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Staff Memorandum

To: AAU AGS Deans
CC: AAU Chief Academic Officers
From: Toby Smith, Vice President for Policy
Emily Miller, Associate Vice President for Policy
Date: November 29, 2017
RE: AAU PhD Education Initiative

As discussed at the 2017 Association of Graduate Schools (AGS) Deans meeting, the Association of American Universities (AAU), with leadership provided by AAU President Mary Sue Coleman, intends to launch a new initiative in collaboration with our member universities focused on doctoral education (PhD Education Initiative).

To help advance a PhD Education Initiative AAU submitted an invited proposal to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation in June 2017. Despite expressing broad support for many aspects of the proposal, the reviewers' critiques raised important questions about the proposal's direction, and it was not funded. After considering the reviews and given recent discussions we have had with the AAU Chief Academic Officers (i.e. Provosts), AAU AGS Deans, and other key stakeholders it is clear to us that we are at a more nascent stage in the development of our PhD Education Initiative than we recognized.

Based on what we learned from our discussions and building off the momentum around the Chief Academic Officers' [statement](#) on doctoral education data transparency, AAU now considers the best starting point for the Initiative to be to work in partnership with our member campuses to support data collection efforts that can help inform discussions about PhD student experiences and career pathways, as well as the structure of doctoral programs. We acknowledge that although data alone do not spur action, we are convinced that reliable,

accurate, and transparent data are critical for reflective and informed discussions that can lead to changes in the way students experience and navigate PhD programs.

AAU has become aware of several emergent institutional, multi-institutional, and national efforts to document and make public PhD program and career outcome data. Unfortunately, there seems to be little communication between these efforts despite the fact that many institutions are participating in multiple projects. Thus, to better understand the landscape and foster synergy, AAU hopes to hold a workshop in early spring 2018 that will engage representatives from both institutions that have developed the necessary infrastructure to make PhD program and employment data public and from multi-institutional projects working to document PhD career pathways. Along with representation from these two groups, AAU will invite additional key stakeholders including Institutional Researcher Officers, Graduate Deans and Provosts, as well as individuals involved in projects focused on broadening career pathways for PhD students.

The workshop will raise awareness about the methodologies being used in each data collection effort (e.g. taxonomy, survey instruments, data definitions, levels of disaggregation); deepen understanding concerning how the information being collected in each of these efforts will and will not be used (e.g. institutional improvement, public data transparency, etc.); and help identify synergies and opportunities for collaboration between these various efforts.

Requested assistance from you and your campus

In preparation for a workshop we would greatly appreciate if the Graduate Dean would provide a coordinated response to [this online survey](#) to help AAU understand the involvement by your university in various PhD data collection and transparency efforts. In addition, AAU has also worked to refine the Initiative prospectus. We welcome your institution's feedback and thoughts on the draft [AAU PhD Education Initiative prospectus](#). This request is designed to prompt campus discussion of the AAU PhD Education Initiative and further guide the development of the Initiative's aims and goals. There will be ample opportunity to continue the dialog as the development of the AAU Initiative proceeds. Please complete the online survey and submit feedback on the prospectus to Tara King, AAU Higher Education Project Coordinator at tara.king@aau.edu by **Wednesday, January 17, 2018**.

AAU is optimistic that, with additional input and guidance from experts and stakeholders in PhD education, we can launch a successful and influential effort to improve the educational experience of PhD students at research universities.

To help address common inquires and questions, AAU will host a webinar on the PhD Education Initiative on **Monday, December 11 at 4:00 p.m. EST**. All interested individuals on your campus are welcome to join the webinar.

Webinar Information: Please use the following link to register for the AAU PhD Education Initiative Webinar on December 11, 2017 4:00-5:00 PM EST:

<https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/register/176868927020494851>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

You may address any inquiries and/or questions to us at: Toby Smith (toby_smith@aau.edu) or Emily Miller (emily.miller@aau.edu).

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