

CREATING PATHWAYS TO EXCELLENCE: THE PLAN FOR SKIDMORE COLLEGE 2015-2025

OUR CHALLENGE – AND OUR OPPORTUNITY – IS TO CREATE AND EMBRACE A VISION OF SKIDMORE COLLEGE 2025 THAT IS AT ONCE DISTINCTIVE, COMPETITIVE, GROUNDED IN SKIDMORE’S PARTICULAR EXPRESSION OF THE VALUES OF LIBERAL EDUCATION, AND ACHIEVABLE. Because of the breadth, depth, and interconnectedness of our academic and co-curricular programs, the ways we teach in them, and how we encourage our students to find their own paths through our curriculum, the College is well positioned to seize this opportunity

We begin by reaffirming our commitment to the fundamental principles of liberal education as realized in a residential liberal arts college,¹ while acknowledging the need to refine and refresh Skidmore’s distinctive expression of those values in ways that best meet the needs of our students in the 21st Century. The time-honored outcomes of a high quality liberal education include intellectual freedom and courage, a critical and analytical disposition, the personal humility to know that even one’s most deeply held beliefs could be wrong, the ability to sustain critical inquiry, to identify and challenge entrenched assumptions, to write and think cogently, to present one’s views effectively and persuasively orally and in other ways, to access different modes of knowing, to develop new insights through empirical research and conceptual exploration, and to expand one’s cultural horizons and self-knowledge. At the same time, just as the Library has changed from a repository of books into a dramatically different workspace that integrates paper with the new digital universe of research and learning, so too are we considering new and creative pedagogies and curricula that will support our transition to a technology-rich college. Doing so will enable our students to take best advantage of the resources available to them both here and in their post-Skidmore lives. It also acknowledges the fact that our students increasingly come to us having experienced new forms of technologically enhanced learning in their primary and secondary schools – learning experiences that we must be prepared to credit and build upon.

Because it represents the most direct expression of our core educational mission, we place the commitment to developing the above skills and habits of mind at the center of our planning. Liberal education has long been regarded as the best preparation for a life of professional success, civic engagement, and personal fulfillment. This realization holds true even more today, especially given the rapidly changing and uncertain world our graduates will confront. Accordingly, the educational outcomes we seek are expressed most vividly in the lives of our graduates. Their professional, civic, and personal contributions to this world represent a primary measure of the College’s value.² We acknowledge that recommitting to an educational process grounded in the distinctive model of the American liberal arts college stands in opposition to many prevailing trends in both higher education and in our society writ large.³ Nevertheless, we persist in believing that students learn most dynamically and effectively within the setting of a residential college community focused on the developmental requirements of the traditional college-age student – in an aesthetically inspiring campus environment, through direct face-to-face interactions with teachers, mentors, and with one

¹See *Engaged Liberal Learning: The Plan for Skidmore College 2005-2015*, §B. “Skidmore’s Distinctive Identity – the Values of Engaged Liberal Learning,” pp. 5-11.

²The more specific educational outcomes we seek are summarized in the “Goals for Student Learning and Development” that were endorsed by the faculty and are included below as Appendix I.

³For example, an increased emphasis on technical or vocationally-oriented degree programs and short-term “return on investment,” decreased reliance on full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty in favor of part-time adjunct instructors, the creation of efficiencies through larger classes, distance learning and other forms of technologically-mediated instruction, etc.

another, developing skills that are crucial to their future in ways that simply cannot be replicated in more impersonal educational contexts or over the Internet.

Our achievements under the guidance of the previous *Strategic Plan* give us confidence in our ability to attain new levels of excellence in teaching and learning and in meeting the demands of the environment in which we operate. This *Plan* points the way to achieving these outcomes by setting out creative pathways to accomplish the *four strategic goals* that are identified below (p. 6). It calls upon the entire Skidmore community to be nimble, experimental, and imaginative in aligning our actions to ensure that our immediate priorities, allocation of resources, and institutional energy support these broad objectives.

Central to our educational enterprise is the work of our faculty of teacher-scholars who establish relationships with our students built upon their personal concern for every student's success. Our faculty members also directly contribute through their own research and creative work, which sustains their critical relationship to the larger scholarly community, contributes to the store of knowledge, and in turn enriches what they bring to our students in the classroom, the lab, and the studio. Indeed, our faculty members are the heartbeat of the institution. They interact with our students, with their colleagues, with the Skidmore community, with their disciplines, and with the larger academy in complex and important ways. They have a multidimensional role – as teachers, scholars, leaders, role models, and mentors – and, because of these multiple roles, we have a responsibility to provide even greater levels of support. The excellence of our academic enterprise depends directly on the skills, capacities, and freedom of our faculty. We are ever mindful that the traditional ways of teaching, producing scholarship and artistic work, and leading at Skidmore may no longer work in the twenty-first century. As a result, we must be proactive and forward thinking in our approaches to the work of the faculty, enabling them to adopt the most promising new pedagogical practices and learn to provide the necessary academic leadership in today's increasingly multi-cultural classroom.

The educational philosophy central to the residential liberal arts college places the work of teaching and learning within a larger developmental framework that also values what our students learn through the co-curriculum – on the athletic field, by holding leadership positions in clubs and organizations, writing for student publications, and the like. Dedicated staff members and administrators, many of who also directly assist our students through coaching, mentoring, and interacting with them in other ways, support this nexus of curricular and co-curricular learning. Our alumni, parents, and students take pride in their affiliation with Skidmore. Increasing numbers of applicants seek admission to the College, including more prospective students from domestic and international populations that would not have been represented to the same extent just a few years ago, providing concrete testimony to their perception of the educational value we offer.

Despite being under-resourced relative to our achievements and, certainly, to our aspirations, throughout our history, Skidmore has made imaginative and bold institutional decisions despite their uncertainty and risk – moving from our original campus to our present one, admitting men, developing the concept of a teaching museum, and envisioning a Center for Integrated Science that represents the most ambitious single capital project the College has ever imagined. Such choices have made the College stronger now than it has ever been. Through effective portfolio management and the *Creative Thought – Bold Promise Campaign*, our endowment has more than doubled in the past ten years (from \$155 million to nearly \$322 million as of September 30, 2015); annual fundraising has doubled as well (from \$10 million to \$20-25 million). Under the previous *Strategic Plan*, we increased the size of the faculty and added programs in Neuroscience, Arts Administration, International Affairs, Intergroup Relations, Chinese, Japanese, and most recently Film and Media Studies. We grew our applicant

pool by more than 50% and dramatically improved both the quality and diversity of our student body, which has changed our community in profound ways. We completed over \$200 million of facilities projects, including the Northwoods, the Zankel Music Center, and Sussman Villages, along with renovations to Scribner Library, Filene Hall, Murray-Aikins Dining Hall, Starbuck Center, and Wachenheim Field. In sum, we have made significant progress in building the institutional capacity necessary to achieve the educational excellence we seek.

Because our collective imagination will always outpace available resources, we will continue to face difficult strategic choices. Economically, higher education as a whole has moved beyond a period of relative abundance in the 1980s and 1990s – when endowments grew rapidly, demand from prospective students was high, and schools could actually gain prestige and attract more students by raising their prices faster than competitors – to a time of significantly constrained resources. More broadly, this is a turbulent time for all colleges and universities – one in which the values of liberal education referenced above no longer automatically command the public esteem they did in the past. In many quarters, respect for learning as an intrinsic value and the role of colleges in nurturing the virtues of citizenship and civic engagement has been supplanted by concerns about economic access to a college education and the immediate job prospects of graduates. These issues are certainly important and will command our renewed attention among the range of values that provide reasons for students to attend the College.

The residential liberal arts college does represent a labor-intensive and *per force* a resource-intensive form of undergraduate education. So long as we are committed to attaining ever-higher standards of excellence in the context of this educational model, we will face pressures for new investments that will not go away. The increasing inability and, in many cases, the unwillingness of families to pay their share of the rising cost of a college education will significantly constrain our capacity to increase our comprehensive fee at rates that we have seen in the past and drive an increasing dependence on financial aid to support an ever-greater percentage of our student body. Moreover, the changing demographics of our nation entail that future student populations will look very different from those of the past, and we will face increasing competition from other schools seeking to enroll essentially the same students we wish to recruit.

Yet even in this increasingly complex setting, a select group of highly valued residential liberal arts colleges will still be able to attract the students, faculty, staff, administrators, and financial resources they require to chart their own course in offering the highest quality undergraduate education. Most importantly, they will be able to do so on their own terms, without compromising their basic educational values or mission. ***In order to achieve our aspirations, it is essential that we do everything in our power to enable Skidmore College to be counted among this group of school: as an institution that is an acknowledged and distinctive leader in undergraduate liberal education.*** We must do this not only to assure our institutional autonomy but also to position our graduates to succeed in meeting their personal life goals throughout their post-Skidmore lives.

