The Assessment Plan for Skidmore College has been designed to contribute to our understanding of how well we are accomplishing the first three strategic goals of Skidmore College:

**Goal I – Student Engagement and Academic Achievement**

*We will challenge every Skidmore student to achieve academic excellence through full engagement with our rich and rigorous educational experience.*

**Goal II – Intercultural and Global Understanding**

*We will challenge every Skidmore student to develop the intercultural understanding and global awareness necessary to thrive in the complex and diverse world of the 21st Century.*

**Goal III – Informed, Responsible Citizenship**

*We will prepare every Skidmore student to make the choices required of an informed, responsible citizen.*

The results of our assessments can provide data and informed judgments that can help us contribute to the fourth strategic goal:

**Goal IV – Independence and Resources**

*We will preserve Skidmore’s independence by developing the resources required to realize our aspirations.*

Assessment provides evidence of the knowledge, skills, and perspectives that our students have achieved as a result of their education at Skidmore. When we have evidence that our students have not achieved all that we work to help them achieve, then we are committed to improving our efforts, our curricula, our co-curricular programs, and our uses of resources.

Our assessment plan has also been designed to meet the accreditation standards for Middle States accreditation. Appendix C summarizes the “fundamental elements” of three standards: Standard 7—Institutional Assessment; Standard 12—General Education; and Standard 14—Academic Assessment. The remaining 11 standards each indicate that assessment results are to be used as part of the information used to meet each standard.

### The Relation of Academic Assessment to Governance, Administration, and Strategic Planning and Budgeting

#### The Roles of Administration, Governance, and Faculty

- The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) is responsible for guiding assessment
activities and will be the responsible spokesperson for assessment at Skidmore College. The VPAA monitors assessment plans and annual assessment reports to assure that assessments are taking place regularly and systematically and that the College, through its departments, interdisciplinary programs, and College-wide assessments, is responding to the findings of its assessments. The VPAA provides appropriate budget support for academic assessment efforts as warranted. The VPAA may delegate specific responsibilities for various assessment activities to appropriate administrators.

- Department Chairs have responsibility for guiding their academic programs’ assessment planning, guiding the implementation of assessment activities, and, in their Departments’ annual reports, reporting both assessment results and how those results are being or will be used.

- The faculty are responsible for developing academic assessment plans within their academic programs and for participating in academic assessments.

- Assessment results will not be used to evaluate individual faculty.

- Department efforts to assess student work and act on the results will be recognized through the annual report process.

- The Committee on Educational Policies and Planning (CEPP) is responsible for reviewing, revising, and approving the Academic Assessment Plan for Skidmore College. CEPP may propose revisions to the plan as appropriate and when required. CEPP may (or will) appoint a sub-committee of faculty to monitor academic assessment planning at the College level and to make recommendations to CEPP regarding institutional assessment plans and activities.

- The Curriculum Committee is responsible for reviewing and approving syllabi for new courses and new or substantially revised academic program plans to assure that student learning objectives are clearly specified in both syllabi and department- and program-level documents.

- Student Affairs collaborates with faculty in support of student learning and is responsible for assessing all activities within Student Affairs that support the academic mission of the College.

- Academic support offices within Academic Affairs, such as the Library and the Writing Center, are responsible for assessing the effectiveness of their efforts to support student learning.

- Offices in other areas of the college that support student learning, such as the Center for Information Technology Services (CITS), are responsible for assessing the effectiveness of those aspects of their programs that support student learning.

- Each vice president is responsible for reporting the results of their units’ assessments to the
President and for providing appropriate resources for their support.

**Strategic Planning and Budgeting**

Our strategic planning and budgeting processes will use the results of our assessment activities to maintain, improve, and strengthen Skidmore College and its ability to educate our students. Planning and budgeting effectively requires the systematic gathering, analysis, and use of a variety of information about our efforts, all in support of our academic mission. Budgets should provide appropriate resources for assessment activities.

**Academic Assessment within Academic Departments**

All academic departments and interdisciplinary programs leading to a degree are to assess student learning within their programs regularly and systematically. Each academic program leading to a degree is to have an academic assessment plan that:

1. Specifies the learning goals and outcomes that all students within the program are to achieve;
2. Specifies the methods that faculty will use including direct assessments of student work;
3. Plans a systematic approach to assessment that may be spread over a timeline of up to five years;
4. Explains how and when the assessment results will be reviewed and by whom.

Each academic department or interdisciplinary program’s assessment plan may be modified as experience is gained with it and is to be included within the department or program annual report to the VPAA.

Each academic program should assure that all courses within the program have goals that are clearly related to the overall goals of that program.

