

Members say ...

I believe that in 10 years, the country will be lucky to have one progressive women's organization "left standing" as a viable organization. I think that organization can be AAUW. But to make that happen, we are going to have to "walk our talk" and eliminate our own barriers to membership, so any member of, say, NOW or BPW or League, can join us.

—Corky Bush, AAUW Champion

This new bylaw proposal is the right thing to do! We can't be an organization that says "do as I say, not as I do," and still be effective in today's world. I agree that we need to honor the women who came before us and their accomplishments, but we do need to continually be moving forward.

— Charmen Goehring-Fox, AAUW ME President

I can enjoy the company of educated women every day, many with doctorates, but only in AAUW can I be pretty sure of being in company that supports equity for women and girls.

—Patricia DeWitt Shorter, AAUW GA President

I don't agree that the degree requirement is AAUW's "brand." Our mission is our brand, and one of the reasons that this change is so important is that the notion that we're defined by our membership requirements rather than our mission really weakens our voice in the fight for equity.

—Sandy Kirkpatrick, AAUW CA

We have changed our membership requirements many times over the years to respond to changing social, political, and economic conditions, and we have survived, even grown. Frankly, it's the principle that justifies this action now; and in ten years, we will be a stronger organization because of it.

—Diane Ehernberger, AAUW MT President

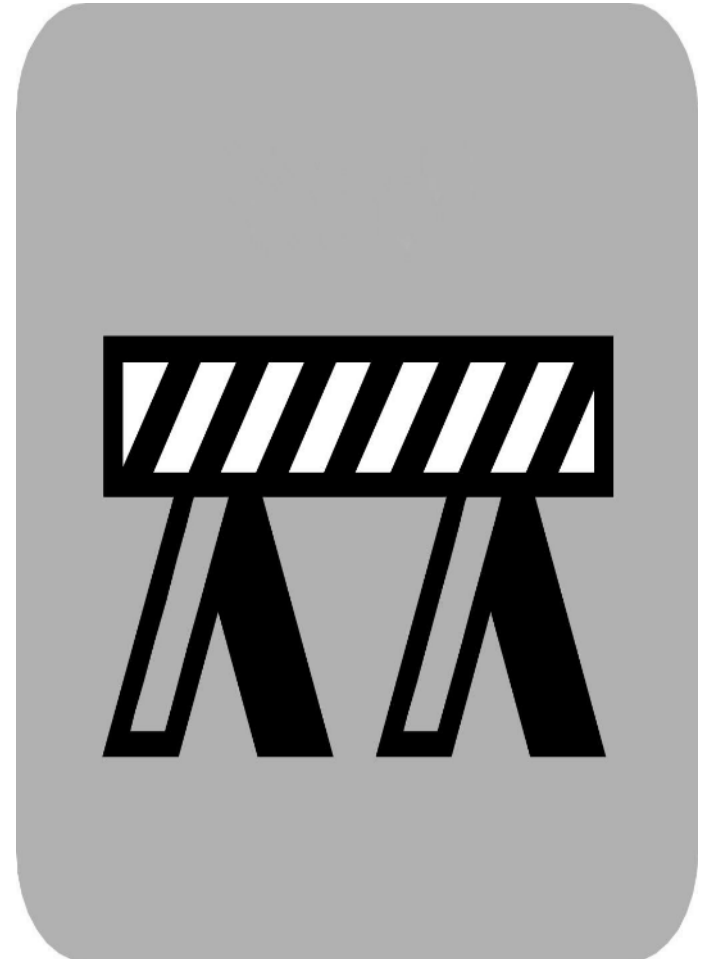
To maintain our power to effect change, we need to be able to say "If you support equity for women and girls, join us," not "If you support equity for women and girls AND you have a degree AND you don't mind associating with those who refuse to work side by side with those who don't have a degree, join us."

—Nancy Shoemaker, AAUW NC

Open Membership = Equity in AAUW

Paid for by the Open Membership Committee; Marilyn Arp, Treasurer

break our own barrier



Open Membership

Open Membership Will Break Our Own Barrier to Equity

AAUW's proposed bylaws changes are the result of a decade-long strategic planning process aimed at ensuring AAUW's survival in the face of changing member demographics and social realities. Emerging from thousands of member surveys, hundreds of hours of discussion, and a unanimous mandate at the 2007 Phoenix Convention was the recognition that "equity for women and girls" is the heart of everything we do. "Lifelong education," "positive societal change," and "uniting alumnae of different institutions" were all important, but none was seen as the "core value" of the organization.

Open membership is essential to this core value. By welcoming all those who support our mission to join AAUW, we demonstrate that we:

- **Believe in our own equity statement**, which reads, "AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research." After all, how can we promote equity if we don't practice it ourselves?
- **Recognize that many people see AAUW as "elitist."** This view limits our ability to attract and retain younger members, many of whom consider a post-secondary degree to be a right rather than a mark of exceptional accomplishment.
- **Embrace all possible allies in our communities.** Potential allies too often view AAUW as being "discriminatory" because of our membership requirement. This view affects our ability to work effectively in coalitions. In addition, diversifying our membership will expand our programming and allow us to draw from a broader pool of presenters.
- **Remove a major barrier to the "mission clarity"** that was identified at the 2007 Phoenix Convention as being a critical factor to our long-term success. If we are to realize our vision, we must be clear about who we are and why we exist.

Yes, but ...

Won't this damage AAUW's image?

Our image may not be what we like to think it is. Because some potential members view AAUW as elitist, they currently go elsewhere when wanting to join a progressive organization. Also, some AAUW members see AAUW as a "professional" organization and wonder why more professionals don't join, yet AAUW has never been tied to any specific profession. Opening membership will clarify and enhance our image.

Isn't AAUW membership a reward/incentive for getting a degree?

For many long-time members, joining AAUW was both reward for completing their degrees and recognition of the hardships they endured to get those degrees. However, these incentives no longer seem to be working as well as they once did. In fact, AAUW membership has been declining even though the number of degree holders has been increasing.

Won't this send a message that we are devaluing education?

Not at all. Rather, it recognizes that, just as people can support their local symphony without being composers or musicians, people do not need to hold post-secondary degrees in order to value education. Advocates of open membership want AAUW to become the organization that all people who support our mission can join without being questioned as to their workplace or certified as to their training.

What about the unique, historical status of our degree requirement?

Just as the U.S. Constitution has been amended to reflect evolving social values, AAUW has also changed its membership requirements throughout its history. For example, we dropped the list of "approved" colleges and universities; next we admitted men; then we allowed those with associate's degrees to join; and now we can complete our march toward equity in membership by allowing all those who support our mission to join.

What will happen to our name?

Nothing has to happen, any more than it did when we amended the bylaws to open membership to men. AAUW has benefitted from the two most recent changes in membership requirements—the admission of men in 1987 and the admission of post-secondary degree holders in 2005. Not only have these changes brought new members and leaders into the organization, they have brought new perspectives and new energy. In addition, just as GEICO no longer insures only government employees and AARP membership is no longer limited to those who are retired, we can be recognized for our initials rather than our whole name. If we later choose to make a change, that is an issue for another time.