Our Distinctive Institutional Imperative: Creativity

What is sometimes forgotten in the history and rhetoric around liberal education is the importance of *creativity*. For some time, Skidmore has explicitly recognized that the attributes our students require to navigate our increasingly complex world necessarily include creative imagination. This realization is hardly unique to Skidmore. ***But because of our heritage as an institution rich in the visual and performing arts, and because of our work at the intersections of disciplinary boundaries where creativity frequently flourishes, the College is uniquely positioned to distinguish itself by embracing creativity in its broadest sense: as***

the capacity to imagine and to do that extends across all disciplines and fields of human endeavor. We will make this realization the primary lens through which we bring our priorities into focus.

We define *creativity* as the capacity to deploy one's imagination in posing questions, investigating ideas, identifying problems, and inventing solutions. This conception is at once inspirational and utilitarian, combining both pragmatism and hope. It entails both the flexibility of mind needed to envision new possibilities and the capacity to map a path to realizing them. These abilities encompass the full spectrum of human undertaking. For every notable human achievement involves some act of imagination that transcends what has been done before. Thus the concepts of *excellence* – most especially, *academic* excellence – and *creativity* are intimately and inextricably interwoven, because every significant academic achievement requires its own creative moment. If our students are to attain the level of excellence that we celebrate, they must do more than simply repeat what their professors have told them, or what has previously been realized or done. Rather, they must develop the independence of mind required to make their own imaginative contributions through the work they undertake.

Achieving excellence, of course, requires more than just creativity. It takes discipline, persistence, and rigorous thought; it also requires collaboration – either synchronous collaboration with one's contemporaries or the asynchronous collaboration with one's predecessors whose work laid the foundation for today's achievement. Indeed, one of the main objectives of liberal education is to enable students to draw upon both the wisdom of the past and the insights of their contemporaries, accessing networks of expertise that define learned and artistic communities. But discipline, persistence, collaboration, and analytical rigor are not in themselves sufficient. Achieving a truly excellent result requires the spark of creative imagination. Our assertion that *Creative Thought Matters* expresses this realization, and it is embedded in our institutional DNA. The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, for example, has provided numerous examples through its interdisciplinary exhibits. Creativity is equally manifested throughout the design of the Center for Integrative Sciences and, most especially, in the curricular partnerships and synergies among programs that drive that design. Emerging academic programs such as the John B. Moore Documentary Studies Collaborative have allowed students and faculty to explore new modes of inquiry and expression across a wide range of disciplines. Such examples can easily be multiplied.

It also ties directly to our long heritage of educating “both mind and hand” – combining theory and practice. For “*Creative Thought Matters*” declares not only that creative thought is important but also that ideas, if they are to “count,” must be made material: they must take shape in a concrete project – a senior thesis, a successful lab experiment, volunteer work that changes a community, a business plan that launches a new enterprise, a summer project that brings potable water or a new more environmentally friendly way of cooking to a remote village in a developing nation, a painting, short story, or novel. Helping our students learn how to realize their ideas and connect them with the world engages them actively as learners and reinforces the importance of the work they do. Indeed, this moment represents a unique opportunity for Skidmore to assert its distinctive commitment to preparing students for today's world: empowering them to create new career paths, imagine new fields of study and endeavor, and thereby to model creativity and imagination as core elements of a liberal education. It is also a unique moment for our professors to model the type of creative thinking and teaching that higher education needs so badly. Cultivating and celebrating creativity is, in short, not just a phrase; it is our institutional imperative. Enabling our graduates to navigate the world creatively is Skidmore's special responsibility and one that sets us apart from other liberal arts colleges. Fulfilling this educational commitment will position our students to overcome the increasing personal and professional complexities of a rapidly changing world. It will enable

them to make connections across an ever-broadening spectrum of knowledge. And it will empower them to transform themselves, their communities, and the world.

To succeed in realizing this commitment to creativity requires the College to be a special kind of supportive community – one in which the broadest possible range of ideas is explored and critically interrogated, comprising persons who bring the broadest possible range of personal experiences to their interactions. In short, a commitment to creative thought also requires a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion – to inclusive excellence. Under the aegis of the previous *Strategic Plan*, we set out to increase intercultural and global understanding within the College. In order to do so, we first needed to become a more diverse community, dramatically increasing our percentage of domestic students of color and international students. We understood, as well, that we needed to strengthen our faculty and staff by hiring more persons of color and persons with international backgrounds. In recent years, we have developed more effective hiring practices for attaining these goals in faculty searches, and we have become more successful in attracting more broadly representative entering faculty “classes.”

As we continue the work of diversifying our various campus populations, we also know that this is merely a start. *Inclusive excellence* encompasses the expectation not only that our community become more diverse over time but also that we fully embrace our individual differences (e.g., personality, learning style, life experiences), as well as group and social differences (relating, e.g., to race or ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, and ability, as well as cultural, political, religious, or other affiliations). To embrace such differences means that we welcome individuals equitably and see such differences not as “problems” to be solved but rather as resources to enrich the critical conversations at the heart of liberal education. Achieving inclusive excellence requires us to continue achieving our persistence and retention objectives, for example, that all student populations graduate at similar rates and that all tenure-track faculty populations achieve tenure and promotion at similar rates. But in the end, we seek to be a community in which all members of our increasingly diverse populations feel truly welcome – not just “admitted” but “invited” to participate fully in all facets of College life. *All* of our students, especially, should feel that Skidmore is *their* school and have the kind of positive experiences that enable them to view the College as an integral part of their personal identities.

We still have work to do to achieve these objectives. Skidmore is a microcosm of the larger society, where sadly attitudes of intolerance and disrespect still persist and make their way on to our campus. So, as is the case for all colleges and universities, we still need to do more to make the Skidmore campus a place that truly has no place for bias incidents relating to race, sexual orientation, gender, and other identity markers, as well as for sexual and gender-based misconduct. But as a close residential community in which *every* student and *every* member of the faculty and staff is here by invitation – and in which each of us remains only so long as we continue to earn the privilege of membership in the College community – we have a unique opportunity to make progress more quickly than may be possible in the larger society beyond our boundaries. We continue to embrace the values of respect and commitment to discourse that, if fully realized, would indeed make Skidmore a community others would seek to emulate. To do so, we must deploy the best resources of our collective creative imagination to prove that we can be better than we are at present and certainly better than what we still too frequently see in in our nation or the world.

Commitment

Our previous *Strategic Plan* identified the central objective of fostering active engagement and the pursuit of excellence in their work for *all* our students and *every* member of the faculty member and staff. This new *Plan* extends that commitment and envisions a College that is even more successful in fostering an inclusive learning environment that challenges and supports *all* our students to develop their creative capacities in the context in realizing the promise of liberal education.

Our vision here is three-fold. First, we intend that our graduates carry with them the understanding of the role that creativity needs to play throughout their lives and the capacity to deploy their creative imagination in ways that advantage both them and the world. Second, we will challenge our faculty and staff to incorporate creativity more deeply and pervasively into both the primary educational work of the College and the many functions that support that educational mission. Third, we affirm our intention to build a stronger *creative and inclusive community of excellence* – to be a truly distinctive residential college that enables our students to realize the promise of liberal education. Within this community, we will challenge one another to reach higher levels of achievement in teaching, learning, and all the other work necessary to the College; in addition, we will seek new ways to become the inclusive, respectful, and healthy community needed to support these aspirations fully. Operationally, we will pursue new ways to attain these objectives sustainably – both now and into the future.

The result will be a College that over the next ten years builds on its already evident strengths to support students as they create individual pathways through their undergraduate careers to take advantage of the opportunities we offer in ways that are most meaningful to them. In finding their passion to study a particular subject or constellation of subjects, they will develop habits of engagement and thought that will carry forward through their professional and personal lives. Through this process, we will challenge them not only to achieve excellence in their academic and co-curricular lives, we also will challenge them to identify ways to address the daunting issues that today vex our nation and, indeed, the world. In addition, we will support the faculty, who are the most important guides on this transformative journey. We will empower faculty members to take pedagogical risks that empower students to reach even higher levels of awareness and learning. And we will commit even more resources to our teacher-scholars, as they are the models – and often the inspiration – for the very creativity that distinguishes Skidmore.

In sum, we expect Skidmore graduates to be able to go anywhere in the world, come to terms with the local culture, interact effectively with people across lines of difference, identify key problems, and develop creative solutions to those problems. We further expect that when potential employers or admissions deans of graduate and professional schools see ‘Skidmore College’ on a resume, they will think, “This is someone who will elevate our organization.”

