

Creative Futures: The Skidmore College Strategic Plan 2025-2030
Final Draft 7 (March 29-30, 2025)

Statement of Purpose and Institutional Vision

Who are we at Skidmore College? What is distinctive about us? What are the things that make us such a special place? In recent years, we have asked these questions so we can prioritize what is most essential and defining to our continued thriving and future growth. This Strategic Plan emerges out of that shared effort, builds upon the achievements of our College, and charts our path forward with confidence into the 2030s and beyond.

We are one of the great liberal arts colleges in the nation, with a concept of the liberal arts education that distinguishes us from all other schools. Since our founding in 1903 by Lucy Skidmore Scribner as “The Young Women’s Industrial Club,” we have emphasized **an education that is both ideal and practical**, as evoked by our long-standing credo of educating both “**the mind and the hand.**” The result is an overarching educational experience that produces lifelong learners, educates the mind and develops character, and prepares students for thriving careers in which they successfully compete and flourish in the global marketplace. In the arts we are pre-eminent, proudly offering broad studio experiences, a music curriculum and facilities of professional caliber, and comprehensive programs in the visual and creative arts. Our humanities and social science programs offer transformative experiences in humanistic and social inquiry and understanding, skills that have never been more vital. With the completion of the Billie Tisch Center for Integrated Sciences, we offer state-of-the-art science teaching and research facilities to match our superb STEM curriculum. And, unique among the great liberal arts colleges, we provide programs in professional preparation such as management and business, arts administration, social work, education, entrepreneurship, and more. **This is the model for the liberal arts education for the 21st century.** Continuing and growing that education is the heart and soul of this Strategic Plan.

Our beautiful campus expresses and embodies this education. At Skidmore, we don’t just build “buildings”—we build *concepts*. **We take concepts of teaching and learning and we give them material form.** The Zankel Music Center is a *concept* of a conservatory-level music facility supporting the centrality of music to the human experience. The Tang Teaching Museum is a *concept* of teaching the richness and plenitude of the human experience through the medium of art. The Billie Tisch Center for Integrated Sciences is a *concept* of integrated and interdisciplinary science education and research. And our newest complex, the McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center, is the *concept* of holistic health and wellness supporting our entire campus community. In this Plan, we point to similar concepts on our horizon, such as **the residential student experience** and the **teaching and learning spaces** suited for the dynamic educational needs of the 21st century, as well as our vital connectivity with the Saratoga Springs community and culture as a key partner in our enterprise.

Our Plan emerges in **a time of significant headwinds in U.S. higher education.** This is why one of the Plan’s six Foundations emphasizes maintaining financial equilibrium in a time of great challenge and competition. All the great liberal arts colleges seek to attract brilliant, talented, ambitious students to their campus for the life-changing education they offer. This is an intensive

and highly personalized educational model: it is a high-contact, high-technology, constantly-evolving industry that depends on an extremely educated professoriate. Such a model is decidedly costly to provide. This Plan is simultaneously aspirational and realistic in its goals. We will support existing strengths and make possible new efforts, knowing that to do so will require us to downsize other areas of less strategic importance and to explore ways to reallocate resources to our top priorities. This is essential to sound institutional planning: **in a time of constraint and challenge, clear institutional priorities and strategic direction are most imperative.**

At Skidmore, the value of our education consists in its most defining characteristics: **a curriculum** that is unique among the great liberal arts colleges in both breadth and focus; an educational mission that, from our founding, has focused on **both thinking and doing**, as well as on forming character (as Emerson once remarked, “the great [person] will be fit to live as well as to think”); and **our signature emphasis on creativity** — expressed in our defining motto, *Creative Thought Matters*, which animates every aspect of the College. This Plan is committed to continuing to emphasize and grow these qualities, as we draw the best and brightest to our campus for an educational experience that is second to none in its total impact and lifelong value.

