

Wendy Wilson '96

Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Award



Award-winning journalist Wendy L. Wilson has been reporting and directing news coverage for the past 20 years. You can find her work in the pages of *Essence*, *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines as well as the online news and culture platform theGrio, all of which keenly focus on stories that illustrate the African American experience. The New York City resident currently leads the digital editorial team as the executive editor at BET.com (Black Entertainment Television).

One of several journalists who closely covered Barack Obama's presidential campaigns, she maintained that relationship with the White House during the 44th president's tenure in office. "I'm proud of the stories we covered, from the formation of the Affordable Care Act to other key legislative packages that left indelible marks in the Black community." Wendy has interviewed such luminaries as Stacey Abrams, Maya Angelou, former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and former First Lady of the United States Michelle Obama. More recently, she has been a trusted source of accurate and authentic coverage during some of the most impactful events in recent history, including nationwide protests sparked in 2020 by the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

Along the way, Wendy returned to campus as an alumna volunteer, dedicating her time and talents to helping Skidmore foster a culture of inclusion. As a two-term chair of diversity on the Alumni Association Board of Directors, her focus was on ensuring that historically under- or misrepresented members of the College community felt seen and heard — alumni and students of color, those who identify as LGBTQ+ and individuals who are the first in their families to seek higher education. A founding member of the Skidmore Alumni Diversity and Inclusion Steering Committee, Wendy helped develop strategies to engage alumni from diverse backgrounds by encouraging them to get involved in College-sponsored events and programming. Committee members hosted multicultural career networking events, Reunion gatherings, and "meet-and-greet" events for accepted students of color and their parents.

Wendy has vivid memories of her first visit to Skidmore. As a high school junior, she and other students of color were invited to campus through the Connections Program. In addition to an admissions interview and an overnight stay with an upperclassman, she was able to observe a class — fiction writing. "The freedom of expression, the exploration of thought and the genuine interest from the students are some of the reasons why I decided to pursue Skidmore as my college of choice," she reflects.

Wendy found faculty and administrators who encouraged her interests in writing and storytelling. With their guidance and support, she was able to develop her interests in journalism through an English major that incorporated curricular requirements and outside experiences. These included writing for the *Skidmore News*, an internship at *The Saratogian*, becoming a peer tutor in the English Department's Writing Center, and creating a campus-wide newsletter sponsored by Health Services. "Skidmore is the first place that not only validated my proficiency for research and my love for telling other people's stories, but it allowed me the audacity to dream big enough to even imagine a career in media."

She actively participated in campus life, too. As vice president and then president of UJIMA, Wendy helped bring awareness of African, African American and Caribbean cultures to the Skidmore campus and its neighboring community. At the time, student club activities were mostly "do-it-yourself" affairs. Along with the UJIMA board members, Wendy organized and produced a fashion show as interstitial placement within a traditional talent showcase. "We rented clothes from the Saratoga mall, typed up contracts and incorporated poetry and dance performances," she recalls with a smile. That was the first iteration of what has now become an annual campus highlight.

"I will always hold my time at Skidmore as four of the most amazing years of my life," she observes. "I learned so much about being a leader, working with others, independent thinking, the importance of truth and standards, and the true value of creativity."

Wendy is grateful to be recognized by her alma mater in this way. "Being a student and then an alumna of color, particularly a daughter of immigrant parents, life at Skidmore could leave you feeling lost or misrepresented. I wanted to ensure that everyone felt represented within this community, no matter what year they attended. This institution will bind some of us together for a lifetime. All I wanted to do was to strengthen that bond for those who were already engaged and create it for those who felt like it may not have been there for them at the time. I sincerely hope that the work I've done has helped bridge that gap."