



individuals develop these skills and frames of mind to take control over their own learning. Achieving this goal requires that learners experience the broad disciplinary and interdisciplinary character of knowledge – the questions, methods, concepts and theories that are part of inquiry in the various disciplines. The term ‘liberal arts’ denotes an education that frees individuals from the grip of received opinion, unchallenged assumptions, and prejudices through the development of critical and self-critical faculties, and motivates students to become informed, discerning, caring, and creative individuals for whom ideas really matter. It embraces individual and collaborative methods and processes of learning and knowing within a disciplinary and interdisciplinary context. In short, the liberal education necessarily and fundamentally transforms the students’ relation to themselves and modulates the ways they engage the world.

Such an education not only cultivates the best in mind and spirit but attends with equal vigor to the lives that all of us lead beyond the academy. A culture of inquiry and of life-long learning, and an education that regularly tests ideas, explores their relationships to actual phenomena, and fuses theory with praxis, constitutes the best preparation for a fulfilling personal and career life. It prepares them to comprehend local and global concerns, respect diverse human cultures, explore alternatives, solve problems, make wise choices—and to care about making a difference. There is no more prudent investment than in the community of scholars and learners that is the liberal arts institution.

### ***Skidmore’s Academic Culture: A Community of Scholars and Learners***

Skidmore’s ambition to elevate itself to stand among the premier liberal arts colleges is an ambitious but achievable one, requiring a three-part strategy to foster a community acculturated to scholarship and learning:

- First, the College must invest in the development and numbers of the faculty serving the role of teacher-scholar.
- Second, the College must enhance the quality as well as the diversity of the students’ commitment to their academic experience as individual and collaborative learners.
- Third, it must clarify and enhance its commitment to the curriculum both in its rich disciplinary structure and in its distinctively interdisciplinary character.

The College recognizes that these three areas represent intrinsically related objectives, for the academic culture of the College constitutes an organic intellectual body in which each of the academic foci is mindful of the others and contributes to each other’s well-being. Indeed, it is these organic and synergistic components of Skidmore College that inform its essential nature as a *Community of Scholars and Learners*.

### ***The Teacher-Scholar***

It is fair to say that every faculty member at Skidmore College has been drawn to academic pursuits as the result of a passionate commitment to a life-long scholarly engagement in his or her chosen field of study. Their decisions to pursue the life of an academic in a liberal arts

*interests, which inform their teaching and contribute, in the largest sense, to the advancement of learning.”* Scholarly engagement is necessary for maintaining a flexible and focused mind, is the catalyst whereby one flourishes in one’s discipline-centered career, discovers new interdisciplinary horizons of understanding, and becomes and remains an inspired teacher.

Achieving the goals we propose requires a major institutional commitment to support faculty as they pursue active research programs, engage effectively with students both in the classroom and outside as academic advisors and mentors, and explore interdisciplinary opportunities with their colleagues. To inspire and sustain the animating force at the heart of a life of learning requires time as well, time for faculty to engage profoundly with their objects of study and to connect effectively with their students. To this end a re-balancing of the faculty workload is imperative. Achieving this elevation of the teacher-scholar model to the level of the top-tier liberal arts institutions will require a reduction in class enrollments and in the number of courses that each faculty member teaches, a harder look at the burgeoning number of excellent programs to which we commit ourselves, and the hiring of a number of new faculty. Moreover, our ability to attract and retain the best faculty hinges upon the institution’s commitment to these principles. Without these steps, the faculty’s scholarly ambitions, their aspirations for pedagogical innovation, and their exuberance for teaching and guiding students will have been diminished, inhibiting our ability to attain the goals to which we aspire.

We must have a clear sense, moreover, of the sort of person we hope to make a part of the faculty. There must be a commitment of the academic community to seek out individuals who are devoted to their disciplines and the scholarly process, who take joy in teaching and in collaborating with students, who are eager to expand their intellectual and pedagogical horizons beyond their own specialties, who delight in shared academic endeavors with colleagues within the department and across the disciplines, and who want to expand interdisciplinary approaches to questions and problems. These are the faculty who truly live the ideals of a liberal arts environment.

