

Skidmore College – Regents Priorities

New York State Education Department

Introduction

Over a decade ago, Skidmore College modified its Mission Statement to reflect the continuing commitment of its leaders, faculty, staff, and students to creating an environment in which Skidmore students are challenged to extend themselves intellectually and creatively, become independent learners, and apply what they learn beyond Skidmore's boundaries. Faculty members are asked to model the qualities of excellence in their teaching, scholarship, and creative work and to bring their own love of learning to the classroom and to their interactions with students outside the classroom. Staff members, too, are prepared to guide and instruct, support and challenge, assisting students as they navigate through difficult intellectual waters. The Skidmore College Mission Statement reminds us of our overarching goal: to help students transform themselves.

The principal mission of Skidmore College is the education of predominantly full-time undergraduates, a diverse population of talented students who are eager to engage actively in the learning process. The central goal of the College is to graduate liberally educated men and women prepared to continue their quest for knowledge and to make choices required of informed and responsible citizens. The College provides a supportive yet challenging environment which cultivates intellectual and creative excellence among its students, encouraging them to strengthen and extend their expectations of themselves. In keeping with the College's founding principle to link theoretical with applied learning, the Skidmore curriculum balances liberal arts and science commitments with preparation for careers, professions, and community service. The efforts of the classroom, lab, and studio are enriched by co-curricular opportunities of broad scope. The College also creates an environment in which the faculty's teaching, scholarly, and creative interests make a combined contribution to the advancement of learning. Additionally, the College embraces responsibilities as an education resource for the Skidmore, Saratoga, and capital-region communities, and serves as a life-long resource for Skidmore alumni.

This statement of our values and aspirations remains pertinent today and is consistent with the priorities promulgated by the Regents. As part of its on-going planning process, Skidmore has been engaged for several years in the development of a new plan to guide its operational activities. In 1999, President David Porter retired after a successful 11 years of guiding Skidmore to new levels of excellence. Under his leadership, the College's *Commission on the 90s Report* developed a series of goals and objectives focused on building curriculum, enhancing diversity, and stabilizing the fiscal state of the institution, nearly all of which had been achieved. The College's endowment had moved from what now seems like a paltry \$11 million dollars to well over \$100 million, capped by the Journey Campaign which ended well over target. Skidmore College now competes with many much better funded institutions for the top high school graduates in the country, and its faculty receive honors and acclaim from many agencies and organizations.

In his last year in office, President Porter urged the institution to begin thinking about the next decade, and when President Jamieenne Studley assumed the office in 1999, she led the community, writ large, in a self-discovery process that would culminate in the approval of a new statement of goals for the coming years. As part of this process, every constituency was asked to complete surveys, participate in roundtable discussions, put thoughts in writing, and communicate priorities. Faculty, staff, students,

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alumni, Board of Trustees members, and friends of the College all took part. The steering committee for this work produced a valuable Distillation Report that captured many of the thoughts, concerns, and ideas for change generated by the process, as well as a sometimes contradictory set of competing interests and energies. The leadership team of the College attempted to negotiate these tensions and produced a Strategic Plan that was approved by the Board of Trustees in Spring 2002 as a first step in moving the College forward. President Studley, feeling that her primary charge had been completed, stepped down to pursue other professional interests and President Philip Glotzbach was hired in the spring of 2003. Following his inauguration in October, 2003, President Glotzbach set out to learn more about the institution, its needs, and its aspirations, spending much of his first year listening to members of the Saratoga community and many hours on the road listening to parents, alumni, and friends of the College. He is currently leading a major effort to turn the Plan's more general statement of goals into specific objectives for the coming years. The Board of Trustees has reviewed a document which is still characterized as preliminary in that it does not yet include a set of measures for success, but the framework of the Plan is taking shape. Entitled "Engaged Liberal Learning", the document describes the context for our planning efforts, notes the challenges small liberal arts colleges face now and in the future, and identifies goals and initiatives that will guide decisions regarding resources, times, and personnel for the next ten years. These goals are consistent with the priorities set out by the Regents.

The primary goals under consideration at this time include the following:

Goal I – Student Engagement and Academic Achievement

We will challenge every Skidmore student to achieve academic excellence through full engagement with our rich and rigorous educational experience.

