



To: Members of the Skidmore community
From: Philip A. Glotzbach, President
Date: 7 October 2013
Re: Process for Creating Skidmore's Next *Strategic Plan*

The Institutional Policy and Planning Committee (IPPC) is preparing to guide the process of developing the next *Strategic Plan* over the 2013-14 and 2014-15 academic years. As we have found over the past eight years, a *Strategic Plan* not only provides guidance for decision-making, it also gives us a common vocabulary that helps to focus our collective attention on our most important institutional goals.

The process of creating our next *Strategic Plan* itself affords an important opportunity to strengthen community by inviting wide participation to build upon the successes associated with our previous *Plan*, to tap into the intelligence and creativity of the Skidmore community in setting our directions for the next ten years, and to develop support for the next *Plan*.

The members of the IPPC and I propose that, in this planning process, we direct our attention to five large questions:

1. Where are we today as a college?

We need to begin with a clear understanding of what we have achieved over the course of the previous *Strategic Plan* and then explore the following questions:

- a. Can we agree to reaffirm our central mission as a residential liberal arts college? What does that mission mean in the context of the 21st Century – how is it the same, how has it changed?
- b. What unfinished business from the 2005-2015 *Plan* remains?
- c. How should the present *Plan* contextualize our thinking regarding the next ten years?
- d. What do we see as our present strengths, what areas do we need to develop further?
- e. What weaknesses do we perceive in the College?
- f. What opportunities do we see?
- g. What threats do we see from the external world?
- h. Who are our students today – how would we describe what they bring to the College, what do they want to accomplish during their time here, and what they do after they depart?
- i. How would we describe our reputation and standing in the world of higher education – our place in the various “rankings,” our place in the minds of our peer and aspirant institutions, the opinions of our alumni, parents, et al.?
- j. Which colleges/universities are our major competitors, and what factors determine the outcomes of this competition?
- k. How does the world regard the relationship between our “value” and our “price”?

2. What kind of institution do we want to be over the next five and ten years for our students?

- a. How do we need to move the College over the next ten years to provide the educational opportunities most needed by our students?

- b. How can we continue to provide increased educational value for our students – in terms of their time with us and for the rest of their lives?
- c. How should we describe any changes in the student population we would anticipate/want to see over the coming years?
- d. What is the current percentage of entering students who regard Skidmore as their first-choice school, and how can we further increase that number in the future?
- e. How can we continue to increase our student retention and graduation rates?
- f. What changes do we anticipate/would we like to see in our faculty/staff/administration over the coming years? Certainly, we want to continue working to improve the diversity of these populations. What other changes do we anticipate/should we try to effect?
- g. What further improvements to the physical plant do we anticipate?
- h. What do we need to do to be a more environmentally responsible institution – to increase the extent to which our operations are environmentally sustainable?
- i. What other factors are important in this discussion?
- j. How can we best assess our success in meeting our goals?

3. What trends do we see in the external world (trends in higher education, economic trends, demographic trends, etc.) that could most affect the College over the coming years?

It is always difficult (and sometimes counterproductive) to predict the future, but we need to inform our deliberations with our best understanding of the contextual factors that will affect the College in various ways:

- a. What are the primary economic trends affecting our families and the College itself?
- b. Public opinion regarding liberal arts colleges in general – specifically the often-repeated critique that liberal education is both too expensive and has become irrelevant to the needs of today's students.
- c. The changing role of e-learning in higher education and the potential disruptions these trends might represent, both in the broader world of higher education and in the more particular sphere of liberal arts colleges.
- d. Changing demographics of the U.S. traditional college-age population and the potentially disruptive effects of those trends on our admissions picture in the coming years.
- e. Trends regarding international students.
- f. Employment trends for our graduates: What are they doing with their Skidmore educations, and what do they need from the College in both their education and in terms of ongoing support?
- g. Trends in pedagogy: What are the most important changes in teaching we will need to consider over the coming years?
- h. Trends in collaboration among colleges and universities: What do we want to do with the New York Six over the coming years, and what other collaborations will be important to us?
- i. What does the world need from Skidmore graduates, and how can we best equip them to provide it?

4. How can we best present the College to external audiences?

Where are we positioned with regard to external audiences, and what moves do we need to make to influence our reputation in positive ways?

- a. How can we best understand the dynamics of the factors that most directly influence our external reputation? What factors about the College most stand out to external audiences? What factors do we want to be more prominent?
- b. Where are we with the project of “owning” the ‘Creative Thought Matters’ “brand” on a national and international scale? What should we be doing to enhance it?

