

PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

Presented by:

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Supporting Documents

The 2011–2012 Skidmore Catalog is online at: <http://catalog.skidmore.edu/>.

Additional supporting documents referenced in the text are on the enclosed compact disc.

SKIDMORE COLLEGE PERIODIC REVIEW REPORT

May 2011

Section One: Executive Summary

Skidmore is a highly selective, independent, liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 2,500 men and women from nearly 50 states and 50 countries. With its relatively small size and student-faculty ratio of 9 to 1, the College is a close-knit academic community. Skidmore is known for its faculty of teacher-scholars devoted to the instruction and mentoring of students.

Founded in 1903 by Lucy Skidmore Scribner to meet the educational needs of women in the Saratoga Springs area, Skidmore was chartered as a four-year, liberal arts college in 1922. Throughout the College's hist

The most significant major development and challenge since our 2006 Self-Study has been the economic recession and its impact on our current and future finances. Through the disciplined actions that the College took as part of the budget process, we have been able to reduce the fiscal year 2010–2011 budget by approximately \$12 million annually from the initial projections for 2010–2011. At the same time, we have revisited our *Strategic Plan* in consideration of the changed economic context in which both the College and our students find themselves. This has resulted in both renewed commitments and some new initiatives, described in the narrative below. More than ever before, we have made use of data and assessment results of various kinds in our decision-making processes, as we believe will be clear in this report.

The year 2010–2011 saw a temporary shift in leadership during the sabbatical leave of our President, Philip Glotzbach, from November 1 through April 30. In his

Since 2006, we have launched our new First-Year Experience, and it has clearly been successful in helping us to increase student engagement and learning in the first year. The program has become a point of pride, and we continue to assess and refine it.

Our initiative to strengthen

Section Three: Major Challenges and Current Opportunities

This section of our Periodic Review Report returns to the principal themes of our 2006 Self-Study, providing an update on the progress we have made and challenges and opportunities facing us five years later. As part of this report's function to demonstrate continuing compliance with the Standards of Excellence, we place particular emphasis here on the ways that assessments of institutional effectiveness and of student learning (Standards 7 and 14) have informed our planning and implementation of initiatives. Because the Middle States team in 2006 did not make any official recommendations, we focus here largely on our own institutional goals, with some reference to comments made in the team report. This section thus performs several functions simultaneously: it provides an update on the issues addressed in our Self-Study; it documents our compliance with the standards; and it recounts current challenges and opportunities.

Without question, the most significant major development and challenge since our 2006 Self-Study has been the economic recession and its impact on our current and future

academic departments, making use of the results to adjust curriculum and pedagogies in the majors. This is by no means an exhaustive list, and most of these efforts receive more attention in the course of this report.

At the same time, we have found ourselves wanting to articulate the overarching goals of the Skidmore educational experience, asking not just: Are our students engaged? But also: What do we want them to learn? How are they transformed during their four years at Skidmore? In 2008, Vice President for Academic Affairs Susan Kress charged the Assessment Steering Committee (ASC) with drafting a set of goals for student learning. After doing considerable research, consulting with numerous colleagues, and discussing multiple drafts for many hours, the ASC brought a draft of Goals for Student Learning and Development⁵ to the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) in the spring of 2009. CEPP took up the charge, offered important revisions, and hosted several open discussions of the goals; members of the ASC also consulted with student groups (Academic Council, the Student Government Association), alumni and parent groups, and Student Affairs staff in a dedicated meeting. The goals were also the subject of discussion at the Skidmore town hall meetings mentioned above and at meetings of the Board of Trustees. Over the course of these many discussions, more revisions were suggested and adopted, and in December, 2009, the faculty endorsed the new Goals for Student Learning and Development in a unanimous vote.

The consultative, patient process served us well, not only in obtaining that faculty endorsement but also in building throughout the community an understanding of the goals and what is at stake in them. The goals now reflect the aims of the Skidmore education as a whole, defined by the faculty and also by the many staff who have powerful influences on our students' lives in the cocurriculum: staff in Athletics, Residential Life, Health Services, Student Academic Services, and many other areas. We embraced the concept of a Skidmore education as both a classroom learning experience and a more comprehensive transformation. Having established our goals, our next step has been to investigate where that learning is happening, how it dovetails with our requirements for general education and the major, and how we gather, study, and communicate the evidence for it.

We are particularly interested in these investigations when they further our progress in the three initiatives described in this report. Although we are framing an overall plan for assessing our students' success in meeting the Goals for Student Learning and Development, we also want to do this in a way that will sustain our momentum in offering an effective First-Year Experience; building our capacities for studies in the sciences; and providing all of our students with the learning about culture, communication, and social identities that they will need to thrive in a world that will need them, as liberally-educated individuals, to communicate and work across many kinds of differences. In part for this reason, our narrative here retains the tripartite structure of our Middle States Self-Study from 2006. We want to bear in mind, however, that each of these three sections relates more broadly to the Goals for Student Learning and Development and is to be found within those goals as well. Another way of thinking

⁵ The Goals for Student Learning and Development are attached as Appendix F on the compact disc and are also available online at <http://cms.skidmore.edu/assessment/goals-for-student-learning.cfm>.

about the three sections is that each is a major part of our general education vision and requirements. We are in the process of aligning our vision for general education more fully with our goals, with the expectation that this will entail making some changes in our general education curriculum and in our pedagogies.

The spring 2006 report of the Middle States evaluation team praised both our strategic planning and our Self-Study, and noted:

We applaud the attention paid to each of the three areas identified in the Self-Study: the directions proposed are consequential. If each were carried out and implemented fully, together they would move the institution towards greater student engagement, stronger sciences, greater diversity along multiple lines, and a considerably expanded and enriched curriculum: in short, a higher level of institutional excellence as a leading liberal arts college.⁶

Although we have not yet fully implemented each of the proposals in our Self-Study, we believe the evidence shows that we have made considerable progress, and that the “growing strength, confidence, and aspiration” the team found here continue to define us, as does our “scrappiness ... in meeting financial challenges.”

Before we conclude this introductory section, we need to make note of two significant changes in our institutional structure and one institutional initiative that is part of an update to our *Strategic Plan*. First, new since the last Middle States evaluation is a more formalized bridging between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs that resulted from the elimination of the Office of the Dean of Studies and creation of two new offices, Student Academic Services (SAS, in Student Affairs) and the Office of Academic Advising (OAA, in Academic Affairs). As part of the reorganization, the offices were charged with developing a collaborative structure that supports students’ high academic achievement and engagement.

The Office of Student Academic Services (SAS) provides a wide variety of services to promote achievement and help students take full advantage of the academic opportunities available at Skidmore. As part of the College’s commitment to academic excellence, the office serves all students interested in improving their performance. The office organizes peer tutoring and study groups, offers one-on-one and small-group support, counsels students who receive unsatisfactory work notices, and works with international students, students with disabilities, and athletes. The office collaborates with the Writing Center, which now provides English as a Second Language (ESL) support to students requiring longer-term writing intervention, in part with the help of a new full-time ESL specialist. SAS also trains students to be peer tutors and study-group facilitators. The Office of Academic Advising (OAA) oversees Skidmore’s advising programs and services and disseminates information about academic policies, procedures, and programs of study. Academic Advising staff work closely with students, faculty, staff, and families to inform students’ academic decisions, to guide them to support services as necessary, and to enrich their intellectual lives through special program opportunities. These two offices collaborate and communicate closely, supporting

⁶ The MSCHE Evaluation Team “Report to the Faculty, Administration, Trustees, Students of Skidmore College” (April 11, 2006) is Appendix B on the compact disc.

students and faculty advisors, sharing information, tracking data, and intervening when necessary.⁷ The data reflect the success of this collaboration and of our increased offerings of academic support. Approximately 40% of the students seeking support in SAS finish the term with grade-point averages of between 3.5 and 4.0.

