Planning for our Institutional Future
Strategic Action Agenda 2023-2024

Context and review of last year's Strategic Action Agenda (SAA)
It was a bold aspiration in the 2022-2023 SAA *not* to include COVID-19 response as one of Skidmore's five top institutional strategic goals. But after two consecutive years in which the pandemic dominated College planning—and while COVID remained a presence—we could focus on a range of priorities that moved the College forward in multiple strategic ways in 2022-2023. This sense of future-oriented accomplishment focused on how best to sustain and grow the excellence of our institution animates the strategic priorities for the 2023-2024 academic year, with institutional planning as the overarching theme.

Accomplishments of the 2022-2023 SAA: Transitions among cabinet leadership formed a major undertaking for the year. Through scrupulous processes that were collaborative and transparent from start to finish, with faculty, staff, and students on each search committee and broad-based community participation, we successfully completed five VP searches. We also transitioned from the Campus Master Planning (CMP) process of the previous year's SAA, to completion and progress on **the first key projects emerging from the CMP**: the relocation and renovation of the Greenberg Child Care Center and the renovation of the North Broadway entrance to campus. The "Health and Wellness, Fitness, and Athletics" project took shape as the McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center, a major commitment to the health and wellness of our entire student body and indeed entire community, as well as to the improvement of the facilities for our student-athletes. We continued **the Racial Justice Initiative**, now entering its fourth year, as a major priority. In 2022-2023, we supported such key projects as Wyckoff Center programming, including the Natural Hair Festival; multiple trainings in such areas as inclusive hiring practices, transgender support, and conflict resolution; continued national leadership in the LACRELA (Liberal Arts Colleges Racial Equity Leadership Alliance) consortium; Board of Trustees DEI committee work; *In It 7* programming, including a conversation with University of Maryland, Baltimore County President Emeritus Freeman A. Hrabowski and a program on Confronting Antisemitism; an ongoing partnership with MLK-Saratoga, especially for the MLK week events; and the welcoming of commencement speaker and honorary degree recipient and Spelman College President Emerita Mary Schmidt Campbell. We made significant progress on our **Speech and Expression** priority, culminating in the national symposium "Speech and Expression on College Campuses" in April. Finally, we embarked on our year-long **"Visions and Values"** project, pursuing across all constituencies the questions about what makes Skidmore special and what constitutes our unique identity. That project will lead into our initial Strategic Planning discussions this year.

Our five key strategic goals for the 2023-2024 year show a conscious development from the major goals of the 22-23 year. We continue **the Racial Justice Initiative** (RJI), with a particular focus this year on the US/Mexico border crisis, featuring a month-long series of programming titled "Social (In)Justice at the U.S.-Mexico Border." We have also embarked on an AAC&U-sponsored initiative titled "Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation" that promises to enhance our community's resilience and skills in the complex areas of racial justice. A Racial Justice framework allows us to reaffirm our commitment to building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive

community as we navigate the complexity of the Supreme Court decision regarding race as an element in the admission process.

This fall, our faculty will be asked to participate in the NACCC faculty survey to provide input on our campus DEI efforts. By the end of this academic year, we will create a web-based Diversity Dashboard that allows our compositional representation to be publicly understood. We are excited to continue building support around mental health and our communities of color by joining The Steve Fund initiative, a non-profit dedicated to supporting the mental health and emotional well-being of young people of color. The RJI continues to be an essential prism through which we focus our commitments to racial justice, diversity, and inclusivity throughout our community.

The overall student **Residential Experience** has emerged as a major institutional commitment, pointing toward a sustained focus on residential life in our strategic planning and capital campaign discussions to follow. For over two years, we have had fruitful discussions about what it means to be a student "in residence"—to live, work, play, study, and learn on a residential college campus. This wide-ranging inquiry includes the quality and nature of the residence halls, the kinds of programming they should provide, what sorts of connections there are between students' formal education in the classroom and informal education outside of the classroom, and much more. An example this year of early engagement is a recent brainstorming session with our Student Government Association to gather ideas from students around community space needs in the residence halls. Such Strategic Planning conversations will continue as we simultaneously engage with experts to enter into detailed discussions about our residential facility needs and indeed the very concept of a residential education.

