

PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

Presented by:

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Presented to:

Middle States Commission on Higher Education

May 2011

Accreditation Reaffirmed: June 23, 2006
Evaluation Site Visit: March 19–22, 2006

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Supporting Documents

The 2011–2012 Skidmore Catalog is online at: <http://catalog.skidmore.edu/>.

Additional supporting documents referenced in the text are on the enclosed compact disc.

SKIDMORE COLLEGE PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

May 2011

Section One: Executive Summary

Skidmore is a highly selective, independent, liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 2,500 men and women from nearly 50 states and 50 countries. With its relatively small size and student-faculty ratio of 9 to 1, the College is a close-knit academic community. Skidmore is known for its faculty of teacher-scholars devoted to the instruction and mentoring of students.

Founded in 1903 by Lucy Skidmore Scribner to meet the educational needs of women in the Saratoga Springs area, Skidmore was chartered as a four-year, liberal arts college in 1922. Throughout the College's history it has challenged itself to "make no small plans." Its bold initiatives include the decision in the early 1960s to build a new campus and the move to coeducation in 1971. In 1991 Skidmore implemented its first graduate-degree program, an interdisciplinary, nonresidential program offering the master of arts degree in liberal studies. In 2000, the College opened the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, which has earned a national reputation for pushing beyond the boundaries of a traditional college museum in bringing fields of study together in creative ways. The Zankel Music Center, Skidmore's most ambitious building project ever, opened in 2010, a capstone of the successful Creative Thought–Bold Promise campaign and beneficiary of the largest gift in Skidmore's history. Featuring a magnificent 600-seat concert hall, an intimate 100-seat recital hall, expansive rehearsal facilities, and state-of-the-art technological infrastructure, it has quickly become a major resource not only for music but for college-wide events as well.

One of Skidmore's distinguishing features is its approach to the liberal arts, expressed through a curriculum that combines traditional liberal arts disciplines with career-specific fields. With nearly 60 degree programs leading to the B.A. or B.S., the College emphasizes an interdisciplinary approach to all areas of study and fosters experimentation and creativity across the disciplines. A central belief at Skidmore is that every life, every endeavor, and every career is made more profound with creative ability at its core, and creative thinking is an integral part of the campus culture: as we say, "Creative Thought Matters." The cornerstone of the curriculum is the belief that a liberal arts education is the best preparation both for a life of continued learning and for a meaningful career, particularly as graduates face the challenges and opportunities of a world of rapid and unpredictable change.

Skidmore has a commitment to the local community and to the greater Capital District and is an important resource for education, cultural activities, entertainment, and community service. Skidmore students, faculty, and staff are encouraged to play active roles in the community and many contribute their time and energy as volunteers. The College employs approximately 750-full- and part-time faculty and staff, including 160 service employees who are union members.

The most significant major development and challenge since our 2006 Self-Study has been the economic recession and its impact on our current and future finances. Through the disciplined actions that the College took as part of the budget process, we have been able to reduce the fiscal year 2010–2011 budget by approximately \$12 million annually from the initial projections for 2010–2011. At the same time, we have revisited our *Strategic Plan* in consideration of the changed economic context in which both the College and our students find themselves. This has resulted in both renewed commitments and some new initiatives, described in the narrative below. More than ever before, we have made use of data and assessment results of various kinds in our decision-making processes, as we believe will be clear in this report.

The year 2010–2011 saw a temporary shift in leadership during the sabbatical leave of our President, Philip Glotzbach, from November 1 through April 30. In his absence, Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) Susan Kress served as Acting President; Dean of the Faculty Muriel Poston stepped up as Acting VPAA; and Associate Dean of the Faculty Patricia Rubio served as Acting Dean, and was not replaced as Associate Dean. The extra burdens taken on by the leadership have been gratefully acknowledged by the College community.

To prepare the Periodic Review Report, a Working Group was formed in the spring of 2010, consisting of key representatives from major areas of the College and including the VPAA, Dean of the Faculty, the Dean of Student Affairs, the Director of Intercultural Studies, the Director of the First-Year Experience, the Director of Financial Services, a professor of mathematics (a co-author of the report), the Executive Director of the Office of the President, the Director of Institutional Research, and the Assessment Facilitator; the group was chaired by the Faculty Assessment Coordinator. Four individuals drafted sections of the report during the summer of 2010, and these served as the basis for widespread discussion and repeated revisions throughout the fall and spring. Committees and groups that vetted the draft in the fall included: the President's Cabinet; VPAA Staff; Dean of Faculty Staff; Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC); Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP); Student Affairs Staff; Academic Council of the Student Government Association; Assessment Steering Committee; Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding; Science Working Group; and Science Planning Group. After multiple revisions and updates, the draft was vetted by the community in an open meeting in April 2011. Finally, two members of our Board of Trustees read the draft and also suggested helpful amendments and additions.

Our Periodic Review Report (PRR) is organized around the subtopics of our 2006 Self-Study on student engagement—especially in the first year, in the physical and life sciences, and in intercultural and global understanding. We have gathered considerable data on each of these topics about both student engagement and learning. Our assessments have included programmatic and institutional assessments, as well as indirect and direct assessments of students' learning and development. Many of our assessment results have fed back into our decision making as we refine our goals and our ambitions. A quick summary does not do justice to the complexity of the issues below, but we can provide here a sense of where we are with our initiatives in each of these areas.

Since 2006, we have launched our new First-Year Experience, and it has clearly been successful in helping us to increase student engagement and learning in the first year. The program has become a point of pride, and we continue to assess and refine it.

Our initiative to strengthen students' engagement in the physical and life sciences is well under way, with a new vision statement for the sciences. We have seen increased numbers of students, in terms of both majors and enrollments; increased opportunities for collaborative research; increased staffing and resources; and pedagogical initiatives in response to assessments. Assessments have demonstrated a real need for this initiative. We are in the process of refining the Science Vision, building commitment to it, and gauging the resources needed to move forward. These continue to be major challenges.

We have maintained our commitment to the *Strategic Plan's* ambitious goals for our students' learning about and development of intercultural and global understanding. Our results here have been mixed, and major challenges remain. In this area, we have created a new tripartite administrative structure, which has implemented a number of changes and initiatives. We have also regularized the new Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding, as well as a new Bias Response Group. We have increased the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of our student body, and have completed assessments of campus climate that have given us a sense of more work that must be done. We have also launched a successful pilot program of InterGroup Dialogues, and have begun reconsideration of our cultural diversity requirement in the curriculum. Increased numbers of our students are studying abroad, and we are working to maximize the impact of that experience. Ongoing major challenges include increasing the diversity of the faculty and staff, and ensuring that we make a sustained commitment to increasing the awareness, knowledge, and understanding that will be necessary to create a truly diverse, inclusive, and welcoming community both on campus and in the College's neighboring area.

We have also sought to increase our students' engagement and learning throughout their experience by whatever means we can. Always strong in the offering of high-impact educational practices, we have further strengthened those, with particular attention to pedagogies and experiences of civic engagement, also a commitment in the *Strategic Plan*. Our most recent initiative, Transition and Transformation, currently under discussion, aims to engage students early and consistently in preparing for their postbaccalaureate goals.

In sum, we take some pride in the clarity of our vision and our planning processes, and in our assessments and use of data. We know from our assessments that we have a good deal of work ahead of us in realizing the goals of the *Strategic Plan*. That said, despite the economic challenges we have faced and are facing, we continue to make considerable progress on making those goals a reality.

Section Two: Response to Recommendations from the Previous Team Report

The previous team report made no recommendations.

Section Three: Major Challenges and Current Opportunities

This section of our Periodic Review Report returns to the principal themes of our 2006 Self-Study, providing an update on the progress we have made and challenges and opportunities facing us five years later. As part of this report's function to demonstrate continuing compliance with the Standards of Excellence, we place particular emphasis here on the ways that assessments of institutional effectiveness and of student learning (Standards 7 and 14) have informed our planning and implementation of initiatives. Because the Middle States team in 2006 did not make any official recommendations, we focus here largely on our own institutional goals, with some reference to comments made in the team report. This section thus performs several functions simultaneously: it provides an update on the issues addressed in our Self-Study; it documents our compliance with the standards; and it recounts current challenges and opportunities.

Without question, the most significant major development and challenge since our 2006 Self-Study has been the economic recession and its impact on our current and future finances. The financial pressures felt by all higher education institutions have made planning even more critical for continued success and have forced Skidmore to make difficult choices. Through the disciplined actions that the College took as part of the budget process, we have been able to reduce the fiscal year 2010-2011 budget by approximately \$12 million from the initial projections for 2010-2011. We are pleased that our enrollments have remained strong—in fact the current financial model plans on over-enrollment—and we have been disciplined in making necessary adjustments to spending.

That said, as the Middle States evaluation team noted in 2006, we have high aspirations that will require significant resources. We have met many of those aspirations, and we are not abandoning the others. The tension between aspirations and resources remains our biggest challenge. When we submitted our Self-Study in 2006, we had just completed a major planning cycle, culminating in our *Strategic Plan*,¹ and were launching a major campaign. As described more fully in Section Six below, those strategic planning efforts, along with the College's *Campus Plan* for facilities,² have provided effective guidance for strategic decision making.

For our 2006 Self-Study, we chose to do a focused report on the topic of student engagement, specifically in the students' first year; in the natural sciences (or, in more contemporary parlance, the physical and life sciences); and in domestic diversity, global awareness, and intercultural understanding. We return to each of those three subtopics here. It has become clearer to us how each of these subtopics is related to the others. The "sciences" and "learning about diversity" are not isolated islands, but are deeply interconnected and are—or should be—part of every student's education and development at Skidmore, starting if possible in the first year, in a way that engages them and deepens their learning. Some of the powerful interconnections we have recognized appear further on in this report. In developing new initiatives, we have made use of the interconnections to motivate change: for example, as we increase the numbers of students

¹ The *Strategic Plan*, titled *Engaged Liberal Learning: The Plan for Skidmore College, 2005–2015*, is Appendix C on the compact disc and is also available online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/>.

² The *2007 Campus Plan* is online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/campusplan/index.cfm>.

majoring in the physical and life sciences, we have also provided more study-abroad opportunities for students in the sciences. In general, we have sought to increase high-impact educational experiences for all of our students, whether it be study abroad, collaborative research, or intensive engagement with differing worldviews. Our First-Year Experience epitomizes that shift towards a strategic emphasis on engaging practices and pedagogies.

In January 2006, in the Self-Study's Afterword, we noted,

At the outset, we were not sure we knew how to talk about student engagement in the natural sciences, in intercultural understanding, or in the first-year experience. We knew how to talk about hiring people, about developing courses or programs, about changing requirements or providing offices. Collectively, we knew little about how to recognize or gauge deep engagement. ... But individually, it became clear, our faculty watch for the engaged student, plan for the unforgettable class, design the compelling assignment, and know a great deal about student engagement that they have been willing to share with colleagues. ... The challenge for us now is to continue to turn this localized knowledge into models and also generalized habits of engaging teaching and effective collaborations across the College.³

Our efforts since 2006 have focused on just that challenge, as we have sought to gather more systematic data on what works and to move from localized knowledge to informed planning and sustained processes. As this report and the accompanying documentation demonstrate, we have met many of our goals as they were expressed in that report, and we have many more to meet. Our assessments and our planning increasingly address student learning and development as well as engagement, and we have established new goals and processes. A quick summary of our assessment work over the past five years gives an idea of what we have accomplished. We have developed and launched a major initiative, the Skidmore Learning Census: a survey of all alumni over a five-year period that gathers information about their learning at Skidmore related to the Goals for Student Learning and Development. We have continued to participate in multiple national surveys and to make use of those results (NSSE, CIRP, and most recently CHAS); we have conducted a major assessment of writing in the First-Year Experience; the faculty adopted a major change in our writing requirement, so that each department now teaches and assesses writing in the major; we have assessed high-impact pedagogies and learning experiences such as service learning and curriculum-based dialogues on race, and the results have informed decisions about budget allocations and program development; faculty in the natural sciences have conducted a survey on scientific literacy that has informed our planning in that area (see p. 24 below); the College has adopted and begun to implement a plan, "Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College";⁴ we have conducted an extensive survey of students' health behaviors, communicated the outcomes to the campus, and made use of them in determining resources needed for students; and faculty conduct assessments within

³ The "Skidmore College Self-Study Final Report" (February 2006) is on the compact disc.

⁴ The report, "Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College" (2008), is on the compact disc.

academic departments, making use of the results to adjust curriculum and pedagogies in the majors. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and most of these efforts receive more attention in the course of this report.

At the same time, we have found ourselves wanting to articulate the overarching goals of the Skidmore educational experience, asking not just: Are our students engaged? But also: What do we want them to learn? How are they transformed during their four years at Skidmore? In 2008, Vice President for Academic Affairs Susan Kress charged the Assessment Steering Committee (ASC) with drafting a set of goals for student learning. After doing considerable research, consulting with numerous colleagues, and discussing multiple drafts for many hours, the ASC brought a draft of Goals for Student Learning and Development⁵ to the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) in the spring of 2009. CEPP took up the charge, offered important revisions, and hosted several open discussions of the goals; members of the ASC also consulted with student groups (Academic Council, the Student Government Association), alumni and parent groups, and Student Affairs staff in a dedicated meeting. The goals were also the subject of discussion at the Skidmore town hall meetings mentioned above and at meetings of the Board of Trustees. Over the course of these many discussions, more revisions were suggested and adopted, and in December, 2009, the faculty endorsed the new Goals for Student Learning and Development in a unanimous vote.

The consultative, patient process served us well, not only in obtaining that faculty endorsement but also in building throughout the community an understanding of the goals and what is at stake in them. The goals now reflect the aims of the Skidmore education as a whole, defined by the faculty and also by the many staff who have powerful influences on our students' lives in the cocurriculum: staff in Athletics, Residential Life, Health Services, Student Academic Services, and many other areas. We embraced the concept of a Skidmore education as both a classroom learning experience and a more comprehensive transformation. Having established our goals, our next step has been to investigate where that learning is happening, how it dovetails with our requirements for general education and the major, and how we gather, study, and communicate the evidence for it.

We are particularly interested in these investigations when they further our progress in the three initiatives described in this report. Although we are framing an overall plan for assessing our students' success in meeting the Goals for Student Learning and Development, we also want to do this in a way that will sustain our momentum in offering an effective First-Year Experience; building our capacities for studies in the sciences; and providing all of our students with the learning about culture, communication, and social identities that they will need to thrive in a world that will need them, as liberally-educated individuals, to communicate and work across many kinds of differences. In part for this reason, our narrative here retains the tripartite structure of our Middle States Self-Study from 2006. We want to bear in mind, however, that each of these three sections relates more broadly to the Goals for Student Learning and Development and is to be found within those goals as well. Another way of thinking

⁵ The Goals for Student Learning and Development are attached as Appendix F on the compact disc and are also available online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/assessment/goals-for-student-learning.cfm>.

about the three sections is that each is a major part of our general education vision and requirements. We are in the process of aligning our vision for general education more fully with our goals, with the expectation that this will entail making some changes in our general education curriculum and in our pedagogies.

The spring 2006 report of the Middle States evaluation team praised both our strategic planning and our Self-Study, and noted:

We applaud the attention paid to each of the three areas identified in the Self-Study: the directions proposed are consequential. If each were carried out and implemented fully, together they would move the institution towards greater student engagement, stronger sciences, greater diversity along multiple lines, and a considerably expanded and enriched curriculum: in short, a higher level of institutional excellence as a leading liberal arts college.⁶

Although we have not yet fully implemented each of the proposals in our Self-Study, we believe the evidence shows that we have made considerable progress, and that the “growing strength, confidence, and aspiration” the team found here continue to define us, as does our “scrappiness ... in meeting financial challenges.”

Before we conclude this introductory section, we need to make note of two significant changes in our institutional structure and one institutional initiative that is part of an update to our *Strategic Plan*. First, new since the last Middle States evaluation is a more formalized bridging between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs that resulted from the elimination of the Office of the Dean of Studies and creation of two new offices, Student Academic Services (SAS, in Student Affairs) and the Office of Academic Advising (OAA, in Academic Affairs). As part of the reorganization, the offices were charged with developing a collaborative structure that supports students’ high academic achievement and engagement.

The Office of Student Academic Services (SAS) provides a wide variety of services to promote achievement and help students take full advantage of the academic opportunities available at Skidmore. As part of the College’s commitment to academic excellence, the office serves all students interested in improving their performance. The office organizes peer tutoring and study groups, offers one-on-one and small-group support, counsels students who receive unsatisfactory work notices, and works with international students, students with disabilities, and athletes. The office collaborates with the Writing Center, which now provides English as a Second Language (ESL) support to students requiring longer-term writing intervention, in part with the help of a new full-time ESL specialist. SAS also trains students to be peer tutors and study-group facilitators. The Office of Academic Advising (OAA) oversees Skidmore’s advising programs and services and disseminates information about academic policies, procedures, and programs of study. Academic Advising staff work closely with students, faculty, staff, and families to inform students’ academic decisions, to guide them to support services as necessary, and to enrich their intellectual lives through special program opportunities. These two offices collaborate and communicate closely, supporting

⁶ The MSCHE Evaluation Team “Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students of Skidmore College” (April 11, 2006) is Appendix B on the compact disc.

students and faculty advisors, sharing information, tracking data, and intervening when necessary.⁷ The data reflect the success of this collaboration and of our increased offerings of academic support. Approximately 40% of the students seeking support in SAS finish the term with grade-point averages of between 3.5 and 4.0.

