

Contextual Narrative in Support of Fourteen Middle States Standards
Skidmore College
October 2005

Standard One Context: Mission, Goals, and Objectives

Skidmore College's mission began at the turn of the century with a focus on the education of young women who lived and worked in Saratoga Springs, and over the years has evolved into today's statement with its attention to both traditional-aged students and also participants in the College's innovative special programs. Following the inauguration of Dr. David Porter as President in the late 1980s, the College, through its Commission on the 90s, developed a series of objectives that functioned as our strategic plan for the next decade. The Institutional Planning Committee (IPC) monitored this set of objectives over the years, and by the end of that decade, it was clear that the Commission's work had provided the necessary direction and priority-setting mechanism for the community. In the 1990s, members of the Institutional Planning Committee worked to develop a more detailed *Vision Statement* that, as an extension of the Mission Statement, would help the campus community as it made the transition from the leadership of Dr. Porter to a new president. That *Vision Statement* and a document outlining its history are provided in the documentation for this standard, although it had no formal standing as a document voted on by the Faculty or the Board of Trustees.

During Jamienne Studley's presidency (1999-2003), the community spent a good deal of time developing the first phase of a new strategic plan. In an effort to gather opinions and commentary from a wide variety of constituents, the community, including alumni and friends of the College, participated in surveys, focus groups, and open fora. The results of this work were summarized in the important *Distillation Report*, which laid the ground work for the planning. This initial Strategic Plan, as approved by the Board of Trustees, started the priority-setting process, but it did not contain the specifics required for integrating planning with budgeting. With Dr. Glotzbach's arrival in the late summer of 2003, the community once again set to work developing a more specific set of objectives, producing the document "Engaged Liberal Learning: The Plan for Skidmore College" ratified in Spring of 2005. This Plan will drive budgetary decisions and academic planning for the next ten years. As part of that process, the College's Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) worked with Dr. Chuck Joseph, VPAA/Dean of the Faculty, on the development of an Academic Vision. Tied to these planning efforts are the various reports completed for external agencies, including the Regents Priorities and the CICU Master Plan Questionnaire, both of which are also included here.

The documentation also includes evidence of how the principles reflected in these more broadly stated documents are reflected in operational documents of the College. These include the Faculty Handbook, the CEPP Operating Code, and revised faculty governance plans for the coming years.

Standard Two Context: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

Skidmore noted a significant overlap between Standards One and Two, as mission statements and documents identifying goals and objectives are tightly interwoven with planning documents. We have referred to the Commission on the 90s Report and the Distillation Report from Standard One, and we have included additional documents here to augment information to the extensive planning process the community engaged in over the past decade. In addition, we have included a listing of the external reviews to be conducted in the near future and examples of some of the more recent external investigations that will inevitably lead to future curricular and resource changes. There is obvious overlap with assessment here as well.

Given the Self Study's focus on the three primary areas of the First-Year Experience, the Sciences at Skidmore, and Diversity Issues, we have also included pertinent planning documents for each of these arenas. All of these documents have functioned as groundwork for the language found in the *Engaged Liberal Learning*, and where appropriate, the results of this work are being integrated into the plans for the latest Comprehensive Campaign. The campus is also currently in the middle of a major effort to revise the Campus Master Plan. During the 04-05 year, the College contracted with an architectural firm to complete a needs assessment. Information from that work is in draft form and is being reviewed by campus personnel but is not yet ready for distribution. Once available, various campus governance groups, such as the Institutional Policy and Planning (IPPC) and Faculty Executive (FEC) committees, will be involved with the review and revision. At the current time, a major addition to the residence hall system – a ten-building project in our North Woods – is under way. The program statement for that project has been included in the documentation.

This year also marks the five year anniversary of the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Gallery. "The Tang," as it is known on campus, is evolving into a centerpiece building for the campus, and its advent has provided faculty and students alike with a panoply of new and exciting opportunities for new pedagogies and experimentation in teaching methods. As a consequence, we have included a number of documents pertaining to the building's development and evolution. We hope the reviewers have the opportunity to visit the museum in order to see the operation first-hand.

In addition, we have included several grant proposals that have been funded in recent years and early campaign planning documents. The current campaign is in a quiet phase, with a formal Case Statement still to be circulated or adopted.

Standard Three Context: Institutional Resources

Documents gathered in support of this standard address the requirement that we provide evidence of the college's fiscal health, and of the relationship between planning and budgeting. To meet these requirements, we have included five years of the audited financial statements, minutes of Board meetings that address the status of the endowment, and a recent report given by the Vice President for Finance to the full faculty. With the approval of the latest strategic plan, the President intends to integrate future budget planning with the activities and initiatives outlined in the Plan. To that end, we have asked the VP for Finance to outline the changes he put in place this year to align these efforts.

In the past, the College's Financial Policies and Planning Committee provided input on the proposed budgets, but members of that group often complained of being placed in the position of being reactive rather than forward-looking. In recent months, structural reorganization has moved oversight of budget planning to the reconstituted Institutional Planning and Policy Committee (IPPC), linking planning and budgeting structurally and practically. We have no experience with this new arrangement as yet, but we anticipate that moving the focus from line items to the larger picture will be a benefit. Given that our budget is tied so tightly with enrollment, and that we remain highly tuition dependent, enrollment management is critical to this process as well. Members of the President's Cabinet now sit on the Institutional Planning body and will be able to provide input and data. Reliance on data driven assessment will doubtless play a significant part in these efforts in coming years. IPPC is also in the process of forming four subgroups to handle consideration of specific issues related to: Budget and Finance, Enrollment Management, Student Affairs, and Environmental Concerns.