The Plan evolved over a four-year period of collaborative and transparent institutional study and planning, beginning with our Campus Master Plan project that describes and prioritizes the array of needs and opportunities on our physical campus. We then embarked on the Visions and Values project, a two-year community-wide conversation that asked, “What is essential to the Skidmore educational experience? What are the values that most define our College? What are the things that, if you took them away, would mean we were somehow no longer Skidmore?” Three defining values emerged: **creativity, curiosity, and caring**; and three defining commitments: **close student-faculty interactions, the embrace of creativity, and the importance of exploration and innovation**. These values and commitments inform every sentence in this Strategic Plan.

The formal Strategic Planning process began in the fall of 2023 and concludes in the spring of 2025, when the Board will consider the finished plan for approval. The process has involved every segment of our community: students, faculty, staff, President’s Cabinet, alumni, the Board, and former trustees. The Institutional Policy and Planning Committee in particular took a leading role in discussing and assessing the inputs from our community.¹ Throughout the process, a series of principles emerged to guide the work:

- Emphasize what will do **the most good for the most people**.
- Aim for **the real and impactful** — avoid the merely symbolic.
- Require **prudent stewardship** — where will we choose to put our precious dollars?
- Create a **people-centered Plan**.
- Focus on **the present and the future** — address current needs and the next quarter century.
- Build on **our signature strengths**, to maintain and grow what we already do so well (as opposed to seeking the next bright, shiny thing).

¹ Full details of the Plan, the process and timing, and the many artifacts, documents, and inputs may be viewed at <https://www.skidmore.edu/2030/index.php>.

- Avoid **open-ended and undefined commitments** that could divert College resources from our top priorities.

This Strategic Plan is tightly focused, charting a five-year course to enable our nimble responsiveness to the rapid pace of change and challenge, while articulating the essential principles to which Skidmore is committed. The Plan is built upon **six strategic Foundations** that will form the pathway for the College's growth and direction in the years to follow. **These Foundations bespeak the principles that guide the Skidmore education, the characteristics that define us and inspire us, and the vision that animates our wonderful college:**

- our creative academic excellence;
- the transformative student experience;
- the value of sustainability and environmental stewardship;
- the essential people, practices, and programs that constitute our sense of an inclusive community;
- the commitment to making this education accessible to all who seek its challenge, regardless of their financial circumstances;
- and the necessity of prudent financial stewardship to guarantee the ongoing quality of our college for centuries to come.

Each Foundation is of equal importance and depends upon the others: there is no hierarchy to the six as presented here, though leading with academic excellence and the student experience does seem appropriate for Skidmore's mission.

In the pages that follow, we clearly state each Foundation in a paragraph that expresses the vision behind that Foundation — the “why,” or its “reason for being,” as one colleague aptly voiced in our feedback sessions. We then share two to four aspirational themes or goals that follow from this vision and that point to the specific initiatives, programs, and projects that will follow from that goal. (A few initiatives appear in more than one Foundation, signifying both their significance and also their purchase on more than one area of the Plan.) The aim is to be both suggestive and specific, aspirational as well as tactical. **A Strategic Plan is only as good as its execution**, and each year to follow, we will use our **annual Strategic Action Agenda**, our institutional planning structures and bodies, and our College leadership to determine how that year's efforts and specific undertakings will align with and fulfill the Plan; each year will conclude **with an assessment of progress toward the goals of the Plan**.

The Six Strategic Foundations to Guide Skidmore's Future

Foundation 1: Creativity and Academic Excellence: Advancing the Skidmore Difference

The Skidmore curriculum is our greatest strength and differentiator: a remarkable combination of the traditional humanities, arts, and sciences, with an abiding strength in the arts, alongside an array of pre-professional programs, all woven together with our emphasis on creativity and interdisciplinarity that stands as the paradigm for the 21st-century liberal arts education. We are committed to preserving and strengthening this educational model, by focusing on **faculty development and support as flourishing teacher-scholar-citizens**; on creative teaching and

teaching support programs; on high-impact, experiential opportunities for our students; on new or expanded curricular initiatives; and on the spaces, structures, programs, and principles that will continue to make the Skidmore education possible for generations of students to come.

