

To All AAUW-PA Members:

AAUW National has put forth three bylaw amendment proposals that will be put to a vote by the membership starting April 25. The AAUW-PA Board of Directors supports and endorses the three bylaw amendments. In order for you to make an informed vote, we are providing some rationale and explanations about each of the bylaw proposals.

Bylaw Change Proposal 1 – Staggered terms of office for AAUW Board of Directors on a 3-year rotation

Rationale – AAUW National Website (abridged):

A staggered term refers to the practice in which members of a board of directors are not all up for election at the same time, with staggered term models often electing one-third of their members in each election.

The AAUW Governance Committee and Board of Directors recommends AAUW move to three-year staggered terms to ensure board continuity, preservation of institutional memory, leadership development, and board innovation. This recommendation is that we increase the term of office from two to three years and that elections for board officers will occur annually to fill vacancies.

Explanation – AAUW-PA:

The existing number of board officers, both elected and appointed, would be retained as outlined in the bylaws. A phasing in process would be used in order to set up the staggered terms (e.g. in 2019 12 members elected of which 1/3 of the board elected for a 1-year term, 1/3 board elected for a 2-year term, 1/3 board elected for a 3-year term; 3 members appointed, 1 for a 1-year term, 1 for a 2-year term, and 1 for a 3-year term). Elections and appointments would then occur every year with 1/3 of the board elected and 1 appointed member named.

Bylaw Change Proposal 2 – Membership requirement for AAUW Board of Directors

Rationale – AAUW National Website:

AAUW is undergoing an important and robust strategic planning process at a critical time in the national conversations on equity. In planning discussions with members across the United States it has become apparent that we need to open our board to people who may not be members of AAUW but bring a wealth of experience and expertise to our organization. As an equity-seeking organization we need to welcome those who are not currently members of AAUW but can make an invaluable contribution to steer AAUW into the future based on their personal and professional experience, industries, geographic location, and other diversity views that can help propel AAUW's mission forward.

Explanation – AAUW-PA:

The AAUW National board is very different from a branch or state AAUW board. For states and branches, the board members do everything. They determine the direction of the affiliate, direct programming both in the affiliate and the community, fundraising, advocacy efforts, scholarship awards, and anything else the affiliate does, then they make sure it is implemented.

The AAUW National board functions more as a corporate board, meaning their role is one of fiduciary responsibility, overseeing the direction of the organization, monitoring programs and finances, participating in strategic thinking to provide organizational direction linked with sustainable resources and measurable outcomes, and so forth.

AAUW recognizes that we could expand our influence and deepen our impact if we could add board members from outside of AAUW that are prominent leaders in equity work. Imagine how our work could be amplified if someone like Neera Tandan, President of the Center for American Progress or Fatima Goss Graves, CEO and President of the National Women’s Law Center were to sit on AAUW’s board.

Even though the bylaw proposal is to allow non-members to serve on the national board, it is our expectation that once elected or appointed, non-AAUW board members will become AAUW members. If they believe strongly enough in the mission of AAUW to be on the board of directors, then it is anticipated that they would be more than happy to join the organization.

Bylaw Change Proposal 3 – Degree requirement for membership in AAUW

Explanation from AAUW-PA with some Rationale from AAUW National Website (in italics):

INCLUSION AND EQUITY.

For the past 4 or 5 years, the Diversity and Inclusion Task Force, which has recently become the Inclusion and Equity Committee, has worked very hard to provide information, resources, and suggestions for ways in which the membership of AAUW can become more diverse and inclusive working from the AAUW Diversity Policy which states “There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or class.”

Included in the Diversity and Inclusion Tool Kit (2015) are the statements:

“Diversity is critical to AAUW’s mission. We recognize that issues of equity — from fair pay to sexual assault to access to health care — affect all women, and we recognize that women in marginalized groups often disproportionately experience the effects of these issues. To succeed in empowering women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research, we must have diverse voices contributing different perspectives.”

“As a membership organization, AAUW depends on our ability to attract and retain new members. To continue to grow and thrive, we must be responsive to changes in our demographics and include individuals with diverse backgrounds and perspectives.”

Our current policy that you must hold an educational degree to be a member of AAUW is at odds with our efforts at inclusion and equity and is counterproductive to recruiting members of diverse race/ethnicity and younger members. *Simply put, AAUW cannot promote equity for all women and girls if the organization maintains exclusionary membership requirements.*

Diverse Race/Ethnicity.

According to the US Census, in 2016, 46 percent of non-Hispanic white women aged 25-29 years completed four years of college. For African American and Hispanic women, the numbers drop to 25 percent and 31 percent, respectively (US Census Table A-2 Percent of People 25 Years and Over Who Have Completed High School or College, by Race, Hispanic Origin, and Sex). This means that before you even start recruiting amongst the population of women, you have eliminated 54 percent of non-Hispanic white women, 75 percent of African American women, and 69 percent of Hispanic women from becoming members. African American and Hispanic women are disproportionately eliminated compared to non-Hispanic white women – how can we achieve diversity in race/ethnicity with this handicap? Not to mention that the women eliminated are aged 25-29 years old, so you are also eliminating young members when holding to the policy of requiring an educational degree.

