Skidmore College

Appendices to the Self-Study Final Report

Submitted to the
Middle States Commission on Higher Education

Skidmore College

Saratoga Springs, New York 12866

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Appendix A

Skidmore College: Institutional Profile

Skidmore is a selective, nationally ranked liberal arts college, currently enrolling 2,200 students in 65 undergraduate academic majors. The College's principal mission is the education of a diverse population of talented students who are eager to engage in the learning process. Our faculty and staff create a challenging yet supportive environment that cultivates students' intellectual and personal excellence, encouraging them to expand their expectations of themselves while they enrich their academic understanding. In keeping with the College's founding principle of linking theoretical with applied learning, the Skidmore curriculum balances a commitment to the liberal arts with preparation for professions, careers, and community leadership.

Skidmore's faculty of more than 200 teachers and scholars take pride in their close work with students and in the innovative curriculum, encouraging collaborative research and creativity within and across all disciplines. The College believes that thoughtful mentoring and teaching are inextricably linked, as evident in Skidmore's new First Year Experience program. The student-faculty ratio is 11:1, and class sizes average 16 students. Equally active beyond the classroom, Skidmore faculty have achieved national and international recognition, from Pulitzer and Emmy awards to major fellowships and grants, including Fulbright, Guggenheim, NEH, NEA, NIH, and NSF.

The history of Skidmore reflects a tradition of dynamic leadership, consistently high aspirations, and corresponding achievements. Founded in 1903 by Lucy Skidmore Scribner to provide a practical education for women, Skidmore was chartered as a four-year college in 1922, and has advanced in less than a century to the front ranks of national institutions of higher education. Skidmore was one of the first women's colleges to make a successful conversion to coeducation, in 1971. Skidmore was also the first school in New York State to provide nonresidential programs for adult learners, through its University Without Walls (UWW), introduced in 1971; a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS) program was added in 1992.

Skidmore's unique combination of leadership, vision, and risk-taking is also evident in its construction of an impressive new campus, beginning in the early 1960s. Today, the campus's 50 contemporary buildings with state-of-the-art facilities are situated on 850 wooded acres, just a short walk from downtown Saratoga Springs. The campus has been designed to be an effective living-learning environment that is conducive to both intellectual and social engagement. The newest campus addition is the nationally acclaimed Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, designed by renowned architect Antoine Predock, where students from all academic majors are engaged in interdisciplinary activities.

Skidmore students are engaged in a multitude of co-curricular activities, study abroad programs, and a competitive NCAA Division III intercollegiate athletics program. The Skidmore campus is active year-round, and some of Skidmore's Special Programs are

particularly popular in the summer, including nationally recognized programs such as the New York State Summer Writers Institute, the Skidmore Jazz Institute, the Boys Choir of Harlem residency, and residencies of major dance companies. The college's Summer Programs draw diverse participants and audiences throughout the season and add significantly to the cultural and arts offerings of the region. Beyond the campus, the quarterly journal of the humanities and social sciences *Salmagundi* represents Skidmore within the arena of influential public debate.

The College is closely aligned with the city in which it is located. Saratoga Springs is the recipient of four national awards for its quality of life and vibrant downtown. Its myriad attractions include the Saratoga Performing Arts Center (summer home of the New York City Ballet and the Philadelphia Orchestra), 10 museums, a famed thoroughbred racetrack, and a number of spas. Set in the foothills of the Adirondack Mountains, Saratoga Springs is a half-hour drive from the New York State capital at Albany and a three-hour drive from New York City, Boston, and Montreal.

Institutional Philosophy

Creative thought matters—every life, every career, every profession is made more profound with creative ability at its core. At Skidmore, the theme of creativity carries throughout and across the disciplines. Our goal has been not simply to encourage creative work within the sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities, but to champion creative thought across traditional disciplinary bounds and to extend this approach into less traditional liberal arts programs such as Management and Business, Education, and Social Work. Thus the College has long been respected for a curriculum that invites serious engagement in both the traditional liberal arts and an array of preprofessional training.

The Skidmore curriculum provides a creative intellectual foundation for every student. Students pursue connections among an unusually wide range of disciplinary perspectives and embark on their careers well-prepared to take full advantage of the diversity of opportunities they will encounter in the complex modern world. The crossdisciplinary, highly sophisticated environment of the College, coupled with skilled faculty guidance, results in heightened intellectual performance for our students. As practiced at Skidmore College, the liberal arts produce a transformational educational experience and promote lifelong learning.

Skidmore College

Middle States Self-Study

Steering Committee (2004-2006)

Sarah W. Goodwin

Associate Dean of the Faculty and Professor of English

Steering Committee Chair

Michael F. Arnush, Director of the First-Year Experience, Associate Professor of Classics

Mary Lou W. Bates, Dean of Admissions and Student Aid

Grace M. Burton, Interim Dean of Studies, Associate Professor of Spanish

James Chansky, Director of Summer Sessions and Summer Special Programs (committee member 2005-06)

Daniel Coleman, Director of the Master of Liberal Arts Program (committee member 2004-05)

Ruth Copans, College Librarian (committee member 2004-05)

Matthew Cronin '06, student

Robert DeSieno, Program Development and Sponsored Research Officer for the Natural Sciences, Professor of Mathematics & Computer Science

Beth E. DuPont, Director of Academic Technologies

Sebastian Fica '07, student

Ann L. Henderson, Registrar and Director of Institutional Research

Susan W. Kerr, Assistant Director for Public Programs, Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery

Susan B. Layden, Associate Dean of Student Affairs, Director of HEOP/AOP

Elliott Masie, trustee

Patricia Rubio, Professor of Spanish and Chair of Foreign Languages and Literatures

Joseph G. Stankovich, Associate Director of Institutional Research

Linda Toohey, trustee

Susan H. Zappen, Acting College Librarian (committee member 2005-2006)

Chrisana M. McGill, *Middle States Coordinator*

Subcommittees (2004-2006)

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Molly Appel '07, student

Andrew Bernstein '07, student

Thomas P. Oles, Dean of Student Affairs

Linda S. Simon, Professor of English, Director of Expository Writing (2004-05), and Chair of English

Daniel Moran '07, student

Lilly Torrey '07, student

Jeff Vickers '07, student

Joanna Zangrando, Professor of American Studies and Director of Liberal Studies

Diversity Subcommittee

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Lenora de la Luna, Assistant Professor of Education

Jessyca Dudley '06, student

Jordana Dym, Assistant Professor of History

Licelot Eralte-Mercer '06, student

Jack Ling, Director of Institutional Diversity (committee member 2004-2005)

Gerardo Rodriguez, Visiting Assistant Professor of Physics

Sciences Subcommittee

Robert DeSieno, *Subcommittee Chair*

Karen Kellogg, Assistant Professor and Director of Environmental Studies

Vasantha Narasimhan, Professor and Chair of Chemistry

Bernard Possidente, Professor of Biology

Lena Webb '05, student

APPENDIX C

Student Engagement: Faculty Survey Reports

I. Methodology:

Phyllis Roth and Kate Berheide conducted an e-mail survey of all our faculty and asked them to write back, identifying what they considered to be characteristics of students whom they would describe as "engaged." 40 faculty responded.

Since there was no formal structure to the responses, those faculty who responded did so in varied ways, ranging from discussing one or two characteristics quite extensively and sometimes eloquently to listing a number of characteristics with little or no discussion. Therefore I decided to identify each characteristic that each faculty member mentioned and tally each as a separate response, even though one faculty member may have listed 5 characteristics and another faculty member may have listed 1. If a faculty member talked about the same characteristic in several ways, I counted it once.

Then, chosing to lump rather than split, I tried to identify the general characteristics that were mentioned, even though several faculty would describe the same characteristic in very different ways. This initial clustering of characteristics resulted in 14 characteristics, which I have ranked by the percentage of faculty who mentioned each characteristic (see section II below). Then, for purposes of our definitions, I attempted to collapse the 14 characteristics into fewer categories so that we could more easily have a working definition that would not overwhelm a reader or reviewer and that could serve assessment purposes. I have summarized those below (see section III).

II. General Characteristics of Engaged Students as Identified by the Faculty

I have ranked fourteen characteristics below in order of decreasing frequency of response by different faculty (the percentage indicates the percentage of faculty who mentioned anything related to this category):

Rank (topic identifier letter) Characteristic (percentage)

1. (A) Do a deeper analysis, question one's own assumptions, achieve more in-depth understanding, make conceptual leaps, develop internal standards, develop creative solutions: 35%

2. (B) Continue working after a class, lab, or field trip: 25%

2. © Voluntarily extend the topic of a class into additional research, further readings, or outside activities such as service learning or student activities: 25%

3. (D)Apply what has been learned to a different context, problem, or task: 22.5%

4. (E) Discover a passion for something, become obsessed with the topic, become physically excited about the topic, demonstrate enthusiasm: 20%

4. (F) Suggest new readings, new approaches, new questions: 20%

5. (G) Be willing to take on more work or work on weaknesses: 15%

6. (H) Arrive on site or in class prepared to begin: 12.5%

6. (I) Talk to others about their learning, involve other audiences, mentor or tutor students in the subject: 12.5%

7. (J) Risk failure to learn more: 10%

8. (K) Develop career or academic goals as a result of the study, course or major: 7.5%

8. (L) Develop a real voice in writing, argue persuasively, exhibit craftsmanship or identifiable style: 7.5%

9. (M) Connect learning to personal experiences, prior knowledge, interests, other courses they are or have taken: 5%

10. (N) Collaborate with others: 2.5%

III. Clustering the Characteristics:

Attempting to determine which of the initial characteristics related to one another, I have clustered the following, as identified by the letters above:

1. Develop a deeper analysis, achieve greater understanding, make conceptual leaps, develop internal standards, develop creative solutions, and question one's own assumptions. (A)

2. Exhibit a real voice, craftsmanship, or identifiable style. (L)

3. Prepare thoroughly for class, be willing to undertake more work, and continue work after class or in new contexts. (B, C, D, G, N)

4. Risk failure to learn more. (J)

5. Demonstrate a passionate commitment to the study now and in the future. (H, I, J, K)

6. Apply learning to a new context, work, or activity and relate learning to personal experiences or prior knowledge. (F, M, E)

I note that characteristics 1 and 2 refer to the products of one's work; items 3, 4, and 5 refer to the attitudes or predispositions of the students toward their study or the topic; and item 6 refers to the students extending what they have learned to something different from the course itself, ranging from current student activities to careers.

A disclaimer: I recognize that my interpretation of the faculty comments is just that, an interpretation perhaps biased by my own subjective understandings of student learning and personal responses to what the faculty have told us. I also recognize that, sadly, my clustering or lumping of their responses necessarily eliminates many nuances and eloquent phrases. Finally, a subsequent study might begin with these initial responses of the faculty and employ a Delphi technique[1] approach to enable the faculty to see these possibilities and rank them. That might lead to greater consensus among the total faculty.

IV. Summary

Based upon the responses of 40 faculty, the identification of 14 broad characteristics derived from the faculty responses, and the subsequent clustering of those into 6 categories, I conclude that the faculty identified "student engagement" to be revealed by the attitudes that students bring to their academic work, the products of their work, and the extension of their learning beyond the class itself.

At this point, we can say that the faculty have provided us with 6 characteristics of student engagement or student outcomes that broadly define student engagement. We can use these as we assess student engagement in the future or we can attempt to redefine them so that they more accurately reflect what we hope for in an engaged Skidmore student.

--Ray Rodrigues

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[1] The Delphi technique reflects the Hegelian dialectic: thesis and antithesis leading to synthesis, with synthesis becoming the new thesis. Essentially, using this technique, a first survey identifies possibilities, and subsequent surveys each use the responses from the previous survey to construct new surveys, moving toward and attempting to achieve a final consensus.

APPENDIX D

Report on Assessment of Critical Inquiry Revealed by Senior Papers

In our institutional assessment plan, critical inquiry is one of our major goals for the overall learning of our students.

Seven faculty participated in the assessment working group who assessed student written work for the Critical Inquiry goal: Tim Burns (Government), Paty Rubio (Foreign Languages), Dawn Riley (Education), Rik Scarce (Sociology), Tim Harper (Management and Business), Laura Paul (UWW), and Stephen Murray (Religion). The group met on two occasions, first, to develop a common understanding of their purpose and, on a subsequent date, to draw conclusions based upon their reading of a variety of student papers. In between, they read and evaluated the papers.

This assessment had the following purposes:

1. to determine whether our students' work addressed the critical inquiry outcomes in a manner appropriate for Skidmore graduates and to identify outstanding examples of student work that did address any of the learning outcomes within the goal;

2. to determine whether the critical inquiry goal as drafted could be assessed by examining student papers, and, if not, to recommend revisions to the goal; and

3. to make recommendations regarding the process of assessing the critical inquiry goal.

I. The Critical Inquiry Goal

Critical inquiry, as defined within our Assessment Plan, involves using various modes of inquiry and interdisciplinary perspectives or methodologies to conceptualize, investigate, and derive meaning. It implies that learners are *active* learners, self-motivated learners, and learners who understand the ambiguities and uncertainties of achieving absolute knowledge, as well as the implications of various courses of action.

Skidmore students who demonstrate evidence of their being critically-inquiring humans:

- Employ both quantitative and qualitative analysis to describe and solve problems;
- Interpret, evaluate, and use information discerningly from a variety of perspectives;
- Tolerate ambiguity while understanding the complexity of many problems, issues, and topics;
- Transform the results of their inquiry into judgments and actions;
- Critique their own conclusions, take into account alternative points of view, and understand possible implications of various courses of action.

Discussion:

"Critical inquiry" is not defined within any of the curriculum documents of Skidmore College, including the *Catalog*, yet the abilities specified by this goal are outcomes that faculty often refer to in their discussions of the purposes of a liberal education at Skidmore. We often talk about wanting our

students to draw upon interdisciplinary knowledge or perspectives in addressing various problems and issues, to recognize the weaknesses in their arguments or recognize what they do not know, and to employ the tools of various disciplines either in their continuing learning or in their future actions. The critical inquiry goal is our attempt to make these desirable outcomes of a liberal education overt. Below we discuss how well we think the goal as drafted does define those outcomes.

"Critical inquiry" is not synonymous with "critical thinking," although the two overlap in a variety of ways. While many standard definitions of critical thinking exist in the literature, no nationally accepted standard definition of critical thinking exists since each discipline emphasizes different aspects of thinking. Critical thinking may involve a wide variety of skills, such as evaluating, comparing and contrasting, inferring, applying knowledge, or drawing conclusions. In many ways, critical thinking resembles the concepts of motherhood or patriotism. Each of us knows what we mean by it, but few of us agree completely upon any common definition.

The critical inquiry goal is intended to describe a set of characteristics that capture the intellectual capabilities of what we expect from Skidmore graduates. As such, it encompasses much of what we intend students to learn in our general education program, but it also assumes that the general education program is only a beginning and that students' learning is cumulative, growing through learning in the majors, through elective coursework, through participating in co-curricular activities, and in experiences outside of the physical confines of the College. The goal is also intended to be applicable to a wide variety of student work, from traditional research papers to art works. We hope that our initial effort to define what we intend by "critical inquiry" will begin a conversation at Skidmore that will lead to more overt understandings by both faculty and students of the overarching purposes of a liberal education at Skidmore.

II. Observations Based upon the Review of Student Work

We read 100 papers: 9 Art papers, 41 Social Science papers, 6 Natural Science papers, 32 Humanities papers, 4 papers from the pre-professional areas, and 8 papers we could not place in any particular disciplinary area. The papers included traditional research papers, science reports, and reflective essays. We read five senior theses as part of this assessment since we were interested in the thinking revealed by the papers more than the quality of the writing *per se*. Each reader read between 14 and 17 papers, depending upon whether they read senior theses, and submitted an evaluation report on each.

Constraints:

Despite attempts to collect work from all graduating seniors, we were only able to collect a limited number of papers from the students themselves or from a small number of faculty who graciously copied work that their seniors had submitted in their courses. As a result, we read all submissions, either as samples to develop common understandings of our purposes or for the assessment itself.

From the beginning, we recognized that no single paper would be likely to encompass all of the learning outcomes specified by the goal, but we wanted to understand whether and how well the papers reflected any of those outcomes. We did not have the assignments that the students were given, and so we are unaware of the expectations that the individual faculty had in making their assignments or the purposes

of the students in writing their papers. We could assume much about the assignments, but we could not be certain of our assumptions. We did not know the extent to which early drafts of the papers were reviewed by the faculty or by other students. Some of the papers were senior theses, and, as such, were undoubtedly subject to intensive review prior to the final draft. They were included in our sample because we were interested in the thinking revealed by the papers, more than the writing ability, which was addressed overtly by the writing assessment group. Finally, despite our attempts to collect samples of papers from all of our seniors, we did not accomplish that, and so our conclusions may not reflect the full range of senior written work.

Summary Observations:

1. The *theses* of most papers were weak and a few non-existent. When present, many theses were either too all-encompassing or self-evident and thus did not lead to critical discussions or reflect a depth of understanding or interpretation. Even when good theses were present, student writers often lost track of those theses and drifted in their development of an argument. Occasionally a student discovered an insightful thesis by the end of a paper, but had not concentrated upon that thesis during the paper and had not revised the paper to reflect the insights that the thesis might have encompassed. The lack of well-developed theses in so many papers indicates to us a corresponding lack of clear focus or purpose. Evidently, many students do not approach their papers with a sufficiently critical intent. That is, too many papers read like reports rather than well-considered explorations of a topic.

2. Most students do not recognize opposing or alternative arguments or points of view. If students have considered alternative perspectives, those apparently have been set aside when writing the paper. In an attempt to develop an unambiguous argument, most simply do not recognize the breadth of perspectives reflected in the scholarly debates and inquiries of our disciplines. Readers commented on such matters as unexamined assumptions or uncritical acceptance of the jargon of the discipline. While few students critiqued their own conclusions, this limitation may be an artifact of the types of assignments they were given.

3. The papers overwhelmingly reflect disciplinary perspectives and knowledge and seldom integrate knowledge or perspectives from other disciplines. While this may be the natural and desirable result of study within any one discipline, it does not reflect the ostensible intent of Skidmore to promote interdisciplinary study.

4. The ability to use sources meaningfully varied greatly across the papers. This may reflect the nature of the varied assignments that the students were given.

5. While it was not the purpose of this assessment to evaluate the writing ability of our seniors, readers commented that weak arguments often seemed to coincide with such aspects of writing as weak organization or weak syntax.

6. The variety of topics, issues, and subject matter reflects the diversity and breadth of courses at Skidmore and, as such, speaks well to the intellectual opportunities available to our students.

7. The assignments have led students to employ a wide range of tones and styles, ranging from pieces reflecting the styles of the popular media to those of scholarly journals.

8. Some papers were truly outstanding in the writers' depth of thinking and ability to engage readers, but the majority of papers were, as summarized above, limited in a variety of ways.

9. Despite the critical comments above, we recognize that our students are still developing as thinkers and writers. We cannot expect all of our students to be fully mature thinkers and polished writers. The more challenging an inquiry task may be, the more likely the student is to demonstrate weaknesses in writing.

III. Is the Critical Inquiry Goal (Including Its Outcomes) Appropriate for Skidmore?

In general, the readers found the critical inquiry goal and its outcomes to appropriately reflect the desirable overall learning of students who graduate from Skidmore, but the readers questioned the exact wording of each of the outcomes.

