

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

**“ON THE OPINION-GATHERING PHASE
OF THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS”**

**A REPORT FROM THE DISTILLATION AND
REPORT-WRITING SUB-COMMITTEE
TO THE INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING COMMITTEE**

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INTRODUCTION

Phase I of the strategic planning process -- Community Conversations: gathering information and opinions -- is drawing to a close. During the Fall semester planning walls were active centers of "discussion" around campus, more than 50 roundtables were held, and we received more than 1000 survey responses. The process generated valuable, thoughtful and extensive contributions from voices in every part of our community including faculty, students, alumni, parents, staff, trustees, neighbors, and friends. This subcommittee of the Institutional Planning Committee (IPC) has been charged with the distillation of the information and opinions gathered during the Fall.

Subcommittee Charge

The notion of this Distillation Subcommittee was first introduced by the Strategic Planning Study Group (SPSG), which met during Summer 2000 to design the strategic planning initiative. SPSG stated that the Distillation Subcommittee "should construct a report that distills our community conversations of Fall 2000." More specifically, the Distillation Subcommittee was to "sort through the gathered materials, organizing the rich diversity of community opinion in order to highlight major themes, major sources of pride, major problems and deficiencies, major topics of interest, and major goals and dreams."

The subcommittee is mindful that its report not preempt the work of the full IPC with respect to setting institutional priorities. Nonetheless the SPSG, IPC and the Distillation Subcommittee have all noted that the work of this subcommittee will undoubtedly involve some selectivity and even some judgment about weighing various options.¹ In this respect, the subcommittee has made every effort to include a wide array of opinions in its report. Where it seemed appropriate, strong or thoughtful minority viewpoints have been noted. The subcommittee, however, recognizes that if this report is to be useful it cannot merely be a restatement of all of the opinions expressed by the community. While in most cases this meant that opinions and ideas have been included in the report if they were mentioned by a good number of participants, the subcommittee also included several thoughtful or novel suggestions even if mentioned by only a handful or even a single participant.

Participation

Participation levels in the roundtables, surveys, and planning walls were high. All constituencies of the college appear to have been represented either through the

¹ The Strategic Planning Study Group report described this subcommittee in greater detail as follows:

The *[Distillation]* subcommittee's report on Phase I conversations will necessarily be an interpretive assessment of campus opinion about our core values, our current strengths and weaknesses, and our dreams and goals for the future. In drawing together this assessment, the *[Distillation]* subcommittee will turn to Institutional Research, and possibly faculty experts in qualitative analysis, for supporting objective analysis of the material collected. Ultimately, however, the document will not be based primarily on this type of analysis; rather, the *[Distillation]* subcommittee's interpretations of the community conversation will reflect the considered judgement of the subcommittee, building on the experience and perspective of the subcommittee members and enriched by the direct input of IPC members who make time to study the gathered materials.

roundtables or the survey, including students (residential, UWW, and MALS), faculty, staff, alumni, parents, trustees, community members, retirees and friends.

<u>ROUNDTABLES</u>	
Faculty Members	146
Staff Members	144
Alumni	111
Students	61
Trustees	26
Friends	22
Retirees	13
Parents	7
TOTAL	530*

<u>SURVEY</u>	
Alumni	747
Parents	248
Students	64
Faculty Members	52
Other	51
CommunityMember/Friend	41
Staff Member	38
Trustee	3
TOTAL	1124**

*A small number of participants did attend more than one roundtable.

**Because respondents could check more than one category if it applied, the sum of the various categories exceeds the total number of surveys submitted.

The Work of the Subcommittee

The subcommittee first met in mid-December to discuss its charge and a plan for tackling the significant task of reviewing a wealth of information and distilling it into some usable format. There are three sources of data: the planning walls, the notes from the roundtables and the surveys. It was decided that all members of the subcommittee would review everything from the planning walls and the roundtables. It was also decided that all members of the sub-committee would review all surveys submitted by on-campus constituencies. Thus every member of the subcommittee reviewed all surveys submitted by students, faculty, and staff.

The approximately 1000 surveys submitted by people off campus (e.g., alumni) were divided evenly among the members of the subcommittee with each member reviewing approximately 10% or about 100 of those survey responses. The subcommittee felt that

the sheer number of these surveys was too much for everyone to review and that a sample of 100 was large enough to get a handle on the general tone and content.

Members of the subcommittee spent the remainder of December and the first few days of January reading the materials. Each member created lists of the recurring themes in each of the topic areas that ultimately became the section headings for this report. Each heading, except the final one, relates directly back to one of the questions. In one case, a single question resulted in two categories (what we do well, and what we do not do well). In another, half of the "threats" question was folded into a different section ("internal threats" was considered under "Things Skidmore Does Not Do Well").

The subcommittee then held a series of meetings to discuss the recurring themes. The subcommittee grouped them into related clusters for inclusion in the report. During the discussions, it became clear that some of the emerging themes were in direct contradiction to others. The subcommittee concluded that, although this grouping did not refer directly to any of the original questions, it would be useful to identify these tensions for further consideration by IPC and the rest of the Skidmore community. Thus, we have included a special section that describes these. We labeled these "tensions," at first, then re-named the section "Search for Equilibrium."

SOUL

The participants in the strategic planning sessions and the members of this subcommittee came to substantial agreement on the qualities we value most at Skidmore. Perhaps this recognition of our essential nature, and the sense of agreement, are also part of the "soul" of the College. The uniqueness of Skidmore may lie in its ability to contain, maintain and connect all of these seemingly disparate elements over the decades.

Academic Strengths

Our mission statement charges us with one principal responsibility; "the education of predominantly full-time undergraduates, a diverse population of talented students who are eager to engage actively in the learning process." According to our roundtables, planning walls and surveys, the majority of people believe that we provide students with a strong, innovative and wide-ranging base for their intellectual development.

Faculty-Student Interactions

When respondents defined the "soul" of Skidmore, no other single element was mentioned as often, or as emphatically, as this: an alum recalled that professors were "academically" and "personally" interested in their students; a current student said that "stimulating academic inquiry is the central aspect of my experience" here. Along with formal classroom contact and "informal chats" come collaborative research: "we have outstanding researchers and scholars who employ undergraduates in their studies," noted a faculty member. A student wrote that "I believe that the soul of this college is based on the relationship between the faculty and the student body."

Teaching Excellence

Teaching, teaching how to learn and classroom discussions seemed another hallmark of the Skidmore experience. One student confirmed that “Skidmore exposes students to differing viewpoints and constantly challenges students to question their assumptions.” We must remain “cutting-edge” in our teaching, said an alum.

The College Curriculum

1. *Liberal Arts* This was mentioned by many respondents, particularly as they noted areas of the College that they felt really must not change. One student, from 1933, said “I had to take a lot of academic subjects for which I have been most grateful...I got an education in spite of myself!” The essence of the College, wrote a member of the faculty, is our “pedagogically sound liberal arts emphasis.”

2. *Pre-professional and Liberal Arts combination* This truly “sets us apart” and, even though it “causes tensions, they are worthwhile tensions,” noted two faculty members. This pairing is stressed, and should be stressed, in Admissions, in our publicity, and on campus.

3. *Range of programs* The offerings of the academic year, our “cross-over of courses and majors, represents the soul,” said a retired faculty member. In addition, our summer and non-traditional programs were mentioned: “Special Programs (UWW, summer etc.) are an important and positive feature of the College.”

4. *Interdisciplinary* Current community members and recent alums highlighted this as something we are doing well and as “our greatest strength.”

Relationships and Community

People at Skidmore know each other. The College was described at a Board roundtable as “very inclusive and embracing.” It is worth repeating here, though it is noted in the “Academic” section above, that the faculty-student relationship was mentioned by all constituencies as the most essential relationship of the College, the relationship that helps define all the others.

Warm, nurturing, caring, supportive, friendly.

The College is “open and friendly.” People help and learn from one another: “there is an exceptionally high degree of effort to be friendly, helpful and even cheerful among people at Skidmore,” wrote one staff member. A faculty member noted that “we provide an excellent, supportive and enriched environment for learning and teaching.” A staff member said that “love for the students has always connected me to Skidmore.” Faculty, staff and alums are all important, welcoming friends and resources for students. “The ‘soul’ of Skidmore is that caring face that I experienced on the first three days of school.”

Unconventional (as individuals and within groups)

This ranges from the diverse types of students and staff we attract to relations among them (“we are very tolerant of our differences” and we don’t “judge/stereotype”). This element of Skidmore’s soul could also contain the unique and changing curriculum, and projects such as the Tang museum.

