

Strategic Renewal:
Reframing our Priorities at the Midpoint of the *Strategic Plan*
17 May 2010

Philip A. Glotzbach
President

The 2009-10 academic year marks the midpoint of *Engaged Liberal Learning: The Plan for Skidmore College 2005-2015*. A separate report, “*Engaged Liberal Learning: The First Five Years*,”¹ reviews our considerable *collective* successes in implementing the *Plan* to-date. The emphasis on “collective” cannot be overstated. It has taken the work of many hands across the entire Skidmore community to achieve the admirable –

- x **And last but not least, our setting in the vibrant small city of Saratoga Springs** with its distinctive cultural life as manifested in its numerous museums, arts organizations, performance venues, equestrian heritage, and many fine restaurants. More broadly, our location in upstate New York in proximity to the 6,000,000-acre Adirondack Park and the Capital Region, within a three-hour drive of Boston, Montreal, and New York City, offers students a host of opportunities.

Together, these eight differentiating attributes define an undergraduate experience that is quite specific to Skidmore. Over the coming years, we need to take account of and, where possible, strengthen these distinctive features. In addition, we must become even more accomplished in referencing this constellation of attributes as we make the case for Skidmore to prospective students and donors.¹³

Strategic Themes

I now challenge us to apply the concept of transformation even more broadly, to acknowledge that the undergraduate college experience represents just one moment – though certainly a crucial one – in the longer passage from late adolescence into early adulthood, a process that begins in high school and extends well beyond our students' time at Skidmore, typically into one's mid-30s. How would our curricula, courses, and mentoring practices change if we were to situate them in the context of this larger developmental arc? What resources can we develop to help us answer this question? How would our relationship to our graduates change if we were to develop a more detailed sense of their needs, say, two years, five years, and ten years

responsible citizenship, a value that has long been part of Skidmore’s mission. Here too, we need to identify specific learning goals and decide which investments of time, energy, and financial resources will yield the greatest strategic advances. One question that has emerged through our work on responsible citizenship is the question of how we can articulate the “public value” of individual majors or programs.

As we determine how best to do this work over the next five years, we also will look to the specific markers of student achievement provided by the “Goals for Student Learning and Development” and the themes of *transition* and *transformation*.

Sustainability and Leverage

The concept of *sustainability* emerged as a point of emphasis in the on-campus Town Hall Meetings. This notion has become a familiar feature of our discourse, applying first of all to the responsible use of resources. And we certainly will continue our efforts to develop sustainable uses of electricity, water, etc., and to reduce waste and energy inefficiency. Our College-wide commitment to *sustainability*, however, extends beyond “green” environmental systems to include sustainable human-resource and financial practices – for example, our commitment to maintaining appropriate and competitive salary levels for all our employees. But the *Plan* also extends the concept of *sustainability* to include our educational aspirations for our students, calling upon us to help them develop the capacities, skills, and habits necessary to leading a sustainable life over the course of professional and personal involvement.¹⁷ Above all our institutional commitment to *sustainability* requires the ability to make the necessary strategic choices that direct our time, energy, and financial resources efficiently to areas of highest strategic priority. One significant way to increase efficiency is to ***leverage*** resources that are already in place, though perhaps in apparently unconnected areas of the College. Accordingly, we will look for initiatives that reach across disciplinary or departmental boundaries or otherwise create opportunities to multiply and concentrate existing resources to achieve strategic ends.

Stewardship

The theme of *stewardship* also emerged as a priority in the on-campus Town Hall Meetings, and it underpins Goal IV of the *Strategic Plan*. This Goal emphasizes that we must manage our resources effectively if we are to retain our independence – our capacity to determine for ~~7/24/24~~

Our Assessment effort too can be understood as another crucial dimension of stewardship: affirming and increasing the integrity of our educational processes, and enhancing our capacity to describe our student learning outcomes to those outside the College.

Going Forward

As I have emphasized throughout this document, the four major Goals of the *Strategic Plan* will continue to provide our primary strategic focus. During the next five years, we will continue to advance key Priority Initiatives already in process, while others that were not emphasized during the preceding five years will be given greater prominence or developed anew. A major test of the effectiveness of our strategic decision-making will be the extent to which we continue to attract

than we do at present. Furthermore, I have directed the Office of Business and Finance to identify areas in which we will evaluate the efficiency of our business practices.

Let me identify one final strategic opportunity relating to the curriculum: I challenge academic administration and the faculty to collaborate in developing a new “space” within the College’s academic structures for curricular and pedagogical exploration – a “space” where faculty members can explore new and perhaps even “disruptive” ideas that can help us shape the Skidmore of the future. For example, that future clearly calls for higher levels of collaboration across institutions (e.g., within the New York Six Consortium), more integral uses of technology (e.g., Internet2), and new models of instruction in which a professor, a program, and perhaps even the College as a whole functions more as an academic “hub” from which we send students out into the world (either physically or electronically) to access resources and explore opportunities that Skidmore cannot provide on its own.

What Are We Prepared To Do?

Over the past eighteen months, virtually every college and university confronted difficulties similar to ours. Although we could not control the developments occurring in the external environment, we can take pride in the way our community rallied to respond to them. Now, as we look to the future, we must reaffirm both our sense of opportunity and our determination to meet the challenges remaining before us. We will continue to call upon the substantial resources within the Skidmore community. The professionalism and commitment of our faculty and staff, the vitality of our students, the strength and support of our extended Skidmore community, our historical willingness to embrace risk, and our record of accomplishment in the face of constrained resources all encourage us to retain full faith in our future. If we continue to unite

APPENDIX A: Skidmore College Goals for Student Learning and Development

The goals that follow reflect the unique characteristics and synergies of our B.A. and B.S. programs, as well as certain emphases that are deeply engrained in Skidmore's history and culture: on creativity, on civic responsibility, and on interdisciplinary thinking. As in the past, we aim to graduate students who strive for excellence, think deeply and creatively, and communicate and act effectively. We continue to ask our students to link theoretical and practical learning, and now also to develop intercultural understanding and an appreciation of their roles as global citizens. These goals have much in common with those of all liberal arts colleges who share a common mission, though we take pride in having long approached them in our own distinctive way.

Our goals emerge in particular from our collective sense of a Skidmore education as a

**APPENDIX B: The Student Voice – Student Perception of our Primary
“Differentiating Attributes”
Spring 2010**

Based on feedback received at on- and off-campus Town Hall Meetings during the fall of 2009, President Glotzbach drafted a list of “differentiating attributes” – attributes that, taken together, set Skidmore apart from other liberal arts colleges. President Glotzbach then asked that current Skidmore students have an opportunity to react to that draft list. Focus groups were conducted with three groups of students: the Academic Council, the Student Government Association Senate, and a joint meeting of members of Students Promoting Social Change and Project Unity.¹⁹ The full report on the student focus groups, including preliminary analysis, is available on the web site of the Office of the President. This appendix summarizes student reaction to the earlier draft list of differentiating attributes.²⁰

MOST DIFFERENT

	Academic Council 3-30-10	SGA Senate 3-30-10	Students Promoting Social Change and Project Unity 4-5-10	Total
1. “Mind and hand”	10	1	5	16
2. Visual and performing arts	6	2	3	11
3. Interdisciplinary spirit	11	15	3	29
4. Creative Thought Matters	10	12	1	23
5. Welcoming community				

