

Strategic Renewal: Reframing our Priorities at the Midpoint of the *Strategic Plan*

17 May 2010

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The 2009-10 academic year marks the midpoint of *Engaged Liberal Learning: The Plan for Skidmore College 2005-2015*. A separate report, “*Engaged Liberal Learning: The First Five Years*,”¹ reviews our considerable *collective* successes in implementing the *Plan* to-date. The emphasis on “collective” cannot be overstated. It has taken the work of many hands across the entire Skidmore community to achieve the admirable – and in some cases, remarkable – progress we have achieved during this time.

This also is the right moment to take stock of the challenges we face, rededicate ourselves to our educational mission, and identify the strategic investments that will make the greatest difference over the next few years. By the *Plan’s* conclusion in 2015, we will have achieved further substantial progress in advancing its four major Goals: *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*. None of these ambitious, open-ended objectives can ever be fully realized, but each step we take further enhances our ability to guide our students through a transformative educational experience – one that prepares them for their continuing journey through life.

Throughout this year, we have tested our understanding of our challenges, strengths, and opportunities through a series of on-campus² and off-campus Town Hall Meetings (THMs) – the latter, entitled “Your Voice - Our Future,” were held across the country.³ While the framework for the on- and off-campus THMs differed somewhat, their overall purpose was to engage the larger Skidmore community in reflecting upon what we could do to enhance the already considerable value – across all the many dimensions of that term – of a Skidmore degree for all of our graduates. Together, the on- and off-campus THMs yielded a rich collection of ideas that reinforced our fundamental values and helped to clarify and sharpen our strategic focus. One crucial dimension of the challenge we face is to build upon, enhance, and increase our effectiveness in articulating Skidmore’s distinguishing characteristics: those attributes that both are important to our students, parents, and alumni and, when taken together, differentiate Skidmore from other schools in an increasingly competitive admissions environment. Therefore, we made this topic a special focus of the off-campus THMs.

¹This document is available on the web site of the Office of the President under the “Strategic Plan” link: <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/>. Annual “Strategic Action Agendas” have outlined the projects to which we have assigned highest priority in advancing the Priority Initiatives falling under each of four major Goals. Those documents also are available on the web site of the Office of the President at the same location.

²Seven on-campus meetings were held in November and December 2009. Six were open to the entire campus community (including students); the seventh was conducted for the members of the SGA Senate and “invited guests.” More than thirty faculty members, administrators, and other staff members served as table facilitators for these discussions; all together, over 200 persons participated. At its October 2009 meeting, the Board of Trustees engaged in a similar exercise. For a summary of these meetings, see the “Synthesis Report,” issued by the IPPC that summarizes ideas arising from the on-campus THMs; the report is available to members of the Skidmore community at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/campusvoice/index.cfm>.

³Eight off-campus meetings were held in Boston, Hartford, Westchester County (NY), New York City, Washington D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Saratoga Springs (for alumni et al. in the Capital region). A ninth, abbreviated version was held in Vero Beach. Overall, nearly 500 persons participated in these events. See <http://cms.skidmore.edu/yourvoice/index.cfm> For a brief press report, see *Currents* (journal of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education), April 2010, pp. 6-7.

This document draws upon all these conversations. It also incorporates the thinking of the President's Cabinet, the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (the IPPC), the Trustees, and others from campus and beyond. Its purpose is to reframe our approach to achieving our institutional goals during the *Strategic Plan's* final five years. It reaffirms the basic elements of our mission as a student-centered liberal arts college. It draws our attention to those characteristics that differentiate us from competitor institutions. And most importantly, it provides a heuristic framework to guide our strategic choices going forward – the actions we will take to continue implementing the *Plan's* four strategic goals. Our success in attaining the increased levels of excellence we seek will be proportional to our capacity to focus our efforts and our resources on those actions that promise to make the greatest improvements in the educational experience of our students, the continuing value we provide to our alumni, and our capacity to articulate the distinctive value of a Skidmore education to those beyond the College.

Context, Challenge, and Opportunity

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.⁴ 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.

Even while dealing with the immediate effects of the recession, we remained focused upon our institutional priorities. Over the past eighteen months, we enrolled another strong entering class (continuing to increase both the diversity and academic preparedness of our student body) and recruited the next one, completed faculty searches, helped to initiate the New York Six Consortium,⁵ advanced our assessment efforts, increased the number and size of external grants,⁶ developed our web-based resources (including launching a new version of the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery web site, with funding from the Getty Foundation), and moved toward the successful completion of the \$200 million *Creative Thought - Bold Promise Campaign*. We also continued to implement the *Campus Plan*⁷ by renovating Kimball Hall, initiating planning for the long-needed replacement of Scribner Village, and making other smaller but nonetheless important improvements to our physical space. We hired the Arthur Zankel Director of Arts Administration to finalize planning for and implement the new Arts Management program that will make curricular connections between business and the arts and reach out into the world as well, and that offers the prospect of becoming a signature program. Finally, we opened the splendid new Arthur Zankel Music Center, which exemplifies Skidmore's continuing commitment to excellence in the arts.

