

Engaged Liberal Learning

The Plan for Skidmore College: 2005-2015

Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir humanity's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical plan once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and daughters are going to do things that will stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon, beauty. Think big.

Daniel Burnham; US Architect, 19th Century

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Mission Statement

The principal mission of Skidmore College is the education of predominantly full-time undergraduates, a diverse population of talented students who are eager to engage actively in the learning process. The college seeks to prepare liberally educated graduates to continue their quest for knowledge and to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens. Skidmore faculty and staff create a challenging yet supportive environment that cultivates students' intellectual and personal excellence, encouraging them to expand their expectations of themselves while they enrich their academic understanding.

In keeping with the college's founding principle of linking theoretical with applied learning, the Skidmore curriculum balances a commitment to the liberal arts and sciences with preparation for professions, careers, and community leadership. Education in the classroom, laboratory, and studio is enhanced by co-curricular and field experience opportunities of broad scope.

Underpinning the entire enterprise are faculty members' scholarly and creative interests, which inform their teaching and contribute, in the largest sense, to the advancement of learning.

The college also embraces its responsibility as an educational and cultural resource for alumni and for a host of nontraditional student populations, and for providing educational leadership in the Capital District and beyond.

Engaged Liberal Learning

The Plan for Skidmore College 2005-2015

Executive Summary

Colleges and universities tend to focus either on their past or on their future. While Skidmore honors, takes pride in, and builds upon the legacy of its past, we are accustomed to thinking in the future tense: about our hopes for our students, changes to be made in our curriculum, or a greater role to be played by our College throughout higher education and in the world at large. Even our declaration that *creative thought matters* orients us toward a distant horizon: The concept of creativity itself points to a moment that does not yet exist – when something hidden will be revealed, a plan realized, a quandary resolved through an imaginative approach. Creativity threatens the *status quo* and so entails risk. Yet Skidmore has always invited change and embraced risk. Because of the dedication, foresight, and audacity of so many who have come before us, the College has made enormous progress across its first century. Throughout our history, we have challenged ourselves to make no small plans – to make no ordinary choices – and we do so still today.

Since our founding, Skidmore College has prepared generations of young women and, more recently, young women and men, to become both successful, productive citizens and personally fulfilled human beings. We also have embraced the education of a smaller cohort of non-traditional students who affirm the power of liberal learning to illuminate both their professional and personal lives. In both cases, we attract students who are *sophisticated, eclectic, collaborative, creative, and adventurous*. We offer them a cosmopolitan and challenging institutional culture, one infused with opportunities to participate in and appreciate the visual and performing arts. We emphasize the importance of creative thought and its practical applications across our curriculum – from the natural sciences, to pre-professional majors, to the humanities, and social sciences, to the visual and performing arts. We encourage our students to experiment, to explore multiple areas of inquiry, and to pursue their individual passions. By modeling the way an educated person examines, challenges, critiques, and synthesizes existing beliefs and creates new ones, the Skidmore faculty communicates to our students what it means to be liberally educated and capable of acting responsibly in the world. A Skidmore education provides the foundation in both the cognitive skills and the personal maturity required to excel in both the workplace and in the polity of the 21st Century. Most importantly, it offers the resources for composing a sustainable life as a moral being in a world where the ethical signposts periodically seem to have been knocked flat.

The members of our faculty take justifiable pride in cultivating our students' intellectual and personal excellence and curiosity; others within the extended Skidmore community take similar pride in their contributions to students' success. Indeed, one of our historic strengths has been to awaken previously unrecognized interests and talents, suggesting new possibilities to students who have not yet appreciated – much less risen to – their potential. Traditional and non-traditional students alike report that Skidmore has enabled them to accomplish objectives and grow personally to an extent impossible to predict when they entered the College. We hear in the testimony of our alumni, from the observations of appreciative parents, and through our own experience that our best students – those who take full advantage of what they find at Skidmore today – receive an educational experience second to none.

The preceding characterization represents not only a description but also a promissory note issued to every new student upon matriculation. Each of them (and their parents) arrives with the legitimate expectation that this obligation will be redeemed in full. We certainly do not say to any individual matriculant, "It's all right with us if you fail at Skidmore: your success

doesn't really matter." Instead, we begin with the assumption that each admitted student can meet the challenges we present and – with the proper commitment, effort, and assistance – join the ranks of Skidmore alumni. We regard matriculation as the beginning not of a four-year relationship but rather of a *lifelong* relationship between a student and the extended Skidmore community. Even so, despite our best intentions, we must acknowledge that for too many of our students Skidmore remains a promise unfulfilled. The gap between the aspirations of our *Mission Statement* and our actual performance provides both a significant challenge and our most important opportunity.

Our overarching objective, therefore, is to become a College that fully realizes the objectives of our Mission: one that inspires, challenges, and supports the highest levels of excellence for all our students, not just for some or even many of them – as evidenced by their achievements in realizing the values of engaged liberal learning while at Skidmore and expressing them throughout their lives. The Skidmore we envision expects that an intellectually rigorous, transformative educational experience will lead to graduates whose achievements at Skidmore will launch them into the next phase of their lives, who are prepared to function effectively in the complex and increasingly diverse world of the 21st Century, and who understand and embrace the responsibilities of living as informed, responsible citizens. Moreover, we expect our alumni to remain deeply connected to one another and to Skidmore as a continuing source of inspiration and support.

More specifically, we seek to become

- A College that involves students immediately and passionately in a life-altering learning experience, from their first days on campus – a process that leads to significant individual academic achievement by the time of graduation, along with demonstrable personal development that will position all our alumni to embark with assurance on the next phase of their lives.
- A College that offers its students a balanced curriculum, reflecting strength across the arts, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and selected pre-professional programs, one that enables its students and faculty to make insightful connections across disciplinary boundaries.
- A College that expects every student to develop increased appreciation of the value of *difference* in human society, in which each student progresses in his or her ability to interact successfully with persons of unfamiliar background, and that provides every graduate an entrée to the understanding necessary to function effectively not only as a citizen of our country but also as a citizen of our increasingly interconnected world.
- A College that expects responsible behavior of everyone within our community, that empowers and inspires all of our students to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens throughout their lives, and that itself acts as a responsible corporate citizen.
- A College that values creativity and excellence in the research of our faculty, expects it in the collective decisions that determine the course of our institution, and insists on it in the work of our students.
- A College that increasingly is recognized for its role as a leading national liberal arts college in advancing the cause of engaged liberal learning within our

national community and world at large – both through the actions of our alumni and through the College’s own contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

This *Plan* establishes the framework to make the choices required to maintain our forward momentum and, above all, to realize our aspirations. We have identified four ambitious *Goals*, together with the *Priority Initiatives* intended to realize them. Some of these *Initiatives* incorporate work that is already underway; others will require new investments of time, effort, or funding and may entail the redirection of existing resources or the development of new ones. To bring our shared vision to reality – to make our own most creative educational thinking matter across our community – we call upon our tradition of audacity, invoke our powers of imagination, and prepare to focus our efforts as never before. One of our greatest assets is the passion for our mission that characterizes us at our best, that is shared by so many members of the extended Skidmore community, and that has led us in the past to our greatest achievements. We reaffirm our sense of shared purpose and commit our collective energy to the task of achieving new levels of excellence and recognition – taking us ever closer to realizing the bold promise that is Skidmore College.

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.

Priority Initiatives

- Increase student academic engagement in the first year.
- Increase support for research and creative activity throughout faculty careers.
- Enhance intellectual life for the faculty, students, and others who comprise the extended Skidmore community.
- Strengthen information resources across the College.
- Strengthen the natural sciences to increase the number of science majors and enhance the science literacy of all Skidmore students.
- Increase our effectiveness in helping our graduates plan and prepare for their post-Skidmore lives.
- Take better advantage of the resources and capacity for innovation in the Office of the Dean of Special Programs (ODSP) to support the relevant initiatives identified under this Goal (and others, as appropriate).

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.

Priority Initiatives

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

- Enhance the diversity of our student population while providing the resources necessary to support all of our students in meeting our educational objectives.
- Enhance the diversity of our faculty and other employee populations and enhance their skills that relate to achieving this Goal.

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.

Priority Initiatives

- Foster pedagogical innovation relating to responsible citizenship; support campus initiatives that teach and exemplify this value.
- Enhance residential learning.
- Enhance the campus residential environment, with special attention to common spaces.
- Increase support for athletics, fitness, and wellness.
- 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.

Goal IV – Independence and Resources

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

Priority Initiatives

- Develop and enhance our key financial resources and our capacity to manage them.
- Achieve and maintain competitive compensation for Skidmore faculty, staff, and administrators; enhance our ability to support their professional development.
- Develop and enhance our capacity to manage our physical resources.
- Develop and enhance those relationships essential to the Skidmore community.
- Develop and enhance the "equity" in the Skidmore name.

A detailed discussion of each *Goal* and each *Priority Initiative* can be found in the body of *Engaged Liberal Learning – The Plan for Skidmore College: 2005–2015*. Readers are encouraged to review and respond to the *Plan* by accessing the strategic planning website at: <http://www.skidmore.edu/planning/>.

Engaged Liberal Learning

The Plan for Skidmore College 2005-2015

A. Overture

Colleges and universities tend to focus either on their past or their future. While Skidmore honors, takes pride in, and builds upon the legacy of its past, we are accustomed to thinking in the future tense: about our hopes for our students, changes to be made in our curriculum, or a greater role to be played by our College throughout higher education and in the world at large. Even our declaration that *creative thought matters* orients us toward a distant horizon: The concept of creativity itself points to a moment that does not yet exist – when something hidden will be revealed, a plan realized, a quandary resolved through an imaginative approach. Creativity threatens the *status quo* and so entails risk. Yet Skidmore has always invited change and embraced risk. Because of the dedication, foresight, and audacity of so many who have come before us, the College has made enormous progress across its first century. Throughout our history, we have challenged ourselves to make no small plans – to make no ordinary choices – and we do so still today.

In this spirit, beginning in Fall 2000, the members of the extended Skidmore community gathered to reaffirm our fundamental principles and the continuity of our history but above all to look forward. We resolved to envision our future confidently and creatively, to be forthright in naming our challenges, to set goals incorporating our highest aspirations, and to identify the actions required to achieve them. Preliminary results of this process appeared in “The Distillation Report,” issued January 2001, and later in the precursor to the present document, “The Plan for Skidmore,” which was endorsed by the Board of Trustees in May 2002. Further development and implementation of the 2002 Plan were temporarily deferred by a presidential transition and the need to address certain financial issues that required immediate attention. Now, having completed that transition, reestablished our fiscal stability, renewed the planning conversation,¹ and begun planning for an upcoming Middle States reaccreditation review,² we bring forward this revised Strategic Plan and look toward the ambitious comprehensive fundraising campaign that it will inspire, a campaign whose scope reflects our bold aspirations for our students and our College.³

In our recent history, and especially over the preceding fifteen years, Skidmore has developed from a College whose financial survival literally hung in the balance to one that successfully completed a new campus, made the transition to co-education, and through the successful Journey Campaign (completed in 1998) continued on course toward acquiring the resources necessary to join the ranks of the nation’s best liberal arts colleges. Since 1993, our endowment has increased nearly fourfold. Our campus is beautiful and attractive, both to prospective students (and their parents) and to those who live and work here. Our 650-acre North Woods represents a wonderful and still largely untapped resource for fitness, recreation, and learning. By virtue of its distinctive cultural, educational, social, and recreational resources, Saratoga Springs provides a superb setting for the College.

