



ASSOCIATION OF AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 14, 2014

CONTACT: Barry Toiv

202-408-7500, barry.toiv@aau.edu

AAU ANNOUNCES SEXUAL ASSAULT CLIMATE SURVEY

Survey Planned for April 2015

The Association of American Universities announced today that it has contracted with Westat, a respected national research firm, to help design and administer a sexual assault climate survey at as many of its 60 U.S. research universities that choose to participate. The association said that Westat would carry out the survey in April 2015.

The survey will employ a valid and reliable survey instrument to document the frequency and characteristics of campus sexual assault and sexual harassment and to assess campus climate in a way that ensures comparability of data across institutions and that protects the confidentiality of respondents. The survey will be administered to undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, but not to faculty or administrators.

The survey will be uniform across all participating campuses except for five questions that will mention campus-specific programs to assess students' familiarity with campus resources, support services, and reporting mechanisms. AAU will publicly report cumulative results from across its participating campuses. Westat will provide each participating campus with its own data, and each university will decide whether and how to disseminate those results.

The association will also invite members of the [Consortium on Financing Higher Education](#) that are not AAU members to participate. However, data from non-AAU institutions will not be included in the AAU-wide information.

A team of university professionals, chaired by Dr. Sandra Martin of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (UNC), will work with Westat to design and administer the survey. They will use as the basis for the survey an instrument developed by the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault. Dr. Martin is Professor and Associate Chair for Research in UNC's Department of Maternal and Child Health and Associate Dean for Research at the Gillings School of Global Public Health.

"Sexual assault is unquestionably one of the most important and complex issues our campuses face," said AAU President Hunter Rawlings. "The first priority for our universities is the safety of their students. That is paramount. Universities also have a responsibility to ensure that adjudicatory processes are trustworthy and fair."

He added, "We are pleased to have a respected firm such as Westat helping us with this climate survey. We believe Westat will bring deep and substantive experience and expertise to this challenging initiative."

“The survey has two primary purposes. First, as our institutions consider what steps they may need to take with respect to safety, law enforcement, adjudication, and other policies, we hope that this survey will provide solid information on the incidence of sexual assault and sexual harassment on their campuses and on attitudes on the issue among their students.

“Second, we have been deeply concerned about the possibility of Congress or the Administration mandating that campuses conduct a government-developed survey. Such an initiative would likely be a one-size-fits-all survey that would provide potentially misleading data, given the extraordinary diversity of higher education in our country, and would not reliably assess the campus culture on this issue.

“We believe it is important that AAU take on the role of providing this information not only to our universities but also to policymakers and the public. We hope it will help ensure that any government policies that do emerge are cognizant of the vast diversity of American higher education.”

#