February 28, 2003

Jeffrey R. Andrade
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy, Planning and Innovation
Office of Postsecondary Education
1990 K Street, NW, Room 8046
Washington, DC 20006

ATTENTION: HEA Reauthorization

Dear Mr. Andrade:

On behalf of the Association of American Universities (AAU), an organization of 62 leading public and private research universities, I am pleased to respond to the Department of Education's request in the December 20, 2002 Federal Register for comments and recommendations regarding the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA).

In general, we believe that the HEA serves students, universities, and our nation well and that it does not need significant modifications. However, there are several areas that we believe merit the Department's attention and action to make improvements.

AAU endorses the higher education community’s reauthorization recommendations submitted by the American Council on Education on behalf of 50 higher education associations and organizations. As a reflection of the interests and priorities of the research universities that comprise AAU’s membership, we especially support the recommendations that aim to:

- increase access to higher education for low-income students by strengthening support for grants and early intervention programs, particularly the Pell Grant program;
- increase financial support for graduate education through the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN), Jacob K. Javits Fellowships, and Foreign Language and Areas Studies (FLAS) programs;
- increase student loan borrowing limits, especially for graduate students;
- improve student loan terms and conditions; and
- reduce the regulatory burden on universities.
AAU also strongly endorses the statement included in the higher education community recommendations on ensuring accountability of institutions through the accreditation system and by providing high-quality information for students. AAU urges the Department to preserve the current decentralized system of higher education accreditation. This system has successfully facilitated self-review and peer-review to ensure and improve academic quality and public accountability of universities for over a half century.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments and we look forward to working with the Department during the reauthorization process.

Cordially,

Nils Hasselmo
President