Technology planning has been a major part of the larger picture in recent years, as the cost of upgrades, replacement of the 20-year-old legacy administrative system, and attempting to stay current with new technologies have all contributed to larger demand. In recent years, when cuts were necessary to balance the budget, technology and facilities lines have been limited, resulting in some deferred maintenance issues that are being addressed in the current and projected budgets for out years. We have included a document from Justin Sipher, the new IT Director, as he begins the process of identifying priorities for the future.

The President has also identified compensation as a major area of concern as he worked with various constituencies in the development of the strategic plan. In collaboration with Human Resources, the President's Cabinet approved and sent to the Board of Trustees a document entitled the Total Compensation Framework which guides compensation decisions. Specific goals have been set to bring faculty and staff to specific salary levels when compared with peers. In addition, the College worked through a difficult series of decisions regarding employee benefits, resulting in the reorganization of health care and retirement benefits contributions to be made by the community.

The College is currently involved in a major revision to its Master Plan. A building project involving expansion of the residential halls in order to bring more upper class students back on campus, the projected building of a new gateway Music facility, and renovations to the dining hall are all included. These follow the building of the Tang and the renovation of the Dana Science facility eight years ago.

Standard Four Context: Leadership and Governance

Skidmore College has a long history of having an excellent working relationship with its governing Board of Trustees and the leaders of the town of Saratoga Springs. In the past decade and more, the Board has provided leadership in the areas of funding raising, building projects, investments, and direction setting. At the current time, the Board is comprised of 31 individuals who have strong ties to the institution. Many are alumni, and three are local community members. These local members represent the town in many areas of discussion, and are often invited to campus to participate in discussions, formal events, and gatherings. The recent Convocation for new students included the mayor of Saratoga Springs in the lineup of individuals welcoming the new students to the campus and the local area, and the previous mayor is himself an employee of the College (currently the Director of the University Without Walls program).

The Board of Trustees meets three times a year on campus, with its final meeting scheduled during Commencement Week in May. The Board will also periodically meet in a fall retreat in order to orient new members, assess the work of the past year, and recommend changes for the upcoming year. While on campus, Board members meet with students, staff, and faculty, with informal dinners at the homes of faculty members also arranged whenever possible. Obviously the members of the Board do not always speak with a single voice, and the meetings involve lively discussions in committee as well as during the Full Board sessions at the close of each meeting. The Executive Committee of the Board also meets in New York City every January to discuss the details of budgetary issues. In recent years, the Board urged the administration to consider alternative benefit structures in order to bring costs under control, and they have also been supportive of efforts to expand and enhance the sciences and to build upon strengths in the arts. Several members, past and present, have considerable fiscal expertise and have guided the College's investments wisely throughout recent difficult fiscal periods. During its May 2005 meeting the Board unanimously voted to support the new Strategic Plan and is firmly behind President Glotzbach's efforts to enhance engaged student learning at Skidmore.

The Board worked collaboratively with the Skidmore community during the 2002-2003 process of identifying the College's seventh President, Dr. Philip Glotzbach, with members of the search committee included from both constituencies. Faculty members on the group reported back to the community on a regular basis; open forums were held to discuss the qualities and characteristics desired in a successful candidate; open interviews were conducted on campus; and the views of the community were solicited and reviewed as part of the process. Dr. Glotzbach arrived on campus with the good will of the community clearly evident, and he has spent the past two years working to develop the next phases of the strategic plan and laying the groundwork for the next capital campaign.

Skidmore also has a long history of shared governance. The Faculty Handbook is the primary governing document for interactions between the Faculty and the Administration. The governance system is designed to provide faculty guidance for and oversight over such areas as the curriculum, educational policy, and promotion and tenure. All-College committees have advisory and legislative roles in the broader areas of planning, information resources, affirmative action, and compliance with governmental regulations. The responsibilities of these groups are spelled out in the Handbook, which is ratified each year by the Faculty at large. During the 2005-2006 academic year, a revised structure involving the work of a new body, the Faculty Executive Committee (which replaces the Committee on Faculty Governance) will go into effect, with three members of the FEC also serving on the primary planning committee, the Institutional Planning and Policy Committee (IPPC). This new structure is intended to streamline what has often seemed to be an overly complex and very time-intensive structure. Members of the Faculty hope this will encourage greater participation of experienced, senior members. Currently, discussions on the topic of how best to encourage cooperation and consultation between the administration and the Faculty are part of the landscape.

The students have an active and engaged governance group, the Student Governance Association. Their bylaws and a new Executive Committee Action Plan are included as documentation of their work. The Board of Trustees's Student Life Committee provides an opportunity for students to have direct access to Board members at least three times a year.