Goal II – Intercultural and Global Understanding

We will challenge every Skidmore student to develop the intercultural understanding and global awareness necessary to thrive in the complex and diverse world of the 21st Century.

Goal III – Informed, Responsible Citizenship

We will prepare every Skidmore student to make the choices required of an informed, responsible citizen.

Goal IV – Independence and Resources

We will preserve Skidmore's independence by developing the resources required to realize our aspirations.

The realization of these goals in the coming decade will be the centerpiece of our activities. Specific objectives will include the re-imagining of students' first year program, strengthening the relationship they have to advisors and mentors, the creation of new opportunities for faculty and staff to work together to encourage student engagement, and the development of new spaces in the form of a new Music Building and a new residence hall complex in which that work can be done. To accomplish these objectives, faculty lines will need to be added, scholarship funds will need to be enhanced, faculty development will remain a priority, and curricular redesign will be critical. We have our work cut out for us. (See attached copy of the planning document in its current state.)

Priority I: Maximizing Success for all Higher Education Students

The Plan for Skidmore College: 2005-2015 emphasizes that teaching is essentially a relationship. Every research effort undertaken to determine what makes Skidmore what it is today ends up focusing on the valuable and durable relationship between teacher and student. The Plan also states that:

[O]ur faculty members invite our students into the ongoing conversations in and among their disciplines, engaging them in the process of inquiry not as passive spectators but rather as active participants. By exploring the various ways of interrogating the world, making meaning, and creating knowledge that are embodied in the academic disciplines and art forms represented across Skidmore's curriculum, our students extend their powers of inquiry and discernment. Ultimately, they learn to appraise the worth of an idea or a work of art for themselves, independently of the identity of its author. This capacity to determine one's own beliefs and, hence, one's actions is foundational to the freedom promised in the concept of liberal learning.

The College's Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) is simultaneously working on an Academic Vision Statement in which it has identified Critical Thinking, Communication, Citizenship, and Collaboration as the key elements of student learning at Skidmore. This conceptual framework is concretized in the all-College curriculum, in the mentoring relationship key to good advising, and in efforts to make Skidmore the students' portal to a larger world. These abstract goals guide the assessment work of the institution. Like many institutions at this point in academic history, Skidmore is in the process of rethinking and reshaping the student experience, hoping to improve student learning and to encourage life long learners in new ways. These documents will inform the target projects that will appear in the College's Campaign Case Statement (currently under consideration) and help to determine resource allocations during budget development.

Assessment is of course key to our efforts. Members of the community (President's Staff, Committee members, Student Affairs professionals, Academic Staff, and other ad hoc groups) are consistently engaged in efforts to analyze summative quantitative measures of student success, including information gathered for reporting and research purposes. The College's Institutional Research Office maintains on-line, easily accessible reports of graduation rates, enrollment trends, fall-to-fall retention, and pertinent student surveys. The College's Director of Assessment, funded by a grant from the Christian Johnson Endeavor Foundation, has been working with various campus groups to develop an assessment plan for the institution. That work will culminate this year in a final set of recommendations. Special committees are also formed as needed to investigate potential problem areas and to recommend changes. Most recently the President charged an ad-hoc group (composed of the Director of Assessment, Institutional Research staff, representatives from the Dean of the Faculty and the Dean of Students offices, the Dean of Studies, and faculty members) to spend a full semester studying various aspects of retention and to provide a blueprint for change. Based on an extensive review of multiple sources of data, the group identified several areas where new programming can better support targeted groups of students who may not have been as well served in the past. These groups include high achieving student (particularly in the sciences), female students, minority/non-HEOP/AOP students, and ESL students. In addition, the group reinforced work being done in other groups to enhance first year advising/mentoring and to bridge academic and student affairs. These priorities are reflected in the Plan and are congruent with the Regents' priorities.

