

What AAUW Branches in Pennsylvania are saying About Open Membership

As of March 8, 2021 we are aware of five branches in Pennsylvania that have committed their support of eliminating the degree requirement for AAUW membership. Below are their statements published in newsletters. We will update as we learn of additional branch support.

State College January and March 2021

Drop the Degree Requirement.

We cannot say we value inclusion and diversity if we choose to exclude women from our organization who took educational paths different from our own.

When AAUW was founded in 1881, the organization sought to provide an opportunity for women to come together for academic and cultural pursuits. Much has changed since that time. A degree is no longer necessary to make us like-minded. Our mission and our challenges have grown, we need all women to come together as one force if we are to be successful in our mission to advance women and girls in today's society.

Moreover, to move our agenda forward, AAUW must have sufficient funding. In the most pragmatic terms, we simply cannot expect corporate organizations as well as other organizations to support AAUW financially if we don't espouse our own values.

It is time to drop the educational degree requirement as a barrier to joining AAUW and our branch. Vote to drop the requirement on the Spring 2021 national ballot.

If you would like to provide input on this significant revision, please send your thoughts by February 5 to <https://www.aauw.org/resources/member/governance-tools/national-election/2021-commentbylaws/>

Cindy Hall and Sally Kalin, Co-Presidents, AAUW State College

AAUW Membership -- Who can join AAUW?

This is the question coming before our members this spring. The question is, should we eliminate the college degree requirement for membership? There are several reasons why it is coming up for a vote, and in my role on the PA Board of AAUW, I have gotten some new points of view, many of them surprising.

Here are some of the issues:

1. **AAUW needs to increase membership.** The average age of our members is currently 72. I actually think this is a great age! Nevertheless, we need to do more to attract younger women, and most of our efforts have proven generally unsuccessful. Our branch is exceptional in that we have not only maintained our membership numbers, but have even increased them, (well, before Covid.) Other branches around the state are not so fortunate and are experiencing declining membership; a few are dying out. What can we do to make our organization attractive to younger women?
2. **We need to focus on our mission.** Our mission is to promote equity and provide opportunities for women and girls. This is really the essence of our existence, our raison d'être. In today's world, college-educated women are breaking glass ceilings every day, although with a pay gap. While we recognize the need to help women who have not been as fortunate as we have been, we do not allow them to join our fight. For this reason we are seen as elitist by many younger women, both college-educated and those without a degree. They don't want to join this kind of group.
3. **We need to expand our diversity.** Our new President is a great role model in choosing a diverse group to work with him in our government. We can't say that we want to include a diverse group of women who believe in our cause, but then discriminate against some of them, the ones who never finished college.
4. **We need more funding from major foundations.** Many major foundations will no longer support organizations that have discriminatory membership policies, including ours. When funding dries up, dues increase, another unfortunate situation that we are facing. I am learning of drastic cuts that have already been made at the National office to balance the shrinking budget.

The most common rebuttal to this proposal is that AAUW actually includes "University Women" in our name. The response is that many organizations have developed, and the name changes with them. IHOP was "International House of Pancakes," but the company now uses just the initials, since they serve so much more than pancakes and breakfast food. The same for AT&T. Does it really matter that there is no more telegraph? There are numerous examples of similar name changes as companies change and grow over time.

In summary, the health of our organization is being tested. Do we want to be a group that focuses on special interests and social activities, or do we want to focus on our mission? Can we join with women from different educational backgrounds to achieve equity at all socio-economic levels? If so, we need to think seriously about our membership policies, and allow all like-minded women to join our cause.

Eva Kaufmann

Bethlehem Facebook post 1-28-21 and February newsletter

On January 6, an extraordinary young woman, Amanda Gorman, captured the hearts of all Americans as she read her poem on Inauguration Day. Yes, there is always light, but we must be brave enough to see it, hear it, and be it. There is a call to see the light to our AAUW membership right now. We must look at the National AAUW recommendations for a change in the bylaws for Open Membership.