Standard Five Context: Administration
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The current administration is in a state of transition. President Glotzbach, hired in 2003, spent the first two years of his leadership getting to know Skidmore and interrogating the organizational structure that was in place before his arrival. He came to Skidmore with an outstanding vita, including leadership at the national level on topics associated with the liberal education of undergraduates and setting directions for small liberal arts colleges. The President's Office web site includes links to several addresses and speeches President Glotzbach has written on these pertinent topics. During the past year, he determined, with input from the community, that the retirement of the Dean for Special Programs provided an opportunity to consider a revision of the Academic Affairs area in order to integrate all three degree granting programs under the auspices of a single Vice President for Academic Affairs. The College has since hired a new Dean for Special Programs (Dr. Paula Newberg) and a new Dean of the Faculty (Dr. Muriel Poston), both of whom sit on the President's Cabinet as of October 1, 2005. The campus undergraduate programs, University Without Walls, and the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies programs all now report to a single Academic Vice President.

In the past two years, the College has also experienced an unusual number of changes in the administration, as retirements and other resignations have left vacancies in several high-level positions. The College has hired a new Vice President for Financial Affairs (Michael West) and a new Director of Information Technology (Justin Sipher) and seen the retirement of the long-term Dean of Studies (search to be completed during the 05-06 year) and the departure of the Director of Institutional Diversity. Plans for the coming year include the formation of a search team to hire an individual for a newly created faculty line, Director of Culture-Centered Inquiry. This individual will work closely with the Director of Multicultural Student Affairs. At the same time, Human Resources will hire a new person with expertise in affirmative action to handle both compliance and outreach for diversity hiring. These two actions are part of the strategic initiative to focus on diversity issues in the curriculum and in hiring. It will, of course, take some time to integrate these new individuals into the community and to chart a new course, but the plans are ambitious.

We have included in our documentation a current organizational chart, the resumes of the members of the administration as evidence of their experience and expertise, the Prospectus from the 2003 Presidential Search, materials from the two searches mentioned above, and the final report of an ad hoc group charged with reviewing possible models for restructuring the Dean of Studies area.

Standard Six Context: Integrity

Skidmore College is clearly dedicated to the principles inherent in Standard Six: the open, creative, and civil exchange of intellectual concepts, ideas, and information. The documents gathered to support this standard are organized into two areas: student-related materials and faculty/staff-related resources. Students receive or have web access to a number of documents which encourage them to think critically about how they approach their work as student-scholars and to work always within an environment governed by the College's Honor Code. During our most recent orientation, new students gathered in three groups to hear about student and faculty perspectives on the Honor Code as their introduction to discourse at Skidmore. They then recited the Code as a class and were asked to sign a copy of the statement which will be displayed four years from now at their Commencement. Student representatives hope to encourage their peers not only to understand the implications of the Honor Code but also to help create an environment where the Code is a pervasive and important aspect of the institutional ethos. Other items document the procedures for filing a grievance as well as the operating code of the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) – the faculty committee charged with oversight of academic policy and the determination of acceptable exceptions. CAS has two students who are important, voting members of the body and who often set the tone for holding their peers to very high standards. The Dean of Studies Office also works to set standards and expectations for scholarly effort by the routine dissemination of its brochure on *The Ethics of Scholarship*.

Documents gathered to support the second area of Standard Six pertain to the College's commitment to ethical and fair practices in hiring, interpersonal exchanges, promotion and tenure, and perhaps most importantly, academic freedom. The Faculty Handbook is a primary resource in this area, accompanied by Human Resources materials. The Faculty Meeting is the primary arena for discussion, and members of the community are free to attend, observe, and comment. There has been some discussion over the years about the desirability of a forum in which only faculty members are present to discuss current issues. At the present time, three to four meetings a year are organized in this way, while the monthly full Faculty Meetings remain open sessions. The Human Resources Office maintains and annually distributes policy and procedure statements regarding harassment, workplace violence, and equal opportunities, and members of that office stand ready to assist any employee with a complaint. Both faculty and students have access to the Committee on Academic Freedom and Rights (CAFR), a faculty committee that is dedicated to the preservation of academic freedom. CAFR deliberates in a completely confidential environment and works on individual cases as needed. The chair of the group reports out annually to the community on the volume of its work in the previous year.

From the Board of Trustees to the administration and faculty to the students, the community is committed to ethical and honest interactions with each other and with those constituents external to the College.

Standard Seven Context: Institutional Assessment

Skidmore College, like many of its peer institutions, has been working for the past six to eight years on various assessment initiatives, attempting to find an approach that is meaningful, reasonable, and workable. Initial focus was, understandably, on the activities of academic departments, focusing primarily on course and program level assessment. At the same time the College began the process of collecting data at the institutional level to inform and clarify issues related to academic and institutional planning. During the nineties, the College instituted a series of student and faculty surveys intended to gather opinions and feedback from incoming, current, withdrawn, graduating, and alumni students. These continue today, with results from the National Survey of Student Engagement most recently sparking an intensive review of first year student engagement, ultimately leading to a major overhaul of the first year program. At the time of the last Periodic Report, the Office of Institutional Research had been working routinely to collect and analyze these data, suggest priorities for change, and inform enrollment management.

Academic departments have also been involved for close to two decades in program reviews which culminate in external visits. These external reports have proven to be invaluable over the years and have been the impetus for changes in staffing, curriculum, and internal practices. The cycle is such that each program will be reviewed every 8-10 years. More recently, each academic department has been charged with 1) identifying and articulating goals for student learning (majors and non-majors), 2) developing assessment plans that will focus on specific questions pertinent to each area, 3) collecting and analyzing pertinent data, and 4) reporting the impact of these efforts in the departmental annual report. This work can perhaps be best characterized as evolutionary, with early plans relying more frequently on indirect measures such as focus groups with graduates and senior exit surveys. In recent years, this work has slowly but increasingly focused on the collection and review of direct evidence of student work, with a special interest in student writing as the current center of attention. Some of the assessments have resulted in curricular changes, others in plans for further discussion or inquiry.

