



## ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

### *President*

Chancellor Michael D. McKinney, MD  
The Texas A & M University System  
200 Technology Way  
Suite 2043  
College Station, Texas 77845-3424

Dear Chancellor McKinney:

The Association of American Universities (AAU) does not, as a general rule, comment on the structures of governance or the processes its member institutions employ for evaluating faculty performance. As an association of leading universities engaged in research and graduate education, however, we are naturally concerned if members adopt policies that undermine or discredit the importance of the research engagement of the faculty. When Texas A&M University (TAMU) was invited to join AAU, it was because AAU believed TAMU fulfilled the objectives of TAMU's own mission statement: "Its mission of providing the highest quality undergraduate and graduate programs is inseparable from its mission of developing new understandings through research and creativity." Recent proposals that have been advanced by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, and apparently supported by some regents and Governor Perry, appear to diverge from this mission statement.

After discussing these proposals in detail at its most recent meeting, the AAU Executive Committee has asked me to write to you to express our concern about this possible change in direction.

The key to the success of the American research university is the close alliance between research and teaching, especially the teaching of graduate students. In his seminal policy recommendations, which have guided American research policy since the Second World War, Vannevar Bush, the scientific adviser to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman, insisted that basic research is essential to the health, economic development, and national security of the nation and that it is most productively conducted in universities, where it is closely associated with the teaching mission of universities. The training of researchers, he argued, could best be conducted by those doing cutting-edge, curiosity-driven research. This was in contrast to government laboratories or research centers, separate from universities, which were the common model for conducting research in many parts of Europe and the former Soviet Union. Now, following our successful example, other countries, especially China, India, and Russia, are adopting the American model of university-based innovation that links research and education.

Given the success of this model, it would be ironic – and exceedingly unfortunate – if American universities were to begin to abandon it. And yet it appears to us as though the "Academic Financial Data Compilation" for FY09, developed by Texas A&M University, as well as the "7 Breakthrough Solutions" for higher education apparently produced by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, would do this by, among other

things, undermining the linkage between research and teaching that have been central to the success of American research universities. They would also evaluate both teaching and research in either unuseful or counterproductive ways.

The Academic Financial Data Compilation appears to evaluate faculty largely on quantitative measures that compare the cost of each faculty member (salary plus benefits) to the income generated (tuition generated by enrollment of students in classes) to yield a positive, "in-the-black" number or a negative, "in-the-red" number. The compilation also notes the amount of research funds the faculty member has generated over the past year and the past five years. This number, along with student evaluations, apparently will be taken into account in considerations of faculty compensation. Neither of these measures takes into account the quality, creativity, or impact of a faculty member's work.

The proposals contained in the document, "7 Breakthrough Solutions", go further yet in severing the bond between teaching and research. This document proposes to budget each activity separately, with 25% of the faculty expected to concentrate exclusively on research, without teaching responsibilities. Like the Academic Financial Data Compilation, it proposes to evaluate faculty performance on the basis of a cost-benefit analysis, with student evaluations determining the quality of instruction. It suggests that research and teaching are incompatible, that research has little social value, and that research quality should be reviewed by "an independent panel of donors and business leaders," thus passing the evaluation of research to panels with no substantive expertise. The document demonstrates little or no understanding of the nature of graduate education, particularly in its questioning of the value of doctoral education.

AAU strongly supports the evaluation of teaching as well as research in tenure, promotion, and merit reviews of faculty. However, to assume that the sole or even the primary metric for such evaluation is a "customer satisfaction" survey is to vastly oversimplify the complex components of good teaching. And to assume that non-experts can evaluate the quality or import of research in any field represents an assault on research expertise itself.

Public and private universities must operate as efficiently and effectively as possible; they must strive to improve the quality of their performance. However, separating research from teaching and oversimplifying the evaluation of faculty does violence to the values that have produced the American universities that are envied and emulated across the globe. Moreover, these proposals directly contradict Texas' stated goal of building more research universities.

We trust that you will resist these ill-conceived calls for "reform."

Sincerely,



Robert M. Berdahl  
President

cc: Chancellor Cigarroa  
President Loftin  
President Powers