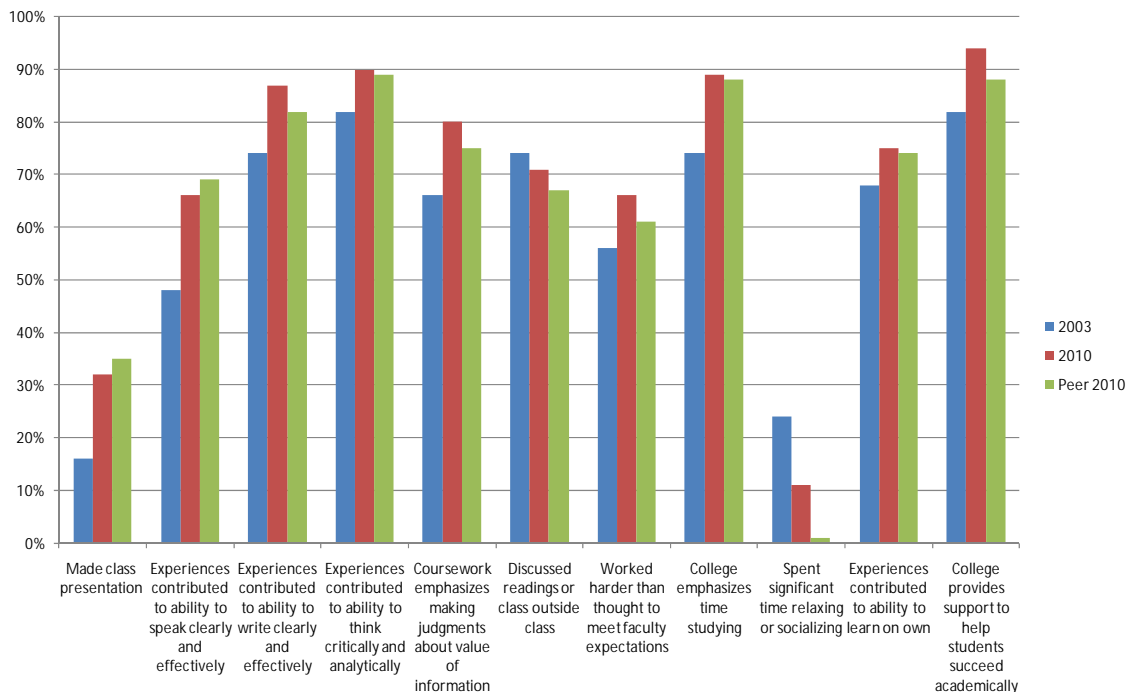
The second institutional change is the separation of the Office of Institutional Research from the Office of the Registrar. Facing the retirement, in December 2010, of our Registrar and Director of Institutional Research, Ann Henderson, the VPAA formed a study group in spring of 2010 to consider the structure of that office. The group recommended splitting the Registrar from Institutional Research, as well as strengthening staffing in Institutional Research. By January 2011, we had hired a new Director of Institutional Research and an Interim Registrar. The transition to two separate offices with new leadership will take some time, but will result, we hope, in increased capacity for Institutional Research.

Our new initiative, entitled Transition and Transformation, emerged out of our ongoing strategic planning process (described in greater detail in Section Six below).

Student Engagement and the First-Year Experience

The most visible initiative undertaken by the College in the last decade to increase student engagement is the First-Year Experience (FYE). Inspired in part by the results of a 2003 NSSE survey that indicated Skidmore was lagging behind peer institutions in engagement and retention, and supported by Part I of the College's *Strategic Plan*, the FYE was introduced in the fall of 2005. Its goals are ambitious: the program aims to increase student engagement by (1) providing students with a faculty mentor/advisor who teaches an intense, interdisciplinary, and intimate seminar based on his or her intellectual passion; (2) creating a living-l

Figure 1: Comparison of Results of Selected NSSE Questions from First-Year Students in 2003 and 2010 (Percent of students reporting “Quite a Bit/Very Much” or Often/Very Often)”



Significantly, the one high-impact pedagogy that does not see notable increase in the NSSE data between 2003 and 2007 is what Kuh (2008) calls learning about “‘difficult differences’ such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality”;¹² for example, there was a slight decrease in students reporting that “diverse perspectives (different races, religions, genders, political beliefs, etc.)” were “included in class discussions or writing assignments.”¹³ By 2010, however, we see an increase of 17% in this measure for first-year students, from 56% to 73%. It seems that efforts to include diverse perspectives in our first-year programming have yielded some results. We take up this and related issues in part three of this narrative below.

¹² Kuh, p. 10.

¹³ See the 2003, 2007, and 2010 NSSE Reports, on the compact disc.

**Figure 2: Percent of First-Year Students who Reported “Plan to Do” or “Done”
for High-impact Practices**

Over the past five years, student participation in most high-impact practices has increased at Skidmore. For example, the number of students participating in summer collaborative research has grown steadily fr

transition successfully to college.¹⁸ The new program is currently being piloted, and already peer mentors have proven to be a critical resource for first-year students experiencing personal and academic difficulty. A recent survey of first-year students demonstrates that peer mentors help ease the transition to college. Findings show that actively engaged peer mentors measurably improve both social and academic outcomes. Going forward, we expect to expand this model to include a role for peer mentors in providing guidance on a range of academic issues, including academic integrity. We also expect to extend programming into the second semester, when peer mentors can help first-year students plan for high-impact experiences during the sophomore year and beyond.

In partnership with Student Affairs, the FYE continues to wrestle with the difficulties of imagining a robust living-learning community. Indeed, when the First-Year Experience was created, it was understood that not all features of the FYE would happen immediately. The living-learning component was one of those features. Over the course of the first five years, the living-learning component of the FYE has begun to take focus; but it is still in its infancy.

Early on, it became clear that tensions emerged between traditional theme housing (substance-free housing, for example) and the plan to group first-year students based on seminar choices. Accordingly, year three of the FYE program saw the elimination of theme floors, which allowed more flexibility for Scribner Seminars to be housed in proximity to one another. Over the past few years, seminar students have been housed together in residence halls in the hopes that intellectual conversations will materialize organically and learning will continue outside of the traditional classroom setting. Moreover, the FYE and the Office of Residential Life have partnered to house similarly themed seminars in the same residence hall (for example, several Scribner Seminars in 2009 were focused on the quadricentennial of the Hudson River; eall

documentary *When the Levees Broke*, and which focused attention on the social, cultural, political, and geographical disaster that befell the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, was particularly fruitful because it represented a successful collaboration between the offices of the First-Year Experience and the Dean of Special Programs. The artist, Terence Blanchard, was the 2008–2009 McCormack Artist-Scholar in Residence and held recitals, classes, and workshops during the fall and spring semesters. The FYE organized speakers and performances throughout the fall and spring that raised awareness of the plight of residents of the Gulf Coast. The FYE also raised funds (approximately \$8,000) through its FYE C.A.R.E.S. program to send several dozen college students down to the region during spring break to work on reconstruction efforts. Despite these successes, we find that maintaining a complex and engaging spring program for the FYE is a real challenge and may not be routinely sustainable.