¹Multiple conversations have occurred within the faculty, in student government, in the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning in developing the “Academic Vision Statement,” in an *ad hoc* Retention Committee, within the administration and the Board of Trustees, and in other areas across the Skidmore community as well.

²Planning for the Middle States review and the revision of this document have been well coordinated, and the themes developed in each process are mutually supporting.

³In May 2004, anticipating the completion of this revised Plan, the Board of Trustees authorized the most ambitious comprehensive fundraising campaign in Skidmore’s history. This campaign will support the highest priority Initiatives identified below (some of which will appear as objectives in the campaign case statement) and, in so doing, will produce significant changes in our institutional landscape.

Over the past forty years, we have advanced from a school whose admissions were once driven primarily by student choice to one that, in recent admissions cycles, has selected a new entering class from more than 6,000 applicants. Prospective students who even ten years ago might not have considered Skidmore now make us their first choice.⁴ These students come to Skidmore in large part because we have attracted a superb faculty that in its teaching, research, and creative work compares favorably with the best in the country. In bringing distinction and rigor to its work, the faculty has considerably elevated both academic standards and our expectations for the entire Skidmore community. For its part, the Skidmore faculty has recently reported finding our entering students better prepared and seeking a higher level of academic challenge. In 2000 we opened the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, which has attained national recognition as a venue and for its programs. Most important of all, we have progressed from a school whose self-image was bounded by a sense of limitation to a self-assured College that views its distinctive identity, achievements, and contributions to the lives of our alumni with a sense of justifiable pride.

At the same time, we acknowledge a number of sometimes daunting hurdles that we must surmount in the near future if we are to realize our ambitions:

- the need for a clear articulation of our distinctive institutional identity – both to support our internal planning and to project to external constituencies;
- recent student survey data and retention figures (especially from the second to the third year) that suggest we are not engaging enough of our students at the beginning of their academic careers;
- our endowment, which remains modest in relation to the holdings of our peer schools, despite its recent impressive growth;
- the likelihood of substantial increases in basic costs such as insurance (health care, property, liability), energy, and financial aid, over the coming years, combined with the prospect of uncertain financial markets and increased external pressure to hold down tuition increases;
- we need to raise the prominence of the natural sciences at Skidmore and provide support to this area of the College commensurate with our expectations for all our academic programs – to increase the balance of our liberal arts curriculum and to address issues of scientific literacy among all our students;
- national trends in the demographics of traditional-age students that have been favorable for a number of years but will begin to level off in 2008⁵; we need to understand and, if necessary, account for ways in which this development might affect us;

⁴This progress is represented both objectively and subjectively. Objective indicators include the increased numbers of applicants, greater selectivity, and higher SAT scores for admitted and matriculated students. Subjective indicators include the fact that Skidmore was identified as the first choice of 65% of first-year students entering in Fall 2003, as compared to 58% in 1999; 72% of these entering students expect to be satisfied with the College, as compared to 68% in a national norm group. Statistics come from the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Survey of entering students, which is administered every four years. Additional detail can be found in Appendix C.

⁵This picture is complex. The number of high school graduates nationally will peak in 2008 and then decline over the next 10 years to 2018. Two of the top five states from which Skidmore attracts students (New York, Massachusetts) will experience projected decreases of up to 10%. However, the three remaining states in this group will see increases of up to 33% (New Jersey) and 10% (Connecticut and California).

- the imperative to invest substantially (perhaps as much as \$100M) in renovating our physical plant and constructing needed new facilities;
- the prospect of having to replace nearly one-third of our faculty (and a substantial number of administrators and staff members, as well) over the period of this plan due to retirements;
- our desire to improve our performance in dealing with the many complicated issues falling under the heading of *diversity*;
- the increasingly competitive environment of elite national liberal arts colleges in which we contend for students, faculty, staff, resources, and recognition; and
- a national context in which liberal education in general and elite liberal arts colleges in particular need to be defended against deep-seated skepticism regarding our value and, most certainly, our cost.

These and other challenges will test our judgment, our imagination, and our collective resolve. At the same time, having developed from institutional adolescence to the brink of maturity, we now find ourselves at a transition point – a juncture at which our significant forward momentum allows us to view the College with fresh eyes and take charge of our destiny in unprecedented ways.

Many of these challenges, however, also represent opportunities. Indeed, we are positioned today to entertain a set of questions that would have been quite unimaginable even a few years ago:

- How might we extend the expectations explicit in our *Mission Statement* and implicit in the statement that *creative thought matters to all* our students?
- How can we prepare *all* Skidmore students to function effectively in the multi-cultural, increasingly interconnected world they will encounter upon graduation?
- How can we challenge *every* Skidmore student to become the “informed, responsible citizen” referenced in our *Mission Statement*?
- What can we do to take a leadership role in the national conversation within American Higher Education about the value and efficacy of liberal education – especially as it relates to the capacity of the American people to engage deeply and *creatively* the issues that confront us today, issues pertaining not just to the future of this country but to the future of the world?
- And last, what must we do to hold ourselves accountable for attaining these results and measure our success accordingly?

We can maintain our current positive trajectory through the coming years only to the extent that we effectively manage new demands on our finances and on our most precious resources: our time and our energy. We must establish clear strategic priorities, understand both their direct and *indirect* costs, and make the difficult choices that will be required to realize them.

This *Plan* establishes an overarching framework for making the necessary choices – for deciding, as a College, that while many objectives are important some must take pride of place. It identifies four ambitious *Goals*, together with the *Priority Initiatives* required to achieve them. Completing these *Initiatives* will entail specific action steps⁶ that will be identified in *Action Agendas* that will be developed annually by the administration in collaboration with the Institutional Planning and Policy Council (IPPC). The Plan references other documents (such as the “Residential Life Plan,” the “Comprehensive Compensation Framework”) that address specific objectives in greater detail.⁷ Also included are three appendices. Appendix A identifies a set of *Expected Outcomes* to be paired with each *Goal*; these benchmarks give specificity to our intentions and will enable us to assess our progress in achieving them. Without a precise financial analysis, this Plan would be not just incomplete but irresponsible. Presented in Appendix B, that analysis indicates which initiatives are already funded (and in some cases already in process), which can be covered through regular budgeting or the redirection of existing resources, which will require new resources, and where those resources are most likely to originate – e.g., grants, fund raising, potential new revenue streams. Appendix B also includes a timetable for implementing the identified Initiatives. Appendix C provides additional background information indicating why we have identified these Goals and not others.

A useful heuristic in planning is to identify available resources and ask where those resources should be invested *first*. Each year’s budget represents a *de facto* answer to that question. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that such choices consistently reflect the *Goals* and *Initiatives* set forth in this Plan. To attain our objectives, however, we must overcome the natural tendency to look immediately to increased revenues to fund each new initiative. A hallmark of effective planning is the willingness to interrogate current practices, asking whether existing resources might be redirected to better purpose. Most organizations, and certainly most colleges and universities, devote the largest percentage of their time, energy, and budget to support ongoing activities that can appear to be nondiscretionary⁸ – such as the costs of energy, liability insurance, and financial aid, or staffing a set of required courses. But in fact *each* of our actions involves choice at some level. We could lower our thermostats in winter, accept more risk, change our financial aid policies (and thus admit different students), or redesign our curriculum. More generally, to fund a recurring budget item or devote effort to a familiar task is to *decide* not to direct those funds or effort somewhere else. By highlighting this process here, we are not signaling the onset of a new wholesale review of programs aimed at cost cutting. At the same time, it is the responsibility of every area within the College – and, indeed, of every individual who works here – to identify creative ways to deploy our assets most effectively.

If it is to be worth our time and effort, this planning process must not only enable us to address our challenges, it ultimately must inspire us to unprecedented achievements – new levels of excellence – in pursuit of Skidmore’s distinctive educational mission. To recommit ourselves to our distinctive mission, we begin by reviewing and reaffirming those core values that make us the College that we are today and that will continue to guide us into the future.

B. Skidmore’s Distinctive Identity – the Values of Engaged Liberal Learning

Although we share many ideals with other schools, Skidmore has claimed its place among the ranks of first-tier national liberal arts colleges not by emulating others but rather by expressing a unique combination of values that define a *distinctive conception of educational excellence*. We

⁶Illustrative action steps are provided beneath each Priority Initiative.

⁷The electronic version of the Plan, available on the College web site, includes links to the referenced documents.

⁸By one estimate, the amount of discretionary spending available even to well-run institutions rarely exceeds 6% of their budgets.

comprehend those principles today under the heading “engaged liberal learning,” reflecting our belief that *engagement is prerequisite to achievement*. Though we must be prepared to embrace good ideas wherever we encounter them, we must resist any temptation to imitate others for imitation’s sake. Rather, we must devise new ways to express our own core values and, in so doing, strengthen our unique identity.

Liberal education and autonomy

Liberal education is not a destination but a life-long journey – a continuing transformative process modeled by our faculty members in their engagement with their disciplines in their research, creative activity, and teaching. Through their work as *teacher-scholars* – in the classroom, the laboratory, the studio, and beyond – they invite our students into the ongoing conversations in and among their disciplines, involving them in the process of inquiry not as passive spectators but as active participants. By exploring the various ways of interrogating the world, making meaning, and constructing knowledge that are embodied in the various academic disciplines and art forms represented across Skidmore’s curriculum, our students extend their powers of inquiry and discernment. The purpose of liberal education is to free individuals from the grip of received opinion, unchallenged assumptions, and prejudices through the development of critical and self-critical faculties. It embraces individual and collaborative methods and processes of learning and knowing within a disciplinary and interdisciplinary context. In short, the liberal education necessarily and fundamentally transforms the students’ relation to themselves and broadens the ways they engage the world.

Historically, knowledge has been constructed, formalized, and structured primarily through the medium of text. Accordingly, text-based organizational structures – e.g., book, chapter, essay, and index – have dominated teaching, learning, and the demonstration of knowledge gained. These organizing structures and the linear reasoning that they support have been crucial to the advance of knowledge, and we must continue to nurture our students’ capacity for logical thought, critical analysis, and argument. In recent years, however, methods of creating and communicating meaning have evolved to include rich media and multimedia built around linear and non-linear access to text and employing auditory and visual imagery. With the advent of the World-Wide Web, these forms of communication can be integrated not just to express knowledge but also to develop and organize it – employing structures that are hyper-linked (not just hierarchical), multi-dimensional (not just linear), constructed, not just displayed, and capable of dynamic, not just static access. Today’s students need to be sophisticated consumers of information conveyed through electronic media, and increasingly they need to be accomplished creators of such resources.

