

THE CREATIVITY IMPERATIVE:

THE PLAN FOR SKIDMORE COLLEGE, 2015-2020

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As a leading liberal arts college, Skidmore is passionately committed to undergraduate liberal education. Our goal is to provide our students with the habits of mind required to lead rich, meaningful, productive lives – lives of learning and purpose that contribute to our understanding of the world and to identifying and addressing its most pressing challenges. These habits of mind 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, and above all, a creative spirit.

This *Strategic Plan* charts a path to ensure that our priorities, allocation of resources, and institutional energy support this mission. It builds on our proud history as a distinctive liberal arts college and it takes seriously the notion that an educated person is someone who attains certain foundational knowledge and then develops various complementary skills: the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, to rise to increasing challenges, and to strive to positively impact the world. Those skills and capacities are time-honored outcomes of a quality liberal education. Indeed, what we hope to impart to our students – 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, to expand one's cultural horizons and self-knowledge, and the like – have long been the mainstay of liberal education. And yet what is sometimes forgotten in the history and rhetoric around liberal education is the importance of creativity. The skills needed to navigate this increasingly complex world require creative imagination. As such, this *Strategic Plan* begins with a commitment to the idea that creativity in its broadest sense—that is, the capacity to imagine *and* to create—will be our primary beacon.

Our Institutional Imperative: Creativity

We define *creativity* as the capacity to deploy imagination and originality 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 envisioning new possibilities and then mapping a path to realize them. The assertion that *Creative Thought Matters* encompasses both these dimensions – declaring not only that creative thought is important but also that ideas, if they are to “count,” must be made material and have an effect in the world. Creativity is linked inescapably with the independence of mind required to formulate a new approach to a particular problem or to reimagine an entire domain of knowledge. It is equally important to help our students see that creativity involves discipline, persistence, improvisation, and the ability to draw collaboratively upon the wisdom of the past and the work of others, accessing networks of expertise that define learned and artistic communities.

Cultivating creativity is, in short, our institutional imperative. Fulfilling this educational commitment will allow our students to understand the increasing personal and professional complexities of a rapidly changing world. It will allow them to make connections across an ever-broadening spectrum of knowledge. And it will allow them to transform themselves, their communities, and the world. This *Strategic Plan* points the way to achieving that goal. It calls upon the entire Skidmore community to be nimble, experimental, imaginative, and confident in aligning our actions with our strategic goals. Enabling our graduates to navigate the world creatively is Skidmore's special responsibility and one that sets us apart from other liberal arts colleges.

Context

Skidmore's history aligns with this imperative. Throughout our existence, we have made imaginative and bold institutional decisions filled with uncertainty and risk – from moving the campus to realizing the vision for a teaching museum. Those choices have made the College stronger than it has ever been. Our endowment has more than doubled in the past ten years (from \$155 million to its current value of \$338 million), as has our fundraising (from \$10 million to \$20-25 million annually). We have increased the size of the faculty, added programs in Neuroscience, Arts Administration, International Affairs, Intergroup Relations, Chinese, Japanese, and Film and Media Studies. We have increased our applicant pool by more than 50% and dramatically improved the quality and diversity of our student body, which has changed our community in profound ways. We have completed over \$200 million of facilities projects, including the construction of Northwoods and Sussman Villages, the renovation of the Scribner Library, Murray-Aikins Dining Hall and Wachenheim Field, and the building of the Zankel Music Center. And this is just a partial list of advancements over the last decade.

Even so, we are operating in a turbulent period for higher education. The values of liberal education no longer automatically command the respect they did in the past. Economically, higher education as a whole has moved from a period of relative abundance in the 1980s and 1990s¹ to a time of highly constrained resources. The increasing inability and/or unwillingness of families to pay the cost of a college education has become a significant challenge.² In navigating this environment, the College must be vigilant. We will need to be innovative in reallocating existing resources, effective in containing and where possible reducing costs, developing new sources of funding, and aligning resources and effort with our highest strategic objectives.