⁴Specifically, we reduced actual and projected expenditures in current and future annual budgets by nearly \$12 million. There has been no general salary adjustment (GSA) in FY 2010 and none is currently projected for FY 2011. We have eliminated the equivalent of approximately 55 positions through a strategic hiring freeze and a successful voluntary early retirement incentive program. These efforts significantly reduced ongoing expenses for compensation – the largest component of our budget. We also made many other reductions in services and supplies and realized significant savings in energy costs. For additional information, see “Skidmore College Financial Update – February 1, 2010,” <http://cmsauthor.skidmore.edu/president/statements/upload/Skidmore-College-Financial-Update.pdf>

⁵In addition to Skidmore, this consortium includes Colgate University, Hamilton College, Hobart -William Smith Colleges, St. Lawrence University, and Union College.

⁶In just the period extending from June 2009 through January 2010, the College received a total of \$3,116,712 in new foundation support. More recently, we have received nearly \$800,000 in additional federal funding for research in Exercise Science and a private grant of \$1.2 million to complete the Mellon challenge grant for the Tang.

⁷*The 2007 Campus Plan: A Vision for the Future*. <http://cms.skidmore.edu/campusplan/index.cfm>.

All of us at the College are fortunate to be associated with an institution that truly is driven by its educational mission. At its center, our “Mission Statement” expresses our commitment:

to prepare liberally educated graduates to continue their quest for knowledge and to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens. Skidmore faculty and staff create a challenging yet supportive environment that *cultivates students’ intellectual and personal excellence, encouraging them to expand their expectations of themselves while they enrich their academic understanding.* [Emphasis mine.]

Building upon this foundation, our *Strategic Plan* asserted a new “overarching objective”:

*to become a College that fully realizes the promise of our Mission: one that inspires, challenges, and supports the highest levels of excellence for all our students, not just for some or even many of them – as evidenced by their achievements in realizing the values of engaged liberal learning while at Skidmore and expressing them throughout their lives. The Skidmore we envision expects that an intellectually rigorous, transformative educational experience will lead to graduates whose achievements at Skidmore will launch them into the next phase of their lives, who are prepared to function effectively in the complex and increasingly diverse world of the 21st Century, and who understand and embrace the responsibilities of living as informed, responsible citizens. Moreover, we expect our alumni to remain deeply connected to one another and to Skidmore as a continuing source of inspiration and support.*⁸

In fall 2009, following very good work by a subcommittee of the Committee for Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP) and our Director of Assessment, the faculty approved the “**Skidmore College Goals for Student Learning and Development.**”⁹ Reflecting our heritage and values, this statement further articulates the commitments of our “Mission Statement” and *Strategic Plan* by naming specific expectations for student achievement that span the many dimensions of the intellectual and personal development students experience during their time with us.

Uniting these expressions of educational value is the realization that *our first and highest responsibility is always to the intellectual and personal development of our students*, a theme that also echoed throughout the Town Hall Meetings – and one that has continuing implications as we make strategic decisions going forward. *At our core and above all else, we are and will remain a student-centered institution.* We take justifiable pride in the educational value we provide to our current students and alumni. We remain committed both to fulfilling the promise of our mission even more effectively in the future and to increasing our capacity to provide persuasive evidence of that value through assessment.

This unity of purpose combines with the advances we have made in recent years under the guidance of the *Strategic Plan* to present significant opportunities that we now are prepared to embrace. The College offers to prospective students a unique combination of distinguishing attributes (see below). To the extent that we can strengthen them, we stand to improve our standing in the competition to attract successive generations of new students. The first three Goals of the *Plan* reflect our ambitions for our students, and we can build upon the progress of the last five years to realize those ambitions more fully. The statement of “Goals for Student Learning and Development” provides additional direction for curricular development. It also positions us to demonstrate in new ways the value of a Skidmore education through effective assessment that will encompass not only the undergraduate years but also the lives of our alumni.

⁸*Engaged Liberal Learning*, p. 11.

⁹The faculty unanimously approved the “Skidmore College Goals for Student Learning and Development” on 6 November 2009. This statement is reproduced below as “Appendix A.”

In order to seize the opportunities before us we need to be very smart institutionally – to make the best strategic decisions regarding what we will do and what we will not do. Even as the economy continues to improve, we still confront many serious and ongoing challenges: growing public concern about the price and value of expensive liberal arts colleges, reduced numbers of high school graduates within the geographical regions (most notably, in the Northeast) from which we historically have drawn the largest proportion of new students, and increasing skepticism among the U.S. population at large about the value of liberal education itself. These factors portend an increasingly competitive context for admissions recruitment.¹⁰ Indeed, some have questioned the continuing economic viability of expensive liberal arts colleges in general, and especially those – such as Skidmore – that remain undercapitalized relative to their quality and ambitions.