Currently, the FYE is collaborating with other offices to think about the ways in which students transition at various moments in their college careers. We believe this discussion might yield fruitful ideas that could further enhance student learning in the spring semester. Of particular interest is the college-wide—and indeed national—conversation about sophomores. With the help of the Teagle Foundation and in partnership with several other colleges, Skidmore has been studying the sophomore experience and the “focused exploration” that occurs in a student’s second year and that eventually leads to the directed study in the major. In partnership with the Office of Academic Advising, we envision using the spring semester of the first year to introduce programming that promotes experiential learning—academic internships, exploratory research, service learning activities, and other high-impact experiences more typically targeted at sophomores and juniors—as vital routes to academic engagement and exploration.

Further Assessment Results and Consequences

Assessment efforts have led to some changes in the First-Year Experience. The FYE has undertaken (or collaborated on) more than a dozen assessment projects and/or surveys since its inception, several of which focus directly on student learning outcomes. In the second year of the program, the inaugural director organized assessment efforts around writing in the seminars,²² perceptions of mentoring in the FYE,²³ and departmental staffing complexities as they relate to delivery of the Scribner Seminars.²⁴ Additionally, in 2009, the FYE partnered with the Office of Campus Life on an assessment of student learning in seminars with embedded service-learning components. second year and that

interest in other subjects, to time spent on reading and writing, to critical thinking skills—students in service-learning seminars reported higher commitments to positive intellectual values than those in non-service-learning courses. In other words, by all measures students were more engaged in their studies by virtue of participating in a service-learning course. We plan to replicate the study in the next few years to see whether the 2009 results were an aberration. In the meantime, however, the FYE is hard at work trying to identify additional faculty with an interest in embedding service learning in their seminars.

In 2009–2010, the FYE conducted its most elaborate assessment of student learning.²⁶ The College was—and remains—interested in the ways in which first-year students demonstrate meta-cognitive thinking, the ways in which they understand the scope of “college-level

the team noted that a more “effective partnership between Academic and Student Affairs” was necessary in order to deepen student engagement at the College.²⁷

Both issues have been systematically addressed. The impact of the First-Year Experience on the Opportunity Program (OP) presented a significant challenge. The Opportunity Program relied heavily on Skidmore’s previous first-year program—the Liberal Studies Program, with its signature first-semester course LS 1: “The Human Experience”—to help economically disadvantaged students obtain the necessary skills to offset certain deficits they encountered early in their academic careers. When the College transitioned to an independent seminar-based program in the FYE, the risk to the Opportunity Program was that their core curriculum would be abandoned. That core is the basis not only of the OP students’ first semester at college, but also of our noted and successful precollege summer program that prepares those students for college-level work at Skidmore. With the support of many dedicated faculty, administrators, and staff, the College opted to preserve an important component of the Liberal Studies program in the form of the SP 100: “Human Dilemmas,” a cluster of 8–12 sections of the Scribner Seminars sharing a similar set of core readings and taught by a team of experienced faculty each year. Indeed, the current Human Dilemmas core reading list looks a good deal like the former LS 1 syllabus. Preserving that cluster, and requiring all OP students to enroll in the “Human Dilemmas” seminars, allows the HEOP/AOP program to maintain its successful pedagogical and curricular approach with particular students, while still working within the framework of the FYE.

Over the past five years, Academic and Student Affairs have forged a solid partnership. The First-Year Experience has collaborated effectively with the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs on New Student Orientation, peer-mentor training, the fourth-credit-hour program, service learning opportunities, and various cocurricular initiatives. It is perhaps in New Student Orientation where that partnership is most visible and impressive. The four-day event was redesigned several years ago to better recognize the specific needs of incoming students. More to the point, internal survey data suggested that students needed more chances to connect with each other, to build the necessary peer relationships to ease social anxieties and to place new students in the best possible situation to tackle the academic rigors of college life. The FYE thus turned to the Office of Campus Life (in Student Affairs) to help design an orientation program that frontloaded social bonding opportunities for the students within their seminars, providing them with a foundational community from the first week. That partnership has been extremely fruitful and, based on surveys of first-year students over the past several years, Skidmore’s orientation program is as effective as, or more effective than, it has been in quite some time. Students feel welcomed, they acclimate fairly easily, and they settle down to face their academic challenges more quickly. We’re seeing greater retention numbers and fewer visits to the FYE office during the first month to talk about homesickness and related troubles.

It goes without saying that challenges remain. We have yet to determine the most viable and effective model for living-learning communities at Skidmore in the first year, for example. We need to assess the effectiveness of faculty mentoring and advising in the

²⁷ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 8.

science majors over a decade.²⁸ There are 51% more students in the class of 2010 majoring in the natural sciences than in 2005. For the class of 2012 there are 66% more

using the DC method were for the least prepared students, which was not true for the traditional method. DC students' responses on the CLASS survey shifted toward more expert responses, while traditionally taught students' responses shifted toward more novice. During the summer of 2011 we will run a workshop on "Inquiry-based, Lab-driven Chemistry Courses" for faculty at Skidmore and other local two-year and four-year colleges and also targeted high-school chemistry teachers.

Alignment with College-wide Goals: Natural scientists must be able to communicate with peers across the sciences and with non-science colleagues, friends, family, and constituents. "Communicate effectively" is the first of the college-wide goals that Skidmore is focusing on, with efforts under way as science faculty assess how well their students communicate in written form,³² orally,³³ and visually.³⁴ The recently implemented requirement for writing in the major is an important element in delivering this outcome across the College.

The Science Vision

As mentioned above, on their visit in 2006, the Middle States review team pointed out a disjunction between our aspiration for the physical and life sciences and the resources earmarked for their development. They also noted that while the goals for our science curriculum are sensible, there is no clear road map as to how these goals will be achieved. At the request of the Dean of the Faculty, in the fall of 2007 the natural science departments began a planning process to realize the standards for the natural sciences set out in the College's *Strategic Plan* and to address the concerns raised by the Middle States review team. From the outset, this planning process has been student-centered and directed toward determining measurable student learning outcomes. A fundamental axiom has been that our planning process must be guided by two underlying questions:

- § What do we want a Skidmore educated student to know?
- § How do we want our students to learn?

The seeds of the current science-planning document, *A Vision for the Physical and Life Sciences at Skidmore College*, were germinated at an all-day retreat held in the fall of 2007 attended by 90% of the natural science faculty on campus that semester. An ad-hoc group appointed by the Dean of Faculty, the Science Working Group (SWG), then took up the work. This science-planning document (also known as the Science Vision) contains three goals. Each of these goals has accompanying student-learning outcomes and programmatic strategies. It should be noted that these student-learning outcomes are closely linked to the all-college learning outcomes endorsed by the faculty in December 2009.³⁵ The Science Vision provides a broad outline of a multifaceted initiative. It is a

³² Denise Brooks McQuade, "Preliminary Assessment of Laboratory Exercises across the Natural Sciences at Skidmore College" (March 2006), on the compact disc.

³³ See the Biology Assessment Plan (2008), on the compact disc.

³⁴

living document, and we are in the process of discussing the vision as a community and working through its proposals in multiple contexts. Additional community discussions will take place as the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) considers the details of the vision and reflects on how, where, and whether to implement them. The vision articulates the following goals:

Science Vision Goal I: The College recognizes the importance of scientific literacy in today’s society and is committed to providing each student with a solid understanding of science, its accomplishments, and its relevance to his/her life.

Science Vision Goal IIa: The Skidmore College science curriculum will model the inherently collaborative nature of modern scientific inquiry both within and among science disciplines. In order to deliver this curriculum, the College recognizes that the sciences must have strong disciplinary programs at its core from which it can support robust, creative, and flexible interdisciplinary programs.

Science Vision Goal IIb: Skidmore College will enhance the student/faculty research experience as an important component of all science major programs.