The second institutional change is the separation of the Office of Institutional Research from the Office of the Registrar. Facing the retirement, in December 2010, of our Registrar and Director of Institutional Research, Ann Henderson, the VPAA formed a study group in spring of 2010 to consider the structure of that office. The group recommended splitting the Registrar from Institutional Research, as well as strengthening staffing in Institutional Research. By January 2011, we had hired a new Director of Institutional Research and an Interim Registrar. The transition to two separate offices with new leadership will take some time, but will result, we hope, in increased capacity for Institutional Research.

Our new initiative, entitled Transition and Transformation, emerged out of our ongoing strategic planning process (described in greater detail in Section Six below). During a series of town hall meetings for the larger Skidmore community held by President Glotzbach in multiple cities during 2008–2009, a recurrent theme was the need for the College to prepare our students more fully for the transition from college to life after graduation. This was also a wish voiced by students during the process of defining the Goals for Student Learning and Development. Subsequently, we have been looking at ways that we can prepare students throughout their Skidmore experience for the challenges they face after graduation. This initiative is just now getting under way.

One final note: our emphasis here is on student engagement and learning, and on related assessments, planning, and policies. A crucial part of each of the initiatives below is also cultivating faculty support, engagement, and expertise. To that end, Assistant Dean of the Faculty Beau Breslin has created the New Faculty Learning Community, in which all new faculty and a number of seasoned faculty participate. We have also just this spring instituted a new structure for Faculty Interest Groups, partly in response to information gathered from the Harvard Collaborative on Academic Careers in Higher Education (COACHE) survey in which we participated during 2007–2008. The new structure has a faculty facilitator and dedicated space in the library for gatherings around topics of interest, both pedagogical and scholarly.⁸ These structures provide us with opportunities for faculty development that is crucial to moving forward with our initiatives.

Each of the three remaining sections of this narrative takes up one of the Self-Study topics, providing an update on those initiatives, with particular attention to benchmarks, evidence of progress, current challenges, and further planning.

⁷ For example, since its creation, the SAS has seen an increase in peer-tutoring hours (from 1,295 in 2005–2006 to 3,600 in 2009–2010) and study-group hours (from 22 in 2005–2006 to 613 in 2009–2010). One-on-one academic support hours average 1,620 hours per year, and the mean GPA of students seeking support from SAS is 3.173. The unduplicated head count of students seen in SAS across an academic year averages approximately 630 students.

⁸ See the “Center Study Group Final Report” (May 2009) on the compact disc.

Student Engagement and the First-Year Experience

The most visible initiative undertaken by the College in the last decade to increase student engagement is the First-Year Experience (FYE). Inspired in part by the results of a 2003 NSSE survey that indicated Skidmore was lagging behind peer institutions in engagement and retention, and supported by Part I of the College's *Strategic Plan*, the FYE was introduced in the fall of 2005. Its goals are ambitious: the program aims to increase student engagement by (1) providing students with a faculty mentor/advisor who teaches an intense, interdisciplinary, and intimate seminar based on his or her intellectual passion; (2) creating a living-learning community in which seminar students reside in rough proximity to each other in the residence halls, and seminars are housed together based on intellectual themes; (3) focusing on the necessary student skills—time management, preparing for exams, note taking, understanding registration, etc.—that maximize a student's ability to transition successfully from high school to college (fourth credit-hour program); (4) providing each seminar with an upperclass peer mentor, a student who will model the type of intellectual and personal behavior we expect from our very best students; and (5) providing cocurricular opportunities for first-year students throughout the academic year.

Results and Accomplishments

Five years into the initiative, we are seeing reports of higher student engagement (in the follow-up 2007 and 2010 NSSE surveys), increased levels of first-year student retention,⁹ and general first-year student satisfaction (NSSE first-year surveys).¹⁰ Some of the NSSE findings that demonstrate increased engagement of first-year students between 2003 and 2010 are shown below in Figure 1. Skidmore's scores on these measures are similar to, or in some cases better than, those of our peers. The emphasis in Scribner Seminars on oral presentation, writing, and mentoring perhaps contributed to the increases in some of these measures of student engagement.

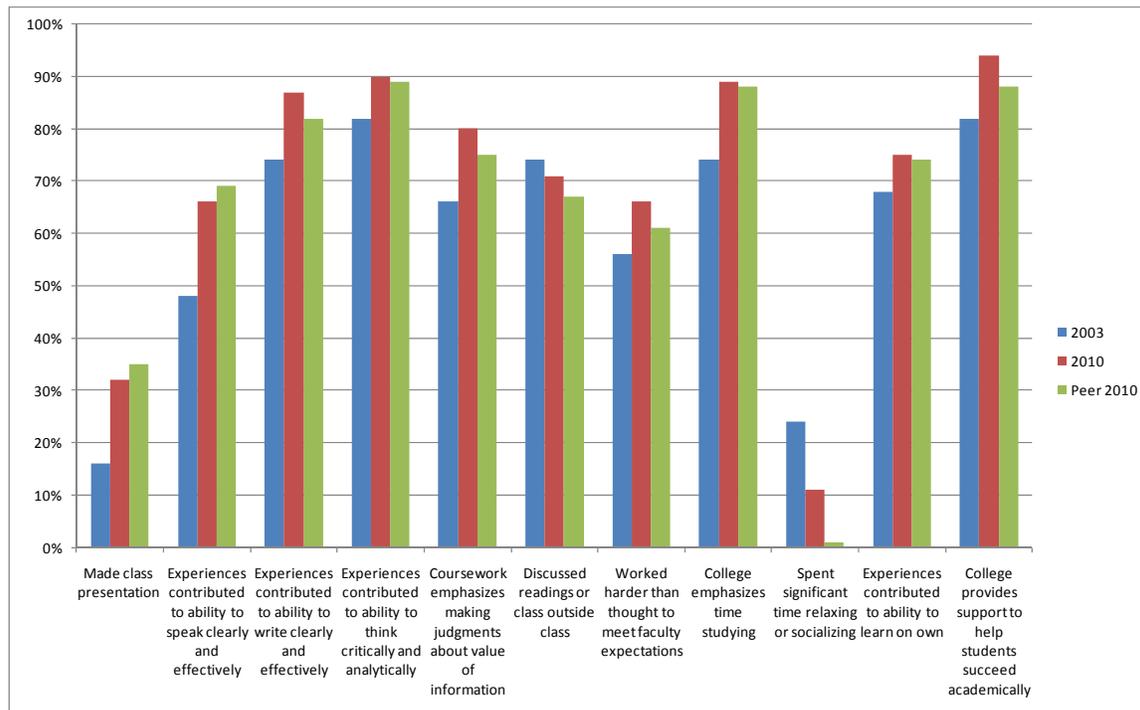
First-year students in 2010 also reported an increased interest in participating in what George Kuh describes as “high-impact activities” that demonstrate student engagement,¹¹ in some cases far above our peers in 2010 (Figure 2). Students come to Skidmore already involved or interested in high-impact practices, as shown by the results of the CIRP survey: 89% of students surveyed said that they had performed volunteer work, and 59% had performed community service as part of a class in high school. The NSSE data confirm these trends. Comparing 2003 to 2010, notable increases (+17–19 percentage points) are evidenced for community service or volunteer work, research with faculty, and culminating senior experience; only independent study showed a slight decrease in 2010.

⁹ From 1995–2005 the average retention of first-year students into the second year was 91.1%. Since the inception of the FYE in 2005, retention of first-year students has averaged 93.9%.

¹⁰ National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) reports for 2003, 2007, and 2010 are on the compact disc.

¹¹ Kuh, George D. AAC&U, 2008. *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, available online at http://www.neasc.org/downloads/aacu_high_impact_2008_final.pdf.

Figure 1: Comparison of Results of Selected NSSE Questions from First-Year Students in 2003 and 2010 (Percent of students reporting “Quite a Bit/Very Much” or Often/Very Often)”

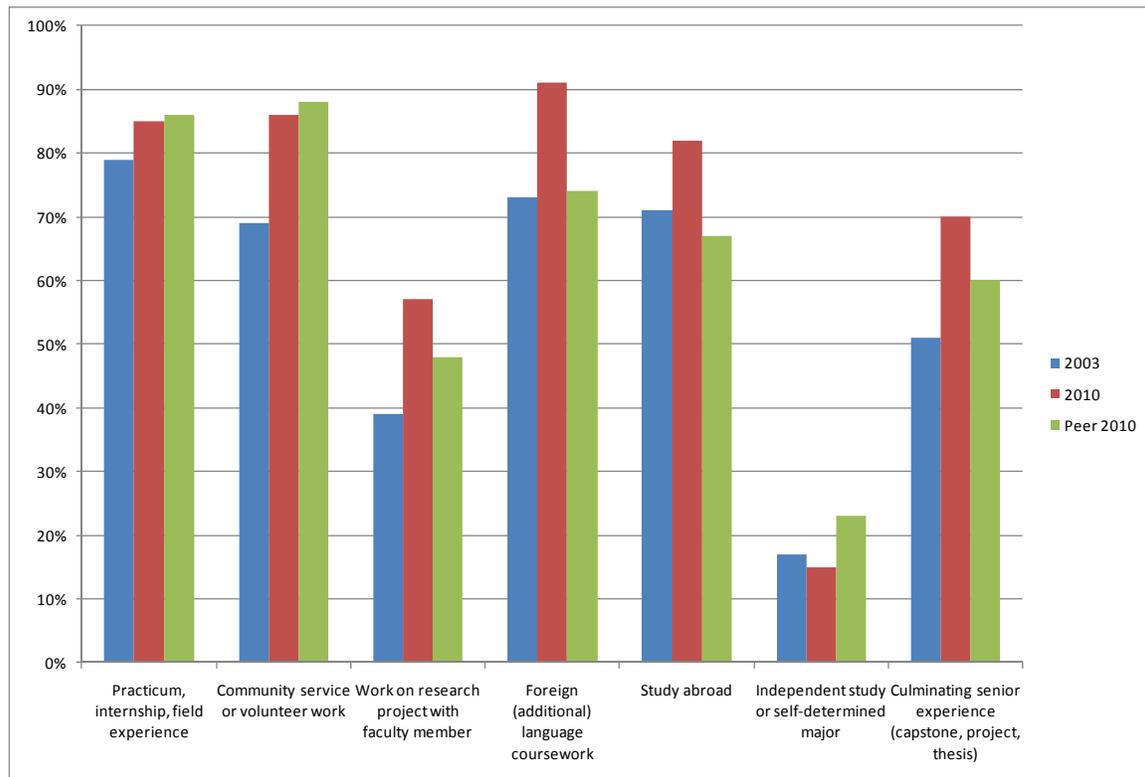


Significantly, the one high-impact pedagogy that does not see notable increase in the NSSE data between 2003 and 2007 is what Kuh (2008) calls learning about “‘difficult differences’ such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality”;¹² for example, there was a slight decrease in students reporting that “diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)” were “included in class discussions or writing assignments.”¹³ By 2010, however, we see an increase of 17% in this measure for first-year students, from 56% to 73%. It seems that efforts to include diverse perspectives in our first-year programming have yielded some results. We take up this and related issues in part three of this narrative below.

¹² Kuh, p. 10.

¹³ See the 2003, 2007, and 2010 NSSE Reports, on the compact disc.

Figure 2: Percent of First-Year Students who Reported “Plan to Do” or “Done” for High-impact Practices



Over the past five years, student participation in most high-impact practices has increased at Skidmore. For example, the number of students participating in summer collaborative research has grown steadily from 15 in 2005 to 51 in 2010; these figures do not include grant-funded summer collaborative research, which has also grown significantly. We have also increased steadily the number of credit-bearing exploratory research experiences in the sciences available to sophomores and juniors, from 49 in 2005–2006 to 98 in 2009–2010. Our students are studying abroad in greater numbers (from 48% of students in the class of 2006 to a high of 59% in the class of 2010; see p. 30 below). Finally, we have also introduced and are implementing a writing requirement in every major, as a supplement to the foundational college-wide one-course requirement. Departments and programs have submitted to the College plans for writing-in-the-majors courses and for assessing and then revising the courses.¹⁴ In one high-impact practice, internships for credit, we have actually seen significant decreases: from 156 in 2005–2006 down steadily to 112 in 2009–2010; we recognize this is a problem and are addressing it in our current initiative to improve support for students’ transition out of college. On the whole, however, we are finding multiple indicators that the increases in student engagement in the first year are holding as well for subsequent years.

The first-year seminars continue to be well received by students; student evaluations in those courses are routinely high. First-year students tell us that the

¹⁴ See the Writing in the Majors website at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/writing/>.

seminars are stimulating, provocative, and, for the most part, challenge their general assumptions about the world around them. Our job is not done, however, even as we reflect on our accomplishments and further stabilize the program. As evidenced by *Engaged Liberal Learning: The First Five Years* and *Strategic Renewal: Reframing our Priorities at the Midpoint of the Strategic Plan*,¹⁵ the College remains fully committed to a “rigorous intellectual experience with robust faculty advising and peer mentoring” for our newest student populations.

Remaining Challenges

The introduction of the First-Year Experience presented many challenges for Skidmore. Staffing of Scribner Seminars by tenure-line faculty was identified at the outset as a significant challenge and it remains a burden for many departments.¹⁶ Departments continue to recognize the institutional importance of the FYE and are thus planning their departmental offerings while being cognizant of their commitment to the program. Evidence suggests that some departments (typically the smaller ones) are feeling a bit squeezed right now, especially when one reviews the number of adjuncts teaching and the present economic reality. The ongoing need for departments to contribute to the First-Year Experience is no doubt one of the reasons for the pressure on these departments. Perhaps the major source of pressure at present is the growth in enrollment at the College. We will continue to be as flexible as possible with all departments, but especially with the ones that are most vulnerable to personnel and curricular pressures.

Fostering an environment where faculty embrace their role as mentors (as opposed to simply advisors) has also been turbulent at times. An earlier assessment effort revealed that faculty and students have slightly different conceptions of mentoring, and faculty are sometimes confused about the breadth and depth of mentoring expectations.¹⁷ What is more, peer mentors have not always been used effectively, and that has posed a challenge for the FYE. Implementing a robust living-learning community has also been difficult logistically. Finally, the use of the second semester to continue and deepen the student engagement that occurs in the first semester remains underdeveloped.

Last fall, the FYE combined efforts with administrators in Student Affairs to develop a new peer-mentoring program. For several years, surveys of peer mentors suggested that faculty were underutilizing their skills and talents and that the peer mentors were somewhat less satisfied than they could be with the job. A change was needed. Based on the concept of “training the trainers,” members of the FYE staff, the Office of Campus Life, Health Promotions, the Counseling Office, Student Academic Services, and others conceptualized a program, to be delivered primarily within the seminar structure by the peer mentors, that is aimed at helping first-year students

¹⁵ The reports are Appendices C and D on the compact disc; they are also available online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/>.

¹⁶ See Beau Breslin, Assessment Report: “Staffing and the FYE” (2007), on the compact disc.

¹⁷ See Caroline D’Abate, Assessment Report: “Understanding Mentoring in the FYE” (2007), on the compact disc.

transition successfully to college.¹⁸ The new program is currently being piloted, and already peer mentors have proven to be a critical resource for first-year students experiencing personal and academic difficulty. A recent survey of first-year students demonstrates that peer mentors help ease the transition to college. Findings show that actively engaged peer mentors measurably improve both social and academic outcomes. Going forward, we expect to expand this model to include a role for peer mentors in providing guidance on a range of academic issues, including academic integrity. We also expect to extend programming into the second semester, when peer mentors can help first-year students plan for high-impact experiences during the sophomore year and beyond.

In partnership with Student Affairs, the FYE continues to wrestle with the difficulties of imagining a robust living-learning community. Indeed, when the First-Year Experience was created, it was understood that not all features of the FYE would happen immediately. The living-learning component was one of those features. Over the course of the first five years, the living-learning component of the FYE has begun to take focus; but it is still in its infancy.

Early on, it became clear that tensions emerged between traditional theme housing (substance-free housing, for example) and the plan to group first-year students based on seminar choices. Accordingly, year three of the FYE program saw the elimination of theme floors, which allowed more flexibility for Scribner Seminars to be housed in proximity to one another. Over the past few years, seminar students have been housed together in residence halls in the hopes that intellectual conversations will materialize organically and learning will continue outside of the traditional classroom setting. Moreover, the FYE and the Office of Residential Life have partnered to house similarly themed seminars in the same residence hall (for example, several Scribner Seminars in 2009 were focused on the quadricentennial of the Hudson River; each of these seminars was housed in the same residence hall).