Residential and Co-Curricular Experience From the initial tours and interviews given to prospective students, to Orientation, to daily life, an important tradition of Skidmore is encouraging its students to feel welcome and invested in the campus community.

Learning to live with roommates, within a residential system staffed by students, is an important part of the Skidmore experience.

1. *Series of artistic, athletic, and other events:* Students and alums mentioned particular events, and these events varied widely, from Junior Ring to walking around the maypole to Ralph Nader's talk. "The way in which relationships are fostered and established through orientation and other activities that reach beyond the campus makes the sense of community at Skidmore special."

2. *Campus life:* Students connect through dorms, majors, sports, SGA, clubs and class year. They have "a genuine and healthy respect for the institution and for each other." And, while diversity could clearly improve (see later sections), diversity in the curriculum and "the fact that students don't all look the same here" are points stressed by Admissions and by the College as a whole.

The Character of the College

This section includes the nature of the institution and its atmosphere.

Risk-taking and Changing/Nimble

The College has undergone a move from the old to new, noted one alum, which was a very risky decision that has proven to be a good one. Perhaps this kind of decision-making is what makes Skidmore's people feel that we, too, are "nimble, innovative ... [and that] we can make things better and actually make a difference at Skidmore." When we make decisions that people might be divided about, we make the best of it. An example might include this observation: "our history of [being] an all-female institution that has moved to a co-ed institution gives strength to our female students that is unique compared to historically co-ed schools." For students, the Skidmore experience is seen as "transforming," an experience remembered long after graduation. Students are encouraged to make discoveries in an institutional setting that is constantly renewing itself.

Enterprising/Foresighted/Creative and Unconventional (as an institution)

For example, designing LSI before other colleges even began worrying about the First-Year Experience.

This is an open, and open-minded, college.

Students are offered freedom to explore and to be independent. Their creativity is encouraged. This principle is connected to the faculty/student relationship, to the range of our curriculum and to the general welcoming atmosphere. Skidmore is "devoted to a rare artistic/creative environment where the gifted are safe to thrive" noted one MALS student. Academic and social choices are extensive, and students who take advantage of these possibilities are not only "safe," but transformed; "the journey is at least as important as the destination," said one Trustee.

The Skidmore experience

The College is "preserving connections to the past" as it integrates students. Skidmore offers both a sense of community and individual growth; we take "unengaged and/or unfocused students" and help them "blossom." A faculty member noted that "at every level we foster individual expression and personal development [this is] a wonderful institution of higher learning and a joyful place to work."

Setting/Size

Space, and a choice between openness and intimacy, (depending on the need for reflection, or for human contact, on any given day) are seen as crucial.

Campus and North Woods

The look and feel of “the grounds, the physical environment” was remembered by an alum at the multicultural roundtable, and this “look” may reverberate more than we think. One person related the open spaces of the campus to intellectual freedoms: “the openness and environment (mental and physical) are great.” The physical plant creates its own bond with, and level of discovery and comfort for, our students.

Number of Students

An alum asked “please do not expand so much that you lose the close-knit feeling of the campus and its students.” One person did suggest expanding to 5,000 students, but virtually everyone else thought that 2100 was just fine.

Class size/intimacy

Students enjoy the “interactive” nature of their classes and this returns us back to teaching and learning excellence. Another student said that “the small class size and the availability of most professors provides students with an open atmosphere for learning and the ability to seek assistance/guidance/support from professors.”

Saratoga Springs

The town draws students in during the academic year and gives us a remarkable setting for summer programs such as the Jazz Institute. A former staff member noted the “interconnected” nature of college and town, and another staff member said “This college loves the place it’s in. It’s unique.”

THINGS SKIDMORE DOES WELL

The list of things that Skidmore does well is as varied as the number of responses received and ranged from “everything” to, in some surveys, seemingly nothing. The pursuit of education was at the heart of most responses addressing Skidmore’s strengths. Academic pursuits in all of their forms (including classroom teaching, student/faculty interaction, and research) were praised by many of the survey respondents. The praise for academic success came from every corner: faculty, students, staff, parents and alumni. Many participants noted that Skidmore accomplished its academic and other successes with few resources, noting that Skidmore “accomplish[es] all that we do with as little as we have.” Comments related to students’ co-curricular life were noticeably absent. Indeed, it was more likely for participants to suggest that co-curricular events were too numerous and not well focused.

Faculty-Student Contact

“What we do best is putting teacher and student together to read, write and discuss the ideas of our disciplines.” Faculty Member

In large numbers, both current and former students say that the faculty/student relationship is at the heart of the educational endeavor. Indeed, in the close-ended portion of the survey that asked respondents to identify those characteristics that are essential to Skidmore's future, "close student-faculty relationships" was cited more than any other and had the highest mean rating.

Thankfully, most respondents in the open-ended questions as well as participants at the roundtables felt that Skidmore was doing an exceptional job at providing close and meaningful student/faculty interaction. Agreement on this point was almost universal and was mentioned as a strength by all constituencies. As one student stated: professors' "commitment to students is unwavering and passionate." As one graduate indicated: Skidmore "promotes real relationships between professors and students (even the hockey guys I knew had professors they hung around with)." Faculty, parents and students agree:

- As a teacher here, the essential feature is evidently my constant interactions with students.
- The soul of Skidmore is the unusually accessible faculty and the concomitant close student-faculty relationships.
- The most meaningful aspect of a Skidmore education is the student/faculty relationship in and out of the classroom setting.
- The professor/student communication is wonderful.
- The accessibility of faculty and their amazingly open attitude is so wonderful and unique.
- The accessibility and outright desire for the professors to connect and assist the students is the single most outstanding feature of the college.
- I value the close relationships I have with my professors.
- The professor/student relationships are by far the most important feature at Skidmore.

A handful of comments, however, suggested that faculty could be even more accessible. A student felt that interaction "in class is great, but who is around after class to provide quality contact with students."

The Faculty as Teacher-Scholars

The general sense of the responses is that the Skidmore faculty has strong credentials, works hard and achieves great results. As one student stated, "the faculty at Skidmore are a tremendously gifted, talented, patient, kind, and generous group of individuals." This sentiment was most often, though certainly not exclusively, echoed by faculty:

- We have outstanding researcher-scholars who employ undergraduates in their studies. We provide our faculty with good facilities (in most cases) and demand high standards and performance back.
- What we do well is provide our students with one of the finest hardest working faculty.
- We work very hard and more often than not provide remarkable support to our students and to each other.
- Faculty are amazing. (This was from a staff member).
- The faculty is really good and want to make their students life-long learners.

- I think the quality of teaching is extraordinary at Skidmore and is one of our strengths.

Academics

Class Size

Small classes were mentioned over and over again as a strength by current students, parents and alumni. One student commented that the relationships that students can have with professors is a direct result of the small numbers of students in each class. Alumni were particularly vocal in commending Skidmore for keeping classes small. Current students also mentioned this repeatedly:

- Small class size and the availability of most professors provide students with an open atmosphere for learning and the ability to seek assistance/guidance/support from professors.
- Small classes and personalized attention.
- Class size is great.

Liberal Arts in Combination with Pre-professional Programs

One staff member noted that "the connection between liberal arts and pre-professional programs is very beneficial." A faculty member also singled out this combination: "The integration of liberal arts and pre-professional programs is a strong point." And a parent supported our "fine blend of arts, liberal arts, and professional curricula."

Interdisciplinary classes and crossing over disciplines

A student wrote that "to me the interdisciplinary and liberal arts aspects are the soul of the Skidmore program." Others felt that the College's ability to encourage new modes of thinking and new perspectives was unusual and essential, a feeling typified by this student's remark: "I feel the focus on interdisciplinary learning and the encouragement of student-teacher interaction outside the classroom builds the groundwork for a meaningful experience at Skidmore."

Fine/Performing Arts

Studio art, music, dance and theater were singled out more than any other set of majors as noteworthy and fundamental to Skidmore's identity: "fine arts is done very well." Many respondents noted that the college seemed to emphasize the arts, but agreed that this was worthwhile and provided students the ability to pursue artistic interests and other academic interests simultaneously.

- Art is done very well: it is your greatest strength.
- Music and studio art stand out.
- I think that the soul of Skidmore comes from the arts.
- Art and music departments have always been outstanding.
- The arts programs are very good.
- Strong emphasis on the arts, which I am pleased to see continues to the present day. (This was a point stressed by alums).