In 2000, the College was the recipient of a grant sponsored by the Christian Johnson Endeavor Foundation which provided funding for hiring a Director of Assessment, Dr. Raymond Rodrigues, who spent time over the four years of the grant period working with individual departments, campus governance groups, and the academic leadership to assist in transforming these departmental efforts. The Director worked to move the campus to a point where assessment would be simply part of the culture and an expected part of everything we do. We are probably not there yet, but we feel that we have made progress. New course proposals now routinely always include student learning objectives; the new First-Year Program was defined in terms of student learning goals; assessment activities are the expected norm. At the conclusion of the grant, Dr. Rodrigues made the decision to retire, and the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning decided to form an Assessment Task Force to determine the College's next steps with respect to assessment. That group has been charged with making

recommendations regarding the permanent structures that will best support our various assessment efforts at the level of both departments and general education.

In 2003, President Glotzbach appointed panel of individuals representing both Academic Affairs and Students Affairs and charged the group with investigating issues related to recruitment and retention, with the goal of making a series of recommendations to him and the community by the end of the year. The Committee on Recruitment and Retention was co-chaired by John Brueggeman, representing the Dean of the Faculty's Office, and Pat Oles, Dean of Student Affairs. Other participants included faculty members from two key governance groups, the Committee on Admissions and Student Aid and the Committee on Academic Policies and Planning, representatives from Admissions, Assessment, and Institutional Research. Because of her expertise in the area of diversity and student support, Sue Layden, then Director of the HEOP Program, was asked to visit as a consultant on several occasions. The group delved into available research, accumulated additional data, and worked on a series of recommendations that spoke to increasing the quality and diversity of entering students, the success of those who enroll, and enhancements to quality of life for those who are living and learning on campus. Many of the group's recommendations have either been implemented or are currently under consideration by various campus bodies. Many of the initiatives of the Strategic Plan refer back to the work of this group, particularly those which emphasize the necessary collaboration between Academic and Student Affairs.

In the non-academic arenas, program reviews have been conducted in several support areas, although the focus was more often on ways to effect efficiencies than on the relationship of these areas to student work. The Student Affairs division has embarked on an intensive study of student alcohol and drug use patterns (using the Core Survey) and the relationship of these behaviors to problems encountered in the residence halls and ramifications for the classroom. Recent proposals to revise student living and dining spaces sprang directly from research conducted on retention and student satisfaction. Members of the Sociology program and Student Affairs collaborated on a semester-long study of student cultures which influenced many conversations at the institution in recent years. The Sociology Department now offers SO-322 Studying Student Worlds as a permanent part of their 300-level elective offerings, providing students with the opportunity to collaborate on qualitative research with their peers and professionals in Student Affairs. Student Affairs is also currently embarking on a series of assessment activities geared toward determining how they can best support and collaborate with their faculty colleagues.

Another important activity for institutional assessment is the routine comparison of Skidmore's performance on key indicators with peer institutions. In 2003, a sub-committee of the then Institutional Planning Committee (IPC) worked for several months to develop a revised list of peer institutions. That group used a carefully constructed, data-driven approach and developed a new list that contains a set of 16 peer and a second set of 5 aspirant institutions, allowing IPC and other bodies the flexibility to work within a range of possibilities for any given topic. Benchmarking is done routinely for fiscal matters as well as curriculum comparisons, and the VP for Financial Affairs is currently

working with Institutional Research to develop a dashboard for reporting comparison data to the community and the Board of Trustees.

We feel we have made much progress, yet we have miles to go: Skidmore does not yet know enough about the goals for student learning and the impact of the courses student take to fulfill most all-College requirements; non-academic areas less routinely consider assessment in their operational modes; outcomes expected as a result of the implementation of the Strategic Plan are not as yet completely articulated and measures are still in the process of being developed. The Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) has therefore charged the Assessment Task Force this year with furthering the work of assessment and determining the best structure for long-term consideration of how assessment can best assist us in improving institutional work.

Standard Eight Context: Admissions

Admission to Skidmore College's campus undergraduate program is organizationally located under the auspices of the Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid. In its recruitment efforts, the Admissions Office attempts to balance a variety of goals, all of which support the institution's mission. The priority is, of course, the recruitment and enrollment of well-qualified candidates who can both make the most of the educational opportunities offered by Skidmore and contribute to the community once enrolled. In addition, Admissions seeks to balance the male/female ratio, improve the diversity of the student population, recruit promising athletes, build strength in the sciences, acknowledge the value of legacy ties, and make the most effective use of the limited financial funds available. In light of this complex charge, Admissions identifies potential markets, encourages applications from qualified students, works very hard to build an on-going relationship with candidates and their families from the very first contact, and makes ethical and equitable admission decisions. Over the past decade or more, Skidmore's selectivity has increased (the acceptance rate has been below 50% for a number of years), the number of applications has grown to over 6,000 for fall admittance, the percentage of enrolled multicultural students has improved by 1-2 percentage points, and the percentage of aided students has also increased to over 40%. Admissions and Strategic Communications, with the assistance of the Mark Edwards Group, have collaborated on the development of new recruitment materials and communications vehicles; strategies are being developed to support the Strategic Plan's emphasis on recruiting more and better science students; and the Dean of Admissions has begun a conversation with the Board of Trustees on the complex and nuanced issues related to improving yield.