For the purposes of this assessment, the readers chose not to determine whether a particular paper employed *both* quantitative and qualitative methodologies, but chose to determine whether students used methodologies *appropriate to the subject.* They recognized that, because they were not experts in all the disciplines represented at Skidmore, they could not be certain that their judgments about the methodologies were accurate. Nevertheless, they agreed that graduates of Skidmore should be able to use both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The readers revised outcome two as follows (*italics* indicate additions): "Interpret, evaluate, *integrate,* and use information discerningly from a variety of perspectives *or sources.*"

They struggled to find a way to understand the outcome "transform the results of the inquiry into judgments and actions," and so they revised it as follows: "transform the results of the inquiry into *refined* judgments." The readers chose to drop "actions" from their review since they felt that they had no basis upon which to judge actions that may have resulted from the individual studies of the students. Please see the discussion in the next section on the use of rubrics to understand the readers' response to their revisions.

The readers added one more outcome: "Demonstrate openness to reason or intellectual honesty/probity." After reading all the papers and upon subsequent reflection, they felt that this outcome might be contained within the outcome "interpret, evaluate, integrate and use information discerningly . . . ." or the outcome ". . . take into account alternative points of view." Once again, please note the discussion that follows on the use of rubrics.

IV. What Process Should Be Employed to Assess the Critical Inquiry Goal?

Given the constraints of this assessment process, we recommend the following:

1. Samples of student work should be drawn from the total body of senior work. Very few students submitted their work voluntarily. Subsequent appeals to faculty to submit the major papers of their seniors led to uneven submissions, with some faculty submitting all their seniors' work and some selecting only the best work, which defeats the purpose of an honest assessment.

2. To assess all the learning outcomes specified within the critical inquiry goal, a portfolio system would best enable this to occur. We recommend that the College continue to explore the implementation of an electronic portfolio system and requirement that students compile portfolios of their work. The obligation to compile a portfolio and

submit samples of work for assessment purposes should be placed upon the students.

3. If reflective essays are to be assessed as part of the critical inquiry goal, then students should be guided in how to write a reflective essay so that it meets the criteria of the goal or reflective essays should be evaluated using those appropriate criteria that faculty determine. We have a wonderful opportunity to begin implementing such guidelines for reflective essays in the new Scribner Seminars since students will be asked to begin drafting reflections upon their academic goals.

4. The critical inquiry goal and its outcomes should be discussed and debated among all faculty. The result may be a total revision of the goal and its outcomes, but that result can then be communicated to students in a variety of forums and media so that they understand what an education at Skidmore can mean.

5. The assessment team of faculty should involve faculty from each of our disciplines so that particular disciplinary constraints or intentions can be communicated to all team members.

6. Members of the assessment team should read papers in common, perhaps with at least two of the team members reading the same papers and comparing their evaluations. In our assessment, other than when we established our initial understanding of the outcomes, we each read different papers and so did not debate our judgments about individual papers.

7. The questions about what each of the learning outcomes means can best be addressed by developing *rubrics*. As defined in our assessment handbook on our assessment website, a rubric is a method of classifying and categorizing student behaviors or products along a continuum. The rubric defines the characteristics of an outcome or goal from the mosst desired characteristics through acceptable characteristics to unacceptable characteristics. Should we want a numerical compilation of our assessment results, rubrics contain within them simple scales. The faculty conducting an assessment can develop their rubrics based upon the sample of student work available to them, not simply by adopting a rubric that someone else has created for a different set of student work. [Rubrics also can serve another very important function, that of providing a guide as students attempt to fulfill an assignment.]

8. We wondered whether, aside from senior theses and honors projects, students produced their best work during the second semester of their senior year. Some believe that many students begin to relax academically by the time of their second semester. Should we only collect work from the Fall Semester, or should we allow and require students to submit work from any of their years here as long as the students believe the work addresses the outcomes?

V. Conclusions: Questions for Continuing Consideration

We submit the following questions for the assessment task force to consider and recommend that they be considered and discussed by all faculty:

1. Does the critical inquiry goal reflect what we expect of graduates who have had a liberal education at Skidmore? Can we find a way to discuss this goal and refine it so that it

does reflect our intentions?

2. How can we collect a broader representation of student work to assess?

3. Should we ask that assignments be submitted along with the products of those assignments?

4. Can we implement a portfolio system to which students must submit work? Should this be an electronic portfolio system? How can we best implement such a system? If we employ a portfolio system, do we need to see the assignments that have led to the student work?

5. How can we best assess student work in the arts if the critical inquiry goal is to encompass such work?

6. Since the best student work that we reviewed tended to be senior theses or honors projects, should all students be required to complete a major project of comparable effort and depth?

7. Should we overtly teach the skills that would lead to the critical inquiry learning outcomes that we desire, and, if so, in what courses and at what level or levels? If we believe in these outcomes, how can we best teach toward them? If, for example, we believe that students should be self-reflective or self-critical, how do we best guide them to become so?

8. What are the implications of the critical inquiry assessment results for our professional development efforts? Should we offer more workshops on specific pedagogical strategies?

REPORT ON ASSESSMENT OF SENIOR WRITING

Expository writing is one of the foundations—if not the cornerstone—of a Skidmore education. The English Department's Expository Writing Committee has assessed student writing after students completed the Expository Writing Requirement. The College, however, has made no formal effort in the past to assess student writing as they conclude their Skidmore education. The May 2005 assessment of senior writing marks the first attempt to describe the writing of seniors from across the disciplines as they graduate. The assessment may have been limited by the number and range of papers collected; nonetheless, it provides an initial portrait of senior writing upon which to build future assessments of student writing and to consider the place of writing in the curriculum at Skidmore.

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The assessment of senior writing was conducted 23-27 May. Six faculty members participated in the assessment: Erica Bastress-Dukehart (History), Tim Burns (Government), Sarah Goodwin (English, Associate Dean of the Faculty), Linda Hall (English), Michael Marx (English), and Denise McQuade (Biology). Ray Rodrigues, director of Assessment, also took part in the discussions.

The Office of the Director of Assessment solicited writing samples directly from students in April through email and invited them to upload their papers at a special site on Web-CT. Since relatively few students responded, the Director of Assessment and the Dean of the Faculty also requested that faculty submit senior papers from their courses. One hundred papers were examined for the senior writing assessment. The papers ranged from short response papers for a museum exhibit project to personal essays and formal seminar papers. The assessment did not include senior theses because theses undergo a rigorous writing and editing process as the faculty advisor and the student work throughout the semester (or in some cases the entire academic year). We recommend a separate assessment of senior theses in the future as part of the ongoing assessment of student writing. The one hundred papers reviewed represent 18 departments, distributed among the academic divisions as follows

Arts	4
Sciences	9
Social Sciences	37
Humanities	49
Pre-professional	1

Each reader was responsible for approximately 17 papers and wrote a report on those papers.

Expectations for Senior Writing

In preparation for reading and assessing senior writing, the readers met to discuss their expectations for senior writing, based in part on the senior writing they have received in their courses. Broadly characterized, senior writing-should demonstrate competence in all areas of college writing. Although it may contain some mechanical errors, the writing itself should be engaged and ambitious, and less a mechanical undertaking. The writing should show an improved and increased vocabulary. Seniors should fulfill assignments better than underclasspersons by going beyond the assignments. Seniors should be better able to make an argument in their writing through both the presentation of ideas and rhetorical strategies. The readers agreed that seniors should be able to sustain a written argument over a long number of pages.

A Description of the Senior Writing Assessed

Although the pool of student papers did not represent a systematic, random sample of senior writing, it did offer a cross-section of the writing of our seniors. The readers encountered excellent papers as well as a small number of poor or unacceptable papers. Impressive research, graceful writing, and careful reading distinguished the excellent papers. The writing was clear and free of sentence level errors. Papers in this group demonstrated good word choice and appropriate vocabulary. These strongest papers showed the writer's clear sense of direction and intellectual investment in the topic, conveyed through a compelling argument. The very best papers in this group showed astute analysis of primary materials, supported through a wide range of reading and research. These excellent papers, however, made up a small portion of the sample.

The majority of the papers demonstrated competence, but, as one reader put it, were uninspired and uninspiring writing. As they undertook the task of writing papers of twenty pages or longer, the senior writers seemed to encounter many difficulties: theses were undeveloped and not compelling; evidence was thin; and as the papers progressed, the internal logic suffered. Overall, this larger group of papers lacked sophistication. The readers described the writing as clichéd not only in vocabulary but also in ideas and argument. Like the strong papers, these papers presented evidence, but in a very limited fashion. Quotations did not lead to analysis and offered little sense of how the sources informed the thinking in the paper. Many of the papers seemed more like reports recounting information rather than arguments or analyses. The writers rarely seemed to question the assumptions informing the resources they consulted nor the very assumptions informing their own thought. These essays suffered because of their "immature" writing and reading skills. Errors—or sloppiness—were more pervasive, and the writing was hampered by limited or "primitive" vocabulary.

Toward a Rubric for Senior Writing

Although the assessment group resisted working from a prescriptive rubric to assess the student writing, the assessment activity may have moved us toward a descriptive

assessment rubric for senior writing. Such a rubric might include the following categories:

Surface features
- Grammar, punctuation
- Vocabulary
- Disciplinary vocabulary

Focus
- Thesis
- Argument
- Originality

Evidence
- Resources for supporting evidence
- Conventions in presenting evidence, including citation and documentation

Analysis
- Of supporting evidence and quotations
- Of underlying assumptions informing the work
- Of the intellectual and historical context
- Depth

Organization
- Logic, internal and overall
- Transitions

OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS

Given the limitations surrounding the essays pool, the readers felt it premature to offer recommendations at this point. Nonetheless, the assessment work was quite valuable in bringing to the foreground observations about the writing of our seniors and questions about writing instruction in the college.

1. Collecting student papers for future assessments. The pool of the essays included in this assessment did not provide us with a solid enough foundation upon which to draw conclusions and offer recommendations. Although well planned, simply inviting students to submit their senior papers electronically is not effective. Currently, Skidmore lacks a culture of assessment, both among students and faculty. We need to cultivate such a culture. Incorporating the collection of student writing directly into courses seems an effective way to assure that we can gather a representative, random sample of all student writing and that we have a full representation of writing across the disciplines. Our current sample was heavily weighted toward the humanities. We did not know if the papers submitted were randomly selected, chosen as "best" work, or offered for some

other reason. Finally, although the focus of the assessment is on the students writing, having the assignment that prompted the paper would greatly benefit our assessment of that work. Collecting the papers directly in class might make it easier to get the assignments simultaneously. Similarly, establishing an e-portfolio for all students would help introduce a culture of assessment at the College and greatly facilitate the assessment of writing and other assessment projects. In addition, an e-portfolio might better allow longitudinal assessment of certain writing skills—such as vocabulary and disciplinary conventions—that develop over time.

2. Sampling papers from both the fall and spring semesters of the senior year. Although many of the essays demonstrated strong writing skills, we were concerned about the larger group of weaker papers. Several readers questioned whether this lower quality might be a reflection of the general attitude of some of our seniors in their last semester of college. Do seniors show a disengagement from the academic realities of college during the spring semester? If so, is that disengagement reflected in the quality of student writing? Might first semester senior writing offer a better picture of our students' abilities as writers? More importantly, if such academic disengagement is true, what should we do as a college to address it and turn it around?

   On a related note, several of the readers observed that the division in student writing reflected a similar split in our seniors. One group of students consists of good students, engaged in their studies, and eager to go deeper in their work; thus, this group pursues senior theses, projects, and other capstone experiences. The other group, perhaps the majority of our students, never seems to have caught fire intellectually; they are not budding scholars. How does college writing respond to the needs of these students? What might the College do to engage these students more fully in their intellectual growth and college education?

3. Preparation for writing long papers. Although senior science majors are typically encouraged to write concise papers of 3-10 pages suitable for publication, as noted earlier in the report, many faculty in other areas expect seniors to be able to sustain an argument effectively in a long paper of twenty pages or more. However, our assessment suggested that such a task was challenging for many students. Should students be doing more shorter writings designed around specific, focused tasks? How do we prepare students to write longer papers within the sequence of courses students take in their major and more broadly as students move from 100- to 200- to 300-level courses throughout the curriculum? Put another way, how do the papers we assign on the 300-level differ from 100- and 200-level assignments? How might we (better) sequence assignments across course levels to prepare students for the quality of writing we desire from seniors?

4. Forms of writing in the senior year. This assessment activity demonstrated that seniors are asked to write in a variety of forms their last year of college. As indicated earlier, the senior thesis is a special category of senior writing and

requires a separate assessment. But as the sample rubric above makes clear, not all writing done by seniors falls into a single category with similar demands and characteristics. Analytical and argumentative essays share many characteristics. How do students learn to analyze? What can we do in our assignments and pedagogy to highlight the differences—as well as the relationship—between summary and analysis? The reflective essay appears to be another very popular form of senior writing. Reflective essays are serious intellectual tasks. How can we best guide students to be critical in such essays? What prompts best elicit reflective essays? Again, how might the work in the early years—especially with the new RAP—to prepare students to write successful reflective essays?

5. Engagement and senior writing. Although currently very much the buzzword at Skidmore and in higher education in general, "engagement" connotes such a broad range of attitudes and skills to students, faculty, and administrators that it may not be a meaningful word, especially in the context of writing assessment. While the readers looked for evidence of an engaged writer and an engaged mind when reading the senior writing samples, what is the evidence of an engaged writer? While engagement appears to be a requirement for excellent writing, engagement alone does not make for successful writing. What is the relationship, then, between engagement and excellence? How do writers move from a passion for a topic to a fine analysis or presentation of a subject?

APPENDIX F

S. Goodwin
Assoc. Dean of the Faculty

Summary of Departmental Assessments as of Summer 2005

Department chairs and program directors for some years now have been asked to submit reports on their assessment work during the academic year as a part of their annual reports submitted each summer. Over the past ten years, the College has developed a culture of assessment step by step. Departments initially wrote mission statements, followed by goals for student learning articulated in stages. During the current administration, we have had a Director of Assessment, Ray Rodrigues, supported by a major grant from the Christian Johnson Endeavor Foundation. The primary purpose of the grant was to assess student learning across the college, in both the major and general education: our proposal referred to this as "the distance traveled." That proved an elusive assessment goal, though we made some progress in assessing student writing in their upper-level work across the college; students' oral proficiencies via their presentations at our Academic Festival; and the most elusive of all, students' critical thinking in their work as seniors. We also continued to lay extensive groundwork for assessments: for example, since four years ago, every course submitted to the Curriculum Committee for approval must articulate goals for student learning on the syllabus; and our new First-Year Experience program's Scribner Seminars all list the program's learning goals on their syllabus and will take part in the general assessment of students' learning in the seminars. Concomitantly, we have continued to develop and strengthen our departmental assessments, and to make use of that information in planning and curricular change.

We have always encouraged departments to use the assessment tools that are most appropriate to their disciplines and persuasive for their faculty. At the same time, we have urged them to develop new processes, pose new questions, and make increasing uses in particular of direct assessment of student learning. Some faculty continue steadfastly to resist doing assessment work, though as of this summer we now have feasible assessment plans in place in every department and some assessment taking place regularly in all but two departments. A somewhat later project has been to develop and implement assessment plans in every interdisciplinary program; most of these have now emerged as well, and some of our strongest assessment work is being done among them.

The challenges to assessment from the faculty are several; some resist what they see as an imbalance in attending exclusively to students rather than seeing the academy as a fabric of engaged intellectual relationships, and some grow out of the difficulty of finding time in an already overburdened schedule. More thoughtful challenges have emerged in our collective discussions, most often in Academic Staff among chairs and directors. Some faculty resist what they see as the imposition of a rubric between them and their students' work. They believe, in other words, that if we teach to a rubric or a narrow set of objectives, we define learning in advance too narrowly and eliminate a rich and important space for discovery and surprise. We have tried to counter this argument with materials

from Grant Wiggins, who proposes using the best student work as a model from which to derive a rubric. The kinds of discovery, surprise, creativity, or unorthodoxy that some of us may value in our best students' work can be alluded to in a rubric, just as we hold them in our minds as values when we read and evaluate individual students' work.

Other faculty argue that assessment attempts to quantify matters that are qualitative and should not be quantified. Thus, for example, in some disciplines students must test the limits of what they can do or know and experience failure along the way to their best work. How can that failure possibly be assessed by any normative process? These same faculty, however, assign grades to student work. A failing grade is a failing grade, whether or not it is a helpful step along the way to greater achievement—which in turn is measured by a higher grade. If a faculty member values student work that fails as part of the process of learning, it is not only possible to identify and assess "useful" failures (as opposed to derailing failures), it could be quite fascinating to do so.

These arguments and resistance have occurred less and less frequently over the past two years. Increasingly, respected faculty have found their assessments tell them things about their students that surprise them, or things that they find useful as they shape new curricula or make the case for new resources. And some departments and programs have become fully committed to a cycle of assessment and planning. Faculty are increasingly drawing the connection between holding to high standards for their students and considering the evidence of the results. For example:

- When Biology completely overhauled their curriculum two years ago, they started with questions about what they want their students to learn, how they best learn it, and how to sequence it. Their curriculum proposal consisted of a complete vision of student learning in Biology, with new goals articulated for each course and course level, and with plans for assessing student work throughout the curriculum. For example, after assessing their students' degree of preparation for advanced work, they revised their introductory courses so they can engage students in connected exploration of community, organismic, cellular, and molecular aspects of living organisms, and prepare them for all four paths of investigation in upper-level courses and in collaborative research. The department's work includes assessing student written and oral proficiencies in the major, with improving writing and oral communication one goal of their curricular reform.

- When History faculty gathered to assess their seniors' work in their capstone research projects, they grudgingly admitted to each other that the students were not doing sophisticated research at the level they expected. Addressing that problem meant going back to their gateway course and other lower-level courses in the major and building in research in a more carefully staged way.

- When Mathematics and Computer Science designed their senior exit interviews, they included one question (Who is your favorite mathematician, and why?) that enabled a form of direct assessment: as the students answer this question, they are being assessed on their oral delivery and clarity conveying complex mathematical

concepts simply and directly. One of this department's goals for their students is that by the time they graduate they appreciate the beauty of mathematics; this appreciation, too, can be assessed directly during the exit interview. On a more quantitative level, Mathematics faculty have developed and revised a mid-level course (MC 215) in response to students' need to learn methods of proof for more effective work in upper-level courses; and they have revised their Calculus offerings to meet in a more differentiated way the varied levels of student preparation and competencies.

- The Department of Foreign Languages, using detailed rubrics for both written and oral competencies, regularly assesses its students' learning in each language section, with the result that they have repeatedly revised the curriculum in order better to meet the students' needs for clear sequencing and expectations.

These are just a few examples of much effective and useful assessment work being done throughout the departments.

Departments use a number of different assessment tools. All quotations in the passages that follow are from departments' 2004-05 annual reports to the Dean of the Faculty; I have also drawn on more informal communications from chairs.