Intellectual Context

Safe to Experiment Within Classes and Among Disciplines

Skidmore really is "the place that you really feel like you can do anything"; students were very positive about Skidmore with respect to the intellectual atmosphere on campus. The overwhelming sense from student responses and comments indicates that students feel free to be themselves, to pursue varied interests, and to express their opinions openly. The responses further seem to indicate that fellow students and faculty are both important in creating this sense of security. The varied nature of the student body was mentioned as a Skidmore attribute that encouraged exploration and consideration of various viewpoints and ideas.

- Skidmore allows people the freedom to do what they want to do, say what they want to say.
- Innovation is the key word. Skidmore refuses to accept a common notion of who we are as an institution. We are constantly transforming ourselves to something newer and better – expanding our visions and hopes for the future. The Tang is the perfect example of a daring innovation and its architectural style is a visible symbol of Skidmore's willingness to accept cutting edge challenges.
- Skidmore is a place that you really feel like you can do anything. That is its most positive aspect and it means a lot.
- Give a good bit of freedom for independent thought to your students.

Skidmore Develops Student Potential

Several participants mentioned that Skidmore is good at taking students who have not reached their highest level when they arrive and helping them grow. The fact that Skidmore is a nurturing environment may play a role in this ability. Skidmore "awakens unknown interests and stimulates possibilities in its students," said an attendee at a Board roundtable, and a staff member said the College demonstrates an "ability to transform students who had not yet risen to their full potential into wonderful engaged articulate citizens." A faculty member said we take "unengaged and/or unfocused students" and help them "blossom."

Setting

Generally, Skidmore was praised for creating a relaxed, comfortable setting for student growth. Students in particular commented that they felt safe to explore and be innovative. In addition to the security to be "yourself," students also indicated that Skidmore provided a safe physical environment in which to learn and live. A handful of respondents found the lack of a greek system as a positive influence on campus. As one parent stated, "Skidmore has managed to create a non-sorority/fraternity community that works, which is wonderful." While there was not an overwhelming number of comments about the greek system, no one commented that the lack of a greek system was a problem. A student wrote that the number of clubs on campus and the open events build "character and at the same time may encourage involvement in important issues." Most environmental comments in both surveys and roundtables called for recycling and other programmatic changes. The lone exception was the praise for Northwoods, "an excellent natural resource," according to one student.

THINGS SKIDMORE DOES NOT DO WELL

Workload and Expectations

This is an area where faculty, staff, alumni and trustee responses clearly expressed agreement about core weaknesses in the institution's character and modus operandi that need to be addressed in order to protect and strengthen the college's most vital resources: people and academic programs.

Setting priorities

Across all constituencies, despite an apparently deeply-felt connection to the College and to colleagues, there was an impressive recognition that Skidmore suffers from a syndrome of inter-related and progressive structural problems: "We don't say 'no' very well. We want to be everything to all people. I worry that we spread our resources too thin." These concerns were pervasive, and genuinely reflect a concern for the whole institutional enterprise rather than concerns about particular special interests or issues. The prime directive, expressed in survey responses and roundtable discussions, was that the college needs to set clear priorities in order to focus our resources and strengths to do our core mission well, in ways that we can support and enjoy, to learn to say 'no' to ourselves when further commitments will only strain personal, financial and physical resources further. As a way of addressing this question, people tended to make broad observations such as "We make decisions badly" or that "There should be fewer priorities and a clearer self-concept and this should be honestly communicated to the community." Occasionally participants offered more specific suggestions, directed at a particular area: "We try to do too many things in many academic areas and programs. We should do fewer things and support them more effectively." But, generally, these concerns about the College's priorities and process were expressed without specific recommendations, in a way that conveyed a sense of support for moving in this direction, in spite of the implicit difficulties and challenges that would have to be overcome, so that we can all benefit more in the long run.

Out of Control Demands on Time.

Observations about how well we work together and how much we are able to accomplish were often followed with reflections about the cost of these accomplishments in human terms. The on-campus community repeatedly talked of an 'out of control' workload resulting in not having the time to do everything we are supposed to do, especially the most important things: "It is virtually impossible to find free time." One respondent said that "The Skidmore culture is always to do more. We confuse more with better." This stressful atmosphere, in turn, degrades morale and erodes the quality of the institution. This sense of relentless, excessive demands on our time was expressed by students as well as faculty and staff, but for different reasons. Faculty and staff expressed frustration about being spread too thinly across various responsibilities, mostly worthwhile, under the familiar categories of teaching/advising, scholarship, and community service for faculty, and a demanding, but taken-for-granted atmosphere for staff. A professor felt that "Faculty do NOT have the time they need to develop their own scholarship and provide effective teaching." One roundtable facilitator noted that "All participants agreed that a sense of stress and tension was apparent among faculty and staff." Students expressed a frustration about being spread too thinly either across too many academic requirements and interests, or the combined demands of academic and co-curricular commitments:

“Students are stretched, too. The reality is that none of us can do it all and do it well.” As with complaints about inability to set priorities, there was no attempt to lay blame or suggest specific remedies; rather the focus of the comments was to urgently identify this, as well, as a problem that needs to be addressed for everyone’s benefit. There was also a sense of recognition that both the priority problem and the out of control demands on time are problems that we all enable and contribute to: “The strongest threatening force to Skidmore’s success is not having a clearly defined sense of who and what we are....[we] feel overwhelmed most of the time.” Participants voiced concerns about deteriorating morale, lack of recognition for doing a good job under such circumstances, and the need to reward employees better with more competitive and appropriate compensation. The latter issues, while reflecting general concerns, were most strongly and notably prevalent in feedback from support staff: “I feel that the support staff sometimes get short shrift. Skidmore is a good place to work, but there is room for improvement.”

Unavailability of Courses

There was one very specific problem about expectations relating to the curriculum. Our various majors and requirements entail demands of their own: “There is significant gridlock in the curriculum...[which leads to] an inability to deliver the educational experience we promise to deliver to students.” There were many student complaints about the lack of availability of courses students needed to satisfy requirements for their major, minor or for the core curriculum. Some disciplines are clearly more pressed than others, but faculty and students felt, generally, that “We lack the number of faculty necessary to deliver regularly the courses in our catalog; this is very frustrating to both faculty and students.” There was a significant but smaller number of complaints about the constraints on the ability to pursue academic interests as a result of the large number of course requirements, and the reduction in numbers of courses offered and taken as a result of reconfiguration.

Community

Who We Are, and Who We Want to Be

There were many concerns expressed about ‘community’ that conveyed a sense of fragmentation and disconnection among many otherwise vibrant, vital, supportive and successful islands of communal strength: “We stress uniqueness but we don’t do enough to promote community.” One very common and poignant expression of this sense of isolation was a simultaneous expression of pride and accomplishment and urgency of purpose of one or another of many social or academic groups combined with a sense of bitterness from lack of support and recognition by the rest of the community. One person noted that “The faculty does not know what their colleagues are doing.” A pride in personal and community accomplishment and richness of community seems to be diluted by a corresponding sense of isolation and perceived irrelevance. The sense of direction needed was one of a need for more connection among diverse community elements, as opposed to fewer elements with more heterogeneity. Perhaps, suggested more than one respondent, “We need to establish more of a sense of community and ritual.” A concern that was frequently expressed regarding community was that there are too many events on campus that are attended very poorly and rarely recognized or acknowledged beyond the small number of people participating directly: “Students expect teachers to be active members of the community and involved in a number of ways, but students suffer from

this at times because the resources and our efforts as a College on the whole are spread thin." And student life, too, feels the pull: "Students feel fragmented and divided between academic and social life." Probably the most identifiable single community that voiced these concerns with respect to a sense of 'identity crisis' was the athletic community. There were a considerable number of comments about the pros and cons of expanding the role and prominence of athletics on campus. Clearly, we need to reflect upon the ways we spend, or hope to spend, our energies as members of the Skidmore community.

Lack of Diversity

There was broad and frequent concern expressed about the lack of diversity on campus. There was some discussion regarding how broadly or narrowly diversity should be defined and which elements of diversity are most important to focus on in the context of a college community, but the most frequent concerns were directed at the lack of ethnic, racial and economic diversity at Skidmore. A typical comment follows: "Skidmore's conception of diversity should extend beyond racial and ethnic lines; it should also focus on the entire community and not just students." Again, there were few suggested solutions, but there were clear expressions of desire for effectively addressing this issue. There was a broad recognition that Skidmore's population is not representative of the world at large, and that a more representative population would enrich the college community socially and academically, and enhance the relevance of the Skidmore experience to our lives beyond Skidmore. The practical constraint most often mentioned that works against greater diversity among students was availability of financial aid. There was recognition of progress in recent years in the area of financial aid and promoting diversity among the student body, in contrast to comments from both students and faculty about a relative lack of progress in building a diverse faculty and staff, which is also a function of the larger community that is beyond Skidmore's control. There was also concern expressed, partly related to concerns about community, that progress we've made to date in recruiting a diverse student body is undermined to a degree by a lack of integration in the social life of students with respect to diversity: "Diverse groups don't have much of a conversation together now." For the most part, there was broad agreement that "In terms of diversity, we still have a long way to go."