To move forward, we must resist any temptation to regard our recent experience as a one-time event receding into the past. Through the efforts and sacrifices of the entire campus community, we have taken important *initial* steps toward re-establishing our budget on a sustainable footing – so that it again can include appropriate investments in personnel, programs, and our physical plant, as well as in financial aid. But even so, the second five years of the *Strategic Plan* – and in all likelihood, the life of the College for many years beyond – will be shaped, in part, by significantly more constrained resources than were available either at the time of the *Plan*'s development or during the early years of its implementation. In short, we simply do not have the option of reverting to a “business-as-usual” mindset, returning to an approach to our work that was more tenable prior to the economic downturn. Skidmore's future will depend upon our ability to internalize this new reality – to continue combining creative thought with discipline. It also will depend upon our ability to add significantly to our endowment and our fundraising, especially, to defray the cost of financial aid that inevitably will rise over time. Most of all, it will depend upon our continuing ability to add to the educational value our students and alumni receive from the College, and the four Goals of the *Plan* continue to point the way to do so.

Skidmore's Most Valued and Differentiating Attributes

A primary objective of the off-campus Town Hall Meetings was to determine how closely the perceptions of the wider Skidmore community reflected the core values referenced above. Moreover, in order to attract successive generations of students who can take full advantage of what we offer, in an increasingly competitive admissions environment, ***it is crucial that we understand and emphasize those features that set us apart from competitor institutions. For those are the factors that make the most compelling case for a prospective student to select Skidmore from among his or her options.*** Accordingly, we framed two questions at the off-campus Town Hall Meetings and in several additional meetings with students on campus: “What characteristics of a Skidmore education do you see as most distinctive?” and “What characteristics of a Skidmore education do you see as most important?”

From these and many other conversations, we can reaffirm that students, alumni, and parents value Skidmore, first of all, because we embody the iconic values of a classic liberal arts education, as offered in every selective liberal arts college. These include close interactions between students and our highly accomplished faculty of teacher-scholars, opportunities for students to pursue independent research or creative work, the high value placed on academic achievement and personal development, and the opportunity for students to develop meaningful, lifelong friendships with both classmates and teachers. More broadly, we offer an education that prepares our graduates for continued learning, gives them the ability to master change in an increasingly complex world, and points them toward a life of purpose and meaning. As one of the nation's highly selective liberal arts colleges, Skidmore will continue to uphold and promote these and related elements of student-centered liberal arts education at its best.

¹⁰For further comment on challenges relating to student recruitment, see “Urgency and Focus: The Strategic Action Agenda 2009-10,” September 2009, which is available at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/planning/>.

Other familiar characteristics of a Skidmore education, which also are highly prized by students, parents, and alumni, do more to differentiate us from other small liberal arts colleges. These *differentiating attributes* reflect the particular dimensions of our heritage and values:

- **Our welcoming campus community that stresses collaboration as fundamental to achievement and the value of the individual student.** This attribute is manifested in the “non-proprietary” attitude of our faculty that encourages our students to develop their own eclectic interests. This attitude that shapes the approach by our faculty to mentoring also points to the special nature of the student-faculty relationship that is central to a Skidmore education.
- **Our assertion that “Creative Thought Matters” in every field of human endeavor.** This commitment reflects not only Skidmore’s heritage in the arts – where creativity has long been celebrated – but also our fundamental realization that *every* great human achievement in *any* field required an act of imagination. It also incorporates our historical commitment to educating both “mind and hand,” a connection that reaches back to the vision of our founder, Lucy Skidmore Scribner. This linkage of between “mind and hand” is also reflected in our emphasis upon service throughout our students’ college years and beyond.¹¹
- **Our extraordinary curricular breadth** that includes the traditional liberal arts and sciences as well as pre-professional programs (Management and Business, Exercise Science, Social Work, and Education, along with our B.S. programs in the arts), which are quite atypical of selective liberal arts colleges. This breadth of offerings affords our students an exceptional range of choices, both initially and over time: a student can change his or her mind about a major and not have to change colleges.
- **The interdisciplinary spirit that pervades our faculty** – reflected, among other ways, in our requirement that all Scribner Seminars include an interdisciplinary dimension, our faculty members’ teaching and scholarship, in the central mission of the Tang as a laboratory for interdisciplinary exploration and experiment, and in the individualized curriculum of the Masters of Arts in Liberal Studies (MALS). Our faculty members know the interests of their colleagues, and they actively support and encourage our students to make connections across disciplines and programs.
- **Our historical and continuing strength in the visual and performing arts**, including the truly unique resources represented by the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, the Office of the Dean of Special Programs, and, most recently, the Arthur Zankel Music Center.
- **Our commitment to intercultural and global understanding** illustrated, in part, by the fact that, on average, 60% of each graduating class will have studied abroad.¹²
- **Our lively summer campus** that uniquely combines high caliber programs in humanities and sciences with those in studio and performing arts, renowned public events, and revenue-generating activities. Recently, we have developed new programs and services that draw upon resources developed during the summer to support residential college faculty work and student learning throughout the year.

¹¹Skidmore has been named to the 2009 President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, which recognizes selected colleges and universities for exemplary, innovative, and effective community service programs.

¹²A recent national study, conducted by the Institute for International Education (IIE), ranked Skidmore fifth among all liberal arts colleges in the number of students who study abroad for one semester or longer.