Commitment

Yet this moment also represents a unique opportunity for Skidmore to assert its preeminence in 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. Accordingly, we renew our intention to build a *creative community of excellence* – beginning with the curriculum but extending through the co-curriculum and, ultimately, across all facets of the College. This affirmation reflects the best dimensions of our educational mission. It provides the lens through which we will construct *creative pathways to excellence* in pursuing the strategic objectives identified below. In doing so, we will build upon our historical commitment to being a community of respect, one that affirms the basic value of all members of our community and looks for their unique contributions to our shared work, based upon their distinctive identities.

The outcome 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 a way to make a significant difference in the world – working to cure a debilitating disease, envisioning new ways for people to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and dignity, creating jobs that will enable employees to live better lives, exercising leadership in the political sphere to address the many issues that vex our nation and the world.

Recognizing the challenges we face, the confidence we have, the possibilities in front of us, and the imperative around creativity that both humbles and inspires us, we affirm the following specific goals:

- I. To Develop Our Students' Capacities to Create, Imagine, and Affect 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. To Open Access To An Extraordinary 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.*
- III. To Strengthen the Health of our Community:** *We will create new opportunities for developing the skills that will make Skidmore a better – and more healthful – community.*
- IV. To Build a Sustainable Foundation:** *Deploying the concept of sustainability, broadly understood, as an organizing principle, we will invest in initiatives to ensure the College's long-term viability and success.*

In moving the College toward these worthy objectives, this *Plan* represents the convergence of our greatest aspirations and the imperative to push the boundaries of creativity and imagination. These goals reflect a ten-year vision for the College. Following a further articulation of these goals, are action steps that are focused on a five-year planning horizon. Across the time of this *Plan*, additional action steps will be developed as part of our ongoing institutional strategic work and as part of the process of developing annual Action Agendas – a process that was crucial to the success of the previous *Plan*.

GOAL I: TO DEVELOP OUR STUDENTS' CAPACITIES TO CREATE, IMAGINE, AND AFFECT 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.*

As we embark on the next decade of Skidmore's journey, we steadfastly continue to believe in the intellectually rigorous and transformative potential of a Skidmore education. We are committed to creating a distinctive educational environment in which students encounter varying ways of thinking and knowing, and novel ways of relating to one another and to the world. If we are successful, students will emerge from their Skidmore experience more knowledgeable, more intellectually humble, and more capable of developing the habits of mind that sustain life-long learning and allow for informed decision-making.

The notion that *creative thought matters* is embedded in Skidmore's institutional DNA. The Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery, for example, has provided numerous examples through its interdisciplinary exhibits. Creativity is 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.

To realize the creative imperative described above, however, it is necessary for us to achieve a new level of intentionality about incorporating this fundamental value into all our educational endeavors. The ongoing revision of our general education program presents an 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.³ 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 individual understands not only the complex, nuanced, and multidimensional nature of the issues and problems most worth interrogating but also the various ways they interconnect. 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

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. Course-level interdisciplinarity, too, is a microcosm of the broader commitment to integrative learning, as are our many successful interdisciplinary majors and minors. We also have a long history of bridging theoretical and applied learning through the arts, sciences, and beyond. Integrative learning through praxis arises in students' pursuit of 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 intention is both to deepen this emphasis 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. The College, in turn, must provide the context, space, and time for such activities. Our assignment, therefore, is to challenge 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.

Fostering civic literacy and engagement will be of special importance to us. 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 narrative imagination so one can empathize with those in a situation one has never directly experienced; creativity; the capacity to talk respectfully in contexts marked by difference, and the like.⁵ It seems clear that we need to become more adept at talking across lines of difference. 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. We need to seek agreement where we can find it, accept disagreement when we must, and then continue to look for common ground on which to act.

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 employ Creative Community Conversations to engage students and other members of our community in public forums for debating and disseminating ideas relating to contemporary local and global matters.⁶ 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.

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 2020, it must be commonplace for

students to have access to experts at other NY6 schools and beyond. 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, and 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 and 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.