Science Vision Goal III: Skidmore College will achieve a distinctive integration of the sciences with the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

The Science Vision is our road map, and what follows is a description of the College’s efforts to address the challenges listed above.

Challenges that Remain

While the progress that the College has made is significant, many of the challenges that existed at the time of the review and that were noted by the external review team remain. Some of these challenges have been magnified by the successes that we have achieved to date. In particular, the review team called attention to the following problems that continue to challenge us:

Faculty Lines: The increased enrollments that have occurred in the sciences exacerbate the demands on science faculty that the review team characterized as “a faculty already stretched very thin.”³⁶ Increased enrollments in the sciences have made it more difficult for faculty to participate in the First-Year Experience program. This tension was predicted in the reviewer’s report. The review team pointed out that the four faculty appointments recommended in the science white paper—“two in Neuroscience, one in Environmental Studies and one in Biological Chemistry”—are “reasonable, but they may not be enough.”³⁷

³⁶ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 12.

³⁷ MSCHE “Report to the Faculty ...” (Appendix B), p. 12.

Community Buy-in: The team questioned the level of community support for strengthening the sciences and stated that the College needs to have frank and open discussions with the entire Skidmore community around the science initiative.³⁸

Addressing this problem, the Science Planning Group began to initiate discussions of the vision in the spring of 2008 and has continued to seek input from the community. The group has met with the chairs of the social science, humanities, and arts departments. It has met with the Committee on Educational Policy and Planning (CEPP) and has brought the planning document forward for discussion at a meeting of department chairs and program directors as well as at Academic Staff. The Science Planning Group has endorsed the document, and President's Cabinet has discussed the plan on several occasions. In the spring of 2010, CEPP hosted an open forum for all faculty, and it anticipates there will be future open discussions. Also, in the fall of 2010, the vision was brought to the Academic Affairs Committee of the Board of Trustees, which passed a resolution in support of it.³⁹ Further discussions took place at the February 2011 Board meeting, including a sense

In addition to building faculty support, we know that we need a clear sense of what is possible financially, especially in the current economic climate. In order to ascertain the true costs of enhancing the physical and life sciences at Skidmore, in the spring of 2010 the College contracted with the academic planning firm Dober, Lidsky, Mathey. We asked the firm to determine additional resource needs in terms of faculty and laboratory and technical personnel necessary to implement the Science Vision and programmatic strategies, based on current and projected enrollments. They will also help

Figure 3: Percent of students who responded “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to the NSSE question “To what extent has your experience at Skidmore contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in analyzing quantitative problems?”

Skidmore				Peer			
	2003	2007	2010		2003	2007	2010
First-Years	42%	56%	62%		57%	65%	73%
Seniors	53%	54%	68%		66%	70%	72%

Plan and the midpoint report, though we face major challenges in further building support for this initiative across the College, and in financing necessary changes in

InterGroup Dialogue Program; and the development of new sexual assault policies. According to our data, we remain challenged to increase—indeed, to halt a decrease in—the diversity of both faculty and staff. Further, as we elaborate below, quantitative and qualitative data from multiple sources make it clear that we need to improve campus climate both inside and outside the classroom and become a more genuinely inclusive campus. We need to sustain and strengthen initiatives to hire and retain faculty and staff of color; to cultivate greater awareness and sensitivity among white constituencies on campus; and to develop the curriculum, including refining the cultural-diversity requirement.

A key development since 2006 has been the effort by the College to formalize diversity initiatives within the larger administrative structure. Specifically, a three-person group was charged with operational responsibility for coordinating implementation of *Strategic Plan* Goal II: the Director of Intercultural Studies (faculty), Assistant Director of Equal Employment Opportunity and Workforce Diversity (staff), and Director of the Office of Student Diversity Programs (students). This diversity team was fully in place by January 2008.

Representing Academic Affairs, Human Resources, and Student Affairs, members of this diversity team work individually, collectively, and as part of larger groups such as the newly established and important Committee for Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU) and the Bias Response Group (BRG). Individually, the three members of this team have worked to provide leadership on issues of diversity and inclusion regarding the curriculum, workplace, and student climate, respectively. The team's ongoing collaboration is perhaps most prominent in the multifaceted work of CIGU. Begun in September 2005 as the Intercultural and Global Understanding Task Force (IGUTF) cochaired by the President, CIGU is now an ongoing subcommittee of the Institutional Policy and Planning Committee chaired by the Director of Intercultural Studies, and cochaired by the Director of Off-Campus Study and Exchanges (OCSE). CIGU is a 14-member committee responsible for considering issues of both domestic and international diversity.

CIGU was also charged with drafting an assessment document to measure the College's progress with respect to Goal II.⁴⁹ Led in part by the diversity team, CIGU members worked to fashion a document that both lays the groundwork for diversity assessment and stands in conversation with the overall assessment efforts undertaken by the Assessment Steering Committee. CIGU members approved the document, "Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College," in spring 2008.⁵⁰ The IPPC formally endorsed the document in fall 2009 as a guiding instrument for assessing progress toward Goal II. Future work to assess progress toward Goal II will need to incorporate not only racial and ethnic diversity, but also diversity related to areas such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious preference, and disabilities, as well as incorporating a substantive treatment of global diversity.

Many of the items in the assessment document are stated as objectives. The next steps will be to identify quantitative, measurable, items for assessment where possible; to

⁴⁹ "CIGU: Goal II, Assessment of Learning Goals," on the compact disc.

⁵⁰ "Assessing Diversity and Inclusion at Skidmore College" (2008), on the compact disc.

synthesize and make use of the assessments we have done over the past two years; to align the objectives and assessments with the newly adopted Goals for Student Learning and Development; and to make recommendations for specific changes based on the outcomes. A faculty assessment workshop held in May 2009, with outside consultant Gavin Henning, Associate Director of Assessment at Dartmouth College, made it clear to those present just how complex this process of alignment is and will continue to be. CIGU provides the structure and the oversight to move the process ahead.

Another new group within the new structure, the Bias Response Group (BRG), is

25.8%).⁵² In contrast, in 2006, the ALANA students represented 17.3% of the entering class. These figures represent a significant increase over the past five years and a real accomplishment for the College. We are now in the process of coming to terms with what this change means and what further changes the College needs to make to accompany it. We take up these challenges below.

Off-campus Study

Another area where we have made significant changes and growth over the past five years is in off-campus opportunities for all of our students.

The Office of Off-Campus Study and Exchanges (OCSE) continues to play a central role in the realization of the *Strategic Plan's* Goal II for Skidmore students. More than 59% of 2010 graduates had studied off campus; the College ranked sixth among top baccalaureate institutions for students studying abroad for a semester or more in 2008–2009, according to the IIE Open Doors Survey.⁵³ When comparing figures from 2005–2006 and 2009–2010, there is a significant increase in the percentage of students who have studied off campus prior to graduation: the figure jumped from 48% to 59%. In Skidmore programs we saw the greatest increase in our Spain (52%) and London programs (98% increase for our London spring program). In terms of non-Skidmore approved programs, we saw an increase in Asia (over 700%), although enrollments in Japan declined (-51%); an increase in Europe outside of Spain, France, and Italy (over 200%); and an increase in enrollments in “Other” (135%) which can include programs in the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, or programs with various sites. Study in Latin America saw a minor increase (22%) and study in Africa realized a slight decrease (-5%). The significant increases in study away and in students’ choice of sites other than the traditional European countries meet goals articulated in our 2006 Self-Study.