- **And last but not least, our setting in the vibrant small city of Saratoga Springs** with its distinctive cultural life as manifested in its numerous museums, arts organizations, performance venues, equestrian heritage, and many fine restaurants. More broadly, our location in upstate New York in proximity to the 6,000,000-acre Adirondack Park and the Capital Region, within a three-hour drive of Boston, Montreal, and New York City, offers students a host of opportunities.

*Together, these eight differentiating attributes define an undergraduate experience that is quite specific to Skidmore. Over the coming years, we need to take account of and, where possible, strengthen these distinctive features. In addition, we must become even more accomplished in referencing this constellation of attributes as we make the case for Skidmore to prospective students and donors.*¹³

Strategic Themes

The central objective of the mid-term review of the *Strategic Plan* has been to articulate a set of strategic themes that stand conceptually between the *Plan's* relatively more abstract Goals and the specific action items we will identify over the coming five years. The three themes discussed below emerged in the context of this year's discussions. They resonate with the core values and distinguishing attributes referenced above, as well as with the objectives of the *Plan* itself. At the same time, they offer a new perspective on the *Plan* and, as such, will help to focus our interpretation of the Goals and sharpen our selection of specific action items in the coming years.

Transition and Transformation

We have always regarded a liberal education as the best possible preparation for life. The increasing demands imposed upon our graduates by a world marked by an accelerating rate of change only serve to reinforce our commitment to this fundamental premise. We will continue to develop in our graduates the high level cognitive, social, and personal abilities that position them for the multiple careers they are likely to experience over their professional lives. This commitment, however, is fully compatible with the awareness that – especially in today's economy – we can do more to prepare our students for the ***transition from college to the working world or to further studies***. Concern with this transition-point in our students' lives figured prominently throughout the off-campus and on-campus Town Hall Meetings, and it was already included as a Priority Initiative under the first Goal of the *Plan*.

We have long thought about the transitions related to our students' undergraduate years. Five years ago, we implemented the new First-Year Experience Program to facilitate a more successful transition for our students into college. Since then, we have been working to improve the sophomore year – a time of transition from new student to declared major. We also have implemented a number of programs such as “The Liberal Arts at Work,” SkidBiz, The Alumni Career Network, the Parents Council's “Career Jam,” and others focused on the transition out of college. Discussions at the Council of 100 prompted us to develop the web site “Creative Thought At Work.” Various offices have been involved in helping students begin planning earlier and more effectively for graduate school and assisting them in applying for post-graduate fellowships. All of these efforts have yielded positive results.

Over the next five years, however, we need to do better: We need to start more of these efforts to facilitate our students' transition out of college within their very first year at Skidmore and then continue them across their undergraduate careers. This new institutional commitment must leverage and integrate resources across academic programs, faculty mentoring, Career Services, and alumni career networks. Departments and programs will be asked to

¹³Appendix B. reports on what we learned from a series of focus groups that asked current students their opinions regarding the above listing of distinguishing attributes.

continue efforts such as “The Liberal Arts At Work,” and we need to develop more systematic ways to provide information about the post-Skidmore lives of our alumni to our faculty. Some years ago, before we initiated the First-Year Experience (FYE), data from the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) indicated that our newest students reported having fewer conversations with faculty members about their future plans than was the case at other comparable institutions. In response, we have placed greater emphasis upon mentoring within the FYE – encouraging students to begin actively thinking about their post-Skidmore lives from the beginning of their time at the College. Going forward, we will help students connect with alumni through career networks, internships, and other avenues – again, beginning in the first year. Because we are serious about preparing our students to move capably beyond their undergraduate years, we must become clearer about the knowledge, abilities, and skills they need to make this transition – and we can be more creative in developing opportunities for students to acquire them across their time at Skidmore. Everyone who works at the College needs to internalize this objective so that we all can seize opportunities presented by our students to help them prepare for life after Skidmore. In the end, of course, our students must work out their future plans for themselves, but we can and must be more imaginative in providing them the resources they need to do so.

None of this should be read as calling for a Skidmore education to become more “vocational” or less focused on our historical core values. As emphasized above, the essential elements of liberal education must remain at the center of our efforts – even within our pre-professional programs. In fact, we need to help our students understand and articulate more clearly the core values of a liberal arts education – and specifically, the elements of the “Goals for Student Learning” – so they can be more intentional in continuing to develop and use those key capacities throughout their lives, and so they will be better able to explain those values to others, including prospective graduate and professional schools and potential employers. But the overarching goal of a Skidmore education is both broader and deeper:

A liberal education provides the best possible preparation for a life of professional achievement; it also provides the foundation for a life of satisfaction in the deepest sense of that term – a life of human flourishing, Aristotle’s *eudaimonia*. Such a life certainly requires some measure of material success. But even more importantly it entails continuing intellectual and personal growth, the cultivation of mature friendships and loving family relationships, professional, civic, other forms of community involvement, attention to the arts and other sources of spiritual renewal, and a commitment to health and wellness.¹⁴

Indeed, our new emphasis upon *transitions* should be set within a larger and more familiar conceptual framework relating to ***transformation***. This concept has long played a prominent role in our discourse. It appears several times above in the discussion of our student-centered mission, and it is both a category heading and referenced in the introduction to the “Goals for Student Learning”:

Our goals emerge in particular from our collective sense of a Skidmore education as a *transformative experience*. [Emphasis mine.] We want our students to acquire both knowledge and capacities that enable them to initiate and embrace change and apply their learning lifelong in new contexts. We believe that this learning takes place throughout our students’ experience, both inside the classroom and out, on campus and off.¹⁵

Understandably, we have tended to concentrate on the transformation that occurs during the years our students spend with us – a transformative experience that should be proportional to a student’s success in meeting the ensemble of objectives in the “Learning Goals.”

