

# VISIONS & VALUES: PROJECT REPORT

---

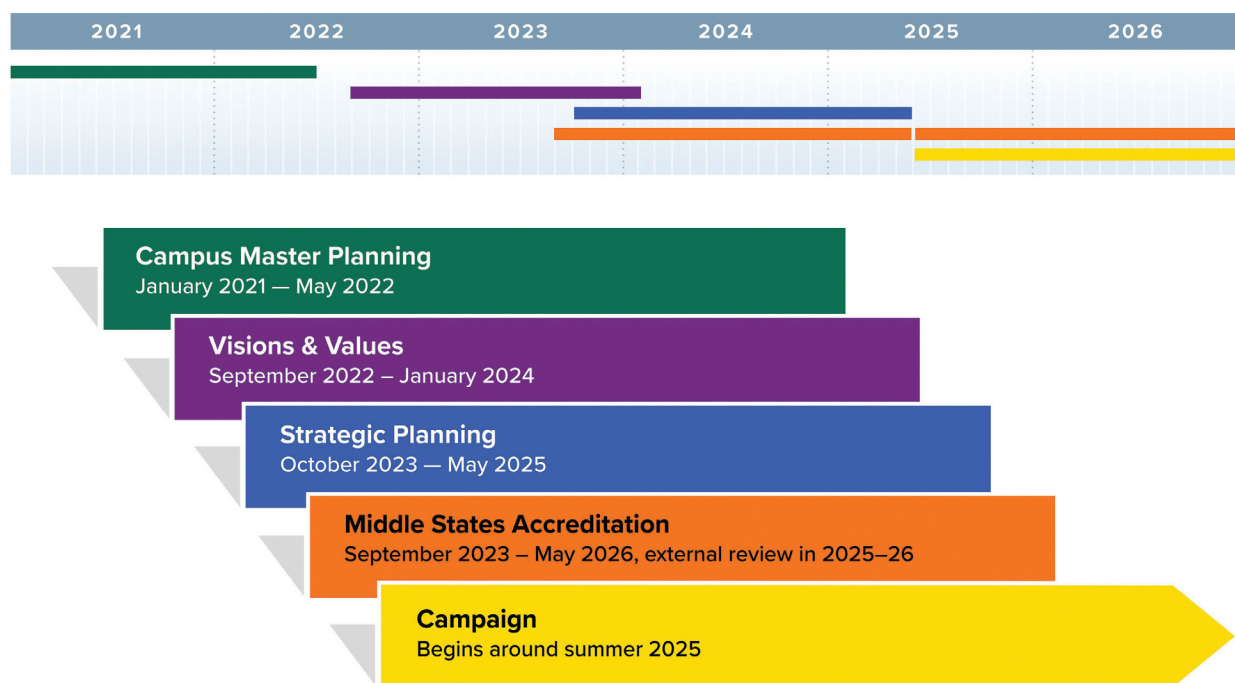
JANUARY 2024

## Planning with a Purpose

Skidmore College is a creative, curious, and caring community that today stands at the crossroads of all that it has achieved and all that it can become.

Always committed to marrying the “hand and mind,” Skidmore is now charting its vision for its second century through a series of major institutional planning efforts including Campus Master Planning, the Visions & Values project, Strategic Planning, Middle States reaccreditation and, eventually, a major campaign.

### INSTITUTIONAL PLANNING TIMELINE



## Defining Our Visions & Values

We began the Visions & Values project by asking ourselves, “What are the values that most define Skidmore? What is essential to who we are and what we do?” To help determine what values define our highest aspirations and, most immediately, will inform the forthcoming strategic planning process, the College embarked on a project designed to engage our community in these high-level questions about what is “signature” about Skidmore – what, if you took it away, would mean we were somehow no longer Skidmore?

Through a series of moderated conversations and participatory opportunities, staff, faculty, and students reflected on Skidmore’s strengths, distinctive features, and what we value most.

## Engaging the Community: Feedback and Validation

### FALL 2022 – SPRING 2023

- Conversation-based group sessions are held, engaging several hundred campus constituents at IPPC, staff, faculty, Board, and SGA meetings.

### SPRING 2023

- All campus community members are invited to provide thoughts and reflections through an online feedback form that includes open-ended questions like those posed during in-person sessions.
- Questions focus on strengths and are designed to be reflective, but also aspirational and forward-looking.

