

To All AAUW Idaho Members:

Over the past four years we have visited all Idaho branches multiple times. Regardless of the size of a branch we are always impressed with AAUW Idaho members and their commitment to AAUW and their community. When reaching out via telephone or email, we have found members to be well informed and ready to take action that will lead to positive change for women and families. We are now asking you to take an action that will expand the voice and reach of AAUW: **vote to eliminate the degree requirement for membership.**

As we travel the state and at AAUW Idaho board meetings we always discuss the issue of membership. We have conducted membership training and talked about ways to grow membership. In those same discussions we have identified barriers to growing our branches. The biggest barrier, especially for the branches in rural areas, seems to be the degree requirement. We are an organization that advocates equity yet we are exclusive (some have said "elitist") in our requirements for membership.

We have been relentless in asking Idaho branches to grow because if we are to have a voice in the issues of our time, our voice must be backed by numbers. At any function or event, we continually try to recruit new members. When we talk to prospective members about AAUW many of them are interested in learning more: "How can I join you in working towards AAUW's mission?" We are then faced with having to ask them if they have an associate or higher college degree. This is a difficult question to ask. It may result in embarrassing the prospective member if they don't meet the education requirement. Never mind that their passions, their accomplishments, and their contributions are significant, and we share the same values about empowering girls and young women. They cannot join AAUW because they do not meet a requirement that was established over 130 years ago.

Over the years AAUW has modified other eligibility requirements to reflect the ever-changing social climate:

- 1882 – Degree from a specific list of colleges or universities
- 1949 – Degree from any accredited four-year college or university
- 1987 – Membership extended to male college graduates
- 2005 – Membership extended to include graduates who hold an associate or equivalent degree from a qualified educational institution

How many potential members are we losing because AAUW has this eligibility requirement? We can answer that question to some extent based on conversations we have had over the years and around the state with interested individuals:

- We lose younger women and men who meet the education requirement but don't want to join an organization that seems elitist to them.
- We lose women and men who share our vision for the future but because of a myriad of circumstances they were not able to attain a college degree. This did not keep them from having careers or joining other activist organizations. They just cannot join AAUW.

- We lose donations from organizations that support our mission but do not understand why one must have a college degree to work towards gender equity.

Some members object to open membership because they wonder “What will our name be?” AAUW is the fourth name we’ve had in our years of being a membership organization. The name was not changed when AAUW started accepting men as members, or people who had a community college degree. What we call ourselves is not the end-all in our decision to become a more inclusive organization.

While AAUW is an organization that fully supports women getting a college education in the field of their choice, we need to recognize that education comes in many forms. Over our professional lives we have worked with many women and men who did not have a formal degree. This is not a measure of intelligence...sometimes it is the lack of opportunity or choices made early in life that are difficult to reverse. If you look at the statistics, in 2016, 46% of non-Hispanic white women aged 25 to 29 years completed four years of college. For African American and Hispanic women, the numbers are more stark at 25% and 31% respectively. This suggests AAUW cannot promote equity and diversity for all women and girls if the organization maintains exclusionary membership requirements.

We need every woman and man who supports our mission - empowering women and girls - to join us in the ongoing challenge of achieving gender equity.

When online voting begins on April 25, **we encourage you to vote “Yes” to eliminate the college degree requirement for membership in AAUW.**

Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Kathy Scott and Julie Custer  
AAUW Idaho Co-Presidents