Materials collected in support of this standard document admissions policies, information presented to enrolled students regarding requirements as well as course placement policies and procedures, and final reports presented to the Board each fall detailing the outcomes of their work. In addition, Admissions has expanded its practice of rating each applicant on the basis of academic preparation and personal qualities to include the addition of two new ratings (Involvement Rating and Character Rating) in support of the Plan's emphasis on citizenship and community involvement. Used for the first time during the 2004-2005 recruitment period, assessment of successes will be completed in coming months. With the implementation of a fall London Program for 36 students who would formerly have entered in January, and after two consecutive years of over-enrollment, the student body has increased in size to its largest figure in many years. Conversations will begin this fall on the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC) on the topic of optimizing enrollment and the benefits and negatives associated with maintaining larger enrollments.

Admissions and Student Aid worked for a number of years with the Committee on Admissions and Student Aid. This Committee has been folded into the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC) along with fiscal planning, given that these issues are so utterly intertwined. Goals for the upcoming year, derived from the Plan, are

included in the documentation. Additionally, we have used a variety of survey instruments to inform admissions practices, including the Admitted Student Questionnaire and a Withdrawn Student Survey. Additionally, as described in the section on Standard Seven, admissions strategies were reviewed carefully by the Committee on Recruitment and Retention in 2003, and implementation of that group's recommendations are under way. We have learned much over the years from these initiatives and have focused attention on attracting students who represent the best fit with Skidmore's strengths.

The targeted and effective use of student financial aid is a critical piece of the admissions puzzle. The vast majority of Skidmore aid is dedicated to need-based packaging, but Skidmore does manage two merit-based programs – the Filene Music Scholars and the Porter Science Scholars. Skidmore has established a working relationship with the College Board through Dr. Sandy Baum, a member of our Economics Department. Dr. Baum has worked with the Student Aid Office to investigate a variety of possible strategies for maximizing the effectiveness of the aid we do have to offer, using the College Board's FAST software application. Admissions decisions are need-sensitive, with a long-standing commitment to access. This past year, Skidmore increased the size of its opportunity programs (HEOP and AOP), moving the enrolled number of incoming students from 25 to 40 – a major change long contemplated as a goal. Board members are in full support, and a special Kettering Foundation grant, for which Skidmore recently applied, will support aid for needy students from Ohio if the College is successful.

Standard Nine Context: Student Support Services

Skidmore's approach to student learning is to view the social and intellectual development of its students as a complexly interwoven whole. To that end, the Strategic Plan Goal III emphasizes the importance of preparing students to make choices and to live as responsible citizens. Academic Affairs and Student Affairs cannot function as separate entities in this endeavor, and the leadership of both areas has pledged to work to integrate what the students do in the classroom with how they live their lives outside of the academic arena. To this end, an array of student support services are in place, documented with information from the web as well as brochures and materials defining opportunities for students to meet and collaborate with each other and faculty, to find academic and personal support, to consult with well-trained professionals, and to adjudicate problems when they arise. We have included formal documents, as well, that outline policies and procedures for students to use when questions arise.

Based on findings from research conducted in recent years, Skidmore has turned its attention to the question of advising and mentoring, establishing this fall an entirely new program associated with the First-Year Experience. Scribner Seminars sit at the center of this effort, with the instructors functioning as advisors, and more importantly as mentors for the first year students. The seminars incorporate time for additional work outside the classroom that supports the work of the seminar but which also speaks to the developmental process of students as "emerging adults." Upper-class peer mentors will work to assist students as they negotiate the new world of higher education and complement what the faculty do in the classroom or in mentoring sessions. Coaches, support staff, and other administrators see themselves as partners in this work.

Reports from various study groups, assessment teams, and annual reviews are included to document the efforts put forth to evaluate the impact these efforts have on students and to recommend improvements. Of particular note is the Student Cultures Report, produced following extensive qualitative research conducted by members of a Sociology class; a series of reports on the state of athletics at Skidmore that informed many of the recent changes in leadership and policy; and several Student Affairs area reports that have set the stage for goal-setting in that area. The proposals provide evidence of Skidmore's interest in and commitment to the enhancement of joint ventures between Academic and Student Affairs. This theme was echoed in the recommendations of the previously described Committee on Recruitment and Retention.

Standard Ten Context: Faculty

Skidmore's faculty are dedicated to the work they do as teachers, mentors, scholars, creative artists, and community members. They are accomplished professionals, active members of their disciplines, and participants in the political, social, and artistic circles of Saratoga Springs and the Capital District. To a person, they seek to find a way somehow to juggle these multiple roles and balance how they spend their time. Included in the documentation are curriculum vitae, statistical reports, and Faculty Handbook and Committee on Promotion and Tenure (CAPT) information on appointment and promotion processes. These materials demonstrate the strength, quality, and breadth of the faculty.

