



Creative Futures: The Skidmore College Strategic Plan 2025-2030
Working Draft, February 4, 2025

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

We are one of the great liberal arts colleges in the nation. When it comes to the arts, we are pre-eminent, boasting a conservatory-level music education and comprehensive offerings in the visual and creative arts. Our humanities and social science programs offer transformative experiences in humanistic 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 science 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. Our signature emphasis is an education that is both ideal and practical, as evoked by our founder, Lucy Skidmore Scribner, who asserted that we would educate both “the mind and the hand.” The result is an overarching educational experience that produces life-long learners, educates the mind and develops character, and prepares students for a life of thriving careers in which they successfully compete and flourish in the global marketplace. This is the model for the 21st-century liberal arts education. 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*, concepts of teaching and learning in material form. The Zankel Music Center is a *concept* of a conservatory-level musical education in a liberal arts context. 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 our newest complex, the McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center, is a *concept* of holistic health and wellness for a dynamic campus community. In this Plan, we point to similar concepts on our horizon, such as a concept of the residential student experience and the concept of academic spaces for the dynamics and demands of the 21st century education.

This is a time of significant headwinds in U.S. higher education. The challenge for all the great liberal arts colleges is to attract brilliant, talented, ambitious young students to their campus for the transformative education they offer. This is an intensive and highly personalized education that, like any high-contact, high-technology, constantly-evolving industry, is costly to provide. At Skidmore, the value of our education consists in its most defining characteristics: a curriculum that is unique among the great liberal arts colleges; 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 superb motto, *Creative Thought Matters*—which pervades every

aspect of the college. Continuing to emphasize and grow these qualities is our highest priority, as we draw the best and brightest to our campus for an educational experience that is second to none in its total impact and life-long value.

This Strategic Plan is focused and compact, charting a five-year course to enable our nimble responsiveness to the changing times and challenges, while articulating the essential principles to which Skidmore is committed. Over the next five years, we will follow a pathway supported by the six foundations elaborated here. These foundations bespeak the highest values of the college: our creative academic excellence; the transformative student experience; the value of sustainability and environmental stewardship; the essential places, persons, and programs that constitute our sense of community and belonging; the commitment to making this education accessible to all who are up to the 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. And at the heart of this strategic plan are the people of Skidmore and the creative education that those people make possible.

The Plan evolved over a four-year period of collaborative and transparent institutional study and planning, beginning with our *Campus Master Plan* project (2021-22) that outlines and prioritizes the array of needs and opportunities in 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?” From this introspective exercise, 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 the 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 its approval. Throughout the highly collaborative process, a series of principles emerged to guide the work:

- 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?
- This will be a *people-centered* plan.
- This plan will focus on the present and the future.
- We will build on our signature strengths, to maintain and grow what we already do so well (as opposed to seeking the next bright shiny thing).
- We will avoid open-ended and undefined commitments that could divert College resources from our top priorities.

The collaborative, transparent process involved every segment of our community: students, faculty, staff, 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. Particular thanks go to Joshua Woodfork, VP for Strategic Planning, who chaired the process, and to Smriti Tiwari, associate professor of Economics, who served as vice-chair of the process. Full details of the plan, the process, and the many artifacts, documents, and inputs may be viewed at <https://www.skidmore.edu/2030/index.php>.

In the descriptions of the Six Foundations that follow, we lay out not just a range of initiatives and goals, but also the principles that guide the Skidmore education, the characteristics that define us and inspire us, and the vision that animates our wonderful college. Each year our annual Strategic Action Agenda will draw from the Plan to help guide our key efforts and projects for that year, as we chart the progress toward achieving the aspirational goals articulated here in the Plan. The future is indeed very bright at Skidmore, and we embark upon our future with confidence.

Foundation 1: Creativity and Academic Excellence: 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 an 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, especially as creative teacher-scholars; on creative teaching and teaching support programs; on the high-impact, transformative experiential opportunities for our students; on new and growing 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 and support 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.
- 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 Support, Center for Leadership in Teaching and Learning, the IdeaLab, the Writing Center, and the Tang Teaching Museum.

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

- Advance the Campus Master Plan recommendation of transforming the Tisch Learning Center with renovated teaching spaces, co-curricular spaces, and faculty offices, and explore needed renovations to teaching and social spaces in Palamountain/Bolton.
- Continue our commitment to the vitality of the Humanities, including support of the Humanistic Inquiry Symposium.
- Review opportunities to sustainably support existing academic programs and pursue new curricular directions.
- Strengthen the collaborations and partnerships between the Career Development Center and Academic Programs, departments, and the culture and tactics of 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 city and region where we study, live, work, and serve by supporting Civic Engagement and community-based teaching, learning, and scholarship.
- Continue our emphasis on 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. Such areas may include global literacy, new technologies and data, digital citizenship, 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, eat, work, and play on our campus, where they build communities and form friendships that last their lifetimes. Student space that supports and provides the outside-the-classroom learning environment is vital to a rich student experience. We will reconceive and renovate the residence halls 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 preparation and workforce readiness for every Skidmore student. We want the Skidmore student to experience *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 fosters and supports the transformative potential of the Skidmore education.