GOAL II: TO OPEN ACCESS TO AN EXTRAORDINARY 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 COMMUNITY 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.⁷ 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.⁸ 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.⁹ It also has enabled us to attract an academically more prepared and significantly more diverse student body.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ As 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.¹² 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 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.¹³ 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 recognize the need to develop new, creative admissions strategies.

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, the very experiences that can have the most profound impact on a student’s

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

Such realities are fundamentally 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.¹⁶

Although financial constraints may explain some or even most barriers to participation, the situation is likely to be more complex for many students. Some students may lack knowledge about how to navigate the networking required to secure certain opportunities, for example; other students may lack access to the close mentoring relationships that help inform a student's educational trajectory. Programs that address both financial constraint and make information more uniformly available are thus critical.¹⁷

Just as Skidmore is committed to protecting access to the institution and its many opportunities for theoretical and applied learning, we are also committed to supporting students in their determination to achieve. We conceive of support as cultivating in students intellectual and personal resiliency and independence. As maturing learners, Skidmore students take responsibility for their education and demonstrate agency when they encounter challenges in and outside the classroom. We also cultivate in students familiarity with and an inclination towards discomfort, for it is when stretching beyond the comfortable that deep learning occurs and creative thought and action become possible.

In this endeavor, we recognize a growing disconnect between the preparation students receive in their secondary education and the academic competencies and personal resilience we expect of entering students. Roughly 20% of first-year students at Skidmore report receiving remedial support for reading and writing in high school and a quarter received remedial assistance in mathematics. Further, 92% of students entering Skidmore report feeling overwhelmed by all that they have to do, and nearly 20% report suffering from a psychological disorder. Similar patterns are seen at like colleges nation-wide.¹⁸ Like many students across the country, a growing number of our students exhibit unhealthy behaviors¹⁹, lack of agency, and a proclivity to view deadlines and course and institutional policies as matters of (in)convenience. 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. It requires highly creative and innovative approaches to fostering resilience, persistence, and self-efficacy.

In pursuing this balance, we recognize that the growing diversity of Skidmore's student body necessitates new approaches. Since 2005, our international student population has grown from 2.5% to over 10%. The College has a responsibility to provide English language instruction and mentoring targeted to the needs of these students so that they may engage fully

in Skidmore's highly collaborative and rigorous learning environment. As well, we must be attentive to the challenges of teaching in an increasingly multi-cultural classroom, and we must continue to consider the vitality and inclusivity of Skidmore's community even as we celebrate our differences.

Access to the Post-College World

The liberal arts curriculum has long been seen as the best possible preparation for life after college.²⁰ 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. Second, we need to see that *engaged liberal learning practices*²¹ 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.

GOAL III: TO STRENGTHEN THE HEALTH OF THE COMMUNITY: *WE WILL CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPING THE SKILLS THAT WILL MAKE SKIDMORE A BETTER -- MORE HEALTHFUL -- COMMUNITY*

A Creative, Inclusive 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 here. Indeed, issues about how our community is experienced by all of its members relate directly to our most basic values. As such, 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.²² 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 and the institution of new retention programs 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. Diversifying our community has enhanced our institution in meaningful ways, but we clearly need to do more. The frequently quoted phrase that “diversity is being invited to the party; inclusion is being asked to dance” can help to frame Skidmore's next challenge.²³

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 would 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 will create and fill a new Cabinet-level position of Chief Diversity Officer, who will report directly to the President, and charge that individual to lead such an 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.²⁴ Skidmore stands at a critical juncture where we must focus more on fostering an *inclusive* and *respectful* climate 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 welcomed.

Wellness and Well-Being

The cultivation of well-being, a multi-faceted construct that includes flourishing, fulfillment, satisfaction, meaning-making, mindfulness, social responsibility, and a sense of belonging, is integral to the realization of the unique potential of each member of our community. It is also critical to the health of an educational institution. 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.

GOAL IV: To BUILD A SUSTAINABLE FOUNDATION: *DEPLOYING THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABILITY BROADLY UNDERSTOOD AS AN ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE, NEW WILL INVEST 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 difficult market space, 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, physical, human, 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. *Physical resources* pertain primarily to our campus, where we must ensure that our facilities are run as effectively, sustainably, and efficiently 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. And primary among our *marketing resources* is our brand or institutional identity, which plays such a critical role both in attracting students and staff as well as creating a shared sense of purpose and identity across the Skidmore community.