In recent years, the holders of the position of Vice President for Academic Affairs/Dean of the Faculty have focused attention on benchmarking salaries and compensation, working to eliminate gender differences in salary, and setting goals for enhancing compensation at all ranks. Comparisons with AAUP data have been important, as Skidmore's performance has not always been as positive as we have hoped – too often gains we think we will make are offset by more substantial gains made at peer institutions. The Strategic Plan incorporates specific goals for the future related to this area.

In addition, considerable effort has been expended in the arena of faculty development. Presidential funds as well as Mellon Foundation funds have been targeted for specific initiatives, with Mellon funds used to promote exchanges with Union College in Schenectady, plus Colgate and Hamilton Colleges when possible, and to help faculty at particular points in their careers remain informed and invigorated. In the past five years, the Faculty have developed an array of new (and for the most part interdisciplinary) programs, building on the Liberal Studies program developed in the 1980s and 90s. The Curriculum Committee has approved new majors in Women's Studies, International Affairs, Latin American Studies, and of course the new First-Year Experience Program that brought 47 new course proposals in Spring 2005 alone. These are not individuals who shy away from innovation and change.

Evaluation of faculty members at Skidmore has intentionally been kept separate from the work of assessment of student learning. Evaluations are conducted every semester, with each class enrolling five or more students asked to complete both all-College quantitative forms (short forms) and department-specific narrative forms (long forms). The results of these evaluations are used by department chairs to identify potential problem areas and prompt possible curricular changes. The data are also included in tenure and promotion files. CAPT is currently wrestling with questions related to appointments to interdisciplinary programs, the role of mentoring and other student support activities in the tenure and promotion process, and whether or not to consider implementing a web-based evaluation process.

In addition, documentation includes important evidence of the faculty's and the institution's commitment to the principles of academic freedom.

Standard Eleven Context: Educational Offerings

With its primary mission defined as the education of full-time undergraduates, the College Catalog describes degree requirements that begin with the Scribner Seminar and fulfillment of a set of all-College foundation requirements, expand to exploration of a variety of disciplines as well as interdisciplinary methodologies and ways of thinking/knowing, and then move students to a deeper and intensive investigation of a major area. Courses are offered at the 100, 200, and 300 levels with more focused work requiring pre-requisite knowledge at the 300 level. Disciplinary range is substantial for an institution of this size, with offerings available in the traditional liberal arts (B.A. programs) and pre-professional (B.S. programs) fields. Departments also develop courses that contribute to interdisciplinary programs in such varied areas as Asian Studies, Environmental Studies, International Affairs, Neuroscience, and Women's Studies. Students may also elect to major in one of the many interdepartmental areas which combine course work in two departments, often culminating in a final project that integrates the two areas.

In recent years, many departments have focused attention on the value of building toward a culminating capstone experience. Whether it is a specific integrative course (e.g. MB-349 for Business Majors), an independent research project, an independent study or thesis, a senior seminar, or a senior show or performance, students are encouraged to see this project as a way of integrating their work and finding ways to connect what was learned throughout the major into their thinking and decision-making about their life choices. In the areas where the number of students precludes a mandatory capstone for all majors (English, Government, and Psychology), students seeking to qualify for departmental honors upon graduation must propose and complete a senior project. Our research indicates that these capstones are frequently considered by the students to be among their most valuable academic experiences; they rave about the opportunities they have had to work directly with faculty on these projects. Since 1999, the Honors Forum annually sponsors an Academic Festival at the end of each academic year where students showcase their work, sharing what they have learned with the college community.

The College's Curriculum Committee has the authority to approve modifications to the College Catalog, including changes to existing courses, the addition of new courses, changes in major and minor requirements and descriptions, and of course, the addition of new programs. New majors must also be approved by the full Faculty as well as the Board of Trustees and are then submitted to the New York State Department of Education for review and approval. The Department of Education assigns a HEGIS code and tracks the College's offerings on the *Inventory of Registered Programs*. The Department also reviews substantive changes to majors. The Curriculum Committee's Guidelines are included in the documentation, along with the policy statement regarding the articulation of transfer credits.

Between 1999 and approximately 2003, the configuration of courses and majors underwent fairly dramatic changes as many of the undergraduate courses shifted from

three credits to four. The student load moved from an average of five courses per term to an average of four, and the majors were revamped to accommodate these shifts. Consequently, the all-College program was also revised in 2001 to maintain the 1/3, 1/3, 1/3 balance of general education/major program/electives that is the general paradigm Skidmore strives to maintain. The rationale behind this reconfiguration was to allow students the time to work in a more concentrated way on fewer subjects and for faculty to be able to teach fewer courses per year. The faculty course load remained the same (between 17 and 20 credits per year, averaging 36 over a two-year period) but configured across five courses rather than six. During this same period of time, many departments and programs began to develop and implement one-credit options for students – sophomore-level research projects, honors add-ons, language across the curriculum options, and smaller independent study projects on topical issues are a few examples. Faculty members continue to experiment with a variety of options for the fourth credit as well. Some opt for more contact time in the classroom, while others have designed curricula that take advantage of the wealth of cultural and academic co-curricular offerings (some 3,000 events each year), while others use peer tutors and collaborative projects to round out the requirements. The Scribner Seminars reflect these varied approaches as well, with the primary focus of the fourth credit on mentoring. The flexibility we have gained from reconfiguration has added variety to the curriculum, yet it has created some level of hardship for smaller departments trying to offer enough sections for student demand and also to contribute to interdisciplinary programs and the First-Year Experience at the same time. The final department completed its reconfiguration plan last year, while others are entering their fifth year. Assessment projects will, of necessity, be focused on the impact of reconfiguration on student learning as we move forward. An earlier attempt to assess reconfiguration concluded with the sense that it was still too early to gauge its full effects. No major curricular overhauls are anticipated for some years, but we will continue to augment interdisciplinary offerings and existing major requirements will continue to evolve as a result of program reviews and assessment work.

