Assessing Quality of University Education and Research (AQUER)

Project Description: April 2001

The Association of American Universities has initiated a five-year pilot project to develop improved measures of the quality of university education and research. The purpose of this project is to meet two critical needs. First, this project will provide analytic support for the association's policy development activities. The AAU has a longstanding commitment to promoting institutional and national policies supporting high quality programs of research and education. These policy development activities would benefit from a strong capacity for analysis of university research and education programs and the factors that contribute to their quality. Second, the project will develop improved measures of quality that will aid in more accurate and informative institutional descriptions and assessments. An association capacity to describe and assess member university research and education programs would provide a valuable service to parents, students, member institutions, as well as to policy makers more generally.

The project will proceed in two stages, an initial theoretical or conceptual phase, followed by an empirical implementation phase. In the initial two-year phase of project design and development, we will specify a working conceptualization of research and education program quality. In the second implementation phase, we will translate this conceptual framework into reliable measures of the concepts. We intend to take a fresh look at how quality within higher education should be understood and evaluated in order to propose creative solutions for improving the assessment and quality of research universities.