Costs

Financial Constraints

It was recognized, almost universally in responses enumerating criticisms and problems, that while money isn't everything, greater financial resources would go a long way toward resolving many of our problems or at least facilitating their potential solution. "The relative lack of financial resources is clearly a significant problem and helps explain some of the above dilemmas." People were concerned, too about compensation: "Salary is a big issue for support staff. It is unbelievably low." One roundtable participant said "We only get a three percent cost of living increase annually and there is no merit pay."

Clearly, issues such as limited resources with respect to faculty lines, curricular offerings, constraints on financial aid and recruitment with respect to diversity would all be less formidable with more financial resources. One person felt that "Every department on campus cries out for resources." There was recognition across all constituencies that the most limiting financial resource, and the one most desirable to enhance, is endowment.

Cost of Attending Skidmore

Concerns were expressed, particularly by alumni and trustees, that the high cost of tuition, room and board meant that many potential Skidmore students no longer see us as an option. It remains particularly difficult for financial aid to reach students from middle-income families, where the parental contributions and loans seem most daunting: "Costs for a top-rate education are skyrocketing beyond many families' reach." There was a sense, from respondents, that our costs severely limit our socio-economic diversity: "Skidmore is not a place for the non-wealthy." Other community members, noting what our competition can do, urged the College to set aside more financial aid money.

The Outside World

Preparing for the 'Real World'

A frequent complaint, expressed especially by alumni, trustees and students, was that Skidmore could do a better job preparing students for the 'real world'. One respondent said "Career placement/visibility is a huge inadequacy...Skidmore should strive to get top Fortune 500 companies on campus for recruiting." There was no sense of doing this at the expense of our liberal arts mission, and there was little sense of irony with respect to our distinctive pre-professional programs, but rather a general recognition that these qualities could be leveraged more effectively for students in the practical sense of translating them more effectively into moving from Skidmore into the job market and graduate degree programs after graduation. These comments were frequently connected to suggestions for remedial action, such as encouraging more community service, internships and study abroad by students at Skidmore, encouraging and educating students more effectively about opportunities and preparation for graduate school, and providing students with more connections to recruiters for potential employment after graduation.

Environmental Concerns

A significant number of responses addressed concerns about environmental issues: "One extremely important thing that Skidmore should be doing is protecting the natural and educational resource that is North Woods." The most frequent, mostly from students, voiced frustration with the campus-wide efforts to recycle: "The school is about as environmentally friendly as a barrel of toxic waste." A smaller number commented on their concern about preserving the North Woods, and some more general issues addressed included use of pesticides, attention to more energy-efficient buildings, and a need for greater awareness of environmental issues in both the academic program and everyday campus life.

Failure to 'Tell the Skidmore Story' Successfully

There was a strong sense, particularly from alumni, parents and trustees, that the external perception of Skidmore is behind the curve with respect to the quality and strength and accomplishments of the institution: "We have not told the Skidmore story well." There was some recognition that the college has never stopped evolving since its inception, and that there is almost a generational lag-time in changes in public perception of such

institutions, but there was also a strong sense of frustration from lack of recognition of Skidmore's strengths and quality outside the institution in real time. One person stated that "Skidmore is far better than its reputation." Students, too, voiced frustration: "We need to get the word out that students here work VERY hard. We don't get enough credit." And, within the College family, concerns were noted about the need to do a better job keeping alumni connected to the college. Another related issue that is probably most logically related to issues of reconciling dissonance between our internal and external image, in the vein of enhancing institutional 'self-esteem,' is the self-imposed tension created by the choice of 'peer institutions' that we constantly compare ourselves to, as well as the value we place on external comparative instruments such as the *U.S. News & World Report* college rankings. There was a general consensus that we should choose our peer institutions for comparison more realistically with respect to our core values, priorities, aspirations and budgets so we can focus on goals that are appropriate, achievable and most critical rather than try to compete with more elite institutions on every level.

HOW TO PREPARE OUR STUDENTS TO LEAD RICH AND MEANINGFUL LIVES

The second question on the planning survey, "What should we be doing to prepare our students to lead rich, meaningful lives?" elicited a diverse array of responses across all categories of respondents. Unlike some of the other questions, there were fewer identifiable faculty or student or alumni patterns of response with similar suggestions coming from all participants in the planning process. The responses fell into three broad categories: liberal education, preparation for citizenship, and work experience, though most respondents focussed on the first two categories.

Liberal Arts Education

Critical Reading, Writing and Thinking

One student commented: "We need to stress traditional liberal arts values, while another said "we need to stress academics as much as we stress the nice dorms here." One faculty member wrote "We need to develop writing skills, critical thinking skills, critical reading skills...[in our students]" while another added that Skidmore should provide the "essential skills a student must acquire...in order to develop critical abilities crucial in a situation of crisis."

Intellectual Risk-Taking

Other participants wanted Skidmore to challenge students to "go outside of what they are comfortable with and what they are used to," and to encourage them to take "more responsibility for their own learning." We should open students' minds to "disturbing but important ideas" teaching them to appreciate the value of interdisciplinary work, and exposing them to various ways of thinking and knowing. Students should experience creative problem-solving, and achieve information literacy.

Students Taking Responsibility for Their Own Learning

Many respondents, students, faculty, employees, asked that we “challenge, not coddle” our students, and that students should be encouraged to be “passionate about what they are studying.”

Lifelong Learning

Skidmore students should be encouraged to develop a love of learning which will last them all their lives. A student wrote of the college years as a time to “soak oneself in a love for learning.” “READ, READ, READ,” chanted one faculty member, echoing Maya Angelou’s admonition when she last spoke on campus.

Foster Informed and Responsible Citizens

Community Service

The second broad area of responses, like the first, represents opinions from all kinds of survey respondents. “Help [students to] become good citizens as well as good thinkers,” said a student. “Educate them [students] to be active, involved, and aware members of the community.” But there was less agreement about what that community meant. For some students, Skidmore needs to “develop a broader sense of community” on campus. For others, the community is Saratoga Springs, and students should experience “mandatory community service” there. For a number of respondents community is a national concept: “Teach the meaning of living in a democratic society and how citizens can best participate in it.” Others clearly have a more international or global community in mind: students should learn to apply their knowledge, “especially to the common good of human kind.”

Civic Consciousness and Responsibility

Many participants would agree with the student who stated “Skidmore needs to more actively encourage the development of social responsibility,” and that we should be “paying attention as a college to issues outside of the college—environmental, political, international.” Specific strategies for achieving some kind of civic consciousness—campus, local, national, or international, varied. Some students suggested that all should take a course in civics, while others thought the college could do a better job of modeling and mentoring community concern—whether over the environment, corporate ethics, or the existence of sweatshops.

Global Citizenship

Faculty wanted to teach students “decision-making skills for active citizenship,” “educate students to be citizens of a global village” through the study of foreign language and culture, and “improve the linkages between what is going on in the classroom and the real world.” Alumni were especially interested in this “civic preparation” idea, suggesting that students encounter community activities which would “foster an understanding and partnership with people who are less fortunate and privileged,” and that “volunteerism” should be encouraged.

Translating Liberal Arts into Lifelong Careers

Alumni were among the strongest exponents of better preparation for the post-Skidmore world, making a series of specific suggestions that included more exposure to technology “the ability to find and evaluate information and use technology to accomplish tasks (communicate, analyze data, etc.),” increased internship opportunities, and a more active and effective career planning service. “Expose students to the job market,” install a “mandatory...freshman course...on basic computer skills,” offer “a job fair,” and do more to teach “organization, communication, and teamwork,” were all specific alumni suggestions. These strong feelings are apparently based on their own experiences at the time these alumni graduated from Skidmore. Some students agreed that all students should be exposed to “computer and technology fields” for success in the post-Skidmore world. But few other respondents, and even fewer faculty, provided these kinds of specific recommendations, rather emphasizing liberal arts education and civic preparation as the best way to ready students for life after Skidmore.