Another goal of the living-learning community is to integrate already scheduled cocurricular events when possible into the life of the student, resulting in a bridge between learning in and outside the classroom. The process should be seamless. Conceptually, the living-learning component of the FYE makes a good deal of sense, and yet the reality is that few tangible programs have emerged that might kick-start a more substantive living-learning environment. A small working group, consisting of the Director of the First-Year Experience, the Dean of Student Affairs, the Director of Residential Life, the Student Academic Development Coordinator, two members of the faculty, and a peer mentor, continues to meet to talk about ideas in this area.

To date, Scribner Seminar faculty have eagerly used resources outside the classroom to engage their students. Between FYE programming and what is available through other departments and campus life, faculty find an array of choices to incorporate into their course content and encourage, as well as require, student participation. While the plan is in place, the entire program is not. The Skidmore living-learning community

¹⁸ The train-the-trainers model is based on the idea of cascading mentoring, a concept whereby mentors are trained by professionals and other individuals to deliver important academic, social, and life skills to the first-year students.

continues to be an evolution. It is hoped that even more collaboration can develop between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs so that more deliberative planning can take place.

The Office of the First-Year Experience continues to collaborate with other offices as well, especially around the topic of advising and mentoring. Most particularly, we have worked closely with Academic Advising, the Registrar, and Student Academic Services to foster a challenging, yet nurturing, environment where all students can succeed. Our joint collaboration has been notably effective during periods such as summer advising, Scribner Seminar selection, and at times when particular students are in crisis. Summer advising is a new development that has been quite successful. Incoming students are matched with faculty and staff according to shared academic interests, and these summer advisors assist students with course selection for the fall semester. Because students arrive on campus with schedules in place, Scribner Seminar instructors are increasingly free to focus early advising sessions on broader issues of particular concern for first-year students.

The Middle States evaluation team also noted that the College should contemplate the role of the FYE in the spring semester. Specifically, the team asked: “How should advisors and peer mentors continue to work with this cohort of students without the structure of the seminar?”¹⁹ Over the course of its first five years, the FYE has tried a number of initiatives to sustain the intellectual momentum of the seminars into the second semester. Between spring 2008 and spring 2010 the FYE offered an average of 10 sections of ID 151: “Scribner Colloquium,” an interdisciplinary one-credit course conceived as an extension of the Scribner Seminar (and several sections of ID 171, similarly conceived), including one section each in 2009 and 2010 that fell under the umbrella of our pilot IGR (InterGroup Relations) program.²⁰ For the most part, the Scribner Colloquia were well received by first-year students. On average, about three-to-four ID 151 courses each year could be called direct extensions of the seminar. The Scribner Colloquia program was an important component of the First-Year Experience and it proved to be a reasonably effective way to maintain a high level of engagement during the spring semester with a fairly significant percentage of first-year students. Unfortunately, we had to suspend the program because of cost. It represented roughly 30% of the FYE’s annual budget, and we could not sustain the cost during the economic downturn. It is likely, however, that the ID 151 IGR dialogues on race for first-years will be sustained, as we explain in more detail later in this report.

Additionally, the FYE has always tried to sustain a yearlong focus on the themes surrounding the summer reading.²¹ The College was highly successful doing so with several of the summer reading assignments, particularly *Burial at Thebes* and *A Tale of God’s Will*. The latter, a jazz recording that accompanied Spike Lee’s award-winning

¹⁹ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty...” (Appendix B), p. 11.

²⁰ See p. 33 below for a fuller discussion of the IGR pilot courses.

²¹ Skidmore’s assigned summer readings since the introduction of the FYE have included Seamus Heaney’s *Burial at Thebes* (2005), Gregory Howard Williams’ *Life on the Color Line* (2006), Tracy Kidder’s *Mountains Beyond Mountains* (2007), Terence Blanchard’s *A Tale of God’s Will* (2008), Eric Foner’s *Our Lincoln* paired with Bill T. Jones’ *Fondly Do We Hope... Fervently Do We Pray* (2009), and Neil Shubin’s *Your Inner Fish* (2010).

documentary *When the Levees Broke*, and which focused attention on the social, cultural, political, and geographical disaster that befell the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, was particularly fruitful because it represented a successful collaboration between the offices of the First-Year Experience and the Dean of Special Programs. The artist, Terence Blanchard, was the 2008–2009 McCormack Artist-Scholar in Residence and held recitals, classes, and workshops during the fall and spring semesters. The FYE organized speakers and performances throughout the fall and spring that raised awareness of the plight of residents of the Gulf Coast. The FYE also raised funds (approximately \$8,000) through its FYE C.A.R.E.S. program to send several dozen college students down to the region during spring break to work on reconstruction efforts. Despite these successes, we find that maintaining a complex and engaging spring program for the FYE is a real challenge and may not be routinely sustainable.

Currently, the FYE is collaborating with other offices to think about the ways in which students transition at various moments in their college careers. We believe this discussion might yield fruitful ideas that could further enhance student learning in the spring semester. Of particular interest is the college-wide—and indeed national—conversation about sophomores. With the help of the Teagle Foundation and in partnership with several other colleges, Skidmore has been studying the sophomore experience and the “focused exploration” that occurs in a student’s second year and that eventually leads to the directed study in the major. In partnership with the Office of Academic Advising, we envision using the spring semester of the first year to introduce programming that promotes experiential learning—academic internships, exploratory research, service learning activities, and other high-impact experiences more typically targeted at sophomores and juniors—as vital routes to academic engagement and exploration.

Further Assessment Results and Consequences

Assessment efforts have led to some changes in the First-Year Experience. The FYE has undertaken (or collaborated on) more than a dozen assessment projects and/or surveys since its inception, several of which focus directly on student learning outcomes. In the second year of the program, the inaugural director organized assessment efforts around writing in the seminars,²² perceptions of mentoring in the FYE,²³ and departmental staffing complexities as they relate to delivery of the Scribner Seminars.²⁴ Additionally, in 2009, the FYE partnered with the Office of Campus Life on an assessment of student learning in seminars with embedded service-learning components.²⁵ The study aimed to compare self-reported student learning outcomes in those courses to seminars that did not include any service learning connections. The results were compelling. In every single category—from engagement in the seminar, to

²² See Mimi Hellman, Assessment Report: “Writing in the Scribner Seminars” (2007), on the compact disc.

²³ See Caroline D’Abate, Assessment Report: “Understanding Mentoring in the FYE” (2007), on the compact disc.

²⁴ See Beau Breslin, Assessment Report: “Staffing and the FYE” (2007), on the compact disc.

²⁵ See David Karp, “Civic Engagement in the First-Year Experience: Assessment of the Bringing Theory to Practice Grant” (2009), on the compact disc.

interest in other subjects, to time spent on reading and writing, to critical thinking skills—students in service-learning seminars reported higher commitments to positive intellectual values than those in non-service-learning courses. In other words, by all measures students were more engaged in their studies by virtue of participating in a service-learning course. We plan to replicate the study in the next few years to see whether the 2009 results were an aberration. In the meantime, however, the FYE is hard at work trying to identify additional faculty with an interest in embedding service learning in their seminars.

In 2009–2010, the FYE conducted its most elaborate assessment of student learning.²⁶ The College was—and remains—interested in the ways in which first-year students demonstrate meta-cognitive thinking, the ways in which they understand the scope of “college-level learning.” We thus asked students to write a short essay on the topic just as they arrived at college (during orientation) and then again after the first semester was complete. Interestingly, the results suggest that students are better able (or more willing) to express meta-cognitive thoughts as they enter college and that those skills deteriorate slightly during the first semester. There may be several reasons for the peculiar findings: (1) students rarely think as broadly about the intellectual journey through college as when they are imagining that journey before they actually begin; (2) students are so focused on the specifics of finishing assignments at the end of the semester that their commitment to a meta-cognitive exercise is diminished; (3) we asked students to reflect on their meta-cognitive capabilities; next time we should ask them to perform meta-cognitive exercises instead; and (4) college materials (brochures, applications, etc.) often use meta-cognitive language to tell the story of college life—such language may be fresh in the students’ minds when they arrive but may fade with time. There may be several other reasons for the dip in meta-cognitive thinking, and before we close the loop by implementing changes to the FYE or the Scribner Seminars we may want to conduct a slightly altered study. In the end, we plan to undertake a longitudinal analysis of meta-cognitive thinking by using these same students as they progress through their college careers, with the goal of identifying and reinforcing the pedagogies and experiences that are most conducive to this cognitive development.

Conclusions

The College is justly proud of the many accomplishments associated with the First-Year Experience. Faculty, administrators, staff, and students continue to support the program. Especially satisfying are the strides made in those areas flagged by the Middle States evaluation team. The team arrived on campus during the first year of the FYE. In fact, one round of seminars, in fall 2005, was complete at the time of the visit. Reports from the first round of seminars were generally quite positive, but the evaluation team picked up on a number of issues related to the implementation of the program. In particular, the team reported two significant issues: “First, the impact of the new seminar structure on the HEOP/AOP program” required attention. Second, and related to the first,

²⁶ The report, “FYE Learning Assessment Final Summary” (Fall 2009), is on the enclosed compact disc.

the team noted that a more “effective partnership between Academic and Student Affairs” was necessary in order to deepen student engagement at the College.²⁷

Both issues have been systematically addressed. The impact of the First-Year Experience on the Opportunity Program (OP) presented a significant challenge. The Opportunity Program relied heavily on Skidmore’s previous first-year program—the Liberal Studies Program, with its signature first-semester course LS 1: “The Human Experience”—to help economically disadvantaged students obtain the necessary skills to offset certain deficits they encountered early in their academic careers. When the College transitioned to an independent seminar-based program in the FYE, the risk to the Opportunity Program was that their core curriculum would be abandoned. That core is the basis not only of the OP students’ first semester at college, but also of our noted and successful precollege summer program that prepares those students for college-level work at Skidmore. With the support of many dedicated faculty, administrators, and staff, the College opted to preserve an important component of the Liberal Studies program in the form of the SP 100: “Human Dilemmas,” a cluster of 8–12 sections of the Scribner Seminars sharing a similar set of core readings and taught by a team of experienced faculty each year. Indeed, the current Human Dilemmas core reading list looks a good deal like the former LS 1 syllabus. Preserving that cluster, and requiring all OP students to enroll in the “Human Dilemmas” seminars, allows the HEOP/AOP program to maintain its successful pedagogical and curricular approach with particular students, while still working within the framework of the FYE.

Over the past five years, Academic and Student Affairs have forged a solid partnership. The First-Year Experience has collaborated effectively with the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs on New Student Orientation, peer-mentor training, the fourth-credit-hour program, service learning opportunities, and various cocurricular initiatives. It is perhaps in New Student Orientation where that partnership is most visible and impressive. The four-day event was redesigned several years ago to better recognize the specific needs of incoming students. More to the point, internal survey data suggested that students needed more chances to connect with each other, to build the necessary peer relationships to ease social anxieties and to place new students in the best possible situation to tackle the academic rigors of college life. The FYE thus turned to the Office of Campus Life (in Student Affairs) to help design an orientation program that frontloaded social bonding opportunities for the students within their seminars, providing them with a foundational community from the first week. That partnership has been extremely fruitful and, based on surveys of first-year students over the past several years, Skidmore’s orientation program is as effective as, or more effective than, it has been in quite some time. Students feel welcomed, they acclimate fairly easily, and they settle down to face their academic challenges more quickly. We’re seeing greater retention numbers and fewer visits to the FYE office during the first month to talk about homesickness and related troubles.

It goes without saying that challenges remain. We have yet to determine the most viable and effective model for living-learning communities at Skidmore in the first year, for example. We need to assess the effectiveness of faculty mentoring and advising in the

²⁷ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 8.

first year and cultivate strong mentoring by faculty. And in doing all this, we will not only be maximizing the potential of the FYE; we will also be laying the groundwork for stronger support for our students as they make the major transition from college into the workforce or graduate degree programs, an initiative that will rely on collaborations across offices that are similar in many ways to our FYE.

On the whole, our First-Year Experience is well-launched, and we continue to monitor and adapt it.

Advancing Student Engagement in the Physical and Life Sciences

Skidmore's 2006 Self-Study identified strengthening student engagement in the natural sciences as a major goal for the College. In the following narrative on the physical and life sciences, we relate the challenges and/or opportunities identified in the Self-Study, and the College's reaction to these challenges, to the belief that enhancing and strengthening the sciences at Skidmore will foster greater student engagement and will benefit the College in other ways as well. We continue to implement this goal, meeting some of our targets and creating new ones.

In the 2006 Self-Study the term "natural sciences" referred to the programs, faculty, students, pedagogies and departments of Biology, Chemistry, Computer Science, Environmental Studies, Geosciences, Health and Exercise Sciences, Mathematics, Neuroscience, Physics, and Psychology. As we move forward in these sciences we accept that it is more appropriate to refer to this collection of departments and programs as the physical and life sciences. For the sake of readability and flow, the term natural science is still often used and often further truncated to *science*. We recognize that the general term *science* normally includes the social sciences as well, and part of this initiative is to intentionally build synergies between the physical and life sciences and the social sciences and other disciplines. At the same time, our goal has been and remains a strategic rebalancing of our curriculum by strengthening the physical and life sciences.

Accomplishments and Major Changes Since 2006

Since the Middle States Review in 2006, Skidmore College has made noteworthy progress towards achieving goals for the physical and life sciences that were recommended in its Self-Study report. In particular:

Collaborative Research: As noted above, the number of students that participate in collaborative research in the sciences in the summer has increased from 15 in the summer of 2005 to 62 in the summer of 2010, including grant-funded research.

Increased Number of Science Majors: An increased focus on the sciences at Skidmore (as described in the *Strategic Plan*) and cooperation between the science departments and Admissions have resulted in considerable increases in the number of students majoring in the sciences or with interests in science-related careers. The benchmark cited in the Self-Study was a goal of a 50–75% increase in the number of

science majors over a decade.²⁸ There are 51% more students in the class of 2010 majoring in the natural sciences than in 2005. For the class of 2012 there are 66% more declared science majors than in 2005. At the same time, the number of students registering with the Health Professions Advisory Committee (HPAC) has more than doubled, from 136 students in 2006 to 284 students in 2010.

More Diverse Student Population: We see strengthening the sciences as one aspect of attracting a more diverse student population to the College. At its April 2010 Discovery Tour weekend for accepted multicultural students, the academic forum with the highest attendance was the one on science and math.

Our efforts to increase the number of students from underrepresented groups studying science at Skidmore College include a \$550,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to support the Skidmore Scholars in Science and Mathematics (*S³M*) program. Including the incoming class of 2014, this program provides financial and academic support to 28 students, all of whom are from populations traditionally underrepresented in the sciences. Generally, *S³M* scholars have performed at a level above their classmates during their time at Skidmore: for the class of 2013 the average GPA of the *S³M* scholars is 3.357, while it is 3.278 for the entire class of 2013.

The support systems for students in the Opportunity Program (OP) and the *S³M* program serve as a model for academic support in the sciences for all students. A standard bearer for these efforts is the Department of Biology. Prior to 2009, few OP students completed both BI 105 and BI 106, the full introductory Biology sequence. As part of its departmental assessment conducted in the 2009–2010 academic year, the department determined that while *S³M* students generally performed at a level that was comparable to non-*S³M* students, 95% of the OP students earned a grade of C+ or lower on the first exam in BI 105. While 11% of the students in the class were OP students, they received 25% of all the grades in this category. Through focused mentoring provided by an academic counselor from Student Academic Services (SAS) who audited the class, as well as a program of study groups for at-risk students, this performance gap was entirely erased by the second exam. It was erased not through attrition of the poorest-performing students, but through improvement shown by individual students. Moreover, the OP students were as likely to enroll in BI 106 as were other students.²⁹ The program of study groups offered through SAS has grown and supports all of the sciences. SAS offers 20–25 study groups each term, and many of these are in gateway STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) courses; in fall 2010, 16 of the 20 study groups were in STEM courses.

Increased Grant Funding: In 2007, the College hired a full-time sponsored research officer. Since that time, the level of external funding in the sciences has increased from \$672,681 in 2005 to \$2,500,208 in 2010. Recent grants support a wide range of endeavors, from pedagogical innovation to instrumentation for research by both students and faculty. Examples include: an NSF Advance grant that supports a collaborative effort between Skidmore and Union Colleges to enhance recruitment and retention of faculty women in the STEM disciplines and to promote their advancement

²⁸ “Self-Study Final Report” (February 2006), p. 60; on the compact disc.