Younger Members.

In addition to eliminating younger members who don't achieve educational degrees, we are also alienating them as a group because they do not like the educational degree requirement. "Younger feminists do not want to join an organization that does not appear truly intersectionally feminist. It's not simply because AAUW can't recruit them, they do care about the mission yet don't want to be affiliated with an organization that claims to be feminist but is exclusionary. Without their membership, AAUW will cease to exist one day. A Fourth Wave has arrived; we can either reach out to them or fail to survive." (AAUW-PA C/U Liaison Dr. Holle Canatella, Associate Professor; History, Political Science, International Studies, and Foreign Languages Department, Lock Haven University).

The average AAUW member age is in the neighborhood of 70+. If we want to attract younger members so that the organization can continue, we have to be the organization they want to join. Retaining our exclusive policy of requiring an educational degree will prevent us from attracting younger women – some because they don't have a degree and some who have a degree but don't like the policy of requiring one to be a member. This makes it extremely difficult to attract young women to AAUW.

FUNDING from CORPORATIONS and FOUNDATIONS

AAUW membership dues are important to AAUW, but to put it into perspective in FY 2017 the membership dues represented 13 percent of revenue received (AAUW Annual Report, Fall 2017). Membership dues are increasing for FY18 which may put a burden on some members. In order to minimize the financial dependency on members through dues and our very generous member donors, AAUW is continuously seeking other streams of revenue including

corporations, foundations, and other grant-making organizations. AAUW has had some success with corporations, for example, sponsors for the Tech Trek STEM camps and NCCWSL.

AAUW as an organization is potentially a great partner for corporations and foundations because our mission of advancing equity for women and girls resonates with them. However, these same corporations and foundations often have policies and practices in place that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in their organizations and with the partners with which they collaborate. *AAUW doesn't meet basic inclusion language required for many of these funders* and as a consequence are *prospectively losing* these opportunities putting even more burden for funding on our members.

In order to expand fundraising efforts outside of going to our members again and again, AAUW needs to eliminate what is seen as an exclusive policy in requiring an educational degree.

FUTURE OF THE AAUW ORGANIZATION

AAUW is in a period of change. With the new CEO Kim Churches and the Board of Directors, we are plotting our path for the future. A first order of business is drafting a strategic plan for the organization to determine among other things what issues are we the go-to organization for, where do we lead, where do we support, how can we move forward in a strategic manner to ensure we are around to fulfill our mission that we all care so deeply about and are no longer needed?

To remain relevant and impactful, we need committed members and funds. With our membership demographic of overwhelmingly white and an average age in the 70+ area, we cannot survive. In order to remain strong, we need to diversify our membership in terms of race/ethnicity and infuse it with younger members. We can't do that with the roadblock of requiring an educational degree for membership for the reasons given above. We've made difficult changes before, if you remember in 2005 when we voted to merge the Educational Foundation and the Association (membership) branch of the organization we were faced with the option of merging or going out of existence because financially we could not sustain the Association as it existed. We face a similar crossroads with this proposed amendment. If we do not change our membership requirements so that more diverse and younger members join, we will face the potential of going out of existence and that would be a great loss for everyone.

Common Statements and Responses on the Elimination of an Educational Degree:

Statement: Our founding mothers instituted the degree requirement, we should abide by that. If we drop the degree requirement it says we don't care about getting an education anymore.

Response: AAUW will always care about promoting higher education for women and works tirelessly to support access to education, Title IX protections, STEM education, and a host of other education issues. AAUW also supports access to the equally important career and technical

education (CTE) occupations where women also face barriers. Many of the CTE occupations are non-degree jobs, yet they offer women a chance to participate in these higher-paying nontraditional fields.

The support of women's access to education at whatever level and funding to support graduate women students through the Fellowship and Grant programs, will always be a part of AAUW regardless of the membership requirements.

Members should bear in mind the context of the times when the degree requirement was set. When Marion Talbot and the other founding mothers began the Association of Collegiate Alumnae it was uncommon for women to have college degrees. These women formed the ACA to remove the roadblocks to getting an education and subsequent work for women of their generation and beyond. Today non-degree women are factory workers, construction workers, electricians, plumbers, realtors, saleswomen, corporate workers, industry workers, telephone company workers, health workers, mechanics, artists, police officers, and so many more, and often are single mothers, all of these women face inequities. If Marion Talbot formed AAUW today, it's hard to believe that she would prevent these women from fighting for equity. We are not honoring AAUW's legacy with this degree requirement, quite the opposite. We need to let non-degree holding women work for their own equity and their daughter's equity alongside the rest of us.

Statement: If we drop the educational requirement, we will stop funding Fellowships and Grants for graduate women because we no longer value education.

Response: Not true. AAUW Fellowship and Grant funds are financially robust. AAUW has no plans whatsoever to discontinue the Fellowship and Grant programs. Dropping an educational requirement for membership does not mean AAUW does not value education. AAUW recognizes that education comes in many forms, not just formal degrees, and we want all those members joining our fight to achieve equity for women and girls.