In pursuing this vision within the challenging environment described above and with limited resources, the College must be vigilant. We simply cannot afford the luxury of inefficiency. As we act to realize our ambitions and achieve the institutional goals that are now in sight, we must align our investments of time, energy, and financial resources with our strategic priorities to an extent we have never before achieved. To do so will require us to be creative, disciplined, and collaborative in every aspect of the College’s operations. We must find ways to redirect resources, when feasible, to support those priorities. We must establish new internal and external partnerships to leverage existing resources. And we must deepen our connections with our alumni, parents, and friends in seeking the financial support that will be

necessary to sustain our positive trajectory. This project will engage every person who works at the College, as well as everyone in our extended community who cares about Skidmore's future. We must complement these efforts with enhanced capacities to create more effective ways to tell our institutional story, strengthen connections with members of the extended Skidmore community, and reverse troubling trends of lower participation in giving among some of our alumni populations. Finally, we are committed to charting a sustainable path to realizing our vision – one that is sustainable economically, in human terms for those who learn and teach here, and in terms of the environment.

Recognizing the challenges we face, the new confidence we feel, the possibilities in front of us, and the imperatives relating to creativity and inclusive excellence that both humble and inspire us, we affirm the following specific goals:

- I. **Integrative Learning – To Develop Our Students' Capacities to Create, Imagine, and Change the World:** *We will invest in programs and educational strategies that develop our students' capacities to demonstrate excellence as engaged, creative, and integrative learners.*
- II. **Access – To Assure Access for All Our Students To An Extraordinary Educational Experience:** *Students will have full access to opportunities across all three phases of their Skidmore careers – at admission, as undergraduate learners, and in transitioning to their post-college lives. This commitment provides the context in which we can challenge all our students to achieve excellence.*
- III. **Well-being – To Strengthen the Inclusiveness, Health, and Well-being of Our Community:** *We will create new opportunities for developing the skills that will make Skidmore a more healthful, inclusive, and creative community*
- IV. **Sustainability – To Continue to Build a Sustainable Foundation for Excellence:** *Deploying the concept of sustainability, broadly understood, as an organizing principle, we will invest our time, energy, and funding in initiatives to ensure the College's long-term viability and success.*

GOAL I: INTEGRATIVE LEARNING – TO DEVELOP OUR STUDENTS’ CAPACITIES TO CREATE, IMAGINE, AND CHANGE THE WORLD: *WE WILL INVEST IN PROGRAMS AND EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES THAT DEVELOP OUR STUDENTS’ CAPACITIES TO ACHIEVE AND DEMONSTRATE EXCELLENCE AS ENGAGED, CREATIVE, AND INTEGRATIVE LEARNERS.*

This *Plan* reaffirms the College’s belief in the intellectually rigorous and transformative potential of a Skidmore education, as well as in the personal and social values it embodies. A liberal arts education certainly represents a personal good for our graduates, preparing them not only to make a living but also to create a life *worth* living – a life that truly matters for themselves and others. But a Skidmore education also represents a broader social good that is seldom remarked upon in contemporary discussions of higher education. We highlight this value in our expressed determination to prepare our graduates to live as informed, responsible, and globally and interculturally aware citizens who are capable not only of bringing their personal plans to fruition but who also strive to make the world a better place for all.

To realize our creative imperative, it is necessary for us to be more intentional about incorporating this fundamental value into all our educational endeavors. The ongoing revision of our general education program presents an important opportunity to do so, and we must seize that opportunity to invite our faculty, staff, students, and others to explore how we might push the boundaries of creativity in our students’ work. Following CEPP’s lead, we will begin by infusing the concept of ***“integrative learning”*** throughout the curriculum. It is foundational to liberal learning that an educated person understands not only the complex, nuanced, and multidimensional nature of the issues and problems most worth interrogating but also the various ways they interconnect. It entails learning across disciplinary boundaries, across time as students progress through their education, across the boundaries that traditionally separate the curriculum and co-curriculum, and across the border between the campus and the world beyond. An integrated learning approach pushes students to identify and connect theoretical concepts from diverse disciplines and experiences and, where appropriate, apply them to unscripted, real-world challenges. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) recognizes integrative learning as one of the most important goals and challenges for higher education.⁴ We understand this concept to encompass our students’ abilities to make connections over time – from the moment they are accepted into Skidmore on into their lives after college. This includes a capacity for hindsight and forethought: the metacognition involved in reflecting on the past and projecting into the future. In sum, we expect students to integrate learning from many different disciplines, moments, and sites – drawing upon everything the College offers to create the meaningful and ongoing process that is their Skidmore education.

Many parts of our curriculum, of course, already encompass integrative learning. Our decades-long interdisciplinary emphasis – epitomized in the Liberal Studies curriculum and carrying through to the current First-Year Experience – is a form of integrative learning. Many of our students complete double majors, self-directed majors, and combinations of majors and minors. Course-level interdisciplinarity, too, is a microcosm of the broader commitment to integrative learning, as are our many successful interdisciplinary majors and minors. Planning carried out by faculty members from the physical and life sciences in anticipation of the projected Center for Integrated Sciences produced many ways of strengthening instruction within and across disciplines and programs. We also have a long history of bridging theoretical and applied learning. Integrative learning through praxis arises in students’ pursuit of

⁴See “Interrogating Integrative Learning,” *Peer Review*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Fall 2014-Winter 2015).

international study; independent study, theses, and collaborative research with faculty; the making and performance of art; and the diverse opportunities for leadership and civic engagement made possible through Campus Life, Athletics, and Residential Life, among others.

Our students come to us increasingly experienced in using technology, both in their personal lives – where they are accustomed to being constantly connected electronically to their peers and the world at large – and, for some, through their high school experience, where technology is now a pervasive presence in teaching and learning. Moreover, the incredible pace of technological development constantly offers new ways for us to connect students to opportunities beyond our physical boundaries and enhance pedagogy in the classroom in ways unimaginable even a few years ago. Technology is increasingly important in the research and creative work of our professors, as well. So determining how best to support – and afford – investments in this area that enhance integrative learning will take on greater strategic importance in our short- and long-term planning.

Our objective is both to deepen this emphasis on integrative learning through a range of curricular and co-curricular initiatives and to make students intentional partners in this enterprise. Realizing the full promise of integrative learning requires that students be *self-aware* and *intentional* about making meaningful connections across traditional and non-traditional boundaries. They must actively reflect on what it is that ties disparate subjects and ideas to each other; indeed, they must fully and dynamically participate in the intellectual enterprise by employing self-reflection, contemplative thought, and focused action. Our students must be information-literate – must understand the way information is structured – both in their majors and more broadly, in order to integrate knowledge within and across disciplines. The College, in turn, must provide the context, space, support, and time for such activities – taking care that all students feel that they are invited to participate in this work. Our assignment, therefore, is to challenge all our students to be more self-reflective about their education and more purposeful in making the deep and meaningful connections that are a necessary part of the liberal arts experience. Only then will they fulfill their promise as students of the liberal arts and as citizens of the world. In order to achieve this outcome, we will need to be intentional in supporting our faculty members in new ways.

Because we want Skidmore students to be inclined to turn their creativity on the problems of the world, fostering civic literacy and engagement also will continue to be of special importance. We see the necessary attributes of citizenship as precisely the qualities of mind and character found at the core of liberal education itself: critical thinking; a capacity to access the kinds of empirical and conceptual knowledge created by the different disciplines; awareness of the multiple social, cultural, and political perspectives we find in the world; cultivation of one's creativity and narrative imagination so one can empathize with those in a situation one has never directly experienced; the capacity to talk respectfully in contexts marked by difference, and the like.⁵ To do this, we need to increase our own capacity, as an educational community, to engage in such discussions both critically and respectfully. A leading liberal arts college interrogates difficult questions and explores “dangerous” ideas. Our campus needs to be a place where discussion of difficult issues is commonplace. The objective of such conversations is not somehow to make everyone agree with or even like everyone else. Rather, it is to create a framework of mutual respect, care, and dialog, based on the recognition that each of us has value as a human being and that, ultimately, we share a common fate. On that basis we then seek agreement where we can find it, accept disagreement when we must, and continue to look for common ground on which to act.

⁵See, for example, Martha Craven Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997) and *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

The time has come for the College to consider a more intentional framework in which to situate this crucial project of developing informed, responsible citizens – one that more consistently emphasizes the relationship between the stated goals of liberal education and the requirements of democratic citizenship. Over the next five years, we will develop new ways to engage students and other members of our community in public forums for debating and disseminating ideas relating to contemporary local and global matters. In doing so, we will also create opportunities for members of our community to explore the meaning of *social justice*, to ask how issues of social justice affect our professional, academic, and personal lives, and to interrogate whether this concept should play a more prominent role in our collective understanding of the mission of the College. We will seek ways to link such conversations to course content. In short, we will model the good polity. Going forward, we will also expand our efforts to invite to campus outside scholars, filmmakers, diplomats, policy analysts, and activists who represent a broad range of political and social viewpoints, encouraging students and others to engage them in critical but respectful discourse.