Change is difficult, but with enough information and background on proposed changes, we can make informed decisions on this topic. National AAUW recommends opening membership to all women who hold our missions and our core values of equality for all and remove any barriers that keep us from achieving these outcomes. They hope to achieve a more diverse and inclusionary organization. They strongly recommend eliminating the degree requirement for membership to accomplish this.

The following are some key points to consider in making an informed decision on the proposed changes.

- This change is about inclusion. AAUW has a vision of Equity for All. Our practices should align with this vision.
- We need to create a more diverse membership bringing new perspectives to meet our mission of advancing gender equity.
- The educational requirement is in opposition to recruiting more diverse and younger members.
- Education's role comes in many forms, including Career Technical Education, on the job training, and similar routes.
- Not having a degree does not exclude advocates from working on our mission. As an organization that promotes equity, we do not treat non-degree individuals as equals. Sometimes, we are seen as an exclusionary and elitist organization and have not evolved.
- Organizations and foundations prefer to work with and fund other organizations that adhere to diversity, inclusion, and equity policies and practices. We are losing dollars to fund our missions in the future.

This spring, between April 7 and May 17, 2021, our members will vote on a change to our bylaws to open membership to non-degree members. We need at least 5% of our members to vote and a 2/3 vote to amend the bylaws. Please take time to review, research and consider this change to our bylaws. Be brave enough to see it, consider it, and change it.

More information on Open Membership can be found on the following link. Copy and paste in your browser.

<https://www.aauw.org/.../Membership-Requirement-full...>

North Hills Pittsburgh – January 2021 newsletter

National Election 2021 Submitted by Peggy Schmiedecke This spring AAUW members will be asked to vote on amendments to the Public Policy Priorities and bylaws, in addition to electing members to the national Board of Directors. Every AAUW member has the right to comment on proposed changes to the bylaws or Public Policy Priorities before they are put the membership for a vote.

We will be given the information needed to prepare for voting. Also the opportunity to comment on proposed bylaws and Public Policy Priorities to discuss the changes or propose your own changes. The comment period will open on Monday, January 11th. We believe an email will come from National with a link to make comments and proposed amendments of which may be submitted until February 5, 2021 at 5:00pm ET.

It is very important that you vote. Each member gets one vote. Our National leadership has stated that 5-10% of our membership typically votes. They wonder why an organization that gives us each the ability to have a direct impact on women/girls won't show up to vote in their own election.

Here are key dates:

- April 7 Voting opens – online voting is encouraged
- April 16 Last day to request a paper ballot
- April 30 Postmark deadline for mailing paper ballots; ballots must be postmarked by 11:59 pm ET to be counted
- May 17 Online voting ends at 5:00 pm EST

North Hills Pittsburgh – February 2021 newsletter

Should AAUW Drop the Degree Requirement?

AAUW National is again suggesting that we drop the degree requirement for membership. This issue was presented to the entire membership two years ago, and, at that time, 46% of the national membership was in favor. This issue will come to a vote again in Spring 2021. In the meantime, be thinking about how you will vote. In many ways, the future viability of AAUW hinges on that vote. We ended our January Branch meeting with a discussion regarding this.

Here are some of the pro's and con's of the argument:

PRO – Drop the degree requirement

- AAUW will be more inclusive of other women. There are many talented, community-minded women who would make our organization stronger and who do not have degrees.
- It makes sense in the North Hills area of Pittsburgh to make ourselves more relevant to our community which has a wide range of educational opportunities. We would be more representative of our community.
- AAUW still maintains in title, mission, and activities an interest in higher education for women and girls.
- AAUW National will have greater eligibility for grant money from corporations and foundations if we are more inclusive. It is extremely important that National find sources of income other than dues in order to continue to operate, offer opportunities to women and girls, and maintain its legislative activities.

- AAUW North Hills Pittsburgh Branch was founded 50 years ago to give like-minded women an opportunity to come together for academic and cultural pursuits. Society has changed. The degree is no longer necessary to make us like-minded, and our mission is broader.

CON – Maintain the degree requirement

- AAUW will no longer be special if we allow members without degrees. Our members are university women.
- It has always been this way. This is a lopsided argument, but it is difficult to come up with reasons to maintain the degree requirement.