1. Renewed Focus on Faculty Development as Creative and Innovative Teacher-Scholars.

- Convene a collaborative exploration of the most meaningful areas of support for faculty as creative teacher-scholars across the entire arc of the faculty career. This might include such elements as research travel, collaborative projects, mid-career growth, and more. We will seek to enhance resources for faculty development in the most meaningful areas of scholarly and creative endeavors.
- Enhance support for innovative, creative, and interdisciplinary teaching and the exploration/creation of new pedagogies. This could include existing innovative programs such as MDOCS, the Tang, and Entrepreneurship, as well as other potential new directions.
- Enhance support for creative high-impact opportunities for our students, including collaborative research, internships, experiential learning, and civic and community engagement.
- Explore new alignments, synergies, and spaces to foster greater collaboration in our existing areas of teaching and learning support, such as Learning Experience Design and Digital Scholarship (LEDS), the Center for Leadership in Teaching and Learning, the IdeaLab, the Writing Center, Lucy Scribner Library, and the Tang Teaching Museum.

2. Support for Innovative and Interdisciplinary Curricular Efforts, Spaces, and Projects.

- Advance the Campus Master Plan recommendation regarding the Tisch Learning Center for renovated teaching spaces, co-curricular spaces, and faculty offices, and pursue needed renovations to teaching and social spaces in Palamontain and Bolton halls.
- Continue our commitment to the vitality of the humanities, including support for the Humanistic Inquiry Symposium.
- Strengthen the collaborations and partnerships between the Career Development Center and academic programs, departments, and faculty advising.
- Develop planning for the Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery to ensure that its facilities and programming meet current institutional and student needs and are also adaptable to future priorities.
- Build intentional support for faculty and students with respect to the use/adoption of generative artificial intelligence, including improving strategy and community education to support ethical and efficient use of generative AI and other technologies in the classroom and the College.

3. Enhanced and Sustainable Support for the Skidmore Curriculum.

- Seek additional resources to bolster our commitment to the core curriculum through curricular and co-curricular support for the First-Year Experience, the Bridge Experience, and the Senior Coda.
- Cultivate structures, resources, and programming to strengthen our connection with the Saratoga Springs city and region where we study, live, work, and serve by supporting civic engagement and community-based and experiential teaching, learning, and scholarship.

- Continue and strengthen our emphasis on the essential nature of academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression as an institutional and academic priority, foundational to the mission of the College.
- Explore programs and initiatives in support of new literacies vital for understanding and engaging the challenges of the 21st century, including such areas as global and environmental literacy, in both curricular and co-curricular areas.

Foundation 2: Creative Thought in Action: The Skidmore Student Experience

The student residential experience is central to the Skidmore mission. Our students live, study, create, learn, compete, eat, work, and play on our campus, where they build communities and form lifelong friendships. Student spaces that support and provide the outside-the-classroom learning environment are vital to a rich student experience. **We will reconceive and renovate the residence halls, Case Center, and other key student spaces** to make the student experience as fulfilling and engaging as possible, and to support programs for inclusive engagement, learning, and development. We will also prioritize the vital sphere of career design and preparation for thriving careers in the global marketplace for every Skidmore student. We want the Skidmore student experience to provide *four unforgettable years* at Skidmore, an *education that is life-changing*, and *robust preparation* for fulfilling and successful careers after college. The ultimate goal is *to lead lives of consequence*, rich with learning and creativity, well prepared for the many challenges and opportunities of the global economy and the responsibilities of democratic citizenship.