¹⁴*Strategic Plan*, §B. “Skidmore’s Distinctive Identity – the Values of Engaged Liberal Learning” p. 10.

¹⁵See Appendix A, below.

I now challenge us to apply the concept of transformation even more broadly, to acknowledge that the undergraduate college experience represents just one moment – though certainly a crucial one – in the longer passage from late adolescence into early adulthood, a process that begins in high school and extends well beyond our students’ time at Skidmore, typically into one’s mid-30s. How would our curricula, courses, and mentoring practices change if we were to situate them in the context of this larger developmental arc? What resources can we develop to help us answer this question? How would our relationship to our graduates change if we were to develop a more detailed sense of their needs, say, two years, five years, and ten years out from commencement? This relationship is expressed concretely in our Alumni Affairs programming (including Reunions), but the question extends beyond this one office. If we truly regard a Skidmore education as *transformative* in its core, then we should be able to use this insight in our decision-making regarding curricular and pedagogical development. (See below.) In further exploring the nature of this transformation, we also should take full advantage of expertise present within our faculty – e.g., in the areas of developmental psychology, sociology, and so on.

Continuing curricular development

Many comments regarding the curriculum occurred throughout the on-campus Town Hall Meetings – some indicating where we should place additional emphasis (e.g., science), others suggesting that we need to be more intentional in identifying areas where student demand does not match the allocated resources. Let me affirm that the curriculum remains first of all an expression of the academic values and vision of our faculty, and the faculty appropriately retains a primary role in determining its content and shape – both within departments and programs and through governance committees such as Curriculum and CEPP.¹⁶ At the same time and especially in dealing with the reality of constrained resources, it is the joint responsibility of Academic Affairs and the faculty to collaborate effectively in placing curricular development within the context of the *Strategic Plan*. Over the past five years, the *Plan* has both reflected and guided such curricular development – in the First-Year Experience, in the area of intercultural literacy, in relation to the goal of responsible citizenship, in science planning, in assessment, and elsewhere.

As we look to the future, the *Strategic Plan* identifies areas of ongoing curricular work:

- Goal I – *Student Academic Engagement*: Fostering innovative curricular and pedagogical thinking and new opportunities for students (e.g., for collaborative research) – especially as they relate to the “Goals for Student Learning and Development.” We will continue our science planning, with special emphasis on enhancing the *scientific literacy* of all Skidmore students. And it is time for us to become more intentional in further developing our capacity to make good on our claim that “Creative Thought Matters” by attending more intentionally to this value in our curricula and individual courses.
- Goal II – *Intercultural and Global Understanding*: Continuing to develop the Skidmore curriculum, the pedagogical skills of our faculty, and the inclusiveness of our campus community to enable our students to achieve the knowledge and skills relating to *intercultural and global understanding* that are so crucial to achieving success in today’s world. We also need to identify specific learning goals relating to these issues and build upon the good work that already has been done, for example, by faculty members and students through the Inter-Group Relations (IGR) program.
- Goal III – *Responsible Citizenship*: Continuing to develop both the Skidmore curriculum and social milieu to enable our students to achieve the knowledge and skills relating to

¹⁶A recent commentary in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (28 March 2010) addresses the faculty’s role in disciplining the growth of the curriculum. See “The Elephant in the Room: Curricular Glut,” by Michael Bugeja: <http://chronicle.com/article/The-Elephant-in-the-Room-/64835/?key=QGx0d1kyNyIdbHoxfSUXcyIGYSB8KR19biNGZSaaYF5d>

responsible citizenship, a value that has long been part of Skidmore’s mission. Here too, we need to identify specific learning goals and decide which investments of time, energy, and financial resources will yield the greatest strategic advances. One question that has emerged through our work on responsible citizenship is the question of how we can articulate the “public value” of individual majors or programs.

As we determine how best to do this work over the next five years, we also will look to the specific markers of student achievement provided by the “Goals for Student Learning and Development” and the themes of *transition* and *transformation*.