### SUMMER 2023

- All feedback, including notes from in-person sessions, as well as written submissions from more than 50 community members, is compiled and studied.
- Key themes regarding our community's values and our commitments to how we live, work, and learn are identified and distilled.
- Cabinet engages in review of feedback and themes.

### FALL 2023

- Findings (values and commitments that appeared frequently and notably) are validated through a second survey, open to our entire community, designed to confirm what most resonates with our community's own sense of Skidmore.
- The survey is completed by 471 respondents – distributed fairly evenly across faculty (24%), staff (37%), and students (31%) with a small subset of retirees (4%) and board members (4%) responding as well.
- President Conner presents a high-level overview of results at faculty and staff meetings, noting major themes, key takeaways, and a commitment to share more in the near future.

## What We Learned: Results

### COMMUNITY FEEDBACK – A SUMMARY

Throughout this project, three overarching themes emerged as essential to Skidmore: our **people**, our **places and spaces**, and the **creativity** that pervades every part of the institution.

Our community shared that they believed Skidmore's "creating areas," such as the Tang Teaching Museum & Art Gallery and the Arthur Zankel Music Center, are some of **"the best among small liberal arts colleges."** They also noted that our communal gathering spaces are valued for how they support our pursuit of community-building and holistic well-being.

They talked about how, when we are at our best, everyone has a voice and role that is valued. Others expounded upon the crucial role our talented faculty play in supporting the growth of the whole student as a person – **"intellectually, creatively, professionally, and personally"** – in and out of the classroom through close relationships.

Some spoke proudly of the ways in which our community invests in student interests, carving out room for whatever combination of creative and academic endeavors students want to pursue – all part of our **"belief in the beauty and diversity of human achievements."**

As for what makes us distinct, a common theme of a unique and kind community arose: Individuals noted that we are **"eclectic, eccentric, and accepting"** and **"the campus runs on the kindness of its staff, faculty, and students."** Others reinforced that notion, describing how our size fosters close connections, a sense of **"responsibility to one another,"** and begets **"empathy and understanding."**

Responses to questions were sometimes critical of how we fall short of our aspirations, but there was consistent sentiment that, overall, we strive to better ourselves and our community. While all the values and commitments we aspire to may not yet be fully realized, we don't shy away from the challenges inherent in pursuing them or the charge to evolve.

## LIVING OUR VALUES SURVEY

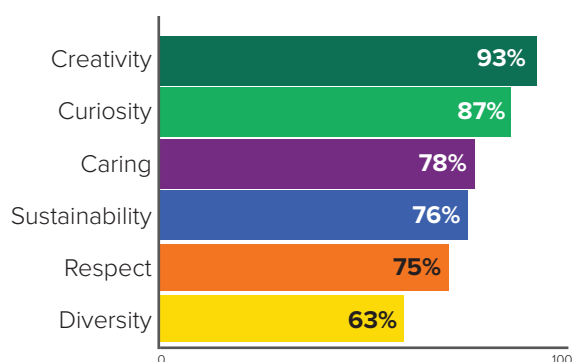
The community was asked to consider and rate six values that emerged during our year-long conversations and from the first survey based on how accurately they felt each represented our community.

### The top three overall values:

- At Skidmore we value ... **Creativity**
- At Skidmore we value ... **Curiosity**
- At Skidmore we value ... **Caring**

### Living Our Values

% of people who said "sounds a lot like us" or "sounds pretty much like us"



\*The top two values shared across all three primary constituent groups (faculty, staff, and students) were: Creativity and Curiosity.

\*\*Across all values, very few people (0-2%) rated them as "this isn't who we are."

Each of the values above consistently rose to the top in conversations and in survey results, indicating they are all valued by our community. However, some values saw less consensus around the degree to which they "sound like us." We might consider that, for those values, respondents may have felt we are not living or exemplifying them as fully as we might wish to.

Far from discouraging, these results illuminate areas that might be carefully interrogated during the strategic planning process, with planners considering how to bolster or support these values or commitments – perhaps by leveraging those in which we already excel or find strength. Strategic Planning will look not just at strengths, values, and aspirations, but at critical perspectives, where we fall short, and the obstacles to attaining what we seek.