A Final Note

A number of survey respondents felt that Skidmore is already doing a good job of preparing students to lead rich and meaningful lives. One alumni characterized the Liberal Studies program as “an invaluable resource of knowledge and thought,” and many others referred to the college’s existing commitment to liberal education as strong preparation for life. “Continue to enrich mind, body, and spirit,” one Skidmore graduate commented.

EXTERNAL THREATS

Economy/Lack of Resources/Cost of Tuition

Although respondents and roundtable participants identified a host of internal threats to Skidmore’s successful future, external threats were more limited in number -- although not in seriousness. The majority agreed that financial issues loomed the largest for the institution, or as one faculty member succinctly summed it up: “Money, money, money and the possible lack thereof.” Respondents related financial issues to diversity, selectivity, quality of faculty, and the ability to keep up with technological changes.

The Economy and the Endowment

Many individuals identified Skidmore’s small endowment as a severe limitation, especially when compared with that of our competitors, and the fact that we are so dependent upon the state of the national economy did not go unmentioned.

Tuition Costs

Several respondents noted the relationship between the cost of our tuition, our dependence on tuition revenues, the difficulties in providing sufficient aid to students who are highly desirable but who cannot attend Skidmore because of the costs, and the

quality of the institution. "Clearly we need more endowment so that we can support a more diverse student body, drawn from an ever more diverse national and international population." Changes in governmental policies related to aid and the potential for loss of scholarship dollars were also identified as possible areas of concern. Alumni, in particular, were quick to identify tuition costs that have risen faster than the cost of living indexes, the need for adequate aid packages, and dependence on the economic health of the country as critical threats:

"I believe the ongoing raising of tuition and charges will adversely affect Skidmore's (and other private institutions) ability to attract qualified students who cannot afford the tuition and will be forced to go to public colleges. The obvious answers to this problem are to stabilize tuition and/or provide more student aid."

"The rising costs of tuition may threaten the middle-income student; therefore limit qualified students who would enrich the student body. Both racial and economic diversity should be a focus for Skidmore."

"The College must be sensitive to the increasing difficulty for families to afford a Skidmore education and we should focus on financial aid issues."

"We could be vulnerable to the ill effects of an economic downturn and at some point vulnerable to the charge that what we do is simply not worth the price (although it's priceless.)" (Here, a faculty member clearly shares the alumni view).

National Demographics

This presents a combination of challenge and opportunity. As more students of color graduate from secondary schools and seek to enter college programs, Skidmore is presented with the chance to diversify the student body. Yet in order to take advantage of this opportunity, Skidmore will need more aid packages that can respond to the financial needs of this population as well as academic support for those who are not as well prepared for college work. Resources are again at issue. A faculty member wrote that "Projected demographics indicate that we may have opportunities to successfully increase diversity on campus. To do so, we need to hold down tuition and substantially increase the financial aid endowment." Skidmore's location is also presented as a challenge when considering diversifying the faculty and student bodies. Although a plus in many ways, the demographics of the area and Saratoga's isolation from major urban settings create problems to overcome for students and faculty of color.

Competition and Technology

In addition to seeing Skidmore as competing with other institutions for students and resources, participants also identified the progress that other institutions have made in the area of technology as a threat. "If other colleges and universities move ahead of Skidmore in areas such as technology, it could be detrimental to Skidmore's success."

State-of-the-Art-Technology

Institutions that have seen the challenges and responded by embracing technology were seen as having an edge. One participant indicated that the most critical factor will be how Skidmore adapts to the changes brought about by technology's penetration into so many aspects of our lives. Those institutions with more resources to spend (i.e. larger endowments) have an obvious advantage, as Skidmore struggles to distribute fewer available dollars to meet similar needs/demands. In addition, the phenomenon of information overload created by advances in technology pose a threat to faculty members who are constantly attempting to keep abreast with what is new in their fields and to present information to their students in an effective manner. An employee wrote:

"I would guess that Skidmore might be somewhat threatened by the existence of so many other good liberal arts colleges with much bigger endowments. As these schools use their superior funds to diversify their faculty, staff, and student bodies, offer more scholarship aid, strengthen their facilities and programs, there is a chance that Skidmore may be left behind UNLESS we can further define and solidify and effectively market our niche."

Technological Competition

Distance learning and on-line educational programs were also perceived by some as presenting additional challenges. Although many indicated that the type of experience we offer students, i.e. a residential college with chances to work closely with faculty members, counters the threat of distance programs, participants remarked that the College needs to be aware of the opportunities presented by technology. Some respondents viewed technology as providing many opportunities for growth and change, while one voice raised the specter of a world without residential institutions and asked if we were ready for that possibility. The decisions that face Skidmore include how to best use technology (e.g. to increase contact with alumni, to attract students, to enhance classroom learning) and where to position ourselves as newer and better technologies become available. Skidmore needs to decide if it can afford to be at the forefront and when; this was a view shared across constituencies:

"Skidmore should become proactive rather than reactive when discussing the future of technology-based learning."

"Globalization and technology provide great opportunities for the future."

"Skidmore must capitalize on technology to build excellence in teaching and to build community."

"The emergence of on-line education and the linking of universities and colleges with the 'for-profit' world can be either an opportunity or a threat to Skidmore."

"We need to embrace new ideas and technology – not shy away from it. The residential college will cease to exist in the near future. Get ready for it now. Small colleges are doing nothing while large schools are way ahead in this area."

Our Image

Skidmore's reputation also ranked high on the list of concerns. How Skidmore is viewed externally shaped many comments. Some felt that Skidmore's reputation as a "party school" and "a rich kids' school" had not yet been eliminated, and that we have not become widely enough known for our strengths and unique qualities. Respondents urged the College to work harder at getting the word out about Skidmore's virtues, to work harder at changing these misconceptions.

Colleges with which We Compare Ourselves (CWWCO)

Comparisons with other institutions created tension, with some respondents expressing concern that we compared ourselves to those other institutions in an unfair light much too often, characterizing our constant comparisons as bordering on obsessive. Others felt that in some cases we would never measure up to those in our peer groups and that we should instead simply concentrate on what we do best. This begs the question of how our peer groups are structured and how we use these lists.

Possible Threats to Skidmore's Identity

An Emphasis on Pre-Professional

Participants also expressed concern about the apparent national pressure on students to link college education to very practical outcomes. "A lot of new students are looking for schools that will prepare them and make them marketable," wrote an alum. The sense of "creeping commercialism" is also connected to the ways in which we view our students – are they consumers or students? As the drive to develop academic programs that are geared exclusively toward training students for jobs rather than teaching students to think and learn is emphasized, the very core of Skidmore's mission comes into question. Some respondents even identified the increasing population of Business majors at the College as inconsistent with our identity as a liberal arts college.

Isolation in an Era of Globalization

Voices encouraging linkages to the community, preparing students for the reality of a technological future, and maintaining our balance of liberal arts and pre-professional programs were equally as prevalent. One roundtable participant indicated that "faculty should be searching for opportunities to team-teach with colleagues from other colleges and universities", and other respondents noted the advantages and opportunities presented by the College's relationship to the larger community of Saratoga Springs. The increasing globalization of the larger world led many to comment on the need for Skidmore to prepare students for living in such a world and the need for interdisciplinary learning that teaches students to embrace different ways of knowing and understanding that world. "Globalization requires interdisciplinary learning....and an ability to embrace change."

THE FUTURE STATE OF SKIDMORE COLLEGE

This is an important time for Skidmore. Tremendous development, growth, and change have taken place in the last decade. But this growth, and our high aspirations, combine to place enormous pressure on our resources: the people and the finances of this College. This is the moment we must begin to plan for the next decade. As we do, it is worth remembering that *all* of the respondents to our surveys, our planning walls, and our roundtables agree that future plans must not alter those qualities we have identified as our "soul." Over and over again, people said "whatever you do, be sure to keep the close faculty and student relations" and mentioned, with equal passion, other key characteristics of Skidmore. Whatever decisions are made in the years to come, the core values of this institution must remain recognizable to students, faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, parents and friends.

What follows here are a few specific suggestions offered by participants for the future; the first suggestion, the sub-committee felt, needs to lay the foundation for the others.