The **Visions and Values** project of last year provides a foundation for our **Strategic Planning** conversations this year and in the years to follow. We will transition from the Visions and Values inquiries into a sustained series of discussions, forums, dialogues, and inquiries to begin our Strategic Planning enterprise, which will be a major focus of our work through 2024-25. These strategic discussions will overlap with our upcoming **Middle States reaffirmation of accreditation** process, and the priorities and principles we develop will structure the next **Capital Campaign** at Skidmore, that will begin somewhere around the summer of 2025. Having these **institutional planning efforts** in alignment and informing one another will be invaluable for the best efforts on each process, and will constitute a major focus for the College this year.

Speech and Expression continues to be a major focus for our campus, as we seek to reinforce and engage the pressures on freedom of expression in all areas of higher education. Threats to freedom of expression have emerged throughout the nation in regard to education, including incursions into the content of syllabi, the choice of texts, and the discourses within and without the classroom. These external pressures on freedom of speech are matched by internal pressures, ranging from pressures to dis-invite speakers to a chilling of free expression that students and faculty alike have noted as self-censoring and inhibiting of the full exchange of ideas. Freedom of expression, diversity of perspectives, openness to many points of view in our conversations and collaborations, a welcoming spirit to everyone in our community—these are essential elements not just to building the community of trust to which we aspire, but also for the liberal arts education Skidmore provides. It is more necessary than ever before to have sophisticated and attentive conversations and programs that examine the challenges to free speech and expression, the concerns that such

conversations give rise to, the issues of power and privilege that circulate in any such discussions, and the most supportive and sustainable positions the College can take on these matters for the best outcomes for all in our community. Programs this year will include speakers, artistic productions, forums, debates, colloquia, and other ways of engaging on these complex cultural matters.

Last year we embarked upon an extraordinarily ambitious commitment to holistic student health and wellness. The resulting McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center—one of the largest capital projects ever on our campus—will come to completion in the coming year, as the new Fitness Center, the Health and Wellness facilities, and the indoor tennis complex all approach completion. We now seek to expand this effort to include our entire community and all constituencies in a pathway toward a **Community of Care**. This year we will ask such questions as, "What does a Community of Care mean at Skidmore College? How can we address the growing mental health concerns of students and higher education professionals? And what would it mean to work together toward such aspirations?" This undertaking must be more than words; it must be an institution-wide dialogue to discuss mental health issues openly and without stigma in order to provide an education and workplace experience that *prioritizes our people*—for our people are at the very heart of what makes Skidmore so special. Being a community of care means that our people matter to one another, that that we strive to see and support one another's success and wellness, and that, as a community, we are invested in the continued success of the institution. This year we will focus on the renewal of and commitment to our faculty, on the support and care of our staff, and especially on the thriving and well-being of our students, through a range of professional and career development programs, and an ongoing attention to student health and wellness.

Context of our current *Strategic Plan*

The five goals for this year's SAA, as in previous years, continue to emerge from and support our ongoing ten-year *Strategic Plan*, *Creating Pathways to Excellence, 2015-2025*. We continue to see how the *Plan*, the result of a full community effort to determine the guiding strategic goals for Skidmore, remains a relevant and inspiring map for our present and future efforts. The four major categories of the *Plan* remain impressively relevant: **integrative learning**, **access**, **sustainability**, **well-being**—these are areas where Skidmore continues to seek achievement and improvement, 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 we have made on the *Strategic Plan*, showing multiple accomplishments and pointing towards more to come. In the same spirit of fidelity to our institutional *Strategic Plan*, and also responding attentively to current needs and priorities of the institution, this year's SAA has been crafted. The **Racial Justice Initiative**, the **Speech and Expression** priority, and the **Community of Care** effort each emerges from and responds to the *Strategic Plan's* categories of access and well-being; the **Residential Experience** focus is similarly supportive of access and well-being, and is also an example of integrative learning as we see the residential experience as a fundamentally educative process. Finally, the **Institutional Planning** focus embraces and supports all aspects of the *Strategic Plan*, as well as pointing to that *Plan's* successor as it nears its conclusion.

Taken as a whole, these five goals demonstrate our continued focus on the student experience at Skidmore, on the unique nature of our residential education, and on our ongoing commitment to make the Skidmore experience and community as welcoming and supportive as possible for all of our people. The major elements of our current *Strategic Plan* all find purchase on these goals, and progress on this SAA will constitute continued progress on that overarching *Strategic Plan*. Finally, this SAA moves us forward into a year of focused consideration of what our *next* Strategic Plan might include, and what that planning process should look like to most successfully produce a collaborative and aspirational process for thinking about Skidmore's future, as we define and pursue the kind of College we want to be as we move further into the 21st century.

Endorsed by the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, October 6, 2023
Endorsed by the Board of Trustees, October 20, 2023.