



20 April 2016

Dr. Elizabeth H. Sibolski
President
Middle States Commission on Higher Education
3624 Market Street, 2nd Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear Dr. Sibolski:

On behalf of the entire Skidmore College community, I am submitting to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) our formal response to the MSCHE evaluation team's report, prepared by Dr. Janet Riggs and dated April 4, 2016.

The College is delighted to learn that the evaluation team confirmed the findings of the document review team that Skidmore "continues to meet the Requirements of Affiliation in Characteristics of Excellence" and that the institution "meets all relevant federal and state regulations and the requirements of other Department of Education recognized accreditors." Additionally, we are pleased that the evaluation team came away from the visit impressed with the College, especially with the shared passion we have for our "liberal arts mission." Skidmore cares deeply about the value of liberal education in a residential college setting. We are deeply committed to the proposition that it remains the best model for achieving educational excellence, and we believe that the accreditation process as practiced by the MSCHE reinforces and sustains this model.

We were impressed by the external team's commitment to understanding the subtleties and nuances of our complex educational community. By delving so deeply into our selected topics self-study the team has underscored the importance of its central concepts and detailed elaborations. Of course, we are heartened by the many commendations in the report, particularly in areas (such as chapter IV, which focuses on diversity and inclusion) that can so easily be politically charged and contested. The suggestions the team makes regarding each of the chapters are equally, or even more, valuable.

The team made several suggestions that arose directly from recommendations we made in the self-study, and we are grateful for the support of the team in reinforcing those initiatives at Skidmore. In particular, we appreciate the suggestions intended to move the revision of the general education curriculum along, to promote the idea of integrative learning at Skidmore, and to provide reflective moments for students at various stages of their time here. We will certainly continue to prioritize funding for the Center for Integrated Sciences and renovations to the Tisch Learning Center to make available more appropriate spaces for integrative teaching and learning. We already have begun conversations about assessment in Student Affairs and will formalize a structure for assessment within that division once the new Vice President is hired. We are excited about new partnerships recently formed or in process to bring faculty and staff in

Academic Affairs more closely in touch with staff in Student Affairs to advance students' skills and knowledge, especially related to values and ethics. We continue to develop and conduct assessments of the Goals for Student Learning and Development; we have focused in the past on communication, information literacy, and quantitative reasoning, and we will continue to focus as well on diversity, access, and inclusion, and on sustainability.

We want to emphasize that we particularly appreciate the team's attention to the issues described in Chapter IV of the self-study: Diversity and Inclusion. As we say in the self-study, "...we are grappling with the enormous challenge of changing not just behaviors but also mentalities and implicit assumptions about race, ethnicity, social class, and other social identities." The team commended Skidmore on several programs designed to improve diversity and inclusion at Skidmore, and we appreciate the team's suggestions that are designed to carry us even further. We realize that most, if not all, campuses are dealing with similar issues, and we value the ideas of the team members, who clearly have experience in these areas.

We would like to comment on the recommendations on pages 10-11 of the report. While we are not so presumptuous as to think we would be immune from recommendations, we were a bit surprised that the visiting team made recommendations pertaining specifically to compliance with certain Standards that were previously considered by our generalist document reviewers in the fall. Our understanding of the selected topics self-study process is that only issues that arose as part of the self-study topic—in our case integrative learning—or as the result of a request for follow-up by the generalists would be addressed by the visiting team. Standards 7 and 14 were not addressed in the self-study because we addressed them in the early document review and the reviewers found Skidmore to be in compliance, with no recommendations or request for follow-up by the team.

Accordingly, we went into the full team visit with the understanding that the matter of meeting the fourteen standards was settled. As a consequence, we did not anticipate another review of the standards, and so we did not provide the visiting team with the full documentation road map demonstrating compliance. Had we anticipated that the standards would play a renewed role in the team visit, we most certainly would have pivoted and focused our attention on those aspects of assessment that gave the team pause. Our focus was instead on the self-study and on the extensive documentation that accompanied it. Nevertheless, despite the indicated disagreements with the process by which we received the recommendations, we formally accept the team's report.

Above all, I want to express my gratitude to the members of the Middle States evaluation team for a productive and helpful visit. The team was professional and collegial, with an experienced and accomplished chair, and all members provided valuable feedback to us. Moreover, we learned a great deal about best practices, other schools, and, indeed, about ourselves. If the purpose of any reaccreditation effort is for the institution to improve, this team has helped us to see some new ways in which we might do that, has reinforced our resolve, and has supported our efforts to follow through with changes that are already underway. I am deeply gratified that the team came away with a positive impression of Skidmore, and we at the College are grateful for the valuable time and effort they

contributed to Skidmore and to the liberal arts college community in conducting our accreditation review.

Let me conclude by extending our thanks, once again, to the members of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, to our liaison Dr. Christy Faison, and to Dr. Janet Riggs and all the other members of the visiting team for the consideration they have shown to Skidmore College throughout the entire reaccreditation process.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Philip A. Glotzbach". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Philip A. Glotzbach
President