students – and sometimes for other community members as well – a safe and encouraging environment. Results of recent surveys show that too many of our non-exempt employees feel disrespected or underappreciated by other community members and take issue with the way they are treated by supervisors or others in leadership roles. Realizing that these gaps remain between our aspirations and the reality many community members experience must energize each of us to find ways to do better.

Our assertion that *Creative Thought Matters* highlights a central reality of our institutional life and reflects our awareness that imagination is a necessary aspect of achievement in *any* area of endeavor. It draws upon both our historical strength in the arts and our longstanding commitment to educating “mind and hand.” It has served us well in many contexts and with multiple College constituencies. And it has resonated especially with prospective students. Our

¹The term ‘microaggression’ was first used by Harvard professor Chester M. Pierce in 1970 to describe social interactions in which whites made comments to blacks that reinforced perceived differences in social status. Today, the term is commonly understood as encompassing brief and commonplace verbal, behavioral, or environmental slights or indignities towards persons of color or members of other underrepresented groups that are experienced as derogatory or insulting. Microaggressions are frequently unintentional: those who are responsible for the comments or behaviors are often unaware that they have done anything to harm another person. Nonetheless, microaggressions send the clear exclusionary message that the targeted individual somehow does not “belong” or have full membership or status in a community.

challenge now is to integrate this value even more seamlessly across our teaching and learning, and more broadly throughout our institutional life. As we have noted in earlier years, along with our larger and stronger admissions pools, we now find ourselves competing for students with colleges and universities offering higher prestige or substantial non-need-based financial aid. And as we have met and often exceeded our fundraising goals and completed major capital projects, we have identified ever more ambitious objectives – such as the Center for Integrated Sciences, a new Admissions building, and improved athletic facilities. In sum, we are, by any measure, a much stronger and better performing institution than in the past and, at the same time, one that continues to challenge itself to achieve new levels of excellence.

In last year’s “Strategic Action Agenda,” I asked that we give renewed attention to the meaning of *community* at Skidmore and reminded us that a commitment to basic values regarding community is foundational to our success as “*a leading liberal arts college ... dedicated to the education of our students as whole persons.*” I also urged that every member of our educational community has both a stake and a role in helping to support the development of our students as whole persons. In a discussion at Scribner House with members of Skidmore’s Black Faculty and Staff Group, I was inspired to hear individuals who work in Dining Services and other areas of College operations talk about how they interact with student employees on a daily basis – coming to know them personally and often mentoring them so they take away valuable life lessons from their student employment. Yes, our students learn first in the classroom, but they also acquire important knowledge and life-skills from their broader Skidmore experience. As I pointed out in last year’s SAA, our campus community provides the overall context in which this learning occurs. Accordingly, it is essential that we attend carefully to the way our community functions – whether it serves to support our broad educational mission as well as we would wish. This year, against the background of these reflections, I again invoke themes that have been prominent in previous “Strategic Action Agendas” – themes that reflect the values that define our educational Mission, our community, and the kind of leadership we need at this moment.

First, in last year’s SAA I called upon all of us to renew our commitment to our basic educational project of preparing our graduates – by offering them the best possible liberal education, both inside and outside the classroom for lives of purpose, professional success, and personal fulfillment as they make their way in an increasingly complex and troubled world. That project establishes the fundamental values that define us and give all of us our primary reason to be here. **I now call upon us to reaffirm this commitment.**

Second, I ask all of us to renew our commitment to doing all that we can to strengthen our community. Creating a strong and inclusive campus community remains a work in progress. No matter how it is constituted, any community is always vulnerable to disruption and instability. And as noted above, we still have much work to do. Accordingly, it is the responsibility of every member of our College community to affirm – not just in words but through our actions toward one another – the fundamental values of respect and dignity that undergird our efforts to fulfill our educational mission and create across the College a commitment to excellence in all that we do. Regardless of what I and others holding recognized positions of leadership do in our work, we cannot succeed without the efforts of everyone: every student, every faculty member, every member of the professional staff, every union employee, and every administrator.