Much of the increase and shift in student study off-campus is due to the implementation of a departmentally-focused approved programs structure. This structure has allowed departments and academic programs to choose which programs their students will attend based on academic fit and administrative strengths. Faculty have an important voice in the approval process and, as a result, are better able to advise students regarding how programs might fit into their academic plans. As we had hoped, this structure has allowed for more widespread and substantive faculty engagement in off-campus study and has opened doors for additional conversations about how to link more effectively off-campus study and the on-campus programs.

As we consider our international programs in light of other institutional goals, we have been cognizant of the need to view the *Strategic Plan's* three goals holistically. With this in mind, OCSE has endeavored to develop more opportunities abroad in the sciences, through approved semester-long programs that focus on the natural sciences and through faculty-led Travel Seminars that allow faculty and students to gain hands-on experience with theory they have studied on campus. (Some examples of Travel

⁵² IPEDS Fall Enrollment Reports 2007–2008 through 2009–2010, on the compact disc.

⁵³ U.S. Study Abroad: Leading Institutions, available online at <http://www.iie.org/en/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/US-Study-Abroad/Lead/e98u>

Seminars focusing on science are given later in this section.) Data shows an increase in the number of science majors studying abroad: from 40% of in the class of 2006 to 51% in the class of 2010 (though the trajectory is not a straight line). The increase is likely due in part to the addition of 58 programs that are approved by the sciences (Biology–10; Chemistry–2; Environmental Studies–14; Geosciences–5; Health and Exercise Sciences–5; Neuroscience–11; Psychology–11). Even given the strides we have made, it is clear that off-campus study remains more accessible to some majors than others; therefore, OCSE hopes to continue to explore options for all science students regardless of discipline.

Service learning and community engagement are two other areas OCSE has begun to incorporate into our off-campus programming. Many of our Skidmore-administered and non-Skidmore approved programs offer students opportunities to engage in internships, vo

Relations (IGR) program at Skidmore, introduced by Kristie Ford, Assistant Professor of Sociology. As Ford's assessment report notes,⁵⁵ IGR is a nationally recognized credit-bearing social justice academic program that originated at the University of Michigan in the wake of racial violence in 1988. Its primary goal is to support student learning around inter- and intra-group relations, conflict, and social justice across a range of social identities, including race, gender, sexuality, social class, religion, and nationality. The Michigan program has expanded to several colleges and universities across the country, including Amherst, Occidental, and Mount Holyoke. As Ford describes the initiative,

In 2008, Skidmore supported the development of a four-course pilot program, adopted from the Michigan model, to address Goal II. The series consists of: (1) Race and Power, a 200-level introductory course; (2) Racial Identity Theory and Praxis, a 300-level advanced training course for students interested in facilitating race dialogues; (3) Practicum for Peer-Facilitated Race Dialogues, a 300-level course that provides ongoing support for peer-facilitators; and (4) Peer-Facilitated Race Dialogues, a series of topical inter- and intra-group courses facilitated by graduates of the training course. In spring 2009 the College piloted four peer-facilitated dialogues: (1) People of Color/White People Dialogue for First-Years; (2) People of Color/White People Dialogue for Sophomores; (3) People of Color/Multiracial Identity Dialogue; and (4) White Racial Identity Dialogue.

Since then, in spring 2010 three dialogues were offered, and four were again offered this spring. Ford's assessments of the dialogues include measures of substantial success in meeting goals for our students' learning in these dialogues. That learning can be related directly to several of the recently-endorsed College goals for our students: understanding social and cultural diversity in national and global contexts; interacting effectively and collaboratively with individuals and across social identities; and interrogating one's own values in relation to those of others, across social and cultural differences. Given the strongly positive results about our students' learning and development from the IGR assessments, the College has continued to support the IGR curriculum and pilot program. However, as we note below, sustaining IGR is also a challenge, because it requires precious new resources—financial, but also faculty and staff time—to develop, run, and institutionalize the program.

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Assault Policies

In another development related to the campus climate on gender, the College has made efforts to build awareness of the problem of sexual harassment and assault on college campuses. All employees are required to attend anti-harassment training soon after being hired at the College. Additional refresher training is conducted every two years via an online training program on the Human Resources website or by the Assistant Director for Equal Employment Opportunity and Workforce Diversity. Training on sexual harassment has been conducted continuously over the past five years. In the spring

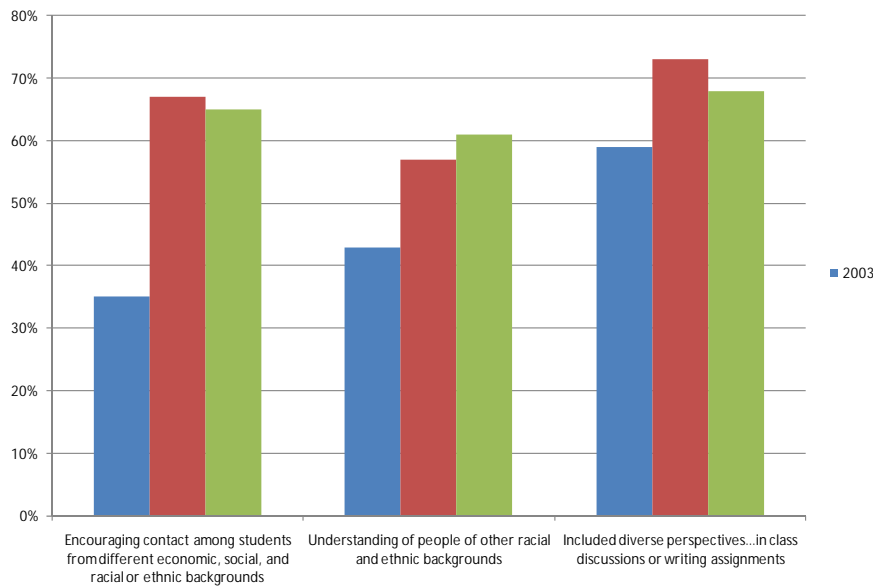
of 2010, the College held education workshops for faculty on sexual harassment, conducted by John Bagyi from the law firm of Bond, Schoeneck & King. Equal Employment Opportunity, Diversity, and Anti-Harassment Policies and Procedures (Part Six) of the Faculty Handbook was revised in 2007 to include language addressing our sexual harassment policy and the College's procedure for resolving complaints of harassment or discrimination. Additional training workshops will recur for all new employees, which will be followed by refresher online training every two years.

Concurrently, in spring 2010 students voiced concerns, and the result was a new Sexual Misconduct Policy. The new policy, implemented in October 2010, emphasizes the importance of "effective consent," the act of giving consent for sexual activity in a

understanding of other countries and cultures. In other words, it seems that our incoming students consider themselves somewhat cosmopolitan and do not necessarily think that they need to promote racial understanding in an active way, though they are open to learning more. Results from the other three assessments suggest that the students do change their positions and their awareness over their time at Skidmore, and that the College could be doing more to encourage greater understanding.

