

Present and Future
STRATEGIC ACTION AGENDA 2020-2021

We are just past the midpoint of Skidmore's current 10-year Strategic Plan, [Creating Pathways to Excellence, 2015-2025](#). President Emeritus Philip Glotzbach has drafted a midpoint review that summarizes our progress on that plan and describes this moment of transition. That midpoint document has been reviewed by me and the President's Cabinet and now constitutes the [2015-2020 Strategic Plan Midpoint Review document](#). It demonstrates the substantial progress we have made on the Strategic Plan, showing multiple accomplishments and pointing toward more to come.

The midpoint review also brings into relief how vibrant and applicable the Strategic Plan continues to be for Skidmore. 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.

In a typical year, we might engage in a longer process of planning for the current academic year and mapping our efforts precisely onto the ongoing Strategic Plan. But of course, this year is anything but typical. In this extraordinary season of COVID-19, we face the necessity of focusing in a laser-sharp way on five major institutional goals for 2020-21. Attaining these goals will require the full capacity of the College in the changed context of COVID-19 and all it enjoins upon us. In this focused effort, we are not in any way shifting from the current Strategic Plan, for in fact all five goals are fully consonant with that plan and emerge from it.

The following five goals constitute our guiding Strategic Action Agenda (SAA) for this year:

1. **Successful execution of the 2020-2021 academic year**, in terms of the three guiding principles we have articulated for negotiating the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic: ensuring the health and safety of our entire community; delivering the full Skidmore education of an in-person, engaged, transformational learning experience; and preserving the fiscal strength of the College.
2. **Successful completion of the Racial Justice Initiative**, focusing on achieving/enacting all 12 action goals of the initiative that also will inform and strengthen our overarching diversity, equity and inclusion work as a result (and then planning how we will continue this crucial work next year and in the years to follow).
3. **Successful completion of the capital campaign**, [Creating Our Future](#), which we have extended through December of 2020 with a revised aspirational goal of \$220 million, the largest campaign ever undertaken at Skidmore. In addition, we will search for and appoint a new Collyer Vice President of Advancement to guide our future advancement work.
4. Collaboratively formulate and begin implementing **a plan to address the structural budget deficit by realizing long-term budget savings**. This work will include aligning the student/faculty and student/staff ratios with our peer and aspirant schools and with our endowment capacity, as well as implementing changes to the College's health care plan and student employment program.

5. Begin a collaborative **Campus Master Planning process** that will involve our entire community in guided discussions of near- and long-term future capital projects that will shape and define the Skidmore campus for the coming decade and more.

It is evident that these five goals focus on both the present and future needs of the College, and that each is a deeply collaborative effort. **Goal number one** is our all-encompassing effort to chart our course through this year of the pandemic, while continuing our teaching mission to our students and sustaining the College for the future. This is an extraordinary team effort and any institution would understandably limit its year's expectations simply to completing this project.

But we also maintain our commitment to **goal number two**, the Racial Justice Initiative, as an equally essential goal for the year, and equally a sustaining and defining effort for Skidmore's present and future as goal number one. Both the pandemic and America's ongoing challenges of antiracism and racial justice are in effect health crises, and we seek to address both as we continue to focus on our community as a place where everyone can thrive, feel at home, and both challenge and be challenged by our peers.

Goal number three is almost absurdly ambitious: to complete the most far-reaching capital campaign in the history of the College while navigating a global pandemic and striving for meaningful institutional progress on the formidable areas of racial justice. Yet we have insisted since the summer that we will not allow the present crisis to take our eyes off of the future. The long-term sustainability and strength of Skidmore College must always be a goal, even in the midst of present challenges that dwarf any period heretofore in American higher education. Consequently, we continue to work to secure ongoing support for the College in the key campaign areas of scholarships and financial aid, the Center for Integrated Sciences, the Skidmore Fund, Athletics, Health, and Wellness, the Tang Teaching Museum, and Career Development and Transformative Experiences. Our goal for this year's Skidmore Fund is also ambitious, and these efforts will go hand-in-hand with our goal of recruiting and appointing a skilled and committed new VP for Advancement to continue Skidmore's trajectory into the future.

Goal number four is consonant with goal number three, in its focus on securing the long-term financial health of the College. As detailed in the [Strategic Action Agenda for 2019-20](#), our financial models show unsustainable deficits over the next five years. The [Future Financial Sustainability](#) website was launched [in May 2020](#) by President Glotzbach to help our entire community understand the financial challenges that Skidmore currently faces. In order for the College to continue to grow in the achievement of its key goals and to offer the extraordinary college experience as well as the opportunity and access for this education to an ever-increasingly diverse student body, Skidmore must implement a plan to address the College's structural budget deficit. The student/faculty and student/staff ratios need to come into alignment with our peer and aspirant schools, and we must continue to work together to reduce health care benefit costs and manage the student employment program. This goal will require a collaborative process with faculty, staff and administrative leadership that will be data-driven and in unity with our key strategic priorities.

Finally, **goal number five** gives us an opportunity to collaborate and critically assess the many capital/building projects that have been proposed, planned and framed in recent years, with an eye toward freshly evaluating those projects and seeing how they fit into the emerging priorities of the College. We will examine potential future projects in academic affairs and student life, and see what curricular needs might help us structure future building projects. We will be able to align our many projects and needs in such a way that we can prioritize and strategically evaluate those projects and needs, and be sure each project we undertake fits with our overarching priorities and goals. Sustainability, diversity and access will inform each decision, and the process will involve our entire community — students, staff, faculty, as well as the Saratoga Springs community — so we can clearly identify and articulate the highest needs of the entire College in this future-oriented planning. Working with a professional campus master planning firm will be of great value in attaining this coherent and comprehensive campus plan, our first such plan since 2007.

This Campus Master Planning project will be the prelude to future strategic planning efforts, which will then inform the next capital campaign, several years off but requiring these steps to ensure maximum success for what will be an institution-defining campaign effort. That is certainly looking to the future, and this year's focused Strategic Action Agenda will accomplish both the present needs of our College while also strengthening the College's future.

Marc C. Conner

President

December 13, 2020

(reviewed by the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, presented at the all-staff and all-faculty meetings December 4, 2020.)

[See also 2015-2020 Strategic Plan: Midpoint Review](#)