²⁹ See “Assessment Activities, Department of Biology” (April 1, 2010), on the enclosed compact disc.

through rank; an NSF Course, Curriculum, and Laboratory Improvement (CCLI) Program award that will allow Skidmore to adapt the “Discovery Chemistry” model of inquiry-based, laboratory-driven courses for its general chemistry sequence; and an NSF Major Research Instrumentation grant to establish an integrated research instrumentation cluster, enabling faculty and students in Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Studies, and Anthropology to engage in basic and applied research that links composition with the structure and function of biological, chemical, and anthropological systems.

New Faculty Lines, Hiring, and Support: Since 2005 the College has added two of the four tenure-track faculty lines called for in the 2004 science white paper, “Science in the Liberal Arts: The Future of Science Education at Skidmore College.”³⁰ In addition, we have added three technical support positions in Biology and Chemistry, and three additional teaching associate positions in the natural sciences.

A Mellon grant providing bridge funding is also enabling us to hire a new faculty member now in Computer Science in anticipation of a retirement in 2013. Further, the NSF Advance grant has supported faculty development through pre-tenure and mid-career research support awards and modified teaching loads.

Engaging Pedagogies: The natural science faculty at the College continues to collaborate with the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery to produce major interdisciplinary exhibitions that have garnered national attention and provided a framework for pedagogical experiments. The most recent of these, “Molecules that Matter,” co-curated by Chemistry Professor Ray Giguere and Dayton Director of the Tang John Weber, was an interdisciplinary look at the 10 most significant 20th-century organic molecules that have changed the way we live.³¹ Professor Giguere engaged his students in a broad range of projects related to the exhibit, both as it was being prepared and while it was here, and many other professors incorporated the exhibit actively and creatively into their courses, providing a model for increasing our students’ scientific literacy through projects across disciplinary borders.

More recently, the CCLI grant from the NSF will support faculty in revamping the introductory Chemistry sequence with a new approach called Discovery Chemistry (DC); this involves laboratory-based learning, guided inquiry, data pooling, and cooperative learning. This approach was used in the honors CH 107 course in the fall 2010 term; student engagement, learning, and attitudes about science were assessed and compared with the same measures in a traditionally taught class in fall 2009. The results were inconclusive but not discouraging (given the small number of subjects tested). We used an in-house developed knowledge test and the Colorado Learning Attitudes about Science Survey (CLASS) for the assessment. Students in both classes—the one using traditional pedagogies and the (DC) class—made statistically significant gains in knowledge over the semester, with the DC group making greater gains than the traditionally taught students (but not at a statistically significant level). The largest gains

³⁰ Environmental Studies added a line in 2006–2007, and funding for a new line in Neuroscience has been allocated for 2011–2012.

³¹ The “Molecules that Matter” website is at <http://tang.skidmore.edu/index.php/calendars/view/151/tag:1/year>. See also the report “Molecules that Matter: Statistics and Summary,” on the compact disc.

using the DC method were for the least prepared students, which was not true for the traditional method. DC students' responses on the CLASS survey shifted toward more expert responses, while traditionally taught students' responses shifted toward more novice. During the summer of 2011 we will run a workshop on "Inquiry-based, Lab-driven Chemistry Courses" for faculty at Skidmore and other local two-year and four-year colleges and also targeted high-school chemistry teachers.

Alignment with College-wide Goals: Natural scientists must be able to communicate with peers across the sciences and with non-science colleagues, friends, family, and constituents. "Communicate effectively" is the first of the college-wide goals that Skidmore is focusing on, with efforts under way as science faculty assess how well their students communicate in written form,³² orally,³³ and visually.³⁴ The recently implemented requirement for writing in the major is an important element in delivering this outcome across the College.

The Science Vision

As mentioned above, on their visit in 2006, the Middle States review team pointed out a disjunction between our aspiration for the physical and life sciences and the resources earmarked for their development. They also noted that while the goals for our science curriculum are sensible, there is no clear road map as to how these goals will be achieved. At the request of the Dean of the Faculty, in the fall of 2007 the natural science departments began a planning process to realize the standards for the natural sciences set out in the College's *Strategic Plan* and to address the concerns raised by the Middle States review team. From the outset, this planning process has been student-centered and directed toward determining measurable student learning outcomes. A fundamental axiom has been that our planning process must be guided by two underlying questions:

- What do we want a Skidmore educated student to know?
- How do we want our students to learn?

The seeds of the current science-planning document, *A Vision for the Physical and Life Sciences at Skidmore College*, were germinated at an all-day retreat held in the fall of 2007 attended by 90% of the natural science faculty on campus that semester. An ad-hoc group appointed by the Dean of Faculty, the Science Working Group (SWG), then took up the work. This science-planning document (also known as the Science Vision) contains three goals. Each of these goals has accompanying student-learning outcomes and programmatic strategies. It should be noted that these student-learning outcomes are closely linked to the all-college learning outcomes endorsed by the faculty in December 2009.³⁵ The Science Vision provides a broad outline of a multifaceted initiative. It is a

³² Denise Brooks McQuade, "Preliminary Assessment of Laboratory Exercises across the Natural Sciences at Skidmore College" (March 2006), on the compact disc.

³³ See the Biology Assessment Plan (2008), on the compact disc.

³⁴ Denise Brooks McQuade, "Final Report on the Assessment of Visual Communication in the Sciences" (June 7, 2006), on the compact disc.

³⁵ Goals for Student Learning and Development (Appendix F), also online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/assessment/goals-for-student-learning.cfm>.

living document, and we are in the process of discussing the vision as a community and working through its proposals in multiple contexts. Additional community discussions will take place as the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) considers the details of the vision and reflects on how, where, and whether to implement them. The vision articulates the following goals:

Science Vision Goal I: The College recognizes the importance of scientific literacy in today’s society and is committed to providing each student with a solid understanding of science, its accomplishments, and its relevance to his/her life.

Science Vision Goal IIa: The Skidmore College science curriculum will model the inherently collaborative nature of modern scientific inquiry both within and among science disciplines. In order to deliver this curriculum, the College recognizes that the sciences must have strong disciplinary programs at its core from which it can support robust, creative, and flexible interdisciplinary programs.

Science Vision Goal IIb: Skidmore College will enhance the student/faculty research experience as an important component of all science major programs.

Science Vision Goal III: Skidmore College will achieve a distinctive integration of the sciences with the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

The Science Vision is our road map, and what follows is a description of the College’s efforts to address the challenges listed above.

Challenges that Remain

While the progress that the College has made is significant, many of the challenges that existed at the time of the review and that were noted by the external review team remain. Some of these challenges have been magnified by the successes that we have achieved to date. In particular, the review team called attention to the following problems that continue to challenge us:

Faculty Lines: The increased enrollments that have occurred in the sciences exacerbate the demands on science faculty that the review team characterized as “a faculty already stretched very thin.”³⁶ Increased enrollments in the sciences have made it more difficult for faculty to participate in the First-Year Experience program. This tension was predicted in the reviewer’s report. The review team pointed out that the four faculty appointments recommended in the science white paper—“two in Neuroscience, one in Environmental Studies and one in Biological Chemistry”—are “reasonable, but they may not be enough.”³⁷

³⁶ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 12.

³⁷ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 12.

Community Buy-in: The team questioned the level of community support for strengthening the sciences and stated that the College needs to have frank and open discussions with the entire Skidmore community around the science initiative.³⁸

Addressing this problem, the Science Planning Group began to initiate discussions of the vision in the spring of 2008 and has continued to seek input from the community. The group has met with the chairs of the social science, humanities, and arts departments. It has met with the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) and has brought the planning document forward for discussion at a meeting of department chairs and program directors as well as at Academic Staff. The Science Planning Group has endorsed the document, and President's Cabinet has discussed the plan on several occasions. In the spring of 2010, CEPP hosted an open forum for all faculty, and it anticipates there will be future open discussions. Also, in the fall of 2010, the vision was brought to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, which passed a resolution in support of it.³⁹ Further discussions took place at the February 2011 Board meeting, including a sense of the infrastructure aspirations for the Science Vision.

In the spring of 2010, the group held a special focus group meeting to talk about Goal III of the Science Vision with approximately 30 faculty invited from disciplines across the College. The SWG believes that this goal, in particular, offers an opportunity and basis on which to build community-wide support at the College for the sciences at Skidmore. The goal recognizes and celebrates Skidmore's uniqueness, capitalizing on the fact that—as the *Strategic Plan* states—“we attract students who are *sophisticated, eclectic, collaborative, and adventurous.*” Goals I and III of the Science Vision cannot be achieved without the input and support of the entire faculty at the College, and the lively and responsive focus group discussions lead us to believe that we are on our way to building that support. Discussions of this report with various faculty groups have helped with that process.

There remain some tensions within the faculty around this initiative because it requires substantial resources at a time when many departments are feeling the pinch of budget reductions. Among our next steps should be to develop a plan for building stronger support among the faculty from outside of the physical and life sciences.

Infrastructure/Funding: The College's Self-Study recommended building and enhancing infrastructure that will support and develop students' engagement in natural science. The review team states that “this leads directly to the question of the possible need for a new or expanded science building.”⁴⁰ The team asserts that the College must have a more informed picture of the full costs of the science initiative and that the funds earmarked in the current (now completed) campaign were not sufficient to fully implement the proposed initiatives.⁴¹

³⁸ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), pp. 12–13.

³⁹ The resolution reads: “Be it resolved, that the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees expresses its commendation and support for the science vision—and its encouragement for taking the next steps toward implementation” (October, 2010).

⁴⁰ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 13.

⁴¹ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 12.

In addition to building faculty support, we know that we need a clear sense of what is possible financially, especially in the current economic climate. In order to ascertain the true costs of enhancing the physical and life sciences at Skidmore, in the spring of 2010 the College contracted with the academic planning firm Dober, Lidsky, Mathey. We asked the firm to determine additional resource needs in terms of faculty and laboratory and technical personnel necessary to implement the Science Vision and programmatic strategies, based on current and projected enrollments. They will also help us define the facility and space needs for the physical and life sciences; and they have estimated funding needed to implement the strategies outlined in the Science Vision document. The firm's final report was received by the President's Cabinet in January 2011 and is currently under consideration. Without question, the financial obstacles to our goals are substantial.

Science Literacy/Breadth Requirement: Finally, the review team pointed out that a central component of Skidmore's Self-Study that was not well developed was that of science literacy and that the natural science breadth requirement needs to be assessed with particular attention to the goals of the requirement.⁴²

Faculty in the physical and life sciences have been addressing this issue with assessments and planning. The Vision proposes changes in science curricula based mainly on the results of two recent assessments. The first was the Middle States 2006 Student Survey (created and administered by Skidmore).⁴³ As reported in Skidmore's 2006 Middle States Self-Study, 61% of the respondents disagreed or disagreed strongly with the assertion, "Understanding of natural sciences is essential for an engaged citizen." The second assessment was a Science Literacy Survey,⁴⁴ commissioned by the SWG in the spring of 2008. The survey was designed to test two basic components of science literacy: (1) knowledge of basic concepts across multiple scientific disciplines, and (2) the ability to extract information from a popular press report of a scientific study. The survey was administered to students in junior- and senior-level capstone courses. Sixty-two science majors and 97 non-science majors completed the survey. Overall, the students performed well on the first part of the survey (mean of 84.7%), which was designed to measure general knowledge of basic science concepts. Neither group of students did particularly well on the questions designed to test analytical skills and quantitative reasoning, however.

The results of these two assessments indicate that our students have a reasonable baseline of scientific knowledge but do not appreciate the relevance of science and are weak in analytical skills. Results from our NSSE surveys complement these findings. In the NSSE results for all years—2003, 2007, and 2010—both first-years' and seniors' answers regarding quantitative analysis in their coursework trail those of our peer institutions, as Figure 3 demonstrates.⁴⁵ We do note that the gap is narrower for seniors, and that there are signs of gradual improvement across these years, though the troubling gap between our students and our peers' remains:

⁴² MSCHE "Report to the Faculty ..." (Appendix B), p. 13.

⁴³ Middle States 2006 Student Survey Results, on the compact disc.

⁴⁴ Denise Brooks McQuade, "Preliminary Findings from the Science Literacy Survey" (March 3 2008). This study, conducted at the request of the Science Working Group, is on compact disc.

⁴⁵ The NSSE reports are on the compact disc.

Figure 3: Percent of students who responded “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to the NSSE question “To what extent has your experience at Skidmore contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in analyzing quantitative problems?”

Skidmore				Peer			
	2003	2007	2010		2003	2007	2010
First-Years	42%	56%	62%		57%	65%	73%
Seniors	53%	54%	68%		66%	70%	72%

Data from our Alumni Learning Census 2010 reinforce these findings. Interestingly, among the five intellectual skills that alumni report as having been least “enhanced by Skidmore,” two are related to the sciences: they ranked “Apply Scientific Principles and Methods” and “Use Quantitative Tools to Solve Problems” among the lowest in terms of their learning at Skidmore, indicating that the alumni respondents did not seem to believe that their education in the physical and life sciences had been effective.⁴⁶

In response to these results—which are disappointing but confirm our internal student assessments—we are considering strategies to help students understand scientific methodologies and the relevance of science in today’s society rather than the simple acquisition of scientific facts. In order to realize the goals for student learning with regard to scientific literacy, the SWG proposed that all Skidmore students be required to take a designated course that would focus on the ability to critique scientific information and foster an understanding and appreciation of the relevance of science to the human experience. Some courses that satisfy the current laboratory science requirement could be modified to satisfy this scientific literacy requirement. Additional science literacy courses could be offered both from within the physical and life sciences and from other academic departments and programs across the College. Further, the second quantitative reasoning (QR2) course would have substantial focus on statistics and/or mathematical modeling.

We recognize that improving our students’ knowledge of and facility with quantitative and scientific reasoning is an important task for the College as a whole—and in particular for the social sciences as well as the physical and life sciences—and we hope to engage faculty from across the College in this undertaking. Currently, a group of faculty from multiple disciplines is working on potential guidelines for science literacy courses. The SWG anticipates forwarding guidelines regarding the scientific literacy criteria to CEPP by the end of this academic year.

Conclusions

The College has made significant progress in enhancing the physical and life sciences since the review team’s visit in 2006. We believe that we are now on the path to achieving the goals for the physical and life sciences set out in the College’s *Strategic*

⁴⁶ 2010 Alumni Learning Census Executive Summary (April 8, 2011), p. 4, on the compact disc.

Plan and the midpoint report, though we face major challenges in further building support for this initiative across the College, and in financing necessary changes in infrastructure and personnel. The Science Vision complements this fresh look at the *Strategic Plan* in a variety of ways. Its emphasis on scientific literacy is a continuing objective of the goal of student academic engagement, and the Science Vision sets out specific expectations for student engagement that dovetail with the all-college Goals for Student Learning and Development. Most important, the *Strategic Renewal* document reaffirms the College's commitment to continuing our science planning and strengthening our students' scientific literacy.

The College's Self-Study of 2006 reflects on the direction that the sciences might take at the College: "Some of us ask: will we become a community that offers students the best of collaborative research at a liberal arts college, that attracts external funding to support research, and that uses this research to enrich, deeply, the content of robust interdisciplinary science courses? Or will we devote extensive time and effort to a fusion of art and science, experiences that become a hallmark of science at Skidmore, and an attractor for students who wish to study at the interface of two distinctly different ways of exploring the world?" The report suggests that some believe that we cannot afford to do both, while others see these paths reinforcing each other, providing unique opportunities for collaboration and reinforcement. As the third goal of the Science Vision document validates, the natural science faculty at the College believe that these paths are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, many of our students are out ahead of us on this goal: since 2006, between 10.5% and 16.5% of our majors in the physical and life sciences—a total of 63 students—have had a second major outside of the sciences.

In the President's *Strategic Renewal* document, he states that "it is crucial that we understand and emphasize those features that set us apart from competitor institutions...." Goal III of the Science Vision seeks to achieve exactly that. The review team points out that the College needs to identify why a student interested in science should enroll at Skidmore rather than elsewhere.

We believe that the answer is not that a student should study science here in spite of our traditional strengths in the arts and humanities, but rather, *because of* our traditional strengths in the arts and humanities and our long-established tradition of interdisciplinary interaction. Our assessments and planning in the physical and life sciences aim to help us to make good on that potential, both now and over an extended period of ambitious changes.

Engagement in Intercultural and Global Understanding

Accomplishments and Major Changes

The progress we have made toward the realization of Goal II of the *Strategic Plan*—intercultural and global understanding—has been possible in large part because of the affirmative work of President Glotzbach in both framing and supporting the project. "The underlying concern of the *Strategic Plan*'s second goal is *difference*," he noted in

“Intercultural Literacy,” a fall 2007 essay.⁴⁷ “Every one of our students needs to understand— not just *in theory* but also as a matter of *practical life skills*—how to live and work effectively with persons whose lived experience may have given them a radically different perspective on the world. Specifically, our graduates need to have learned how understanding and appreciating such different perspectives can broaden and deepen their own thinking.” Furthermore, in an effort to realize this undertaking, the President has utilized discretionary funds to make diversity-related programming visible and to support key initiatives.