Ultimately, we want our students to develop the capacity to appraise, for themselves, the worth of an idea, an argument, or a work of art independently of the identity of its author and no matter how it is presented to them. This capacity *to determine one’s own beliefs and so direct one’s actions* is foundational to the personal freedom promised in the concept of *liberal learning*. We expect our students to practice this freedom at once by taking charge of their own academic odysseys, beginning with their matriculation at Skidmore. Through systematic and effective *mentoring* (the responsibility of every full-time faculty member), we empower them to develop their own pathways through the myriad possibilities within our academic programs. In response, our students elect both traditional and quite unexpected combinations of majors and minors that they pursue with purpose and passion – making choices that reflect not the expectations of others but rather their own highest aspirations for themselves.

Creative thought matters

The historical and continuing prominence of the arts at Skidmore within a broad liberal arts curriculum has long set us apart from our peers.⁹ Where others have talked about the value of integrating the arts as an essential component of liberal education, Skidmore has created a vibrant culture that is enriched throughout by the fine and performing arts.¹⁰ This key dimension of our heritage led naturally to the phrase *creative thought matters*. The implications of this idea, however, extend far beyond the arts. It is a motif interwoven throughout the fabric of the College, touching all that we do. For the importance of creativity is manifested not solely in the arts but rather in all areas of human endeavor, certainly in every region of the Skidmore curriculum. As evidenced across the research and artistic work of our faculty of *teacher-scholars*, creative thought matters just as much in science or mathematics or government or management as it does in theatre, dance, or sculpture. It is linked inescapably with the independence of mind required to formulate a new approach to a particular problem or to rethink an entire domain of knowledge. Genuine creativity does not come easily; it requires a rigor of thought and practice that conjoins knowledge and imagination with discipline.

Skidmore's insistence that creative thought matters takes on added significance in light of the world our graduates will encounter: a world marked by conflict, unpredictability, insecurity, and an accelerating pace of change. At the same time, it is a world of unprecedented opportunity for both personal and collective achievement. To comprehend this increasingly complex environment, our graduates must be intellectually nimble, self-directed, lifelong learners, with the flexibility of mind required to master new fields of inquiry, learning and *un-learning* on their own. To prevail over multi-dimensional problems that defy one-dimensional thinking, they must combine analogies and insights from disparate sources. Interdisciplinary programs represent one important way to gain such facility, and our faculty has long affirmed the value of such work. Twenty years ago, we implemented an innovative Liberal Studies curriculum emphasizing the capacity to make cross-disciplinary connections as an essential component of the knowledge most worth having. We also developed concentrations, majors, and minors and, in the process, infused a spirit of interdisciplinarity throughout our curriculum. This emphasis continues in our new First-Year Studies Program designed to meet the needs of today's students while preserving the spirit of Liberal Studies.

In the end, creative thought matters only to the extent that thought *itself* matters. At its deepest level therefore, Skidmore's commitment to liberal education affirms the value of ideas – especially the power of innovative thought – in human affairs. In short, the concept of *engaged liberal learning* means, first and foremost, *active engagement with ideas*. Liberal education initiates students into that fraternity and sorority of the human community, unbounded by time and space, whose members have experienced the power of ideas in their own lives and who, on occasion, have given their lives in service of their beliefs. In support of this ideal of intellectual engagement, we strive to be an academic community for whom ideas matter consistently and pervasively in all that we do: in every classroom, lab, and studio, across our campus, in our publications, within our alumni community, and through our contributions to the larger world.

⁹There is evidence that we attract a student body qualitatively different from those of both a group of peer schools and a national sample of liberal arts colleges represented in the 2003 Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Survey of entering students (class of 2007). For example, 54% of Skidmore's entering first-year students rated themselves as "above average" or in the "highest 10%" in terms of artistic ability (compared to 35% of students in a peer group), and 79% rated themselves similarly in regard to creativity (vs. 63% in the peer group). At any given time, more than 40% of all Skidmore students are taking a course in the Art Department, and this number grows considerably when the performing arts are included.

¹⁰In the Tang Museum, to choose just one example, we are exploring the power of artifact exhibition not merely to display information but to create new ways of knowing – a project that will become an increasingly important aspect of the Skidmore pedagogy.

Mind and hand

Merely to value ideas, however, is not enough. For the project of liberal education itself is grounded in an ethic of concern that aims not just to transform the lives of individual students but to empower them, ultimately, to transform the world: increasing the store of human knowledge, attacking social problems, creating works of art that lift the human spirit or reveal previously unseen aspects of the human condition, parenting well, increasing our collective wealth, helping to realize the promise of democracy, and through service giving back to the human community more than they take for themselves. If this is to occur, our students must learn how to put their ideas into effect: to make their creative thoughts *material*. For the *un*-embodied thought – the building that is designed but never built, the novel envisioned but never written, the peace plan proposed but never implemented – remains decidedly *unreal*, a mere chimera, an illusion. Thus the very notion that *creative thought matters* is grounded in Skidmore's dual legacy of *mind and hand*, *episteme* and *praxis*.

We began in 1903 as an “industrial club” that fostered personal independence for young women of modest means by offering practical instruction in business and other “industrial arts” leading to gainful employment, along with the “cultivation of such knowledge and arts as may promote their well-being, physical, mental, spiritual.”¹¹ That early “club” soon evolved into a school for the arts (1912) and then into a four-year college (1922) dedicated to a unique approach to liberal education – one that retained selected elements of professional preparation – as representing the most promising path to the original goal: independence for our students. Throughout the intervening years, Skidmore has preserved its linkage of theoretical and applied learning. This heritage remains apparent today in our complex curriculum that includes selected pre-professional programs (in management, exercise science, social work, and education). *Episteme* and *praxis* come together pedagogically in opportunities for service learning, internships, and study abroad, as well as in our many courses that involve laboratories and studios. The span of Skidmore's curriculum signifies a *broader concept of liberal education* than typically is found at peer institutions: providing multiple dimensions of engagement for our students, further enriching intellectual life within the Skidmore community itself, and presenting opportunities to acquire skills that relate directly to our students' post-Skidmore lives.

Education for the multi-cultural, interconnected world of the 21st Century

Everyone who lives in the increasingly interconnected world of the 21st Century – from the young person just attaining adulthood to those with a bit more life experience – needs to become an adept traveler in a complex multi-national, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural milieu that scarcely could have been imagined just decades ago. To do so requires that we all develop the intercultural skills necessary to affirm one another's humanity, no matter how different we might at first appear, with the ultimate goal of living and working successfully together.¹² In fact, the concept of *diversity* stands as an essential element within the larger framework of Skidmore's most fundamental and longstanding¹³ institutional commitments. Liberal education requires the interplay of a full spectrum of ideas, viewpoints, and perspectives.

¹¹“Constitution of the Young Women's Industrial Club,” quoted by Joseph C. Palamountain Jr. in ““Such Growth Bespeaks the Work of Many Hands”: The Story of Skidmore College,” address to the Newcomen Society, 1976, p. 10.

¹²A Skidmore graduate who works in the banking industry commented on her company's multi-national work force by saying, “I don't manage people: I manage *cultures*.”

¹³Skidmore's present-day commitment to diversity has its historical origins in Lucy Scribner's Young Women's Industrial Club, whose directors enacted a policy, in 1903, offering admission to students of color. Even though the Club was affiliated with a single Saratoga Springs church, its directors also stipulated that the organization was open to members of other denominations. These policies were reflected on early application forms. See *Make No Small Plans: A History of Skidmore College*, Mary C. Lynn (Saratoga Springs, NY: Skidmore College, 2000), p. 17.

Persons from different backgrounds frequently can draw upon distinct personal histories, expanding the range of ideas and insights brought to the table. Diversity, likewise, links directly with creativity: interactions between disparate perspectives frequently strike the intellectual sparks that herald the emergence of a new idea.

Complementing the importance of diversity in our thinking is our determination that students leave Skidmore with a *global perspective* upon the political, social, environmental, and cultural issues facing humanity today. Former Chair of the Board Josephine Case concluded her “Charge to the Architects” by insisting: “One thing we do not want for our new campus and that is walls or gates. For we want the world to enter.”¹⁴ We still want the world to enter Skidmore: through the scholarship of our faculty, throughout our curriculum and courses, in the person of invited speakers and students who have returned from studying abroad, and through increased international representation within our community itself – most especially among our students and professors – so that Skidmore better reflects and more deeply interrogates the world our graduates will enter. Similarly, we want more of our students to encounter their world directly through study abroad, service learning, internships, and volunteerism. To accomplish this goal, we must replace the outdated image of Skidmore as a protected enclave with that of an *active portal* through which our students engage the world in full.

Informed, responsible citizenship

Although liberal arts colleges collectively educate only a small proportion of the nation’s students, our graduates are represented disproportionately in the leadership ranks of business, the professions, and government. This reality imposes upon these institutions, in general, and upon Skidmore College, as a case in point, a substantial social imperative. Our *Mission Statement* recognizes this obligation as the commitment to “prepare liberally educated graduates ... [who will] make the choices required of *informed, responsible citizens*” – an objective that speaks to the basic social requirements of democracy itself. Democracies stand on the political assertion that every citizen possesses the right – and, indeed, the obligation – to participate in collective social decision-making. But they rely equally on the notion that persons, on balance, possess greater wisdom collectively than individually and on its corollary that better public decisions tend to result from broader – as opposed to more limited – participation by an educated, thoughtful citizenry in the public conversation. The requirements of effective participation in civic discourse itself¹⁵ therefore shape our understanding of the attributes that education for responsible citizenship therefore must instill: attributes that are central to liberal learning itself.

Effective civic discourse first of all needs to be informed by the idea that truth matters, as well as by cogent argument and the best available information. It thus requires citizens (and especially leaders) who can evaluate knowledge claims and participate in genuine conversation, as opposed to mere ideological polemic. To do so, our students must acquire the knowledge and hone the conceptual skills required to articulate, examine, reflect upon, and question their own beliefs as well as those of others. This learning begins with attention to the various dimensions of language, to an awareness that words have meanings that are not fixed in time but still transcend the intentions of particular speakers, that arguments can be sound or fallacious on logical or empirical grounds, and that metaphor plays an integral role not just in the elaboration but in the very creation of significance. Thus our *Academic Vision Statement* stresses the importance of writing throughout our curriculum, as a means of expressing one’s viewpoint effectively and, more importantly, as a crucial step in bringing one’s ideas into focus.¹⁶

¹⁴Quoted in Lynn, p. 246.

¹⁵The current highly polarized political climate of our nation and the widely remarked erosion of our public conversation during the recent presidential election (in which genuine dialog has too often been replaced by invective) shows how easily and how pervasively civic discourse can be undermined.