The quality of the Skidmore faculty has evolved rapidly and dramatically in the last 25 years. Responding to its sense of rising professional standards, in 1992 the faculty made the teacher-scholar—the highest and most demanding model of academic excellence—the standard by which to measure itself in hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. The successful implementation of this model represents one of the central distinctions between the top liberal arts colleges and those that fall short of this standard. As a result of this decision, Skidmore has built a faculty many of whose members have achieved national and international standing, hold offices in national and international professional organizations, and have garnered prestigious awards and grants. If given the time and opportunity to develop their potential, the faculty will conduct the research, produce the works and pedagogies, and graduate the students that will raise markedly Skidmore’s standing among other top liberal arts colleges. The proposed increase in the number of faculty will accelerate this rise in standing, provide additional faculty to strengthen our existing disciplines and programs, and help secure our leadership in interdisciplinary education.

### ***The Student-Scholar***

Our goal is to enhance a culture in which faculty and students share the same level of excitement and energy for a rigorous course of study. As students shoulder increased responsibility for shaping their education, they will learn to handle complexity and the co-existence of differences and contradictions in a world that is internationally sophisticated, culturally diverse, and technically and scientifically advanced. While the achievement of excellence in teaching, learning, scholarship, and academic standards and expectations is facilitated primarily by the faculty, our reaching these goals also requires a student culture of honorable, active, and intelligent engagement in the intellectual and co-curricular life of the

institution. The vestiges of a culture of comfort and of getting by must be supplanted by students' dedication to the rewarding work of active learning, scholarship, and creative engagement.

integrations of Skidmore's founding efforts tell a noble history. The worth of such principles, however, is evidenced not so much in their original intent but in the vitality of their evolution over nearly a century of Skidmore successes. In our current model of higher education, theoretical and applied learning are conjoint as praxis and concept move along the same educational pathway. Our traditional liberal arts and professional programs do not merely co-exist; rather, they share a common vision, complement one another's methodologies and paradigms, and thrive on their partnership in educating life-long learners. In their interrogation of underlying assumptions, attention to critical thinking skills, and encouragement of students toward a broad and responsible understanding of human histories and cultures, all of the disciplines at Skidmore belong among the liberal and liberating arts.

Skidmore's fruitful integration of disciplines that, in many other institutions, occupy quite separate academic divisions, suggests why we were able to move earlier and more successfully than most colleges and universities toward a formal program of interdisciplinary education. While we have often debated, over the past thirty years, the proper balance between discipline-centered and interdisciplinary studies, we have generally understood that a healthy disciplinary infrastructure was the solid base out of which interdisciplinary studies grow, and we have therefore experienced interdisciplinarity as the flowering of healthy disciplinary growth, as an enrichment and strengthening of disciplinary and collaborative vigor, not as a competing force. This commitment is evidenced clearly in, for example, the genesis of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary programs, the extensive inclusion of interdisciplinary perspectives and scholarship within the individual academic disciplines, in college-wide participation in programs such as Liberal Studies and International Affairs, and in the recent creation of the Tang Museum. There are other initiatives which should be given careful consideration and encouragement, and CEPP should be encouraged to develop a framework for such deliberations.

Especially important for Skidmore's long-term plans for excellence is that it include, we submit, an even stronger commitment to interdisciplinarity within and across the disciplines. Our goal in the next decade is for the faculty to clarify its commitment to discipline-based and interdisciplinary programs. We all agree that robust interdisciplinary endeavors are an essential part of Skidmore's identity, and that the lives we live cannot be parsed easily into disciplinary

upon graduation. The curriculum should develop and require a faculty culture in which discipline-based research and teaching are of the highest caliber, in which faculty commitments to interdisciplinary education are strong and creative, and which encourages faculty regularly to share teaching and research insights, and inspires truly interdisciplinary education. In equal measure the curriculum of our future should be directed to student-scholars who want to invest their best energies in an exciting and demanding course of study, develop the foundational skills and perspectives needed for life-long-learning, and work in creative partnership with faculty in interdisciplinary and disciplinary endeavors.