Sustainability and Leverage

The concept of *sustainability* emerged as a point of emphasis in the on-campus Town Hall Meetings. This notion has become a familiar feature of our discourse, applying first of all to the responsible use of resources. And we certainly will continue our efforts to develop sustainable uses of electricity, water, etc., and to reduce waste and energy inefficiency. Our College-wide commitment to *sustainability*, however, extends beyond “green” environmental systems to include sustainable human-resource and financial practices – for example, our commitment to maintaining appropriate and competitive salary levels for all our employees. But the *Plan* also extends the concept of *sustainability* to include our educational aspirations for our students, calling upon us to help them develop the capacities, skills, and habits necessary to leading a sustainable life over the course of professional and personal involvement.¹⁷ Above all our institutional commitment to *sustainability* requires the ability to make the necessary strategic choices that direct our time, energy, and financial resources efficiently to areas of highest strategic priority. One significant way to increase efficiency is to ***leverage*** resources that are already in place, though perhaps in apparently unconnected areas of the College. Accordingly, we will look for initiatives that reach across disciplinary or departmental boundaries or otherwise create opportunities to multiply and concentrate existing resources to achieve strategic ends.

Stewardship

The theme of *stewardship* also emerged as a priority in the on-campus Town Hall Meetings, and it underpins Goal IV of the *Strategic Plan*. This Goal emphasizes that we must manage our resources effectively if we are to retain our independence – our capacity to determine for ourselves how best to teach our students and otherwise manage our affairs. Over the coming years, to further develop our *stewardship* of all our resources, we will undertake a number of systematic reviews of business practices and policies across the College. These reviews will build upon past efforts to ensure that we are receiving maximum value added for our investments of time, effort, and financial resources. More broadly, we must expect all members of the Skidmore community to become engaged and effective stewards, through our actions on a daily basis, to help preserve and protect the well being of the College.

In addition, we must continue to be vigilant not only in stewarding our financial resources but also in protecting and adding to the integrity of our institutional reputation – our “brand” – that is so important to our success in admissions, in faculty and staff recruitment, and in generating external support from alumni, parents, friends, and foundations. Furthermore, we must continue to strengthen our capacity to nourish life-long relationships between our students and the College. Indeed, Skidmore becomes part of the “personal brand” of each of our graduates, and we must continue to enhance the value of this relationship to them over time.

¹⁷See the *Strategic Plan*, §B. “Skidmore’s Distinctive Identity – the Values of Engaged Liberal Learning” (p. 10), and under Goal III (pp. 25-28).

Our Assessment effort too can be understood as another crucial dimension of stewardship: affirming and increasing the integrity of our educational processes, and enhancing our capacity to describe our student learning outcomes to those outside the College.

Going Forward

As I have emphasized throughout this document, the four major Goals of the *Strategic Plan* will continue to provide our primary strategic focus. During the next five years, we will continue to advance key Priority Initiatives already in process, while others that were not emphasized during the preceding five years will be given greater prominence or developed anew. A major test of the effectiveness of our strategic decision-making will be the extent to which we continue to attract and retain the students we most want to attend Skidmore, at a financial aid cost that allows the College to continue to develop sustainable budgets.

The preceding strategic themes will provide an effective heuristic for making the strategic choices before us in a time of limited resources. Specifically, they provide a set of questions to ask as we evaluate each potential initiative:

- Does it enhance our focus as a student-centered institution and help to foster the transformative experience we wish for all our students?
- Does it support our faculty in their central role in accomplishing the College's mission?
- Does it advance our knowledge of the transformative process in which our students are engaged – and, more importantly, does it help us facilitate that process?
- Will it enhance our students' ability to manage their transition from college to their post-college lives?
- Will it contribute to the sustainability of the College – does it enhance environmental responsibility, does it create more sustainable lives for our employees, or does it help our students and alumni lead more sustainable lives?
- Does it leverage existing resources or combine resources across boundaries within the institution?
- Does it contribute to the stewardship of our resources or our reputation?
- Does it strengthen one or more of our distinguishing attributes?

It is unlikely that any single initiative could address all of these issues. But answering these questions will give us clear reasons to select some options over others. As we deliberate regarding possible strategic action items over the coming years, we also will be intentional in articulating expected outcomes, determining the resources (time, energy, funding) required to complete them, and identifying where those resources are to be found.

I have directed various Cabinet members to undertake immediately a number of administrative initiatives aimed at addressing issues we have identified over the preceding months as having special urgency – issues reflected in the preceding discussion. For example, we have begun a comprehensive project relating to our students' transition from college to the working world, led by an administrative working group. I also have directed the Office of Admissions and Financial Aid to undertake, in collaboration with other offices, a thorough review of promotional materials, financial aid packaging practices, and other procedures relating to the admissions cycle – all to enhance our capacity to make the case for Skidmore even more effectively in the future

than we do at present. Furthermore, I have directed the Office of Business and Finance to identify areas in which we will evaluate the efficiency of our business practices.

Let me identify one final strategic opportunity relating to the curriculum: I challenge academic administration and the faculty to collaborate in developing a new “space” within the College’s academic structures for curricular and pedagogical exploration – a “space” where faculty members can explore new and perhaps even “disruptive” ideas that can help us shape the Skidmore of the future. For example, that future clearly calls for higher levels of collaboration across institutions (e.g., within the New York Six Consortium), more integral uses of technology (e.g., Internet2), and new models of instruction in which a professor, a program, and perhaps even the College as a whole functions more as an academic “hub” from which we send students out into the world (either physically or electronically) to access resources and explore opportunities that Skidmore cannot provide on its own.