¹⁶The *Academic Vision Statement* was authored by the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP).

Meaningful civil discourse also requires the attitude of openness to the ideas of others that enables a genuine exchange of views. Such openness is best acquired through an appreciation of our inherent limitations as knowers. This awareness begins with the realization that we have been mistaken on numerous occasions – indeed, that whole societies and ages have held beliefs to be obviously true that we today regard not just as false but as pernicious. This understanding that we human beings, both individually and collectively, are *highly fallible knowers* opens one to the possibility that on any given occasion someone else – a person, a different political group, a foreign religion or culture, even another era – might possess a better idea than oneself. As noted by Bertrand Russell, acquiring such a sense of humility with regard to one’s own beliefs provides an antidote to “the somewhat arrogant dogmatism of those who have never traveled into the region of liberating doubt.”¹⁷ When it succeeds, liberal education guides students into that disquieting region and challenges them not to remain in doubt but rather to develop personal certainties that they can affirm without falling into dogmatism.

We cultivate such virtues in our students first of all by modeling them in ourselves. It is not enough that our professors demonstrate the assurance conferred by their hard-won disciplinary expertise. They also are called upon to acknowledge both the existence and the legitimacy of alternative views (or, at least, their possible legitimacy). By creating instructional contexts that value a diversity of viewpoints in which opposing positions are not ridiculed but rather are seriously engaged, they encourage students to explore alternative perspectives for themselves. Just as we challenge our students to be creative in their thinking, so too must we challenge them to understand the complexity of difficult questions and reward them for doing so. In further support of these ideals, we strive to be a community of discourse in which ideas matter consistently and pervasively in all that we do and that reflects a genuine diversity of viewpoints on complex issues.

The challenge to live as a responsible citizen also invokes the value of concern for others, for a greater social good, that extends beyond one’s narrow self-interest. In expecting our students to become responsible citizens, we challenge them to live what Robert Coles¹⁸ has termed “lives of moral leadership” professionally, civically, and personally. To do so, our students must understand that all persons encounter situations that call upon them to invoke moral categories and stand behind the ethical judgments they make. Accordingly, we must demonstrate for our students the need for moral decision-making, help them critically explore available ethical frameworks, equip them to make responsible choices among those frameworks or create new ones, and thereby enable them to calibrate their own moral compasses.

Balance and sustainability

A liberal education provides the best possible preparation for a life of professional achievement; it also provides the foundation for a life of satisfaction in the deepest sense of that term – a life of human flourishing, Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*. Such a life certainly requires some measure of material success. But even more importantly it entails continuing intellectual and personal growth, the cultivation of mature friendships and loving family relationships, professional, civic, other forms of community involvement, attention to the arts and other sources of spiritual renewal, and a commitment to health and wellness. As we consider the College we are today and plan for the College we will be tomorrow, we must keep in mind these constituents of a *sustainable* life and ask how we might do more to promote them – not only for our students but also for those who work at the College and for our alumni. A key element in this equation is *balance*: the ability to handle the competing – and frequently conflicting – demands on our time and attention. We ask our faculty members to model this characteristic for our students as well:

¹⁷Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 157.

¹⁸Robert Coles, *Lives of Moral Leadership* (New York: Random House, 2001).

That is, we expect them to balance the competing demands of being a teacher-scholar-citizen, the three major components of the faculty role at Skidmore. It is certainly easier to achieve excellence by emphasizing just one component of one's life; it requires much more agility to shift among different roles. By attending more intentionally to this aspect of our humanity we may be able to address one of the most significant challenges our graduates will face in their post-Skidmore years, that of finding balance in their lives.

Individuality within community

Skidmore historically has expressed its commitment to excellence in terms of yet another dimension of engagement by fostering *individual achievement within the context of a caring, supportive academic community*. Indeed, throughout our history we have realized the *complementarity of individuality and community* – that human beings are dependent upon their social context for their very existence as individuals, and that any one person's achievement is made possible only through the contributions and support of many others. Students, faculty members, and staff members new to Skidmore quickly learn that they have joined a close-knit community that fosters individual excellence without at the same time generating destructive forms of zero-sum competition in which some necessarily must fail if others are to succeed.¹⁹ This unique community unites our alumni from the 1930's to our most recent graduates. More broadly, even as we honor the differences of color, cultural background, sexual orientation, religious heritage, and other factors that add richness to the human family, we also honor the even deeper affinities we all share as human beings. Such affinities influence us far more profoundly than do our sometimes more obvious differences. Our understanding of our human identity remains incomplete without an appreciation of these profound commonalities. This understanding is echoed in Skidmore's emphasis on community that we continue to affirm today.

Skidmore's distinctive identity

This constellation of institutional history, mission, and values delineates a unique institutional identity that is immediately recognizable within the extended Skidmore community and that forms the core of the story that we need to communicate to external audiences. Since our founding, Skidmore College has prepared generations of young women and, more recently, young women and men, to become both successful, productive citizens and personally fulfilled human beings. We also have embraced the education of a smaller cohort of non-traditional students who affirm the power of liberal learning to illuminate both their professional and personal lives. We attract students who are *sophisticated, eclectic, collaborative, creative, and adventurous*. We offer them a cosmopolitan and challenging institutional culture, one infused with opportunities to participate in and appreciate the visual and performing arts. We encourage them to experiment, to explore multiple areas of inquiry, and to pursue their individual passions. Traditional and non-traditional students alike report that Skidmore has enabled them to accomplish objectives and grow personally to an extent impossible to predict when they entered the College. Indeed, one of our historic strengths has been to awaken previously unrecognized interests and talents, suggesting new possibilities to students who have not yet appreciated – much less risen to – their potential.

The members of the Skidmore faculty take justifiable pride in cultivating our students' intellectual and personal excellence and curiosity; others within the extended Skidmore community take similar pride in their contributions to students' success. We hear in the testimony of our alumni, from the observations of appreciative parents, and through our own experience that our best students – those who take full advantage of what they find at Skidmore today – receive

¹⁹Not surprisingly, the *Academic Vision Statement* emphasizes the importance of *collaborative learning*, a value that takes on added significance today as we prepare our graduates for a professional world that increasingly respects and, indeed, demands the ability to work effectively with others.

an educational experience second to none. A Skidmore education provides the foundation in both the cognitive skills and the personal maturity required to excel in both the workplace and in the polity of the 21st Century. Most importantly, it offers the resources for composing a sustainable life as a moral being in a world where the ethical signposts periodically seem to have been knocked flat.

C. The College We Aspire to Be: Strategic Goals and Priorities

The preceding characterization of Skidmore College represents not only a description but also a promissory note issued to every new student upon matriculation. Each of them (and their parents) arrives with the legitimate expectation that this obligation will be redeemed in full. We certainly do not say to any individual matriculant, “It’s all right with us if you fail at Skidmore: your success doesn’t really matter.” Instead, we begin with the assumption that each admitted student can meet the challenges we present and – with the proper commitment, effort, and assistance – will join the ranks of Skidmore alumni. We regard matriculation as the beginning not of a four-year relationship but rather of a *lifelong* relationship between a student and the extended Skidmore community. Even so, despite our best intentions, we must acknowledge that for too many of our students Skidmore remains a promise unfulfilled. The gap between the aspirations of our *Mission Statement* and our actual performance provides both a significant challenge and our most important opportunity.

Our overarching objective, therefore, is to become a College that fully realizes the objectives of our Mission: one that inspires, challenges, and supports the highest levels of excellence for all our students, not just for some or even many of them – as evidenced by their achievements in realizing the values of engaged liberal learning while at Skidmore and expressing them throughout their lives. The Skidmore we envision expects that an intellectually rigorous, transformative educational experience will lead to graduates whose achievements at Skidmore will launch them into the next phase of their lives, who are prepared to function effectively in the complex and increasingly diverse world of the 21st Century, and who understand and embrace the responsibilities of living as informed, responsible citizens. Moreover, we expect our alumni to remain deeply connected to one another and to Skidmore as a continuing source of inspiration and support.

More specifically, we seek to become an academic community in which minds are inspired:

- A College that involves students immediately and passionately in a life-altering learning experience, from their first days on campus – a process that leads to significant individual academic achievement by the time of graduation, along with demonstrable personal development that will position all our alumni to embark with assurance on the next phase of their lives.
- A College that offers its students a balanced curriculum, reflecting strength across the arts, humanities, natural sciences, social sciences, and selected pre-professional programs, one that enables its students and faculty to make insightful connections across disciplinary boundaries.
- A College that expects every student to develop increased appreciation of the value of *difference* in human society, in which each student progresses in his or her ability to interact successfully with persons of unfamiliar background, and that provides every graduate an entrée to the understanding necessary to function

effectively not only as a citizen of our country but also as a citizen of our increasingly interconnected world.

- A College that expects responsible behavior of everyone within our community, that empowers and inspires all of our students to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens throughout their lives, and that itself acts as a responsible corporate citizen.
- A College that values creativity and excellence in the research of our faculty, expects it in the collective decisions that determine the course of our institution, and insists on it in the work of our students.
- A College that increasingly is recognized for its role as a leading national liberal arts college in advancing the cause of engaged liberal learning within our national community and world at large – both through the actions of our alumni and through the College’s own contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

At the heart of our mission – and so of this *Plan* – is the education of our students in the broad tradition of liberal learning. This mission *per force* assigns a central role to the teacher-scholar-citizens who constitute the Skidmore faculty. Through their teaching and mentoring our professors engage our students actively in their own education. More broadly, by modeling the way an educated person examines, challenges, critiques, and synthesizes existing beliefs and creates new ones, the Skidmore faculty communicates to our students what it means to be liberally educated and capable of acting responsibly in the world. Though teaching, mentoring, and service tend to be their most visible activities on campus, the members of our faculty were initially drawn to the academic life through their own passionate scholarly engagement with a field of study. It is crucial for a faculty member, across the span of an entire career, to continue her or his scholarly engagement by maintaining active membership in an extended disciplinary community. Without a foundation of continuing professional engagement, one’s teaching cannot reflect the current state of an evolving area of study. Without the sharp give-and-take in the scrutiny of one’s own work by professional peers who are in a position to evaluate it, one all too quickly can lose the intellectual edge required to advance knowledge and to challenge one’s students. Most importantly of all, in order to inspire one’s students, one first must be inspired oneself; unless one continues to grapple with issues in one’s field that one defines as important, one’s scholarly passion can fade. The sources of such inspiration are manifold, but among these the stimulation of active membership in a learned community ranks high. Thus our *Mission Statement* affirms that “underpinning the [College’s] entire enterprise are faculty members’ scholarly and creative interests, which inform their teaching and contribute, in the largest sense, to the advancement of learning.” Accordingly, this *Plan* recognizes and supports the need for every faculty member to maintain an active agenda of research or creative work.