### ***Goals and Their Strategies***

Skidmore's vision of taking its place among the premier liberal arts colleges is an ambitious but achievable one; it requires a tripartite strategy: first, investing in the development of the faculty as teacher-scholars; second, strengthening the curriculum both in its existing disciplinary structure as well as specially supporting the distinctively interdisciplinary vision of the curriculum; and third, enhancing the quality of the students' academic experience as



- More intensive learning experience.
- Closer contact between teacher and students, and students amongst themselves.
- Enables attention to writing in the curriculum where larger classes don't.
- More feasible to apply meaningfully academic standards and expectations.

#### ◆ **Center for Interdisciplinary Studies**

Rationale: Although there are a number of different interdisciplinary programs, currently the College has no body dedicated to the planning, development and oversight of interdepartmental and interdisciplinary programs and initiatives. If Skidmore is to engage in interdisciplinary work in a proactive and deliberate manner, a Center should be established that would coordinate and cultivate interdisciplinary work among faculty and students. Life-long learners must be integrative, synthetic thinkers, and the Center would provide institutional and curricular support to that end. It would:

- Assist in the development of interdisciplinary initiatives.
- Improve the coordination of existing interdisciplinary curricular and co-curricular activities
- Provide resources for faculty and students working on interdisciplinary projects
- Promote the development of interdisciplinary courses.
- Maintain and provide information about faculty expertise
- Assist in the integration of disciplinary activities into the larger College community
- Promote dialogue and activities across disciplines.
- Promote the integration of curricular and extra-curricular activities (internships, community service, etc.)

#### *Second Priority Initiatives and Rationales*

##### ◆ **Diversity**

Rationale: Just as one of Skidmore's great historical strengths has been the variety of its programs, so the many ways in which diversity can be understood and promoted are essential to the richest learning environment. Specifically,

- Skidmore must aspire to building a talented and diverse faculty – racial, socio-economic, gender, and national differences must be prized as a strength to the learning com , and ntedni –



### ◆ Increase Sabbatical Support

Rationale: Sabbaticals are the most precious of research opportunities that make possible the pursuit and completion of projects that would be impossible without an extended period of time free of other academic obligations. There are several different ways to increase sabbatical support.

- A) A full year at 80% of full salary would make a full-year sabbatical possible for many for whom it is impossible.
- B) Accelerating sabbaticals -- to every sixth or fifth year -- would increase the productivity of faculty, by shortening the now relatively long period of time between sabbaticals
- C) A half-year sabbatical every three years, and a full year sabbatical every sixth year would enable faculty to integrate more effectively the opportunities presented by sabbaticals in to an ongoing program of research, creative projects, and pedagogical innovation, thereby giving rise to greater productivity of faculty.

### ◆ Increased Library Funds

Rationale: The library is the primary resource for independent, self-directed learning, and it must be equipped to provide for the daily, 'on-demand' needs of teacher and student scholars. Network and interlibrary services are a boon to its patrons, but to serve its community well, the library must increase its material holdings and subscriptions to electronic databases.

### ◆ Increase Travel Funds

Rationale: The levels of funding for attending professional conferences having decreased in the last 15 years and the costs have increased; it is penny wise and pound foolish not to support faculty in their regional, national, and international engagements. Attendance at such meetings is important not only for the development of the faculty, but is an important opportunity to raise Skidmore's public profile. The equivalent of support for attending two conferences a year is a reasonable goal.

### ◆ Establish Visiting Fellowships

Rationale: A group of short term (1-3 years) Fellowships would supplement the faculty and maintain curricular and administrative flexibility. Specifically, these would

- Enhance individual programs
- Enable 'targeting' of general education and LS programs
- Establish Links between programs
- Promote faculty diversity
- Provide a 'testing ground' for program development

### ◆ Increase Departmental Discretionary Funds

Rationale: The Departments would be better able to take advantage of unexpected opportunities and be responsive to faculty and students needs.

### ◆ Establish a Hosting Fund to Bring Professional Academic Conferences/events to Campus