To achieve the stated objectives for our students – to make good on the promise to achieve higher levels of excellence throughout the College – we will seek new ways to support the work of our faculty: empowering them to be even better teachers, scholars, artists, and leaders. We will encourage and reward alternative teaching methods, pedagogical risk-taking, and innovation; and we will increase our tolerance for failed pedagogical experiments. We will seek new ways to support the scholarly and artistic lives of our faculty. And we will reconceive the notion of service to better reflect what it truly is: institutional leadership. In sum, the principle of creativity that guides our efforts on behalf of our students should also help us find new ways to sustain our faculty.

Marshaling the resources to deliver on these promises will not be a trivial undertaking. Although many of the objectives envisioned here simply require us to be more intentional in incorporating new insights into work we already are doing – e.g., teaching – the extraordinary education we envision for our students must also include additional forms of integration, especially those across the dimensions of time and space. Some of these are expensive. Consider connectivity as an example. Greater technological connectivity and competence, both in and out of the classroom, has the power to improve the intellectual and social experience of our students and provide them with additional skills in this technological age. But there are costs associated with enhanced technology and connectivity. Therefore, finding innovative ways for all members of the community – faculty, staff, alumni, parents, and especially students – to connect is another imperative. We thus must increase our capacity and vision in this entire area. Our various partnerships – starting with the New York Six – hold the key to yet another integrated and connected experience. Students should be exposed to the myriad possibilities these partnerships afford, and we also need to leverage these partnerships to achieve cost-savings and, where possible, cost-reductions. Long before 2025, it must be commonplace for students to have access to experts at other NY6 schools and throughout the world. Strategic partnerships, and the creative possibilities they present, must become an essential component of our shifting mindset.

Above all, Skidmore will retain a sharp focus on our students – on helping them reach the highest levels of achievement possible in the work they do with us, and encouraging them to carry a commitment to the pursuit of excellence with them when they graduate. We will challenge them to think more deeply and intentionally about how the ideas, hypotheses, theories, and data they encounter in one course can animate and inform the topics they explore in other courses. We will encourage them to apply the lessons around leadership and collective action that they learn on the athletic fields or when organizing peaceful protests to their residence halls and, later on, to graduate studies and their workplaces. We will work with them

to integrate knowledge and experience, to help them make the connections between what they learn at the College and what they want to accomplish across a life of productive work – serving them and their communities well into the future. In the end, our students are responsible for doing their own work, making their own connections across the different disciplines they have studied and the co-curricular experiences that have enriched their college careers, and then applying what they have learned. But the College will be more intentional in supporting them in this transformative project of seeking a liberal education that will enable them to make creative thought matter across the full arc of their lives.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES in support of GOAL I: Integrative Learning

- ***Complete fundraising and construct the Center for Integrated Sciences.***
 - Provide the physical context to bring together all nine departments and programs in the physical and life sciences to support new approaches to integrative learning not just in the sciences but across other curricular areas as well.
 - Develop a prototype of the Idea Lab, in anticipation of its inclusion in the CIS.
 - Bolster Scribner Library's capacity to support integrative learning associated with the CIS. Develop infrastructure and expertise to improve data services (including data hosting, data management, data curation, and data literacy) on campus.
- ***Create new structures to support student integrative learning, making that concept a regular part of Skidmore's internal narrative.***
 - Complete General Education Curriculum revision, including new ways to support scientific literacy (for all students, not just science majors, as is required of all responsible citizens in today's world), quantitative reasoning, information literacy, and visual literacy.
 - Evaluate feasibility of establishing a Center for Quantitative Reasoning and a Center for Entrepreneurship.
 - Align Library collections and services with curricular goals of fostering creativity and integrated learning. Convene and *ad hoc* or permanent faculty advisory committee for the Library to review collections and services and identify opportunities for improving this alignment.
 - Partner with other New York Six (NY6) colleges to expand opportunities for Skidmore students to study (in some cases via technology) with NY6 faculty members from those schools or to access programs sponsored by other schools (e.g., study-away programs).
 - Develop better, more consistent, and more effective assessment mechanisms for determining where and to what extent integrative learning is taking place at Skidmore.

- Explore possibility of expanding the Tang Museum, especially as our permanent collection increases.
- ***Develop new ways to support faculty members across all three dimensions of their work: teaching, research/creative activity, and service.***
 - Evaluate the feasibility of increasing the size of the tenure-track faculty by fifteen over the next ten years.
 - Expand faculty development resources and initiatives through the Faculty Development Committee, the Center for Leadership, Teaching, and Learning, and the Dean of the Faculty's Office.
 - Explore the desirability and evaluate the feasibility (both curricular and financial) of implementing an alternating 2-2, 3-2 (18-15 credits) teaching load aimed at increasing teaching effectiveness and supporting even stronger connections between students and faculty.
 - Interrogate the criteria for faculty promotion. Consider how to reevaluate the traditional emphasis on, and balance between, teaching, research/creative work, and service.
 - Support new faculty development opportunities pertaining to the implementation of new curricular initiatives linked to the general education curriculum.
 - Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a Center for Humanistic Inquiry.
 - Partner with other NY6 colleges to form faculty collaborations and leverage resources to enhance teaching and learning.
- ***Provide digital/IT resources for the development of new approaches to integrative learning and enhancing connectivity.***
 - Continue the process of renovating and refreshing classrooms to better support integrative pedagogy.
 - Enhance resources of the Center for Leadership, Teaching, and Learning to assist faculty members in understanding, evaluating and, where appropriate, adopting new technologies in their teaching and research.
- ***Build stronger and more coherent curricular and co-curricular programs to enhance civic engagement, social responsibility, and the connection between liberal education and responsible citizenship.***
- ***Identify specific ways to further enhance connections between the curricular and co-curricular lives of our students.***

GOAL II: ACCESS – TO ASSURE ACCESS FOR ALL OUR STUDENTS TO AN EXTRAORDINARY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE: *STUDENTS WILL HAVE FULL ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS ALL THREE PHASES OF THEIR SKIDMORE CAREERS – AT ADMISSION, AS UNDERGRADUATE LEARNERS, AND IN TRANSITIONING TO THEIR POST-COLLEGE LIVES. THIS COMMITMENT PROVIDES THE CONTEXT WITHIN IN WHICH WE CAN CHALLENGE ALL OUR STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE EXCELLENCE.*

Access to Admissions

Consider the following information: A teenager from a family in the lowest income quartile in the United States has a 9% chance of graduating from college, while a teenager from a family in the highest income quartile has a 90% chance. The consequences of that disparity play out across a lifetime. A comparison of average income among families of college students nationwide demonstrates the power of higher education – the average family income of first-generation students is \$37.5K, compared to \$99.6K for students whose parents attended college.⁶ For the nation, this disparity represents an unacceptable waste of intellectual and creative potential, and for individuals, it contributes to entrenched poverty and lack of upward socioeconomic mobility.

Skidmore has long embraced access to higher education as an institutional responsibility, and our recent investments in financial aid have yielded tremendous advances. Over the last ten years, we have increased annual budgetary provision for financial aid by more than 150%, from \$16M to more than \$42M. This strategic investment in our students has enabled us to keep the average net cost to families receiving institutional aid relatively constant, even as our comprehensive fee has increased.⁷ It also has enabled us to attract an academically more prepared and significantly more diverse student body.⁸ These achievements are being threatened, however, by larger shifts in the economy. One of the most significant is the discrepancy between increases in college fees and median family income, which has been stagnant for some time.⁹ Since that gap is likely to continue to widen, our ability to meet the need of lower-income and working-class families will be increasingly tested.

As we look toward 2020, we reaffirm our commitment to access and diversity, even as the College faces an increasingly challenging admissions landscape. In addition to greater demand for financial aid, we will face increased competition for students who do not require aid, especially from those institutions with tuition-driven business models.¹⁰ In the effort to enroll these students, many schools – private and, increasingly, public – have increased their reliance on so-called “merit” or “non-need-based” aid: scholarships aimed primarily at affecting choice that are provided to families in higher income brackets, often at the expense of need-based aid

⁶*Chronicle of Higher Education* (22 May 2015).

⁷In the period from FY 2008 through FY 2014, as Skidmore’s comprehensive fee increased from approximately \$46,000 to \$60,000, the average net cost to first-year students receiving institutional aid remained relatively flat.

⁸Compared to their unaided peers, aided students are overrepresented among the higher AQR bands. Among 5098 students entering F05-F12, 36.0% of aided students were in the top AQR bands compared to 15.8% of unaided students. (Academic Quality Rating, AQR, is a subjective assessment of the academic preparation of Skidmore applicants made by Admissions staff based on the strength of the student’s high school, schedule, grade outcomes, etc.)