Now through February 5, 2021, you can provide thoughts and comments on the proposed changes to the AAUW bylaws as well as proposed changes to the Public Policy Priorities. To learn more about the proposed changes and submit your feedback, please visit the National AAUW website. Simply type in the search window “AAUW Elections.” Voting will open on April 7 and close May 27, 2021. A link will be sent to all members so you can vote.

AAUW Carlisle March 2021 newsletter

Your Voice Matters – Voting Begins April 7 to amend AAUW bylaws

On January 19th AAUW National held a virtual town hall to discuss the proposal that AAUW amend the bylaws to open membership and eliminate the degree requirement to join AAUW; a proposal that will be put to virtual vote by national membership April 7 – May 17. The national AAUW Board of Directors strongly supports the proposal, along with dozens of member leaders across the country. I would like to briefly share a few key points from the virtual town hall I attended and encourage all AAUW members to vote in favor of amending AAUW's bylaws.

Why change things? To put it bluntly, we are not walking the walk when it comes to diversity and inclusion, and funders take note of that. Because our current educational degree requirement can be deemed discriminatory and not in keeping with our mission, some foundations and corporations will not donate to our organization since it is counter to their criteria of equity. This disadvantage, along with the now 400-plus organizations competing with AAUW on women's equity issues for funding, affects National's ability to get much needed funding. Declining membership, now at 50,000, only provides 15-20% of the annual budget. This is not enough to support branch and member services.

What do we gain? Eleanor Roosevelt and Lily Ledbetter would not qualify for AAUW membership with our current educational requirement. Many of our members have (frankly, terrible) stories about having a speaker or community partner inquire about membership and having to reject them because of the educational requirement. The image that comes to my mind is women climbing the ladder but pausing to deliver a sharp kick to those still on the ground. We are closing ourselves to the potential talent of members that could further our mission and help our organization thrive. One of the best hires I ever made was a woman who had to drop out of college for financial reasons and never completed a degree.

Would we have to change our name? The bylaw change would not affect AAUW's name, just as the name did not change when we changed bylaws to allow college and associate degrees or changed the bylaws to allow men into the organization. Plenty of organizations (YMCA, NAACP) identified by acronyms have evolved away from their original wordings.

What, specifically, will change? We will no longer limit membership by penalizing women who cannot attain a degree due to today's skyrocketing educational costs, childcare, elder care, transportation, working multiple jobs and language barriers. Today, there are more alternatives to college degrees, which have burdened women with two-thirds of the national college debt. With more careers open to women, i.e., firefighters, pilots, entrepreneurs, artists, politicians, manufacturers, retail managers, our bylaws are particularly outdated. The bylaw change means our branch will not be demeaned by having to reject women interested in membership who are enthusiastic about our mission but do not meet our criteria.

What if we do not change the bylaws? I am going to go back to something mentioned before, which is declining membership. To frame it with my own perspective (someone under 50), I had trouble initially understanding that this was even a conversation. I could not believe that an organization dedicated to women's equity would shut out women who wanted to join. There were not a lot of dissenting voices in the town hall I attended, but there were enough to shock me. The prize for achieving our own educational goals is not to shut out others who did not achieve theirs. I will offer that I do not believe anyone of my generation could understand an organization dedicated to equity having entrenched inequity built into their membership laws. Organizations that do not evolve do not last.

Our membership should be unified by our mission, not by our privilege.

You will receive an e-mail when voting opens April 7 – online voting is encouraged but paper ballots can be requested (please reach out to Kate Elkins or Katie Perkowski if you need a paper ballot.) Further information about the proposed bylaw changes can be found at <https://www.aauw.org/resources/member/governance-tools/national-election/2021-comment-bylaws/>.

AAUW Member Voices -- Across the Country

"I would like to share my mother's story: In 1942, she graduated first in her high school class and traditionally would have received a college scholarship from a local women's group. When the group learned she was the daughter of immigrants, they changed the selection criteria and denied her the scholarship. As the youngest child of a widowed immigrant mother, she could not continue her education. She raised two daughters who achieved five degrees between them. Are today's women who were denied an education through poverty or prejudice unworthy?"

Janine Greenwood

Katie Perkowski
Public Policy Co-Chair