1. A Student Residential Experience that Promotes and Strengthens the Transformative Skidmore Education.

- Fulfill the Campus Master Plan goal to renovate and enhance the residence halls and Case Center, especially the creation of affinity and community spaces for activity and interaction.
- Work collaboratively with divisional and campus partners to develop and promote a *residential curriculum* that enhances student learning and development.
- Foster creativity, critical thinking, and inclusivity across all facets of the student curricular and cocurricular experience, including the integration of Universal Design for Learning, to create meaningful community-building and multi-faceted learning.

2. The Student Learning Experience and Career Preparation.

- Enhance opportunities for students to pursue high-impact co-curricular learning experiences, including civic and community engagement, summer experiences, internships and practicums, experiential learning, and other life-skill-building programs.
- Enhance support for the Career Development Center, guiding students in career design and curating their educational experiences to develop transferable skills and creative abilities, leveraging our unique Skidmore curriculum and its defining integration of creativity and professional life.
- Cultivate the talent and commitment of the Skidmore Alumni Network in support of student learning, internships, mentoring, and career opportunities.
- Continue our commitment to academic freedom and freedom of speech and expression across our campus and in all our programming and engagement, prioritizing mutual

respect, constructive debate, and finding common ground as central to the liberal arts education and a community that listens with an open mind and respect for different perspectives.

3. A Community and Culture of Holistic Health and Well-Being to Empower and Sustain All Members of the Skidmore Community.

- Build on and continue to develop the McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center as a central resource hub for education and programming for fitness, mental and physical health, counseling services, and wellness.
- Continue to support the Division III student-athlete model, and develop Athletics planning to ensure that facilities and programming meet current institutional and student needs and are also adaptable to future priorities.
- Communicate clear pathways for faculty, staff, and students to participate in meaningful cross-cultural engagement, community-building, and celebration of traditions that foster a sense of an inclusive and welcoming community.

Foundation 3: Supporting the Opportunities of a Skidmore Education

We are committed to making the Skidmore education possible for every eager and talented student who seeks its challenge. Many of our top academic applicants require financial aid to attend Skidmore; additional financial aid will be necessary to enable more outstanding students to attend.

Increasing our endowment dedicated to student financial aid in order to make this life-changing education increasingly available is seminal to Skidmore's future success. We will continue to make Skidmore accessible to our many talented and ambitious future applicants, continue (and grow) our excellence and standing as a vibrant intellectual community, and sustain the financial health of the College in perpetuity. This ambitious approach to the challenges facing higher education in this moment is our commitment to the future of our College.

1. Make the Skidmore Education Available and Possible for Every Eager Student Who Seeks the Challenge.

- Increase the endowment dedicated to financial aid significantly over the next decade and increase tuition assistance to cultivate and enhance academic excellence.
- Expand our geographic reach and enrollment markets to attract more top students from the entire nation as well as international students to Skidmore.
- Grow support for high-impact student experiences such as partnered research with faculty, internships and practicums, creative projects, global learning, and career preparation, and ensure they are available to all students.

2. Creative Futures: The Campaign for Skidmore

- Embark upon an aspirational Campaign — by far the largest in Skidmore's history — with the goal of increasing the endowment for financial aid at its center.
- Enhance engagement with the thousands of dedicated Skidmore alumni, a vital component of our support for our students and for the overall Skidmore enterprise.
- Increase our focus on major gift cultivation, especially for financial aid and endowed scholarship goals.

3. Tell the Many Stories of Skidmore.

- Expand and strengthen Skidmore’s distinctive brand, embodied in *Creative Thought Matters*, an ethos that is bold, inspiring, unique among our peer and aspirant schools, and most especially, the heartbeat of the liberal arts education required for the 21st century.
- Tell the compelling stories of Skidmore: academic excellence, unique offerings of interdisciplinary and experiential learning, wide-ranging opportunities and professional preparation, the student experience, caring community, and especially the creative spark that runs through all of our academic, athletic, and co-curricular endeavors.
- Demonstrate the positive outcomes — career and professional success, thought leadership, global stewardship, engaged citizenship, lifelong learning — that result from a Skidmore education.

