

Emerging Into the Future **Strategic Action Agenda 2022-2023**

Context and Review of last year's Strategic Action Agenda

In the [Strategic Action Agenda \(SAA\) for 2021-22](#), we remarked that in the year to follow, we anticipate the shift in our COVID-19 responses from the level of institutional strategy to the area of ongoing operational management. Of course COVID will continue to be with us and require our adroit planning and management, but it seems to be moving into an aspect of regular ongoing operations. Consequently, for the first time in the last three years, **COVID response** is not one of our five top strategic priorities. Additionally, the **Campus Master Planning project**, which was one of our top priorities in each of the last two years, was completed in the spring of 2022, and now that finished Plan will help guide our strategic goals and priorities in the years to come. Similarly, for the last two years a major institutional focus has been on the need to address the **projected budget deficits**. That goal has largely been met, and while we continue to evaluate each employee position as it becomes vacant to determine its alignment with our ongoing strategic priorities—a “best practice” in institutional management—that work has shifted from a dominant institutional focus to an area of ongoing normalized operations. Now our attention can be focused primarily on recruitment, hiring, retention, and “employee support” writ large, part of our ongoing effort *to take care of our people*. Finally, last year we set a strategic goal to review, evaluate, assess, and revise our sexual and gender-based misconduct (**SBGM**) and **Title IX policies and procedures**, a process we undertook and completed with rigor and a series of key revisions to our approach to this crucial part of campus life. Consequently, although we are under no illusions that sexual misconduct will not continue to be an area of challenge and effort, as it is on every college campus, nevertheless we are more confident in our abilities to support this area as regular operations of the College, rather than an ongoing strategic goal. Hence, from last year's five major goals of the SAA, only one, the **Racial Justice Initiative**, carries over into the 2022-23 academic year.

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. Although this continues to be a time of extraordinary pressure and transition in American higher education, the sense of acute crisis that emerged in the spring of 2020 from the COVID-19 pandemic does seem to be receding. At the same time, the focus on racial reckoning that followed on the awful racial killings of the spring of 2020 continues to be a priority for Skidmore, as our commitment to ongoing improvement of the Skidmore experience and community continues as strong as ever.

In that spirit, we present **the following five goals** to constitute our guiding Strategic Action Agenda (SAA) for this year:

1) **The Racial Justice Initiative:** Entering its third year, the RJI continues to be a prism through which to focus our annual specific goals for racial justice work, as well as an ongoing structure to channel and share Skidmore's commitment to racial justice as a perpetual aspiration. (It is worth noting that Skidmore's RJI stands out among the initiatives of other institutions in that ours continues to live and transform each year, whereas many other schools dropped their efforts after a year.) Consequently, we anticipate the RJI will continue as one of our five annual SAA goals for years to come, with each year featuring several specific areas of focus and attention. For 2022-23, those areas of focus will include the intersections of race and gender, especially transgender interests and opportunities; enhanced understanding of and engagement with global/international issues beyond U.S. borders; and our ongoing priority of strengthening our recruitment and retention of students, staff, and faculty from racially diverse backgrounds. In addition, we will seek and add other areas of focus as our community generates them throughout the year.

2) **Vice Presidential Leadership Opportunities:** This year will see three transitions among the cabinet leadership, as the Dean of the Faculty and Vice President for Academic Affairs search is well underway (launched May of 2022), the Vice President for Finance and Administration and Treasurer search has begun (launched late September 2022); and the Vice President for Admissions and Financial Aid search has begun (launched late September 2022). These are major opportunities for new leadership and vision to come to Skidmore in these key areas that impact virtually every constituency of the College: staff, students, faculty, as well as the broader Skidmore community. Careful planning and execution of these hires, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, shared governance, and mutual cooperation, will be seminal as we conduct these major searches that will set the table for our future strategic leadership.

3) **Major Capital Projects** emerging from the Campus Master Plan: The CMP established, through a highly collaborative and transparent all-community process, the major projects and priorities as well as the guiding principles that will guide us in the future shape of our campus and respond to the needs of our community for a decade or more. With the CMP completed, we now begin to prioritize the projects it brought into relief, considering such questions as the strategic needs each project meets, the cost and impact of each project, the funding options for each project, the "enabling projects" that must occur in order for other projects to move forward, and the processes for having these conversations and deliberations. Working out how to put in place informed and professional processes to support capital planning and to help our key governance bodies, such as IPPC and the President's Cabinet, to ascertain the details and implications of each project will be essential to this work. Already we are embarked upon two projects that emerged as immediate priorities in the CMP: the relocation and renovation of the Greenberg Child Care Center, and the renovation and expansion of the North Broadway Main Entrance to campus. Furthermore, the major Health and Wellness, Fitness, and Athletics project(s) have assumed a major position in our efforts to enhance support for the students' experience of the Skidmore residential education. Working together to move this cluster of projects forward will be a major element of our strategic efforts this academic year.

4) **Visions and Values:** What is essential to Skidmore College? What are the signature parts of Skidmore, the parts we most value and that define us at our best? What are those elements that, if you took them away, would mean we are no longer Skidmore? And how does who we were and are shape who we will become? The answers to these questions will help shape our strategic planning in the years to come. In this exploration, we will embark upon a series of projects that will help us work collaboratively toward a better understanding of what makes Skidmore special. Possible projects include open forum discussions with key constituencies (board of trustees, alumni, faculty staff and students, et cetera); a colloquium or panel on such Skidmore elements as liberal arts and the professions, the importance of the Tang, interdisciplinarity, and more, as well as overlapping Centennial celebration programs such as the Nursing Program, the Porter Presidency, and more.

5) **Speech and Expression:** 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. Yet in these times of polarization, of a refusal to allow opposing views to speak, of canceling conversation due to different perspectives, and of a refusal to allow other voices to be heard (these challenges are prevalent across all political positions), 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. Although we eschew problematic terms such as “civility” and “tolerance,” we also note that the current tenors of incivility and intolerance in so much of our society are deeply challenging to the community of trust to which we aspire. Possible programs this year could include speakers, artistic productions, forums, debates, and a national spring symposium on these complex cultural matters.

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 toward a consideration in the coming 1-3 years of our next institution-wide Strategic Plan, the values and visions it should articulate, and 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 7, 2022

Reviewed by the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board of Trustees, October 13, 2022.