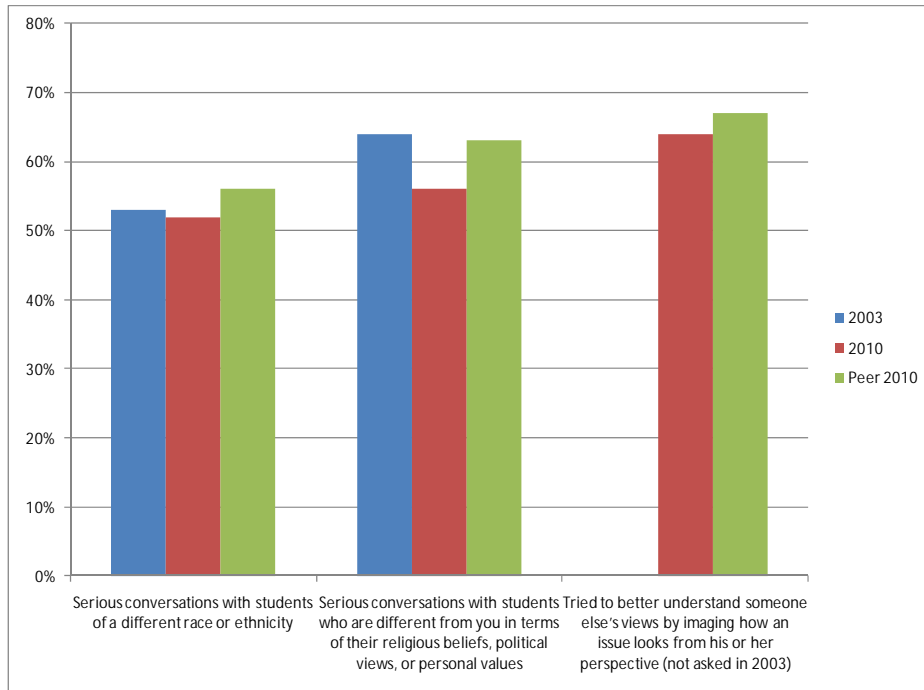
There are noteworthy patterns in the NSSE data from 2003 and 2010 that suggest we are making good progress towards our goals in some areas and are stagnant in others. As the data outlined below show, we have made significant leaps in most categories of response since 2003, and in most cases are now within a few percentage points of our peer institutions as well.

Figure 4: Percent of First-Year Students Reporting “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to Selected NSSE Questions



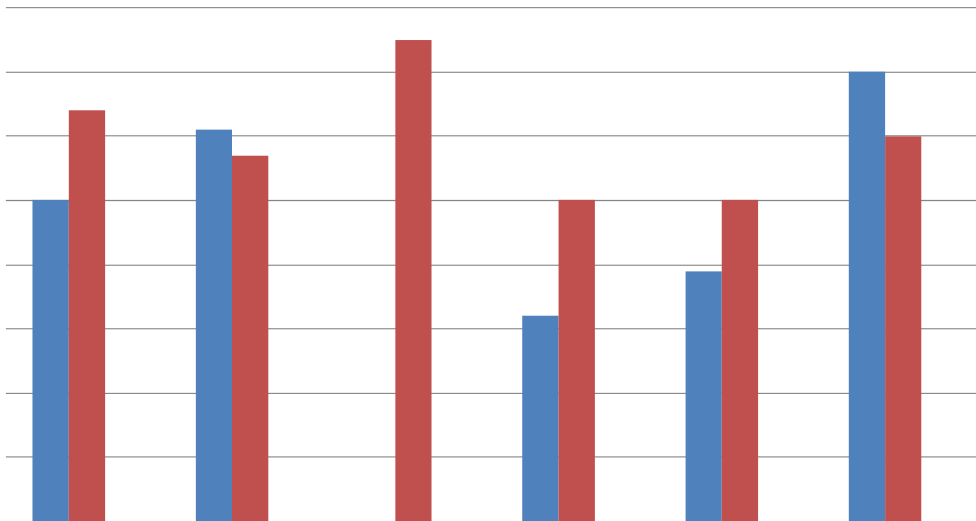
However, other questions showed modest decreases or remained flat (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percent of First-Year Students Reporting “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to Selected NSSE Questions



Seniors at Skidmore reported an increase on most NSSE questions pertaining to global and intercultural understanding in 2010 compared with 2003 (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Percent of Seniors Reporting “Quite a Bit” or “Very Much” to Selected NSSE Questions



One question for which Skidmore seniors notably did not report an increase relates to what happens in the classroom. On whether students “...included diverse perspectives...in class discussions or writing assignments,” there is actually a decrease (Figure 6). On this question, then, there is both a surprising decrease and a deficit relative to our peers. This outcome bears further discussion to identify possible causes and initiatives in response.

The results of the CHAS survey corroborate and expand upon the NSSE findings in some sobering ways. While both white and ALANA students reported being satisfied with their overall Skidmore experience (mean 4.2 on a 5-point satisfaction scale for both), neither group was satisfied with items associated with the amount of diversity, respect, and community found on campus (3.5/5 for white and 3.4/5 for ALANA students). In addition, both groups of students were not satisfied with the climate for minority students (3.2/5 for white and 3.1/5 for ALANA students) or the ethnic/racial diversity on campus (3.1/5 for white and 2.9/5 for ALANA students). For specific items on the survey relating to diversity, respect, and community, 30% of ALANA students reported *experiencing* racial/ethnic insensitivity, and 38% of white students and 51% of ALANA students reported *witnessing* racial/ethnic insensitivity. For a college that aims for all students to learn to communicate effectively across cultural differences, these numbers clearly represent a problem.

Furthermore, the CHAS data suggest that interactions among Skidmore students of different races/ethnicities decreased across class years. For example, 49% of seniors reported that they *never or only occasionally* interacted with someone of a different race—in contrast to only 28.5% of the first-years. And 60% of seniors reported never or only occasionally interacting with international students.

In addition, ALANA students reported much lower rates of participation in high-impact practices—particularly performing arts/music, intercollegiate sports, research with a faculty member, study abroad, and independent study for credit—than did white students. Considerably higher percentages of ALANA students also reported fairly high levels of stress with concerns over future plans than did white students: 55% of white and 73.1% of ALANA students reported moderately to very stressful concerns about the future.

In sum, although the NSSE and the CHAS data give us some basis for believing we have made some real progress against our benchmarks five years ago, we are also learning about some more complex and disturbing matters related in particular to our ALANA students’ lives on campus, and to campus climate more generally, that are more challenging to address.

While members of the Committee for Intercultural and Global Understanding (CIGU) support quantitative assessment such as NSSE and CHAS, several members have suggested the importance of ga

protocol that would enable CIGU to disseminate the findings; so the spring 2010 interviews are the first for which we have a public report. The report does not lend itself to easy summary, because it presents a range of students' views in response to questions, but there are some common threads. The students reported a number of experiences of racial insensitivity on campus (and also off campus). They also expressed a strong desire to see more faculty and staff of color and more LGBTQ faculty and staff, as well as the sense that current faculty and staff of underrepresented identities are not as well supported as they could be. Finally, they

The IGR program is a quintessential example of how specific *Strategic Plan* Goal II initiatives present both opportunities and challenges. Students, faculty, and staff who have participated in IGR classes and workshops have praised the program's effort to connect theoretical work and lived experience inextricably in ways that ultimately serve to complicate and deepen our understanding of particular social constructions. Responses from the 2010 exit interviews with graduating students of color speak to the transformative nature of th

to prepare students for study away and to engage students more substantially upon return. We will share this inventory with students and faculty in the hope that

As we consider whether we are generally using a capacious enough definition of “diversity” in our conceptions of intercultural understanding, it makes sense to note that gender remains an important category of difference on this campus that was once a women’s college. Recent developments include changing the name of our Women’s Studies program to Gender Studies, and we are in the process of making the conceptual changes that entails. Increased numbers of events exploring the campus climate for our GLBTQ students and faculty reflect a growing community awareness that “diversity” includes members of sexual minorities, who often remain invisible and marginal. Much more remains to be done in this regard.

Another area for curricular development that we targeted in our Self-Study was the need to develop courses and programming in Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and other areas of global studies that historically have not been well represented at Skidmore. Meeting this goal on campus continues to be a challenge. It will require a renewed commitment not only to course development, but also to hiring and retaining appropriate faculty and staff.