Senior exit interviews

Most departments interview or survey their graduating seniors about their learning in the major and make use of this information in their planning. In the example quoted above, Mathematics and Computer Science also uses the exit interview as an opportunity to do direct assessment of student competencies. Some departments have not found the exit interviews to be particularly helpful or revelatory; some have found it difficult to get students to participate. Others, however, have directed pointed questions at their majors and have made significant changes in the curriculum in response to what they've learned. Theater, for example, learned that their students wanted to learn from a wider variety of directors with more varied directing styles and techniques; they consequently increased artists' residencies for guest artists. Seniors had also asked for more practical preparation for a career in the professional theater; the department created a new Senior Seminar that complements the performance courses with issues and strategies related to the profession in theater, film and television. American Studies has been doing senior exit interviews for some years and adjusting classroom pedagogies in response to what their students have told them about what works in the classroom and what does not. And Environmental Studies faculty learned that students do not always retain information about careers or designing their majors when it is told to them; they have also learned that their students need and want more upper-level Environmental Studies courses, so that has become a goal of the program.

Perhaps uniquely, Sociology engages its own students in doing qualitative interviews of graduating senior majors and reporting on the results. The student researchers identified

dominant themes, including the need for a new faculty line in the department in order to address enrollment pressures and diversify offerings.

These are just a few examples of the many kinds of useful feedback departments and programs have gathered from their students.

Alumni surveys

Some departments have said that their seniors' responses seemed incomplete, so they have sought further information from their graduates. Alumni have in some cases provided a rich body of information about outcomes of the major. American Studies compiles on its website, accessible to all, notes from alumni about their careers and their connections to American Studies; it is fascinating reading even for someone outside the department, and is certainly a source of ideas for students who are imagining their own career paths and the roles their work in the major might play in them. At the other end of the spectrum, the Government Department in spring 2005 designed a web-based alumni survey that they are currently implementing: it asks, for example, "Which features of the Government Department made the largest contribution(s) to your professional and/or personal development? (Coursework, internships, independent studies or independent research, faculty advising, other)." And: "What skills did the Government major help you to develop? (The ability to think analytically about political issues and problems, the ability to read carefully, the ability to write clear, grammatical prose, the ability to construct cogent, persuasive arguments, the ability to conduct research)."

With the resources of the Mellon grant for undergraduate communities, departments are expanding contacts with their alumni and enlarging the conversations with students about possible career outcomes and their connections to the students' learning in the major. Multiple departments have held Mellon-funded panels with the theme of "Living the Liberal Arts," for which they bring back alumni and hold discussions with current students and faculty. American Studies, for example, held such a panel:

> Each panelist answered a series of questions regarding how their major related to the path they've followed, how they got their jobs, what graduate education was required, what might be some of the next career steps for someone in their jobs, what talents, personality traits and specific skills help people in this field, what they like and dislike about their job, the biggest misconception about their jobs, and what they know now that they wish they had known when they were at Skidmore. ... A brochure ...circulated to the audience included a listing of American Studies alumni who are career advisors; majors or careers which relate to American Studies; additional jobs held by American Studies graduates; professional associations, grants, awards and scholarships; American Studies programs on the web; a list of what employers want from college graduates; a listing of some internships; and online employment listings, networks and prospective resources for American Studies majors.

Although this panel and the others like it are not principally assessment activities, they provide a valuable complement in the ways they both gather outcomes information from alumni who participate and also encourage current students to begin their own internal self-assessments and planning for their own outcomes.

Direct assessments: quantitative

All departments have been urged over the past two years to do some form of direct assessment of student learning. Three are now using quantitative instruments designed within their disciplines: Chemistry; Physics; and Management and Business. The results have been quite interesting to the faculty. Physics reports:

> The results are analyzed using the so-called Hake score, a normalized measure of gain. That is, one calculates the increase in the number of correct answers for each student and divides by the possible gain (29 [the total number of questions] minus the initial number of correct answers). Extensive data analysis by a number of physics education researchers has shown that traditional physics lectures produce an average normalized gain, <g>, of 0.23, statistically independent of instructor, type of institution, and class size. The average normalized gain for instruction in mechanics that uses "interactive engagement" (guided activities, hands-on demonstrations, group problem-solving, etc.), in at least partial substitution for lecturing exclusively, is 0.48. In other words, the latter method for learning mechanics leads on average to about twice the normalized gain to be expected using the traditional method. For our mechanics course, <g>=0.46, indicating that our version of interactive engagement is producing the desired results.

Thus the information gathered about their students' learning from the FCI has helped them to assess the effectiveness of their adjustments in pedagogies. Their report goes on to say, "[W]e believe that we can do somewhat better than this..." and describes the plan to increase the number of formal labs this fall and review the data subsequently. Similarly, Chemistry is pleased with their results from the American Chemical Society instrument, but aims to improve them further. Management and Business obtained differentiated results on the measure that they used, enabling them to target specific student populations for support as well as specific sub-disciplines for curricular development. The results show, as the chair reports, "Overall, our students scored in the 80th percentile relative to the other institutions (469) administering the exam." Across the various subdisciplines, there was considerable variation, from scores in the 95th percentile to the 65th percentile, with a spread of scores in between. These data will of course be useful to the extent the department can draw reasonable connections between the outcomes and the curriculum and pedagogies in these areas.

Direct assessments: capstones

Departments use a number of different qualitative instruments to assess student learning directly. Perhaps most pervasive is the collective assessment of student work in the

capstone experience or other similarly public presentation. Departments such as Music, Theater, Dance and Art have long relied on the students' performances as a moment to assess not only individual but also aggregated achievements in the discipline, and they now formalize those regular faculty discussions with rubrics, summaries or direct consideration of curricular change. Other departments, too, formalize the collective discussion of students' capstone work as an assessment process. For example, Exercise Science has long assessed its seniors' theses in the aggregate, collecting electronic copies of them and, more recently, of students' Power Point presentations as well for assessment purposes. They have reviewed their evaluation rubrics and refined them for both the thesis and the oral presentation. Partly as a consequence of this work, they write,

> Although we are confident that the senior thesis is an appropriate way to evaluate overall learning in the major, it has become clear that we would benefit from having points before the senior thesis where we specifically evaluated a student's ability to perform discrete tasks essential to completing the thesis (i.e., writing an abstract of research, writing a research question, writing a hypothesis, performing statistical analyses, preparing an abstract, presenting data graphically, etc.). When we first began our discussions about assessment the Exercise Science faculty developed a grid to track which courses introduced our students to important skills (critiquing articles, preparing abstracts, fluency with various technologies, etc.). We plan to revisit that conversation and better define the components necessary to meet our overall learning outcome of "Designing and implementing a research study and convey the results appropriately," and more clearly delineate where (in which courses) these desired outcomes are achieved.

Thus the department has drawn a kind of hermeneutic circle: looking at their capstones, they find themselves returning to their introductory and mid-level courses and goals before returning to the overall learning outcomes.

Similarly, American Studies reads and discusses all senior seminar projects as a department and requires all senior honors thesis students to present their work publicly at Academic Festival. Environmental Studies discusses the capstones annually and has worked regularly to increase methodological rigor in the projects; this year they agreed that the quality of the work had improved markedly, and that they need to allow students more time to explore the connections among their projects when they present them to each other. Their discussion included developing a list of ways further to improve the quality of the capstone experience, such as developing a regular interdisciplinary methods course for the fall of senior year, or, alternatively, adding individual workshops with faculty from different disciplines to discuss methodological designs, data collection and data interpretation; increasing the role of Steering Committee members as formal consultants on projects; and developing activities throughout the ES curriculum designed to advance students' research skills. In direct response to the assessments, the faculty decided to add collaborative research presentations to ES 100, the foundation course.

Similarly, Sociology faculty met to discuss papers representing a range of performance in senior seminar to determine how well the papers demonstrated an understanding of

sociological methods. They reported, "In general, students succeeded in achieving our methodological goals," but also recommended changes to strengthen "an already effective program." The recommendations included developing data sets for students to choose from, developing specific skills in SO 227/Social Research Design, revising certain learning goals for the program, and developing students' skills in evaluating previous research findings and identifying more salient results of statistical analysis. These suggestions were implemented in SO 227.

One final example: the Government department completed an assessment of honors in the discipline and determined that their current requirements were not sufficiently rigorous. The department considered a group of papers collected over several years and noted that too few students understood the difference between primary and secondary sources, for example, and that many could not even generate a clear hypothesis. These problems really only came to light, they report, when the department began to look at the students' work in the aggregate. The department then constructed a new set of requirements for Honors as part of a two-year pilot project.

Direct assessments of work throughout the major

Some departments conduct direct assessments of student work outside of the capstones. For example, Art History has long done rigorous assessments of student writing in the major and has repeatedly made changes in its curriculum to increase the role of writing instruction and to challenge their students to improve their writing further. The department devoted one of its assessment meetings this past year to considering together a batch of student papers selected for quality (poor and excellent) from all levels of course offerings. The English Department's work in assessment looked directly at student papers in the majors' introductory genre courses to determine the strengths and weakness of the students' work, although so many non-majors enroll in those courses it proved difficult to draw any conclusions for the major per se. Government's ambitious assessment plan includes regular direct assessment of student papers written in courses at each of the three levels; the learning goals state, for example, that students in 100-level courses should be able to "1) Think analytically and critically about political issues; 2) Develop competence in the four sub-fields of political science; 3) Craft cogent, persuasive arguments in lucid grammatical prose." Other departments' goals are elaborated in similar detail.

Portfolios

Several departments and programs require portfolios of their students and make use of them for assessment and students' self-assessments; more are considering them. For example, Art History this spring "examined 20 graduating senior portfolios which included a two to three page self-assessment by each student" on "art history experiences, including coursework, internships, travel abroad, languages," and any work relevant to the major. Anthropology faculty also considered student portfolios of written work and determined: "Student portfolios demonstrated strong writing and analytical skills.

Students' reflective essays noted the importance of learning writing in the major. Faculty agreed to continue monitoringi the place of writing in the major." (Anthropology faculty's plans for assessment for this academic year extend to study abroad and introductory courses, with further consideration of writing in the major.) Classics has used a portfolio assessment in their major for some years; they use a rubric to assess students' work annually, determining that their majors can read Greek and Latin, analyze texts, identify and assess artifacts, read and analyze historic documents, conduct research, present oral and written arguments, develop multi- and cross-cultural perspectives, and assess and present scholarship and apply theory. And Education has long used an elaborate portfolio system for both assessment and self-assessment of student work in the major.

E-portfolios

The Honors Forum in 2004-05 launched an e-portfolio for Forum students to store and reflect on their work over four years at Skidmore; this followed upon an earlier pilot (2003) in Liberal Studies 1: Human Dilemmas. Honors Forum students must use their e-portfolios during their annual re-application process as they reflect on how the Forum is integrated in their academic and intellectual life. The new First-Year Experience also incorporates a *Reflection and Projection* (RAP) project that builds on the Human Dilemmas e-portfolio. We have undertaken these pilot projects with locally-created web-based portfolios in order to get a better sense of how these work in action. We are in the process of reviewing software and determining which features are most important for us over the longer term. Several meetings of the Information Resources Council have been dedicated to college-wide discussions aiming to narrow and prioritize the list of features we seek. The two primary goals of the student e-portfolios are self-assessment and assessment; options for career services are also a goal. So far the interest in e-portfolios comes from these programs rather than departments, but it seems likely that some departments will quickly move from paper to online portfolios for their students, and others seem willing to make use of them as well. We have also established, with some success, electronic depositories for student papers, so as to enable quick and easy direct collection of aggregated student work for assessment purposes.

Mixed assessments

Psychology may be typical in one assessment project in which they considered student writing within the discipline. They sought and obtained the NSSE research data for their own majors, and analyzed it collectively; they also added questions about writing to their own senior survey and interviews. They reported, candidly:

> Not surprisingly, the subset from the NSSE Survey did not differ substantially from the profile for the Skidmore sample as a whole. If one uses time as an index of commitment, our majors are no more invested in their work than their fellow students in other majors. Students did not report completing a lot of writing for individual courses within the major ... These kinds of remarks were unexpected

given the number and kinds of writing assignments that we incorporate in our courses.

Unsettled by these data, the department held a second meeting to discuss writing assignments, and shared representative samples of their assignments, including goals that guided their design. It seems to have been a remarkable meeting. The chair writes:

> The discussion was fruitful for many reasons. Learning more about each other's writing assignments led to some intriguing discussions about the ways in which we are realizing our goals (by way of these assignments). Furthermore, inspired by the creative efforts of our colleagues, some of us left the meeting with new ideas for our own curricular developments.

The chair goes on to summarize rather puzzling results from the senior interviews about their own writing; many students seem to have felt that though their writing in the major improved substantially, they believed that they were not better writers more generally: "Apparently, from their perspectives, 'science writing' can ruin 'real' writing even when it's done well. ... At the very least, these kinds of remarks gave us pause about the notion that all instruction in writing is (or should be) discipline specific." It would be interesting to learn whether the faculty would come to the same conclusions as the students if they were to consider a batch of mixed portfolios of their students' writing, both in the major and outside of it.

Future work in assessment

The Assessment Task Force that has just been formed will be charged with overseeing the departmental assessments as well as our attempts to gauge student learning in the general education curriculum. As the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning reconsiders our writing requirement this year, surely further direct assessment of student writing will complement and contribute to that project. The Middle States Self-study, focused on student engagement, has prompted some faculty to ask for further assessment of student learning during study abroad, within some interdisciplinary programs, and within the natural sciences. That self-study does not come to terms with a way to assess student engagement in the way we are defining it, which goes beyond the quantitative measurement of behavioral features that NSSE relies on; we may wish to try to assess student engagement more extensively, or to refine our understanding of the interconnections between engagement and learning.

We do expect that within a short time, all of our departments and programs will be conducting regular direct assessments of student work as a complement to the indirect assessments that are currently used throughout the college. Our hope is that these discussions of what our students are learning and doing, done well and rigorously, will help us understand just what we must do to ensure that all of our students are meeting our minimal goals for them, and many of them learning and achieving much more.

APPENDIX G

Skidmore College
Academic Vision Statement, 2003-2004

Preamble

The articulation of an academic vision statement constitutes a reasonable follow-up to the College's endorsement of The Plan for Skidmore: Excellence and Community (May 2002). Such a statement will both clarify and substantiate the primacy of Skidmore's academic mission as stated in our catalog:

> The College seeks to prepare liberally educated graduates to continue their quest for knowledge and to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens.

While Skidmore has long pursued such a goal with notable success, it has not, heretofore, expressly outlined an overarching view that enunciates the core intellectual principles we as an academic community of teachers and scholars wish to embrace. We need to make our intent more explicit. We need clarity in guiding us as we plan our future. Moreover, in imagining that future, an academic vision statement should be bold enough to dream. It should define not only who we are, but contemplate who we hope to become. We should begin with the premise that our work is both solemn and joyous, and that we as a faculty are not only instructors of specific disciplinary material, but also more broadly the agents of change. We must impart the beauty of inquiry to our students while teaching them to understand both the exhilaration of learning and the responsibilities that accompany the power of knowledge.

It is a propitious time to define our identity and our aspirations more clearly. Not only does the inauguration of our new President afford the opportunity to set sail on a new era, but the College is embarking upon its second century. Timely as well, we are also about to launch a critically important capital campaign. The Plan for Skidmore enumerates many urgent academic needs that are costly, including the addition of several faculty lines, new physical facilities that will support our work, and an increase in resources for faculty development. Without such supplemental assistance, we severely diminish our ability to ensure the education of our students-a broadly based education that will continually widen in keeping pace with the rapidly changing and expanding horizons of the new century.

We also need to proclaim our deep belief that as the new century takes hold-with all of its concomitant conflicts and challenges-such a broadly based education offers distinct and powerful advantages over the more concentrated training of career-oriented degrees. The education we offer provides bedrock virtues that will serve our students well as they negotiate the challenges and tribulations that will surely confront them long after they leave Skidmore. It is an education that will inform and energize their lives regardless of the career path they choose to pursue. It is an education that instills flexibility and intellectual agility; hones lifelong learning skills that prepare one to engage the world in responding rather than reacting to its ever-evolving issues; inculcates a taste for interrogation and genuine criticism; venerates the power of reasoned argument in arriving at the conviction of one's beliefs;

enriches our lives by sensitizing us to the intricate workings of our complex world; and prepares our students most ably for virtually any career, rather than a single one. In providing such an education, we need to detail our guiding educational principles as precisely and as persuasively as we can. Otherwise, we have little chance of justifying our needs to external constituencies who want and deserve a thoughtful explication of our purpose as educators. Even more compelling, it is essential to articulate these principles for ourselves, so that we can establish a better sense of our own agreed upon direction as an academic institution.

A Vision Statement (with the apropos acronym, VISTA) should illuminate an educational pathway for our students. It should provide a passport into the life of the mind, all the while nurturing a growing taste for curiosity. It will furnish in very specific and clearly delineated ways, the requisite tools to develop a progressively sophisticated sense of discernment and inquiry. And above all else, this four-year, student-centered journey must be transformative. Such a transformation will undoubtedly evolve at different rates and in a variety of ways. At times, this journey might take the form of paradigm shifts or other ostensibly sudden leaps. At other moments, it will unfold more methodically and perhaps without an awareness that a subtler metamorphosis is at work. But one way or another, through whatever means necessary, this journey will command deep, fundamental changes in the way we learn to understand issues and untangle problems. We must agree that transformation will be the cornerstone of our vision.

A Skidmore education should enable our students to think differently about the nature of the world. It will prepare them to deal effectively with an array of emerging issues, challenges and dilemma. During that relatively brief time between matriculation and graduation, the education we offer needs to provide the wherewithal to help develop nimble minds in cultivating an intellectual acuity capable of making informed decisions. In this sense, we must convince our students that they are obligated to investigate ambiguities and complexities and to formulate solutions imaginatively. We as a faculty must persuade them that creative thought matters in accomplishing nothing short of changing the world. If we cannot accomplish this, then we should be prepared to admit that we have been less than successful. Therefore, in adopting the underlying principles of our academic vision, we need to hold both our students and ourselves accountable.

In examining our current curriculum, the Committee on Educational Policies and Planning began by thoroughly vetting our existing foundation and breadth requirements. With the exception of revisiting the basic concept of a common first-year seminar experience, we recommend no other substantive changes in our general education experience. In fact, CEPP concluded that much that we do at the College in delivering the various elements of our curriculum remains cogent. CEPP feels that many of the difficult curricular decisions we as a community have faced over the last decade were on target and do not demand rehearsing. So while we are not contemplating any dramatic alteration in the overall framing of the curriculum, the vision statement does focus squarely upon casting in a sharper light those fundamental, overarching educational objectives for which we shall continue to strive. While our curriculum currently represents a very effective mode of delivery towards realizing certain goals, we have been somewhat negligent in articulating those goals with assuredness and clarity. Therefore, while we need not dwell upon constructing a new rationale for most of the existing individual aspects of our curriculum, we can do a better job in speaking more forcefully to the curriculum's wider coherence.

This coherence will be built upon the strength of four fundamental pillars intended to provide the structural foundation of our vision: Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration. Each is detailed in the following pages. Collectively, these four components will furnish a broadly based educational integrity to all that we do as an academic community. As such, it becomes incumbent upon us to make these pillars an ubiquitous and dynamic presence in a student's thinking at every reasonable opportunity. The discrete content and methodologies imparted in our individual course offerings-valuable as they certainly are on their own merits, and ranging across all disciplines-must find a more encompassing unity in constantly referencing these broader pillars. Broadly too, we as a community should be prepared to remake ourselves by adopting several important cultural changes. Such changes will better assure the success of Skidmore's academic vision.