⁹From 1982 to 2013, comprehensive fees at private non-profit four-year institutions increased 167%, while comprehensive fees at public four-year institutions rose 257%. Across this same period, however, median family incomes remained essentially flat.

¹⁰Skidmore’s business model currently requires approximately 55% of students to pay the full comprehensive fee. Altering this situation will require increased endowment support for additional need-based financial aid – a priority of the current comprehensive Campaign.

to families in lower ones. In the past, Skidmore has sharply limited the use of such practices, regarding them as inconsistent with our fundamental values.¹¹ As we move forward, to ensure that we can continue to attract and enroll the most creative and promising students regardless of their financial means, we will monitor our admissions experience and remain committed to offering need-based aid as a core principle, even as we develop new, creative admissions strategies.

We also understand the value of attractive facilities in the admissions process. Thus we have benefited from the addition of the Northwoods and Sussman Village apartments, the renovated dining hall, the Tang Museum, the Zankel Music Center, and improvements to our athletic fields. Going forward, we expect to realize additional gains from the CIS and from the further development of our athletic facilities in accordance with the *Athletic Facilities Plan*.

Access to Educational Opportunities

Admitting students is only the first step: if our goal is to engage *all* Skidmore students in liberal learning, they must have equal opportunity to participate in the full range of curricular and co-curricular experiences the College offers. Unfortunately, this ideal is not yet fully realized. The egalitarianism intrinsic to a student's pursuit of academic interests (enrollment in particular courses, choice of major or minor) does not always translate to some elective experiences that can have a profound influence on learning. As one example, first-generation college students from lower income brackets are nearly absent from some research experiences in the physical and life sciences.¹² As a second example, credit-bearing internships during the academic year and summer have historically been the domain of white, affluent students at Skidmore, with domestic students of color and lower-income students underrepresented.¹³ Third, some students may find it difficult to afford the cost of textbooks required in their classes.

Such realities stand at odds with our institutional values if they arise from systematic barriers to inclusion. The fact that such barriers exist and can be successfully mitigated is illustrated by Skidmore's evolving approach to international study. Prior to 2006, students were required to take leaves of absence to study at non-affiliated programs abroad. In this situation, students paid program providers directly, without the benefit of financial aid—not surprisingly, few students were able to access these programs, and international study was largely restricted to those from privileged backgrounds. Starting in Fall 2006, Skidmore adopted a new policy that allows students to carry aid to what has become our “approved programs” list. As a direct consequence of institutional action, the total number of students studying abroad in approved programs has increased dramatically (by 147%), as has the number of lowest-income students, aided students, and domestic students of color.¹⁴

Similarly, building courses around open educational resources (OER) and primary sources housed at the Tang Museum and Scribner Library could significantly ease some financial burdens on students. As teaching oriented institutions, the Tang and Scribner Library are building their rich collections around not only what is currently being taught on campus but

¹¹The College does provide a small amount of non-need-based aid in the form of Filene and Porter Scholarships; these scholarships are not directed at full-pay students and account for only about 1% of the financial aid budget for students entering in Fall 2015.

¹²In Spring 2015, 18 of 100 students enrolled in exploratory research opportunities were first-generation college students, but only 2 of those 18 were among those in the lowest income group at Skidmore (as determined by Federal Pell Grant eligibility). Similarly, 11 of 78 students recruited into summer Faculty-Student Collaborative Research in 2014 were first-generation students, but only 2 of those were Pell-eligible. Roughly half of all first-generation students at Skidmore (and in the physical and life sciences) are Pell-eligible.

¹³*Engaged Liberal Learning Practices: Participation Rates and Consequences*. CEPP, 2012.

¹⁴Compare the 2004-05 and the 2013-14 academic years in terms of access to study-abroad opportunities: 3 vs. 23 Pell-eligible students; 16 vs. 71 aided students; 7 vs. 44 domestic students of color.

also what could be taught in the future. As such, they are places ripe with potential inspiration for students from many backgrounds. Cultivating new holdings that allow a broader range of students to see themselves in the Tang's and the Library's collections could be a new way to help keep at-risk students engaged. Although financial constraints may explain some or even most barriers to participation, the situation is likely to be more complex for many students. For example, some students may lack knowledge about how to navigate the networking required to secure certain opportunities. Programs that address both financial constraint and make information more uniformly available are thus critical.¹⁵

Just as Skidmore is committed to providing access to the College and its many opportunities for theoretical and applied learning, we are also committed to supporting students in their determination to achieve. We expect Skidmore students, as they mature as learners during their time at the College, to take progressively more responsibility for their education, demonstrating agency when they encounter challenges in and outside the classroom. We recognize, however, a growing disconnect between the preparation some students receive in their secondary education and the academic competencies and personal resilience we expect of entering students. Roughly 20% of our first-year students responding to the CIRP survey (overall response rate: 50%) report having sought remedial support for reading and writing, and 25% sought such support for math, in high school. In addition, 92% of students entering Skidmore report feeling overwhelmed by all that they have to do. Similar patterns are seen at like colleges nation-wide.¹⁶ Identifying the proper balance between providing students with needed support and giving them the space to experience the discomfort intrinsic to deep learning is a significant challenge. To do so will require highly creative and innovative approaches to fostering resilience, persistence, and self-efficacy. It also requires that all students learn the processes of research – particularly in their sophomore and junior years – so they understand what is involved in developing and pursuing a research agenda and can appreciate the time and attention required for successful scholarly work.

Access to the Post-College World

The liberal arts curriculum has long been seen as the best possible preparation for life after college. Today more than ever before, we need to help our students understand and articulate connections between the knowledge, skills, and capacities their liberal arts education provides them and the professional, political, and social contexts in which they will live their lives. Our challenge is to empower both our students and Skidmore itself to make creative thought *matter* beyond our physical borders and to assist our graduates in making their first steps into the world beyond Skidmore. We will accomplish these objectives through three interrelated approaches.

First, we will collectively assume the responsibility for assisting our students to become more adept at describing to external audiences the skills and knowledge they have mastered in the course of their liberal education. The world needs first-rate thinkers now more than ever, and those thinkers disproportionately come from liberal arts colleges like Skidmore. It is our responsibility to help our students convey to others the value of this unique and transformative educational experience. Once again, open access provides one key to this effort, in two senses. On the one hand, students need access to library resources after they graduate, but they

¹⁵Consider the SEE-Beyond Program, which invites students to identify an integrative summer experience that will deepen their understanding of the major or minor. Tips developed by faculty through the Pathways Project are easily accessible and help guide students to rigorous experiences, and the award itself (\$4,000) is sufficient to meet aided students' summer financial obligations. In 2014, applications were submitted by students in nearly every department and program; moreover, international students, domestic students of color, and low-income students were overrepresented among awardees.

¹⁶CIRP Freshman Survey, 2014.

currently lose those privileges once they are no longer enrolled, mainly due to restrictive licensing agreements with publishers. The more that institutions of higher education commit to open access publishing models, the more easily our alumni – both newly minted and past generations – can continue their lifelong learning. On the other hand, sharing the fruits of their own intellectual work will help Skidmore students to convey the value of their educational experience with a truly global reach.

Second, we need to see that *engaged liberal learning practices* – such as writing-intensive courses, exploratory research opportunities, credit-bearing internships, summer collaborative research, etc. – that relate directly to our students' post-Skidmore lives are better supported. To that end, we will increase our efforts around, and provide additional resources for, undergraduate research, internships, SEE-Beyond opportunities, career development, and competitive scholarships and fellowships. Third, we need to do a better job of engaging our alumni, parents and friends in this enterprise: communicating with them, hearing their stories, providing them additional value from their ongoing relationship with the College, and seeking their support for current students and for our ongoing institutional efforts. In the end, our creativity imperative insists that we empower our students to make meaningful contributions beyond our physical borders, and that means we must pay greater attention to our students' preparation for graduate study, professional study, and/or entry into professional careers.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES in support of GOAL II: Access

➤ ***Strengthen financial aid and outreach programs that enable the broadest range of students from across the country and around the world to attend Skidmore.***

- Increase endowment support for financial aid budget by \$2M through successful completion of *Creating our Future* Campaign [requires increasing endowment by \$40M].
- Explore alternative admissions pathway that foregrounds creativity and evaluate other admissions practices (e.g., use of standardized tests) that may serve to limit applicant pools. Develop Creativity Scholarship Program of need-based aid targeting highly creative students interested in all areas of the curriculum [requires increasing endowment by \$10M to support \$125K of new awards to each class].
- Develop ways to recruit in new secondary schools in targeted areas (e.g., Southern cities with substantial populations of professionals originally from other parts of the country) that should prove receptive to our message.

➤ ***Strengthen programs that enhance access to academic opportunities for all students.***

- Expand the Summer Educational Experiences – Beyond the Campus (SEE-Beyond), Career Internship, and Collaborative Research programs to ensure that all students engage in at least one such experience prior to graduation. Establish fund raising goals to support these initiatives [requires increasing endowment by \$50M].