Central to our work is our ambition for our students’ learning. The Goals for Student Learning and Development call, among other things, for our students to “understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts;” to “interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities;” and to “interrogate one’s own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences.”⁴⁸ These goals and the results of assessments related to them are the rationale behind developments since 2006 in administrative structure, hiring, admissions recruitment, financial aid, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment.

The changes we have made mark considerable progress, even as we experience ongoing challenges. We have become more aware as a community of how far we still have to go before Skidmore is the genuinely inclusive college we seek to be, and before all members of the community have achieved the goals for intercultural understanding that we have set for our students and for ourselves. Unexpectedly, 2010–2011 has proven to be an unusually challenging year for the College with respect to issues related to campus climate and diversity. During the spring, Acting President Kress called a community meeting to open a broad dialogue about the College’s climate for people of color and other underrepresented groups. In addition, the Student Government Association convened two large dialogue sessions, led by students who were trained in InterGroup Dialogue facilitation and/or conflict mediation, which drew a large and engaged student response. While the engagement in this and other contexts represents a positive development, it has also been at times contentious and uncomfortable. As of this writing, it is not yet clear what specific institutional changes may result; but a commitment has been expressed to ensuring that the College continues to examine issues of diversity and inclusion with the aim of making more progress in specific areas where data show that we fall short. One major challenge lies in the very recent decision on the part of our Director of Intercultural Understanding, Professor Winston Grady-Willis, to take a leave of absence to accept a position elsewhere. Replacing him and sustaining and growing the initiatives he has begun here will be both essential and difficult.

This moment of some agitation comes at the end of five years of some significant changes at the College. Accomplishments include the development of a new administrative structure with new positions for diversity-related initiatives and oversight; a significant increase in the diversity of our student body; increases in study away and in the range of places our students study off-campus; the creation of a successful pilot

⁴⁷ The President’s essay “Intercultural Literacy” is linked directly to this site: <http://cms.skidmore.edu/president/essays/index.cfm>.

⁴⁸ Goals for Student Learning and Development (Appendix F), also online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/assessment/goals-for-student-learning.cfm>.

InterGroup Dialogue Program; and the development of new sexual assault policies. According to our data, we remain challenged to increase—indeed, to halt a decrease in—the diversity of both faculty and staff. Further, as we elaborate below, quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources make it clear that we need to improve campus climate both inside and outside the classroom and become a more genuinely inclusive campus. We need to sustain and strengthen initiatives to hire and retain faculty and staff of color; to cultivate greater awareness and sensitivity among white constituencies on campus; and to develop the curriculum, including refining the cultural-diversity requirement.

A key development since 2006 has been the effort by the College to formalize diversity initiatives within the larger administrative structure. Specifically, a three-person group was charged with operational responsibility for coordinating implementation of *Strategic Plan* Goal II: the Director of Intercultural Studies (faculty), Assistant Director of Equal Employment Opportunity and Workforce Diversity (staff), and Director of the Office of Student Diversity Programs (students). This diversity team was fully in place by January 2008.

Representing Academic Affairs, Human Resources, and Student Affairs, members of this diversity team work individually, collectively, and as part of larger groups such as the newly established and important Committee for Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU) and the Bias Response Group (BRG). Individually, the three members of this team have worked to provide leadership on issues of diversity and inclusion regarding the curriculum, workplace, and student climate, respectively. The team's ongoing collaboration is perhaps most prominent in the multifaceted work of CIGU. Begun in September 2005 as the Intercultural and Global Understanding Task Force (IGUTF) cochaired by the President, CIGU is now an ongoing subcommittee of the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee chaired by the Director of Intercultural Studies, and cochaired by the Director of Off-Campus Study and Exchanges (OCSE). CIGU is a 14-member committee responsible for considering issues of both domestic and international diversity.

CIGU was also charged with drafting an assessment document to measure the College's progress with respect to Goal II.⁴⁹ Led in part by the diversity team, CIGU members worked to fashion a document that both lays the groundwork for diversity assessment and stands in conversation with the overall assessment efforts undertaken by the Assessment Steering Committee. CIGU members approved the document, "Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College," in spring 2008.⁵⁰ The IPPC formally endorsed the document in fall 2009 as a guiding instrument for assessing progress toward Goal II. Future work to assess progress toward Goal II will need to incorporate not only racial and ethnic diversity, but also diversity related to areas such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious preference, and disabilities, as well as incorporating a substantive treatment of global diversity.

Many of the items in the assessment document are stated as objectives. The next steps will be to identify quantitative, measurable, items for assessment where possible; to

⁴⁹ "CIGU: Goal II, Assessment of Learning Goals," on the compact disc.

⁵⁰ "Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College" (2008), on the compact disc.

synthesize and make use of the assessments we have done over the past two years; to align the objectives and assessments with the newly adopted Goals for Student Learning and Development; and to make recommendations for specific changes based on the outcomes. A faculty assessment workshop held in May 2009, with outside consultant Gavin Henning, Associate Director of Assessment at Dartmouth College, made it clear to those present just how complex this process of alignment is and will continue to be. CIGU provides the structure and the oversight to move the process ahead.

Another new group within the new structure, the Bias Response Group (BRG), is a subcommittee of CIGU, established in 2006 and chaired by Rochelle Calhoun, Dean of Student Affairs. The BRG was responsible for reviewing and revising the College's interim Bias Response Protocol. After providing input for further revision, CIGU members approved the revised protocol in spring 2008. The Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC) formally approved the Bias Response Protocol in fall 2009.⁵¹ We have been using the protocol over the past two years.

Equally significant, the BRG launched "Speech Matters," a successful bias-education campaign that has included several forums in which students, faculty, and staff discuss the distinction between academic freedom and free speech on the one hand and insensitivity and targeted hate speech on the other. As part of its educational mission, the BRG also began providing incident alerts to the larger College community in fall 2009. The number of bias incidents on campus has fluctuated: 20 were reported in 2008–2009; they dropped to 12 in 2009–2010; and in 2010–2011, there was an increase back up to 21.

Student Diversity

Skidmore's greatest success in meeting the *Strategic Plan's* Goal II has been in its efforts to increase the number of underrepresented students at Skidmore. In a significant development, in 2007 the College increased the number of students admitted annually in the Opportunity Program from 25 to 40; although these students are not all students of color, they increase the socioeconomic diversity of the College as well. As noted in the section on the sciences above, the institution also secured a grant from the NSF to partially support the S³M program, which provides significant financial and academic support, especially for students from underrepresented groups. Additionally, the College has increased its financial aid budget from approximately \$16 million in 2003 to \$32 million in 2009. Admissions began targeting new high schools and community-based organizations to recruit diverse populations. It also collaborates with five local chapters of the Albany-based Sponsor-a-Scholar program, providing on-campus experiences, and has enrolled a number of students from that program. The College also began to maximize United World College efforts to attract international students with financial need and secure financial support for them.

As a result of these developments as well as increased recruitment efforts, the percentage of students of color has grown in recent years, to 20% in the entering class in fall 2009 and a total of 23.7% for fall 2010. If we count all students who self-identify as students of color, including international students, the figure approaches 26% (exactly

⁵¹ The Bias Response Protocol is available on the compact disc.

25.8%).⁵² In contrast, in 2006, the ALANA students represented 17.3% of the entering class. These figures represent a significant increase over the past five years and a real accomplishment for the College. We are now in the process of coming to terms with what this change means and what further changes the College needs to make to accompany it. We take up these challenges below.

Off-campus Study

Another area where we have made significant changes and growth over the past five years is in off-campus opportunities for all of our students.

The Office of Off-Campus Study and Exchanges (OCSE) continues to play a central role in the realization of the *Strategic Plan's* Goal II for Skidmore students. More than 59% of 2010 graduates had studied off campus; the College ranked sixth among top baccalaureate institutions for students studying abroad for a semester or more in 2008–2009, according to the IIE Open Doors Survey.⁵³ When comparing figures from 2005–2006 and 2009–2010, there is a significant increase in the percentage of students who have studied off campus prior to graduation: the figure jumped from 48% to 59%. In Skidmore programs we saw the greatest increase in our Spain (52%) and London programs (98% increase for our London spring program). In terms of non-Skidmore approved programs, we saw an increase in Asia (over 700%), although enrollments in Japan declined (-51%); an increase in Europe outside of Spain, France, and Italy (over 200%); and an increase in enrollments in “Other” (135%) which can include programs in the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, or programs with various sites. Study in Latin America saw a minor increase (22%) and study in Africa realized a slight decrease (-5%). The significant increases in study away and in students’ choice of sites other than the traditional European countries meet goals articulated in our 2006 Self-Study.

Much of the increase and shift in student study off-campus is due to the implementation of a departmentally-focused approved programs structure. This structure has allowed departments and academic programs to choose which programs their students will attend based on academic fit and administrative strengths. Faculty have an important voice in the approval process and, as a result, are better able to advise students regarding how programs might fit into their academic plans. As we had hoped, this structure has allowed for more widespread and substantive faculty engagement in off-campus study and has opened doors for additional conversations about how to link more effectively off-campus study and the on-campus programs.

As we consider our international programs in light of other institutional goals, we have been cognizant of the need to view the *Strategic Plan's* three goals holistically. With this in mind, OCSE has endeavored to develop more opportunities abroad in the sciences, through approved semester-long programs that focus on the natural sciences and through faculty-led Travel Seminars that allow faculty and students to gain hands-on experience with theory they have studied on campus. (Some examples of Travel

⁵² IPEDS Fall Enrollment Reports 2007–2008 through 2009–2010, on the compact disc.

⁵³ U.S. Study Abroad: Leading Institutions, available online at <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Leading-Institutions-Duration-Institutional-Type/2008-09>.

Seminars focusing on science are given later in this section.) Data shows an increase in the number of science majors studying abroad: from 40% of in the class of 2006 to 51% in the class of 2010 (though the trajectory is not a straight line). The increase is likely due in part to the addition of 58 programs that are approved by the sciences (Biology–10; Chemistry–2; Environmental Studies–14; Geosciences–5; Health and Exercise Sciences–5; Neuroscience–11; Psychology–11). Even given the strides we have made, it is clear that off-campus study remains more accessible to some majors than others; therefore, OCSE hopes to continue to explore options for all science students regardless of discipline.

Service learning and community engagement are two other areas OCSE has begun to incorporate into our off-campus programming. Many of our Skidmore-administered and non-Skidmore approved programs offer students opportunities to engage in internships, volunteer work, and community-based research. In fact, 87 programs offer students formal opportunities for field work, service learning, internships, or volunteer work; two of these programs, one in India and one in Thailand, focus specifically on service-learning. In 2008–2009, 30 of our Skidmore students participated in formal internship work that brought them into the local community; in 2009–2010, 27 Skidmore students did so. While we do not currently track the data, anecdotal evidence indicates there are just as many students who engage in similar community activities in an informal way. Finally, to encourage maximum engagement with the local community, OCSE recently implemented a requirement that students studying internationally be housed in homestays if that option is available through their program of choice.

OCSE has continued to strengthen our short-term faculty-led study-abroad programs, known as Travel Seminars, to foster collaborative relationships among faculty and between faculty and students. The majority of Travel Seminars have a substantive on-campus course the semester prior to the off-campus seminar; this is the preferred model, as the on-campus component allows for a richer, more engaged student academic experience while away. We also give preference to Travel Seminars that allow for experiences that students cannot duplicate through our semester-based program portfolio, including programs in nontraditional locations and those that support underrepresented disciplines. Examples of these Travel Seminars include Culture and Colonialism in Puerto Rico; Globalization and Development: A Case Study in Istanbul, Turkey; Tropical Field Ecology in Costa Rica; and New Zealand on the Edge: Geological Processes at an Active Plate Tectonic Boundary.

Another significant development for OCSE is the growth of its domestic off-campus opportunities, including options through National Student Exchange (NSE), a U.S.-based consortium that allows Skidmore students access to more than 200 colleges and universities in the United States, U.S. territories, and Canada, including several historically black colleges and universities (HBCU). Through NSE Skidmore is able to host exchange students on campus as well. Since the inception of this exchange program in 2008, five Skidmore students have studied at partner institutions, and Skidmore has hosted 11 national exchange students on campus. In addition, in 2009 Skidmore established a formal exchange agreement with Spelman College, the prestigious women's HBCU in Atlanta. This exchange is distinctive in that it allows Spelman students to access Skidmore's programs abroad, while Skidmore students have the opportunity to

study on the Spelman campus and to take some courses at one of Spelman's partner institutions in Atlanta. In fall 2009 two Skidmore students attended Spelman, and two Spelman students attended Skidmore, one on campus and one in the Skidmore in Paris program.

Because so many of our students study away, and because our Goals for Student Learning and Development include goals related to intercultural understanding and communication across cultural differences, we aim to go beyond tracking numbers and assess in a more substantial way the transformations that take place in our students during these experiences. One program of particular interest is our London First-Year Experience, a fall program offered to 36 incoming first-year students who begin their Skidmore career in London accompanied by two Skidmore faculty members. The Skidmore faculty members teach Scribner Seminars; students take other courses offered by our partner in London, focusing on British contemporary and historical themes and utilizing London as a classroom. We have done much work over the past five years to solidify the academic and cocurricular program in London and to formalize the admissions process on campus to ensure students are well served by this opportunity. As this program represents a unique opportunity for our students to engage in questions raised in Goal II as soon as they begin at Skidmore, we are interested in assessing how the program introduces students to these questions and in what ways it might foster further engagement in intercultural issues once they arrive on campus. With this in mind, a pilot assessment of our students' learning in the FYE London program is under way; it has entailed adapting the institutional Goals for Student Learning to the specific framework of the program, and will include direct assessments based on work and experiences in London. Our hope is that this project will serve as a model for future assessments of other programs. In particular, we aim to understand better how our programs abroad and exchanges within the U.S. can best serve our goals for our students' learning about intercultural understanding, so that we can deepen and extend that dimension of their learning in intentional ways.

One of our goals these past few years has been not only to increase our efforts related to Goal II but also to make the good work we are currently doing more visible to the community at large. With this in mind, in 2008 Skidmore developed a web portal—Global Skidmore⁵⁴—that serves as an entry point for all things international and multicultural. The site links to a variety of initiatives, including those from Academic Affairs and Student Affairs and Admissions and Advancement. It allows for student and faculty profiles to highlight the work our community members are doing. While this is a valuable resource, we are in the process of determining how to manage it to ensure current information is always available. This is a question of ownership and human resources that still needs to be worked out.

InterGroup Relations (IGR)

The most significant curricular and pedagogical development and related assessment work bearing on Goal II of the *Strategic Plan* and our students' learning about intercultural understanding has been the development of a pilot InterGroup

⁵⁴ See Global Skidmore at: http://cms.skidmore.edu/global_skidmore/.

Relations (IGR) program at Skidmore, introduced by Kristie Ford, Assistant Professor of Sociology. As Ford's assessment report notes,⁵⁵ IGR is a nationally recognized credit-bearing social justice academic program that originated at the University of Michigan in the wake of racial violence in 1988. Its primary goal is to support student learning around inter- and intra-group relations, conflict, and social justice across a range of social identities, including race, gender, sexuality, social class, religion, and nationality. The Michigan program has expanded to several colleges and universities across the country, including Amherst, Occidental, and Mount Holyoke. As Ford describes the initiative,

In 2008, Skidmore supported the development of a four-course pilot program, adopted from the Michigan model, to address Goal II. The series consists of: (1) Race and Power, a 200-level introductory course; (2) Racial Identity Theory and Praxis, a 300-level advanced training course for students interested in facilitating race dialogues; (3) Practicum for Peer-Facilitated Race Dialogues, a 300-level course that provides ongoing support for peer-facilitators; and (4) Peer-Facilitated Race Dialogues, a series of topical inter- and intra-group courses facilitated by graduates of the training course. In spring 2009 the College piloted four peer-facilitated dialogues: (1) People of Color/White People Dialogue for First-Years; (2) People of Color/White People Dialogue for Sophomores; (3) People of Color/Multiracial Identity Dialogue; and (4) White Racial Identity Dialogue.

Since then, in spring 2010 three dialogues were offered, and four were again offered this spring. Ford's assessments of the dialogues include measures of substantial success in meeting goals for our students' learning in these dialogues. That learning can be related directly to several of the recently-endorsed College goals for our students: understanding social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts; interacting effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities; and interrogating one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences. Given the strongly positive results about our students' learning and development from the IGR assessments, the College has continued to support the IGR curriculum and pilot program. However, as we note below, sustaining IGR is also a challenge, because it requires precious new resources—financial, but also faculty and staff time—to develop, run, and institutionalize the program.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Policies

In another development related to the campus climate on gender, the College has made efforts to build awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and assault on college campuses. All employees are required to attend anti-harassment training soon after being hired at the College. Additional refresher training is conducted every two years via an online training program on the Human Resources website or by the Assistant Director for Equal Employment Opportunity and Workforce Diversity. Training on sexual harassment has been conducted continuously over the past five years. In the spring

⁵⁵ Kristie Ford: "An Assessment of the Educational Benefits of Interracial and Intra-racial Curricular Dialogues on Student Development and Campus Climate" (2009), on the compact disc.

of 2010, the College held education workshops for faculty on sexual harassment, conducted by John Bagyi from the law firm of Bond, Schoeneck & King. Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity, and Anti-Harassment Policies and Procedures (Part Six) of the Faculty Handbook was revised in 2007 to include language addressing our sexual harassment policy and the College's procedure for resolving complaints of harassment or discrimination. Additional training workshops will recur for all new employees, which will be followed by refresher online training every two years.