We have included as additional evidence information regarding the guidelines used for academic program reviews (see Standard 7) and those that govern the creation of new academic affiliations. The Catalog outlines the existing agreements in place, and Standard 13 includes information on the new arrangements for study abroad put in place during the 2004-05 academic year. We have also included several examples of curricular revisions put in place in recent years, including the First-Year Experience Program and an example of curricular revision (in Biology) that resulted from a program review.

Because the Middle States Focused Review will deal with issues related to diversity, we have included documents that support curricular work in that area. In addition, we have added materials describing the Tang Museum and its unique relationship to the academic offerings of the College, Honors Forum information, materials associated with a grant funded program that links Skidmore students and faculty with a local school district, and records of collaborative research. Each of these programs offers students very special opportunities to learn in different and distinct environments.

Standard Twelve Context: General Education

Skidmore's undergraduate program has a well-defined set of requirements that all students must complete. This constellation of courses has recently undergone a major revision with the evolution of the signature interdisciplinary Liberal Studies program into the First-Year Experience and the core Scribner Seminar. The Liberal Studies program was implemented in Fall of 1985 and included a team-taught first-semester course entitled Human Experience (later Human Dilemmas) and three other interdisciplinary courses. Over the years, the all-College curriculum was modified in order to respond to concerns about delivery and proportional balance. Faculty approved curricular changes in the Spring of 1995 and again in the Spring of 2001, maintaining the all-College curriculum as approximately one-third of a student's career with Liberal Studies I/1 at its core.

The most recent shift from Liberal Studies 1 to the Scribner Seminar configuration was made to address concerns regarding first-year advising, retention of our best students, and the desire to allow faculty to teach courses designed around themes and topics that are related to their scholarly interests and passions. Prior to the implementation of the Scribner Seminar, the Dean of Studies sponsored a pilot project where participating LS-1 faculty members were designated as the advisors of the students enrolled in their sections. The positive results from this test run helped support the approval of the new curriculum. An important component on the First-Year Experience curriculum is the inclusion of a formal initial self-assessment on the part of the students called the Reflection and Projection document (aka the RAP), which implementers hope will become the first document in a student portfolio. Discussions regarding an e-portfolio option continue into this year. We have included documentation of the First-Year Experience proposal and evidence of early implementation. The web site for the First-Year Experience contains many more useful references.

Also included in this set of documents are materials prepared for students who register over the summer for their first semesters at Skidmore, the sections of the College Catalog that describe the all-College requirements, an external review of the Liberal Studies I course conducted in 1997, and other documents that provide explication of the general education sequence. The general education assessment work conducted by Ray Rodrigues and his faculty colleagues (see Standard #14) has informed discussions of the all-College requirements, and the Assessment Task Force, currently being formed by the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) must address critical questions regarding what we expect our student to learn in their general education, and what we know and do not know about student learning as a result of course work taken to fulfill these requirements. Most recently, the College has applied to AAC&U to become participants in the Curriculum and Faculty Development Network in order to effectively implement Goal II of the Strategic Plan as it relates to the all-College curriculum.

Standard Thirteen Context: Related Educational Activities
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We have gathered information in support of five different related areas.

Basic Skills: Placements are completed for entering students in three areas – mathematics, foreign language, and writing. Combinations of standardized test scores and scores from testing conducted under the auspices of Skidmore departments are combined to obtain recommendations for course enrollments, which are then monitored by the registration system as pre-requisites. In addition, the College supports a very successful opportunity program called the Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) which provides access for traditionally underrepresented and academically disadvantaged students. Through its summer program, credit and non-credit course offerings, tutoring assistance, and intensive advising and counseling programs, students are prepared and supported for the challenges they face as they meet the expectations for achievement asked of all Skidmore students.

Experiential Learning: Students have a range of experiential learning options available to them. In recent years, the College has established an extensive relationship with the nearby Schuylerville School district under the umbrella of the grant-funded Expanding Horizons Program. Students participate in a wide variety of programs, including tutoring, reading, and mentoring. In addition, the Office of Career Services maintains a database of internship opportunities available to students in all class years. These are advertised to the students through that Office and via the web. Internships for credit must be sponsored by a Skidmore faculty member, and applications are approved by the Dean of Studies Office as a pre-requisite to registration. Most departments on campus offer internship opportunities, with credit options varying for three to nine. A maximum of twelve internship credits may count toward the required 120 semester hours. A third avenue has been opened in more recent years through the development of service learning options in classes across the curriculum. With assistance from the Mellon Foundation, Skidmore has implemented a tracking mechanism for these opportunities. Dr. David Karp from Sociology, Anthropology and Social Work and Dr. Ruth Andrea Levinson from Education have collaborated on much of this work and are interested in expanding the number of opportunities for students, perhaps even developing an institute or center that could forward Goal III of the Strategic Plan.