Managing our Financial Resources

In the coming years we can expect financial pressures to increase in areas such as employee healthcare, technology, 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 growing our endowment, increasing our fundraising capacity, and identifying new revenue streams.

As the preceding pages of this *Plan* demonstrate that 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 growing 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 exemplary of 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 too feel a stronger sense of membership in the Skidmore community and responsibility for continuing to support the College, just as previous generations of alumni et al. had made it possible for Skidmore to offer the opportunities it did to current alumni 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 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. Last, 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 improve our operational efficiency and sense of shared purpose. 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. Last, 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.

Managing our Physical Resources – and Environmental Sustainability

The next several decades 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 the completion of our Athletics Facilities Master Plan, which (pending the identification of sufficient resources) we anticipate completing sometime in the late 2020s. 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 and sustainable 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 environmental 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. The *Campus Sustainability Plan* has now laid out an aggressive agenda of initiatives and goals that we must implement and which are clearly attainable within the next decade.

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.

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.

Lastly, attending to sustainability 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 within the Skidmore community and beyond. 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.

Managing our Human Resources

In many ways, Skidmore's greatest asset are 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 will also launch a pilot Staff Advisory Group and strengthen 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 Marketing Resources

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 assert successfully our preeminence 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.

¹ This was a time when endowments grew rapidly and demand from prospective students was high, such that schools could actually gain prestige and attract more students by raising their prices faster than competitors.

² In the spring of 2015, as this *Plan* was being formulated, Sweet Briar College announced that it would cease operations at the end of the academic year, becoming the highest profile liberal arts college to determine that it was no longer possible to remain solvent. Subsequently, the school has announced plans to remain in operation for the coming year, but its future still remains very much in doubt.

³ As part of this exploration, we need to keep in mind the proviso that ‘creative thought matters’ can never be allowed to serve as an excuse for shoddy or ill-conceived work.

⁴ AAC&U definition. See also “Interrogating Integrative Learning” in *Peer Review*, vol. 16, no. 4 (Fall 2014–Winter 2015).

⁵ See, 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).

⁶ As part of our Creative Community Conversations, 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.

⁷ Needs citation. Note that the first two sentenced are from Phil, 22 Jan 2015 homepage report.

⁸ *Chronicle of Higher Ed* (22 May 2015)

⁹ In 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.

¹⁰ Compared 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.)

¹¹ During the period of 1982 to 2013, comprehensive fees at private non-profit four-year institutions have increased 167%, while comprehensive fees at public four-year institutions have risen 257%. Across this same period, however, median family incomes have remained essentially flat.

¹² Skidmore’s business model requires ~55% of students to pay full tuition.

¹³ Skidmore does provide a small number of merit scholarships in the form of Filene and Porter Scholarships; these scholarships are not directed at full-pay students and account for only ##% of the financial aid budget for students entering in Fall 2015.

¹⁴ In 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.

¹⁵ *Engaged Liberal Learning Practices: Participation Rates and Consequences*. CEPP, 2012

¹⁶ 2004-2005 versus 2013-2014: 3 vs. 23 Pell-eligible students; 16 vs. 71 aided students; 7 vs. 44 domestic students of color

¹⁷ Consider the SEE-Beyond program, a program that 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, and international students, domestic students of color, and low-income students were overrepresented among awardees.

¹⁸ CIRP Freshman Survey, 2014.

¹⁹ Cite AOD stats or summary statistics from Health Promotions

²⁰ For a recent example, see Fareed Zakaria *In Defense of a Liberal Education* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2015).

²¹***Describe engaged liberal learning practices here ***

²² Between the years of 2006-2015, 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 still have work to do on African-American and Native American groups. During the same period, the population of first generation students jumped from 6.3% to 12.4%, and the international student population has reached 10%, representing a 400% increase since 2006.

²³ Verna Myers?

²⁴