



ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

AAU Statement on Preserving Merit Review In Federal Funding of University Research

One important factor in the success of America's national research program is that federal funds for university-based research are primarily awarded through peer review, which allocates funding based on informed judgments of the merit of competing research proposals. AAU has long held that such merit-reviewed competition is the best method of ensuring the quality and cost-effectiveness of federally sponsored research.

AAU is concerned that Congressional earmarking of federal research funds may reduce the capacity of federal agencies that sponsor merit-based competitions to support the most promising research and will thereby impair the quality of our national research program. AAU institutions have a responsibility to support a strong research program based on merit and should refrain from seeking or accepting earmarks that put merit-reviewed funding at risk.

AAU respects the authority of Congress and its Members to set priorities for the investment of federal funds in different areas of research and in other programs. AAU also recognizes that not all federal research funds will be allocated according to strict, competitive merit-review criteria. For example, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) recognizes categories such as inherently unique research, "where funded activities are awarded to a single performer or team of performers without competitive selection." Such awards "may be based on the provision of unique capabilities, concern for timeliness, or prior record of performance." AAU has also recognized that historically most U.S. Department of Agriculture research funding has not been awarded through competitive merit review.

These deviations from or exceptions to the primary process of allocating federal research funds by merit-reviewed competition should not be used by AAU institutions as a license to seek earmarks that could threaten the merit-based funding that is essential to sustaining the highest quality research and providing the most effective use of federal research dollars.

Approved by the AAU Executive Committee on October 9, 2005