Though grounded in present reality, the Skidmore we envision will entail significant evolutionary development. To enable all of our students to live up to their potential, we must challenge ourselves to measure up fully to Skidmore’s most cherished ideals, to meet our own highest standards of excellence in all that we do: in teaching, in research and creative work, in administration, in College governance, in fundraising, in the management of our resources, in the maintenance of our campus, in all of the ways that everyone involved with Skidmore College supports our developmental aspirations for our students. In that spirit, we expect our administrators and staff members to understand their specific contributions to the College’s mission and to meet the highest professional standards in discharging their duties. We expect each member of our faculty to embrace fully the responsibilities of being a teacher-scholar-citizen at Skidmore – as accomplished educators, productive scholars and artists, effective mentors, and engaged institutional contributors. And we must support them at the highest levels possible in doing so.

To bring our shared vision to reality – to make our own most creative educational thinking matter across our community – we call upon our tradition of audacity, invoke our powers of imagination, and prepare to focus our efforts as never before. One of our greatest assets is the passion for our mission that characterizes us at our best, that is shared by so many members of the extended Skidmore community, and that has led us in the past to our greatest achievements. We reaffirm our sense of shared purpose and commit our collective energy to the task of achieving new levels of excellence and recognition – taking us ever closer to realizing the bold promise that is Skidmore College.

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.

During their first year at Skidmore, our most successful students develop close mentoring relationships with their faculty advisors, begin their academic work in earnest, and successfully launch their undergraduate careers. As they move towards choosing a major by the end of their sophomore year, they plan a path through our curriculum that responds to their individual interests and goals and looks toward their future. They immerse themselves in a major (or majors) and take advantage of the rich intellectual and cultural life of the College. Before graduating, they complete significant research or creative projects, some of which achieve a level of quality equaling or exceeding work done at any college or university in the country. Through these experiences, our most successful students currently develop both the skills required to engage in independent thought, as well as the habits of mind necessary to continue their quest for knowledge throughout their lives. As noted above, our overall objective is to create the conditions required for this description to apply to *every* Skidmore student without exception.

To achieve this end, we need to accelerate the process by which students become engaged in their academic work, mentoring them more consistently as they begin to set their own academic goals. We need to strengthen our residential life so that it more consistently represents a context of residential *learning* – so that the co-curricular life of our students more fully reinforces Skidmore’s primary educational values. Our 90% student retention rate from the first to the second year is slightly below that of our comparison group, and we believe it should be improved. Our overall graduation rate of 80% (or slightly below) is even more problematic. We do not find it acceptable that two of every ten students we admit fail to graduate within six years.²⁰ Most importantly, we want each of our graduates to take with them a significant narrative of personal achievement. In short, we expect to improve our graduation rates without compromising our standards; in fact, we expect to raise the level of academic achievement overall.

To begin, we will offer *all* of our first-year students a rigorous academic experience that engages them immediately in the transformative educational journey that is a Skidmore education and, through consistent and thoughtful academic mentoring, sets them on a path toward achievement, both at Skidmore and beyond. We will create additional opportunities for our most advanced students to engage in collaborative research earlier in their academic careers, and

²⁰We know we can do better, in part, because our HEOP students (whose high school records significantly under-predict their college performance) graduate at rates ranging from 90% to 94%.

(again, through more effective mentoring) we will encourage more of these students to continue their educations in graduate and professional schools. We will continue to strengthen our interdisciplinary curricular offerings and, by selectively developing new interdisciplinary research initiatives led by our faculty, create additional opportunities for faculty-student collaboration and meaningful student internships. Finally, we will enhance the opportunities for Skidmore students to complete a significant independent project prior to graduation.

Preserving our historical strengths in the arts and pre-professional majors, over the next ten years we will provide greater disciplinary balance to our curriculum by placing additional emphasis upon the natural sciences. Our aims are to bring greater visibility to their existing strengths, to add resources, enabling them to play a more active role in the Skidmore curriculum, to develop additional strength in interdisciplinary science programs, and to raise the level of science literacy among our students overall. We will realize more broadly and deeply the curricular expression of our commitment to creative thought – not as localized in particular courses but rather as a value that extends throughout our teaching and learning across the College. As part of this effort, we will continue to extend the pedagogical and research opportunities represented by the Tang, realizing that it represents an opportunity for us to develop a new model of teaching and learning that incorporates object exhibition.

Academic departments are local embodiments of the expertise that is essential to disciplinary and interdisciplinary programs alike. They serve their purpose best by functioning not as walled city-states but rather as cells in a common living tissue: as open communities bringing their disciplines to campus both in their formal curricula and informally through reading groups, colloquia, symposia, and other activities that draw together students and faculty members around topics of interest. As they deploy their curricular and co-curricular resources, every major and program should have a clear answer to four important pedagogical questions:

- First, what do we want our students to learn in this discipline, how do those educational objectives inform the curriculum, and how do we determine when those goals have been accomplished?
- Second, how do we invite our students to engage this discipline beyond completing the *formal* curriculum – e.g., through outside speakers, participation in professional meetings, departmental symposia, and so on?
- Third, what do we do now to encourage our majors to complete a substantial independent project by the end of senior year, and what could we do to enable more of them to do so?
- Fourth, how systematically and effectively do we advise our students about the career options our major programs open to them – especially the traditional liberal arts majors? Such advising is not a way to make such programs more “vocational.” It is, rather, to free our students to pursue their own passions for a liberal arts major, secure in the knowledge that their work at Skidmore – whatever form it takes – will provide the foundation for a successful professional life as it evolves over the years.

To increase the capacity of our faculty to fulfill these objectives – especially those concerning student mentoring and the supervision of student research and creative work – we will add a total of fifteen (15) tenure lines to bring the number of tenure-track and tenured faculty positions from 183 in 2002 to 198. Several of those positions are now in place; some of the additional positions that will be allocated in response to specific initiatives are referenced below. Some new positions

will be funded by reductions in the number of part-time faculty positions; others will require new resources.²¹

We will better support the members of our faculty in their aspirations to achieve academic distinction by developing additional resources to sustain their scholarly, creative, and pedagogical work. We recognize that the principal issue facing faculty members in dealing with the full range of objectives identified here is increasing demands on their *time*. We need to balance these demands over the course of a career by realizing that one cannot concentrate simultaneously, in the short term, on the three principal dimensions of the faculty workload. One needs to emphasize different dimensions at different times within a review cycle (e.g., developing a new course, completing a research project, taking on a major service responsibility). We will address this issue not only by adding new faculty lines but also by reducing demands on faculty time wherever possible (e.g., through governance restructure), and by seeking other ways to increase our efficiency. Over the longer term, we will explore ways to decrease the ratio of full-time tenure-track and tenured faculty to students (our initial objective will be to move from 11:1 to 10:1) and maintain appropriate curriculum-specific limits on class size.

Priority Initiatives in Support of Goal I

➤ *Increase student academic engagement in the first year.*

- Implement the First-Year Experience curriculum that will enable each entering student to select a small First-Year Seminar offered by a faculty member who is passionate about the course's subject matter. First-Year Seminars will provide rigorous, challenging academic experiences that establish an atmosphere of intellectual engagement that will continue beyond the first year and throughout the student's career at Skidmore.
- With the assistance of a student peer advisor, the First-Year Seminar professor becomes the academic mentor of the students in his or her class. In this capacity, the professor works with students to help them become more self-reflective about their careers, set goals, and explore use of an ePortfolio that would become a vehicle for tracking students' performance across their time at Skidmore and presenting themselves to future employers or post-graduate schools.
- Add five (5) faculty positions prior to the 2005 academic year to support this initiative. [S]²²
- Clarify the College's expectation that all faculty members will perform their fair share of the work of mentoring students and provide assistance in ensuring that they develop the skills to perform this aspect of faculty work effectively.
- Ensure that we provide the resources necessary to assist faculty members in developing pedagogical strategies to support the educational objectives of this plan (e.g., strategies for engaging students actively in the work of a class, enhancing students' capacities for independent thought, and expecting and developing creativity across the curriculum).

²¹Specifically, two new lines were added in 2003-04 (Chemistry, Psychology), and two lines are being added for 2005-06 (English, Studio Art). Three new lines have been approved for search in 2005-06 (Computer Science, Sociology, Religion), and four additional lines have been projected for the natural sciences (Biology, Chemistry, Neuroscience, and Environmental Science). Four lines remain to be determined.

²²Indicates that additional resources will be required.

- Give additional attention to all introductory courses to ensure that Skidmore's most accomplished teachers offer them, engaging our students actively and effectively in the work of the discipline.

➤ ***Increase support for research and creative activity throughout faculty careers.***

- Enhance faculty research and creative work by increasing support for yearlong sabbaticals to 80% of salary; explore ways to reconfigure sabbatical program (e.g., with regard to the timing of sabbaticals) to increase effectiveness of the sabbatical program. [S]
- Enhance the usefulness of internal grant resources and develop other new resources to support such efforts. [S]
- Enhance internal support and external resources (e.g., through the Independent Colleges Office) to assist faculty members in all areas of the curriculum in identifying and seeking external grants for research, creative work, curriculum development, and pedagogy. [S]
- Provide additional support for departments, programs, and individual faculty members in bringing external speakers, workshops, and conferences to campus. [S]
- Seek opportunities to bring externally funded research projects to campus that will create opportunities for faculty groups to collaborate and that may provide new opportunities for student internships and research assistantships.

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

- Develop the funding necessary to complete the new music building to accommodate the needs of the Music Program. This building will include a 700-seat auditorium that will accommodate musical and other performances (throughout the traditional academic year and in the summer). It also will provide a venue for events that will further enhance the intellectual life of the College and serve as a resource for our region. Renovate Filene Hall and other areas on campus, as identified in the revised Campus Master Plan, to meet the academic program's requirements for additional space on a timetable that allows for the development of adequate funding. [S]
- Continue to raise expectations for achievement in writing for all students across the entire curriculum, provide necessary support for the faculty in developing effective writing pedagogies that are both discipline-specific and general.
- Continue to develop the resources of the Tang to encourage innovative interdisciplinary teaching and learning and the creation of new pedagogies involving object exhibition. [S]
- Develop additional resources to support students' research and creative activity, such as the Student Opportunity Fund and resources for collaborative faculty-student research. Enhance opportunities for students to complete independent research or creative projects prior to graduation. Add five (5) faculty positions to

support these efforts. Explore ways to account for oversight of such student work in the teaching load. [S]

- Ensure that major curricula are sufficiently rigorous to provide students the option of entering graduate or professional programs directly from Skidmore, should they so choose. Enhance mentoring so that students are aware of their options and understand what they need to do to prepare themselves to take advantage of those opportunities.
- Enhance programs that inspire and celebrate academic excellence, such as the Honors Forum, the Academic Festival, and the graduate Masterworks Forum.
- Develop new resources – especially web-based resources – and opportunities to facilitate the lifelong learning of Skidmore alumni by maintaining rich connections to the ongoing life of the College.