Concurrently, in spring 2010 students voiced concerns, and the result was a new Sexual Misconduct Policy. The new policy, implemented in October 2010, emphasizes the importance of "effective consent," the act of giving consent for sexual activity in a manner free of any pressure. The Sexual Assault Task Force, comprising a number of administrators, faculty members, and students, created this new draft after hearing students' opinions concerning the need for a new policy. The revisions of this policy were student-driven. Students reported that they felt their voices were heard, and the administrators were proud that the student body was so involved in the revision process. The meetings and rallies that occurred fostered an open discussion and made students more responsible, informed citizens (pursuant to Goal III of the President's *Strategic Plan*).

Further Assessment Results: Student Learning about and Perceptions of Intercultural Understanding

Our assessments have given us a large amount of data on students' learning about and perceptions of intercultural understanding, as well as a good sense of the campus climate for students of color and other underrepresented groups. The data provide us a picture, not surprisingly, of some accomplishments in recent years as well as many challenges still facing us.

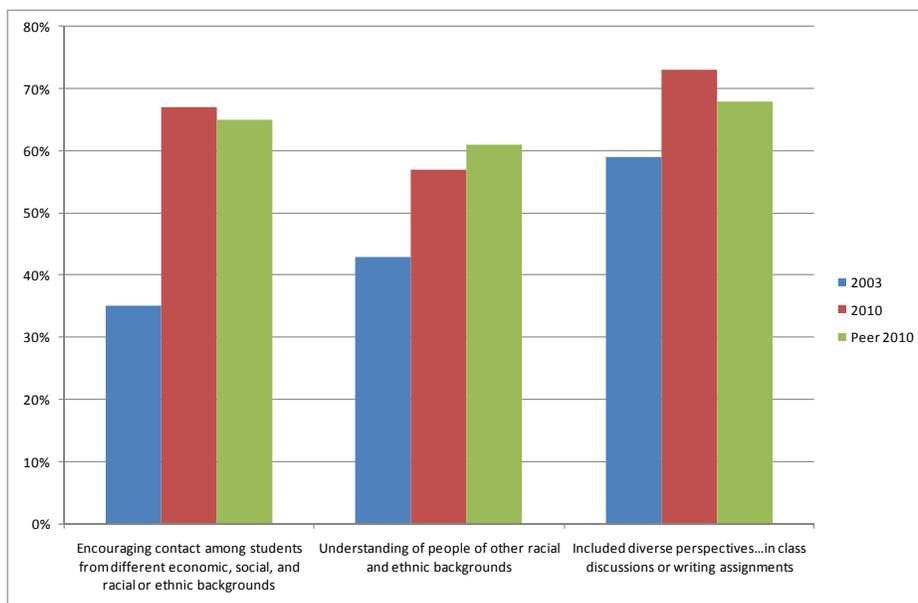
Two important sources of information regarding our students' learning about intercultural understanding are the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) data and the Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) data, both surveys administered in spring 2010. NSSE has several questions that are designed to provide a measure of students' global and intercultural understanding and how well the College supports or encourages this understanding. A third assessment is the report "Exit Interviews with Graduating Students of Color," from interviews conducted in May 2010, cited at the end of this section below.

In addition, the most recent Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) survey, administered to incoming students, gives us a snapshot of our students as they arrive on campus. The results suggest that Skidmore first-years have high expectations for social interactions across differences, but they are more mixed on learning about race and cultural differences. Our students are already used to socializing in racially mixed groups (78% responded positively when asked if they had socialized with someone of a different race/ethnicity in the past year) and plan to continue to socialize with students of other races/ethnicities (89% said that chances are "very good"). In contrast, just 48% of students said that they think it is "essential" or "very important" that they help to promote racial understanding, although 75% felt it is important that they improve their

understanding of other countries and cultures. In other words, it seems that our incoming students consider themselves somewhat cosmopolitan and do not necessarily think that they need to promote racial understanding in an active way, though they are open to learning more. Results from the other three assessments suggest that the students do change their positions and their awareness over their time at Skidmore, and that the College could be doing more to encourage greater understanding.

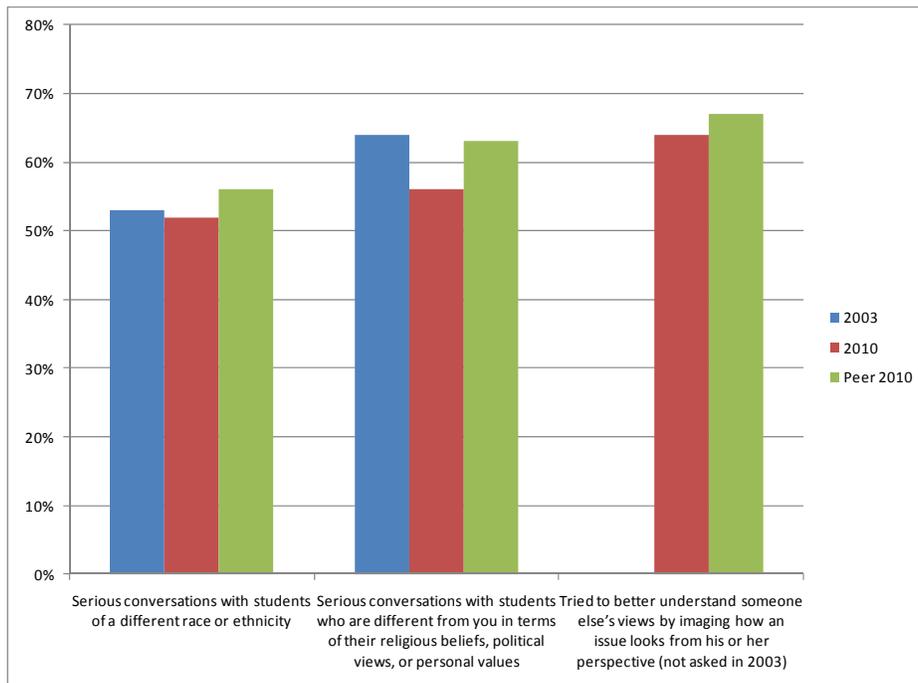
There are noteworthy patterns in the NSSE data from 2003 and 2010 that suggest we are making good progress towards our goals in some areas and are stagnant in others. As the data outlined below show, we have made significant leaps in most categories of response since 2003, and in most cases are now within a few percentage points of our peer institutions as well.

Figure 4: Percent of First-Year Students Reporting “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to Selected NSSE Questions



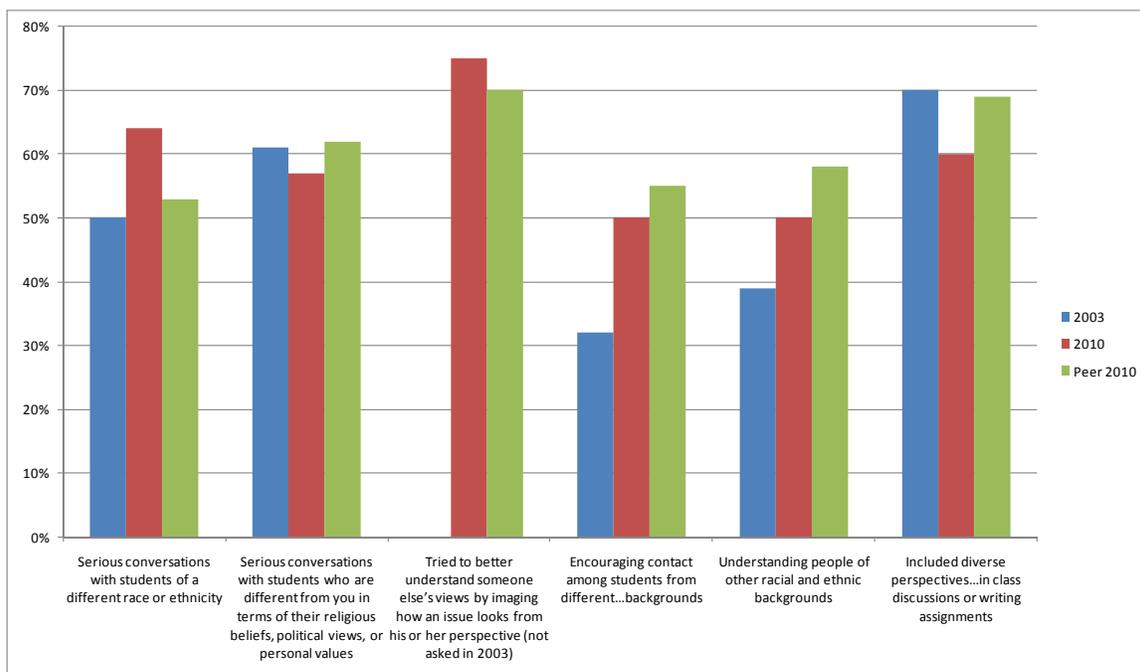
However, other questions showed modest decreases or remained flat (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percent of First-Year Students Reporting “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to Selected NSSE Questions



Seniors at Skidmore reported an increase on most NSSE questions pertaining to global and intercultural understanding in 2010 compared with 2003 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percent of Seniors Reporting “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to Selected NSSE Questions



One question for which Skidmore seniors notably did not report an increase relates to what happens in the classroom. On whether students “...included diverse perspectives...in class discussions or writing assignments,” there is actually a decrease (Figure 6). On this question, then, there is both a surprising decrease and a deficit relative to our peers. This outcome bears further discussion to identify possible causes and initiatives in response.

The results of the CHAS survey corroborate and expand upon the NSSE findings in some sobering ways. While both white and ALANA students reported being satisfied with their overall Skidmore experience (mean 4.2 on a 5-point satisfaction scale for both), neither group was satisfied with items associated with the amount of diversity, respect, and community found on campus (3.5/5 for white and 3.4/5 for ALANA students). In addition, both groups of students were not satisfied with the climate for minority students (3.2/5 for white and 3.1/5 for ALANA students) or the ethnic/racial diversity on campus (3.1/5 for white and 2.9/5 for ALANA students). For specific items on the survey relating to diversity, respect, and community, 30% of ALANA students reported *experiencing* racial/ethnic insensitivity, and 38% of white students and 51% of ALANA students reported *witnessing* racial/ethnic insensitivity. For a college that aims for all students to learn to communicate effectively across cultural differences, these numbers clearly represent a problem.

Furthermore, the CHAS data suggest that interactions among Skidmore students of different races/ethnicities decreased across class years. For example, 49% of seniors reported that they *never or only occasionally* interacted with someone of a different race—in contrast to only 28.5% of the first-years. And 60% of seniors reported never or only occasionally interacting with international students.

In addition, ALANA students reported much lower rates of participation in high-impact practices—particularly performing arts/music, intercollegiate sports, research with a faculty member, study abroad, and independent study for credit—than did white students. Considerably higher percentages of ALANA students also reported fairly high levels of stress with concerns over future plans than did white students: 55% of white and 73.1% of ALANA students reported moderately to very stressful concerns about the future.

In sum, although the NSSE and the CHAS data give us some basis for believing we have made some real progress against our benchmarks five years ago, we are also learning about some more complex and disturbing matters related in particular to our ALANA students’ lives on campus, and to campus climate more generally, that are more challenging to address.

While members of the Committee for Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU) support quantitative assessment such as NSSE and CHAS, several members have suggested the importance of gathering qualitative information as well. The increase in student diversity has been accompanied by a growing effort to gauge the experiences of students of color, both domestic and international, through qualitative assessments. In the spring of 2010, CIGU conducted two group exit interviews with students of color to provide qualitative assessments that complement our quantitative assessments with greater depth. Such interviews had previously been conducted, but without a clear

protocol that would enable CIGU to disseminate the findings; so the spring 2010 interviews are the first for which we have a public report. The report does not lend itself to easy summary, because it presents a range of students' views in response to questions, but there are some common threads. The students reported a number of experiences of racial insensitivity on campus (and also off campus). They also expressed a strong desire to see more faculty and staff of color and more LGBTQ faculty and staff, as well as the sense that current faculty and staff of underrepresented identities are not as well supported as they could be. Finally, they voiced support for the IGR program, and most of them had participated in it.

Interestingly, the responses to the Alumni Learning Census confirm the general picture of Skidmore as a college that does not yet teach our students very well how to communicate across social and cultural differences. Alumni in this year's cohort, asked to rank intellectual skills according to how well they had been enhanced by Skidmore, ranked "Work with People of Different Cultures" fifth from the bottom. They also ranked this as a relatively *important* skill, so that the disparity is significant. The skill may be important in part because 96% of them report that they interact at times with people of different races or ethnicities, with almost two-thirds responding that it happens very often.

These data call for a multifaceted response and sustained efforts. In a related development, in 2010 the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs launched focus group discussions with international students in response to their concerns regarding the classroom climate, particularly assumptions made by U.S. students about their experiences, as well as the institution's response to their specific needs. We anticipate following up on these efforts as well.

Opportunities and Challenges

On the whole, then, our data seem to suggest that we have made some progress in encouraging learning about intercultural understanding over the past seven years and are becoming a more inclusive community; nevertheless, it is clear that much more progress remains to be made. During these years, as we have noted, the most significant structural changes that parallel these results are the strengthening of the administrative core overseeing diversity at the College; the significant increase in the diversity of the student body; the launching of InterGroup Relations (IGR) as a pilot program; and a significant increase in the numbers of students studying abroad. Additionally, as we note below, we observe a plateau in the racial and ethnic diversity of the College's faculty and staff. It seems that IGR and our cocurricular programming are having a positive impact on the students, but that we need to continue expanding that impact and look for ways to reinforce it. Further, we need to recruit and retain more faculty of color and international faculty; to cultivate existing faculty's awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of an increasingly diverse student body, faculty, and staff; and to be more intentional in our curriculum. We note that even at their most positive, the NSSE data show that we have barely managed to catch up with our peers. It is likely to require a significantly greater effort and commitment of resources to sustain this momentum and make further changes.

The IGR program is a quintessential example of how specific *Strategic Plan* Goal II initiatives present both opportunities and challenges. Students, faculty, and staff who have participated in IGR classes and workshops have praised the program's effort to connect theoretical work and lived experience inextricably in ways that ultimately serve to complicate and deepen our understanding of particular social constructions. Responses from the 2010 exit interviews with graduating students of color speak to the transformative nature of the program for many of these students, with some suggesting that the sequence should be mandatory for all students.⁵⁶ As one white male student in the IGR sequence noted: "Now my race means I have two choices. I can decide to continue ignoring my race, which is unlikely and almost impossible due to my experiences in the racial dialogues, or to confront my white racial identity and fulfill my obligation to reconcile my privilege and become a white ally."⁵⁷

Recognizing the assessment results showing the impact that the IGR sequence has had on individual students, the College administration has been supportive of the program financially. Nevertheless, two challenges remain: developing the budget for a sustainable program, and growing faculty support and participation. Some faculty members have expressed a reluctance to participate in an academic program that stresses the importance of lived experience, while others have suggested that the program is "too activist" in nature. A core group of faculty members have committed themselves to the program and the number has grown slowly but steadily; however, for IGR to be fully institutionalized, more individual members of the faculty, particularly tenure-line faculty, need to become involved. As noted above, Professor Ford's detailed assessment of the program provides substantive, compelling evidence of the need for IGR and for its success in meeting our Goals for Student Learning among those who take the dialogue courses.

Another area with ongoing challenges is off-campus study. Despite Skidmore's achievements in study away, the College continues to face important challenges in terms of Goal II, Intercultural and Global Understanding. Of significant importance is the need to link students' study-away experiences to their academic and cocurricular work on campus—both before they study away and upon their return. In an attempt to go beyond the data point of how many students study away and to truly achieve internationalization on campus, Skidmore must carefully evaluate how on-campus curricula and cocurricular activities support students' efforts to prepare for their off-campus experiences and to allow them to engage in ongoing exploration of intercultural issues when they return from study away. This is a serious challenge, given the competing demands on our limited resources within the College departments and offices; however, if Skidmore is serious about internationalizing the College, we must determine to what degree we are willing to support our efforts through gathering evidence and making true curricular and cocurricular change. In the coming years, we plan to work with departments and programs that are actively engaged with returned study-away students to develop best practices to be shared across the College in the hope that all disciplines and offices will find significant and effective ways to engage these students in and out of the classroom. We also hope to inventory (and perhaps expand) the courses offered on campus that help

⁵⁶ "Exit Interviews with Graduating Students of Color" (May 14, 2010), on the compact disc.

