

Enhancing Skidmore Excellence: **Strategic Action Agenda 2024-2025**

Context and Review of last year's (2023-2024) Strategic Action Agenda (SAA). This past year saw us move further from the pandemic and its impact, welcome to the Skidmore leadership five new Vice Presidents, take the next steps in institution-wide planning, and respond to the global conflicts that impacted college campuses across the country. The College should be proud of how well we pursued our annual strategic priorities, which helped us respond to challenges that could not have been foreseen. This year, building on last year's achievements and successes, our **four strategic priorities** focus on *enhancing the excellence of the institution* for the immediate future and for longer-term horizons, as Skidmore continues to grow and thrive well into the 21st century.

Accomplishments of the 2023-2024 SAA. 1) [The Racial Justice Initiative](#) (RJI) continues to serve as a guiding light for our focused work on diversity, inclusivity, community-building, and understanding across racial difference. We began the year with a superb six-week program titled "[Social \(In\)Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border Series](#)," which included an array of programs, speakers, musical performances, artistic exhibits, and film, examining the US/Mexico border and its many implications and challenges. As in recent years, we also provided programming on the Israel-Palestine conflict, whose issues certainly overlap with racial justice concerns and approaches. The [annual "In It" series](#) connected with the RJI this past year in its focus on Civil Rights activism through film and lecture. The RJI also supported multiple projects among faculty and students throughout the year. Similarly, our focus on the **2) Residential Student Experience** has been fruitful, particularly as we progress with our next Strategic Plan that will include this category as a major theme. Substantial infrastructure projects in the residence halls, ranging from HVAC to showers to flooring, as well as upgrades to wireless service, and committing to providing laundry service free of charge to all students, have been major accomplishments.

Our continued efforts in **3) Institution-Wide Planning** moved forward substantially. We completed the two-year [Visions and Values](#) project, and transitioned from that foundation-setting effort to the formal, collaborative work of building [Skidmore's next Strategic Plan](#). We engaged in multiple forums and sessions on what our next strategic priorities should be, involving the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, the Board, student leadership, staff and faculty meetings, and more. This dovetailed with our [Middle States Commission on Higher Education reaffirmation of accreditation work](#): we formed our collaborative structure and began the two-year work toward our reaffirmation. The initial conception and discussion of what will ultimately become Skidmore's next Campaign progressed. Parallel to these institution-wide conversations was our ongoing focus on Health and Wellness, which we formulated as fostering a **4) "community of care,"** culminating in the near-completion of the McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center, with its commitment to the holistic health and wellness of all students and employees. We elevated the voice of all our employees to the Cabinet level with the fulfillment of the VP for Human Resources position, and engaged all year in discussions and round tables with our employees on what a community of care would truly mean and how we can implement it. Our people are the heart of Skidmore, and this priority gave expression to that commitment.

Finally, the 2023-2024 academic year saw a level of turmoil and unrest on college campuses unlike anything we have seen since the 1960s around the tragedy in Israel and Gaza. At Skidmore, we

leaned into this complex conflict through a wide range of programs, discussions, forums, vigils, speakers, and events. Our ongoing, multi-year focus on **5) [Speech and Expression](#)** was invaluable as we worked to sustain and strengthen our fundamental mission and values as a liberal arts college. We emphasized our fundamental commitment to freedom of expression, academic freedom, and an openness to different views and perspectives, without censure or incivility. At the same time, we emphasized our defining kindness at Skidmore, and our care for the fellow student or colleague at our shoulder and how our words and actions impact others in our community. We resolutely rejected anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism, and any expressions that constitute threats of violence or harassment based on protected categories. Consequently, we experienced a wide array of expression all year—vigils, lectures, colloquia, demonstrations, art displays, and more. All of this is a sign of a healthy campus and an environment where freedom of speech is championed as a vital part of a liberal education. Our policies on academic freedom and rights and on political expression were tested and reaffirmed, and our campus should be justly proud of how well we navigated such a challenging year in higher education.