1. If we look back at the "soul" and "things Skidmore does well" sections of this report, the sectional headings reveal our preoccupations and our talents: faculty-student contact, faculty as teacher-scholars, academic strengths, relationships, intellectual context, the character of the College and our setting. "Protect and preserve" these values.
2. "Stay small and think big."
3. Create and maintain a more diverse faculty, staff and student body (but a more inclusive, "diverse" diversity, to include not only racial and ethnic considerations but also sexual orientation).
4. Set priorities and be "efficient": Skidmore should "decide what it wants to do and do it well."
5. Build (one, big) community: "balance and communication," combining "nobility of purpose and vision with kindness to the individual" and look at the time crunch; we need to "preserve, nurture, and increase close student/faculty" and "student/student" relationships. Consider reducing the number of events. Define the difference between co-curricular and social life for students.
6. Think of community in a second, external sense: building better relations with Saratoga, and linking with other colleges, universities and communities in the northeast and internationally. Become a leader in "teaching about social responsibility."
7. Decide on the "outer-directed vs. inner-directed" tension -- whether we are looking more in one direction than the other and whether we want to keep our current CWWCO list and/or look to a second, more modest list
8. Establish environmental programs: North Woods, recycling, no pesticides, save energy, retrofit buildings.

9. Offer financial aid/consider affordability, which may be linked to more "serious" students and fostering a more intellectual atmosphere. And challenge students, as well as nurture them, when they get here.
10. Remain selective, retain our traditions and "be thoroughly unique."
11. Incorporate technology into classes and alum outreach. Look "on-line education" straight in the eye.
12. Eliminate or better justify/integrate outsourcing
13. Define athletics at Skidmore. Athletics council and many student athletes have asked for increased funding; this is a small, but vocal, group of students and parents who say that involvement in athletics -- the team, the competitions -- connects them to the school. Athletics, for this group, epitomizes the lessons we can all learn in life. The College has, in the past, made clear commitments, both in terms of resources and in terms of student recruitment. There is an opposing set of opinions that feels that athletics may conflict with classroom obligations, or that money spent there might better be spent on other priorities. There is public discussion of this issue now (in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, for example). We may need to have further conversations and investigate our own data to see if some difficulties that other colleges are experiencing might be our difficulties as well. As we investigate, we may want to include these concerned athletes and parents in our discussions.

SEARCH FOR EQUILIBRIUM

Most participants' responses in roundtables and surveys coalesced around several major concepts that represent the "soul" of Skidmore College. The purpose of this section is not to question those core values. It is important to emphasize that we have come, as a community, to a high level of agreement about who we are. There is variation, however, on questions about what Skidmore offers and should offer to students; what Skidmore does well and should continue to do as opposed to what Skidmore does not do well and should not continue; and what they expect Skidmore to be ten years from now. On these questions, participants often differed in emphases, expressed ambivalence, and, on some occasions, gave conflicting assessments. Nonetheless, responses clustered around certain dimensions that overlapped in complex ways. They led, on the one hand, to expressions of hope and pride and, on the other hand, to expressions of frustration and anxiety. On every issue, Skidmore must engage in a continuous pursuit for balance among competing wants and needs, guided by its mission as interpreted and applied in changing times. The survey suggests a need to examine the goals, or ends, that Skidmore should pursue and the means we adopt to achieve those goals and to articulate those decisions clearly and consistently to the campus community and beyond. The pairings described below point to some of the basic dilemmas that we face and our need to continually balance competing goals. This need can also be viewed as part of the academic "high-wire act" mentioned by President Studley at her inauguration.

Faculty

Teaching v. Scholarship

Faculty members believe that they play the central role in the education of Skidmore students and accept that responsibility readily, and students, staff, and alumni recognize this role when they speak about the soul of Skidmore and what Skidmore does well. Most faculty try to fulfill the teacher-scholar model set for them, because they understand the relationship between high quality teaching over an entire career and scholarship. They realize that they must represent the very best teacher as well as the very best practitioner of their disciplines and arts if they are to serve their students well. In contrast, students and alumni often express opinions that do not see the connection between teaching and scholarship and set them as mutually exclusive activities.

Many faculty feel pressured by the competing demands made upon them. As teachers, they deliver curricula that change frequently; stretch to teach interdisciplinary courses; incorporate new technologies into the classroom; and try a new interactive, student-centered pedagogy. At the very same time, they believe that they must meet ever rising expectations for professional accomplishments evidenced in publications, performances, and exhibitions, if they are to be retained, gain tenure, and receive promotions. Moreover, the explicit teacher-scholar model often turns into a teacher-scholar-citizen model at small liberal arts colleges, and the latter requires faculty members to be an active campus citizen and presence. A junior faculty member expressed difficulties trying to discover a workable balance: "Are we emphasizing scholarship like a research university" [or] "are we emphasizing teaching like a smaller liberal arts institution?" "Faculty get mixed signals about how to spend their time," according to another survey participant. However difficult the balance might be, some voices wished to emphasize that scholarship is enormously valuable to the teaching process, and that bringing research to the classroom is a critical skill.

In the face of multiple demands, a few faculty respondents simply advise that colleagues devote their time to teaching or scholarship, and others recommend that faculty stick to traditional disciplinary instruction rather than venture into interdisciplinary courses. Even fewer suggest that colleagues focus on teaching and scholarship and put aside other duties. A member of academic staff, for example, asserted that "Committee/teacher should not be held as high as scholar/teacher." Even so, the question of appropriate balance eludes easy definition. Many faculty members try to do the best they can to fulfill all expectations. The result of such efforts, however, is captured by a faculty member who quipped "I feel like a Windows program, multi-tasking all the time. I wonder if the quality of what we offer isn't being sacrificed." A faculty respondent to the online survey suggested other harmful effects from trying to do everything: "Lack of money, fewer full time faculty doing more administrative work, while demands for publications and curricular changes increase simultaneously. Hard to avoid frustration, enmity, burn out."

Breadth v. Depth

At the very same time when many faculty participants in this process thought that the College should refrain from making further demands that spread their time and talents too thin, some of their colleagues pressed for new programs and new courses to meet special

interests and student demands. Another called for a re-invigorated commitment to "prepare students to be responsible and respectful citizens," a call supported by more than one student who favored students accepting greater social responsibilities for the welfare of the community and society. Faculty disagree on exactly where to fix the balance when they are pulled in different directions. Thus, as one faculty member recommends that we "check the proliferation of new programs, majors and minors," another acknowledges that "staff and faculty [themselves]...add duties to our normal working days because we share a positive feeling towards Skidmore College."

Liberal Education v. Career Preparation/Events

Meanwhile, students, alumni, and parents, concerned about the practical, economic value of education, often ask that faculty become even more involved with student clubs and organizations, attend athletic contests, assume greater academic and career counseling duties, and incorporate a more utilitarian, career-related pedagogy than they do at present. Here as in so many other areas, respondents frequently treat realms of ideas and activities that are related as if they are separate spheres, such as teaching v. scholarship, academic v. social, liberal arts education v. practical education. The question remains: how to weigh these realms to achieve an appropriate balance.

Students

Nurturing v. Challenging

The overwhelming majority of participants identified the close, personal relationships of faculty and students as well as of other campus groups with students as a core value at Skidmore. Without denying the importance of this supportive environment, respondents expressed concern that the college erred too much on the side of nurture and support and not enough on the side of challenge and rigor. An Alumni Board Roundtable speaker stated, for example, that "Skidmore is too caring, not challenging enough." Reflecting back on the Skidmore experience, an alum agreed: "I did not feel the academic bar was set high enough." Whereas one student believes that Skidmore should make academics rather than "aesthetics and quality of life" the center of the institution, another flatly declares, "I did not want a competitively intense experience." A similar dichotomy appears in support for the Honors Forum as "a true forum to discuss academic matters" that allows students "with the support of others to study harder and pursue advanced academic studies" and a counterpoint that opposes the Forum on the grounds that "all students should be expected to perform at the same level." One faculty member observes that "sometimes there is too much nurturing here--coddling, handholding." A colleague seems fed up: "The fact that I need to send out failure notes...annoys me to no end. It assumes [that students]...don't even know enough to know they are failing." A Board of Trustee Roundtable participant identified the difficulty succinctly: "Skidmore is conflicted as to whether it can be both challenging and caring."

Accommodating Students v. Too Accommodating to Students; Treating Students as Customers v. Treating Students as Students

Other respondents associate the nurture v. challenge balance in terms of the tension brought about by the college's desire to accommodate student needs and the resulting

difficulty in making the distinction between what is a legitimate need and what is not. On one matter, there seems to be general agreement: first-year students should have greater access to courses they want and need to take. On other matters, however, Skidmore sometimes treats students as customers, just as students and parents sometimes want to be treated that way. The competition with other quality liberal arts colleges and universities for students and the college's continued dependence on comprehensive fees to fund operations create the context for this issue. One faculty member commented that "Skidmore may be unwittingly attracting students who require too much hand-holding. But that may have to do with the way we present the College to the outside world, as one that gives close, personal attention."