For example, there must be an increased emphasis on and dedication to the genuine mentoring of our students. We need to accept our roles as counselors, just as our students need to learn to tap our collective experiences as a faculty. Accordingly, we will find the means needed to facilitate these dialogues, including more one-on-one interactions in our offices and a greater presence in the important co-curricular activities of our students. We should also become more willing to confront students who are not motivated to perform up to their intellectual potential. Establishing a higher degree of academic excellence will demand an increased sense of responsibility for both faculty and students. Moreover, it will demand both our courage and flexibility in becoming much more vigilant about learning outcomes. We should be willing to assess constantly how effective our efforts are in attempting to raise our standards. There must be a clear recognition and acceptance that assessment and excellence are full partners. And we must remain willing to make whatever modifications are required to strengthen the academic tone and character of the campus.

This tone should immediately become unmistakably evident to our first-year students. Commencing with as compelling and integrative a first-year experience as we can imagine, we shall be intentional in impressing upon our newest students our readiness to challenge their abilities in helping them to understand and realize their promise. That intention will be greatly deepened and most fully realized if we directly match mentoring and instruction at this early but already pivotal moment. Teachers of the first-year gateway course will thus be better positioned to interact with their students both within and beyond the classroom, and as frequently as possible. Given that we propose to invest a great deal of energy and time into this faculty/student relationship, we should be prepared to assess its effectiveness-just as we should also be prepared to provide the incentives needed, in terms of support, for this relationship to succeed. Virtually every piece of data on the national academic landscape confirms that the first-year experience is profoundly formative. We need to seize this shaping moment. Our resolve must be strategic, widely endorsed, and unrelenting. Importantly too, we must enfold all four "C's" into a gateway course that continues to incorporate the interdisciplinary virtues of our LS 1 and 2 courses. We continue to believe that an interdisciplinary perspective provides an important hallmark for our community. Such an indispensable perspective demands that all of us think broadly in making connections across borders. As detailed in Part 3 of this document, CEPP will propose the integration of the proven virtues of both our LS 1 and LS 2 courses into this single, focused gateway experience.

Issues of social responsibility should also be raised as a widely shared concern, and faculty must engage fully in that conversation. Moreover, we need to see ourselves increasingly not

only as citizens of Skidmore and Saratoga, but also as citizens of a global community. Nationwide, and over the last five years alone, study abroad at other institutions has increased 61%. In the service of diversity as broadly defined, and especially in a concerted, serious commitment to shun parochialism of any kind, our concept of citizenship must take on a global perspective. As such, we shall support initiatives to internationalize our curriculum and our students' experiences. As every other campus widens its lens, we too must widen ours. Service learning embodies the spirit of citizenship as well, and here too we need to take deliberate, purposeful action to engage students more fully in meaningful community interactions. The unifying key in all of these initiatives, whether local or global, is a deeper sense of direct involvement that will lead to a more informed, inclusive, and responsible citizenry.

An academic vision must also address the ever-evolving climate of institutional priorities. For example, while Athletics will continue to play a vital role in our future, we also need to enfold wellness more directly as part of the more closely integrated mind/body synergy. The Arts and Humanities, long venerated as perhaps our most conspicuous strengths to the outside world, must retain their vigor and well-deserved visibility. Yet we should endeavor to offer increased support to other foundational disciplines in the liberal arts, especially the sciences. We should aspire to a balanced curriculum of all the liberal arts and, in achieving that balance, we need to attract more talented students in the sciences, especially by strengthening and supporting our emerging interdisciplinary science education programs. Finally, we need to reconsider our current conception of our pre-professional programs. In so many pioneering ways, Skidmore has long remained in the forefront, and well ahead of the "mind and hand" curve that other institutions are only now embracing as an appropriate model. These programs are part of our tradition and a signature aspect of our institutional identity. Nonetheless, we must think of ways to incorporate these disciplines more directly into our vision. How will they address the fundamental principles we would espouse, such as the four "C's," in delivering these broader virtues along with the more specific requirements of their programs? They should not have to run the risk of residing on the periphery of our thinking. We simply need to rethink their role as part of our broad educational mission.

Any vision statement, regardless of how far reaching and well intended it might be, will in retrospect appear disappointingly myopic if it fails to consider some hard realities from the start. Indeed, if Skidmore's VISTA does not have the required underpinnings of full financial support, it will be severely compromised. Inevitably then, difficult choices must be made in identifying priorities-priorities that we can focus upon intellectually. Too often, it seems, we are forced to make financial concessions simply to make do, to live to fight another day. Making such choices, frankly, has not been our strength. And in the absence of an overarching strategic plan, there hasn't been a pressing need to do so. Consequently, our academic choices sometimes have seemed more reactive than genuinely strategic, doing little more than hastily addressing the financial exigencies that regularly arise from one fiscal crisis to the next. It may well be that we will have to do less, but that as a consequence we will be able to do things better. The choices we will make will take many forms. They will help guide us in directing our campaign efforts so that we can secure the added means needed to develop and advance our vision. They will demand that we internally reallocate resources as we balance our fiscal responsibility with the sustenance of programs we wish to grow. And perhaps most importantly, our choices must allow us to regain a sense of equilibrium, a much-needed communal stability in knowing that we can truly plan our educational initiatives in an informed and reliable way. CEPP and the Dean of the Faculty

will work together in envisaging an invigorating, intellectually meaningful, and fiscally responsible plan to guide us in the future. The pages that follow outline the beginnings of what we think that future might be.

Edited 31 August, 2003

Skidmore College
Academic Vision Statement, 2004

Vision Components

Revision: 6 February 2004

The transformation of the Skidmore student is the goal of the entire community and resides fundamentally in the capacities to address issues and to describe solutions, to work independently and collaboratively, and to act responsibly. A flexible, inventive, and expressive mind enables the Skidmore student to take advantage of the opportunities she or he will encounter in a culturally rich and intellectually complex world. Successful Skidmore students develop abilities in four essential areas: Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration.

Critical Thinking

A Skidmore education is an interdisciplinary experience that both draws upon and combines the intellectual tools and ideas characteristic of four general areas of academic endeavor: the arts, the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences. Students must develop the abilities to conceptualize, to identify, to analyze, to evaluate, to synthesize, and to apply different kinds of often contradictory information in order to reach informed conclusions and to understand the positions of others. Moreover, understanding how different cultures reason will enable the Skidmore student to begin an intellectual dialogue with the world. Indeed, the components of this vision rely upon an interdisciplinary and intercultural integration of critical thinking skills, whether in effective expression, the capacity to "identify, analyze, and act upon social issues" (Mission Statement), or the ability to learn from one another.

Communication

Skidmore students must communicate effectively through oral, written, and other expressive modes, in the vernacular and scholarly discourse of one's own culture as well as in at least that of one other culture. If students are to discover and to assess new areas of knowledge, to consider issues and situations from various perspectives, and to articulate ideas and positions with confidence and authority, then they need to engage in the joy of expression in every class. Students must develop their critical skills of perception (e.g., reading and listening abilities) both within their major and across disciplines. Moreover, effective communication in local and global spheres contributes to self-awareness and empowers students to co-exist with and to respect others different from themselves.

Citizenship

Skidmore students and faculty pursue both local and global responsibilities in a culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse community and demonstrate leadership both on and off

campus. The symbiotic relationship serves as an engaging microcosm of the world that students will enter upon graduation. We embrace difference in a diverse population of talented students, faculty, administrators, and staff, reflecting our regional, national, and international aspirations as we foster civic engagement both locally and globally. Our integrated residential life, campus governance system, curricular, and co-curricular life complements our reputation as a portal to the world. Furthermore, our principled intellectual excellence and leadership attracts an increasingly well-qualified and ambitious community of scholars who embrace change as part of a successful educational strategy.

Collaboration

Skidmore students and faculty must foster shared purpose in their peer-to-peer and mentor-to-peer engagements. Student-faculty collaborations are particularly valuable whether in the pursuit of independent studies, collaborative research projects, joint performances, and/or senior theses. Students collaborate with each other, with faculty, between students and with members of the larger community both in and beyond the classroom. Student-faculty collaborations draw upon the scholarly interests of the faculty and unleash the educational potential of co-curricular involvements. Mentoring promotes successful habits of mind and attracts and retains the students and faculty who can help us to excel as a nationally and internationally respected institution.

Skidmore College
Academic Vision Statement, 2003-2004

Recommendations

CEPP sees the following topics as areas for discussion and development: the current core requirements (Breadth, Expository Writing, Quantitative Reasoning, Cultural Difference, and Liberal Studies), Advising-Mentoring, Global Skidmore (Study Abroad, Global Studies Coordination, Global-local Integration, and Diversity), Excellence, Faculty Development, and Student Development.

If we accept the four Vision Components (Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration) as encompassing the principles underlying the formation of our identity, then we need to establish what the characteristics of that identity are. Our vision components are consonant with the basic values of a liberal-arts education. Once we agree upon our educational values, we believe this community should creatively imagine how students can transform themselves while on their distinctly Skidmore journeys.

For most of the areas below (unless otherwise noted), CEPP recommends appointing subcommittees to collect data and ideas from the community to create Skidmore responses to these recommendations. Reports from most of these subcommittees should be complete by the fall of 2005. In some cases, individuals and offices are already working on problems and are developing strategies. Some issues demand immediate attention. Notably, the relationship between the first-year experience, advising, Liberal Studies, and the Vision Components should be the first item for discussion. These discussions should begin this fall.

Breadth

Retain and strengthen our current "breadth" model of arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences.

Rationale: The common divisions of academic discourse not only reflect ways of categorizing knowledge, but also group the kinds of critical thinking in which we engage. Graduates must be able to draw upon several different disciplines in their reasoning. A student completing a course in any of these categories should be able to employ methodologies characteristic of a discipline within that division to demonstrate that they can understand and explain ideas. The problem we face is that a single course in any breadth area does not adequately prepare a student to think in that mode. How do we bring depth to the breadth requirement without overloading the core requirements?

Expository Writing (-Oral Presentation) Requirement

Retain and strengthen. Students must be able to demonstrate successful writing and oral presentation skills not only within their discipline, but across disciplines. In the context of

capstone seminars and/or presentations in the major, they need to demonstrate the ability to communicate their work verbally at the advanced level. How do we implement the notion of "writing across the curriculum"?

Rationale: Verbal (written and oral) communication is perhaps the most important way students demonstrate their ability to think critically. Students must engage in clear, precise, and logical writing and speaking in every department and program. The Expository Writing requirement asks students to demonstrate the ability to compose in coherent and sophisticated English written work of a complex nature, based upon the development of a thesis and supported with evidence. In electives and major courses at all levels, students must hone these written skills and develop oral capacities as well, learning to stake out positions in public dialogue and debate and present the results of their research. Students must be able to demonstrate in assignments, classroom discussions and presentations, both in the major and in electives, the ability to read critically and listen thoughtfully. How do we implement expectations of sophisticated writing in the majority of our classes, not just a select few?

Quantitative Reasoning

Retain and strengthen. Students must demonstrate an ability to understand and describe quantitative data. "Quantitative reasoning is the basic language of the sciences and, like expository writing, is itself a medium for intellectual discovery" (Skidmore resolution, approved 8 April 1983). We need to recognize the importance of quantitative reasoning (and the sciences) in a liberal-arts education and find ways to integrate these into courses across campus.

Rationale: The abilities to quantify and to calculate are perhaps the most fundamental examples of what we mean when we talk about critical thinking; however, like writing, we need to find ways of extending the QR across the curriculum. A graduate should be able to apply quantitative reasoning skills in a wide range of contexts in order to better understand that information. Moreover, the sciences (and quantitative reasoning) have come to play a role in almost every discipline. How do we recognize the growing importance of the sciences in the lives of our students and disciplines?

Cultural Difference

Retain and strengthen. Students must demonstrate the ability to understand how a culture other than their own reasons about some realm of human endeavor. The Foreign Language requirement immerses students in a foreign culture through the medium of its language and the study of the cultural context within which it exists. The Non-Western Culture or Cultural Diversity requirement must ask students both to demonstrate that they understand the role that culture plays in decision making and to do so in specific cultural contexts outside their own cultural milieu.

Rationale: The College has made progress in its effort to advance diversity; now it needs to marshal its resources to make respect for cultural difference a hallmark of a Skidmore education. If culture defines us as humans, then understanding the ways in which cultures reason is a special kind of critical thinking of significant importance for a successful graduate. Courses in non-Western culture, for example, should explore how these cultures

think critically about their worlds.

Liberal Studies

Combine the two semesters of Liberal Studies into an enhanced single first-semester seminar. Whether a section retains the current form or has a faculty-devised subject that introduces students to a topic of special interest, this seminar must have the hallmarks of a Skidmore education: multiple critical-thinking approaches, oral and written communication, and independent and collaborative research, preparation, and presentation. Listening, reading, writing and speaking skills are all essential to the well-educated Skidmore student and need to receive repeated attention in the curriculum: the first-year experience - the Liberal Studies program - must emphasize all four skills. We should also find ways to link the initial advising and mentoring of students with this first-semester seminar. CEPP believes we should pursue solutions to these challenges for implementation in the fall of 2005.

Rationale: The interdisciplinary philosophy exhibited in LS has increasingly become de rigueur in much of our scholarship over the past twenty years and can serve as a wonderful way to engage students in how our fulltime faculty members employ critical thinking in their own research and writing. However, we need to find ways to bring our senior and fulltime faculty into this important course and into direct contact with first-year students. If this "experience" is a signature of Skidmore, why do adjunct instructors figure so prominently in its delivery? If this course is to function as an exciting introduction into higher education, we need to have our most experienced professors. Students should come away from these classes exhilarated.

Advising-Mentoring

Improve advising and mentoring - especially as these activities relate to planning an intellectual career at Skidmore and anticipating postgraduate plans. Establish a first-year advising relationship between students and the faculty members who lead the classes that first-year students take. (The most logical place for this is the first-year seminar, but other courses-especially gateway courses to majors-are also ideal places to launch this mentoring process. Skidmore may need to develop a way of rotating faculty through these courses and/or a mechanism for moving students on to other advisors.) Support opportunities for informal faculty-student dinners, departmental colloquia, etc. for broader communal mentoring.

Rationale: The student-faculty relationship is at the heart of the educational endeavor at Skidmore. Advising and mentoring stimulate student inquiry and structure student learning and are an extension of classroom teaching, a context wherein students make connections between their academic program and their life plans. Not only will better mentoring enhance the quality of the educational experience of students, but we will enhance our retention of our best students. The teacher-advisor has a much better idea of how a student is progressing than either an advisor or a teacher who has only one context of contact with a first-year student. Moreover, we need to find ways to get more first-year students into classes in areas in which they have interest. We believe that not only will these students have better initial experiences with the College, but they will have stronger long-term relationships with the institution. Finally, programs that structure discourse among faculty and students help to deepen relationships and extend learning beyond the classroom and

the four-year enrollment.

Global Skidmore

1. **Study Abroad**. Expand and enhance our study abroad programs.
   Rationale: Skidmore should become a portal to the world with students studying abroad whenever possible on our own programs. In addition to the courses students traditionally have taken in language, the humanities, and the arts, we need to find ways to expand their opportunities in areas such as the sciences and pre-professional programs.
2. **Global Studies Coordination**. Create mechanisms by which academic programs that promote engagement with world cultures (such as Asian Studies, International Affairs, and Latin American Studies) and campus offices connected with Skidmore's programs in diversity and internationalism (such as the Office of International Programs, the Director of Diversity, and the Intercultural Center) can coordinate their efforts. This could be part of the duties of an Intercultural Center Director (see below). [Meetings have already taken place between these program directors and more meetings are scheduled.]
   Rationale: Too often, these programs and offices work at odds with each other or, at best, independently. A twice-a-semester meeting of the heads of these entities would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts to integrate Skidmore's local and global initiatives. Through combined efforts, students would have greater opportunities to engage the world in informed contexts. The coordination must be equitable and flexible enough to allow initiative on the part of individual programs while encouraging them to cooperate.
3. **Global-Local Integration**. Institute an advisory committee to the Office of International Programs to coordinate and to facilitate co-curricular activities linked with study abroad programs.
   Rationale: We must integrate study abroad into on-campus curricular and co-curricular life in a structured and synthetic way to capitalize on and to reinforce the often-transformative experiences students undergo while immersed in other cultures. Students could hone their oral and written presentation skills through descriptions of their overseas study experiences. Moreover, we must explore ways in which Skidmore students can contribute in the contexts of their study abroad, either through internships and/or community service.
4. **Diversity**. Create a position with faculty status, housed within an academic department, which has broad responsibilities over diversity programming. Such a position could bring effective inter-cultural discourse to the College's curricular and co-curricular life and support the cultural diversity of our campus. [Discussions at the level of the Office of the President have already taken place.]
   Rationale: A Director of Intercultural Studies would highlight our commitment to a diverse campus through the promotion of interdisciplinary academic cooperation. This purpose of the position would be to expand and to enhance programs that bring diversity into our curriculum and onto our campus. Such programs would assist Skidmore in actively promoting the development of under-represented communities in academia. If a liberal-arts education is a building block of individual success, then we have a role to play in developing future generations of a diverse America.

Excellence

Coordinate, develop, and implement communal structures that reinforce and regularly review the quality of a Skidmore education.

Rationale: Perhaps one of the most important purposes of assessment is to determine the value of a Skidmore education. We have engaged in several conversations over the past decades about standards and expectations, each time developing ways to enhance academic rigor and to encourage excellence. Skidmore's efforts at rewarding our best students and encouraging the pursuit of excellence have resulted in three major organizations that recognize superior students: The Periclean Society, Phi Beta Kappa, and The Honors Forum. Moreover, the number of departmental awards and the number of students graduating honors has grown over the years. Does this dilute the value of these rewards? If Skidmore is to sustain the value of honors, then we need to examine the condition of our system. We propose that CEPP reconstitute the Committee on Academic Standings and Expectations to conduct a review and make recommendations.

Faculty Development

Continue to support and to encourage our exploration of pedagogical initiatives through which faculty continue to develop as scholar-educators. Encourage and support faculty to develop collaborative learning components in their courses. Foster faculty exchanges that will bring professionals from abroad to teach semester-long or shorter 1-credit courses and that send Skidmore faculty abroad to develop their expertise and experience.

Rationale: Professional development helps to inform Skidmore's faculty, including self-examining and re-imaging how we teach. If Skidmore faculty members are to consider how to expand implementation of critical thinking, expository writing, and/or quantitative reasoning into their classes, then they need assistance in the form of workshops and conferences. Without incentives, support, and rewards the traditional course is the pedagogical default. Faculty, especially younger faculty engaged in building a research agenda and record, need institutional support to invest in collaborative activities with small groups of students. Sending faculty abroad to teach and to foster institutional relationships is a proven development tool. Bringing faculty from abroad to campus both helps to cement our connections with the world while enhancing our international reputation.

Student Development

Retain and strengthen student opportunities for collaborative research, independent studies, tutorials, capstone projects and service learning opportunities.