At the program level, departments have been charged with the identification of specific learning goals for their majors, the development of assessment plans to evaluate student success, and the creation of recommendations for change once data is collected. Each department chair submits an annual report to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, a section of which discusses the findings of the department and the changes in pedagogy, curriculum, or approach being considered. Clearly capstone courses provide some of the best arenas for consideration of the students' progress in the discipline. A CEPP sub-committee has also been working in parallel to produce a similar set of initiatives to assess general education at Skidmore. Although early in the process, some initial pilots have proved to be very instructive, and the work of this group points toward the potential that electronic portfolios hold for future

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assessment work. Departments also undertake regular program reviews, working with peers from other institutions to identify strengths and weaknesses and to recommend changes.

The Regents also emphasize access to all students in New York who seek higher education. In the spring of 2004, the College signed an agreement with Schenectady County Community College to encourage eligible transfers to move into Skidmore at the junior level funded by scholarship monies provided by Skidmore. The College hopes to extend this agreement to other area two-year schools in the coming years. Skidmore is a member of the Hudson-Mohawk Consortium, allowing for the exchange of students locally. Skidmore College also has several articulation agreements in place, providing its students access to programs at other institutions (Clarkson, Dartmouth, RPI, Cardoza Law School, the Marine Biological Laboratory, and American University); study abroad; and early entry to graduate programs.

Because Skidmore's comprehensive fee is prohibitive to many, the College is committed to increasing the percentage of students with funding and to offering opportunities to others from international communities. In recent years, the College has increased the percentage of students on aid from 25% to close to 40%, has increased significantly its financial aid budget each year, and has added individual scholarships for transfer students and international students. The average aid award is now \$12,000⁺ and early campaign plans target this area for attention. Because the aid budget is tied to diversity, it is an extremely important vehicle for attracting students from other economic and social backgrounds and enhancing the experience of students who attend classes in Saratoga.

As previously mentioned, the College has focused a good deal of attention over the past year on issues of retention. Members of this committee reviewed carefully the results of Withdrawn Student Surveys, Senior Exit Surveys, attrition reports, and student interviews. Obviously, student support programs are critical to student success, and the faculty are committed to identifying students who need extra attention, assisting with tutorial work, spending time with individuals when needed, and more generally, mentoring students throughout their four years. CEPP is currently focusing on the first year student experience, but it is safe to say that the faculty provide individual attention to all students who make the effort to engage with the material and meet the challenges of the classroom. Student Affairs professionals work as colleagues with faculty, with the idea that their work dovetails with what takes place in the classroom. Support mechanisms include an active and successful HEOP program that has been augmented to include an Academic Opportunity Program to assist students who are in need but who may not meet the stringent requirements for participation in the state program, a free tutoring service, a Writing Center, a Math Lab, first year peer mentors, and individual counseling services. Work is currently underway to enhance these services by developing an even closer working relationship between academic affairs and student affairs. This work is reflected in The Plan. In the next two to three years, we will close our last remaining downtown residence hall and will build a new facility on campus, allowing us to house more juniors and seniors than is currently possible. Planners are focusing on ways to build community and create spaces where the bridging of students' academic and social lives can occur naturally and easily.

In order to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate accommodations and that faculty members are aware of effective learning strategies, the College funds a position housed in the Dean of Studies Office filled by a licensed psychologist who functions as a learning specialist. Cynthia Guile works with prospective as well as enrolled students to develop individual plans for accommodations (where appropriate and requested). Once accommodations are in place, Cynthia is available for scheduled appointments, and she is working with students and faculty members to negotiate the best approaches to individual concerns, problems, or issues. Cynthia also coordinates workshops for faculty, bringing in specialists from other institutions to help keep the community informed and thinking about innovative strategies.

Priority II: Smooth Transition to Higher Education

Because Skidmore College is a selective liberal arts institution, all students who enroll are judged to have the abilities and skills needed to succeed. However, since some number of students may come to the College from challenging environments that could create obstacles to that success, the institution has developed several programs to assist students in making the transition to a highly competitive academic situation. The HEOP/AOP Program is recognized across the state for its successes, graduating students from academically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds at rates equal to or better than the student population at large. These HEOP students participate in a summer preparatory program, receive tutoring assistance, have access to individual personal counseling on a regular basis, and work with a dedicated staff who challenge and support them on a daily basis. A highly structured support system is put in place during these students' early years at the College, but the staff work hard to encourage them to become both independent and integrated within the community. HEOP students participate in student clubs and organizations, study abroad, take top academic honors at graduation, and go on to earn graduate degrees and to work in prestigious arenas, as do those who entered through the regular admissions process. The AOP program mirrors this support system for students who need the assistance but whose families earn more money than is allowed under the HEOP guidelines.