- Increase our commitment to open educational resources (OER) in order to ensure that Skidmore students have access to sources without needing to pay out of pocket. Create incentive programs to help faculty members across the curriculum to reconceive course syllabi, where possible, to utilize library and museum resources rather than assigning expensive textbooks. Increase or reallocate Library budget to support acquisition of resources that will allow faculty to forego expensive textbooks.

➤ ***Develop new creative ways to position Skidmore graduates to take their initial steps into their post-College lives and enhance ongoing career support for all graduates.***

- Set and achieve targets for percentage of students in each graduating class who have made use of the Career Development Center; identify and track outcome targets associated with this activity.
- Ask students to establish goals for their first five years out of college and track outcomes. Use that information to further enhance programs to assist students in making the transition from their undergraduate careers to their later lives.
- Archive high-quality student research in Skidmore's institutional repository, *Creative Matter*, so that it will be preserved and made available to scholars from around the world far into the future, and so that it can be used by our graduates to demonstrate past accomplishments.

GOAL III: WELL-BEING – TO STRENGTHEN THE INCLUSIVENESS, HEALTH, AND WELL-BEING OF OUR COMMUNITY: *WE WILL CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE SKILLS THAT WILL MAKE SKIDMORE A MORE HEALTHFUL, INCLUSIVE, AND CREATIVE COMMUNITY.*

A Creative, Inclusive, and Safe Community

The climate of the Skidmore community establishes the overall context for our students' educational experience – a context that can reinforce or impede their efforts to achieve their educational objectives. It does so as well for the members of the faculty and staff who work at the College. Indeed, issues about how our community is experienced by all of its members relate directly to our most basic values. Therefore we collectively strive to create a community that lives by higher standards than are seen in the world at large. By insisting upon those standards and expecting members of the community to comport themselves accordingly, we are providing an image of the possible – an image we hope all of us can look to as we do our part to influence an imperfect world for the better.

Over the course of the previous *Strategic Plan*, we made important gains in diversifying our student body and our faculty.¹⁷ Adding more members of historically underrepresented groups to the campus populations has enhanced our institution in important and meaningful ways. We need to persist in these efforts and, in fact, to place renewed energy behind them, especially in the areas of staff and administration. We believe that recent changes in hiring practices will make a difference not only within our faculty but in other areas as well. But continuing to add increase quantitative measures of diversity is not enough. As noted above, inclusive excellence requires us to foster a community that supports the highest quality of experience across our entire student body, faculty, and staff.

Extensive surveys of our campus populations have shown that members of historically underrepresented groups – especially persons of color – can experience the campus as a less inclusive environment than our ideals call for. The factors that produce this situation have made it more difficult for these community members to achieve academic and professional success. Moreover, the obstacles to inclusion also have impeded their inclination and ability to contribute their ideas, suggestions, and creativity to the broader campus – a notable waste of important talent and a clear missed opportunity. The time has come to create a comprehensive institutional blueprint around issues of diversity and inclusion – a *Campus Plan for Diversity and Inclusion* – analogous to the *Campus Sustainability Plan*. We have created and filled a new Cabinet-level position of Chief Diversity Officer, who reports directly to the President. We have charged that individual to lead this effort, incorporating the substantial work already done over the past few years by the Committee on Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU) and others. Indeed, we have a shared responsibility to cultivate a campus climate in which all community members can thrive.

We will engage the campus community, over the coming months and years, in new efforts to understand the challenges to inclusion that exist – both at the College and in the larger world – and to increase our success in addressing and overcoming those challenges. Skidmore stands at a critical juncture where we must focus more on fostering an *inclusive* and *respectful* climate

¹⁷Between the years of 2006 and 2015, the percentage of students of color in the general student population increased from 14.8% to 22.3%. The increase is largely due to greater numbers of Latino and Asian-American students. We have not seen a similar increase in the number of African-American and Native American students. During the same period, the population of first-generation students grew from 6.3% to 12.4%, and the overall international student population has reached 10%, representing a 400% increase since 2006. The class that entered in fall 2015 included 13% international students, plus an additional 6% of students holding dual passports.

in which every member of our community feels valued and all experience a sense of belonging, because they know that their contributions to the community are both welcomed and appreciated. As an educational community in which dialog is highly valued, achieving this outcome should not be so much a matter of implementing new forms of “training” as it is of creating new opportunities for frank, honest, open, and respectful conversation among various constituencies in settings both small and large.

We also acknowledge that eliminating sexual and gender-based misconduct has become an increasing topic of concern on Skidmore’s campus, as has been the case throughout higher education across the country. In recent years, we have intensified longstanding efforts to examine and periodically update the College’s policies and procedures around these issues. We have reviewed and revised our policies and processes; in collaboration with the Board of Trustees, we have had our policies and procedures reviewed by external legal experts; we have revised our policies to ensure compliance with a changing legal environment (including recent changes to New York State law); we have held numerous campus forums on this topic – seeking both to inform our community and to receive input; and we have collaborated actively with the other New York Six schools to share best practices and develop the necessary capabilities on our campus. But we still are not where we want to be in achieving a community that is free from such behavior. Over the course of this *Plan*, we will continue our efforts to adopt and implement the best practices available nationally, and to ensure that we have the necessary institutional structures in place to prevent unwanted behavior where possible and to deal with it effectively, should it occur. We have directed significant attention to educational efforts for our student body, and we will continue to seek new and more creative ways to help all members of our campus community collaborate in addressing this issue.

Wellness and Well-Being

Our larger goal is the cultivation of *well-being* among all our populations. This concept is a multi-faceted construct that includes traditional ideas regarding human flourishing that are embedded in the values of liberal education itself. Examples include the appreciation of the aesthetic dimension of human existence, the experience of performing meaningful work, an attention to social responsibility, a sense of belonging to a community, and an overall sense of personal fulfillment and satisfaction with one’s life. Such values are integral to the realization of the unique potential of each member of our community. They also are critical to the health of an educational institution. And although it is impossible to guarantee that every member of our community will realize these values, it is possible to create structures and promote relationships within our community that support such ideals.

Accordingly, we now choose to elevate the value of well-being – both individually and institutionally – and approach it more systematically and intentionally than in the past. We will draw upon our commitment to create transformative educational experiences to develop creative strategies to cultivate the qualities that are central for well-being: resilience in the face of adversity, motivation to persist in spite of failure, trust in one’s agency, development of purpose and meaning, a sense of belonging, and motivation to contribute to the common good. This effort will include a development of a comprehensive *Campus Wellness Plan* (again, analogous to the *Campus Sustainability Plan*) and identification of resources that will be required to implement it.

We believe that creating a resilient and responsive campus – one in which all individuals know both how to ask for help and how to help one another – is directly linked to creating a context in which all individuals feel valued and included: a campus where all members of our community have the opportunity to learn, create, challenge one another, and contribute to the

educational mission of the college. Inclusion and well-being belong together, because they require and reinforce each other. We view well-being both as a community value and as a community responsibility, meaning that all members of our community have a role to play in helping our students and other community members develop life-long healthy habits of mind, body, and spirit. These habits of well-being are directly linked with the capacity of our students to tolerate uncertainty, anxiety, distress, and confusion in the interests of intellectual growth, creativity, and emotional maturation. Thus attention to well-being and inclusion is not an “add-ons” to our strategic vision, but rather it relates to the very foundations of the intellectual and personal growth we seek to foster at Skidmore.

We will create multiple opportunities on campus for our students to learn and practice such healthy habits and responsible behaviors. We will establish strategic links between their academic and co-curricular well-being, resiliency, and balance – challenging them to grow and transform across multiple individual, academic, and interpersonal dimensions in their four years on campus. We will consciously and consistently open our eyes to the ways in which our campus is not yet fully inclusive or welcoming to all members, and we will acknowledge the ways in which our student’s lives are negatively affected by alcohol and substance abuse, mental health issues, and by sexual and gender-based misconduct. We are committed to taking an inclusive, public-health-based approach to these issues to understand existing structures and tendencies within our various populations and use that understanding to foster positive change. These objectives represent just one more manifestation of our commitment to being a community of respect: one that affirms the basic value of all its members, that calls upon them to respect both themselves and one another, and that provides a context in which all community members are supported in making their unique contributions. Our overarching objective is always that all our students consistently have full access to the opportunities and challenges of a liberal arts education.