➤ ***Strengthen information resources across the College.***

- Promote the integration of technology into the work of the College. [S]
- Promote information literacy for all students. Reinforce the importance of information literacy as a new and powerful aspect of a Skidmore education through workshops and curricular developments that offer students a means to acquire the requisite skills and understanding needed for the 21st Century.
- Provide support for the technology required for faculty research and creative activity. [S]
- Provide effective and responsive technology services and infrastructure that are supportable, sustainable, and scalable. [S]

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

- Strengthen the natural sciences and enhance their visibility at Skidmore by providing additional support to departments and programs, increasing the number of science majors (in part, by raising awareness of existing targeted student scholarships and, where possible, creating new ones), and encouraging more of our students to pursue science-related graduate and professional work. Add four (4) faculty positions and two (2) technical support positions to the natural sciences to support this effort.²³ [S]
- Strengthen interdisciplinary science programs as a distinctive focus. [S]
- Develop curricular resources and enhance programming (e.g., external speakers, symposia) to raise the level of science literacy and awareness of the connections of science and public policy among all Skidmore students. [S]

²³ See the report, “Priorities for Science at Skidmore.”

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

- Expand collaboration among our academic departments, career services office and alumni affairs to provide students with information, guidance, and support in exploring career options related to various majors. Encourage departments to share best practices related to such activities.²⁴
- Enhance our capacity to mentor students earlier in their careers regarding graduate and professional school options. Improve mentoring related to post-graduate fellowship opportunities.
- Develop ways to engage alumni, parents, Trustees, and friends more effectively in career-related mentoring.

➤ ***Take better advantage of the resources and capacity for innovation in the Office of the Dean of Special Programs (ODSP) to support the relevant initiatives identified under this Goal (and others, as appropriate).***

- Expand current efforts and develop new ways to facilitate greater cross-fertilization and shared participation between activities and programs sponsored by Special Programs and those occurring during the traditional academic year. In particular, encourage more involvement in summer programs by traditional students in support of the effort to attract and retain stronger students and to enhance students' sense of Skidmore as a place for intellectual growth and artistic innovation.
- Broaden the conversation about student engagement, assessment, citizenship and independent learning by considering ODSP experience with non-traditional students.
- Continue to foster collaboration between ODSP and relevant areas of the college in support of student and faculty engagement in ODSP residencies and events.
- Provide support for faculty members to take greater advantage of ODSP resources and programs for pedagogical innovation and experimentation. [\$]

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.

It has perhaps never been more important for the world's voices to be heard in America, never more important for the world's ideas and dreams to be known and thought about and discussed, never more important for a global dialogue to be fostered. ... The cold

²⁴A 2004-05 Mellon grant provides resources to assist such efforts.

war is over, but a stranger war has begun. Alienation has perhaps never been so widespread; all the more reason for getting together and seeing what bridges can be built.

– Salman Rushdie²⁵

It is arguable that the global situation changed in the 1980's but the United States did not fully wake up to those changes until September 11, 2001. No longer is the world divided into two spheres of superpower influence. Although the United States retains a preponderance of military power in the Post-Cold-War era, multiple sources of economic influence, political power, and cultural energy compete for attention on the world stage and affect every aspect of our students' lives – from the price they will pay for gasoline, cement, and steel to the types of jobs available to them in our economy to the quality of the global environment to the governmental policies that will be necessary to maintain not just their accustomed standard of living and personal freedom but the very possibility of a stable world order. If we want them to emerge as leaders and not just as observers, our students must understand this world and their place in it. Our job is to immerse them in that world. It is their future.

We need to do more to include global perspectives in our curriculum and foster global awareness throughout our community. Specifically, all Skidmore students need to understand that no one's worldview is universal, that other people may have profoundly different perspectives and values, that world systems are interdependent, and that local choices have global impact. To become globally aware, students must study at least one foreign culture and language; understand the dynamics of international conflict, collaboration, and negotiation; learn to differentiate between phenomena that are area-specific and transnational; and develop the skills to identify and analyze complex international problems in their historical, technological, and ethical contexts. We will encourage more of our students to undertake transformative study abroad as part of their undergraduate education – with destinations such as Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America becoming as common as Paris or London. For their part, 61% of the students entering in Fall 2003 indicated a desire to study abroad. We must enable them to do so, and we need to affirm these values by supporting our faculty as well, to enhance their own ability to lead such efforts.

This project begins with the composition of our student body itself. We seek to recreate Skidmore as a more diverse, globally conscious community better able to prepare *all* our students for the world each of them will encounter upon graduation. For any college, each year's applicant pool marks a moment of transition and opportunity. As we look towards the Skidmore student population of the future, we must first of all assert that *creative thought knows no boundaries*. We want our strongest accepted candidates, whatever their backgrounds, to make Skidmore their first choice. We also need to be clear about our objectives with regard to increases in specific populations, such as students of color, international students, and so on. For example, creating an educational context capable of supporting meaningful discussions about the world situation, requires a student body that includes meaningful numbers of students whose backgrounds place them in direct touch with the perspectives of persons living in other countries. Accordingly, our long-term objectives must include not only a more diverse student body drawn from across the United States but also a substantial increase in the number of international students attending Skidmore. Furthermore, in attending to *diversity*, we need to think inclusively: considering factors such as socio-economic background, geographical distribution, and national origin, as well as race, gender, ethnicity, cultural heritage, sexual orientation, religious background, and the like.

²⁵Salman Rushdie, "The PEN and the Sword," New York Times Book Review, April 17, 2005, p. 31.

In the first few years of this planning cycle, we will build upon our existing strengths to make the most significant differences with our foreseeable resources. In 1969 we created the Skidmore Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP).²⁶ This innovative initiative has gained national recognition for enabling students whose backgrounds would not have predicted academic success to gain access to higher education and, indeed, to realize significant achievement. That program later was extended to a broader population as the Academic Opportunity Program (AOP). In Fall 2004, we expanded this program by 40%. We will continue this progress by expanding and enhancing HEOP/AOP, take best advantage of existing relationships with known feeder schools in the United States, and work to extend those relationships to new schools.

As a complement to the preceding efforts, we will work to identify high schools with significant populations of first-generation American and immigrant students who can bring to Skidmore perspectives shaped by first-hand international experiences. We also will make selective use of existing contacts with individuals and schools in other countries and programs such as United World College where, with their help, our recruiting efforts can be most efficient and effective. As we progress over the term of this planning cycle, we will increase our efforts to attract more international students. We must match these efforts to change our student population by continuing to challenge ourselves to enhance the diversity of our faculty and staff. We have begun these efforts, though to date our success has been limited. This is an area in which we must aggressively employ both our own ideas and the best practices of other schools – raising our expectations to see not just increased efforts but increased results.

Though our concern with diversity begins with questions of access, it is ultimately not about numbers of students from specified backgrounds. Rather it is about understanding and achievement. We will succeed only to the extent that our graduates are accomplished at interacting with persons whose backgrounds differ from theirs – seeing difference as a positive feature and knowing how to forge relationships that span what once would have constituted divides within the human community. We must address the complex needs of an increasingly diverse student population, enabling all our students to attain high levels of achievement. We will continue our efforts to understand why the performance of certain student sub-populations fails to meet our expectations and, based on that enhanced understanding, we will increase our efforts to meet their needs more successfully. We need to become more creative in helping *all* of our students develop the interpersonal skills required to interact successfully not just within an increasingly diverse College population but even more importantly within our increasingly pluralistic world. As one vehicle for fostering such learning, we will develop new ways to engage our students beyond the classroom through collaborative research, service learning, internships, and volunteer activities

We have not yet reached consensus within the College about how to achieve these aims or even about their meaning. More specifically, there is no agreed upon articulation of the skills and competencies required by today's graduates – much less a consensus on how to develop them systematically and measure our success in doing so. Important conversations regarding these issues have occurred in the past, and these matters represent one of three primary foci of the current Middle States review. We need to build on this good work and engage a vigorous conversation within our faculty and across our community to clarify our understanding of what our students need to know in this area and how we can best assist them in coming to know it. In short order, this conversation needs to result in action, with departments and programs taking the lead in enhancing courses and curricula to advance this initiative. These concerns also need to be reflected in the shared conversations prompted by visiting speakers, symposia, performances and other such public events that are vital to the life of any academic community.

²⁶Skidmore was a “founding institution” in this New York State program.

Priority Initiatives in Support of Goal II

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

- Under the leadership of the President, constitute a College-wide Intercultural and Global Understanding Task Force (replacing the Diversity Committee) co-chaired by the President and a faculty member to provide leadership in achieving the objectives of this Goal. Primary among its responsibilities, the Task Force will be charged to advise the President in leading the College to define specific objectives and develop initiatives to achieve those outcomes in support of this Goal. Fund the Task Force using Presidential Discretionary Funds, enabling the Committee to provide internal grants to individuals and groups on campus who propose creative approaches to advance the objectives of this Goal.
- Increase our efforts through mentoring and programmatic changes to enable a higher percentage of our students to study abroad for at least one semester. Our initial goal will be to raise the percentage of Skidmore graduates who have had such experience to 60%.²⁷ Draw on the expertise and professional connections of our faculty to provide additional opportunities for students to study abroad. Find new ways to take advantage of the resources represented by students returning from study away to enrich the campus community.
- Provide additional encouragement and assistance to faculty members whose research and teaching have an international focus. Help them develop their expertise and assist their efforts to share their expertise with the larger Skidmore Community. [\$]
- Support programs (e.g., the International Affairs major), curricula, courses, lectureships, and symposia that enhance global awareness on campus. Consider adding faculty positions in international areas not currently well represented in the curriculum (e.g., the Middle East). [\$]
- Develop additional resources to support faculty efforts to create opportunities to take our students abroad for experiences that foster global awareness. [\$]
- Reduce the obstacles to students going abroad from certain disciplines (e.g., the natural sciences). Allow all majors to offer study-abroad as an option, through more effective mentoring, help students choose relevant courses to prepare them effectively for study abroad.
- Increase our institutional capacity to take advantage of the experiences of students returning from study abroad (including London Program first-year students); develop new ways for such students to share their experiences with others (e.g., via web logs, Academic Festival, etc.).

²⁷Once this target is achieved it will be reevaluated to see if it is feasible to increase it.

