



## ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **LEADING RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES COMMIT TO IMPROVED DATA ON UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION**

The Association of American Universities (AAU), which comprises 60 leading public and private research universities in the United States and two in Canada, has committed to collecting and providing to the public basic information about undergraduate student performance, such as graduation rates, time to degree, and careers pursued following graduation.

AAU also will help its member universities develop cost estimators that will provide more accurate information about the actual (also known as “net”) costs to individual students to attend a specific institution.

Generally, collective statistics will be released by AAU, and institutions will release their own individual information.

The decision caps an effort begun in January, 2005 with the formation of the AAU Committee on Institutional Data, chaired by John D. Wiley, Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

“AAU and its member universities recognized that our institutions could provide better, more accessible information to prospective students and their families about the likely cost of attending a university, how long on average it takes to complete a baccalaureate degree, the percentage of students who graduate, and what its alumni do following graduation,” said AAU President Robert M. Berdahl.

He added, “Collecting this information is not a simple matter, however, so it has taken time to determine the best means of doing so, and it will take a few years before it is fully implemented. But the process has already begun, and we hope to begin reporting some data by the start of the next academic year.”

The information provided by AAU and its members will supplement the extensive information that the Department of Education already collects and disseminates on every college and university.

The AAU data collection will be carried out by the AAU Data Exchange (AAUDE), the organization of AAU university institutional research and planning officers. AAU and AAUDE will do the following:

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- AAU members will participate in the Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE) survey (<http://www.ou.edu/csrde/index.html>), operated by the University of Oklahoma. The survey provides data on retention and graduation by various demographic and other student characteristics. A number of AAU universities already participate, and AAUDE will compile and separately aggregate the survey information for AAU members.
- AAUDE will collect data on time to degree, that is, how long it takes for students to achieve their degrees. This information will be collected by broad discipline (e.g. natural sciences, humanities) as well as by major (e.g. physics, history).
- AAU will work with the National Student Clearinghouse (<http://www.nslc.org/>), a non-profit organization that provides student degree, diploma, and enrollment verification, to provide data on students who transfer between AAU institutions so that such students can be included in institutions' graduation rates. Current data about graduation rates are faulty because they do not account for transfer students and therefore do not consider those who graduate after transferring to have completed college successfully.
- AAU will help its members to develop “cost estimators,” online tools that enable prospective students and their families to estimate what it would cost them to attend a particular institution, based upon key financial, demographic, and other data, as opposed to the stated “sticker price” of an institution, which most students do not actually pay.

Berdahl noted that participation in the institutional data project, and in the separate elements of the process, is voluntary for individual universities. However, he said he expects nearly every AAU institution to participate in at least some elements of the data project.

“There is a consensus among AAU universities that they should strive to provide information to prospective students in the most accurate, useful way possible,” he said. “I expect a very high level of participation as this project phases in.”

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*The Association of American Universities ([www.aau.edu](http://www.aau.edu)) is an association of 62 leading public and private research universities in the United States and Canada organized to develop and implement effective national and institutional policies supporting research and scholarship, graduate, professional, and undergraduate education, and public service in research universities. AAU universities award over one-half of all U.S. doctoral degrees and 55 percent of those in the sciences and engineering.*