As we have noted, faculty and staff diversity has not kept pace with increases in student diversity. Recruiting and retaining faculty and staff of color remains a priority. This is a long-standing effort—going back at least to the early 1990s and reinvigorated under the new *Strategic Plan*—that has yielded mixed results. We have had some successes. In the spring of 2007, as part of a major Mellon consortial grant for faculty development, Skidmore cosponsored a symposium on faculty diversity along with Union College and Colgate and Hamilton Universities. The symposium focused on understanding and developing strategies for cultivating a more diverse faculty through hiring and retention.⁶⁰ A second symposium followed it a year later. The immediate results seemed positive. In 2008, Skidmore made tenure-line target-of-opportunity hires in two fields, Classics and Music. The effort to identify and utilize College resources to make such tenure-line appointments resulted in part from the Mellon symposia and is a concrete example of collaboration between individual departments and the administration to further the *Strategic Plan*. In 2008–2009 the College then launched the CASE Liberal Arts Diversity Initiative in an effort to recruit individuals from underrepresented groups to the field of Advancement.

Although the President has publicly written on the importance of faculty and staff diversity, and despite several workshops addressing the need for a diverse applicant pool in faculty searches, the relative absence of progress on this front is fairly palpable.⁶¹ The movement forward represented by the aforementioned target-of-opportunity hires is complicated by the impact that the economic crisis has had on faculty diversity. Specifically, the suspension of the NYU Minority Dissertation Fellowship and Consortium for Faculty Diversity positions—along with the decision to change a contract for one African American scholar teaching jointly in English and History, resulting in his resignation—represented a tangible blow. The most recent IPEDS data, for 2009–2010, tell us that of the 249 full-time faculty (tenure-line and non-tenure-line), 85% are white;

⁶⁰ See “Four-College M. Mellon Foundation Symposium on Faculty Diversity Issues” (March 2–3, 2007) and “Final Assessment of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Four-College Collaborative Faculty Enhancement Grant” (December 2008), pp. 9–13; both are on the compact disc.

⁶¹ “Diversity in Hiring: Strategic Considerations” (2007), on the compact disc.

2% are black; 3% are Hispanic; 5% are Asian; and 4% are nonresident alien. In sum, 10% are people of color, and 4% are international faculty. This represents a minimal change over the figures for 2005–2006, despite our initiatives: at that time, 9% of the full-time faculty were people of color. The one significant

across cultural differences among the faculty and staff as well as among students. With faculty, it is clearly not enough just to hire individuals; creating an inclusive faculty community will require collaboration, effort, and strategies. Similar challenges face us in the hiring and retention of more staff from underrepresented groups.

As members of the community discuss our shared goals for our students' learning, and the ways that we gather evidence of that learning, we also find ourselves changing and learning in that process. If we are to meet the goals for our students' learning around intercultural understanding, so ambitiously laid out in the *Strategic Plan* and the Goals for Student Learning and Development, it is clear that we must be prepared as a community to learn and to change ourselves.

Section Four: Analysis of Enrollment and Finance Projections

In his May 2010 *Strategic Renewal* report, President Glotzbach described the context, challenges, and opportunities impacting Skidmore's enrollment and financial decision making:

We have just weathered the worst economic recession since the great Depression. Beginning in fall 2008, this national (and international) crisis affected the College directly through endowment losses and reductions in giving, and indirectly through economic disruptions experienced by families of current and potential students. In response, we identified our financial problems and faced them head-on. Our community demonstrated that by working together—by *combining creative thought with discipline*—we could lower expenses significantly, reducing current and future budget commitments by nearly \$12 million. None of these efforts was easy, and we are still coming to terms with the full implications of some of the changes we have made. Through this process, we also increased our community's *strategic literacy*: our shared understanding that every decision to deploy our precious resources—whether time, energy, or financial assets—represents a *strategic* investment and must be evaluated as such.

In the face of this daunting economic climate, Skidmore has had considerable success in enrolling large and strong classes, reducing expenses—notably with a strategic hiring freeze and highly successful voluntary early retirement program—and completing the Creative Thought–Bold Promise campaign in May 2010 with a total of \$216.5 million, well above the \$200 million goal.

Finance Trends

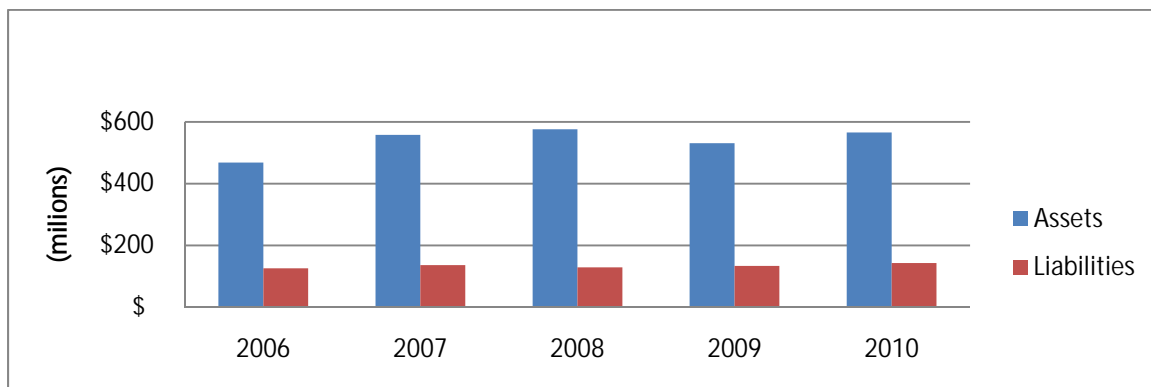
Against this backdrop of continued economic variability and uncertainty, Skidmore has experienced overall favorable financial results, although the past three years have proven to be challenging for the College, particularly on an operating basis. The College responded to constrained resources by reducing expenses, offering a one-time early retirement incentive program to certain employees, eliminating several programs, controlling growth in compensation, and delaying many new initiatives. We

entered this year with continued pressure on many revenue sources—tuition, program revenues, endowment distributions and gifts. We also expected continued pressure on compensation, student aid, insurance, utilities, and other expenses. In light of these pressures, we continue to examine our costs carefully to ensure that we are managing the College in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. Skidmore has an ambitious agenda over the next four years as outlined in the *Strategic Plan*, and we are committed to the sound financial management necessary to achieve the College priorities.

As reported in the Statement of Activities,⁶² in fiscal year 2010 the College experienced a modest excess of operating revenues over expenses of \$4.7 million or 3.5%. Permanently restricted net assets increased \$5.3 million or 5.5%. Total net assets increased \$25.5 million or 6.4% to \$423.2 million. Endowment net assets increased \$32.4 million or 13.5%.

As reported in the Statement of Financial Position, assets totaled \$565.9 million, and liabilities totaled \$142.7 million. Net assets of \$423.2 million include \$102.8 million of permanently restricted funds. Unrestricted net assets, a key metric which provides the College with the maximum flexibility of reserves, recovered nicely from the prior year but are significantly less than fiscal 2007, largely due to the economy and the effect on our investments, student aid expense, and accrued postretirement benefits from the change in the discount rate and other actuarial assumptions.

