

Skidmore College

Academic Vision Statement, 2003-2004

[Committee on Educational Policies and Planning](#)

Note: These materials are works in progress. CEPP will be considering revisions to these documents to reflect the conversations of the coming months. Comments can be made in the open meetings CEPP will sponsor or more informally to [Gordon Thompson](#).

[Acknowledgements](#) (31 August 2003)

[Preamble](#) (31 August 2003)

[Vision Components](#): Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration (28 August 2003)

[Recommendations](#): Breadth, Expository Writing (-Oral Presentation), Quantitative Reasoning, Cultural Difference, Liberal Studies, Advising-Mentoring, Global Skidmore (Study Abroad, Global Studies Coordination, Global-Local Integration, and Diversity), Excellence, Faculty Development, and Student Development (28 August 2003)

[Timetable](#) (19 September 2003)

Skidmore College

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Acknowledgements

The Committee on Educational Policies and Planning spent most of the 2002-03 academic year discussing and debating what would constitute and how we would proceed with Skidmore's first document specifically dedicated to academic vision. Spurred on by Chuck Joseph's determination that we produce a clear statement of where Skidmore was going academically, Michael Arnush, Catherine Bookhout, John Brueggeman, Pat Fehling (Chair), Hugh Foley, Nick Merrill, Pat Oles, Amelia Rauser, Ray Rodrigues (ex officio), Paty Rubio, and Gordon Thompson gradually developed the philosophical structure and recommendation categories of this Vision Statement (which we sometimes refer to as the ViSta).

In preparation, members located and shared the various reports and other relevant documents that Skidmore has produced over the past twenty years related to educational philosophy. Our internal sources included (but were not limited to) "Resolutions on Curriculum and Calendar" (1983), "The Report of the Commission on the 90s" (1989), "Report 1990" (Subcommittee on Academic Standards and Expectations, 1991), "Core Abilities Curriculum" (CEPP 1999), "Strategic Planning Study Group's Report to the Institutional Planning Committee" (2000), "Periodic Review Report Submitted to the Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools" (2001), "On the Opinion-gathering Phase of the Strategic Planning Process" (The Distillation and Report-writing Sub-committee to the Institutional Planning Committee, 2001), and "Skidmore College 2011: A Strategic Plan for Excellence" (2002). We also studied internal reports on advising and study abroad programs.

In addition, we consulted materials from outside organizations, including Association of American Colleges and Universities on civic engagement and on diversity and their report, "Greater Expectations" on the future of education in the United States. We also looked at the American Library Association's report on Information Literacy, Campus Compact's material on the civic purposes of higher education, and web pages from National Resource Center for the First-year Experience and Students in Transition and the National Academic Advising Association. Finally, we searched the web sites of a number of comparable schools to see how they handled academic vision.

While we cannot say that our research was exhaustive, we do believe we covered some of the most pertinent sources.

As the cheers of May's graduation ceremony were still echoing around campus, members of CEPP spent three days formulating the ideas of a vision. Michael Arnush, Hugh Foley, Chuck Joseph, Pat Oles, and Paty Rubio; co-chairs Pat Fehling and Gordon Thompson; and Ray Rodrigues divided up a variety of tasks associated with the preparation of this document. We also received assistance from David Peterson, Sarah Goodwin, and John Brueggeman. At the end of the three days, we had reached a consensus about the Vision

Components section and about a number of curricular initiatives we believed were worthy of development.

Dividing the work, we decided that Chuck Joseph would write a preamble contextualizing the Academic Vision Statement. Other members took on the tasks of defining the components and identifying recommendations: Critical Thinking (Michael Arnush, Ray Rodrigues, and Gordon Thompson), Communication (Michael Arnush and Paty Rubio), Citizenship (Paty Rubio and Gordon Thompson), and Collaboration (Hugh Foley and Pat Oles).