Rationale: Skidmore embraces the teacher-scholar model of rigor and active learning. In collaborative research, independent studies, tutorials, and capstone projects students answer questions they develop and assume responsibility for answering those questions. Students working with faculty to create knowledge develop the habits of mind prized among Skidmore alumnae. In service learning, students connect classroom experience with community service and develop a sense of civic responsibility and a tolerance of difference while the college gains a valuable medium by which to engage the world. We should seek out internship opportunities both locally and wherever Skidmore has engagements in the world, as well as forging new relationships. Through internships, students apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in the classroom in a professional context, promoting

engagement and mastery in potential career contexts. Several innovative projects at Skidmore-the student cultures project, the law and society program's involvement in campus judicial affairs, and Expanding Horizons-creatively link the scholarly interests of the faculty and student co-curricular life. These projects are distinctive, creative efforts to exploit the educational power of co-curricular involvements.

Edited 31 August, 2003

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

National Survey of Student Engagement
NSSE – 2003
Skidmore College

Methodology & Demographic Characteristics

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is an annual survey of first-year and senior students at four-year colleges and universities throughout the U.S. The instrument measures the extent to which students take part in educational practices that research has shown to be strongly associated with quality learning and enhanced personal development. NSSE differs from other studies in that it places greater emphasis on student behaviors than student opinions. The five key concepts, or benchmark areas of effective educational practices, assessed by NSSE are Level of Academic Challenge, Active and Collaborative Learning, Student-Faculty Interactions, Enriching Educational Experiences, and Supportive Campus Environment. Designed by assessment specialists and administered by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research & Planning, long associated with the College Senior Survey (CSS), the results identify areas where colleges perform well and where improvements are needed.

NSSE was first administered nationally in 1999 and this year (2003) is the first time Skidmore participated. Equal samplings of both first-year (Class of 2006) and senior students (Class of 2003) were created to target 450 Skidmore students. These students were asked to complete the NSSE survey using a rigorous contact schedule:

- 01-30-2003 – IR email to first-year and senior lists informing students of survey
- 02-03-2003 – Students receive paper survey with web option
- 02-13-2003 – Postcard reminder sent to nonrespondents
- 03-21-2003 – IR email to first-year and senior lists informing students of second mailing
- 03-24-2003 – Second mailing with paper survey and web option sent to nonrespondents
- 04-09-2003 – IR email sent directly to nonrespondents
- 04-16-2003 – NSSE email to nonrespondents

The resulting response rate for Skidmore is 67% with an equal number of responses from first-year and senior students. A greater percentage of first-year students completed the survey on the web than seniors. Skidmore's response rate is significantly higher than that of all Baccalaureate – Liberal Arts schools (51%) and all 2003 participating institutions (43%). Responding students are quite representative of their corresponding classes by race/ethnicity, sex, and SAT with the exception of first-year male under representation (See Table I). The sampling methods and strict contact schedule ensured a representative response group thereby lending a high level of credibility to the findings.

This report uses the Baccalaureate – Liberal Arts Colleges (Bac-LA) as a primary comparative group. The participating institutions are diverse and include 81 liberal arts colleges. Only three of Skidmore's self-defined peer institutions (Vassar, Connecticut, and Franklin & Marshall) administered the survey. None of Skidmore's aspirant schools participated (See Appendix A). Significant differences between Skidmore and the Bac-LA group are identified using 2-tailed tests. Particular attention is given to effect size or the "practical significance," the mean difference divided by the Bac-LA comparison group standard deviation, to determine if an effect is small or large.

Preface

Given recent and upcoming campus-wide discussions regarding academic vision, rigor, and enhancing learning opportunities, the results of this survey come at an ideal time. There is a clear interest in the issues of academic rigor, learning modalities, and the educational experiences of our students by both faculty and administrators. These issues become even more important as the school charts a course for

the future. Questions often heard in committee, faculty meeting, and armchair conversations center on whether our students are capable of doing more than we currently ask of them.

- How does the level of academic rigor at Skidmore compare to that of similar institutions?
- What role should collaborative learning play in the curriculum?
- How can we foster enhanced student-faculty interaction both in and out of the classroom?
- What student skills and abilities should be augmented by the curriculum? When and How?
- How serious is the institution about providing a supportive environment that meets students' needs?

These are obviously complex questions that, in any attempt to answer, will undoubtedly raise further questions that no single survey can answer. Collectively, faculty members surely have much quantitative, qualitative, and anecdotal evidence to explore these topics with conviction. The findings presented here will enhance the community's understanding of accomplishments, but they will also present challenges, that when acted upon, may enhance learning and scholarship for all Skidmore students.

Table I: Comparison of Skidmore Population and Response Group.

	Total Population	Response Group
First-Year Students		
N	600	150
% Female*	60%	73%
% Nonwhite	15%	15%
SAT - mean	1247	1230
Senior Students		
N	530	148
% Female	59%	62%
% Nonwhite	13%	13%
SAT - mean	1199	1205

From the total populations, two samples of 225 students were drawn. The resulting response rates were 67% for First-Year Students, 66% for Seniors Students, and 67% overall.
*Significant (p<=.05)

Level of Academic Challenge

The NSSE instrument assesses academic challenge in several ways. Students are asked how much their coursework emphasized five mental activities during the past academic year. With the exception of rote memorization, the concepts of analyzing and synthesizing ideas, applying theory, and making judgments about the value of information closely align with the Educational Policy and Planning Committee's (CEPP) Critical Thinking cluster of the proposed academic vision statement. First-year students were on par with Bac-LA means with the exceptions of being slightly less likely to report "applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations (Very much; 29% v. 37%)" and the "memorization of facts, ideas, or methods (Very much; 53% v. 63%)." Encouraging results were obtained from seniors, as means equaled or exceeded those of the Bac-LA group. Skidmore seniors reported greater proficiency than the Bac-LA group in "analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory (Very much; 66% v. 52%)" and in "synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new more complex interpretations and relationships (Very much; 56% v. 44%)." The differences between the first-year and senior year are evident. Seniors do less memorizing and more of the mental processes (analyzing, synthesizing and organizing, applying theory, and making judgments about the validity of information) characteristic of a liberal arts education. The positive differences

between first-year and senior students were greater for Skidmore than the Bac-LA group for every mental activity measured.

First-year Skidmore students report they are less likely to "come to class without completing readings or assignments (Often or very often; 7% v. 16%)" but receive slightly fewer "assigned textbooks, books, or full-length packs of course readings (More than 20; 17% v. 25%)" than Bac-LA first-year students. First-year students report they write just as many papers, with usually none over 20 pages, as others Bac-LA colleges. Compared to Bac-LA seniors, Skidmore seniors write more papers that are fewer than 20 pages and an equal number that are 20 pages or more. While seniors appear to be doing more writing than the norm group, they also indicate they are slightly less likely than the Bac-LA group to "prepare two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in." Not surprisingly, Skidmore students, spend significantly less time on homework problem sets, items associated with typical science and math programs, than peers at Bac-LA colleges.

Serious engagement and time on task in academic endeavors beyond the classroom are clear expectations students must meet at the college level. Previous studies at Skidmore have shown that relatively few students meet the expectation of two hours of out-of-class work for every hour of instruction time. NSSE largely confirms those findings. The first-year student average does not differ significantly from the Bac-LA group; however, a greater number of first-year students report spending 21-25 hours per week preparing for class (23% Skidmore v. 13% Bac-LA) than those reporting 30 or more hours of preparation (3% Skidmore v. 7% Bac-LA). Skidmore seniors report more time on task (average of 16-20 hrs/wk) than both Bac-LA seniors and Skidmore first-year students. Nevertheless, nearly two-thirds of seniors spend 20 hours or less preparing for class (63 % Skidmore v. 71 % Bac-LA). While Skidmore students either equal or exceed Bac-LA norms for time on task, they certainly exceed the norms for time spent relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, exercising, etc.). One in four Skidmore students spend 21 or more hours per week relaxing and socializing, whereas only 1 in 6.5 Bac-LA students does so. All this extra free time might result from students reporting fewer hours working for pay and caring for dependents. Skidmore students generally report fewer hours working, on campus or off, than their peers. Given the traditional college age of Skidmore students, seniors also spend less time providing care for dependents living with them (parents, children, spouse, etc.).

Students may quickly recognize, and possibly conform to, the extent of the academic culture at their school. Faculty and administration may send very similar or even mixed messages about the academic climate. When asked if you "worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations," Skidmore students are no different from their peers. 56% of first-years and 61% of seniors did report working harder than expected "often" or "very often." However, Skidmore students were slightly less likely than Bac-LA students to report their exams have "challenged you to do your best work." Only 44% of Skidmore first-year students report a high level of challenge on exams (those reporting 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale where 7 = very much) compared to 65% in the Bac-LA group. The same can be said for seniors, but the difference is not as great (45% v. 54%). Skidmore students are somewhat critical of the several institutional environment items measured, although only one directly applies to this benchmark. Students were asked "to what extent does your institution emphasize spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work?" While slightly over half of Skidmore students replied "quite a bit" to this question, only about one-fifth of students reported "very much." This proportion is significantly lower than that of the Bac-LA group where nearly half of all students reported "very much" (First-Year; 21% v. 48%, Senior 23% v. 47%). Clearly, Skidmore students are interpreting messages, or a lack of messages, from administrators, peers, faculty, or others, about what is valued at Skidmore.

Active and Collaborative Learning

Research suggests that students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education. Active and collaborative learning can foster an increased inquisitiveness and commitment to learning. Often, a good deal of learning after college requires proficiency in these learning modalities when willing mentors are not always available. Clearly, active and collaborative learning ought to be part of an undergraduate

experience in some meaningful way. The items NSSE measures fit well with CEPP's proposed "Citizenship" and "Collaboration" vision components though they are not exhaustive of CEPP's undertakings.

Seniors clearly do more active and collaborative learning than first-year students at Skidmore and Bac-LA schools. Skidmore seniors and Bac-LA seniors report very similar ratings on these measures as no significant positive or negative differences were found. In essence, Skidmore seniors report experiences that are no better but no worse than Bac-LA seniors. Mixed results were found for Skidmore first-year students. Although they ask questions, contribute to class discussions, and work with other students on assignments both in and out of class as often as Bac-LA first-years, Skidmore first-years report some shortcomings. Skidmore first-year students were less likely to make class presentations (Often or very often; 16% v. 29%), tutor or teach other students (8% v. 15%), and participate in community-based projects as part of a regular course (4% v. 10%). The proportion of Skidmore students engaging in these three activities is also lower than the national norm group (all NSSE respondents, including those from large doctoral and master's level institutions). While Skidmore first-year students did say they were slightly more likely than their peers to have "discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class," first-year Skidmore students seem to be trailing their peers in some recently touted areas of active and collaborative learning.

Student-Faculty Interactions

Just as collaborating with peers is considered good educational practice, interaction with faculty is key to the entire educational process. Both in and out of the classroom, professors become role models, mentors, and guides to students as they prepare for a life of learning, understanding, and exploration. CEPP's proposed vision statement explicitly lays the foundation for fostering increased "mentor-to-peer" engagements.

As expected, seniors at Skidmore and Bac-LA schools have more interactions with faculty than first-year students on nearly every measure. They discuss assignments more often, talk about career plans more often, and work with faculty on activities other than coursework more often. A myriad of things, including maturity and class size, probably account for such differences. Skidmore senior and first-year students are very much like their respective peers in their frequency of discussing grades or assignments with instructors, discussing ideas from readings or classes with faculty outside of class, and receiving prompt feedback regarding academic performance. Skidmore seniors report greater contact with faculty than their peers through e-mail (Often or very often; 95% v. 85%) and for work on research projects outside of course or program requirements (Yes; 50% v. 39%). Skidmore first-year students did not surpass their peers in any type of faculty interaction and even report less interaction with faculty for activities other than course work (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.) (5% v. 17%). Enhancing the frequency of such experiences may occur with greater cohesion between student life and academic life.

A primary area of concern for Skidmore is discussion of career plans with faculty members or advisors. Skidmore's mission as a liberal arts school, despite a few pre-professional programs, often leads to the belief that graduates will be prepared to do whatever they want to do since a liberal arts education teaches them how to learn. At Skidmore, 47% of seniors discuss career plans either "often" or "very often" compared to 57% of Bac-LA seniors. The difference is much greater for first-year students (Often or very often; 18% v. 34%). In fact, just 1% of first-year students at Skidmore report they talk "very often" with a faculty member or advisor about career plans, whereas 11% of Bac-LA first-years do so. It is difficult to know from this study if Skidmore students are dissatisfied with the level of career discussion undertaken or if Skidmore students are just less needy and demanding in this area. Nevertheless, some quality career discussions at an early stage in the college career are most likely prudent. These discussions may help students find a major or career goal, thereby enhancing their academic seriousness. They may also assist students in understanding their options in weak economic times.

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities often augment academic programs both in and out of the classroom. Diversity, technology, internships, community service, and senior capstone courses can all play a role in providing opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge.

Skidmore students are very similar to their peers when it comes to how often they synthesize information from various sources or courses for assignments or during class discussions. Yet, somewhat mixed findings prevail about experiences that are often supposed to enhance interdisciplinary thinking. Skidmore seniors equal their peers in participation in "practicums, internships, and field experiences" and "culminating senior experiences (capstone, thesis, comprehensive exam, etc.)." Skidmore seniors far exceed Bac-LA seniors in studying abroad (49% v. 35%) and foreign language coursework (85% v. 64%). A full 71% of first-year Skidmore students anticipate going abroad before graduation. On the other hand, Skidmore seniors report less community service and volunteer work (58% v. 77%) and a lower percentage of first-year students either have done or anticipate doing either (69% v. 82%). Skidmore seniors also reported less participation in learning communities than the norm group (17% v. 26%). First-year students were on par with their peers with about one-quarter indicating such an experience. As in the Bac-LA group, nearly half of Skidmore seniors report doing either independent study or self-determined major.

Skidmore students participate in co-curricular activities (organizations, student government, sports, etc.) as frequently as their peers with only 9% of students spending over 20 hours per week. Compared to first-year students at other Bac-LA schools, Skidmore first-year students feel their institution places less emphasis on attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.) (Quite a bit or very much; 65% v. 77%). Skidmore seniors did not differ from their peers (68%). Skidmore clearly has much to offer in the realm of campus events and activities. The fact that this item combines athletic events with speakers and performances is problematic given Skidmore's relatively low athletic event attendance. Nevertheless, this is only one of many campus environment issues, detailed in the following section, where Skidmore students feel their college is less supportive than Bac-LA peers feel about their schools.

In recent years, Skidmore has made diversity an institutional priority through the establishment of the Office of the Director of Diversity and Affirmative Action, the 2002 strategic plan, the revised all-College curriculum, and other initiatives. While Skidmore did not exceed the Bac-LA normative means on any diversity measure, no difference is found in the frequency of including diverse perspectives (races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments (Often or very often; Skidmore - frosh 59%, seniors 70%), serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity (Often or very often; Skidmore - frosh 53%, seniors 50%), and serious conversations with students who are very different in terms of religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values (Often or very often; Skidmore - frosh 64%, seniors 61%). Despite these findings, Skidmore students report they trail peers in their school's contribution to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in "understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds (Quite a bit or Very much; First-year – Skidmore 43%, Bac-LA 53%; Senior – Skidmore 39%, Bac-LA 53%). Compared to students at other Bac-LA colleges, Skidmore students also feel their institution places less emphasis on "encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds (Quite a bit or Very much; First-year – Skidmore 35%, Bac-LA 57%; Senior – Skidmore 32%, Bac-LA 48%)." It is difficult to discern the possible reasons for such findings without additional research. Being critical of the institutional environment is nothing new for Skidmore students, but students appear to be partaking in activities that would seem to foster increased understanding and awareness at a rate equal to their peers. Skidmore students are quite vocal about their dissatisfaction with diversity on other institutional surveys. This report as least validates some previous findings, while raising additional questions.

Technology can often enhance or facilitate collaboration between peers and mentors. Perhaps it is not the most ideal way for some, but it certainly does have benefits to the student and instructor. Skidmore students "use computers for academic work" and "electronic mediums (list-serv, chat group, Internet, etc.) to discuss or complete assignments" at rates comparable to peers. As noted earlier, Skidmore seniors

report a good deal of email communication with instructors, exceeding the norm group average. Despite these encouraging activities, first-year students are less likely to report their college contributed to their knowledge, skills, and personal development in "using computing and information technology (Quite a bit or very much; 49% v. 62%)." Students might be very able and willing to use email and word processors, but less interested in or have fewer opportunities to use programming-specific applications. Alternatively, students might feel they were already quite adept in information technology before coming to Skidmore.

Supportive Campus Environment

It is reasonable to assume that colleges committed to student success and positive social relationships among different campus groups ought to have students who perform better and are more satisfied. As noted earlier, compared to their peers, Skidmore students are fairly critical of their institution's emphasis on study time and academic work, encouraging contact among diverse groups of students, and attending campus events and activities. Skidmore students are also less likely to report their institution emphasizes "providing the support you need to help you succeed academically" (Very much; First-year – Skidmore 31%, Bac-LA 46%; Senior – Skidmore 24%, Bac-LA 39%). Additionally, first-year Skidmore students are less likely than the peer group to report their institution "helps you cope with non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) (Quite a bit or very much; 22% v. 36%) and "provides the support you need to thrive socially." Once again, further research is needed to gain an understanding of why Skidmore students feel this way and whether there are steps the College can take to convince students of its commitment to such endeavors.

The quality of relationships students have with people at Skidmore varies by constituency and by student level. For example, seniors and first-year students report their faculty members are just as available, helpful, and sympathetic as students at other institutions report. Skidmore seniors report slightly more helpful, considerate, and flexible administrative personnel and offices, while first-year students generally say the reverse is true reporting service that is below the Bac-LA norm. First-year students also take some issue with their peers. In the past, students have criticized peers as being apathetic, snobbish, or wealthy on many all-College Skidmore surveys. Here, first-year students are less likely than Bac-LA students to see peers as friendly, supportive, or exuding a general sense of belonging.

Skidmore students are more critical of their institution's environment and quality of relationships than Bac-LA peer students are of their institutions. This effect is greater for first-year students than for seniors. Even though these questions largely deal with perceptions students have about the extent the institution values and supports such endeavors, it is disconcerting that students feel this way given the emphasis Skidmore places on the first-year experience.

Educational & Personal Growth

While not entirely part of the five key educational practices, questions concerning the institution's contribution to educational and personal growth closely resemble the abilities students rate in Skidmore all-college surveys and represent several of CEPP's interests. NSSE provides the benefit of comparative data to this area. With the exception of "understanding yourself," "acquiring a broad general education," and "voting in elections" first-year students reported Skidmore contributed less to their educational and personal growth than Bac-LA peers report on every other measure (12 of 15 measures). Seniors fare better, but are still below the peer group for "acquiring work-related knowledge," "analyzing quantitative problems," "understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds," and "contributing to the welfare of your community." Skidmore students did not exceed the norm group on nearly all measures of institutional contribution to growth (See Table II). It's difficult to speculate about the reasons for such differences. Perhaps Skidmore students feel they already were quite competent in many of these skills and abilities before ever stepping foot on campus. If this is the case, students might have more positive growth with increased academic challenge and expectations. Nevertheless, the negative differences are somewhat distressing given that only a handful of participating institutions are in the first tier of liberal arts colleges.

Table II: Educational & Personal Growth – Percentage of Students Indicating Knowledge, Skills and Personal Development Enhanced "Very Much" by their Institution.