**Academic Assessment of the Overall Learning of Skidmore Students**

**The Goals and Learning Outcomes of a Skidmore Education**

In developing our goals, we have been guided by “A Vision for Skidmore College,” the College Strategic Plan, the mission of the College, and a variety of ongoing discussions and studies about teaching and learning at Skidmore. We believe that the assessment goals reflect the statement in “A Vision for Skidmore College” that…

Skidmore College shall be a community of learners, integrating the efforts of faculty, staff, administrators, students, alumni, and trustees in pursuit of its mission to prepare flexible, reflective, and creative learners whose ethical, aesthetic, and intellectual values enable them to succeed at their careers, serve their
communities, and, through their coherent and integrated world views, contribute to an increasingly ambiguous and continually changing world.

For the purposes of assessment, the definition of *curriculum* in “A Vision for Skidmore College” is pertinent:

A *curriculum* is the sum total of all the experiences that a student has at Skidmore, whether academic experiences in the classroom; experiences in student clubs, activities, and organizations; or experiences beyond the campus, whether in internships, study abroad, or work. The life of the classroom both reinforces and is reinforced by student life outside of class.

Thus, we conceive of the “general education” of Skidmore students to encompass not only the first courses that students take at Skidmore, such as the First Year Seminars and the breadth requirements, but also the total education experience, including the majors and the experiences outside of class.

Our goals for assessing the overall learning of Skidmore students reflect the transformative vision of Skidmore within the Strategic Plan:

- A College that involves students immediately and passionately in a life-altering learning experience, from their first days on campus – a process that leads to significant individual academic achievement by the time of graduation, along with measurable development in realizing the values we comprehend under the heading “engaged liberal learning.” This experience will position *each* of our alumni to embark with assurance on the next phase of his or her life.

- A College that offers its students a balanced curriculum, reflecting strength across the letters, arts, sciences, social sciences, and selected pre-professional programs, one that enables its students to make *insightful connections* across disciplinary boundaries.

- A College that expects *every* student to develop increased appreciation of the value of *difference* in human society, in which each student progresses in his or her ability to interact successfully with persons of unfamiliar background, and that provides every graduate an entrée to the understanding necessary to function effectively not only as a citizen of our country but also as a citizen of our increasingly interconnected world.

- A College that itself acts as a responsible citizen, that expects responsible behavior of everyone within our community, and that empowers and inspires all of our students to make the choices required of informed, responsible citizens throughout their lives.

- A College that values and expects creativity in the research of our faculty, in the collective decisions that determine the course of our institution, and in the work of *all* our students across our curriculum and throughout their post-Skidmore lives.
A College that increasingly is recognized for its role as a leading national liberal arts college in furthering the cause of enlightenment within our national community and world at large – both through the actions of our alumni and through the College’s own contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

The following goals have been derived from Skidmore’s ongoing conversations about our curriculum such as the open forums on the First Year Seminar; planning documents such as the Vision Statement, Strategic Plan, and the Distillation Report; research studies such as the National Study of Student Engagement and the Student Cultures Study; and a review of the national literature such as the Greater Expectations report of AAC&U. They will be used to guide our assessments of the overall education of students at Skidmore (see Appendix A for a summary of the learning outcomes intended to initiate our assessment efforts). Both the goals and their learning outcomes may evolve as we gain more experience with actual assessments.

1. Intellectual engagement

Skidmore seeks an emotional attachment to learning from our students, not simply fulfilling requirements. Engagement refers to the commitment, passion, and intensity that a student brings to a learning task. Because this is an overarching goal for Skidmore, a variety of methods to assess “intellectual engagement” may be employed. Students will be able to reflect explicitly on present and past learning experiences in ways that demonstrate their vision of their learning experience as a whole, of their goals, and how all that reflects their own standards for what it means to be a learner. We may also employ interviews, student research, and various national studies to supplement and expand our understanding of our students’ intellectual engagement.

2. Critical inquiry

Critical inquiry involves using various modes of inquiry and interdisciplinary perspectives or methodologies to conceptualize, investigate, and derive meaning, whether through research or creative acts. It implies that creative learners are active learners, self-motivated learners, and learners who understand the ambiguities and uncertainties of knowledge or of knowing and who understand the consequences of various choices and acts.

3. Communication

Skidmore students should be able to communicate information, concepts, and ideas effectively through writing, speaking, and visual representation. Effective communication is founded upon three skills: the ability to transmit information, the ability to receive information, and the ability to recognize when communication is impeded and revise one's approach accordingly. In addition, communication should be appropriate for various audiences and for the specific discipline in which students are communicating.

4. Citizenship
Citizenship includes the ability to value and apply the principles of equity, social justice, and ethical judgment; to appreciate ambiguity and to value competing perspectives; to encourage respect for difference, including domestic and global diversity; to contribute democracy, civic life, and civic responsibility; and to promote intellectual honesty and personal freedom coupled with social responsibility. Students will consider citizenship, as expressed through curricular efforts or co-curricular and community service, as an integral part of their experience (service such as, but not limited to, voluntary activities, club leadership, environmental efforts, journalism, student government, and campus governance).