Third, it is important to acknowledge that those of us in leadership positions have special responsibilities to create the conditions that allow the values referenced here to flourish across our community. This leadership group includes more individuals than one might, at first, realize – certainly members of the senior administrative leadership team but also many others throughout the College with supervisory responsibilities, including academic department chairs and program directors, professors in their classrooms, others who serve on governance committees, and student leaders of the SGA, clubs, and organizations. In fact, many of us move in and out of formal and informal leadership roles across the different contexts we

encounter in our institutional lives. In other words, many of us have opportunities on a daily basis, as leaders, to help the College realize its most important goals. This year, we will be intentional in stepping up efforts to provide additional resources and mentoring to those in leadership positions. Once again, we offered the “Everyday Leadership” program to over 300 returning students as just one part of this effort. Various other opportunities for leadership development will be evident throughout the year.

Finally, our recent successes in attracting larger student applicant pools and academically better prepared and more diverse entering classes should not obscure the fact that questions about the value of liberal education, in general, and the worth of expensive small liberal arts colleges, in particular, remain prominent in national conversations about higher education. There are many aspects of the College and what we offer to our students that make us distinctive and attractive to new students. But every time we recruit another entering class, we are testing whether it is possible to achieve the excellence we seek with our students and advance our ambitious institutional agenda with a much smaller resource-base than is desirable, and with a “business model” that requires more than 50 percent of our students to attend without benefit of institutional financial aid. If the College is to endure and prosper, each of us must keep in mind the reality that we stand or fall on the basis of choice: prospective students who choose to attend, prospective donors who choose to give, prospective faculty members and other employees who choose to come and remain here and then choose to do their best work. **We can continue our current positive trajectory and build on our achievements only if we align our efforts strategically: devoting our time and resources to creating the educational value for our students that we claim to provide, achieving our highest strategic priorities as we work to make tomorrow’s Skidmore even better than today’s, and doing all this in the most cost-effective way possible.** Even though it can be difficult to achieve this kind of “strategic alignment” of efforts and resources in an academic institution, this is the challenge we must embrace, and I call upon each of us to do so.

As I wrote in the 2012-13 SAA, all of us connected with Skidmore – and in fact, all of us who care about this College – have skin in this game. That is to say, *all* of us who work at the College, who are alumni, parents, current students, or Trustees, are personally invested in Skidmore’s success. We participate in both the risks and rewards associated with that success (or lack of it). Those of us who work here, especially, need to feel a sense of deep personal engagement with this institution. All of us make day-to-day decisions about how we spend our time and allocate the financial resources for which we are responsible; some of us make broader and longer-term decisions as well. But each of us needs to do so with the understanding that all our decisions ultimately affect Skidmore’s short- and long-term prospects for continuing to be the institution we cherish. We are in this together.

Philip A. Glotzbach
President
29 September 2014

Strategic Action Agenda Items 2014-15

Note: Unless otherwise indicated, the expected date of completion for the following projects is June 1, 2015.

In contrast to previous years – the members of the President’s Cabinet have identified a small number of large-scale projects on which they will focus this year. At this moment of transition – as we bring the current *Strategic Plan* to a close and work to create the next one, as we continue the review of our general education curriculum, and as we prepare for our upcoming Middle States reaccreditation – it seemed appropriate to direct our collective attention to these larger strategic projects. We know that there are many other important activities that of course will continue throughout the year as well (for example, the Task Force on Divestment). But this is a moment to draw our attention to the larger questions, decisions, and actions that will enable us, by working together, to create our future.

Project/Action Steps

Academic Affairs

1. Expanding Partnerships

We will commit to expanding the collaborative decision-making that is so critical to the success of Academic Affairs. We will share promising practices in pedagogy, mentorship, resource allocation, inclusivity, support, etc. across department, programs, and offices.

- Assess the impact of the Center for Leadership in Teaching and Learning, especially how it has encouraged course development, sharing promising practices, developing e-learning activities, and increased leadership among the members of the faculty.
- Partner with all divisions of Academic Affairs to develop ways of achieving cost-containment and more efficient use of resources.

2. Creativity and Risk

We will empower individuals, departments, programs, and offices to think creatively and to take the type of risks that could lead to real innovation in our work with students, faculty, administrators, and staff. We will accept failure as an inevitable part of the creative process, and we will collectively celebrate our accomplishments and success. Our goal is to shift the culture this year towards one that values creativity and risk.