➤ ***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.***

- Charge the Intercultural and Global Understanding Task Force to initiate and support this conversation.
- Provide additional resources to faculty members to meet the pedagogical needs of an increasingly diverse student population and take advantage of the opportunities represented by a more multicultural classroom environment. [S]
- Identify individuals who will have leadership and operational responsibility for guiding the implementation of this initiative.²⁸ [S]

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

- Expand and stabilize the resources of our remarkably successful HEOP/AOP programs, ensuring that these will continue regardless of the vicissitudes of external (primarily governmental) funding. We will target some of these new scholarships toward students with strong interest in science and mathematics.²⁹ [S]
- Support the initiative to increase diversity through improved collaboration between the relevant ODSP programs and Admissions, HEOP/AOP, and relevant departmental programs.
- Increase our endowed scholarship funds for students with economic need – paying special attention to students who will contribute most to the goals of educational excellence, rigor, and diversity. [S]
- Improve retention and achievement among traditionally under-represented student groups by improving academic support where it is needed.
- Strengthen programs that enhance campus climate and promote understanding among cultures, races, religions, and individuals, such as the Intercultural Center. [S]
- Increase the number of international students. An important but less immediate focus in the first five years of this planning cycle is to begin with existing contacts and target our admissions efforts to recruit additional foreign students who can afford to study at Skidmore and who – through their presence here – have the potential to attract additional students from their homelands. We also will pay special attention to children of recent immigrants to America. We will make targeted use of our limited need-based financial aid funds to attract students with very high academic potential or who come with assistance from other sources (e.g., United World College). [S]

²⁸One such position, a Director of International Education, is proposed in the report of the CEPP Subcommittee on Study Abroad and Diversity, Fall 2003.

²⁹A significant part of our strategy for achieving this objective is increasing our retention rate.

➤ ***Enhance the diversity of our faculty, staff, and administration and enhance their skills that relate to achieving this Goal.***

- Increase our efforts to recruit and retain faculty members, administrators, and staff members who represent excellence in their field and who also will increase the diversity of our employee population. Where feasible, we will use flexible interdisciplinary faculty positions to increase the diversity of applicant pools. We will send clear signals that we are seeking faculty members with an interest and experience in working with previously under-served student populations.
- Using Fulbright and other international grants, bring accomplished international scholars to Skidmore to teach as visiting faculty members, in short-term residencies, etc.
- Consistently include programs to enhance the skills that relate to this Goal in the professional development of our faculty, staff, and administrators.

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.

The crucial work of educating informed, responsible citizens decidedly begins at home on a campus that has moved beyond the concept of residential life to that of *residential learning*. To establish this context, we will forge stronger links between the campus built environment and our Mission, ensuring that the spaces we provide for our students to live and work are conducive to their intended purposes. We will scrutinize our systems and procedures to ensure that our institutional actions consistently reinforce our stated values (e.g., that our weekly class schedule does not encourage Thursday-night partying). We must overlook no opportunity to encourage our students to take full responsibility for their beliefs and to act responsibly during their time at Skidmore. Indeed, responsible student behavior is the foundation of academic achievement.

The concept of *responsible behavior* encompasses every dimension of college life: the intellectual climate on campus (as enhanced by visiting speakers, conferences, and performances, and as supported by more extended-hour study spaces on campus), the student culture in our residence halls, the social opportunities available to our students on campus (especially on evenings and weekends), our insistence that each of our students grapples with issues of local, national, and global concern throughout the curriculum, and our systematic promotion of lifelong habits of health – not just for those involved directly in intercollegiate athletics but for all of our students. In fact, it begins with the Admissions process itself. Developing the strongest possible student body includes seeking out those applicants best able to take advantage of our distinctive resources and most likely to make their own contributions to the College as Skidmore students and as alumni. Just as we seek students eager to engage energetically in intellectual inquiry across disciplines and ways of learning – students who value educational excellence and will challenge themselves to meet the standards and expectations of the faculty – we also seek students who will contribute to the sense of honor and responsibility of the campus, and eventually contribute to the communities they will join upon graduation.

Our *Mission Statement* adds to this picture the expectation that in their time at the College our students will progress toward becoming a particular kind of independent adult: an informed, responsible citizen. An essential component of this developmental process is the realization that such independence – autonomy – involves not the absence of regulation but rather increasingly sophisticated forms of self-regulation that are, in fact, quite demanding of the individual. Realizing these values involves both thought and action: mind and hand. If Skidmore is to develop and reinforce these values in our students, the environment in which they live must be a place that instantiates and reinforces them as well. Although there is much to admire about student life at Skidmore, we currently face a number important obstacles to this goal.

The College will address aspects of student culture that impede engagement and detract from excellence, first of all by revisiting our admissions criteria and evaluative procedures to ensure that we attend to indicators relevant to these objectives as we choose the members of each entering class. We will bring significantly more upper-class students back to campus and foster the contributions these students can make as role models and mentors to younger students. Achieving our broad objectives, however, will require us to realign the educational portfolio of Student Affairs to ensure greater collaboration with Academic Affairs and to enhance the contribution of Student Affairs to the College's overall educational mission. We will strengthen the linkage between the academic and residential programs (especially for first- and second-year students). We will improve support for students as they consider post-graduate education and careers. We need to do more to support non-credit-bearing out-of-class experiences that advance our developmental objectives with respect to citizenship and students' personal growth. Our challenge will be to staff such efforts properly, to realize the educational gains that could result by providing additional "coaching" to such student activities as *The Skidmore News* or the Student Government Association (SGA). Overall, we must take care that all of our students understand both the benefits and the responsibilities entailed by membership in the Skidmore community. We must devote additional attention to sub-populations of students who do not appear to be engaged in the community as deeply and consistently as we expect.

The requirements of responsible citizenship, however, transcend the need for a mature realization of autonomy; they require active participation in civic discourse, political decision-making (e.g., voting), and other forms of community involvement. We need to engage in a broad-based conversation about the personal qualities that underlie such participation, our effectiveness in fostering such characteristics in our graduates, and ways in which we can become more successful in doing so.

Next, liberal education aims to prepare students not just to attain professional and civic goals and achieve a measure of prosperity but, most importantly, to live well: to construct balanced lives that are fully human, satisfying, and happy. Some have argued that we have obligations to ourselves to create the conditions for such a life, at least where possible, and one such condition certainly is health and wellness. Accordingly, the College is committed to help our students develop patterns of behavior that will serve them throughout their lives in this regard. This commitment is the primary reason for student life programming aimed at discouraging the abuse of alcohol and drugs. It extends even to the food we serve in our dining halls, which should be nutritious and wholesome as well as appealing.

This commitment to wellness also motivates renewed attention to athletics (varsity athletics, club sports, and intramural sports) and recreational and fitness activities. In recent years, several extensive reviews of our athletic programs have made it clear that it is time to re-balance and re-center our efforts in this area, with special attention to questions of gender equity in support of women's intercollegiate teams.³⁰ We are and will remain a Division III school, which means that our student athletes should be representative of our student population at large;

³⁰See the 2002 Athletic Review Committee (ARC) Report.

in all instances, academic values must take priority. We will not sacrifice the quality of our academic or residential life by admitting or retaining students whose focus on athletics comes at the expense of other, more central values.

At the same time, our intercollegiate teams deserve coaches who are effective recruiters and teachers of their sports and, at the same time, successful mentors of student athletes, with whom they frequently develop close relationships marked by respect and trust. The quality of resources provided for coaches and trainers, other support services, and our expectations for each program should meet our College-wide standards. Intercollegiate teams should be competitive when they take the field: our student-athletes should know that if they play to their capacity they have the opportunity to win. To fulfill our commitment not only to our student-athletes who compete against other colleges but also to the remaining 65-75% of our students and to our employees, we need to continue upgrading our athletic facilities and make them more readily available (especially to our students). We need to increase support for recreational programming. We also need to encourage our students to take advantage of one of our most noteworthy advantages: our proximity to the Adirondacks.

Finally, we acknowledge the deep connection between our commitment to responsible citizenship and our institutional behavior itself – especially in the realm of environmental awareness. As we make decisions about the use of our resources and our development as a College, we will give pride of place to the concepts of sustainability and balance, not just in managing the demands we place upon our people but also in the demands we place upon the environment. We will become better stewards of our precious North Woods, and we will extend our efforts to manage – and, where possible, to minimize – Skidmore’s “environmental footprint.” This means that every expansion, renovation, and purchase should be viewed, in part, through the lens of environmental impact. Our goal is to become an environmental leader in our local community, state, and where possible in our nation, a worthy role model for our students, alumni, and staff. Establishing environmental sustainability as an institutional priority honors Skidmore’s progressive, service-minded legacy of mind and hand, while giving special meaning to our emphasis on making creative thought matter.

Priority Initiatives in Support of Goal III

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

- Engage faculty conversation about the value of responsible citizenship and its place in the Skidmore curriculum. Develop, support, and enhance pedagogical innovations such as service learning, collaborative research, and project-based learning to support the application of knowledge beyond the classroom and promote meaningful connections between students’ academic experience and personal lives. [S]
- Define, support, and reward faculty involvement in research, teaching, and the sponsorship of projects that promote the knowledge and skills requisite for informed citizenship. Monitor effects of those changes and revise as necessary. Make the Skidmore campus itself a domain of study in which the values of responsible citizenship take on practical significance. Encourage students and faculty members to undertake projects aimed at improving some aspect of Skidmore’s performance as a responsible institutional citizen. In so doing stress the relationship between local actions and more global concerns and emphasize the positive effects of such efforts.

- Educate Skidmore community members regarding the rights and responsibilities of information citizenship.

➤ ***Enhance residential learning.***

- Implement those aspects of the First-Year initiative that pertain to Residential Life. Review and revise as necessary our Residential Life programming and staffing to ensure that we are creating a campus environment that supports our educational objectives. Intentionally design (and, where necessary, redesign) co-curricular and residential programs to promote collaboration between the faculty and the Office of Student Affairs. [S]
- As we implement and continue to evaluate recently changed campus drug and alcohol policies, expand and enhance on-campus programming that provides social and recreational alternatives consistent with the College's values and educational objectives. Monitor effects and revise policy and programming as necessary. [S]
- Strengthen the Honor Code. Raise the intolerance level for behavior that is destructive of community values (e.g., mutual respect for members of this community, caring for the campus physical environment). Actively promote the development of social integrity, civic virtues, and personal responsibility.
- Support student involvement in College governance. Extend faculty and administrative mentoring to key student organizations such as SGA, *Skidmore News*, etc., while recognizing such work as a valuable dimension of faculty service within the system of faculty review.
- Increase the weight of the citizenship profile in Admissions decisions.
- Increase the number of Student Affairs professional staff in residence halls.

➤ ***Enhance the campus residential environment, with special attention to common spaces.***

- Complete the move to the “new” campus by closing Moore Hall, and expand our total residential capacity by 200 to 300 beds, to bring more of our students now living off-campus back into the residential community. The centerpiece of this effort will be the new North Woods apartments, to be funded by revenue bonds. Expanding residential capacity on campus will also reduce detrimental effects to the local housing market.
- Modernize our dining facilities (also to be funded by revenue bonds), develop a more flexible meal plan, and support a “fourth meal” so that the dining experience more effectively supports the creation of community on campus. [S]
- Develop new common spaces on campus in which students can gather informally to socialize and study – both as individuals and in groups. [S]
- Increase options for late-night studying on campus. Ensure that students are able to study in their residence halls.