- c. What do we need to do to further differentiate the College from competitor institutions and continue to build our reputation?
- d. How can we better understand the dynamics that influence “yield” on accepted candidates (prospective students)? What can we do to improve it?

5. How can we maximize the College’s economic sustainability over the coming years?

What changes, if any, do we need to make in our “business model” and our operations to remain economically viable and realize our vision in light of the contextual factors that will affect us?

- a. What should our strategic objectives be with regard to future increases in our comprehensive fee and our net costs?
- b. What is the appropriate size of our student population, relative to our goals, resources, and applicant pools?
- c. What strategic choices do we need to make to control increases in cost of operations?
- d. What strategic choices do we need to make about where to direct our resources?
- e. How can we continue to increase student access – primarily, through financial aid? Should we make any changes in the way we allocate our aid (need-based vs. non-need based)?

With these considerations in mind, I propose that we approach this process in five stages:

A. Data-gathering, developing the necessary background and contextual information to inform our deliberations – September 2013 - November 2013

Objective: Create an internal Skidmore website that contains key documents to inform the strategic planning process. These documents will include the following items:

- The 2005-2015 *Strategic Plan*.
- Selected “Strategic Action Agendas.”
- The 2010 Mid-Term Report.
- The previous Middle States Accreditation report and supporting documents.
- “Skidmore College Goals for Student Learning.”
- The 2012-13 Assessment Report.
- Presentation of our current financial situation, along with financial projections for the next 5-10 years.
- Relevant information on our peer and aspirant schools.
- Brief (2-3 page) “white papers” prepared by various divisions (e.g., Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, etc.), committees and sub-committees, and organizations (e.g., SGA Executive Committee and other student clubs) describing how they view the College today, how they view the external world, and key questions that should be addressed in the planning process.
- Data regarding external trends (demographics, economic data, trends in college admissions, employment trends for graduates, etc.).
- Trends in higher education (e.g., documents from professional organizations such as AAC&U, materials/published pieces regarding technology, etc.).
- Selected materials from the popular press regarding higher education.
- Data about our graduates – their perceptions of the College, their sense of the value of their Skidmore education, their desires regarding their relationship with the College, etc.
- Information from Skidmore parents – their perceptions of the value of a Skidmore education for their sons/daughters, etc.
- Additional materials.

Although much of this work would take place in the administration and the IPPC, we also want to seek broader community input into this stage of the strategic planning process.

B. Community-Building and Idea-Gathering – December 2013 - April 2014

Objective: In reference to the materials and information referenced above, solicit opinions from the Skidmore community about where we want to go as a College – where we want to be in 5 years, 10 years, and 20 years – and what we need to do to get there. These should be open-ended, “divergent” conversations that generate ideas from which the IPPC will identify trends and select ideas that seem to have the greatest merit.

- How should these conversations be staged?
- How do we achieve broad representation of various constituencies?
- How do we encourage both divisional and cross-divisional conversations?

C. Analysis by IPPC – April 2014 -May 2014

Objective: In this “convergent” phase, the IPPC will consider what it has heard over the previous months, identify trends in the context of a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats), and apply its judgment to establish a framework for the next *Plan*.

D. Composing the Next *Strategic Plan* – May 2014 - December 2014

Objective: Compose successive drafts of the new *Strategic Plan*, circulate and vet these drafts with the Skidmore community. Produce final version to be submitted to appropriate groups for discussion and approval/endorsement

Principal Authors: President, IPPC, and President’s Cabinet

In April and May 2014, the IPPC will begin to consider, evaluate, and select from the ideas generated in Phase B. Collaboratively, we will focus on key themes and begin to develop an outline of the emerging document. The President, the Cabinet, and IPPC faculty leadership will work over the summer to produce a draft to be reviewed and modified by the IPPC in fall 2014.

September - December 2014, the IPPC will issue drafts of the emerging *Plan* for community comment, using those comments to refine successive iterations of the *Plan*, with the objective of completing the draft prior to the end of the fall semester.

E. Secure Approval/Endorsement of next *Strategic Plan* – January 2015 – April 2015

Objective: Secure necessary approvals/endorsements of the new *Plan* by appropriate groups by April 2015. Begin process of creating first “Strategic Action Agenda” of the new planning cycle for the 2015-16 academic year.