May 1, 2009

Tami Tamashiro
Executive Secretary
Task Force on Sustainable Energy
National Science Board
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Blvd.
Arlington, VA

Dear Ms. Tamashiro:

The Association of American Universities (AAU) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft report released by the National Science Board titled “Building a Sustainable Energy Future” (NSB-09-35).

AAU represents 60 leading U.S. public and private research universities and is devoted to maintaining a strong national system of academic research and education. Our institutions conduct over half of all federally sponsored university-based research and nationally award approximately 17 percent of all U.S. bachelor’s degrees, 20 percent of master’s degrees and more than 50 percent of all doctoral degrees. As you might expect, our universities have a significant interest in advancing energy research and training to help address our nation’s energy challenges.

AAU applauds the NSB’s leadership and the work of the NSB Task Force on Sustainable Energy in preparing this draft report. We strongly endorse and support the report’s overarching policy recommendation: “The U.S. Government should develop, clearly define, and lead a nationally coordinated research, development, demonstration, deployment, and education (RD3E) strategy to transform the U.S. energy system to a sustainable energy economy that is far less carbon-intensive.” AAU also agrees strongly with this guidance to the National Science Foundation (NSF) offered in the report: “The NSF should continue to increase emphasis on innovation in sustainable energy technologies and education as a top priority.”

On April 21, 2009, the member presidents and chancellors of AAU approved a resolution on green energy research and training. This resolution is very much in keeping with the spirit and recommendations contained in the NSB report, and it is consistent with recommendations made by AAU to then President-Elect Obama on December 23, 2008.

Specifically, the AAU resolution calls upon the Administration and Congress to initiate a new government-wide, multi-agency sustainable energy initiative to support
innovative energy research and education efforts at U.S. universities. AAU suggests that this initiative be modeled after the National Nanotechnology Initiative and coordinated by the National Council of Science and Technology and the Office of Science and Technology Policy in close consultation with the Department of Energy (DOE). In addition to the DOE, it should make university-based energy research and education a high priority across other major federal research departments and agencies, including a major role for the National Science Foundation.

Two specific points raised in the AAU resolution where we feel the NSF can and should play an important role are:

1) support for multidisciplinary science and engineering research at universities, including the social sciences, aimed at addressing areas such as energy usage, conservation, efficiency, and the market feasibility and environmental desirability of new energy technologies; and

2) support for new programs to train the next generation of scientists and engineers in key energy-related disciplines.

Attached is a copy of the AAU resolution. As the NSB moves to finalize its report, AAU would very much encourage the Board to take this resolution and its recommendations into account.

Again, we thank the NSB for the leadership it has taken in drafting this report and would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the NSB as it moves to finalize the report and further considers actions that should be taken by the federal government and the National Science Foundation to address our nation’s energy challenges.

Please contact me at tobin_smith@aau.edu or 202-408-7500 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Tobin L. Smith
Associate Vice President for Federal Relations