As we look to 2024-2025 and beyond, our focus is on *continuing to enhance the excellence of Skidmore College*. Consequently, we have arrived at the following **four Strategic Priorities for the 2024-25 academic year**. **1) The Racial Justice Initiative**, first conceived in the summer of 2020, continues to be a key priority. This year, the guiding theme of the RJI is *Dialogue Across Difference*, promoting programs and events that seek to build “transformational conversations” to help us understand many perspectives, positionalities, identities, vernaculars, and experiences. We remain committed to our previous RJI areas of focus through our [In It 9 programming](#), as well as our substantial [election programming](#), our dialogue on the Middle East conflict, and our curricular and co-curricular work in our interdisciplinary programs. Our overarching goal continues to be to build understanding and fluency across racial difference, and to strengthen the sense of community on our campus. Similarly, we will continue to engage our ongoing priority of **2) Speech and Expression**, building on the [achievements in this area](#) of the last two years. Major areas of effort include the 2024 national election and ongoing Middle East programming, including Skidmore’s participation in such national efforts as the [College Presidents for Civic Preparedness](#) project and [Project Pericles](#). Our entire campus will be an ongoing seminar on the election this fall. More fundamental are the principles we embrace at Skidmore: an unwavering commitment to freedom of expression and academic freedom; a total rejection of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and any speech that constitutes harassment or violence; and a resolution to engage, debate, and learn from those perspectives with which we might strenuously disagree, with civility, respect, and kindness.

Our other two goals for this year are similarly essential to securing the long-term excellence and continued improvement of Skidmore. This year we will complete our next **3) Strategic Plan**, a focused five-year plan that will, through a collaborative community engagement, articulate our top priorities for the long-term benefit of Skidmore. In the broad categories of *student life, academic affairs, financial aid, diversity and inclusion, and sustainability*, we will design a plan that lays out the priorities and projects that will continue and grow Skidmore’s commitment to excellence in undergraduate education. The five-year timeframe of the plan matches how dynamic and volatile the higher education landscape has become, with challenges and opportunities that demand a nimble and adroit response in a more focused time of strategic planning.

Strategic Planning is best undertaken with a clear-eyed sense of the short-term and long-term budget and financial condition of the college—that is, in partnership with a rigorous and comprehensive plan for the **4) Strategic Resources** of the institution. We will continue the transparent and collaborative approach to college finances we have followed in recent years: we have planned regular updates to our entire community on budget matters; we have expanded the IPPC budget and finance sub-committee for the fall semester to engage and advise on budget decisions; we will continue to partner closely with our central policy and planning committee, IPPC, to get the fullest input from all constituencies; and we will closely work with the Board of Trustees to articulate our budgetary constraints and needs. The landscape of higher education, particularly in the field of admissions, has never been more competitive, and the long-term thriving of Skidmore depends upon a rational, collaborative, and clearly understood financial approach that ***aligns our resources with our top strategic priorities***. We will determine what priorities are most in need of support through these planning processes, and simultaneously make progress toward identifying programs and areas of the college whose priority has subsided and that will no longer be an area of resourcing. These are difficult but necessary conversations, to which all members of our community are invited for input and contribution. At the end of this year we anticipate achieving a strategic plan that guides our future, as well as a resource plan that makes that future possible. Over the next five years, we will position Skidmore for the next quarter century or more of continued growth in excellence, aligning resources with strategic priorities—a once-in-a-generation opportunity to clearly articulate and guide the short and long-term future of Skidmore.

These priorities are all consonant with our current Strategic Plan, *Creating Pathways to Excellence, 2015-2025*, that reaches its end this year. The four major categories of the Plan remain impressively relevant: Skidmore continues to seek achievement and improvement in **integrative learning, access, sustainability, well-being**, and all our major programs and projects are well described in these goals. The Strategic Plan was thoroughly reviewed and commented upon in the fall of 2020, resulting in the [2015-2020 Strategic Plan Midpoint Review](#) document, which brings into relief the substantial progress made on the Strategic Plan, showing multiple accomplishments and pointing towards more to come. This year's SAA has been crafted in the same spirit of fidelity to our institutional Strategic Plan, and in response to current needs and priorities of Skidmore.

Reviewed by the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, September 27, 2024

Endorsed by the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, October 11, 2024

Endorsed by the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board of Trustees, October 17, 2024

Approved by the Board of Trustees, October 18, 2024