This conversation also includes considerations of athletics and physical fitness. In recent years we have enhanced both our athletic facilities and fitness programs. But we know that more needs to be done in these areas. We have developed an *Athletics Facilities Plan*, and over the course of the next ten years, we will continue to seek the funding necessary to implement its initial stages.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES in support of GOAL III: Well-being

- ***Develop additional institutional capacity and programming to make Skidmore a truly creative and inclusive community, such that other schools look to Skidmore as a model.***
 - Develop an institutional *Diversity and Inclusion Plan* to guide College-wide work toward achieving inclusive excellence.
 - Increase professional development opportunities for members of the College staff.
 - Increase community-wide opportunities for all members of the College community to engage in meaningful dialog, conversations, and sharing of personal narratives.

- Continue to support Pilot Staff Advisory Group; after one year determine if it is to be an ongoing organization.

➤ ***Create new opportunities to foster practices that enhance wellness and well-being of all community members.***

- Reevaluate College benefits package for employees to make health and wellness a more prominent objective; incorporate wellness assistance and incentives into health insurance.
- To promote strategic alignment of well-being initiatives across college divisions, convene a group of campus leaders to form a well-being collaborative to plan, seeking funding for, and implement programs to promote campus-wide well-being.
- Holistically address sexual and gender-based misconduct through implementation of an inclusive public health approach that involves all campus constituencies.
- Encourage interrogation of the bio-psycho-social correlates of mental health throughout various disciplines in the curriculum and wherever possible, connect and apply such study to co-curricular initiatives that promote mental well-being.
- Develop a comprehensive plan to enhance opportunities for members of the campus community – most especially students but also members of the faculty and staff – to pursue activities relating to physical fitness and overall health.
- Understanding better leverage the relationship between campus athletic facilities, the health of students and employees, and the success of our student-athletes who participate in intercollegiate athletics, continue fundraising to implement initial stages of the Athletics Facilities Plan: Boathouse for Crew Program, and expanded locker rooms, weightlifting area, cardio-fitness center, and tennis facility.

GOAL IV: SUSTAINABILITY – CONTINUE TO BUILD A SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATION FOR EXCELLENCE: *DEPLOYING THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY BROADLY UNDERSTOOD AS AN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE, WE WILL INVEST OUR TIME, ENERGY, AND FUNDING IN INITIATIVES TO ENSURE THE COLLEGE’S LONG-TERM VIABILITY AND SUCCESS.*

The success of all of the initiatives outlined above, along with our capacity to compete effectively for students and resources in an increasingly competitive “market,” will depend in large part upon our capacity to *increase and steward* our resources wisely, creatively, and effectively. In particular, there are four categories of resources that we must consider: *financial, human, natural, and marketing*. The first is perhaps the most obvious: we must find ways both to grow our endowment and core revenue streams while using those resources as effectively as possible. ‘*Human resources*’ refers both to our faculty and staff as well as the broader community of alumni, students, and friends who contribute significant amounts of time, energy, and financial support to the College. ‘*Natural resources*’ refers to the effect of our decisions and actions on our campus, where we must ensure that our facilities are run as effectively, sustainably, and efficiently as possible. But it also refers more broadly to the larger environment; here we must consider issues of *sustainability* understood in the widest sense. And principal among our ‘*marketing resources*’ is our public institutional identity – our “brand” – that plays such a critical role in attracting students faculty members, and staff. But the narratives by which we communicate our institutional identity also play a role in creating a shared sense of purpose and identity across the Skidmore campus community and with our alumni, parents, and other friends of the College.

Managing our Financial Resources

In the coming years we can expect financial pressures to increase in areas such as employee healthcare, technology, library resources, maintenance on our physical plant, energy, and, most significantly, financial aid, and compensation. At the same time, our capacity to generate significant revenue growth from at least one of our major traditional sources, tuition and fees, will be quite limited as we seek to keep Skidmore affordable. This means placing a greater emphasis on stewarding and growing our endowment, increasing our fundraising capacity, and identifying new revenue streams.

As the preceding pages of this *Plan* demonstrate, there are few constraints on our ambitions. We have taken one major step towards addressing this issue with the launch of *Creating Our Future: The Campaign for Skidmore*. Beyond providing for several key capital projects, the campaign will also add \$60-80 million to the College’s endowment while enhancing a reliable source of annual operating dollars through the Skidmore Fund. Longer term, we also need to reverse the continuing erosion of our participation rate of donors among our alumni. While it exemplifies a larger national trend among colleges and universities, and despite the fact that the dollar value of our annual contributions has steadily increased, our declining alumni participation is nevertheless concerning and must be addressed. For this and other reasons, we must develop new and creative ways to increase alumni engagement – to help them feel a stronger sense of membership in the Skidmore community and responsibility for continuing to support the College, just as previous generations of alumni made it possible for Skidmore to offer the opportunities it did to them when they were students. Even more broadly, we must enhance our capacity to project our institutional message externally to key targeted audiences.

We also need to continue to manage our endowment in a “prudently aggressive” fashion. A key element of our success over the past twenty years, and a critical part of our ability to survive through challenges as the recent recession, has been a stable and steadily growing

endowment. It provides an essential underpinning to our long-term planning, and our goal is to exceed the \$500 million mark over the next decade through market increases and giving. Lastly, we must identify additional, reliable streams of income to buttress our financial position. Areas we will interrogate include an expansion of our summer conference program and further development of the Skidmore Classic Horse Show, which generates support for the College's financial aid program.

Beyond increasing our resources, we also must enhance our sense of shared purpose in improving our operational efficiency. This means aligning all of our activities as closely as possible with our strategic priorities. It places greater emphasis on effective communication across operational areas (an issue identified in our recent staff surveys) to avoid waste, duplication of effort, and unnecessary delays in accomplishing basic functions. And it means adopting a "limited-growth" approach that assumes all or most new initiatives will be funded either by newly identified funds, through partnerships across areas or other collaborations, or by cost reductions or reallocation of resources. We must continue to identify opportunities to share or lower costs through collaborations (such as those we currently have with the New York Six schools) as well as technology (such as offering instruction in less frequently taught languages via the web). Leveraging existing resources in these ways will be crucial but not sufficient in themselves. In addition, we will need to be both innovative and disciplined in seeking annually to identify 3-5% of our resources through reallocation, cost-containment, cost-reduction, and new sources of revenue. Our financial sustainability depends upon our success in doing so, and it is far better to build such practices into our ongoing operations than to wait for a crisis to force them upon us.

An important example of the need to realign spending and engage in cross-institutional collaborations is the Library. The cost of scholarly resources has skyrocketed in recent decades, resulting in double-digit profit margins for the biggest scholarly publishers. Journal subscriptions are bundled and licensed like cable TV packages, with annual subscriptions that burn through acquisition budgets, leaving comparatively scant funds for book purchases. Increasingly, students and faculty members at colleges such as Skidmore have difficulty finding the resources they need for teaching, learning, and research. As more institutions of higher education commit to supporting open access publishing models, libraries like our own will eventually be able to cancel these expensive subscriptions and instead invest those funds into high quality, peer-reviewed, open access publishing initiatives that will make scholarship freely available to the Skidmore community and beyond in perpetuity. Skidmore College cannot accomplish this alone; the success of open access depends upon broad participation throughout the "citizenry" of higher education.

Managing our Human Resources – Strategic Alignment

In many ways, Skidmore's greatest asset is its people – the faculty and staff who do the work of the College as well as the many thousands of alumni, parents and friends who support that work through their gifts of time, energy, and resources. It is essential, therefore, that we nurture both groups to maximize their effectiveness and satisfaction. Recent staff surveys, for example, have shown a need to make improvements in how staff are managed and trained and how we communicate within and across our community. They have also asked for more opportunities to engage directly in the planning and operations of the College. With those concerns in mind, we will implement changes in how we train managers, while identifying ways to provide better staff development opportunities. We also have launched a pilot Staff Advisory Group and strengthened our internal communications. We will continue to operate within our "Total Compensation Framework Plan," which is designed to ensure that we can continue to offer competitive compensation to all faculty and staff. With regard to our alumni, parents, and friends, we will focus on three areas: growing our fundraising volunteer base, expanding our

programming for alumni in their first five years, and broadening efforts to support the career needs of alumni throughout their lives.

But in a broader sense, we must change how we operate to enhance both planning and communication and seek new levels of both transparency and “strategic alignment” in how we do our work across the College – meaning that all of us within the Skidmore workforce must take responsibility for understanding both our strategic objectives and how our actions and decisions influence our ability to achieve them. We need to find new ways to encourage people not just seek to follow rules in a narrow sense but to use their judgment to achieve excellence in the work they are responsible for completing.

Managing our Natural Resources

As outlined in the recently endorsed *Campus Sustainability Plan* for Skidmore, “we endeavor to enact environmentally responsible practices, grounded in economic and social equity, and through our actions to have a positive impact on our community and planet.” The *Sustainability Plan* sets challenging goals in the areas of energy, food, waste, lands and grounds, and engagement, and we talk not only about environmental sustainability, or our impact to natural resources, but we embrace the more comprehensive definition of sustainability that speaks to the interconnected spheres of the environment, the economy, and society.