## SHAPING OUR VISIONS SURVEY

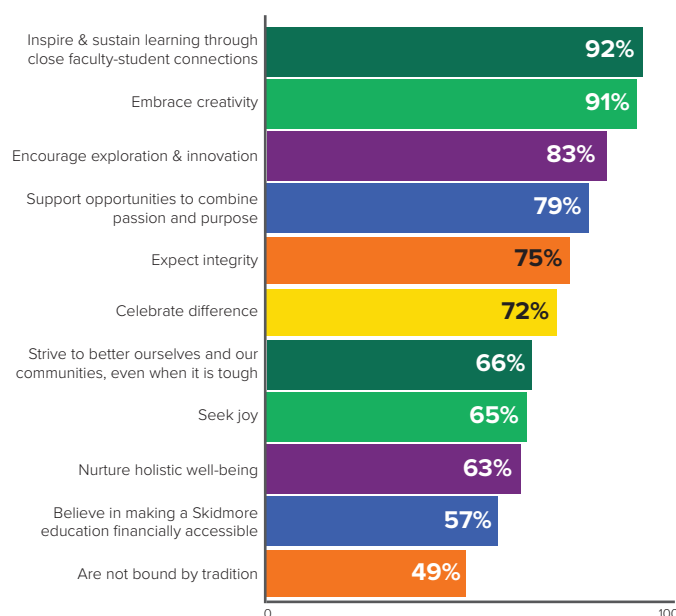
The community was asked to consider and rate eleven community commitments that emerged as themes during our year-long conversations and from the first survey based on how accurately they felt each represented our community.

### The top three overall commitments:

- At Skidmore we ... **inspire and sustain learning through close faculty-student connections**
- At Skidmore we ... **embrace creativity**
- At Skidmore we ... **encourage exploration and innovation**

### Shaping Our Visions

% of people who said "sounds a lot like us" or "sounds pretty much like us"



\*The top two commitments shared by all three primary constituent groups (faculty, staff, and students) were: Inspire and sustain learning through close faculty-student connections and embrace creativity.

\*\*Across all commitments, very few people (0-4%) rated them as "this isn't who we are."

## A Shared Ethos

The written feedback, conversation notes, meeting minutes, and survey results collected and compiled over 16 months shaped the summary below of the values and ideals our community has said they want carried forward.

Though not exhaustive, as nothing that exists within a complex environment ever fully can be, the proposition that follows is a robust reflection of us, our aspirations, and what we know to be essential to retain and reinforce as we endeavor forward in our daily work and in our strategic planning efforts.

### SKIDMORE COLLEGE VISIONS AND VALUES:

At Skidmore, we integrate our values into how we live, work, compete, and study and into the spaces and places we inhabit as we strive to inspire learning, build community, and support the holistic well-being and evolution of our College and of every individual here.

#### CREATIVITY

At Skidmore, **Creative Thought Matters**. In the classroom, on the stage, in the workplace, in the lab, on the field, or away from campus, our passion for innovation, entrepreneurship, and imagination elevates all we do.

#### CURIOSITY

We ask: “Why?”, “Why not?”, and “What if?” to better understand our world – and ourselves. Exploration is encouraged and inspires customized learning experiences. We know that “play” is essential to productivity.

#### CARING

We are a community that cares for each other and considers the broader impacts of our decisions and our actions. Here, our connections to one another support and sustain our individual and collective success.

#### DIVERSITY

We support diversity in all its many facets and actively cultivate inclusion, accessibility, acceptance, understanding, and belonging.

#### RESPECT

We recognize our unique differences – and the freedom to follow our own paths. When necessary, we agree to disagree, but integrity, civility, and kindness are always expected.

#### SUSTAINABILITY

We are stewards, not only of our environment, but also of our institution, and we are responsible for making careful choices to maintain both for the future.

## What’s Next? Informing the Strategic Process

The Visions & Values project and its results provide a foundational consensus about what we hold most dear at Skidmore — what our defining values are. The results also build upon what we learned during the Campus Master Planning Process, which examined how the physical spaces on campus could reflect our priorities. Now, we can consider how our values and commitments align with the guiding principles of the Campus Master Plan and, being attentive to those synergies, further refine our focus.

With clarity and affirmation, our values will anchor the Strategic Planning process; strategy and strategic goals that are rooted in our shared values respect our community as the greatest source of potential, energy, and knowledge essential to realizing them.

Our vision and our set of values will also serve as our compass — marking the path forward, helping us set goals oriented toward evolving our unique liberal arts experience, and aiding us in developing plans and tactics that leverage the resources at our disposal to the ultimate benefit of our students and the fulfillment of our mission.