The Dean of Studies Office, the Registrar's Office, and other offices associated with the Dean of Student Affairs are currently working with CEPP on the development of a revised program for first year advising and mentoring that will be coupled with a newly approved First Year Seminar. A pilot program involving six volunteer faculty members is underway for Fall 2004, and the Plan references this as a priority for the future. In this new design, students would be assigned advisors who are their instructors in the First Year Seminar, with the expectation that a true mentoring relationship would evolve throughout that first term. The students would, for the most part, stay with that mentor until the point when he/she declares a major and moves on to a departmental mentor. This close working relationship would help the student make the transition to higher education with much more support and would become a hallmark of the Skidmore First Year Program.

The Dean of Studies Office also coordinates an early alert system where instructors identify students having academic difficulty in specific classes so that advisors and the Dean of Studies staff can intervene as appropriate. Although this program depends on the good will of the faculty, and participation is optional, the Dean of Studies Office handles anywhere from 250-400 referrals a term. The advantage of this system is that the advisor and the Dean of Studies Office can get a full picture of student problems: if a student is depressed or disengaged, it is likely that destructive behaviors are consistent across classes and are not isolated to a single section. This approach, which allows the staff to identify a student with serious problems earlier in the semester, gives both students and staff the opportunity to develop a constructive plan of action. Sometimes that may mean working with the parents and the student on a possible medical leave; sometimes it may mean a referral to the Skidmore Health Center; sometimes it may mean tutoring or skills assistance; and sometimes it may mean just giving the student a wake-up call. Each case is different, and each student is treated as an individual.

Prospective students seek information from Skidmore through a variety of means. The staff of the Office of Student Aid and Family Finance teams up with the Admissions Office in the presentation of information to families in the capital district about how to find funding sources for higher education. Members of the Admissions Office work closely with a wide variety of high school guidance counselors, informing them of Skidmore's academic and co-curricular programs. In addition, however, the College has been an active collaborator in the *Expanding Horizons Program*, a program linking Schuylerville High School students with Skidmore students and faculty. In the past year alone, the project has encouraged participation in a range of activities, including a Before- and After-School Program, a Junior Great Books initiative, a Physics Outreach program, enrichment classes, and mini-college events. These

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activities are designed to engage students early in their academic lives, to make learning exciting and fun, and to encourage more students to consider college as an alternative. Strong links have been forged between the two institutions, and assessment of the outcomes is scheduled for the coming years. For additional information about this program, the College's web site offers many additional pages: <http://www.skidmore.edu/academics/education/horizons/index.htm>

Priority III: Graduate Education

Skidmore students are informed of graduate opportunities through collaborative efforts carried on by departmental mentors and the Office of Career Services. Students primarily access information through the College's website where links guide students to information regarding financial resources and scholarships. The office also has a library of materials to assist students with funding graduate education. Career Services offers a Graduate School Guide that contains a financial section describing fellowships, traineeships, assistantships, and student loan information. There is also a section written by Skidmore's Director of Student Aid and Family Finance that provides lists of options for students looking to finance graduate school. The Dean of Studies Office also works with high achieving students who may be applying for competitive fellowships and who need assistance putting together portfolios. In coming years, we assume that electronic portfolios will become a vehicle used by students to present themselves and their work to prospective programs. Two pilot programs are currently underway to investigate more fully this potential. In addition, Skidmore has in place articulation agreements that provide opportunities for students to participate in programs that lead to joint degrees (e.g. a 3/2 Engineering programs with Clarkson University and Dartmouth, a 4+1 MBA program with Clarkson, and a 4+1 Master of Arts in teaching program with Union University.)

Students interested in attending law school or pursuing a medical degree are advised by the faculty individually. The Law and Society minor involves students in the interdisciplinary study of law, and the pre-law advisor assists students preparing for law school by counseling them about their choices and helping them to prepare applications. Students interested in the fields of medicine, veterinary studies, and dentistry are encouraged to work with a member of the Health Professions Advisory Committee from the earliest possible point in their academic careers. Members of this committee counsel students in their curriculum planning and assist with the graduate school application process.