We envision a Skidmore that truly embraces the principles of sustainability in all of its institutional decision-making, and this means that every purchase, project, and, when appropriate, policy should be viewed, in part, through the lens of sustainability. Positioning sustainability more prominently in our decision-making will continue to transform our physical campus into one that immerses all of our students, staff, and faculty members in a living and learning environment characterized by practices that embody institutional values. In order to fully realize this vision, we must be even more intentional about making visible the work we are doing around sustainability in our operations at Skidmore. This includes not only enhancing the communications about the outcomes of our work but also making more transparent various decision-making processes themselves. Visibly modeling how to make such institutional decisions will demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and complex considerations necessary for making enlightened decisions and help promote more sustainability-oriented behavior in people’s lives, most especially our students’ lives. In other words, we have a significant opportunity to leverage our efforts to create a deep living and learning environment around sustainability on campus; the changes we – students, staff, faculty, administrators, and alumni – help make on our campus will be carried forward to the various communities in which we live.

The next several years will mark an historic moment in the College’s history as we complete a more than fifty-year migration from the College’s downtown location to what we continue to refer to as “the new campus” at the end of North Broadway. This phase will begin with the construction of the Center for Integrated Sciences and a new Admissions and Financial Aid building (near-term) and end with implementing the initial stages of our Athletics Facilities Master Plan, which (pending the identification of sufficient resources) we anticipate completing sometime in the late 2020s. We have some additional capacity for debt. But, as has been our pattern, we will continue to rely largely upon new resources (primarily contributions) to construct or significantly renovate any major facility. At the same time, we will work carefully both to maximize the usage of our existing facilities and to attend to their upkeep on a reasonable schedule. Our guide in this work will be the *Campus Master Plan*, which we adopted in 2007 and which we will continue to update as needed.

An essential element of our approach must be integrating sustainability into every aspect of our facilities management and construction. Over the past decade, we have made impressive strides in reducing our environmental impact and enhancing community engagement around sustainability. Our geothermal, solar, micro-hydro, and energy-efficiency projects have helped us reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by well over 50% since 2000 and have positioned us as a national leader on innovative energy strategies. Our Bikemore bike-share program, community garden, composting, dining hall, waste, and land stewardship projects have raised awareness and empowered the community to contribute to these efforts. And our faculty members have also integrated the issue of sustainability into a number of courses.

Sustainability-related efforts already permeate the curriculum as well, and, as we have already experienced, there is a rich feedback loop inherent in our sustainability work. Often ideas that are developed in our sustainability-related courses feed changes to our campus operations, and modifications to our campus often serve as case studies and research opportunities for our courses, hence fostering curricular and pedagogical innovation. It should come as no surprise then that the lines between student experiences related to sustainability are truly blurred. For example, a volunteer effort on campus may lead to a senior thesis idea; a service-learning project in a course can meld into an internship with a local community organization; a tour of one of our alternative energy projects on campus may launch a research project during a study abroad program; and serving as a student Sustainability Representative in a residential hall might spark a summer collaborative research idea. Sustainability, therefore, exemplifies integrative learning by connecting student experiences across time, across disciplinary boundaries, across boundaries that traditionally separate the curriculum and the co-curriculum, and across the border between the campus and the world beyond.

Attending to sustainability also directly supports our institutional goals around community, well-being, integrative excellence, and inclusion. Making collective and informed decisions about sustainability compels us to become more scientifically literate, to better understand the complex social networks and markets inherent in a more globalized society, to enhance our multi-cultural understandings, to engage more deeply in interdisciplinary communication and collaboration, and to think about what a more equitable, just, and healthy world should look like. Working towards such a world requires that we listen to a variety of perspectives and learn to more fully engage in informed, thoughtful, and respectful dialogue both within the Skidmore community and with the larger community outside our borders. The skills and knowledge we develop through our work on sustainability, therefore, will serve us well as we continue to strive to become a more open and inclusive community.

Strengthening the Extended Skidmore Community and Enhancing our Public Identity

The world has taken note of Skidmore's achievements, and the College has never been better positioned to take advantage of its standing within the universe of American colleges and universities. The phrase "Creative Thought Matters" and the marketing campaign we developed around it to define our institutional identity have been central factors in our success over the past fifteen years. They have helped us attract larger, better prepared, and more diverse student populations. They also have allowed us to gain stature and wider recognition within the higher education community. They have given our core constituents a language that is both affirming and aspirational to describe themselves and their community. In short, *Creative Thought Matters* has both great power and institutional value. It also must be nurtured and, most importantly, must reflect the true character of the College.

In recent years, a number of institutions have recognized that “creativity” resonates strongly within the higher education marketplace, and we now see other colleges and universities championing the cause of creativity. This places at risk our ability to use this idea to distinguish us from other institutions. We can, however, continue to strengthen our position as the institution where creative thought truly matters first and foremost through the strategic investments in our community and educational programs outlined above, and through a more focused, comprehensive, and persistent approach to how we present ourselves to the world.

We have already taken the first step in this process by creating a new, Cabinet-level division of Communications and Marketing, headed by a Vice-President, who will report directly to the President. This Office has been charged with developing and implementing a complete and exhaustive plan for articulating the College’s story to prospective students, the broader world of higher education, our campus community, and our extended community of alumni, parents and friends. It will also develop a series of metrics to measure our success and inform future planning and investments. Last, recognizing the power of the campus visit on prospective students, we will construct a new Admissions and Financial Aid building more centrally located on campus that more powerfully reflects the strengths and unique qualities of a Skidmore education.

PRIORITY INITIATIVES in support of GOAL IV: Sustainability

➤ ***Continue to develop, effectively manage, and steward the financial resources necessary to maintain ongoing College operations and achieve the objectives incorporated in this Plan.***

- Through effective portfolio management and fundraising, increase College endowment to \$500M by 2020.
- Develop and implement a long-term cost-containment program tied to projections of key budget parameters (e.g., net F.T.E. of student body, comprehensive fee, net tuition revenue, compensation, financial aid discount rate, etc.).
- Complete fundraising and construct Center for Integrated Sciences [\$100M; additional funding required: \$60M].
- Complete fundraising and construct new Admissions and Financial Aid building on the main campus [\$5-7M].
- Complete fundraising and construct new Boathouse for Crew program [additional fundraising required: \$250K].
- Complete fundraising and implement Phase I of *Athletic Facilities Plan* [additional fundraising required: \$6-8M].
- Complete the current comprehensive \$220 - \$240 million fundraising campaign, *Creating Our Future – The Campaign for Skidmore*, by 2019.
- Explore the desirability and evaluate the feasibility of decreasing the reliance on *short-term* and *part-time non-tenure-track faculty* by 10% (not included in this

initiative are Artists in Residence, Writers in Residence, Teaching Professors, and other long-term non-tenure-line positions).

- Make an explicit commitment to open access in order to reduce Skidmore's reliance on expensive journal and database subscriptions that promise to outstrip the library budget over time. Seek a faculty open access resolution, including commitment to self-archive publications and/or manuscripts (including pre-prints and peer-reviewed manuscripts) in Creative Matter and to publish in open access venues whenever possible. Formalize CAPT commitment to valuing high quality open access publications in tenure review actions.

➤ ***Managing our Human Resources – Strategic Alignment***

- Enhance training resources for managers at all levels within the College, emphasizing administrative competence, creative problem solving, and ways to enhance strategic alignment of efforts across the College.

Enhance communication across camps and, especially, between the administration and other segments of our community but also across groups (work to minimize experience of disconnection across different areas and divisions).

➤ ***Managing our Physical Resources – Campus Environmental Sustainability***

- Implement the *Campus Sustainability Plan*. Assess progress in meeting benchmarks identified in the *Sustainability Plan* and reevaluate on an ongoing basis.

➤ ***Managing our Natural Resources – Social Responsibility***

➤ ***Strengthening the Extended Skidmore Community and Enhancing our Public Identity***

IN CONCLUSION

Across the course of this Strategic Plan, the Skidmore community will strive to cultivate creativity in service of integrative learning, access, well-being, and sustainability. In pointing the way for the College to achieve Goals identified above, this *Plan* represents the convergence of our aspirations and the imperative to push the boundaries of creativity and imagination. These Goals set out a ten-year vision for the College. Across the duration of this *Plan*, additional action steps will be identified as part of our ongoing institutional strategic thinking – in the process of developing annual “Action Agendas” (a practice that was integral to the success of the previous *Plan*), as well as in a formal review at the five-year mid-point. But at the heart of this work stands our ongoing commitment to the values of liberal education that animate our Mission, to the specific values of *creative thought* and *inclusive excellence*, and above all to the success of our students.

APPENDIX I**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 can think deeply and creatively, communicate well 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.

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

- 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

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