⁵⁷ Ford (2009), p.1.

to prepare students for study away and to engage students more substantially upon return. We will share this inventory with students and faculty in the hope that students will take advantage of the resources available to allow them to maximize their study-away experience.

The curriculum provides other sites for both opportunities and challenges. An extensive audit of cultural diversity (CD) and non-Western (NW) course syllabi by the Assessment Facilitator has demonstrated that while some courses do provide explicit learning outcomes that dovetail with the College's Goals for Student Learning and Development endorsed by the faculty in December 2009, there is much work to be done to ensure that the courses fulfilling this requirement are addressing these goals—and that students are actually meeting the goals in their learning.

An analysis of CD courses by the Director of Intercultural Studies suggests that the guidelines for defining such courses need to be revised.⁵⁸ For instance, although the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are not explicitly mentioned in the guidelines, the survey of CD courses suggests that they are implied. Terms such as *sex*, *gender*, and *patriarchy* are also not explicitly mentioned in the guidelines, and it is apparent that they are not implied either. Issues of cultural difference can certainly be analyzed in gendered terms, as the Gender Studies curriculum indicates. The faculty should consider whether CD guidelines should reflect this fact, particularly in the growing number of courses that apply an intersectional analytical frame that explicitly interrogates relationships among gender, race, class, sexuality, and other variables. There are several CD courses that embrace an intersectional analysis, such as “Black Feminist Thoughts (AM 342), “Critical Whiteness in the U.S.” (AM 331), and “Race and Power” (SO 219 C), but each is clearly identified in some way by an explicit connection to race and ethnicity. Other courses, such as “Language and Gender” (EN 208 01) and “Queer Fiction” (EN 338 01), should also be up for serious discussion as potential CD courses, as we consider more fully how the CD requirement aligns with the Goals for Student Learning and Development.

The discussion of these guidelines is related to another issue, namely, the nature of the College's culture-centered inquiry requirement, which includes the CD course as one option. One analysis of such courses would urge CEPP to consider a proposal that would mandate that the NW/CD component of the requirement be increased from one to two courses. That a student can complete this requirement by enrolling in only one such course—perhaps in her or his final semester at Skidmore—raises legitimate concerns about the seriousness with which we view our commitment to intercultural literacy, as well as intercultural and global understanding. These tasks can hardly be accomplished with integrity if students are expected to confront these issues explicitly in only one course during their intellectual journey at Skidmore. However, another analysis of curricular offerings suggests that it is not the number of said courses, but rather, the substantive content of them—and their pedagogy, as the assessment of student learning in the IGR courses demonstrates—that is of far more consequence.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Winston Grady-Willis, “Survey and Analysis of Cultural Diversity Courses at Skidmore College,” on the compact disc

⁵⁹ Ford (2009).

As we consider whether we are generally using a capacious enough definition of “diversity” in our conceptions of intercultural understanding, it makes sense to note that gender remains an important category of difference on this campus that was once a women’s college. Recent developments include changing the name of our Women’s Studies program to Gender Studies, and we are in the process of making the conceptual changes that entails. Increased numbers of events exploring the campus climate for our GLBTQ students and faculty reflect a growing community awareness that “diversity” includes members of sexual minorities, who often remain invisible and marginal. Much more remains to be done in this regard.

Another area for curricular development that we targeted in our Self-Study was the need to develop courses and programming in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and other areas of global studies that historically have not been well represented at Skidmore. Meeting this goal on campus continues to be a challenge. It will require a renewed commitment not only to course development, but also to hiring and retaining appropriate faculty and staff.

As we have noted, faculty and staff diversity has not kept pace with increases in student diversity. Recruiting and retaining faculty and staff of color remains a priority. This is a long-standing effort—going back at least to the early 1990s and reinvigorated under the new *Strategic Plan*—that has yielded mixed results. We have had some successes. In the spring of 2007, as part of a major Mellon consortial grant for faculty development, Skidmore cosponsored a symposium on faculty diversity along with Union College and Colgate and Hamilton Universities. The symposium focused on understanding and developing strategies for cultivating a more diverse faculty through hiring and retention.⁶⁰ A second symposium followed it a year later. The immediate results seemed positive. In 2008, Skidmore made tenure-line target-of-opportunity hires in two fields, Classics and Music. The effort to identify and utilize College resources to make such tenure-line appointments resulted in part from the Mellon symposia and is a concrete example of collaboration between individual departments and the administration to further the *Strategic Plan*. In 2008–2009 the College then launched the CASE Liberal Arts Diversity Initiative in an effort to recruit individuals from underrepresented groups to the field of Advancement.

Although the President has publicly written on the importance of faculty and staff diversity, and despite several workshops addressing the need for a diverse applicant pool in faculty searches, the relative absence of progress on this front is fairly palpable.⁶¹ The movement forward represented by the aforementioned target-of-opportunity hires is complicated by the impact that the economic crisis has had on faculty diversity. Specifically, the suspension of the NYU Minority Dissertation Fellowship and Consortium for Faculty Diversity positions—along with the decision to change a contract for one African American scholar teaching jointly in English and History, resulting in his resignation—represented a tangible blow. The most recent IPEDS data, for 2009–2010, tell us that of the 249 full-time faculty (tenure-line and non-tenure-line), 85% are white;

⁶⁰ See “Four-College M. Mellon Foundation Symposium on Faculty Diversity Issues” (March 2–3, 2007) and “Final Assessment of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Four-College Collaborative Faculty Enhancement Grant” (December 2008), pp. 9–13; both are on the compact disc.

⁶¹ “Diversity in Hiring: Strategic Considerations” (2007), on the compact disc.

2% are black; 3% are Hispanic; 5% are Asian; and 4% are nonresident alien. In sum, 10% are people of color, and 4% are international faculty. This represents a minimal change over the figures for 2005–2006, despite our initiatives: at that time, 9% of the full-time faculty were people of color. The one significant change is in an increase in international faculty: in 2005–2006, fewer than 1% were foreign nationals.

The data for staff show that the staff is even more predominately white, with, again, little change over time. In 2005–2006, 5% of staff were people of color; in 2009–2010, this had increased to 7%. This includes staff in all areas of the College.

Given the persistent low numbers of faculty and staff of color at Skidmore, can the institution stand to diminish the presence of any such teaching scholars, even those who are not permanent or tenure-line? This question takes on more significance in light of recent hiring cycles, in which so many searches have yielded so few finalists of color, let alone actual hires. Clearly, tenure-track lines are the gold standard. However, at an institution that has not had a stellar history of attracting and retaining faculty from underrepresented populations, every individual presence takes on even more meaning. With this in mind, Skidmore participated in spring 2010 in a major workshop, co-organized with Union College and funded by an NSF Advance grant, to cultivate more inclusive hiring practices. A somewhat similar workshop was launched on campus in fall 2010 for chairs and supervisors. But the single greatest challenge remains building the community's commitment to the goal of hiring more faculty and staff of color, along with faculty and staff from other underrepresented groups, along with the need to support and retain those hires.

The specific concerns of international faculty complicate the discussion further. In spring 2009 international faculty met to address: (1) the immigration/visa process, (2) specific classroom concerns, and (3) the overall culture and climate at Skidmore. International faculty have become increasingly concerned about disrespectful and condescending behavior on the part of students both in the classroom and at office hours. Some U.S. faculty have made patronizing remarks and assumptions about the socioeconomic backgrounds of international faculty and have suggested that there is little in the way of intellectual production overseas. "I thank my lucky stars that I didn't come here as a junior faculty member," one professor, a foreign national, noted, indicating that things are tougher for international faculty early in the tenure process. The attitudes of faculty affect how departments assess student evaluations of international faculty, as well as how U.S. faculty gauge participation by international faculty socially. Not enough substantive effort has been made to understand the cultural styles of societies outside the United States. The 2009 gathering of international faculty was followed up by a faculty-led Faculty Interest Group discussion, based on readings, of the challenges to international faculty in the U.S. college context; plans are under way to sustain this group or a similar one.

As daunting as the challenges in terms of hiring may be, opportunities await. With as many as 25.5 faculty positions being authorized during the next several years, the College has an opportunity to move forward in a way that underscores that diversity is inextricably bound with academic excellence. In doing so, and to meet the goals of the *Strategic Plan*, the College will need to build further support for assertive hiring of faculty of color; and it will need to sustain ongoing dialogues to build understanding

across cultural differences among the faculty and staff as well as among students. With faculty, it is clearly not enough just to hire individuals; creating an inclusive faculty community will require collaboration, effort, and strategies. Similar challenges face us in the hiring and retention of more staff from underrepresented groups.

As members of the community discuss our shared goals for our students' learning, and the ways that we gather evidence of that learning, we also find ourselves changing and learning in that process. If we are to meet the goals for our students' learning around intercultural understanding, so ambitiously laid out in the *Strategic Plan* and the Goals for Student Learning and Development, it is clear that we must be prepared as a community to learn and to change ourselves.

Section Four: Analysis of Enrollment and Finance Projections

In his May 2010 *Strategic Renewal* report, President Glotzbach described the context, challenges, and opportunities impacting Skidmore's enrollment and financial decision making:

We have just weathered the worst economic recession since the great Depression. Beginning in fall 2008, this national (and international) crisis affected the College directly through endowment losses and reductions in giving, and indirectly through economic disruptions experienced by families of current and potential students. In response, we identified our financial problems and faced them head-on. Our community demonstrated that by working together—by *combining creative thought with discipline*—we could lower expenses significantly, reducing current and future budget commitments by nearly \$12 million. None of these efforts was easy, and we are still coming to terms with the full implications of some of the changes we have made. Through this process, we also increased our community's *strategic literacy*: our shared understanding that every decision to deploy our precious resources—whether time, energy, or financial assets—represents a *strategic* investment and must be evaluated as such.

In the face of this daunting economic climate, Skidmore has had considerable success in enrolling large and strong classes, reducing expenses—notably with a strategic hiring freeze and highly successful voluntary early retirement program—and completing the Creative Thought–Bold Promise campaign in May 2010 with a total of \$216.5 million, well above the \$200 million goal.

Finance Trends

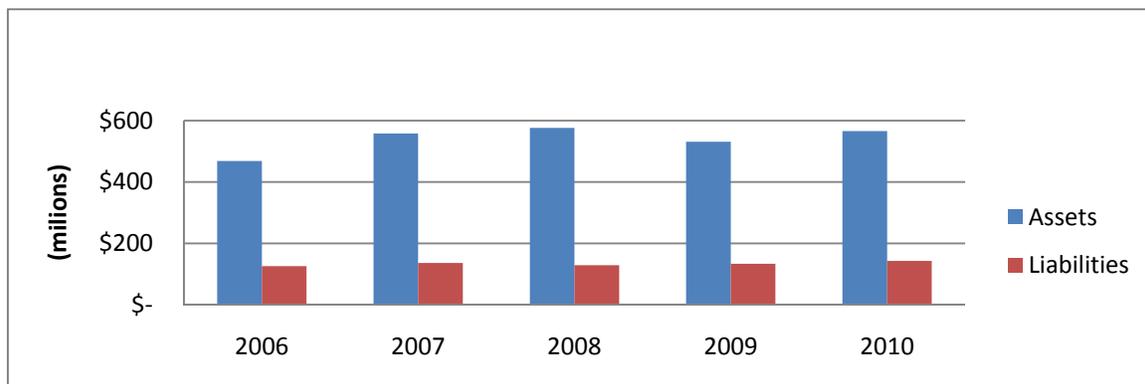
Against this backdrop of continued economic variability and uncertainty, Skidmore has experienced overall favorable financial results, although the past three years have proven to be challenging for the College, particularly on an operating basis. The College responded to constrained resources by reducing expenses, offering a one-time early retirement incentive program to certain employees, eliminating several programs, controlling growth in compensation, and delaying many new initiatives. We

entered this year with continued pressure on many revenue sources—tuition, program revenues, endowment distributions and gifts. We also expected continued pressure on compensation, student aid, insurance, utilities, and other expenses. In light of these pressures, we continue to examine our costs carefully to ensure that we are managing the College in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. Skidmore has an ambitious agenda over the next four years as outlined in the *Strategic Plan*, and we are committed to the sound financial management necessary to achieve the College priorities.

As reported in the Statement of Activities,⁶² in fiscal year 2010 the College experienced a modest excess of operating revenues over expenses of \$4.7 million or 3.5%. Permanently restricted net assets increased \$5.3 million or 5.5%. Total net assets increased \$25.5 million or 6.4% to \$423.2 million. Endowment net assets increased \$32.4 million or 13.5%.

As reported in the Statement of Financial Position, assets totaled \$565.9 million, and liabilities totaled \$142.7 million. Net assets of \$423.2 million include \$102.8 million of permanently restricted funds. Unrestricted net assets, a key metric which provides the College with the maximum flexibility of reserves, recovered nicely from the prior year but are significantly less than fiscal 2007, largely due to the economy and the effect on our investments, student aid expense, and accrued postretirement benefits from the change in the discount rate and other actuarial assumptions.

Figure 7: Assets and Liabilities—Statement of Financial Position



Total assets increased \$34.8 million or 6.5% this past year to \$565.9 million. Investments, which represent 56.0% of total assets, were \$316.7 million, an increase of \$31.8 million or 11.2% from the prior year. The net increase after the spending rate of 5% to support operations was primarily due to investment returns of 13.5%,⁶³ which was favorable compared to endowment funds of similar size. The spending rate from endowment was similar to that of other colleges. Gifts for permanently restricted assets were \$5.4 million. Fixed assets, net of depreciation, which represents 29.3% of total assets, were \$166.0 million, up \$5.8 million or 3.6% as a result of capitalization of new

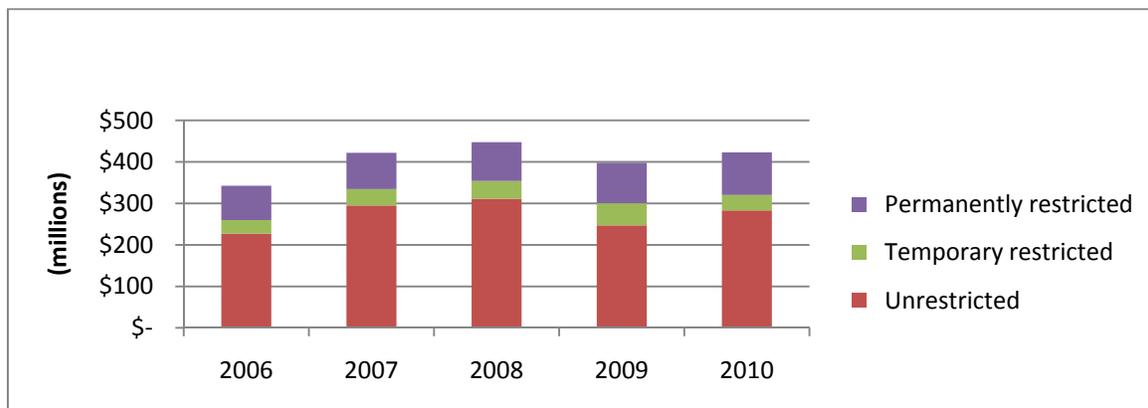
⁶² Audited financial statements for fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010 are Appendix H on the compact disc.

⁶³ This return is on a June 30 basis, the generally accepted measurement date for college endowments.

projects offset by depreciation expense. Other assets of \$83.2 million, representing 14.7% of total assets, remained relatively unchanged in total.

Total liabilities increased \$9.3 million or 7.0% this past year to \$142.7 million. Bonds and notes payable, which represent 43.1% of total liabilities at year-end, were \$61.5 million, a decrease of \$6.9 million or 10.0% from the prior year, as this year included a special balloon payment of approximately \$3.0 million. Accrued postretirement benefits increased this year by \$17.8 million or 58.0% to \$48.6 million and now represent 34.1% of total liabilities, largely the result of changes in the discount rate and other actuarial assumptions. Other liabilities of \$32.6 million remained relatively unchanged.