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

- Strengthen programmatic support for athletic, fitness, and recreational activities. Continue to upgrade facilities (including a new on-campus exercise facility for students). Be mindful of the relationship between each of these activities and community values. [\$]
- Ensure that coaching and other dimensions of support for athletics meet College-wide expectations for excellence. Support athletic coaches in embracing the Division III philosophy that assigns primacy to students' academic success and personal development – especially in regard to leadership skills and teamwork. Recognize that coaches frequently become their student-athletes' most important mentors and support them in this aspect of their work. Ensure that the Skidmore community fully includes all our athletic teams. Strengthen support for women's intercollegiate teams. [\$]
- Ensure that the quality of food served in our dining halls is consistent with our overall goals for student health and wellness.

➤ ***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.***

- Make the Skidmore campus an environmental laboratory, increase our emphasis on responsible planning for environmentally sustainable operation, and continue efforts to reduce the College's "environmental footprint." Promote a campus intellectual climate that supports these goals. [\$]
- Increase students' understanding of and their involvement in local and state social, political, and environmental issues (e.g., the North Woods, Adirondack Park, the Water Initiative, SPAC). Increase support for students who research, fundraise, and volunteer within the local community. Increase students' awareness of the historical role of Saratoga in the founding of the United States.
- Strengthen relations between the College and the town of Saratoga Springs. Find new ways to promote awareness in the community beyond our borders of the resources represented by the College.
- Explore the possibility of opening – in partnership with an appropriate entity – a retirement facility associated with the College.

Goal IV – Independence and Resources

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

It is time for Skidmore to alter its historic pattern of seeking individual excellence within a context of institutional limitation. Although no college can ever assemble all the resources required to fulfill its every ambition, we must continue to develop new sources and levels of funding, increasing substantially our institutional capacity to support our highest priorities and, ultimately, to preserve our institutional independence. At the same time, we must renew our efforts to manage as efficiently as possible our existing resources, including the *time* of those of us who work for the College. As central to this effort, we need to reaffirm a vision of leadership and participation across the Skidmore community based on effective communication, transparency, and efficient shared governance that reinforces the highest ideals of professionalism, honesty, and integrity that should be the hallmark of any academic community.

We need to provide the resources necessary to sustain our core activities of teaching and learning by adding fifteen (15) tenure-track faculty lines³¹ not only to meet the demands of our curriculum but also to enhance our collective intellectual life through their research and creative work, to mentor our students and supervise their independent work, and to perform the other kinds of service expected of full-time faculty members. In addition, we must ensure that our compensation and working conditions remain attractive to those prospective faculty members (and others) we will want to recruit over the coming years,³² increase funding for research projects (especially research involving students), create opportunities to develop collaborative learning components in the curriculum, offer workshops and conferences devoted to different pedagogies, and develop additional off-campus and overseas relationships with other institutions so that the faculty members can teach and conduct research away from Skidmore. Similarly, we must support all Skidmore employees by offering competitive levels of compensation (in wages and salaries and in benefits), supportive working conditions, and opportunities for personal growth and professional advancement. Our long-term goal is to operate Skidmore College so that it is valued by all our employees as one of the best – if not the best – places to work in the Capital Region.

We also must keep in mind that two of our most precious resources are the relationships that bring together the members of the extended Skidmore community and the perceived value of the Skidmore name among external constituencies. Our professors understand that teaching is a relationship, not a transaction – a relationship that our students, alumni, and professors identify as Skidmore's most salient attribute. Standing in opposition to a disturbing trend in higher education, we do not regard our students as customers involved in a four-year business transaction. Rather, we see them as future alumni at the start of an enduring relationship with the extended Skidmore community – a relationship that entails responsibilities as well as privileges and that, ultimately, helps to define them as individuals throughout their lives. In this light, our conversation about the ideals that define our extended community is multifaceted: It concerns the continuity of the values that shape our shared sense of purpose over time; it speaks to the experience of today's students and our plans for the students of tomorrow; and it involves the personal identities of our alumni. It also pertains to the way we use the Skidmore College name

³¹As referenced above under Goal I.

³²In part, to replace the significant cohort of senior faculty members expected to retire over the next ten years.

in projecting our “brand” to external constituencies and the “equity” of that brand in the marketplace. For all of these reasons, not only must we understand and live up to our values but we also must attend carefully to the symbolic expression of our identity, protecting, preserving, and strengthening it as one of our most precious institutional assets. Within the Skidmore community, we must be more intentional in shaping the semiotics of our campus architecture, signage, and internal publications to reinforce our sense of community. We need to ensure that the College’s communications with our students – especially those pertaining to prospective students – reinforce the lifelong relationship we are forging with them. Finally, we must become even more effective in establishing our distinctive identity with external constituencies as we make known to them the worth of a Skidmore education.

Our recent admissions campaign emphasizing the theme *creative thought matters* appears to have met with initial success (both in terms of numbers of applicants and in terms of their self-selection). At the same time, as a College with aspirations to diversify the geographic (national and international) and demographic composition of our student body and to increase our visibility as a distinctive liberal arts college, we must build on past efforts to define Skidmore’s external “brand identity.” This does not mean somehow reducing our complex reality to a simple slogan, but it does entail a more sophisticated institutional recognition of the steps needed to attain the indicated goals. We will be advantaged to the extent that we are able to define and “own” a concise, recognizable, and distinctive identity. Doing so will require persistence in presenting the College to the external world – repeating a consistent message long past the point at which, internally, we will have grown weary of hearing it. This process will be facilitated to the extent that we can discipline ourselves to unify and coordinate our publications and other expressions of institutional identity (including, again, the appearance of campus buildings and spaces) to present a consistent and identifying appearance to external audiences.

Finally, we envision a Skidmore increasingly recognized for its role, as a leading national liberal arts college, in advancing the cause of engaged liberal learning – indeed, the cause of enlightenment – within the world community both through the actions of our alumni and through the College’s own contribution to the advancement of knowledge. That contribution takes two principal forms: The first is the professional activity of our individual faculty members (in many cases, in collaboration with our students) in advancing the work of their disciplines. The second is the contribution of the College itself through its sponsorship of significant artistic and intellectual events such as performances, conferences, exhibits, and symposia dealing with the most important questions of our time. In this context we might again mention the Tang, along with our journal, *Salmagundi*, our summer institutes in the arts and letters, the Filene Visiting Artists Series in music, and our named annual lectureships and residency programs. We will seek ways to strengthen our already impressive work in these areas and identify new ways to enter the national conversation on the role of liberal education in contemporary society.

Priority Initiatives in Support of Goal IV

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

- Complete a comprehensive \$200M fundraising campaign by 2010. Continue to work aggressively to increase the overall annual participation rate of alumni in giving to 50%, with a 35-40% growth in the Annual Fund by the end of the Campaign. Our goal is to produce a sustainable annual revenue stream from fund raising of \$25-30M – an increase of 100%. Continue to expand our relationships with charitable foundations with a goal of increasing foundation support over the coming years.

- Enhance our capacity for long-range budget forecasting and integrate long-range budgeting with the strategic planning process. Maintain fiscal discipline in holding annual increases in the comprehensive fee within 2% of the rate of inflation. Maintain a financial aid discount rate of 28-30% or lower.
- Continue to increase the endowment through investment policies and fundraising, aiming at a minimum annual rate of increase averaging at least 8%. Maintain an endowment-spending rule of 5% or less per year. Our target for the endowment in FY 2010 is \$240M; our target for FY 2015 is \$300M. Attaining these goals would produce a 50% growth in endowment support for the operating budget by FY 10 (approximately \$4M increase) and nearly a 100% increase by FY 15 (approximately \$7.5M increase). Because of projected spending growth based on inflation, these increases would produce only a 1% increase in the percentage of the annual budget supported by the endowment – i.e., a 1% decrease in tuition dependence. Obviously, increases in endowment that exceeded these projections would result in more dramatic changes in tuition dependence (currently, approximately 85% of the operating budget).

➤ ***Achieve and maintain competitive compensation for Skidmore faculty, staff, and administrators; enhance our ability to support their professional development.***

- Implement the “Total Compensation Framework” in conjunction with the market study. Review and revise the “Framework” as necessary and appropriate to reflect changing external conditions and the availability of resources. Pay special attention to changing market conditions in hiring (e.g., in faculty hiring). It is likely that we will need to move aggressively to address issues of compensation early in this planning cycle. [S]
- Ensure that the criteria and standards applied in the review of faculty members for reappointment, promotion, and tenure fully reflect the College’s expectations of them as teacher-scholar-citizens – especially in light of our current emphasis on student mentoring, supervision of independent student projects, and forging closer relations between the faculty and Student Affairs.
- Collaboratively implement changes in the formal governance system of the College to maximize that system’s efficiency and reduce, where feasible, its demands on the time of faculty members and other members of the Skidmore community.
- Improve the management of the College in every administrative area by providing ongoing training to administrators at all levels and placing responsibility on them to help all members of the faculty, staff, and administration to understand their contribution to fulfilling Skidmore’s mission and to create the working conditions necessary for them to experience Skidmore as a positive place to work. Continue to improve communication and transparency of decision-making at all levels within the College.
- Expand opportunities for the professional growth and job satisfaction of all members of the faculty, staff, and administration through training, mentoring, and recognition. Encourage staff participation in degree and other offerings of Special Programs, as well as College programs involving cultural and other events. [S]

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

- Complete and implement a comprehensive 10-year plan for the renewal of our campus facilities. [\$]
- Revisit and revise as necessary the Campus Master Plan to account for projected new buildings (e.g., the new music building). Complete space utilization and space needs studies to use as the basis for future planning and renovation. Include in the funding for any new building project provision for an additional endowment to support the increased operational costs resulting from that project. [\$]
- Develop a long-term vision that identifies the Skidmore North Woods as a primary asset of the College and that addresses the question of what we want the North Woods to be 100 years from now. Based on that vision, implement a stewardship plan for the North Woods that engages not only the Skidmore community but also the town of Saratoga Springs and the broader region. [\$]

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

- Become more effective in helping each newly arriving generation of students understand that it is beginning a lifelong membership in the extended Skidmore community; reinforce that message across their time at the College and at Commencement. Increase our ability to impress upon graduating seniors their responsibility, over time, to give back to the College for the benefits they have realized.
- Improve our success in maintaining contact with graduates during their early years as alumni and then across their lifetimes. Develop new ways to continue providing value to alumni through continuing access to the faculty, campus resources, career counseling and referral, and campus events. Enhance our use of the web to create a vibrant alumni network that strengthens community within and across classes.

➤ ***Develop and enhance the “equity” in the Skidmore name.***

- Develop consensus among the members of the Skidmore community (including both the on-campus and extended communities) in the College’s defining values as articulated in this Plan and elsewhere. Become more consistent in celebrating our distinctive identity internally and projecting it externally. As just one aspect of this effort, we develop new ways to project our distinctive trademark – *creative thought matters* – beyond the boundaries of our campus. Continue Admissions outreach to new regions and potential new feeder schools. Continue seeking ways to enhance our external visibility (e.g., the Tang, telling our story in public venues such as national educational conferences, etc.).