

March 10, 2025

Greetings Trustee Colleagues and Trustees Emeriti:

I am pleased to share the following report about the February 2025 Skidmore College Board of Trustees meetings. February's meetings were particularly special because we had the opportunity to hear from members of Skidmore's faculty, staff, and students.

Board events began on Wednesday, February 26, when trustees and other community members gathered in the Wyckoff Center for a screening of the film *Rising Hope*. The film's director, Theo Avgerinos, director of photography, Chris Lytwyn, and film participant and social worker, Dr. Cora Jackson, joined us for a panel discussion after the screening. *Rising Hope* explored a community in the Mississippi Delta and the issues surrounding the state's historically oppressive policies towards Black Mississippians, the massive employment loss following NAFTA, and the devastating effects of defunding public education for consecutive generations. Thank you, Trustee Bob Wyckoff, for sponsoring the evening's event and bringing this moving documentary to the Skidmore community.

The Board's formal meetings began on Thursday morning, February 27, with an update from President Conner. He provided an overview of the draft 2025-2030 Strategic Plan along with key feedback he has received to date from the campus community. When reviewing the draft Plan, President Conner asked trustees to pay particular attention to the three areas where the board has a unique and authoritative perspective: *fiduciary* - is this an affordable plan?; *strategic* - is this a plan that serves the strategic direction of the College?; and *mission* - is this a plan that supports the mission of the College?

Trustees had a lengthy and fulsome discussion about their reactions to the Plan and provided helpful and insightful feedback. We talked about focusing on the Plan's alignment with the College's priorities, presentation to many different audiences, financial implications, and implementation strategies. With this feedback in mind, further revisions will be made in the next few weeks. Once it is finalized, the Plan will be shared with the campus community for final comments and then presented to the Board in May for approval.

Trustee Barbara Kahn Moller, the Board's liaison to the Middle States Accreditation Team, provided an update on the Middle States reaffirmation of accreditation process and progress.

The Board then heard from a faculty panel on the changes in teaching and pedagogy over the past decade. Panelists F. William Harder Chair of Business Administration Matt Lucas, Associate Professor of Mathematics and Statistics Lucy Oremland, Associate Professor of Theater Eunice Ferreira, and Associate Professor of History Erica Bastress-Dukehart, representing different departments and disciplines, explored how faculty continue to design innovative learning experiences that challenge and engage students beyond traditional classroom methods. They

provided trustees with a deeper understanding of current teaching practices and academic excellence and in turn further helped us in our discussions on the Strategic Plan.

During the lunch session, the Board committee on Diversity and Inclusion met and hosted a panel of leaders of the various student services departments. Each panelist highlighted their role in the highly comprehensive system of student support Skidmore has in place, showing synergies across the different offices, and the overall network of student care.

Trustees also received a status report on our current fundraising efforts from Collyer Vice President for Advancement Carey Anne Zucca, as well as a detailed update on the substantial preparations that are in process for the next major campaign, from our expert external consultant Emma Kieran.

Vice President for Enrollment and Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid Jess Ricker discussed the opportunities and challenges currently facing higher ed, highlighting shifting demographics and increased price sensitivity. Expanding our geographical reach, increasing targeted outreach, and investing in the Skidmore brand to communicate Skidmore's unique strengths and value proposition are some of the strategies we are implementing to help combat these challenges. While the annual admissions cycle is far from complete, VP Ricker reported several positive signs in the college's results so far, including an overall increase in applications versus last year driven by gains in the south, southwest and western regions of the US, and a strong early decision yield that has secured just over half of the first-year class.

The Budget, Finance, and Infrastructure Committee reviewed the status of the current year's budget including a deep dive into Skidmore's study abroad programs and their impact on the student experience as well as their financial impacts. They then discussed the College's preliminary 2025-26 budget, future assumptions and approved next year's comprehensive fee and general salary adjustment. The Audit and Risk Management Committee provided trustees with an update on their work developing a formal enterprise risk management policy. Assistant Vice President for Finance and Controller Kyle Bernard and General Counsel and Vice President of Human Resources Sarah Vero highlighted 15 areas of risk and grouped them into four major categories: reputational, regulatory legal and compliance, financial, and operational. The Board was gratified to see such a comprehensive, enterprise-wide risk assessment.

Trustees later enjoyed dinner and conversations with eight student government leaders and two Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) members.

On Friday, the Board reviewed reports from each Board Committee and the Board Chair's report (please see attached slides), voted to grant the recommended 2025-26 tenured sabbatical leaves, pre-tenure research leaves, and non-tenure sabbatical leaves and approved the comprehensive fee and general salary adjustment for the next academic year. They continued their conversation around the Strategic Plan, received an update from General Counsel and Vice President of Human Resources Sarah Vero on the tentative contract agreement with the non-tenured faculty union and the College's assessment of the implications of the various executive

orders coming from the new administration in Washington. Lastly, the Board heard from President Conner about any additional issues or concerns. The meeting concluded with a Board only discussion.

As always, the Board appreciated all the efforts of Skidmore staff and leadership to provide a thoughtful discussion about our College, with particular emphasis on the new Strategic Plan.

Thank you to all who attended the meetings, in person and remotely, and for making the meetings so productive. I look forward to seeing everyone in May in Saratoga Springs and together celebrating the class of 2025.

Jon Achenbaum '77  
Chair, Skidmore College Board of Trustees