Student Choice/Freedom v. Dumbing Down the Curriculum)

This ambivalence extends into conversations about co-curricular life. These conversations relate not only to matters of nurture, challenge, and appropriate accommodation to student interests, but also to earlier issues of faculty time and resources. Thus, a roundtable participant wondered, "Who is around after class to provide quality contact with the students? Where do students learn to be citizens?" As if in response, a faculty member in the online survey wrote, "we provide many opportunities and rich possibilities for students, but we also provide too many things that compete for attention and distract from serious contemplation. I am not convinced that the co-curricular aspect of our program is effective in terms of overall goals for student learning." A roundtable speaker added, "We need the community to talk about academics and student life together. Students feel fragmented and divided between academics and social life. We need to merge it better....The students feel their experiences are polar opposites: academics vs. social obligations."

Stresses on Faculty [and on Staff, Students]

Academic Diversity/Offering Rich Curriculum v. Spreading Faculty Too Thin/Restraints

The multiple demands, the raising of standards and expectations, the balance between ambition and resource constraints, and the frenetic pace of campus life makes life stressful for faculty, students, administrative professional staff, support staff, and many employees. As for faculty, one member explained, "There is a high personal cost to sustaining a high quality academic environment and strong faculty-student relationships." A participant in a roundtable commented, "We often spin our wheels, which may result in an inability to deliver the educational experience we promise to deliver to students." Another participant said, "We try to do too many things in many academic areas and programs. We should do fewer things and support them more effectively." Moreover, the attempt to do so much "may contribute to the sense of underlying stress and tension." In their feelings of being pressured and asked to do too much, faculty mirror the feelings of students and other groups on campus. One employee/staff member reminds others that employees want and need "a well-rounded life" as well and to have their needs accommodated. Achieving a balanced life is made difficult, as another employee points out, because "We are understaffed."

Change v. Preservation

Ability to Change and be Nimble v. Bureaucracy and Inflexibility

Skidmore relies on the creativity and flexibility of the faculty, administration, professional staff, support staff, and all employees to work within the constraints imposed by limited resources. Indeed, the college makes a positive out of a potential negative by creating a culture wherein "risk-taking is part of the Skidmore way" and change provides an opportunity for improvement. An alum forecasts that "To the degree...[that] Skidmore continues the dance of change it will remain a vibrant community of learners." All of the rhetoric and the substantial history that supports it lead to anxiety as well. Time and time again, respondents in surveys pleaded that Skidmore preserve certain core values and not allow them to erode. Among these were a strong liberal arts foundation that includes the arts, faculty-student relationships, and small class sizes.

My Project or Building v. No More Projects or Buildings

In the context of change and preservation, flexibility and principles, and being nimble v. being bureaucratic, participants expressed divergent opinions about building projects and other major initiatives at the college. There were frequent complaints about excessive construction projects, manifested in comments such as "The central priorities of years ago have evaporated to building initiatives" and "We are spending too much money on bricks and mortar." Against this general critique of monies poured into new buildings are requests for particular facilities that the college needs. Faculty and students requested new athletic facilities, residence halls, a gathering space for at least 400 people, better space for institutional advancement operations, a gateway building, and a recital hall. Opponents of additional construction projects usually gave as their reason the diversion of funds that should go to investment in human resources. But a substantial number of faculty, employees/staff, and students spoke of the need to preserve the woodland character of the campus. An example of the difference in attitude is suggested by the following request from one employee/staff: "Skidmore needs to do a better job with planning athletic fields; we have limited resources but we are land rich." Others saw Skidmore treating land, such as Northwoods, as a commodity to be used instead of a resource to be sustained.

Decision-Making

Democracy v. Efficiency

Many participants in roundtables and survey believe Skidmore is democratic and inclusive, though some feel that their role is more nominal than substantive; others simply feel excluded. A student claimed that "Students [are] treated as equals, heard, [and] listened to," and a faculty member agreed that "The democratic feel to Skidmore, the tripartite committees with real influence, [is] not just lip service." Many who are part of the decision-making process, as well as those who are not, raised questions, however, about how "big ticket" decisions are actually made. An employee/staff member implies that broader participation and consultation will lead to better understanding of decisions: "These strategic planning conversations are great. We need broader representation, though, including housekeepers, administrative secretaries, etc." Another respondent

suggests, "I think the administration should involve broader constituencies when making decisions about how dollars are spent." Others, like this employee/staff member, suspect that such participation diffuses responsibility and leads to too much talk and not enough action: "Skidmore rules by consensus which means a lot of time is spent spinning wheels while we try to reach consensus." A faculty member adds, "I remember the Pew process, which tried to be all things to all people. You cannot have eleven priorities." A colleague adds, "Skidmore is good at hearing all of our voices, but not good at shaping a vision." With difficult and complex issues of the sort addressed in this strategic planning initiative, Skidmore may not always be able to make decisions by consensus. Those in positions of leadership must be willing and able to lead within an institutional culture that prides itself on inclusion--no easy task.

It is not clear that respondents think of democratic participation as an end in itself or a means to some other end. It is also not clear that constituents make this fundamental distinction: all groups play an important role in the college but they have different kinds and levels of responsibility, including legal responsibility, for institutional decision-making. An employee/staff member comments: "We get bogged down in too many committees and too many layers and get distracted by long speeches that tend to harden differing opinions rather than building consensus. The community atmosphere as a result can be fractious and many people throw up their hands and conclude that it is pointless to bother getting involved." The gap between democratic, inclusive rhetoric and the distribution of authority creates misunderstanding and miscommunication that adversely affect the feeling that we live and work in a true campus community.

Community

Small, Interconnected Communities v. One Large Community)

Most participants agreed that a sense of community was a core value at Skidmore, and many used the metaphor of family to describe that community. Many alumni recall fondly their groups of friends and their relationships to academic departments, co-curricular organizations, and athletic teams, as concrete examples of smaller communities that linked them to the larger campus community. A significant number of respondents expressed a different view, and depicted a college ideal that fell far short in reality. "It is too splintered...[and] rarely comes together as a total community," one faculty member observed, and a staff member agreed: "we do not cross boundaries very well." Employees, faculty, and especially students are concerned about "outsourcing and temporary workers" and what they see as a developing corporate ethos based on the "bottom-line" that undermine the sense of community. Some staff also wistfully recalled a time when relationships among students, faculty, and staff seemed more personal and intimate, and when there was a lot more trust in one another's good intentions and capabilities.

Students identified a number of specific areas that made them question whether a true campus community existed. Some complained about the shortage of courses and classes, and wondered what kind of college makes it difficult for them to enroll in courses that

they need. More than a few stressed the importance of environmental issues, such as recycling and developing an awareness of conservation and preservation, and found more obstruction than encouragement from the college. Many students, faculty, staff, and alumni spoke about diversity, its meaning and its potential effects, and the way diversity makes more challenging the task of building a campus community for the 21st century. Finally, students expressed concerns about the gap between academic and social life that divide their world into seemingly disparate parts.

The difference between the core value of community and the reality needs closer examination. That examination should take into account not only what is idealized and what is real but what is perceived and what is real. Responses in the surveys indicate that those outside of a particular group such as the faculty long for a sense of community that the group appears to have, but that those within the group believe that they are fragmented too. Community building begins at the local level, not at the campus-wide level, and the planning process should consider ways to encourage the former as well as the latter. In so doing, Skidmore should not forget what one roundtable participant advised: "We should reinforce the sense of community by trusting each other to do the right thing."

Self Image/Esteem

Inferiority v. Ambition

In spite of some disappointments, frustration, and occasional anger, respondents among faculty, students, staff, and alumni usually speak with pride about Skidmore College. In the words of one faculty member imagining what the future holds, "I see a campus that combines nobility of purpose and a vision with kindness and individual attention." Nonetheless, respondents seem to be hesitant about claiming excellence for the institution. One says that we are "cutting edge," another says that we consider Skidmore a "second choice school," and a third believes that "we do not think of ourselves as an intellectual center." Relating back to earlier issues about expectations for the faculty, one survey respondent says: "If we want to be more like Swarthmore (i.e. emphasis on scholarship) then we need to commit to the necessary institutional changes rather than just 'say' we want to get there and not provide the resources necessary (more faculty). If we would rather go the route of the smaller institutions then we need to de-emphasize the scholarship to the deference of teaching. Either way we need to pick a direction and go with it."