- Provide every opportunity (through regular meetings such as the Academic Leadership Retreat, Department Chairs and Program Directors’ Round Tables, the Academic Summit, etc., as well as in non-traditional settings) for faculty and staff members to propose and explore novel ideas about the future of liberal education, the education of our students, faculty development support, the intersection of disciplines, curricular reconstruction, shared governance, and so on.
- Participate in an external creativity inventory/assessment project so as to establish a baseline level of creativity at the College and a metric for comparison with other colleges and universities.

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

Admissions

3. Increasing Yield

Increase 2015 spring yield one percentage point or more over 2014 yield:

- a. Conduct analysis of historical yields by different populations of accepted applicants.
- b. Target student communications in response to ESP (Enrollment Strategy Profiler) qualification scoring.
- c. More heavily weigh applicant contact information in decisions.
- d. Work with Enrollment Management Committee to facilitate more faculty contact with targeted accepted students.
- e. Increase contact with strongest accepted Tuition Exchange students.
- f. Consider creation of program of offering funded stipends for a summer or semester break experience (i.e., internship, research, etc.)

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

Advancement

4. Comprehensive Campaign

Complete second year of quiet phase of *Creating Our Future: The Campaign for Skidmore*. Secure \$35-40M in new commitments. Focus on fundraising for the Center for Integrated Sciences.

5. Alumni/Parent Engagement

Identify and implement new strategies to deepen engagement of core constituencies (alumni/parents/friends). Develop metric for measuring and tracking engagement.

6. Branding

Develop comprehensive plan to better manage and more effectively project the College's brand to core constituencies.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President for Advancement

Finance and Administration

7. Investing in Our People

Our people are our greatest asset. Under the leadership of the President, the Cabinet, and the Associate Vice President for Finance and Administration, we are all committed to continuing to implement our Total Compensation Framework, including providing competitive compensation and funding professional development opportunities for faculty and staff. We are also committed to following up on the information developed in last spring's Staff Survey and working, especially, to support a climate of respect in which all employees understand the importance of showing respect for one another. Toward these ends, we will work to provide the following:

- For all student workers, secure wage increases to at least current minimum wage guidelines, as requested last year.
- For all employees in leadership positions, a new required management

development program series, starting with the Cabinet and Extended Cabinet this year, with an emphasis on the College’s core values.

- Hold several Town Hall Meetings for exempt and non-exempt employees to review the findings of the staff survey and discuss recommendations with the community. Develop action plan to implement recommendations.

8. Continue Implementation of Science Plan

Working with the Dean of Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs and others, complete the Design Development Phase of the Center for Integrated Sciences project, based on evaluation of existing science facilities and program planning for enhanced science pedagogy. Secure approval from Board of Trustees for design.

9. Improve Financial Reporting, Modeling, and Our Capacity for Cost-Control

Create new resources for consolidating, analyzing, and reporting financial information and other key institutional information that is essential to administrative decision-making.

Administrative Responsibility: Vice President for Finance and Administration

Office of the President

10. Lead Process of Creating New Strategic Plan

In collaboration with IPPC, Board of Trustees, and the Skidmore community, develop the College’s next comprehensive *Strategic Plan*. Achieve endorsement of the new *Plan* by the community and ratification by the Board by May 2015.

11. Expand Efforts to Enhance Communication Between the Administration and Everyone Else in the College, Increase Accessibility of the President to Exempt and Non-Exempt Employees.

Expand the number of Town Hall Meetings and Community Meetings; hold open Presidential Office Hours, seek new ways to communicate via electronic and print media.

Administrative Responsibility: President

Special Programs

12. Enhance Revenue

- a. Pursue additional outside conference business especially in the month of June, when we have the largest availability of residential space.
- b. Explore the possibility of bringing a Fullbridge business program to campus in June.
- c. Partner with the Saratoga Convention and Tourism Bureau to offer Skidmore facilities as available to accommodate overflow needs from large meetings/conventions.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Special Programs

Student Affairs

- 13. Community of Care and Responsibility: A Healthy Campus**
- a. Identify specific challenges in the current culture that negatively affect student well being.
 - b. Develop, implement and evaluate new prevention strategies.
 - c. Communicate to all members of our community the important roles that they can play in helping to create a community of care and responsibility.

Administrative Responsibility: Dean of Students and Vice President for Student Affairs