In July, Michael Arnush, Hugh Foley, Chuck Joseph, Pat Oles, Ray Rodrigues, Paty Rubio, and Gordon Thompson (chair) brought together these more detailed definitions of Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration for discussion and critique. After further revisions and comments, Gordon Thompson assembled these materials into separate sections on Vision Components and Recommendations, which he circulated to the other summer authors in early August. After further comments (including a brief presentation to the Dean of Faculty's staff and to President Glotzbach), Thompson circulated subsequent edits and revisions in preparation of the presentation of these materials to Academic Staff on 28 August 2003. Chuck Joseph completed editing of his Preamble and the entire document finally appeared on the web on 31 August 2003.

CEPP proffers these materials for broader community response and comment. We will actively seek responses at a series of fora this year and in our own meetings. We look forward to an exciting conversation.

Gordon Thompson

Edited 1 September, 2003

Skidmore College

Academic Vision Statement, 2003-2004

Preamble

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

what we think that future might be.

Edited 31 August, 2003

Skidmore College

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Vision Components

The transformation of the Skidmore student is the goal of the entire community. The transformational seed of a Skidmore education lies fundamentally in our students' abilities to address issues and to describe solutions, to work independently and collaboratively, and to apply their abilities responsibly.

Skidmore students must be prepared to take advantage of the opportunities they will encounter if their lives are to be challenging and rewarding. We cannot know what these opportunities will be, nor which specific skill sets an increasingly intercultural and interconnected world will demand. But by having a flexible and inventive mind with the capacity of expression, Skidmore graduates will flourish. Successful Skidmore students develop abilities in four essential areas: Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration.

Critical Thinking

Skidmore cherishes its interdisciplinary identity and has developed a milieu in which students and faculty creatively engage in understanding and solving problems. Our graduates must be able to draw upon the intellectual tools characteristic of our four general areas of academic breadth: the arts, the humanities, the natural sciences, and the social sciences. Students must have the ability to conceptualize, to identify, to analyze, to evaluate, to synthesize, and to apply different kinds of information in order to reach informed conclusions and to understand the positions of others. They must be able to evaluate numerous and contradictory sources of information, to establish validity, and to communicate their conclusions independently and collaboratively both in written and oral form. (Some describe these ideas under the rubric of "Information Literacy"). Moreover, successful graduates understand the power of reasoning in diverse cultural modes, western and non-western. Indeed, the other components of this vision rely upon a thorough integration of critical thinking skills, whether in effective expression, the capacity to "identify, analyze, and act upon social issues" (Mission Statement), or the ability to learn from one another.

In order to accomplish these goals, faculty members must establish clear learning outcomes in the curriculum and structure assignments and programs to provide opportunities for students to develop and to demonstrate their abilities. We know that Skidmore students have engaged in "critical thinking" through their behavior inside and outside of the classroom. Ultimately, the transformation of our students is evident in the sophistication of their interactions with the world.

Skidmore faculty and students apply critical thinking skills creatively: creative thought matters. Skidmore must continue to invest in the success of its graduates and in the development of its faculty through programs that encourage interdisciplinary and

pedagogical skills. Faculty must continue to transform themselves if they are to model similar behavior among students.

Communication

Skidmore has a history of eloquent expression in word, gesture, visual representation, and other modes of semiotic conveyance. Skidmore students must have the ability to communicate effectively in order to be prepared to participate actively in a civil society and a diverse world. Communication in oral, written, and other expressive modes, in the vernacular and scholarly discourse of one's own culture as well as in that of another culture, is essential for engagement in dialogues across cultural differences. Effective communication in local and global spheres contributes to self-awareness and empowers students to co-exist with and to respect others different from themselves, to discover and to assess new areas of knowledge, to consider issues and situations from various perspectives, and to articulate ideas and positions with confidence and authority. Effective communication also requires that students develop their critical skills of perception (e.g., reading and listening abilities) both within their major and across disciplines. We must provide numerous opportunities for these different modes of communication and clear standards by which students and faculty may judge their effectiveness.