Figure 7: Assets and Liabilities—Statement of Financial Position



Total assets increased \$34.8 million or 6.5% this past year to \$565.9 million. Investments, which represent 56.0% of total assets, were \$316.7 million, an increase of \$31.8 million or 11.2% from the prior year. The net increase after the spending rate of 5% to support operations was primarily due to investment returns of 13.5%,⁶³ which was favorable compared to endowment funds of similar size. The spending rate from endowment was similar to that of other colleges. Gifts for permanently restricted assets were \$5.4 million. Fixed assets, net of depreciation, which represents 29.3% of total assets, were \$166.0 million, up \$5.8 million or 3.6% as a result of capitalization of new

⁶² Audited financial statements for fiscal years 2008, 2009, and 2010 are Appendix H on the compact disc.

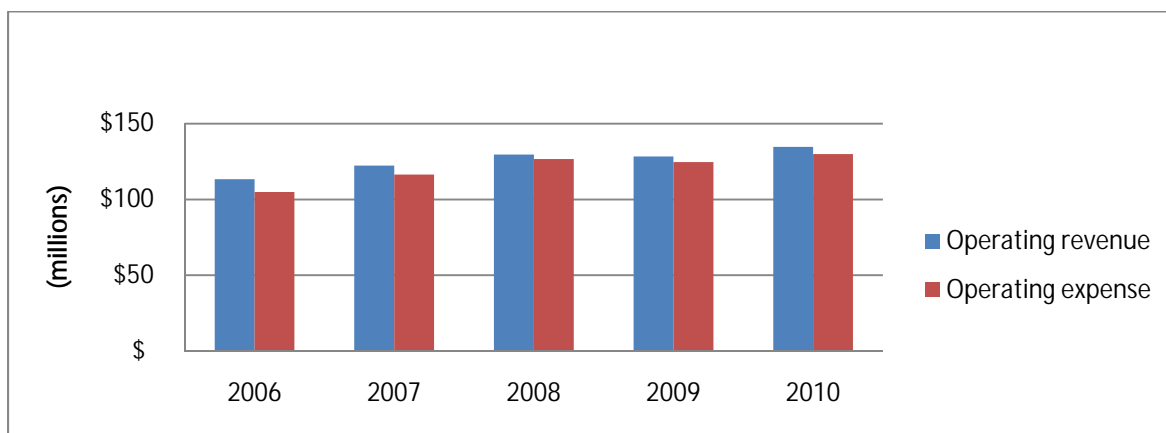
⁶³ This return is on a June 30 basis, the generally accepted measurement date for college endowments.

projects offset by depreciation expense. Other assets of \$83.2 million, representing 14.7% of total assets, remained relatively unchanged in total.

Total liabilities increased \$9.3 million or 7.0% this past year to \$142.7 million. Bonds and notes payable, which represent 43.1% of total liabilities at year-end, were \$61.5 million, a decrease of \$6.9 million or 10.0% from the prior year, as this year included a special balloon payment of approximately \$3.0 million. Accrued postretirement benefits increased this year by \$17.8 million or 58.0% to \$48.6 million and now represent 34.1% of total

represent 20.0% of revenues, remained relatively flat at \$27.0 million. Gifts and grants, which represent 9.0% of revenues, increased \$3.6 million or 42.3% to \$12.1 million, primarily the result of several new grants related to increased federal spending to stimulate the economy. Net assets released from restrictions totaled \$44.4 million, largely associated with the recently concluded campaign and construction of the Zankel Music Center.

Figure 9: Operating Revenue and Expenses—Statement of Activities



Unrestricted operating expenses increased \$5.3 million or 4.3% to \$130.0 million, primarily the result of costs associated with the voluntary early retirement program of \$3.3 million, general increases in the costs of employee benefits, services, and supplies.

Enrollment Planning

Our fiscal stability during this period is related in part to continuing strong enrollments. Over the past 10 years, Skidmore’s on-campus degree-seeking enrollment has increased from 2,191 FTE in Fall 2001 to 2,500 FTE in Fall 2010—a 14% increase.⁶⁴ Most recently, a larger than expected fall 2010 entering first-year cohort (the class of 2014 came in at 768, a figure 74 students greater than any other entering cohort) and higher retention (which has ranged from 93.0% to 94.6% over the past four years) have contributed to this trend. Plans are now under way to return enrollments to the budgeted levels by enrolling smaller first-year classes in the coming years. The funds generated by the over-enrollments have not been incorporated into the core operating budget, but instead have generally been reserved for building improvements and other capital projects (one-time expenses). Enrollments are projected for four years and are based on three-year weighted average retention rates by class level. These figures are reviewed by an enrollment committee and assist the group in setting entering class targets. The committee is diverse and includes members from Admissions, Bursar, Finance, Registrar, Residential Life, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, Off-Campus Study and Exchange, Academic Advising, Dean of Faculty, Student Affairs, and Institutional Research.

⁶⁴ See Skidmore Enrollments and Projections Fall 2011–Fall 2014, Appendix J on the compact disc.

Future Challenges

The continued strong financial support of friends and alumni is essential for success of the College. The College will need

Section Five: Evidence of Assessments of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning, Results, and Informed Planning

The most complete evidence of our assessment processes, we believe, is contained in our narrative in Section Three, where we aim to demonstrate the ways that we establish goals, work to meet them, gather evidence of the results, and re-establish goals in an ongoing process throughout the College. In some areas this cycle is more complete and sustained than in others; but no area is untouched by it, and the transition to documenting the ways our decision-making processes are planful and evidence-based is well under way.

For the sake of brevity and concision, we will provide here examples of documents and processes illustrating each part of the assessment cycle, with key documents included in the Appendix and on the enclosed compact disc. The most important document in this context is the Assessment Plan⁶⁷: it spells out the assessment processes in every part of the College, lists responsible parties, and explains our governance structures in relationship to institutional assessment and the assessment of student learning and development. Our supporting documents—including the Biology Assessment Plan and report, FYE assessment reports, and Alumni Learning Census—aim to illustrate that the processes outlined in the Assessment Plan are indeed in place.

The College demonstrates its commitment to an integral and strong culture of assessment not only by supporting the Office of Institutional Research and the Faculty Assessment Coordinator with budgets and personnel, but also in its commitments to externally-based initiatives such as the Presidents' Alliance for Excellence in Student Learning and the Carnegie Foundation's Community Engagement classification. The Faculty Assessment Coordinator is a Teagle Assessment Scholar, a position that gives Skidmore access to many resources, including national debates about best practices. Two of our faculty are also Carnegie Scholars. Most important, our assessment structures are designed to encourage information sharing and decision making across institutional boundaries.

Examples of documents and processes illustrating each part of the assessment cycle:

1. Defining clearly articulated institutional and unit-level goals

- § *Strategic Plan*
- § *Strategic Renewal*
- § Annual Strategic Action Agendas reflecting projects and action steps for each year, tied to *Strategic Plan* goals; plus accompanying matrix tracking progress of each action item at regular intervals and at year's end
- § *Campus Plan*
- § Goals for Student Learning and Development
- § Department-level goals for student learning
- § Course-level goals for student learning

⁶⁷ The Institutional Assessment Plan 2011–2016 is Appendix K on the compact disc.

2.

must not exceed 2% of the current year budget. Equipment requests must be zero-based. Concurrent with this process, proposals for any significant new initiatives are forwarded through the appropriate dean or vice president for consideration by the President's Cabinet. New initiative proposals are linked to and evaluated in the context of the *Strategic Plan* (and, beginning this year, in the context of *Strategic Renewal*), and results of any related assessments are taken into consideration. After all of the requests are compiled, a preliminary operating budget is prepared. Operating and investment revenues, compensation expenditures, student aid expenditures, new initiative funds, and other items such as utilities, student wages, insurances, library collections, etc., are estimated using a variety of models and assumptions.

The preliminary budget parameters and new initiatives are then reviewed in detail by the College's senior administrative team. Since the College is a tuition-driven