Co-Curricular and Other Academic Support of Student Learning at Skidmore

Learning occurs not only within our classrooms, but also across the campus in a variety of experiences available to our students. Non-academic programs responsible for supporting student learning at Skidmore will each develop and implement assessment plans that:

- Specify the goals of the program;
- Indicate how the goals will be assessed and who will be involved in that assessment;
- Indicate how the results will be discussed and for what purposes.

Each program that supports student learning will conduct ongoing, systematic assessments and will submit its plan and the results of its assessments to the appropriate vice president for review, approval, and support.

Making Assessment a Meaningful and Integral Part of a Skidmore Education

Our strategic planning and academic planning efforts must take into account the results of our assessment efforts, for if they do not, assessment will then be simply a required activity, but not one that is relevant to the future of Skidmore and its students.

Faculty participating in the assessment teams determining whether our seniors have achieved our all-college goals will be paid an appropriate stipend. Such compensation should be part of the academic budget for the College, included in a line designated for assessment purposes. In addition, faculty and staff who participate in assessment activities will be recognized publicly for their efforts and contributions. Assessment efforts should count toward tenure and promotion decisions, but the results of academic assessments should not be used to evaluate faculty. Outstanding efforts, not solely of individuals, but also of departments and support units, should be commended in Faculty Meetings, Board Meetings, and other appropriate opportunities. Our public relations efforts should note such efforts and help our various audiences realize that Skidmore is a leader among our peers in meaningfully assessing our students’ learning.
**Timetable for Assessing the Learning of Skidmore Students [See attached]**

The timetable (see Appendix B) is a guide to an initial five-year cycle of assessment. We assume that the methods and timetable will evolve as we gain more experience with these assessments.

**Methodologies to Assess the Overall Learning of Skidmore Students**

The plan includes a variety of methodologies selected to provide a breadth of perspectives into the overall learning of Skidmore students. These assessments have been distributed over a five-year timeline to allow appropriate time for development and to avoid excessive commitment of time in any given year.

An *electronic portfolio* allows students to demonstrate multiple examples of their work, provide views of their development over time, and reflect upon that development. Our intention is to select an appropriate software program during the Fall 2005 semester. During the 2005-2006 academic year, first year students will be trained in how to enter documents and other files into an electronic portfolio developed on campus by CITS. Once a more robust electronic portfolio is acquired, students will enter documents in their electronic portfolios based upon the four broad goals that we have designed to assess the overall learning of students. It is the responsibility of the students to maintain their portfolios. Students will continue to submit documents and other files to the portfolio throughout their four years at Skidmore. In the senior year, each senior will write a reflective essay in which he or she guides the reader through a self-evaluation of the student’s learning. Faculty teams will assess the components of the portfolios completed by senior students prior to graduation.

*Department assessments* in all of their varieties may also inform the campus about the overall learning of students and should be consulted when the annual assessment reports are submitted by departments. [Note: If various departments wish their students to compile electronic portfolios for department assessments of their academic programs, they may do so.]

*Interviews* of selected senior students prior to graduation can provide both in-depth and creative insights into the lives and thinking of our students. We proposed that non-academic staff and administrators be the primary interviewers, asking a limited set of broad questions designed to elicit responses that will give us insights into the learning and perspectives of our students.

The communication goal employs a variety of methods, from *rubrics* to assess actual oral presentations to assessment of writing in the portfolios to methods not yet determined to assess the visual learning of students. A sub-committee of faculty proposed that we include visual learning as one of the communication goals in recognition of the increased use of graphics, illustrations, and media presentations that many of our students use and that are accepted in publications, reports, and media projects nationally. We propose that, during the 2005-2006
academic year, a team of selected faculty be convened to determine whether and how we can assess visual learning.

Questionnaires do not actually assess student work directly, but they are most useful to assess aspects of student learning that cannot be determined by direct assessments, and the results can be used to guide more direct assessments. Our plan calls for such questionnaires to be developed and used as needed.

Finally, Institutional Research has a record of implementing a variety of surveys, both locally and nationally developed. We believe that they should continue to be used and the results fed into the overall assessment of our students’ learning.

Teams of faculty and/or staff to assess the various goals and report the results to the campus will be composed each year and compensated appropriately.

When assessment results have been developed, they will be shared with appropriate governance committees, faculty, and others through both open meetings and other means of distribution. The results will be discussed by appropriate campus groups as we work to achieve our strategic vision for Skidmore College.

[1] On March 9, 2005, CEPP approved the assessment plan and decided to appoint a special task force for one year, and the task force would review the implementation of the Plan for the next year.

[2] Mary Diez has described a portfolio as a mirror, map, and sonnet: a mirror in that it allows a student to reflect upon the student’s own academic goals over time; a map in that it aids in student planning, goal setting, and plotting a course through the student’s work; and a sonnet in that it provides a structure within which a student can exercise creativity. (Diez, Mary. “The portfolio: Sonnet, mirror and map.” In K. Burke, ed., Professional portfolios: A collection of articles. Arlington Heights, IL: IRI/Skylight Training and Pub., 1996)