Citizenship

Skidmore must complement its identity as a nurturing and protective enclave with that of a portal through which students actively engage the world. Saratoga is where Americans convinced the world of their citizenship in the community of nations and their commitment to principle. Now is the time for Skidmore to recognize this inheritance. The founding of our institution was an act of citizenship and responsibility that we must continue to embrace and to develop.

Skidmore students and faculty strive for principled intellectual excellence and leadership and our reputation attracts an increasingly well-qualified and ambitious community of scholars. Our academic vision and aspirations must keep pace with the growing sophistication of our community. Adaptive change is part of a successful strategy.

Skidmore students must recognize their local and global responsibilities both in respect to their roles as citizens and to the cultural, racial, and ethnic diversity of their communities, as well as to human rights. They must increasingly and actively engage the world through a combination of service-learning activities and study-abroad programs. We must welcome difference as a campus characteristic in order to achieve a diverse population of talented students, faculty, administrators, and staff to underpin our long-term regional, national, and international aspirations. We should exploit the benefits of student involvement in residential life, student government, and campus clubs and organizations. Furthermore, we should seek avenues by which students can apply citizenship both on and off campus.

Collaboration

Skidmore students and faculty must foster shared purpose in their peer-to-peer and mentor-to-peer engagements. Student-faculty collaborations are particularly valuable, whether in the pursuit of independent studies, collaborative research projects, or senior theses. Students who develop close working relationships with faculty find tremendous opportunities for learning and remember these collaborations as among their most positive educational

experiences at Skidmore.

We need to create more opportunities for collaborative experiences between students and faculty, between students and community resources, and among students both in and beyond the classroom. Skidmore must continue to create innovative projects that link the scholarly interests of faculty with the lives of students in order to exploit the educational power of co-curricular involvements. Collaborative programs (such as internships) can be effective promoters of engagement, excellence, citizenship, and intercultural understanding.

Finally but significantly, we must develop a more effective mentoring process to promote successful habits of mind and to attract and to retain the students and faculty who can help us to excel as a respected national and international institution. We need to find ways to bring students into discipline-related advisory relationships with faculty much sooner than we do now and we need to do so in ways that are both more meaningful and effective than is currently often the case.

Edited 31 August, 2003

Skidmore College

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Recommendations

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

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

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

Breadth

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

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

Expository Writing (-Oral Presentation) Requirement

Retain and strengthen. Students must be able to demonstrate successful writing and oral presentation skills not only within their discipline, but across disciplines. In the context of capstone seminars and/or presentations in the major, they need to demonstrate the ability to communicate their work verbally at the advanced level. How do we implement the notion of

"writing across the curriculum"?

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

Quantitative Reasoning

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

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

Cultural Difference

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

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

Liberal Studies

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

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

Advising-Mentoring

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

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

Global Skidmore

1. **Study Abroad.** Expand and enhance our study abroad programs.

Rationale: Skidmore should become a portal to the world with students studying abroad whenever possible on our own programs. In addition to the courses students traditionally have taken in language, the humanities, and the arts, we need to find ways to expand their opportunities in areas such as the sciences and pre-professional programs.

2. **Global Studies Coordination.** Create mechanisms by which academic programs that promote engagement with world cultures (such as Asian Studies, International Affairs, and Latin American Studies) and campus offices connected with Skidmore's programs in diversity and internationalism (such as the Office of International Programs, the Director of Diversity, and the Intercultural Center) can coordinate their efforts. This could be part of the duties of an Intercultural Center Director (see below). [Meetings have already taken place between these program directors and more meetings are scheduled.]

Rationale: Too often, these programs and offices work at odds with each other or, at best, independently. A twice-a-semester meeting of the heads of these entities would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts to integrate Skidmore's local and global initiatives. Through combined efforts, students would have greater opportunities to engage the world in informed contexts. The coordination must be equitable and flexible enough to allow initiative on the part of individual programs while encouraging them to cooperate.

