

RECOMMENDATIONS TO 2020 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

October 2020





On behalf of the [Association of American Universities](#) and its [65 leading public and private research universities](#), I am pleased to offer the following key policy recommendations to you and your campaign team as you consider your administration's agenda for the next four years.

AAU's member institutions are the nation's leading research universities, and every day they transform lives and advance society through education, research, and innovation. We are at the forefront of the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and are critical to protecting public health and advancing the technology that helps build our nation's economy and strengthen America's national security. The federal government's historic partnership in supporting scientific research and helping students of all backgrounds attend and succeed in college has played a vital role in making America the global leader in science, innovation, medicine, and higher education. Now – amid a global pandemic that threatens America's public health, economy, and national security – is a crucial moment for the president of the United States to double down on supporting the institutions and research that have made America the envy of the world in higher education and innovation.

Our nation has lost crucial ground in recent years. This is due in part to statutory constraints placed on discretionary federal spending. These limits have greatly constricted higher education and scientific research investments critical to educating our workforce, driving scientific and economic innovation, protecting public health, and advancing national security. Policymakers have also neglected and avoided difficult decisions and failed to institute long-overdue federal policy reforms in higher education, research, immigration, tax, and other critical areas. These much-needed changes would help the nation address pressing challenges and take advantage of opportunities that will bolster our nation's workforce, competitiveness, and security.

This is also an important time to renew the federal government's commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education, scientific research, and the innovation and entrepreneurship born of scientific advancement. The events of 2020 have made clear the obstacles and inequities facing so many Americans, and changes to federal higher education and research policies and programs can help address some of these challenges while strengthening our nation's innovation workforce.

AAU offers key recommendations that will help propel our nation forward and safeguard our position as the world's educational, technological, and economic leader. It is also critical that the administration work with Congress to alleviate the pandemic's continuing harmful impacts on students, colleges and universities, and the nation's research enterprise.

We are committed to working with the administration over the next four years to develop and implement policies to address national challenges and advance our country's economic competitiveness and national security.

Sincerely,

Barbara R. Snyder
President

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION: Expand Pell Grants. The Pell Grant program should be significantly expanded by: tripling the maximum Pell Grant award by 2024 to \$19,000; establishing a new eligibility maximum for family income of at least \$100,000 and indexing it to inflation thereafter; providing all first-time Pell recipients a \$2,000 one-time grant for college transition needs (like orientation programs and technology acquisition); and extending Pell eligibility to incarcerated students, Dreamers, and students with Temporary Protected Status.

- **RATIONALE:** When Pell was first implemented in 1975, the maximum award covered 79 percent of the cost of in-state tuition and fees at public universities. Today, it covers only about 30 percent of in-state tuition. Restoring the purchasing power of the Pell Grant and expanding eligibility, award size, and program benefits to aid in student success and completion are vital to renewing the promise of Pell.

RECOMMENDATION: Protect DACA recipients until Congress acts on permanent immigration reform. The administration should protect Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program recipients and other Dreamers from deportation while Congress passes legislation to normalize the status of these deserving young people.

- **RATIONALE:** While the Supreme Court has temporarily halted adverse actions against DACA recipients, they and other Dreamers remain in legal limbo. These hard-working young people deserve certainty about their long-term fates.

RECOMMENDATION: Immediately commit to sustaining real growth of *at least 5 percent a year* for scientific research and infrastructure supported by NSF, NIH, DOE, DOD, NASA, USDA AFRI, and other federal research agencies. One-fifth of the at least 5 percent annual increase should be directed toward scientific infrastructure; and basic and applied research focused on areas critical for economic competitiveness and national defense, such as artificial intelligence, quantum information science, biotechnology, environmental sustainability, and advanced manufacturing.

- **RATIONALE:** America's global competitors continue to [astronomically grow](#) their research and development spending, and our nation is not keeping pace. China is on track to surpass the United States in R&D investments this year. According to the [National Science Board's 2020 Science and Engineering Indicators](#), "the United States is increasingly seen globally as an important leader rather than the uncontested leader." A new report, "[The Perils of Complacency: America at a Tipping Point in Science & Engineering](#)," calls again for establishing a sustainable real growth rate of at least 4 percent in federal basic research investments. This is based on the findings of a [2014 report](#) in which [more than 500 organizations](#) from business, higher education, and science endorsed this same recommendation. Increased funding for scientific research should be coupled with reinvigorating research infrastructure to keep the United States at the forefront of science, engineering, and innovation. This includes investing in

research facilities, equipment, instrumentation, and technology transfer programs at the NSF, NIH, and the Department of Energy, and other federal agencies.

RECOMMENDATION: Reaffirm National Security Decision Directive 189 (NSDD 189). First issued by President Ronald Regan in 1985 and reaffirmed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2001, NSDD 189 asserted that “to the maximum extent possible, the products of fundamental research [defined as basic and applied research] remain unrestricted,” and declared that classification should be the primary mechanism for control of sensitive scientific and technological information.

- **RATIONALE:** Research universities share the federal government’s interest in ensuring intellectual property, proprietary information, sensitive data, and other classified and/or otherwise controlled government information developed or housed by universities is not vulnerable to exfiltration or espionage. The administration must restore proper balance between the need for securing federally funded research and the need to make new scientific knowledge publicly accessible to ensure continued scientific progress. NSDD 189 has enabled the government to strongly protect a narrow set of key technologies when imposing information security controls, while still ensuring the widespread, public, and open dissemination of research results. This clear policy avoids ambiguous measures that make it difficult for U.S. universities to comply with federal security controls.