Inner Directed v. Outer Directed, Especially in Terms of CWWWCO

Some thought that Skidmore should be looked at "on its own merits" and develop "a real niche in the educational community that involves strong academics." Others saw Skidmore looking over its shoulders "at the colleges we compare ourselves with." There is a difference of opinion whether Skidmore is confident about what it is and has internal standards that it tries to meet or whether it feels second best and looks for recognition from others. That difference leads to uncertainty about the future direction that Skidmore should take.

Conclusion

Before the institutional planning process moves to the future, it may be useful to review our central objective as set out in the first sentence of our mission statement: educating students. Everything we do as an institution should contribute to this end. The mission statement goes on to note that "the College seeks to prepare liberally educated graduates to continue their quest for knowledge and to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens" (emphasis added). During the outreach period of this process, we asked an open-ended question: "what should we be doing to prepare students to lead rich and meaningful lives?" Without having any immediate reference to the mission statement, respondents came astonishingly close to its wording and substance; the answers from all constituencies of the College fell mainly into two categories: "liberal arts education" and "civic preparation" are the best ways to prepare our students. If we combine this broad vision with the specific answers given to the final, pointed question about Skidmore's future, we can begin to identify our institutional goals.

When we prepare students well, we create, as a collateral effect, an enriched environment for learning and for working. This, in turn, provides a clear image of the College, an image that unifies us and which we can readily and proudly describe to the outside world. What hinders us are "those things we do not do well" and "external threats." However, what we have in our favor, fortunately, is the wealth of "tools" delineated in the "soul" and "what Skidmore does well" sections of this report.

APPENDIX A

This section includes ideas from the sub-committee that were not necessarily included in the data we collected, but were suggested by the data or by our own experiences here at Skidmore.

1. One member said that we need to remind ourselves that "we have come so far in a relatively short time. We have high expectations, and that is what defines us."
2. There was a means vs. ends debate. If we see educating students as our goal, then shouldn't nurturing, and community, be subsumed as a means to that end?
3. We do, it was agreed, need to define community, and improve communication within that community. It is rare that faculty really know what other faculty are writing and researching, and the same is true for students. Honors Convocation is a wonderful ceremony, but is closed to most students. It was suggested (only semi-seriously!) that we may need a "notifications" officer.
4. If faculty-student relations are so critical to all of us, why don't we feel we are truly part of an academic community?
5. Perhaps we need to re-introduce workshops for students to teach them the basic vocabulary and political skills of getting and keeping a job.
6. Better advertising and awareness of all volunteer/internship possibilities.
7. What will our pool of potential students look like in 2-5-7-10 years? (would further data help?)
8. What are the Federal and State regulations that could change, adversely affecting us? (data help?)
9. Are our students coming to us under-prepared by their high schools?
10. Learning communities might be formed.
11. We could also use some more occasions or excuses for informal meetings.
12. Students don't always know about, or take advantage of, some of our best intellectual resources (for example, *Salmagundi*, or the named lecture series).
13. We need a better connection between our academic-year programs and our summer programs; students and alumni seem largely unaware of the variety of summer offerings. This may be a public relations opportunity.
14. Along the same lines, alumni and retirees need and want better academic connections to Skidmore; perhaps on-line or life-long learning courses (through Special Programs?) could assist here.
15. Students did not respond in great numbers to this outreach; the group felt that we should mention the Honor Code and the Residential Life programs as two "un-represented" student concerns.
16. There was a suggestion that we enhance staff and faculty contact with students by considering an invitation to faculty and staff to go to dinner on Wednesday nights in the dining hall with students.

A CFG White Paper: Improving Participation in Faculty Governance

DRAFT: 27 March 2002

Part One: *What is at Stake*

Currently Skidmore faculty governance is undergoing a crisis of participation. It seems that we are not alone in our dilemma. Many colleges and universities are now facing dissatisfaction with the system and confusion regarding the role of faculty in campus decision-making (Schuster et al., 1994). In their theoretical work on planning and governance Schuster and colleagues (1994) describe four imperatives for higher education decision-making. These include involvement, leadership, efficiency, and environment. In recent years two major factors have influenced faculty life. Faculty members are tolerating more administrative decisions because they are made more efficiently and academics are struggling to adapt in an environment that makes increasing demands on time. Although it has reigned supreme for many years, the push for participatory governance is diminishing on many campuses.

In keeping with the trends of the 1980s Skidmore convened a task force on faculty governance that addressed the issues of faculty meetings and the faculty committee structure. Our current system is based largely on the recommendations made by that task force (Ciancio report, 1988). Not even a decade later, however, the Committee on Faculty Governance (CFG) was experiencing problems with the committee system. Not enough faculty were willing to serve; some committee members were dissatisfied with their roles (e.g. FPPC and IPC); some faculty thought that their committee work was fruitless and their time was wasted; and others called for a more two-way communication between faculty and administration (Ginsberg report, 1996). CFG distributed surveys, conducted focus groups, held Committee of Committees meetings, made recommendations, and continued serious discussion of the issues. In 1997 we identified three key concerns. These included the structure of committees, recognition of committee service, and communication/trust (Azzarto report, 1997). In 2002, despite much work, we are still facing the same problems and they are becoming more serious. Our work, however, has proceeded on the assumption that the Skidmore faculty wants a participatory governance system. Perhaps it is time to question that assumption. CFG needs the answers to some basic questions from our community: How involved in governance should each faculty member be? How long is the administration willing to wait for the less efficient decision-making process that includes committee input? How much should individual faculty members struggle to resist environmental pressures that focus us exclusively on teaching and scholarship? Who are the leaders amongst us who have not stepped forward to serve?

If the time for strong participatory governance has past, we must critically consider the consequences of letting this principle die. Other campus communities have become complacent and left academically sacred curricular decisions to administration and trustees. (For a close-to-home example, recall the recent imposition of a core curriculum by the SUNY Albany Board of Trustees, following the failure of faculty governance to accomplish the mission.) If we agree that we want to remain a faculty that assumes leadership in its community and involves itself in the governance system, then CFG invites consideration of this report.

The data above would seem to have no dramatic messages, but they do contain some useful information. Perhaps most clear is a dispelling of the myth that *untenured tenure-track faculty do not participate in the system sufficiently*, probably because of worries about the other two areas (teaching and scholarship). On the contrary, currently 60% of this group actually serves, well above the 34% of tenured faculty and the 10% of non-tenure-track faculty. Moreover, this group constitutes only 21% of the eligible pool, yet it fills 56% of the unrestricted slots. CFG concludes that, at least currently, *untenured tenure-track faculty more than "pull their weight" in the governance system*.

The situation with non-tenure-track faculty is difficult to assess because this group is so diverse. A 10% service rate may seem low, but many individuals in the group have specialized roles in the community that may not be compatible with college-wide committee service.

CFG is concerned about the participation levels of the *tenured* faculty. Currently only a third of the tenured faculty are serving on the faculty and college committees and only a third of the unrestricted slots are filled by tenured faculty even though that group constitutes 53% of the pool. Of course there are many complicating factors – tenured faculty members have many responsibilities in the college that come with seniority. Nonetheless, CFG does feel on the basis of these data that the tenured faculty may not be contributing quite what they should to the system.

Of course, an individual cannot *serve* on an elected committee if he or she is not *elected* to that committee. Hence CFG felt it important to look at the rate of *willingness to serve* among the group about which we are concerned, tenured faculty. This leads to our second, much simpler, item of data:

II. *Willingness to Serve on the part of Tenured Faculty*

Over the period from September 1998 through October 2001 (3+ years), 68 out of 125, or 54%, of the tenured faculty submitted at least one willingness-to-serve for the faculty governance system.

This rate, 54%, even given the disclaimers about the wide variety of activities that can constitute service, seems disturbingly low to CFG. (By contrast, 43, or 91%, of the 47 continuing faculty members who were untenured tenure-track as of Fall 2001 expressed willingness to serve at least once during the same period.) Obviously, one could never expect that all or even almost all tenured faculty would offer themselves for committee service at least once over a three year period, but surely that rate could be closer to 70-75%, say. This perhaps then is our challenge: How can we increase the number of tenured faculty who would be willing to serve from about half of the total to closer to three-quarters? Such a shift would go a long way toward relieving the current difficulties.

Our next measure of participation in the governance system is even simpler and more basic. Observers of the United States political system regularly bemoan the lack of participation of citizens in the electoral process. Presidential elections attract about 50% of the eligible voters, and almost all other elections get lower participation than that. How does the performance of the Skidmore faculty in our own governance system compare?