3. **Global-Local Integration.** Institute an advisory committee to the Office of International Programs to coordinate and to facilitate co-curricular activities linked with study abroad programs.

Rationale: We must integrate study abroad into on-campus curricular and co-curricular life in a structured and synthetic way to capitalize on and to reinforce the often-transformative experiences students undergo while immersed in other cultures. Students could hone their oral and written presentation skills through descriptions of their overseas study experiences. Moreover, we must explore ways in which Skidmore students can contribute in the contexts of their study abroad, either through internships and/or community service.

4. **Diversity.** Create a position with faculty status, housed within an academic department, which has broad responsibilities over diversity programming. Such a position could bring effective inter-cultural discourse to the College's curricular and co-curricular life and support the cultural diversity of our campus. [Discussions at the level of the Office of the President have already taken place.]

Rationale: A Director of Intercultural Studies would highlight our commitment to a diverse campus through the promotion of interdisciplinary academic cooperation. This purpose of the position would be to expand and to enhance programs that bring diversity into our curriculum and onto our campus. Such programs would assist Skidmore in actively promoting the development of under-represented communities in academia. If a liberal-arts education is a building block of individual success, then we have a role to play in developing future generations of a diverse America.

Excellence

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

Rationale: Perhaps one of the most important purposes of assessment is to determine the value of a Skidmore education. We have engaged in several conversations over the past

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

Faculty Development

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

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

Student Development

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

Rationale: Skidmore embraces the teacher-scholar model of rigor and active learning. In collaborative research, independent studies, tutorials, and capstone projects students answer questions they develop and assume responsibility for answering those questions. Students working with faculty to create knowledge develop the habits of mind prized among Skidmore alumnae. In service learning, students connect classroom experience with community service and develop a sense of civic responsibility and a tolerance of difference while the college gains a valuable medium by which to engage the world. We should seek out internship opportunities both locally and wherever Skidmore has engagements in the world, as well as forging new relationships. Through internships, students apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in the classroom in a professional context, promoting engagement and mastery in potential career contexts. Several innovative projects at Skidmore-the student cultures project, the law and society program's involvement in campus judicial affairs, and Expanding Horizons-creatively link the scholarly interests of the faculty and student co-curricular life. These projects are distinctive, creative efforts to exploit the educational power of co-curricular involvements.

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Skidmore College

Academic Vision Statement, 2003-2004

Tentative Timetable (Modified 19 September, 2003)

Spring 2003

Discussions of Vision

May

19-21 CEPP Retreat 1

July

16 CEPP Retreat 2

23 Rewrites of vision statements and proposals due to GT

24 GT distributes (a) combined vision statement [ViSta] and (b) combined proposals

August

7 GT discusses ViSta with Dean's Staff and Pres., CJ distributes introduction (?)

20 Comments to GT for revisions

25 Informal lunch to discuss state of the ViSta and AS introduction

28 Academic Staff: Introduction of ViSta concepts and timetable

September

5 Faculty Meeting: Introduction of ViSta concepts and timetable

8-12 Week of First CEPP meeting; begin process of fine-tuning language

19 Special Faculty Meeting (Benefits and Vision)

24? Subcommittee willingness-to-serve request (CFG)

October

3 CEPP begins process of forming subcommittees

10? Open forum on ViSta and Recommendations

Initial subcommittee meetings with faculty and administrators

November

- 7 Faculty Meeting
- 14? Open forum on ViSta and Recommendations
Continuing subcommittee meetings with faculty and administrators
- 24 Initial subcommittee recommendations

December

- 5 Official Introduction of ViSta and Recommendations at Faculty Meeting
-

February 2004

- 5 Faculty Meeting: Discussion

March

- 5 Faculty Meeting: Discussion

April

- 2 Faculty Meeting: Vote

Summer

Summer workshops on teaching strategies and advising structure

Fall

Course proposals to Curriculum Committee

Winter 2005

Catalogue preparation

Fall

Initial Implementations