What Are We Prepared To Do?

Over the past eighteen months, virtually every college and university confronted difficulties similar to ours. Although we could not control the developments occurring in the external environment, we can take pride in the way our community rallied to respond to them. Now, as we look to the future, we must reaffirm both our sense of opportunity and our determination to meet the challenges remaining before us. We will continue to call upon the substantial resources within the Skidmore community. The professionalism and commitment of our faculty and staff, the vitality of our students, the strength and support of our extended Skidmore community, our historical willingness to embrace risk, and our record of accomplishment in the face of constrained resources all encourage us to retain full faith in our future. If we continue to unite creative thought with discipline and pursue our highest strategic priorities with vigor, we will emerge even more strongly positioned among the nation’s highly selective liberal arts colleges and better able to fulfill Skidmore’s bold promise. Yes, significant challenges still remain. But as we have demonstrated in the past, working together we are up to the task.

APPENDIX A: Skidmore College Goals for Student Learning and Development

The goals that follow reflect the unique characteristics and synergies of our B.A. and B.S. programs, as well as certain emphases that are deeply engrained in Skidmore's history and culture: on creativity, on civic responsibility, and on interdisciplinary thinking. As in the past, we aim to graduate students who strive for excellence, think deeply and creatively, and communicate and act effectively. We continue to ask our students to link theoretical and practical learning, and now also to develop intercultural understanding and an appreciation of their roles as global citizens. These goals have much in common with those of all liberal arts colleges who share a common mission, though we take pride in having long approached them in our own distinctive way.

Our goals emerge in particular from our collective sense of a Skidmore education as a transformative experience. We want our students to acquire both knowledge and capacities that enable them to initiate and embrace change and apply their learning lifelong in new contexts. We believe that this learning takes place throughout our students' experience – both inside the classroom and out, on campus and off. Our goals articulate, then, in language that is as clear and lean as possible, our understanding of students' learning and development at Skidmore. They lay the groundwork for our continued inquiry into the evidence of that learning.¹⁸

I. Knowledge

- Acquire knowledge of human cultures and the physical world through study in the arts, humanities, languages, mathematics, natural sciences, and social sciences
- Understand social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts
- Demonstrate advanced learning and synthesis in both general and specialized studies

II. Intellectual Skills and Practice

- Think critically, creatively, and independently
- Gather, analyze, integrate, and apply varied forms of information; understand and use evidence
- Communicate effectively
- Interact effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities
- Engage in and take responsibility for learning; strive for excellence

III. Personal and Social Values

- Examine one's own values and their use as ethical criteria in thought and action
- Interrogate one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences
- Develop practical competencies for managing a personal, professional, and community life
- Apply learning to find solutions for social, civic, and scientific problems

IV. Transformation

- Integrate and apply knowledge and creative thought from multiple disciplines in new contexts
- Embrace intellectual integrity, humility, and courage
- Foster habits of mind and body that enable a person to live deliberately and well
- Develop an enduring passion for learning

¹⁸ The following documents were fundamental sources for the Goals.

1. Skidmore College Mission Statement
2. Intersections of Paradigms, 2008 [including key phrases from the Strategic Plan, 2005]
3. Skidmore College Core Abilities, 1997-98
4. Skidmore College Academic Vision Statement, 2003-04
5. Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Essential Learning Outcomes
6. Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Colleges: Liberal Arts Outcomes
7. Council for the Advancement of Standards: Learning and Development Outcomes.

**APPENDIX B: The Student Voice – Student Perception of our Primary
“Differentiating Attributes”
Spring 2010**

Based on feedback received at on- and off-campus Town Hall Meetings during the fall of 2009, President Glotzbach drafted a list of “differentiating attributes” – attributes that, taken together, set Skidmore apart from other liberal arts colleges. President Glotzbach then asked that current Skidmore students have an opportunity to react to that draft list. Focus groups were conducted with three groups of students: the Academic Council, the Student Government Association Senate, and a joint meeting of members of Students Promoting Social Change and Project Unity.¹⁹ The full report on the student focus groups, including preliminary analysis, is available on the web site of the Office of the President. This appendix summarizes student reaction to the earlier draft list of differentiating attributes.²⁰