Study Abroad: Skidmore students are encouraged to investigate the complexities of other cultures and to examine how they view others through the lens of their own experiences via study abroad. The Strategic Plan has set new and challenging goals, asking that we move from the current 40% mark to 60% of our undergraduates studying abroad. Skidmore runs its own programs in Paris, Madrid, Alcala, London (three programs), and now Beijing and works through consortial arrangements to run a program in India. Over the past year, the Office of International Programs has worked intensively with departments to develop a new approach to abroad approvals, creating an approved list of programs identified by departments as worthy of our approval. Students must now select from this more limited list (unless an exception for academic reasons is successfully

argued) and is now assessed Skidmore tuition and fees for the term or year they are away. Skidmore covers related costs and continues to provide financial aid to the student, opening up more possibilities for students with higher need. A Freeman Foundation grant supported Skidmore's efforts to develop its most recent program in Beijing, and a copy of that proposal is included in the documentation. The community must grapple with difficult questions surfaced by the setting of this goal, including the impact the increased outflow of students will have on curriculum, student life, and the budget.

Non-Traditional Learning: Because the campus undergraduate program is primarily residential, Skidmore has not developed an extensive set of on-line courses. Some faculty members, especially those who teach in the University Without Walls Program, have experimented with developing course ware, but summer is the only term when any significant number of these offerings are on the books. Several years ago, the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP), the Information Resources Council (IRC), and the Committee on Academic Standing (CAS) all participated in the review of a policy statement governing the acceptance of transfer credits for courses offered on-line. The policy was never finally accepted, but the issue remains on the respective agendas of these groups.

Special Programs: The College has recently modified the reporting structure of the Office of Special Programs, bringing the Dean of that area under the wing of Academic Affairs. Special Programs directs the operation of two external degree programs, the University Without Walls Program (UWW enrolls approximately 250 predominately part-time students from around the world) and the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS enrolls approximately 60 graduate students studying both on campus and independently or on other campuses). With the arrival of a new Dean, it seemed appropriate to work toward greater integration with the campus programs and to take better advantage of the unique and exciting opportunities offered by these distinctive programs. Materials included in the documentation include descriptive brochures and an informational narrative suggesting how increased collaboration might be brought about.

Standard Fourteen Context: Assessment of Student Learning

Please also see the context document for Standard Seven.

In 1990, a subcommittee of CEPP (Committee on Educational Policies and Planning) recommended an increased emphasis on rigor and challenge, balancing a long-standing commitment to supporting students in their development and maturation. This set the stage for a decade of concerted effort to focus both faculty and student attention to clarity about our expectations for student learning. At the same time, the landscape nationally and within the Middle States organization changed dramatically, with institutions pushed and prodded toward a commitment to assessing what and how students learn as undergraduates. The Periodic Review, completed five years ago, outlined what Skidmore had done to date. Since that time, we have had the good fortune of Dr. Ray Rodrigues' presence on campus as a Director of Assessment, funded by the Christian Johnson Endeavor Foundation. With Dr. Rodrigues' assistance, we have approved an Assessment Plan, conducted multiple Pedagogy Workshops—some with outside consultants—to develop faculty expertise in assessment strategies, and begun the process of shifting from indirect to direct assessment methodologies.

Administration of the NSSE Survey in 2003 (see Standard #7) helped to focus our attention on evidence of student engagement, especially in the first year. We saw that although our senior students reported high rates of engagement, attributable to intensive work with faculty in their major departments, first year students were less engaged than seniors and their liberal arts college peers in areas such as time spent on academic tasks, satisfaction with advising relationships, and meaningful intellectual interactions with peers. As faculty developed plans for a more fully engaging first-year experience, they also focused in particular on student writing as an aspect of their work that is both powerfully engaging and central to our highest priorities for student learning. In part because of this, the faculty group working with Dr. Rodrigues decided to focus their attention for their first projects on students' writing and critical thinking skills and abilities. Samples of student writing were collected and assessed from Liberal Studies 2 classes and most recently (Spring 2005) from seniors. In addition, Dr. Phyllis Roth (former Dean of the Faculty and currently a member of the English Department) and Dr. Catherine Berheide (Professor of Sociology) led a faculty-wide discussion of what we might mean by "student engagement," resulting in a body of examples from across the disciplines and in a working definition used by the Middle States team.

Other assessment projects included in the documentation demonstrate Skidmore's various efforts to collect data, review results, and make changes. Especially impressive are the descriptions of student projects collected for the annual Academic Festival program sponsored by the Honors Forum; one pilot assessment based at the Academic Festival also attempted to gauge how well our students are meeting our goals for their oral communication. Faculty members have launched a portfolio type project with the First Year Experience Rap (Reflection and Projection), and there is hope that we can come to a decision fairly quickly this fall on the possibility of implementing an e-portfolio as a

standard for all students. Because the portfolio has many potential uses (documentation of student learning, self reflection, a way of gathering evidence of skills for job searches, and of course, assessment) the discussions will be complex and doubtless difficult.

Assessment at Skidmore will move forward, and we will complete our work within the philosophical framework set years ago –trying to learn how we can best challenge our students to be engaged learners and, at the same time, support them in that process. Through our assessment work, we have learned more about what we want them to learn, and about what they are actually learning, from their skills organizing an argument to their appreciation of the beauty of mathematics or of metaphor. The most helpful assessments have been the ones that yielded surprises, and thus affected planning. At this level, too, we are an institution of learning.