Foundation 4: Building the Inclusive Community

It is a fundamental truth of education that we learn from difference. **At Skidmore, we value the diversity that is foundational to all learning and that is vital to prepare our students to thrive and lead in the complex and many-cultured world of the global 21st century.** One of Skidmore’s defining values is that we are *a community of care*, in which all perspectives, identities, and expressions are welcomed into a creative experience of learning and dialogue. This has long been a feature of Skidmore’s strategic planning: the Strategic Plan of 2005 set the goal of “developing intercultural understanding and global awareness,” and the Plan of 2015 emphasized “well-being” as central to sustaining “a creative, inclusive, and safe community” — aspirations that continue to shape our work today. Over the years, our vision remains steadfast: to cultivate a community that reflects the pluralism of the nation and the world, that is inclusive and welcoming, in which all can find their place and feel this community is theirs. Building this community of care means supporting the *people* who value our shared humanity, the *practices* that sustain our inclusive community, and the *programs* that bring our campus together in common purpose.

1. Our People: Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition.

- Prioritize recruitment and retention strategies for students, staff, and faculty, including increased financial aid for students, career pathways for staff, and equitable promotion and tenure processes for faculty.
- Enhance educational and recognition programs and professional development opportunities for all employees, including student workers, to be able to grow and excel in their work.
- Support and strengthen our employee and student resource and affinity groups, and create a demographics dashboard to chart our progress toward an ever more inclusive community.

2. Our Practices: Cultivate an Inclusive Campus Climate.

- Regularly assess and refine campus policies, procedures, and initiatives to foster an environment of respect and inclusion for all persons and perspectives, including clear accountability measures to ensure that practices align with institutional values.
- Enhance the College’s equal opportunity policies and practices to support an environment that responds promptly and effectively to concerns of bias, discrimination, and harassment.
- Identify, evaluate, and prioritize accessibility improvements across campus to our existing facilities and technologies, including exploring Universal Design principles, and

emphasize accessibility goals in all new construction and significant renovation projects, in accord with our commitment to a welcoming, navigable campus experience for all.

3. Our Programs and Structures.

- Expand our programs and resource our offices to foster connection, cultural competency, and global literacy and promote personal and collective growth.
- Establish mechanisms for feedback, evaluation, and follow-through on inclusion initiatives to demonstrate the institution's commitment and progress.
- Create a concrete organizational structure that is clear to the campus community to illustrate our commitment to and progress on our People, Practices, and Programs model.

4. Our Interconnectedness to Our Past and Present.

- Create opportunities for meaningful dialogue with internal and external constituencies and communities regarding Skidmore's institutional history, including the establishment of an AAC&U truth, racial healing, and transformation (TRHT) project.
- Develop a Board-approved formal land acknowledgement statement, in collaboration with tribal leaders and other community institutions, to honor Indigenous histories and continued stewardship of our campus.

Foundation 5: Sustaining our Environmental Future

Environmental sustainability is one of the defining issues of the current generation of students. As an institution of higher learning, **Skidmore is committed to education and responsible action, within the limits of our resources, toward environmental sustainability and climate stewardship.** In alignment with the global scientific consensus, we will support climate action and renewable energy efforts, a robust building and renovation policy, continued waste reduction and sustainable food practices, and the establishment of sustainability principles across the curriculum. These efforts will enhance Skidmore's already strong standing as a national higher education leader in sustainability education and operations.

1. Teaching and Learning: "Sustainability Literacy."

- Prioritize teaching and learning relative to sustainable practices — "sustainability literacy" — for our entire campus community, to foster an engaged and informed citizenry. This will be an interdisciplinary approach to integrate academics, co-curricular activities, community outreach, and operations.
- Explore a faculty sustainability-focused community of practice and encourage increasing sustainability in the curriculum, including consideration of a sustainability learning outcome.
- Explore student-centered sustainability learning opportunities, such as a community-based sustainability intern program as a high-impact experience.
- Develop communication strategies to share the impact of and enthusiasm for our sustainability efforts.