MOST DIFFERENT

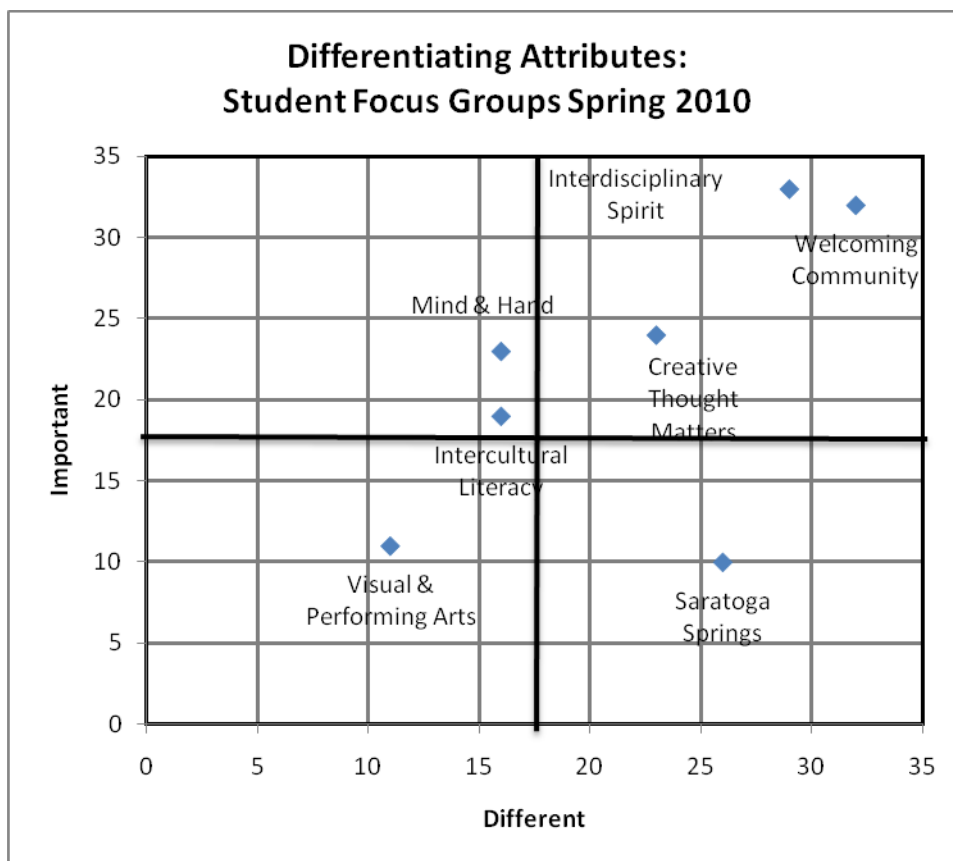
	Academic Council 3-30-10	SGA Senate 3-30-10	Students Promoting Social Change and Project Unity 4-5-10	Total
1. “Mind and hand”	10	1	5	16
2. Visual and performing arts	6	2	3	11
3. Interdisciplinary spirit	11	15	3	29
4. Creative Thought Matters	10	12	1	23
5. Welcoming community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboration • value individual student 	9	19	4	32
6. Intercultural Literacy	9	5	2	16
7. Saratoga Springs/ location	14	9	3	26

MOST IMPORTANT

	Academic Council 3-30-10	SGA Senate 3-30-10	Students Promoting Social Change and Project Unity 4-5-10	Total
1. “Mind and hand”	11	9	3	23
2. Visual and performing arts	7	4	0	11
3. Interdisciplinary spirit	15	13	5	33
4. Creative Thought Matters	9	13	3	25
5. Welcoming community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • collaboration • value individual student 	12	16	4	32
6. Intercultural Literacy	8	5	6	19
7. Saratoga Springs/ location	7	3	0	10

¹⁹A total of 53 different students appeared for these focus groups and were allowed three votes in each of the two categories (most different and most important). Some students left prior to casting any votes; some cast votes only for the “most different,” and some cast votes in both categories but did not take part in the “free writing” exercise. Students who attended more than one session (there was some overlap among the groups) cast votes only once.

²⁰ The draft list of differentiating attributes considered by the student focus groups is reflected in the “Most Different” and “Most Important” charts presented in this appendix. The list of differentiating attributes presented on pages 5-6 in the main body of this “Strategic Renewal” document was revised following the student focus groups to take the student voice into account.



Students were asked to identify other differentiating attributes – i.e., attributes that were not on the draft list but should have been. Themes that emerged from this question included supportive community (including faculty interactions in general and several mentions of the importance of the First-Year Experience) and opportunities for personal growth and leadership development.

Students also were asked to comment on any of the proposed differentiators that did *not* resonate with their experiences. Although CTM and “Mind & Hand” ranked relatively high on importance and difference, some students expressed the opinion that the College’s “real” commitment to these concepts does not always match its “rhetoric.” Some students (notably, students involved in the groups whose missions are related to diversity) indicated a disconnect with respect to the “intercultural literacy” differentiator – both in general terms and, more particularly, with respect to the reference that nearly 60% of Skidmore students study abroad (many students go to English-speaking countries; studying abroad not the only way to get intercultural literacy, and some who study abroad don’t achieve it in any case).

Finally, students were asked to engage in a “free writing” exercise for the final five minutes and to describe “the most meaningful aspect of Skidmore for me has been....” Here, the responses could be grouped into four major categories: welcoming and supportive community; faculty-student relationships marked, most notably, by faculty members’ sense of caring and a commitment to their students’ development; the College’s commitment to interdisciplinarity; and personal growth and development.

Readers are encouraged to review the complete report of “The Student Voice: Student Perception of our Primary ‘Differentiating Attributes’ ” (Spring 2010) available on the Office of the President web site. The full report presents detailed information from the student focus groups, including the full set of student responses to the “free-writing” exercise.