Skidmore's Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program offers students the opportunity to work closely with Skidmore faculty to develop individualized interdisciplinary degree requirements. With the assistance of mentors/advisors, students create academic plans that may include independent studies, campus-based course work, distance learning, and/or internships. Each program begins with an intensive on-campus seminar and culminates in a final project that demonstrates engagement with a body of work and an ability to use the methodologies and research tools from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Priority IV: Creation of Knowledge through Research

Skidmore research priorities are determined by the scholarly interests of the faculty and the intricacies of the curriculum. It is a dynamic relationship in that the faculty members' scholarly activities inform and shape what and how they teach, while the discoveries and ideas developed in the classroom, lab, or studio can and do influence the content and direction of the faculty members' work. Students are active participants in this process, often working along side the faculty member in collaborative research projects or assisting with special projects. These teams are located throughout the College, coming from any of the departments or interdisciplinary programs. Sponsored research occurs primarily in the natural sciences, with faculty having received grants from NSF, NIH, the Petroleum Research Fund, and other philanthropic foundations. The College has also received external funding for collaborative research programs undertaken during the summer months in pairs of students/faculty members. The scientific

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work students and faculty do together serves two functions: it contributes to the increasing importance of making collaboration an integral part of science education, and it generates results that inform the scholarship of the faculty.

Skidmore encourages faculty research through incentives of promotion and tenure, through a faculty development initiative that provides modest funding for emerging research projects that faculty wish to launch, and through a sponsored research office that helps faculty prepare proposals and to submit them to external agencies for consideration. Indirect costs that flow from grants are shared with the principal investigator and his or her academic department to aid operations of the funded departments and to encourage proposal development. Faculty publish their research in professional journals, at professional meetings, in campus colloquia, and in reports to agencies that fund their work. The Plan includes activities that would encourage more collaborative research and focuses on the value of students learning to work independently.

Students also connect with businesses and agencies through volunteer activities, internships, practicum projects, and independent studies. The Department of Management and Business in particular has fostered this type of connection to the community through its entrepreneurship program where senior Business majors work with area businesses on special projects that will give the students experience and the businesses a needed final product. Students have developed business plans or marketing research, worked with local restaurateurs on expansion projects, and developed concepts for new products. These experiences have been invaluable to the students, providing them with real-life opportunities that have assisted them in finding jobs or identifying new career options.

Priority V: Qualified Professionals

Because Skidmore's programs bridge the theoretical and the applied, graduates are often contributors to the area economy and labor market. Students are encouraged to participate in local internships and to attend a number of New York city or state recruitment programs. These activities include networking receptions in New York City, the Eastern College Career Day in NYC, and a Recruiting Fair in Albany sponsored by SUNY and local private institutions. Twenty-seven percent of Skidmore alumni reside in New York. Student internship are offered through eRecruiting (software) along with Liberal Arts Career Network Consortium. Students can access information on-line. Skidmore also has internship listings on MonsterTrak and NACELink along with specific listings on web resources designed for a variety of majors and career fields. The Office of Career Services advertises options to students through the web, its newsletter, and email.

Priority IV: Qualified Teachers

Skidmore College offers a Bachelor of Science degree in Education Studies, with certification in Elementary Education. The program graduates approximately 20 students annually, with a success rate of 100% or close to it on state-wide testing. The Education Department is also deeply invested in the Expanding Horizons program previously discussed in this document. This program has strengthened the relationship between Skidmore and Schuylerville institutions and communities, encourages Schuylerville students to consider higher educational options, and has enhanced curriculum and faculty development opportunities for members of both institutions. Through the Skidmore-Union MAT agreement, students majoring in Education Studies may also choose to move immediately into an advanced program to further their professional careers.

Skidmore's current prospects are bright, and the trajectory is an upward one. The completion of the planning document in coming weeks and months will finalize this second phase at a time when the

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College is prepared to launch its next capital campaign. Through the addition and reallocation of resources, Skidmore will move into an even more exciting next century.