2. Commitment to Meaningful Climate Action.

- Continue our sustainable building and renovation policy, including LEED-certified status for all major new construction.
- Commit to Skidmore participation in the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's Campus Decarbonization Academy, a cohort-based program offered through collaboration among multiple higher education sustainability organizations.
- Commit to a process to advance holistic decarbonization planning for campus (involving in a collaborative way the perspectives and roles of those charged with financial, operations, and construction responsibilities as well as campus and academic planning).
- Aspire to continued progress in campus energy management, and explore methodologies and practices to track and measure impacts.
- Explore and discuss opportunities for education, recreation, conservation, and stewardship of our campus lands.

Foundation 6: Sustaining Skidmore's Long-Term Financial Future

We are committed to the long-term success of our College, which depends upon the continued prudent stewardship of our resources and maintaining financial equilibrium, in which annual revenues and expenses balance. This enables us to effectively support our students, faculty, staff, and campus infrastructure and meet the needs of future generations of Skidmore students. In an era of challenges in higher education, such prioritization of resources is essential for responsible strategic planning. The coming years will require thoughtful review of all existing programs and tough decisions about what to grow, what to continue, and what to downsize. **We will channel resources toward our highest strategic priorities and reduce support to areas that are less strategic and central to our mission.** Priorities and initiatives evolve over time in any thoughtful organization; redirecting resources from legacy projects to emerging needs is vital to sustaining our core purpose. We will pursue such steps through our appropriate shared governance channels, maintaining a collaborative and transparent approach to develop the annual budget priorities to advance the College's resources and mission.

1. Higher Education Budgeting and Finance Best Practices.

- Practice in a collaborative and transparent way the fundamental budgeting and financial decision processes that lead to and support long-term financial equilibrium.
- Continue the practice of developing long-term financial forecasts, based upon consensus-driven assumptions, and commit to actions that address negative forecast results and preserve future financial flexibility and resiliency.
- Develop a set of key financial and operational metrics and guidelines to help us track our efforts toward achieving and maintaining financial equilibrium.
- Pursue best strategies and practices to optimize net tuition revenue in our enrollment and financial aid management efforts.
- Grow the endowment for need-based financial aid as well as for other key priorities described in this Strategic Plan.

2. Collaborative and Transparent Budgeting Practices.

- Develop in a collaborative and transparent process, in adherence to our commitment to appropriate shared governance, meaningful operational and organizational review. We will compare our operations to peer and aspirant institutions, including new and appropriate technologies and instructional and curricular prioritization, to support the College's commitment to financial equilibrium.
- Continue thoughtful space planning, building on our Campus Master Plan of 2022, to establish prioritization criteria to guide reinvestment in and allocation of resources to our campus facilities and infrastructure.
- Avoid open-ended, time-bound, unquantified commitments that bind the College to revenue limitations or cost commitments that may jeopardize the College's ability to maintain financial equilibrium into the future.

Conclusion: The Boldness of Creative Futures

We are a young institution, just over a century old. Fifty years into our existence, Skidmore made the bold decisions to become a co-educational college and to remove from the downtown Saratoga Springs campus and build a completely new campus on the Woodlawn Estate north of downtown. From such courageous thinking, the College as we know it today has arisen to become one of the top national liberal arts colleges. We are a scrappy school, known for punching above our weight, and our grit and resiliency will continue to stand us in good stead. For as this Plan has adumbrated, we are uniquely positioned for continued excellence to meet the challenges not just of higher education, but of the complex and conflicted 21st century — the world for which we prepare our students to thrive and to lead. At the heart of this Strategic Plan are the people of Skidmore and the creative education that those people make possible. We look to the future, confident that this Plan charts our pathways forward and upward, prioritizing the principles and programs that most define us and toward which we will aspire. The creative future is indeed quite bright at Skidmore.