RECOMMENDATION: Expand the Federal Work-Study Program. By 2024, double funding for FWS to \$2.5 billion and encourage the creation of a wide range of undergraduate research opportunities on and off campus.

- **RATIONALE:** By increasing the federal funding for FWS and broadening the scope of employment opportunities, more institutions can participate in the program; more students will be able to complete college with less or no debt; more funds matched by institutions will be leveraged to support students; and more students will gain additional skills and experience that bolster their future job prospects and contribute to our nation’s research ecosystem.

RECOMMENDATION: Strengthen accountability for federal higher education dollars. To ensure that federal dollars aimed at supporting students’ education do not instead go to propping up low-quality schools more interested in making a dollar than educating students, the administration should: restore the 85/15 Rule and count *all* federal educational funds as part of the federal share for that rule’s purposes, including active-duty military and veteran educational benefits; restore the Department of Education’s Gainful Employment Rule and withhold federal student aid from institutions that demonstrate a record of graduating students with debt that outstrips their job opportunities; and create a secure federal student data system to provide more accurate information about student outcomes.

- **RATIONALE:** For-profit colleges should not be funded solely by federal taxpayers, and federal taxpayers should not be propping up low-quality schools. The federal government should have more tools to hold accountable institutions that ensnare veterans and other Americans into unmanageable debt by making unrealistic promises about the value of their degrees. A federal student data system would inform policymakers and accreditors as well as students and families.

RECOMMENDATION: Create a new green card pathway for international STEM students. The administration should work to create a new green card category that would allow international students completing Ph.D. STEM, M.D., and advanced degrees in other designated areas of critical national need at United States universities to self-petition.

- **RATIONALE:** One of the great strengths of American colleges and universities is the presence of the best and brightest international students, scientists, and scholars. Their contributions go beyond the classroom and laboratories and extend into start-up companies, manufacturing, and businesses that create jobs and economic growth. In order to compete with the talent recruitment programs of other nations, the American immigration system needs to be modernized to encourage foreign talent not only to come and study in the United States, but to stay after they graduate to work and help grow the nation's economy.

RECOMMENDATION: Create new partnerships programs to address structural inequities in STEM education, research, and innovation at higher education institutions. Develop and fund a new multi-agency "Partnerships in Research and Education in STEM" program aimed at enabling, building, and growing new partnerships between Historically Black Colleges and Universities, minority-serving institutions, and federally award centers and/or facilities at leading research universities, using the NSF Partnerships for Education and Research in Materials program as a model. Additionally, develop and fund a new regional technology transfer consortium program at NIST to encourage new partnerships between leading research universities and institutions such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, minority-serving institutions, and tribal colleges to help expand technology commercialization capacity across the nation's higher education system.

- **RATIONALE:** Mutually beneficial partnerships between Historically Black Colleges and Universities, minority-serving institutions, and leading research universities can foster greater diversity in the scientific enterprise, facilitate university technology transfer, and encourage more minority entrepreneurs to advance innovation and economic growth. New research, education, and technology transfer partnership programs between HBCUs, MSIs, and other leading research universities can build additional institutional STEM capacity for the nation and assist in the recruitment, retention, degree attainment, and ultimate success of members of groups currently underrepresented in STEM fields.

RECOMMENDATION: Preserve and reaffirm the Bayh-Dole Act from complications caused by efforts to control drug prices. Preserve the Bayh-Dole Act and reaffirm that the [National Institutes of Health's response](#) to previous Bayh-Dole Act "march-in" petitions is the correct understanding of the scope and appropriate uses of march-in rights.

- **RATIONALE:** A [2015 study](#) found that 55 percent of 1,453 FDA-approved new molecular entities were first reported by academia, and a [2011 study](#) found that "virtually all the important, innovative vaccines that have been introduced during the past 25 years have been created by PSRIs (Public Sector Research Institutions)." This innovation has occurred because of the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980, which incentivized the transfer of federally funded university-based research to advance the public good. But recent efforts to make federal funding agencies use Bayh-Dole

Act march-in rights to control drug prices now threaten Bayh-Dole. This approach to controlling drug prices is ineffective and would have a chilling impact on the creation of new drugs by discouraging companies from making the substantial additional investments necessary to take federally funded university-based research from the laboratory to patients.

RECOMMENDATION: Repeal the “scholarship tax” and establish a universal charitable giving deduction. The excise tax on university endowments imposed by the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act should be repealed as quickly as possible and a universal charitable giving deduction for federal income tax purposes should be enacted.

- **RATIONALE:** Endowments enable research universities to aid students, subsidize vital scientific research, and serve their communities. Taxing charitable contributions that fund scholarships and crucial research is not in the national interest. Itemized deductions for charitable contributions had fallen by \$54 billion in May 2019 as compared to May 2018, the IRS reports. A universal deduction for charitable giving would allow non-itemizing taxpayers a deduction for their charitable gifts and increase charitable giving by an estimated \$12.2 billion (4.3 percent). Increased charitable giving to colleges and universities would help support student aid, as well as medical and other important areas of research.

Conclusion

AAU and its members stand ready to work with the administration to sustain America’s leadership in higher education, science, technology, and the economic innovation that is powered by university-based research.

The extraordinary success of [America’s government-university partnership](#) since the end of World War II has made us the world’s leader in higher education, scientific advancement, and the economic and national security benefits that result. But that leadership is no longer undisputed – and the next presidential term offers an extraordinary opportunity to renew and deepen that partnership.

We welcome the opportunity to answer questions about and discuss these recommendations. Please contact us at barbara.snyder@aau.edu for more detail regarding any of these recommendations.