- Fulfill the Campus Master Plan goal to renovate and enhance the residence halls, 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 skill-building programs.
- Enhance support for the Career Development Center, pursuing partnerships with academic departments and professional preparation, leveraging our unique Skidmore curriculum and its natural emphasis on creativity and professional life.
- Continue our commitment to 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 the cultivation of a community that listens with an open mind and respect for different perspectives.

3. Promote a community and culture of holistic health and wellbeing to empower members of the Skidmore community to thrive.

- Build on and continue to develop the McCaffery-Wagman Tennis and Wellness Center as a centralized resource hub for education and programming around fitness, health, and wellness needs.
- 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 connectedness.

Foundation 3: Supporting the Opportunities of a Skidmore Education

We are committed to making the Skidmore Education available and possible for every eager student who is up to the 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. We will continue to make Skidmore accessible to the many talented and brilliant future applicants, continue (and grow) our excellence 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 nothing less than what our College deserves, and we eagerly embrace the opportunity to grow Skidmore's competitive standing and to make our education available to all the creative and curious students who will come to our campus in the years ahead.

1. Make the Skidmore Education Available and Possible for Every Eager Student who is Up to 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 transformative, high-impact student experiences such as partnered research with faculty, internships and practicums, creative projects, global learning, and career preparation.

2. Creative Futures: The Campaign for Skidmore, 2025-2030

- Our College will 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 Skidmore alumni, a vital component of our fund-raising goals.
- Increase our focus on major gift cultivation, especially for the 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, and most especially, unique among our peers and aspirants.
- Tell the compelling story of Skidmore: our academic excellence, our wide-ranging opportunities, our focus on the student experience, and our creative and caring community.
- Share the importance of our unique offerings of interdisciplinary and experiential learning, professional preparation, faculty-student research, global studies opportunities, and AI and technical expertise with an emphasis on 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: A Commitment to our People, Practices, and Programs

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. We will continue to support the People, Practices, and Programs that sustain such a community of care. *Our People* is a commitment to centering on our shared humanity; *our Practices* is a commitment to transforming systems; and *our Programs* is a commitment to meaningful action. This “3P model,” unique to Skidmore, will focus on the tangible elements of difference—which is the foundation of all learning—that make inclusion efforts meaningful, and intertwine them more directly to the lived experiences, systems, and operations of our community.

1. Invest in 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 thrive 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. Enhance 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.
- Evaluate and improve accessibility across campus in compliance with ADA requirements, and explore universal design principles, in accord with our commitment to a welcoming campus experience for all.

3. Expand Programs and Refine Structures.

- Expand our programs to foster connection, cultural competency, 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.
- Strive to adequately resource our offices engaged in People, Practices, and Programs work.

4. Acknowledge our Interconnectedness to our Past and Present.

- Create opportunities for meaningful, transformative 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.

Foundation 5: A Sustainable 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 action. In alignment with the global scientific consensus, we will support climate action and renewable energy efforts, an aspirational building and renovation policy, efforts at continued waste reduction and sustainable food, 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—“sustainability literacy”—for our students, faculty, staff, and entire campus community, to foster an engaged and informed citizenry related to education for sustainable development. 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 constructions.
- 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 planning).
- Aspire to continued progress in campus energy management.
- Explore and discuss opportunities for education, recreation, and conservation on and stewardship of our lands.
- Develop methodologies and practices to track and measure impacts.

Foundation 6: Our Sustainable Long-Term Financial Future

We are committed to the long-term success and thriving of our College, which depends upon the continued prudent stewardship of our resources. We are committed to attaining and maintaining financial equilibrium, in which annual revenues and expenses are balanced. This enables us to effectively support our students, faculty, staff, and campus infrastructure, and to meet the needs of future generations of students at Skidmore. In a time of headwinds and constraints in higher education, such commitments to prudent stewardship and prioritization of our resources is absolutely necessary and a key element in all responsible strategic planning.

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 both 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 see and 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. This includes the strategic commitment of growing the endowment for need-based financial aid.

2. Collaborative and Transparent Budgeting Practices.

- Develop in a collaborative and transparent process, in adherence to our principles and policies of appropriate shared governance, meaningful operational review and organizational redesign, comparing our operations internally as well as externally to peer and aspirant institutions, including new and appropriate technologies and instructional and curricular prioritization, to support the College's 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. This will include our commitments to ongoing sustainable building, renovation, and operations of our campus.
- 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. Identify alternative mechanisms to address the spirit of such commitments while avoiding the financial risk of overcommitment.

DRAFT