	First-Year Students			Senior Students		
	Skidmore	Bac-LA	Sig	Skidmore	Bac-LA	Sig
Acquiring a broad general education	42	50		64	63	
Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	11	21	**(-)	21	30	*(-)
Writing clearly and effectively	28	40	**(-)	46	50	
Speaking clearly and effectively	16	25	***(-)	39	39	
Thinking critically and analytically	44	52	*(-)	64	63	
Analyzing quantitative problems	9	21	***(-)	19	29	**(-)
Using computing and information technology	20	26	**(-)	31	35	
Working effectively with others	19	26	**(-)	40	38	
Voting in local, state, or national elections	12	8	***(+)	13	10	
Learning effectively on your own	24	32	*(-)	40	44	
Understanding yourself	23	30		41	41	
Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	14	21	**(-)	15	22	**(-)
Solving complex real-world problems	11	17	*(-)	20	24	
Developing a personal code of values and ethnics	17	28	**(-)	27	33	
Contributing to the welfare of your community	7	19	***(-)	11	23	***(-)

Significance based on 2-tailed test using means (not reported in this table). See Appendices for all means, frequencies, and tests of significance.
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (2-tailed)

Overall Satisfaction & Advising

Despite the several negative gaps between Skidmore and Bac-LA students, Skidmore students evaluate their "entire educational experience at this institution" similarly. Skidmore students, however, are less likely to report they would choose the same institution if they could start over again. Roughly one-third of Skidmore students indicate they "definitely" would choose Skidmore again compared to nearly one-half of Bac-LA students (See Table III). This figure rises to 80% when including those who would "probably" choose Skidmore again. The percentage of students reporting a desire to attend Skidmore again closely resembles the percentage reporting so on Skidmore's senior and first-year surveys. Lastly, Skidmore students tend to rate the quality of advising below that reported by Bac-LA peers. Only 23% of first-year students and 31% of seniors rated the advising they received at Skidmore as "excellent." Unfortunately, respondents are not given the option to report the rationale for their evaluation of the advising quality. Students did report "talking about career plans with a faculty member or advisor" less often than their peers. The correlation between talking about career plans and advisor quality is positively moderate at best.

In general, Skidmore students tend to report their overall institutional satisfaction and advising satisfaction to be "good," whereas Bac-LA students more often reported their satisfaction to be "excellent."

Table III: Overall Satisfaction & Advising						
	First-Year Students			Senior Students		
	Skidmore	Bac-LA	Sig	Skidmore	Bac-LA	Sig
Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution? [1]	23%	38%	***(-)	31%	43%	**(-)
How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution? [1]	39%	50%		47%	52%	
If you could start over again, would you go to the same institution you are now attending? [2]	35%	49%	**(-)	37%	47%	*(-)

[1] = % reporting "excellent"; [2] = % reporting "definitely yes"
Significance based on 2-tailed test using means (not reported in this table). See Appendices for all means, frequencies, and tests of significance.
*p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001 (2-tailed)

Conclusion

NSSE results present Skidmore with some encouraging findings, but also some disappointing findings. The findings vary by the benchmark area and by class year. Academic challenge measures, for example, show some positive and negative findings that are often intuitive. First year students report greater preparation for class, but have fewer assigned books. Senior students report writing more, although shorter, papers but prepare fewer drafts. Students report less time completing problem sets and feel their institution contributes less to their ability to analyze quantitative problems. It is interesting that, on several issues, Skidmore students seem to be less likely to strongly agree with the items that Bac-LA students do. That is, the mode (the most frequent response on 4-point scale where 1 = poor and 4 = excellent) is often 3 for Skidmore students and 4 for Bac-LA students. This difference can influence the average greatly and results in several areas where Skidmore students indicate less growth, challenge, etc. on average.

Despite reporting a good deal of time on task and working harder than expected, students dully note a lack of challenge on exams and less institutional emphasis on the importance of academic work. Nevertheless, students seem to cherish their time relaxing and socializing here reporting averages that are well above both the Bac-LA group and all NSSE participating schools norms.

Collaborative and active learning measures also present varied findings. Seniors report they are doing just as much collaborative and active learning as their peers; however, first-year students are slightly worse off in that they are falling behind their peers in some areas. Senior students report comparable student-faculty interactions. As expected and for some obvious reasons, seniors simply report more contact with faculty than first years do. First-year students note their lack of such interactions in reporting fewer contacts with faculty that are not related to coursework. For both classes, discussion of career plans with faculty and advisors occurs less often than it does at peer institutions.

Mixed findings also occur when studying issues that ought to enrich educational experiences. Students are reporting high levels of study abroad and foreign language coursework but fewer citizenship activities including community service and volunteering. Most would agree that diversity, no matter how you define it, enriches an educational experience. Students rival their peers in being exposed to diverse perspectives in class and in out-of-class conversations, but at the same time report their institution contributes less to their understanding of racially and ethnically diverse people and provides less institutional support encouraging a coming together of students from diverse backgrounds.

Students offer some particularly critical ratings of Skidmore's campus environment. On the issues of encouraging diversity interactions, support for academic success, social support, and encouraging event attendance, students routinely rate their College lower than their peers. Further first-year students report their peers to be less friendly and supportive and also take issue with some administrative offices. On the positive side, students are equal with their peers when rating faculty helpfulness.

Skidmore students generally did not report any gains in educational or personal development that were greater than the norm group. In fact, for the vast majority of items, Skidmore first-year students report less of an institutional contribution. Seniors fare better here but never exceed the norm group averages. The fact that seniors are doing better than first-years is somewhat encouraging. Yet, it is currently impossible to know if Skidmore is the contributing reason for such growth as the figures are from two different classes. It seems logical to assume that Skidmore is at least playing some part in student growth. A longitudinal panel study would perhaps reveal or confirm some of these conjectures.

Despite some positive and several neutral findings, Skidmore students report concern with the institutional environment and the level of challenge and educational growth when compared to the peer group. The findings for students, particularly first-year students, are troubling given Skidmore's endorsement of the first-year experience and the average to slightly above average quality of the peer schools to which Skidmore is compared. As CEPP and the Dean of Faculty design an academic vision of the future, these data are valuable in presenting areas of success and concern for Skidmore College and its students.

Office of Institutional Research

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09/10/2003

Further analyses will conducted by ethnicity/race and sex in a forthcoming report. The report will also contain national benchmarking data from NSSE for each of the five areas of effective educational practice.

Appendix A
List of Participating Baccalaureate Colleges – Liberal Arts

Agnes Scott College	Decatur, GA
Allegheny College	Meadville, PA
Alma College	Alma, MI
Antioch College	Yellow Springs, OH
Augustana College	Rock Island, IL
Austin College	Sherman, TX
Blackburn College	Carlinville, IL
Centre College	Danville, KY
Chatham College	Pittsburgh, PA
College of the Holy Cross	Worcester, MA
College of Wooster	Wooster, OH
Connecticut College	New London, CT
Cornell College	Mt. Vernon, IA
Denison University	Granville, OH
DePauw University	Greencastle, IN
Eckerd College	St. Petersburg, FL
Emory & Henry College	Emory, VA
Evergreen State College	Olympia, WA
Fort Lewis College	Durango, CO
Franklin & Marshall College	Lancaster, PA
Furman University	Greenville, SC
Gordon College	Wenham, MA
Goucher College	Baltimore, MD
Hampden-Sydney College	Farmville, VA
Hanover College	Hanover, IN
Hartwick College	Oneonta, NY
Harvey Mudd College	Claremont, CA
Hiram College	Hiram, OH
Hobart and William Smith Colleges	Geneva, NY
Hope College	Holland, MI
Houghton College	Houghton, NY
Huntingdon College	Montgomery, AL
Judson College	Marion, AL
Juniata College	Huntingdon, PA
Kalamazoo College	Kalamazoo, MI
Knox College	Galesburg, IL
Lane College	Jackson, TN
Lawrence University	Appleton, WI
Lees-McRae College	Banner Elk, NC
Marlboro College	Marlboro, VT
Marymount Manhattan College	New York, NY
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts	North Adams, MA
McDaniel College	Westminster, MD
Monmouth College	Monmouth, IL
New College of Florida	Sarasota, FL
Occidental College	Los Angeles, CA
Pine Manor College	Chestnut Hill, MA
Presbyterian College	Clinton, SC
Randolph-Macon College	Ashland, VA
Randolph-Macon Woman's College	Lynchburg, VA
Richard Stockton College of New Jersey	Pomona, NJ
Roanoke College	Salem, VA
Saint Vincent College	Latrobe, PA
Scripps College	Claremont, CA
Skidmore College	Saratoga Springs, NY
Southwestern University	Georgetown, TX
Spelman College	Atlanta, GA
St. Mary's College of Maryland	St. Mary's City, MD
St. Olaf College	Northfield, MN
Susquehanna University	Selinsgrove, PA
Texas A&M University at Galveston	Galveston, TX
Transylvania University	Lexington, KY
University of Hawaii - West Oahu	Pearl City, HI
University of Hawaii at Hilo	Hilo, HI
University of Maine at Presque Isle	Presque Isle, ME
University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg	Greensburg, PA
University of Puget Sound	Tacoma, WA
University of the South	Sewanee, TN
Ursinus College	Collegeville, PA
Vassar College	Poughkeepsie, NY
Virginia Military Institute	Lexington, VA
Wabash College	Crawfordsville, IN
Washington College	Chestertown, MD
Wesleyan College	Macon, GA
West Virginia Wesleyan College	Buckhannon, WV
Westminster College	Fulton, MO
Wheaton College	Wheaton, IL
Wheaton College	Norton, MA
Whittier College	Whittier, CA
Willamette University	Salem, OR
Wofford College	Spartanburg, SC

Appendix B
Composition of Five Benchmark Areas

Level of Academic Challenge

9a	Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, etc. related to academic program)
4a	Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings
4c,d,e	Number of written papers or reports >= 20pages; 5-19 pages; fewer than 5 pages
2b	Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory
2c	Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships
2d	Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods
2e	Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations
1r	Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations
10a	Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work
3	*Extent to which exams during the past school year have challenged you to do your best work*
5a,b	*Number of problem sets that take more than hour to complete; less than an hour to complete*
6	*In typical week, number of homework problems that take more than 15 minutes to complete*
1c	*Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in*
2a	*Memorizing facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so they can be repeated in pretty much the same form*
1f	*Come to class without completing readings or assignments*
9e	*Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, exercising, etc.)*
9f	*Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, spouse, children, etc.)*

Active & Collaborative Learning

1a	Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
1b	Made a class presentation
1g	Worked with other students on projects during class
1h	Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments
1j	Tutored or taught other students
1k	Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course
1t	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family, co-workers, etc.)

Student-Faculty Interactions

1n	Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor
1o	Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor
1p	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class
1s	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)
1q	Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)
7d	Worked or planned to work with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements
1m	*Used email to communicate with an instructor*

Enriching Educational Experiences

9d	Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.)
7a	Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment
7b	Community service or volunteer work
7e	Foreign language coursework
7f	Study abroad
7g	Independent study or self-designer major
7h	Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.)
1v	Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values
1u	Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity
1l	Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment
10c	Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial/ethnic backgrounds
1d	*Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources*
1i	*Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions*
7c	*Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together*
10f	*Campus environment encourages attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)*
1e	*Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments*
11g	*Using computing and information technology*
11l	*Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds*
10g	*Using computers in academic work*

Supportive Campus Environment

10b	Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically
10d	Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)
10e	Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially
8a	Quality of relationships with other students
8b	Quality of relationships with faculty members
8c	Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

Items in italicized font are not included in NSSE's benchmarks. They were added to the area by the IR office to facilitate report writing.

National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report
Skidmore College

		Variable	Class	Skidmore	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA			NSSE 2003		
				Mean	Bac-LA Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]
1.	**Academic and Intellectual Experiences**			*In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often*						
a.	Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	CLQUEST	FY	3.01	3.07			2.84	*	.21
			SR	3.41	3.29			3.12	***	.35
b.	Made a class presentation	CLPRESEN	FY	2.03	2.24	***	-.28	2.24	***	-.27
			SR	2.82	2.81			2.84		
c.	Prepared two or more drafts of a paper or assignment before turning it in	REWROPAP	FY	2.69	2.65			2.70		
			SR	2.25	2.43	*	-.18	2.51	**	-.27
d.	Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	INTEGRAT	FY	3.15	3.15			3.06		
			SR	3.49	3.46			3.34	*	.20
e.	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	DIVCLASS	FY	2.78	2.89			2.73		
			SR	2.91	2.92			2.75	*	.17
f.	Come to class without completing readings or assignments	CLUNPREP	FY	1.86	2.00	*	-.20	2.01	*	-.21
			SR	2.12	2.08			2.07		
g.	Worked with other students on projects during class	CLASSGRP	FY	2.22	2.22			2.34		
			SR	2.26	2.27			2.46	**	-.23
h.	Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments	OCCGRP	FY	2.49	2.57			2.40		
			SR	2.70	2.71			2.73		
i.	Put together ideas or concepts from different courses when completing assignments or during class discussions	INTIDEAS	FY	2.69	2.59			2.49	**	.25
			SR	2.89	2.93			2.85		
j.	Tutored or taught other students (paid or voluntary)	TUTOR	FY	1.43	1.74	***	-.36	1.68	***	-.30
			SR	1.94	2.06			1.87		
k.	Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course	COMMPROJ	FY	1.26	1.49	***	-.30	1.46	***	-.28
			SR	1.55	1.65			1.63		

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).

[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

National Survey of Student Engagement
The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report
Skidmore College

				Skidmore	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA			NSSE 2003		
	Variable	Class		Mean	Bac-LA Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]
1.	**Academic and Intellectual Experiences (continued)**			*In your experience at your institution during the current school year, about how often have you done each of the following? 1=never, 2=sometimes, 3=often, 4=very often*						
l.	Used an electronic medium (list-serv, chat group, Internet, etc.) to discuss or complete an assignment	ITACADEM	FY	2.55	2.65			2.65		
			SR	2.82	2.72			2.81		
m.	Used e-mail to communicate with an instructor	EMAIL	FY	3.27	3.18			2.96	***	.35
			SR	3.62	3.38	***	.32	3.17	***	.52
n.	Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor	FACGRADE	FY	2.61	2.75			2.62		
			SR	2.88	2.94			2.83		
o.	Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor	FACPLANS	FY	1.81	2.27	***	-.52	2.15	***	-.39
			SR	2.52	2.75	**	-.25	2.48		
p.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	FACIDEAS	FY	1.93	2.01			1.81		
			SR	2.40	2.34			2.10	***	.35
q.	Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)	FACFEED	FY	2.82	2.82			2.63	**	.23
			SR	3.01	2.99			2.83	**	.23
r.	Worked harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations	WORKHARD	FY	2.61	2.68			2.61		
			SR	2.70	2.73			2.71		
s.	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	FACOTHER	FY	1.41	1.73	***	-.37	1.56	*	-.18
			SR	2.04	2.16			1.84	*	.21
t.	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, coworkers, etc.)	OOCIDEAS	FY	3.12	2.95	*	.20	2.76	***	.41
			SR	3.05	3.06			2.88	*	.20
u.	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	DIVRSTUD	FY	2.69	2.76			2.61		
			SR	2.68	2.71			2.60		
v.	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	DIFFSTU2	FY	2.95	2.99			2.77	*	.19
			SR	2.86	2.90			2.69	*	.18

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).

[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report

Skidmore College

		Variable	Class	Skidmore	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA			NSSE 2003		
				Mean	Bac-LA Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]
				During the current school year, how much has your coursework emphasized the following mental activities?						
2.	**Mental Activities**			*1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much*						
a.	**Memorizing** facts, ideas, or methods from your courses and readings so you can repeat them in pretty much the same form	MEMORIZE	FY	2.56	2.80	**	-.26	2.93	***	-.43
			SR	2.48	2.55			2.72	**	-.26
b.	**Analyzing** the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth and considering its components	ANALYZE	FY	3.35	3.33			3.15	**	.26
			SR	3.61	3.40	***	.29	3.28	***	.44
c.	**Synthesizing** and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships	SYNTHESZ	FY	3.15	3.06			2.88	***	.31
			SR	3.41	3.24	*	.21	3.07	***	.41
d.	**Making judgments** about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	EVALUATE	FY	2.84	2.93			2.83		
			SR	3.16	3.06			2.95	**	.23
e.	**Applying** theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	APPLYING	FY	2.96	3.10	*	-.16	3.01		
			SR	3.29	3.25			3.20		
3.	**Examinations**			*1=very little to 7=very much*						
	To what extent have your examinations during the current school year challenged you to do your best work?	EXAMS	FY	5.30	5.67	***	-.35	5.54	**	-.22
			SR	5.25	5.49	*	-.21	5.45	*	-.17
				During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done?						
4.	**Reading and Writing**			*1=none, 2=between 1 and 4, 3=between 5 and 10, 4=between 11 and 20, 5=more than 20*						
a.	Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings	READASGN	FY	3.67	3.82	*	-.17	3.49	*	.18
			SR	3.80	3.70			3.33	***	.44
b.	Number of books read on your own (not assigned) for personal enjoyment or academic enrichment	READOWN	FY	2.04	2.05			2.01		
			SR	2.32	2.26			2.21		
c.	Number of written papers or reports of **20 pages or more**	WRITEMOR	FY	1.12	1.21			1.24	*	-.19
			SR	1.82	1.75			1.66	*	.20

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).

