

Emerging Into the Future
Strategic Action Agenda 2021-2022

This year's Strategic Action Agenda (SAA) is in many ways a continuation of [last year's SAA](#), partly because of the continued challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic—which continues to impact virtually every aspect of the College's operations and planning—and partly because 4 of the 5 goals articulated in the 2020-2021 SAA have continued into the current year as ongoing major priorities. Campus Master Planning, the Racial Justice Initiative, and Financial Sustainability, along with COVID-19 management, are all areas where we made excellent progress and achievement last year, and they continue to be areas of institutional priority this year. In addition, the area of sexual and gender-based misconduct and Title IX policies and procedures has arisen as an area of major attention on college campuses nationwide, and Skidmore is no exception. This year presents an opportunity for us to review and where necessary revise those policies and practices, as part of our broader effort to support student health and well-being and to foster a campus of inclusivity, support, and trust.

These five goals continue to emerge from and support our ongoing ten-year *Strategic Plan, Creating Pathways to Excellence, 2015-2025*. As I wrote in the SAA for last year, we continue to see 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. 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.

Much like last year's SAA, this SAA emerges from a time of extraordinary pressure on the institution due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This requires once again a laser-sharp focus on five clear priorities for the College, each of which is connected to and impacted by our COVID response and at the same time clearly supports the pillars of our *Strategic Plan*. It is my hope and intention to engage in a more expanded discussion of the College's institutional priorities this spring and summer, prior to the start of the 2022-23 academic year in late August 2022.

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

- 1) **Ongoing successful execution of the 2021-2022 academic year**, in terms of the 3 guiding principles we have continued to articulate for managing 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. This was an area of very impressive attainment in 2020-2021, and continues to be a strategic need in 2021-22 as COVID-19 continues to transform and baffle expectations. Importantly, our efforts will not only seek

to limit the impact of COVID on our educational mission; we also seek to emphasize student health and wellness, employee fatigue and anxiety, and the unquantifiable but very real ongoing impact of the pandemic on morale and the sense of community at Skidmore.

- 2) **Continued attention to and fulfillment of the Racial Justice Initiative**, focusing on completing or extending what remains of the 12 action goals of the Initiative's first year, and planning and executing 6 new action goals for the 2021-2022 academic year as the Initiative moves through its second year of achievement. This will include expanding on the Initiative's initial scope, strengthening the communication effort of its achievements and areas of continued need, and broadening the range of participation and achievement that is so seminal to the Initiative's long-term success.
- 3) Continuing to work collaboratively at the College's ongoing efforts **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; clear and consistent communication with our entire community regarding the budgetary numbers that enjoin this work for us; strategic steps to help us better understand our compensation standards, our alignment of staffing in various areas, and our ideal student body size and projections of enrollments in the future.
- 4) Conclude the collaborative **Campus Master Planning (CMP) process** that we began in 2021, involving 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. This process is informed and shaped by our dual commitments to sustainability and to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all our planning efforts. In 2021-2022, we will progress from stages of observe and assess, to envision and test, and finally to synthesis, as Ayers Saint Gross, our CMP task force, and CMP steering committee engages with all campus constituencies to develop a comprehensive campus master plan that the Board of Trustees can endorse and approve in May of 2022.
- 5) Review, evaluate, assess, and revise our **sexual and gender-based misconduct (SGBM) and Title IX** policies and procedures. SGBM/Title IX challenges continue to bedevil every college campus. Despite our attentive revisions of our policies in the summer of 2020 to the new federally-mandated Title IX regulations and processes, it is evident that Skidmore can continue to improve not just our policies and practices, but also how we frame and communicate those policies to our community, and how we fulfill and enact those policies in real-life situations that are extraordinarily challenging and fraught for all involved.

I look forward to discussions with our community in the spring of 2022 on appropriate priorities for next year and the near future. Though one certainly hesitates to make any predictions about COVID's future, I do feel it is time to transition COVID-19 responses and management from our list of strategic goals. Although COVID will continue to be with us and require our adroit planning and management, I anticipate that COVID will fall squarely into the area of ongoing operational management, something the College is doing as a matter of course and no longer rising to the level of institutional strategy. After two years of having to account for COVID at every level of our thinking and planning, it will be a welcome change to shift to a more operational management of the virus and all its implications.

Of course, the Campus Master Planning project should be complete in May of 2022, and thereafter it will help guide our strategic goals and priorities in the years to come. I am hopeful that the efforts to address the predicted budget structural deficits will have made sufficient progress in 2021-2022 that this area of priority will also shift to ongoing management and operations, and no longer have to be a pervasive institutional project. Our significant attention to SGBM/Title IX policies will move us substantially forward and I hope Skidmore will be regarded as one of the most effective examples of appropriate Title IX response in the country. Although the challenges of sexual and gender-based misconduct will of course remain, my hope is that Skidmore will have best-practices policies and processes in place that we will focus on operationalizing, and this topic will not require institutional strategic focus in the near future. Only the Racial Justice Initiative, in my view, will continue as a persistent strategic goal in 2022-2023, not due to a lack of effort nor progress—quite the contrary—but as the evolutionary embodiment of Skidmore’s commitment to DEI and to the aspirational goals of racial justice.

Reviewed by the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, February 4, 2022

Endorsed by the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board of Trustees, February 17, 2022

Endorsed by the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee, March 4, 2022