Figure 8: Net Assets—Statement of Financial Position



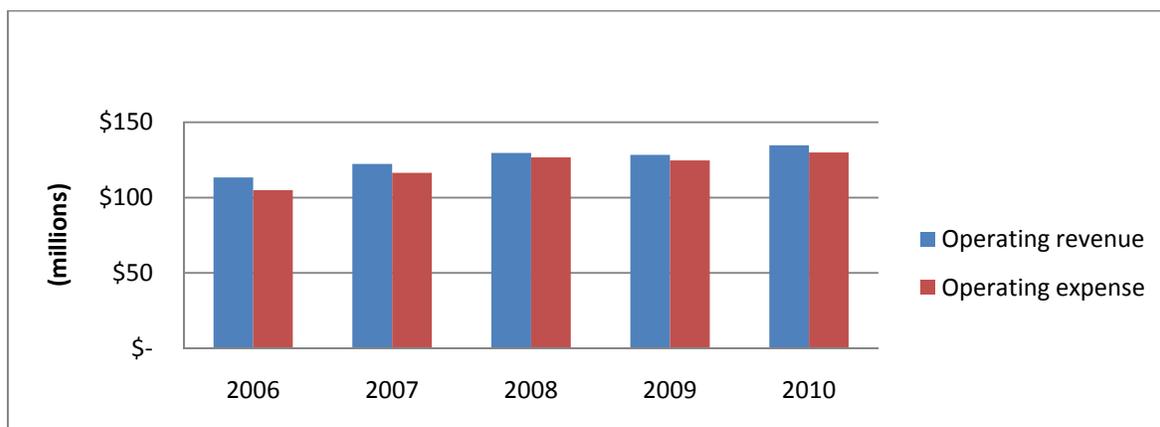
Net assets for fiscal year 2010 increased \$25.5 million or 6.4% to \$423.2 million. Unrestricted net assets which represent 66.9% of total net assets at year-end were \$283.0 million, an increase of \$36.0 million or 14.6% from the prior year. This increase was primarily the result of very good investment returns, net of distributions for spending of \$14.2 million. Temporarily restricted assets, which represent 8.8% of total net assets, were \$37.4 million, a decrease of \$15.8 million or 29.8% from the prior year. This decline was primarily the result of greater net assets released from restrictions net of gifts, grant, and endowment income received. Permanently restricted net assets, which represent 24.3% of total net assets at year-end, were \$102.8 million, an increase of \$5.3 million or 5.5% from the prior year. This increase was primarily the result of gifts.

For fiscal 2010, operating revenues totaled \$134.7 million and operating expenses totaled \$130.0 million, resulting in these revenues exceeding expenses by \$4.7 million or 3.5%.

Operating revenues increased \$6.3 million or 4.9% to \$134.7 million. Tuition and fees, which represent 80.9% of total revenues, increased \$3.8 million or 3.6% to \$109.1 million, primarily because of fee increases. Student aid as a percentage of tuition and fees increased this past year by one percentage point. Net tuition after financial aid, which represents 58.3% of revenues, increased \$1.6 million or 2.0%. Endowment income, which represents 10.5% of total operating revenue, decreased \$.2 million or 1.6%, largely because of market value declines over the past several years. Auxiliary revenues, which

represent 20.0% of revenues, remained relatively flat at \$27.0 million. Gifts and grants, which represent 9.0% of revenues, increased \$3.6 million or 42.3% to \$12.1 million, primarily the result of several new grants related to increased federal spending to stimulate the economy. Net assets released from restrictions totaled \$44.4 million, largely associated with the recently concluded campaign and construction of the Zankel Music Center.

Figure 9: Operating Revenue and Expenses—Statement of Activities



Unrestricted operating expenses increased \$5.3 million or 4.3% to \$130.0 million, primarily the result of costs associated with the voluntary early retirement program of \$3.3 million, general increases in the costs of employee benefits, services, and supplies.

Enrollment Planning

Our fiscal stability during this period is related in part to continuing strong enrollments. Over the past 10 years, Skidmore’s on-campus degree-seeking enrollment has increased from 2,191 FTE in Fall 2001 to 2,500 FTE in Fall 2010—a 14% increase.⁶⁴ Most recently, a larger than expected fall 2010 entering first-year cohort (the class of 2014 came in at 768, a figure 74 students greater than any other entering cohort) and higher retention (which has ranged from 93.0% to 94.6% over the past four years) have contributed to this trend. Plans are now under way to return enrollments to the budgeted levels by enrolling smaller first-year classes in the coming years. The funds generated by the over-enrollments have not been incorporated into the core operating budget, but instead have generally been reserved for building improvements and other capital projects (one-time expenses). Enrollments are projected for four years and are based on three-year weighted average retention rates by class level. These figures are reviewed by an enrollment committee and assist the group in setting entering class targets. The committee is diverse and includes members from Admissions, Bursar, Finance, Registrar, Residential Life, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Off-Campus Study and Exchange, Academic Advising, Dean of Faculty, Student Affairs, and Institutional Research.

⁶⁴ See Skidmore Enrollments and Projections Fall 2011–Fall 2014, Appendix J on the compact disc.

Future Challenges

The continued strong financial support of friends and alumni is essential for success of the College. The College will need to continue to moderate expense growth, particularly the costs associated with financial aid. Because of our aging buildings and infrastructure, consideration needs to be given to increasing funding for capital projects from the operating budget, and planning modest surpluses for anticipated expenses in our uncertain environment.

We will also continue to work on the challenges regarding the larger than planned class of 2014 and on workload issues for faculty and staff due to many positions being left vacant following the strategic hiring freeze and voluntary early retirement programs, particularly as work has not been distributed equally among employees.

Accomplishments and Projections

The community has worked very hard to reduce expenditure growth, and we are proud that the College achieved a budget surplus for fiscal year 2010 and are on target for a modest budget surplus for 2011. We currently are projecting balanced budgets for the next several years,⁶⁵ as well as a gradual return to a budgeted net fiscal enrollment of 2,280. We have made Skidmore more affordable with smaller than usual increases in our fees structure—our historic low of 1.9% for fiscal year 2011 followed by 2.9% for 2012—and have provided substantially more funds for financial aid. With investment performance favorable to similarly invested funds, the endowment has recovered significantly from earlier losses to a March 2011 preliminary market value of \$292.9 million, nearly reaching the October 2007 high of \$298.6 million. We implemented a successful voluntary early retirement program with a significant reduction in our budget going forward.

With the help of many we achieved several of our most important goals: we avoided mandatory full-time staff layoffs; we protected academic programs, particularly keeping our student-faculty ratio at less than 10-1; we continued to hire many talented faculty; we recruited and enrolled large, strong classes and increased significantly funding for student aid; we preserved the College's excellent benefits package for faculty and non-union staff; and we exceeded our goal in the Creative Thought–Bold Promise campaign with an achievement of \$216.5 million.

Details from our January 2011 Moody's A1 rating affirm our stable outlook "based upon the College's strong market position, ample liquidity, balance sheet flexibility, and cash flow generation."⁶⁶

⁶⁵ The 2011 and 2012 Budget and Projections are Appendix G on the compact disc.

⁶⁶ The 2011 Moody's Bond Rating is on the compact disc.

Section Five: Evidence of Assessments of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning, Results, and Informed Planning

The most complete evidence of our assessment processes, we believe, is contained in our narrative in Section Three, where we aim to demonstrate the ways that we establish goals, work to meet them, gather evidence of the results, and re-establish goals in an ongoing process throughout the College. In some areas this cycle is more complete and sustained than in others; but no area is untouched by it, and the transition to documenting the ways our decision-making processes are planful and evidence-based is well under way.

For the sake of brevity and concision, we will provide here examples of documents and processes illustrating each part of the assessment cycle, with key documents included in the Appendix and on the enclosed compact disc. The most important document in this context is the Assessment Plan⁶⁷: it spells out the assessment processes in every part of the College, lists responsible parties, and explains our governance structures in relationship to institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning and development. Our supporting documents—including the Biology Assessment Plan and report, FYE assessment reports, and Alumni Learning Census—aim to illustrate that the processes outlined in the Assessment Plan are indeed in place.

The College demonstrates its commitment to an integral and strong culture of assessment not only by supporting the Office of Institutional Research and the Faculty Assessment Coordinator with budgets and personnel, but also in its commitments to externally-based initiatives such as the Presidents' Alliance for Excellence in Student Learning and the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement classification. The Faculty Assessment Coordinator is a Teagle Assessment Scholar, a position that gives Skidmore access to many resources, including national debates about best practices. Two of our faculty are also Carnegie Scholars. Most important, our assessment structures are designed to encourage information sharing and decision making across institutional boundaries.

Examples of documents and processes illustrating each part of the assessment cycle:

1. Defining clearly articulated institutional and unit-level goals

- *Strategic Plan*
- *Strategic Renewal*
- Annual Strategic Action Agendas reflecting projects and action steps for each year, tied to *Strategic Plan* goals; plus accompanying matrix tracking progress of each action item at regular intervals and at year's end
- *Campus Plan*
- Goals for Student Learning and Development
- Department-level goals for student learning
- Course-level goals for student learning

⁶⁷ The Institutional Assessment Plan 2011–2016 is Appendix K on the compact disc.

2. *Implementing strategies to achieve those goals*

- Individual units responsible for implementation; examples in the narrative section of this report
- Academic program reviews: departments and programs are reviewed on a rotating schedule
- Faculty development: assessment workshops with external consultants such as Barbara Walvoord and Gavin Henning, and with internal leadership; Academic Staff workshops on assessment; individual meetings with all chairs and directors on assessment processes; lunches for groups of chairs and directors to discuss assessment strategies and challenges; attendance with faculty at national assessment conferences

3. *Assessing the achievement of those goals*

- Multiple assessment instruments and methods college-wide, such as:
 - CIRP, NSSE, CHAS, SURE, RICA, Admitted Student Questionnaire (ASQ), and Withdrawn Student surveys
 - Alumni Learning Census: major assessment instrument reaching out to all alumni over a five-year period
 - Exit interviews
- Examples of Skidmore-based assessments of student learning and development :
 - Communicate effectively: Writing in the FYE; Writing in the Majors
 - Interact effectively across difference: IGR assessment; CD requirement report; NW/CD requirement learning goals report; exit interviews with students of color
 - Assessment of Civic Engagement, 2011
 - Health Task Force Report and Recommendations, 2008

4. *Using the results of assessments to improve programs and services and to inform planning and budget decisions*

- We apply criteria set forth in *Strategic Renewal* (p. 10) to evaluate allocation of resources to potential initiatives.
- Many examples of assessment results' informing planning appear in our narrative section above.
- One current specific example: the results reported in a recent white paper, "Engaging Sophomore Students with Liberal Learning: Focused Exploration through Academic Advising," submitted to the Teagle Foundation as part of a grant report, are informing campus discussions of the Transition and Transformation initiative and related budget decisions.

Section Six: Evidence of Linked Institutional Planning and Budget Processes

Strategic Planning Process

In 2005, under the leadership of President Glotzbach and with extensive discussion within the campus community (including endorsement by the Board of Trustees), the College adopted *Engaged Liberal Learning: The Plan for Skidmore College 2005–2015* (“the *Strategic Plan*” or “the *Plan*”).⁶⁸ The College has been disciplined in pursuing priority initiatives that advance the four major goals of the plan: *Student Engagement and Academic Achievement; Intercultural and Global Understanding; Informed, Responsible Citizenship; and Developing (and Stewarding) the Resources Necessary to Preserve our Independence of Choice.*

Each year since the Plan’s adoption, the President has led Cabinet members through the development of annual Strategic Action Agendas.⁶⁹ This past year the College reviewed its collective accomplishments during the first five years of the *Plan*, as well as initiatives under way and those not yet begun.⁷⁰ President Glotzbach also led a series of on-campus and off-campus town hall meetings whose general purpose was to engage the larger Skidmore community in conversations about how to enhance the already considerable value—across all the many dimensions of that term—of a Skidmore degree. Ultimately, those conversations led to President Glotzbach’s paper entitled *Strategic Renewal: Reframing our Priorities at the Midpoint of the Strategic Plan.*⁷¹ *Strategic Renewal* provides the framework that will guide the College’s strategic decision making over the second half of the *Strategic Plan*.

Additionally, President Glotzbach held a number of informational sessions updating both the College and outside community on the *Strategic Plan*, the work of the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC), changes at the College, and other important matters. These meetings were generally well attended and well received. The IPPC Subcommittee on Budget and Finance met regularly throughout the year and discussed the College’s major planning parameters, new initiatives fund, capital projects, compensation goals and phases of implementation, and other important matters.

Operating Budget

The College’s budgeting process begins each fall for the upcoming year when all office directors and department chairs submit budget requests for their department’s non-compensation expenditures through their respective deans or vice presidents to the Office of Finance and Administration. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, these requests must be kept within prescribed parameters; for example, requests for increases

⁶⁸ The full text of the *Strategic Plan* is attached as Appendix C and is also online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/>.

⁶⁹ The annual Strategic Action Agendas are published with the Strategic Planning materials on the President’s website: <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/agendas.cfm>.

⁷⁰ *Engaged Liberal Learning: The First Five Years* is Appendix E on the compact disc and is also online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/agendas.cfm> (link to Midpoint Report).

⁷¹ *Strategic Renewal* is Appendix D on the compact disc.

must not exceed 2% of the current year budget. Equipment requests must be zero-based. Concurrent with this process, proposals for any significant new initiatives are forwarded through the appropriate dean or vice president for consideration by the President's Cabinet. New initiative proposals are linked to and evaluated in the context of the *Strategic Plan* (and, beginning this year, in the context of *Strategic Renewal*), and results of any related assessments are taken into consideration. After all of the requests are compiled, a preliminary operating budget is prepared. Operating and investment revenues, compensation expenditures, student aid expenditures, new initiative funds, and other items such as utilities, student wages, insurances, library collections, etc., are estimated using a variety of models and assumptions.

The preliminary budget parameters and new initiatives are then reviewed in detail by the College's senior administrative team. Since the College is a tuition-driven institution, one of the most critical variables in preparing the budget is the tuition, room, and board rate (collectively, the comprehensive fee). The budget enrollment level is established by the Board of Trustees. Inextricably linked to the level of the comprehensive fee increase is the amount of funds made available for compensation and student financial aid expenditures. Increases in these expenditures cannot be budgeted until the comprehensive fee is determined. After an extensive review and deliberation process, the President's Cabinet (President, deans, appointed officers of the College) and the IPPC make a preliminary recommendation on these broad parameters (comprehensive fee, compensation, student aid, and new initiatives pools) to the Board for approval at their February meeting.⁷² Once the basic parameters are in place, the operating budget is fine-tuned and is presented to the Board in its final form for approval at their meeting in May for the fiscal year commencing June 1.

After the budget is approved, detailed operating budgets are distributed to each department of the College. The budgets include the number of authorized positions as well as amounts authorized for services, supplies, equipment, and other departmental charges. A contingency fund (targeted at approximately 1% of the annual operating budget) is included in the operating budget to accommodate mid-year adjustments and unforeseen circumstances. Reports comparing actual activity to budgeted amounts are available on request to the responsible department and division heads. Summary reports are presented to the Budget and Finance Committee of the Board at their meetings in October, February, and May of each year.

The College has over the past five years experienced significant over-enrollments as compared to plan, which is currently set at 2,280 full-time financial equivalent students. Incremental revenue from these over-enrollments is accounted for separately from the operating budget, as these revenues are temporary and cannot be used to support ongoing expenditures such as new positions or salary increases. These revenues have been used in varying combinations to (1) augment reserves for plant renovation and equipment purchases, (2) augment the quasi-endowment funds, and (3) spend on special initiatives (e.g., information technology). Incremental revenues from over-enrollments are not spent on any programs or initiatives that result in an increase in the operating budget expenditure base.

⁷² 2011 and 2012 Budget and Projections are Appendix G on the compact disc.

Capital Budget

The capital budget is prepared through a process similar to that used to develop the operating budget. At the same time that office directors and department chairs submit their noncompensation expenditure requests, they also submit equipment and renovation requests. Requests of less than \$5,000 are considered as part of the operating budget, while those in excess of this amount are considered for inclusion in the capital budget. These requests are combined with the capital project and equipment lists maintained by the Facilities Services Office and Information Technology Services and are reviewed by the President's Cabinet and the IPPC Subcommittee on Budget and Finance. Projects having health and life-safety implications are made the highest priority. Projects necessary to maintain the quality of our academic and student life programs and to maintain the integrity of the physical plant are given priority, and again, evidence derived from assessments plays a role in the decision making.

Most of the funding for the capital budget is provided through annual allocations from the operating budget to internal reserves for facilities renewal and replacement, information technology, and major equipment. After an initial round of discussion in February with early approval of some items, the capital budget is presented to the Board for approval at its meeting in May and adjustments are made as needed consistent with financial planning.

Strategic Renewal and the Budget

The College's FY 2010 budget cycle benefited from the comprehensive and extensive strategic planning work described above. In particular, the College recognized that significant challenges would be associated with the need to absorb the costs of the program of innovation and revitalization visualized in the *Strategic Plan* and the comprehensive campaign in addition to the need to maintain the College's financial, human, and physical assets. These challenges were evident in the initial projections for fiscal 2011–2016, and are particularly formidable at Skidmore.

Early in the planning process a new initiatives fund was identified as a high priority, in part to address several of the identified goals of the *Strategic Plan*. Fund allocations for new initiatives were discussed in the President's Cabinet and with the IPPC (including its Subcommittee on Budget and Finance). The College is committed to making evidence-based decisions about the use of resources—fiscal and well as human—in the context of the *Strategic Plan*, *Strategic Renewal*, and assessment results.