[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

National Survey of Student Engagement
The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report
Skidmore College

		Variable	Class	Skidmore Mean	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA Mean	Bac-LA Sig [a]	Bac-LA Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	NSSE 2003 Sig [a]	NSSE 2003 Effect Size [b]
					During the current school year, about how much reading and writing have you done?					
4.	**Reading and Writing (continued)**				*1=none, 2=between 1 and 4, 3=between 5 and 10, 4=between 11 and 20, 5=more than 20*					
d.	Number of written papers or reports **between 5 and 19 pages**	WRITEMID	FY	2.65	2.65			2.44	**	.22
			SR	3.18	2.90	***	.30	2.66	***	.54
e.	Number of written papers or reports of **fewer than 5 pages**	WRITESML	FY	3.39	3.44			3.30		
			SR	3.54	3.22	***	.28	3.11	***	.36
					In a typical week, how many homework problem sets do you complete?					
5.	**Problem Sets**				*1=none, 2=1-2, 3=3-4, 4=5-6, 5=more than 6*					
a.	Number of *problem sets* that take you more than an hour to complete	PROBSETA	FY	2.07	2.44	***	-.32	2.52	***	-.40
			SR	1.82	2.09	**	-.24	2.36	***	-.46
b.	Number of *problem sets* that take you less than an hour to complete	PROBSETB	FY	2.07	2.39	**	-.27	2.59	***	-.44
			SR	1.71	1.92	*	-.19	2.18	***	-.40
6.	**Homework Problems**				*1=none, 2=1-3, 3=4-6, 4=7-10, 5=more than 10*					
	In a *typical week,* how many homework problems take you more than 15 minutes each to complete?	HWPROBS	FY	2.48	2.65			2.68	*	-.18
			SR	2.30	2.38			2.61	**	-.24
					Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution? (These items were recoded 0=no or undecided, 1=yes. Thus, the mean is the proportion responding "yes" among all valid respondents.)					
7.	**Enriching Educational Experiences**									
a.	Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment	INTERN	FY	.79	.82			.81		
			SR	.68	.74			.72		
b.	Community service or volunteer work	VOLUNTER	FY	.69	.82	***	-.34	.75		
			SR	.58	.77	***	-.45	.66	*	-.16
c.	Participate in a learning community or some other formal program where groups of students take two or more classes together	LEARNCOM	FY	.25	.30			.34	*	-.17
			SR	.17	.26	*	-.19	.27	*	-.21
d.	Work on a research project with a faculty member outside of course or program requirements	RESEARCH	FY	.39	.38			.29	*	.20
			SR	.50	.39	**	.23	.27	***	.50
e.	Foreign language coursework	FORLANG	FY	.73	.67			.48	***	.51
			SR	.85	.64	***	.43	.41	***	.89
f.	Study abroad	STUDYABR	FY	.71	.56	***	.30	.38	***	.67
			SR	.49	.35	***	.29	.18	***	.79

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).
[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

National Survey of Student Engagement
The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report
Skidmore College

		Variable	Class	Skidmore Mean	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA Mean	Bac-LA Sig [a]	Bac-LA Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	NSSE 2003 Sig [a]	NSSE 2003 Effect Size [b]
7.	**Enriching Educational Experiences (continued)**			*Which of the following have you done or do you plan to do before you graduate from your institution? (These items were recoded 0=no or undecided, 1=yes. Thus, the mean is the proportion responding "yes" among all valid respondents.)*						
g.	Independent study or self-designed major	INDSTUDY	FY	.17	.25	*	-.18	.18		
			SR	.47	.43			.29	***	.38
h.	Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.)	SENIORX	FY	.51	.57			.43		
			SR	.77	.73			.59	***	.37
8.	**Quality of Relationships**			*Mark the box that best represents the quality of your relationships with people at your institution. 1=unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation to 7=friendly, supportive, sense of belonging*						
a.	Relationships with other students	ENVSTU	FY	5.65	5.86	*	-.18	5.74		
			SR	5.73	5.83			5.80		
				1=unavailable, unhelpful, unsympathetic to 7=available, helpful, sympathetic						
b.	Relationships with faculty members	ENVFAC	FY	5.81	5.88			5.56	**	.21
			SR	6.11	6.05			5.72	***	.32
				1=unhelpful, inconsiderate, rigid to 7=helpful, considerate, flexible						
c.	Relationships with administrative personnel and offices	ENVADM	FY	5.11	5.33	*	-.16	5.09		
			SR	5.15	4.88	*	.17	4.80	*	.21
9.	**Time Usage**			*About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following? 1=0 hrs/wk, 2=1-5 hrs/wk, 3=6-10 hrs/wk, 4=11-15 hrs/wk, 5=16-20 hrs/wk, 6=21-25 hrs/wk, 7=26-30 hrs/wk, 8=more than 30 hrs/wk*						
a.	Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, doing homework or lab work, analyzing data, rehearsing, and other activities related to your academic program)	ACADPR01	FY	4.73	4.59			4.11	***	.36
			SR	4.99	4.53	**	.25	4.12	***	.48
b.	Working for pay **on campus**	WORKON01	FY	1.55	1.76	*	-.18	1.60		
			SR	2.27	2.23			1.89	**	.25
c.	Working for pay **off campus**	WORKOF01	FY	1.19	1.48	**	-.22	2.20	***	-.48
			SR	1.68	2.30	***	-.30	3.57	***	-.69
d.	Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, campus publications, student government, social fraternity or sorority, intercollegiate or intramural sports, etc.)	COCURR01	FY	2.87	2.78			2.28	***	.39
			SR	2.69	2.73			2.16	***	.35
e.	Relaxing and socializing (watching TV, partying, exercising, etc.)	SOCIAL01	FY	4.50	3.80	***	.43	3.86	***	.37
			SR	4.64	3.73	***	.56	3.57	***	.66

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).

[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

National Survey of Student Engagement
The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report
Skidmore College

		Variable	Class	Skidmore	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA			NSSE 2003		
				Mean	Bac-LA Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	Sig [a]	Effect Size [b]
				About how many hours do you spend in a typical 7-day week doing each of the following? 1=0 hrs/wk, 2=1-5 hrs/wk, 3=6-10 hrs/wk, 4=11-15 hrs/wk, 5=16-20 hrs/wk, 6=21-25 hrs/wk, 7=26-30 hrs/wk, 8=more than 30 hrs/wk					
9.	**Time Usage (continued)**									
f.	Providing care for dependents living with you (parents, children, spouse, etc.)	CARED01	FY	1.09	1.17			1.54	***	-.31
			SR	1.15	1.46	**	-.22	2.24	***	-.48
g.	Commuting to class (driving, walking, etc.)	COMMUTE	FY	1.72	1.82			2.14	***	-.42
			SR	1.91	1.95			2.29	***	-.37
				To what extent does your institution emphasize each of the following? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much						
10.	**Institutional Environment**									
a.	Spending significant amounts of time studying and on academic work	ENVSCHOL	FY	2.93	3.35	***	-.58	3.18	***	-.33
			SR	2.98	3.33	***	-.48	3.15	**	-.23
b.	Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	ENVSUPRT	FY	3.11	3.32	***	-.29	3.09		
			SR	3.02	3.19	**	-.22	2.95		
c.	Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	ENVDIVRS	FY	2.32	2.74	***	-.43	2.60	***	-.28
			SR	2.21	2.51	***	-.30	2.39	*	-.18
d.	Helping you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	ENVNACAD	FY	1.99	2.25	***	-.29	2.11		
			SR	2.01	2.04			1.89		
e.	Providing the support you need to thrive socially	ENVSOCAL	FY	2.30	2.46	*	-.17	2.34		
			SR	2.13	2.22			2.09		
f.	Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural performances, athletic events, etc.)	ENVEVENT	FY	2.81	3.07	***	-.31	2.82		
			SR	2.77	2.89			2.57	**	.22
g.	Using computers in academic work	ENVCOMPT	FY	3.40	3.37			3.34		
			SR	3.55	3.47			3.44		
				To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much						
11.	**Educational and Personal Growth**									
a.	Acquiring a broad general education	GNGENLED	FY	3.31	3.38			3.17	*	.18
			SR	3.57	3.54			3.30	***	.35
b.	Acquiring job or work-related knowledge and skills	GNWORK	FY	2.43	2.67	**	-.27	2.68	**	-.27
			SR	2.68	2.86	*	-.19	3.00	***	-.35
c.	Writing clearly and effectively	GNWRITE	FY	2.97	3.17	**	-.24	2.98		
			SR	3.27	3.33			3.09	*	.21
d.	Speaking clearly and effectively	GNSPEAK	FY	2.48	2.78	***	-.33	2.72	**	-.27
			SR	3.10	3.11			2.99		

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).

[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

NSSE 2003 Means Comparison Report

Skidmore College

		Variable	Class	Skidmore Mean	Skidmore compared with: Bac-LA Mean	Bac-LA Sig [a]	Bac-LA Effect Size [b]	NSSE 2003 Mean	NSSE 2003 Sig [a]	NSSE 2003 Effect Size [b]
11.	**Educational and Personal Growth (continued)**			*To what extent has your experience at this institution contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? 1=very little, 2=some, 3=quite a bit, 4=very much*						
e.	Thinking critically and analytically	GNANALY	FY	3.24	3.38	*	-.19	3.20		
			SR	3.58	3.54			3.35	***	.30
f.	Analyzing quantitative problems	GNQUANT	FY	2.40	2.68	***	-.30	2.68	***	-.31
			SR	2.62	2.84	**	-.22	2.89	***	-.30
g.	Using computing and information technology	GNCMPTS	FY	2.59	2.80	**	-.23	2.92	***	-.35
			SR	2.91	3.02			3.15	***	-.28
h.	Working effectively with others	GNOTHERS	FY	2.71	2.90	**	-.23	2.86	*	-.18
			SR	3.12	3.14			3.12		
i.	Voting in local, state, or national elections	GNCITIZN	FY	2.22	1.85	***	.39	1.84	***	.41
			SR	2.07	1.93			1.85	**	.23
j.	Learning effectively on your own	GNINQ	FY	2.87	3.04	*	-.20	2.93		
			SR	3.17	3.23			3.07		
k.	Understanding yourself	GNSELF	FY	2.77	2.88			2.75		
			SR	3.08	3.08			2.85	**	.23
l.	Understanding people of other racial and ethnic backgrounds	GNDIVERS	FY	2.34	2.59	**	-.26	2.55	**	-.21
			SR	2.37	2.61	**	-.24	2.55	*	-.18
m.	Solving complex real-world problems	GNPROBSV	FY	2.41	2.58	*	-.19	2.52		
			SR	2.62	2.72			2.68		
n.	Developing a personal code of values and ethics	GNETHICS	FY	2.53	2.76	**	-.23	2.62		
			SR	2.72	2.87			2.71		
o.	Contributing to the welfare of your community	GNCOMMUN	FY	2.13	2.55	***	-.43	2.34	*	-.21
			SR	2.22	2.62	***	-.41	2.41	*	-.19
	Academic Advising			*1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent*						
12.	Overall, how would you evaluate the quality of academic advising you have received at your institution?	ADVISE	FY	2.87	3.17	***	-.39	3.01	*	-.17
			SR	3.03	3.21	**	-.23	2.93		
	Satisfaction			*1=poor, 2=fair, 3=good, 4=excellent*						
13.	How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at this institution?	ENTIREXP	FY	3.31	3.40			3.23		
			SR	3.40	3.43			3.24	**	.23
				1=definitely no, 2=probably no, 3=probably yes, 4=definitely yes						
14.	If you could start over again, would you go to the *same institution* you are now attending?	SAMECOLL	FY	3.11	3.30	**	-.23	3.22		
			SR	3.12	3.26	*	-.17	3.17		

[a] * p<.05 ** p<.01 ***p<.001 (2-tailed).

[b] Effect size = mean difference divided by comparison group standard deviation.

Institutional Benchmark Report

November 2003

Skidmore College

National Survey of
Student Engagement

The College Student Report

National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

2003 Institutional Benchmark Report
Skidmore College

Introduction

The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) annually assesses the extent to which undergraduate students are involved in educational practices empirically linked to high levels of learning and development. In an effort to make it easier for people on and off campus to talk productively about student engagement and its importance to student learning, collegiate quality, and institutional improvement, NSSE created five clusters or benchmarks of effective educational practice:

(1) Level of academic challenge
(2) Active and collaborative learning
(3) Student-faculty interactions
(4) Enriching educational experiences
(5) Supportive campus environment.

The benchmarks are made up of groups of items on the survey and are expressed in 100-point scales. Each year, NSSE calculates benchmark scores to monitor performance at the institutional, sector, and national level. This year's analysis is based on approximately 185,000 randomly selected students at 649 four-year colleges and universities that participated in 2001, 2002, and 2003. The students represent a broad cross-section of first-year and senior students from every region of the country. The institutions are similar in most respects to the universe of four-year schools. More detailed information about the benchmarks can be found in the annual report that accompanies this mailing and on the NSSE website at www.iub.edu/~nsse.

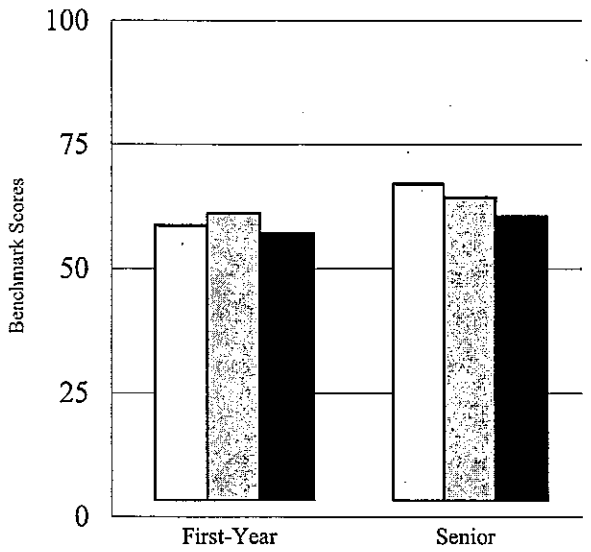
Benchmark Report

The Benchmark Report presents your institution's benchmark scores and compares them to schools in your Carnegie Classification, and the NSSE national norms. In addition, it provides summary statistics, a decile chart that gauges your institution's performance compared with other schools, and your Institutional Engagement Index. This index represents the degree to which your students do more or less than expected in terms of their engagement in the five areas of effective educational practice after adjusting for the types of students that attend your school and various institutional characteristics.

NSSE and the benchmarks of effective educational practice provide an instructive way to look at and talk about teaching and learning. Thus, they are intended to help stimulate conversations on campus and help determine whether student behavior and institutional practices are headed in the right direction.

Level of Academic Challenge

Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. Colleges and universities promote high levels of student achievement by emphasizing the importance of academic effort and setting high expectations for student performance.



	First-Year	Senior
Skidmore	55.5	63.8
Bac-LA	57.9	61.1
National	53.9	57.3

Level of Academic Challenge Survey Items:

Preparing for class (studying, reading, writing, rehearsing, etc. related to academic program)

Number of assigned textbooks, books, or book-length packs of course readings

Number of written papers or reports of 20 pages or more; number of written papers or reports of between 5 and 19 pages; and number of written papers or reports of fewer than 5 pages

Coursework emphasizing analysis of the basic elements of an idea, experience or theory

Coursework emphasizing synthesis and organizing of ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships

Coursework emphasizing the making of judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods

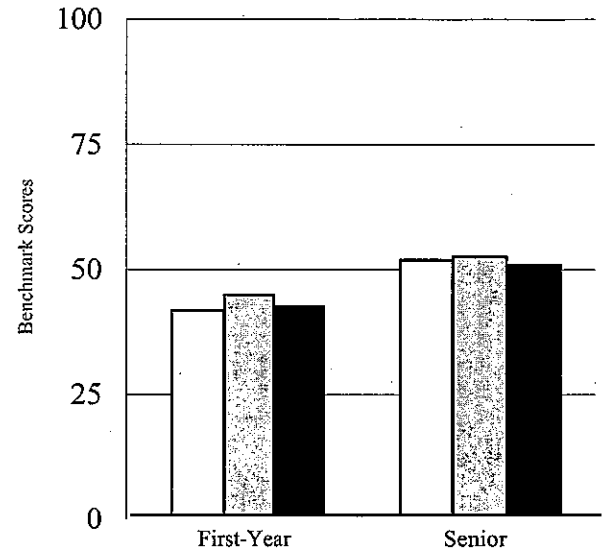
Coursework emphasizing application of theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

Working harder than you thought you could to meet an instructor's standards or expectations

Campus environment emphasizing time studying and on academic work

Active and Collaborative Learning

Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and asked to think about what they are learning in different settings. Collaborating with others in solving problems or mastering difficult material prepares students for the messy, unscripted problems they will encounter daily during and after college.



	First-Year	Senior
Skidmore	41.0	51.2
Bac-LA	44.2	51.8
National	41.8	50.1

Active and Collaborative Learning
Survey Items:

Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions

Made a class presentation

Worked with other students on projects during class

Worked with classmates outside of class to prepare class assignments

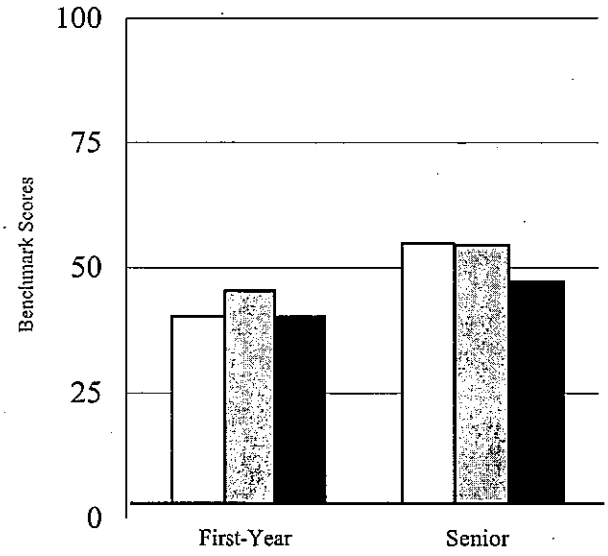
Tutored or taught other students

Participated in a community-based project as part of a regular course

Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class (students, family members, co-workers, etc.)

Student-Faculty Interaction

Students learn firsthand how experts think about and solve practical problems by interacting with faculty members inside and outside the classroom. As a result, their teachers become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, life-long learning.



	First-Year	Senior
Skidmore	37.3	51.8
Bac-LA	42.4	51.5
National	37.2	44.2

Student-Faculty Interaction
Survey Items:

Discussed grades or assignments with an instructor

Talked about career plans with a faculty member or advisor

Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class

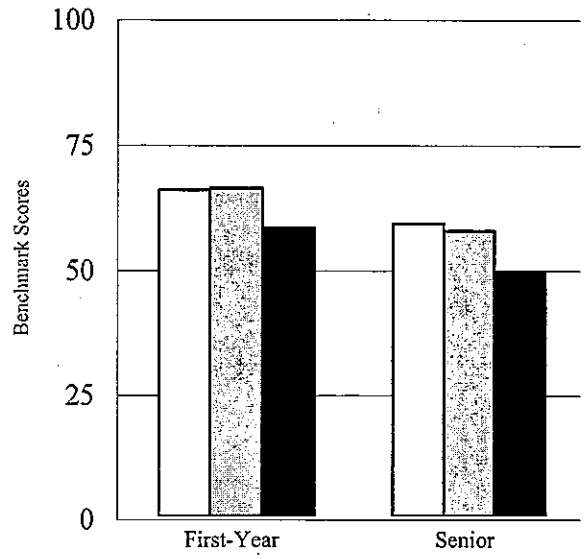
Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student-life activities, etc.)

Received prompt feedback from faculty on your academic performance (written or oral)

Worked or planned to work with a faculty member on a research project outside of course or program requirements

Enriching Educational Experiences

Complementary learning opportunities in and out of class augment academic programs. Diversity experiences teach students valuable things about themselves and others. Technology facilitates collaboration between peers and instructors. Internships, community service, and senior capstone courses provide opportunities to integrate and apply knowledge.



	First-Year	Senior
Skidmore	65.3	58.7
Bac-LA	65.7	57.3
National	57.7	49.1

Enriching Educational Experiences Survey Items:

Participating in co-curricular activities (organizations, publications, student government, sports, etc.)

Practicum, internship, field experience, co-op experience, or clinical assignment

Community service or volunteer work

Foreign language coursework and study abroad

Independent study or self-designed major

Culminating senior experience (comprehensive exam, capstone course, thesis, project, etc.)

Serious conversations with students of different religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values

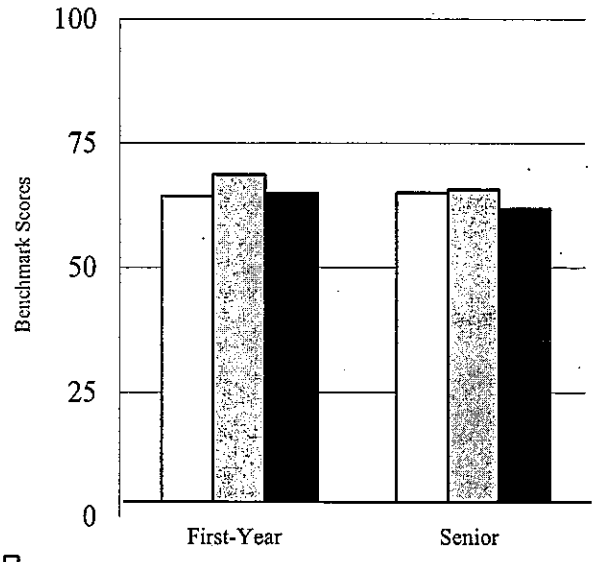
Serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity

Using electronic technology to discuss or complete an assignment

Campus environment encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, and racial or ethnic backgrounds

Supportive Campus Environment

Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that are committed to their success and cultivate positive working and social relations among different groups on campus.