Statement: Women without a college degree can join other women's organizations that don't require an educational degree instead of AAUW.

Response: Not really. AAUW is unique in the vast scope of work we address. There are organizations to address some, many, most of our mission goals and issues, but not all. Organizations such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), the Soroptimist, the League of Women Voters, Planned Parenthood, etc. all do outstanding work in the issues of importance to those organizations. There are over 200 organizations that are part of the National Council of Women's Organizations, including AAUW. The more you read through the missions of these organizations, the more you realize how unique AAUW is as an organization. Included in our mission work are our efforts in breaking down barriers to education of all forms (P-12, college, Career and Technical Education), advocating for pay equity, protecting civil rights, protecting reproductive rights, outstanding gender equity research, the distinction of being one of the world's largest sources of funding for graduate women, our support of legal advocacy efforts to combat sex discrimination in higher education and the workplace, and so much more. So, you

really can't just join another women's organization and have an equivalent experience to your membership in AAUW.

Statement: We will have to change our name and drop the "University" term.

Response: No, we will not have to change our name if we drop the degree requirement. We did not change our name from American Association of University WOMEN when we allowed men into the organization so we don't have to drop it when eliminating the degree requirement.

Statement: The only reason members support dropping the degree requirement is to gain more members for the organization.

Response: No, it is doubtful that we would gain substantially more members because we drop the degree requirement. We did not substantially increase our membership when we allowed men to join in 1987 or when we changed the degree requirement to an Associates' or equivalent degree or higher in 2005. The reason we should drop the education requirement is simply **because it is the right thing to do**. We are an organization that works to advance equity, yet we do not see non-degreed women as equal to us.

For those women who choose not to attend college, that is their choice, if they decided to pursue a non-degree career, we should respect that. What our current degree requirement tells these women, the factory worker, the mechanic, the artist, the electrician, the plumber, etc., who are getting paid less than a man who does the same job in her workplace or being treated inequitably, is that she can't fight for herself. We will fight the battle for her and let her know how it turns out. How is this equitable?

Statement: If the bylaw amendment proposal to drop the educational requirement passes, I will discontinue my membership in AAUW.

Response: AAUW understands that some members may leave if the educational degree requirement for membership is dropped. This is not something AAUW wants to see. Should the proposal pass to eliminate the educational degree, before you leave, ask yourself, is the reason you belong to AAUW because it consists of members with an educational degree? Or, is it because you believe in the mission of advancing equity for women and girls and want to fight that fight? If it is because you believe in the mission, then AAUW encourages you to remain and finish the battle against inequity that we have been fighting for so long.

Statement: Dropping the educational requirement would change the identity of AAUW.

Response: AAUW is defined by its mission "advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research". Holding an educational degree is a current membership requirement, it is not our identity. To advance equity for women and girls you do not need to have a college education.

Statement: Requiring a college degree ensures a commonality and like-mindedness amongst AAUW members.

Response: A college degree does not make us all like-minded, there are plenty of people with college degrees that don't think anything alike. What we hold in common is our belief in the mission of advancing equity for women and girls and that does not require a college degree to support. People with college degrees do NOT speak with one voice by virtue of their college degree. We speak with one voice because of our support of the mission.

Statement: Dropping the Degree Requirement will end what is unique about our organization.

Response: We are NOT a unique organization working for women's equity because we have members with college degrees. Surely some members of the National Organization for Women (NOW), Soroptomist International, and the League of Women Voters (LWV), as well as countless other women's organizations have college degrees. Other organizations address different components of our mission, but only AAUW addresses all that is involved in the comprehensive mission of advancing equity for women and girls. This is our uniqueness; our mission, and this is where we should focus.

Statement: Requiring a college degree sets us apart or makes AAUW special.

Response: AAUW is special because of our mission, to advance equity for women and girls. If one believes that the only thing that makes AAUW special or sets us apart is excluding women without a college degree, then what does that say about us?

Statement: Dropping the degree requirement says that my hard work and sacrifice to earn a degree was a waste of time, demeans my degree, or dishonors my degree.

Response: AAUW supports the potential of all women. If a woman chooses to go on to higher education, that's terrific and AAUW will be there to support those efforts for all women. Those who have degrees can be proud of their hard work and reaching their goal. Working with women without degrees does not demean or dishonor your accomplishment.

AAUW equally supports the rights of women that decide not to attend an institution of higher education or who prefer to pursue non-degree career and technical education.

Do we want to be the organization that suggests that without a college education, a woman has nothing to add to AAUW and its mission?

Statement: Members need a college education to understand the complex issues before us (actual comment from a member).

Response: A college education does not make one uniquely suited to understanding complex issues nor does the lack of a college education make one unsuited to understanding complex issues. As individuals we all have different skills. To suggest as a class college educated people are smarter, better critical-thinkers, the only ones able to understand complex issues, or similar comments, is just not true.

When online voting begins on April 25, **we encourage you to vote “Yes” to all three bylaw amendment proposals.**

Dot McLane, President AAUW-PA on behalf of the AAUW-PA Board of Directors