	First-Year	Senior
Skidmore	61.3	62.0
Bac-LA	65.6	62.6
National	61.8	58.8

Supportive Campus Environment Survey Items:

Campus environment provides the support you need to help you succeed academically

Campus environment helps you cope with your non-academic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)

Campus environment provides the support you need to thrive socially

Quality of relationships with other students

Quality of relationships with faculty members

Quality of relationships with administrative personnel and offices

2003 Institutional Benchmark Report
Skidmore College

First-Year

Benchmark	Skidmore Benchmark Score	Comparison Group Statistics	Bac-LA	National
Level of Academic Challenge	55.5	Benchmark Score	57.9	53.9
		Score Difference	-2.5	1.6
		Standard Deviation	4.1	4.2
		Standard Score	-0.6	0.4
Active and Collaborative Learning	41.0	Benchmark Score	44.2	41.8
		Score Difference	-3.1	-0.8
		Standard Deviation	3.8	4.8
		Standard Score	-0.8	-0.2
Student-Faculty Interaction	37.3	Benchmark Score	42.4	37.2
		Score Difference	-5.1	0.1
		Standard Deviation	5.4	5.7
		Standard Score	-1.0	0.0
Enriching Educational Experiences	65.3	Benchmark Score	65.7	57.7
		Score Difference	-0.4	7.6
		Standard Deviation	6.8	7.3
		Standard Score	-0.1	1.0
Supportive Campus Environment	61.3	Benchmark Score	65.6	61.8
		Score Difference	-4.3	-0.5
		Standard Deviation	4.5	5.3
		Standard Score	-1.0	-0.1
		Number of Institutions	117	646

Senior

Benchmark	Skidmore Benchmark Score	Comparison Group Statistics	Bac-LA	National
Level of Academic Challenge	63.8	Benchmark Score	61.1	57.3
		Score Difference	2.7	6.5
		Standard Deviation	3.8	3.9
		Standard Score	0.7	1.7
Active and Collaborative Learning	51.2	Benchmark Score	51.8	50.1
		Score Difference	-0.7	1.1
		Standard Deviation	3.7	4.3
		Standard Score	-0.2	0.2
Student-Faculty Interaction	51.8	Benchmark Score	51.5	44.2
		Score Difference	0.3	7.6
		Standard Deviation	6.2	6.8
		Standard Score	0.0	1.1
Enriching Educational Experiences	58.7	Benchmark Score	57.3	49.1
		Score Difference	1.4	9.6
		Standard Deviation	7.1	7.3
		Standard Score	0.2	1.3
Supportive Campus Environment	62.0	Benchmark Score	62.6	58.8
		Score Difference	-0.6	3.2
		Standard Deviation	4.1	5.7
		Standard Score	-0.2	0.6
		Number of Institutions	118	648

Explanation of Statistics

Benchmark Score: The weighted arithmetic average (mean) of the corresponding survey items, calculated by dividing the sum of values for each item by the total number of students responding to that item. Each benchmark was put on a 100-point scale. Comparison group benchmark scores are the average of all institutional benchmark scores within the group.

Score Difference: The result of subtracting the comparison group score (Carnegie Classification or national) from your institution's score on each benchmark.

Standard Deviation: The average amount each institution's benchmark score deviates from the mean of all benchmark scores in the comparison group. The greater the dispersion of scores the larger the standard deviation.

Standard Score (SS): In statistical terms, this is a z score, the standardized magnitude of the difference between your school's benchmark score and the mean of the comparison group. It is calculated by dividing the score difference by the standard deviation of the distribution of scores for the comparison group.

Assuming the group means are normally distributed, a SS of 0.5 refers to a benchmark score that is greater than 69% of all comparison group schools, and 1.0 is greater than 84%. Likewise, a negative SS of -0.5 corresponds to a score that is better than 31% of the comparision group, and a -1.0 corresponds to an institution score better than only 16% of the comparison group. A SS of zero indicates that the institution and comparison group benchmark scores are equal, and that the institution's score is higher than roughly 50% of the other schools in the group. These values are illustrated in the table and chart at the bottom of page 8 of this report.

Also note the sign of the SS. A positive sign means that your institution's score was greater than the comparison group average, thus showing an affirmative result for the institution. A negative sign indicates the institution lags behind, suggesting that the student behavior or institutional practice represented by the benchmark may warrant attention.

National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

2003 National Benchmark Deciles
Skidmore College

These tables present the range of institutional scores by decile for the five benchmarks of effective educational practice for both first-year and senior students. Deciles are percentile scores that divide the range of benchmark scores into ten equal groups. A percentile is the point in a distribution at or below which a given percentage of institutional benchmark scores fall. For example, the 60th percentile represents the point at or below which 60 percent of the institutional benchmark scores fall for the respective comparison group. Deciles are listed for both the NSSE national results and for each of the Carnegie Classifications. To help you gauge your institution's performance relative to the comparison groups, the shaded areas on the national and Carnegie Classification tables indicate the deciles that are less than or equal to your benchmark score. For example, if your benchmark score on Academic Challenge for first-year students is 56.1, then your institution falls within the 70th and 80th percentile range on the national table, and between the 80th and 90th percentiles on the Doc-Extensive table.

National

	First-Year											Senior										
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Level of Academic Challenge	44.6	48.9	50.2	51.2	52.4	53.5	54.9	55.9	57.4	59.7	68.2	40.3	52.6	54.2	55.1	56.0	56.8	57.7	59.0	60.2	62.6	74.0
Active and Collaborative Learning	30.5	35.6	37.4	39.1	40.4	41.5	42.8	44.0	45.8	47.9	59.8	38.1	44.8	46.6	47.8	48.9	49.8	50.8	52.0	53.5	55.5	65.8
Student-Faculty Interaction	23.1	30.7	32.4	33.7	35.1	36.3	37.6	39.5	41.5	44.8	74.0	28.1	36.0	38.2	40.0	41.8	43.3	45.3	47.3	49.7	53.5	69.8
Enriching Educational Experiences	39.9	48.4	51.4	53.4	55.7	57.6	59.3	61.3	63.8	67.3	80.3	30.5	40.6	42.5	44.4	45.9	47.7	50.6	52.6	55.1	59.0	75.3
Supportive Campus Environment	45.6	55.1	57.3	58.7	60.1	61.6	63.0	64.5	66.4	68.8	85.4	44.8	51.3	53.7	55.4	57.1	58.6	60.4	61.8	63.7	66.2	76.4

Doc-Extensive

	First-Year											Senior										
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Level of Academic Challenge	47.0	48.5	49.5	50.0	50.6	51.4	52.5	53.6	55.2	57.1	62.1	50.5	52.4	53.2	53.8	54.8	54.9	55.3	56.6	57.0	59.0	61.5
Active and Collaborative Learning	33.1	34.7	35.3	36.1	37.1	37.6	38.1	39.7	40.5	41.8	47.1	39.3	42.8	43.7	44.8	45.5	46.2	46.7	47.4	48.3	49.5	55.7
Student-Faculty Interaction	28.7	30.5	31.9	32.4	32.9	33.5	34.0	35.2	36.0	37.8	44.2	30.8	36.2	37.1	37.9	38.5	39.0	40.6	41.7	43.4	44.4	49.7
Enriching Educational Experiences	47.9	51.7	53.2	54.6	56.3	57.6	58.9	59.6	60.8	63.6	71.0	39.0	42.6	44.4	45.2	46.0	46.7	47.6	49.3	51.9	54.2	57.6
Supportive Campus Environment	50.0	53.8	55.0	56.5	57.5	58.2	58.7	59.5	60.4	61.1	72.3	44.9	48.5	50.1	51.2	52.2	53.4	54.1	55.3	56.7	58.1	69.1

Doc-Intensive

	First-Year											Senior										
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Level of Academic Challenge	46.0	48.5	50.2	51.0	51.8	52.8	53.4	54.0	55.5	57.1	60.2	50.9	52.4	53.6	54.2	54.7	55.2	56.1	57.0	58.0	58.9	59.6
Active and Collaborative Learning	31.4	34.6	35.5	37.5	38.2	39.4	40.5	41.9	44.0	47.7	54.0	39.9	43.4	44.8	45.6	46.5	47.8	48.5	49.6	51.0	52.8	61.2
Student-Faculty Interaction	27.1	29.3	31.0	32.4	33.6	35.3	36.0	37.2	39.4	41.2	46.4	30.5	34.5	35.9	37.1	39.5	41.4	42.7	43.4	44.5	47.3	50.8
Enriching Educational Experiences	45.3	48.8	50.1	51.2	52.9	55.6	57.4	59.6	60.7	64.5	68.2	38.3	40.4	41.4	42.3	43.6	44.8	45.9	47.9	51.7	55.5	65.6
Supportive Campus Environment	49.3	52.2	55.3	56.6	57.5	58.5	59.1	61.2	61.8	62.3	67.3	45.6	48.8	51.4	52.6	53.6	55.2	55.6	56.8	57.7	60.8	65.6

Master's I & II

	First-Year											Senior										
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Level of Academic Challenge	45.2	48.3	49.7	50.4	51.5	52.4	53.2	54.8	55.8	57.4	64.4	48.5	52.6	53.7	54.9	55.6	56.2	56.9	57.7	59.0	60.7	65.4
Active and Collaborative Learning	30.5	35.5	37.1	38.8	40.0	41.0	41.8	43.5	44.7	46.5	54.5	38.7	45.8	47.3	48.2	49.2	50.0	50.8	51.9	53.3	54.6	63.9
Student-Faculty Interaction	23.1	30.0	31.6	33.2	34.4	35.4	36.6	37.7	39.7	41.6	50.0	28.1	35.4	37.5	39.3	40.9	42.2	43.5	45.4	47.2	49.6	57.1
Enriching Educational Experiences	40.5	47.6	49.7	51.8	53.2	55.0	57.0	58.9	60.9	63.4	71.4	30.5	39.9	41.4	42.6	44.5	45.7	47.3	49.4	51.9	54.7	64.0
Supportive Campus Environment	45.6	55.0	56.9	58.6	59.7	61.2	62.6	63.8	65.3	67.5	73.7	44.8	52.2	54.3	55.8	57.4	58.7	59.9	61.3	62.7	64.8	71.8

Bac-Liberal Arts

	First-Year											Senior										
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Level of Academic Challenge	48.9	52.6	54.4	55.7	56.9	58.0	58.9	60.2	62.1	63.2	68.2	52.0	56.2	58.0	59.1	60.0	60.9	62.1	63.1	64.2	66.4	72.3
Active and Collaborative Learning	35.9	39.7	41.0	41.9	42.8	43.7	44.7	46.1	47.1	49.1	55.3	41.9	47.1	48.9	49.9	51.0	51.8	52.6	53.7	54.4	56.9	62.0
Student-Faculty Interaction	30.6	35.8	38.1	39.6	40.8	41.7	43.4	45.0	47.1	48.6	59.5	34.4	42.9	47.0	49.1	50.4	51.5	53.4	54.7	56.8	58.9	66.2
Enriching Educational Experiences	48.4	55.2	59.5	63.0	64.5	65.9	67.9	69.4	72.3	74.1	80.3	35.2	47.8	51.9	53.8	55.4	56.7	58.7	60.7	63.2	67.2	75.3
Supportive Campus Environment	54.7	59.7	61.5	63.0	64.6	65.5	66.7	68.2	69.5	71.3	78.8	51.3	57.3	59.8	60.7	61.7	62.5	63.9	64.8	66.1	67.1	72.5

Bac-General Colleges

	First-Year											Senior										
	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%	0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%
Level of Academic Challenge	44.6	49.4	51.2	52.5	53.4	53.7	54.9	55.6	56.4	57.6	61.8	48.5	51.4	54.8	55.8	56.5	57.3	58.2	59.0	60.2	62.0	74.0
Active and Collaborative Learning	34.0	36.7	39.8	40.9	42.3	43.4	44.4	45.8	47.4	50.4	55.9	42.0	46.7	48.3	49.2	50.0	50.8	51.7	54.2	55.9	58.7	65.8
Student-Faculty Interaction	27.2	31.8	32.8	34.7	35.9	37.1	38.6	39.6	42.1	44.7	56.5	32.5	36.6	39.3	41.5	44.5	45.5	46.9	48.8	49.4	52.3	69.8
Enriching Educational Experiences	42.2	44.6	50.5	53.7	56.3	57.6	58.7	60.3	61.7	64.3	71.0	32.5	40.1	42.6	45.3	46.5	49.0	51.5	52.6	54.8	58.9	64.8
Supportive Campus Environment	49.1	56.3	60.9	62.0	63.5	64.6	65.5	67.0	68.7	70.0	73.9	48.7	54.5	56.5	58.1	59.6	60.7	63.6	64.8	66.8	70.0	73.9

National Survey of Student Engagement

The College Student Report

2003 Institutional Engagement Index
Skidmore College

This report represents the degree to which your students engage more or less than *expected* in the five areas of effective educational practice described in the *NSSE 2003 Annual Report.* The scores are statistically adjusted for the types of students that attend your school and other institutional characteristics.[1] Thus, the Institutional Engagement Index provides an alternative way to view institutional performance.

The report answers three main questions:

1) If your actual benchmark scores were statistically adjusted for the types of students at your school and other institutional characteristics, what would happen to your benchmark scores?

2) Is your institution doing better or worse than expected given your student and institutional characteristics?

3) How does the difference between your actual and predicted benchmark scores compare to other NSSE colleges and universities?

	First-Year				Senior			
Benchmark	*Actual*[2]	*Predicted*[3]	*Residual*	*Standardized Residual*[4]	*Actual*[2]	*Predicted*[3]	*Residual*	*Standardized Residual*[4]
Level of Academic Challenge	55.5	59.3	-3.9	-1.4	63.6	61.2	2.4	0.9
Active and Collaborative Learning	41.0	44.6	-3.6	-1.0	51.2	50.6	0.6	0.2
Student-Faculty Interaction	37.3	42.1	-4.8	-1.2	51.8	50.3	1.5	0.4
Enriching Educational Experiences	65.3	68.5	-3.2	-0.8	58.7	57.4	1.3	0.3
Supportive Campus Environment	61.3	66.5	-5.3	-1.4	62.0	61.4	0.6	0.1

The first column "Actual" highlights your institution's first-year and senior actual benchmark scores, which correspond to the numbers reported in the Institutional Benchmark Report, with the exception of Level of Academic Challenge[2].

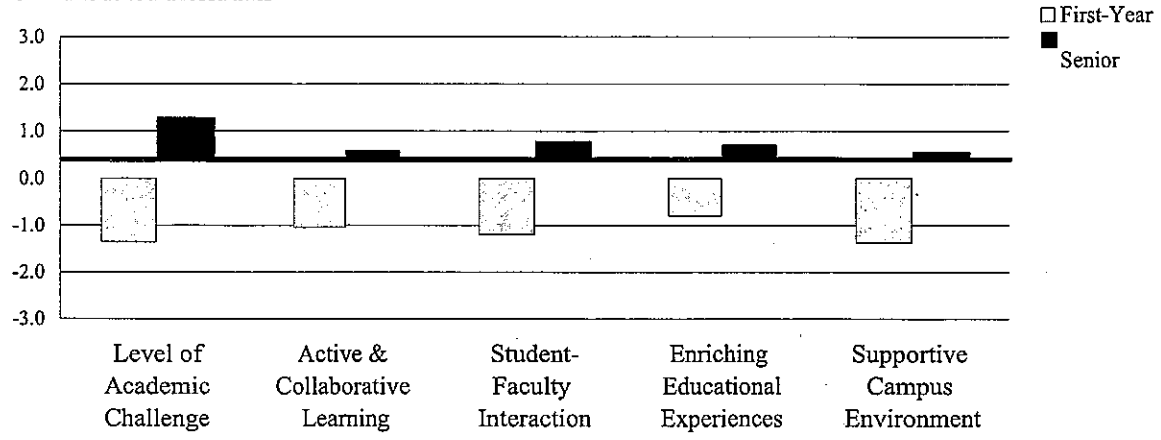
The second column "Predicted" represents what your students are predicted or expected to do across this range of important activities, given their background characteristics and selected institutional information.[3]

The third column "Residual" is the difference between the actual and predicted scores. A positive score indicates that students are more engaged in the respective educational practice (and likely benefiting more) *than expected.* A negative score indicates that students are doing less than expected in these areas of effective educational practice.

The last column is a standardized residual (SR), an estimate of the degree to which your institution exceeded or fell short of its predicted score on each benchmark relative to all other NSSE institutions. It expresses the residual score in standard deviation units. When your school's actual benchmark score is equal to the predicted score both the residual score and the SR are equal to zero. A large, positive SR indicates that your school exceeded its predicted score by a larger margin than most other schools.[4]

The chart below highlights the value of your institution's standardized residuals for each benchmark.

Standardized Residuals



Notes to NSSE 2003 Institutional Engagement Index

The information in these notes will help in understanding the Institutional Engagement Index.

[1] Supporting materials related to the Institutional Engagement Index, including the adjusted R^2 and regression coefficients, are available on NSSE's website at www.iub.edu/~nsse.

[2] The actual score for Level of Academic Challenge reported here may differ somewhat from what is reported on previous pages in the Benchmark Report. The score in the Benchmark Report includes an enrollment status adjustment. This adjustment was not included here because enrollment status is included in the regression model to create the predicted scores for the Institutional Engagement Index.

[3] The following student and institutional characteristics were included in an ordinary least squares regression model to produce the predicted benchmark scores: (a) public/private institutional control, (b) admissions selectivity rating from *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, (c) Carnegie Classification (d) undergraduate enrollment, (e) level of urbanization, (f) proportion full-time, (g) proportion female, (h) proportion of different races/ethnicities, (i) proportion of different student-reported major fields, (j) mean student-reported age and, (k) proportion of students reporting on-campus residence. Unless noted otherwise, institutional and student characteristics were obtained from IPEDS data, the most complete database available. These student and institutional characteristics were included in the regression model since they are not easily changed.

[4] Statistically speaking, the standardized residual is known as the studentized deleted residual or externally studentized residual. To understand how your institution's residuals compare to other NSSE institutions, refer to the table and chart below that applies to both the benchmark standard scores (page 5) and the standardized residual scores.

Understanding Standard Scores

A standard score of 1.0 indicates a score that is greater than approximately 84 percent of all institutions' scores; a standard score of .5 indicates the score is greater than about 69 percent of all institutions' scores. In contrast, a negative standard score of -.5 indicates the score exceeds about 31 percent of all NSSE institutions, and a standard score of -1.0 indicates the score is greater than only 16 percent of the scores of all other NSSE institutions.

A Standard Score of...	...indicates a score that is greater than approximately ____ % of NSSE schools
-2.5	1%
-2.0	2%
-1.5	7%
-1.0	16%
-0.5	31%
0.0	50%
0.5	69%
1.0	84%
1.5	93%
2.0	98%
2.5	99%