

## **AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN**

### **Proposed Amendment to AAUW Charter and Bylaws**

#### **(Attach additional sheet(s) if needed**

**I.** Description or intent of change:

This proposed amendment changes the membership requirement to include as eligible members those who have an associate or two-year equivalent academic education.

**II.** Rationale and background information:

The amendment returns to the floor of the 2005 convention the language on which at the 2003 convention a majority of 762 to 640 (54.35% approval), but not the necessary 2/3 agreed. The overwhelming acceptance of the 2003 resolution calling for an association-wide, structured dialogue on membership demonstrates the need to return to this question. The proposal endeavors to keep before membership a change in the requirement that has growing support.

Although totally open membership may be desirable and supported by many members, the majority of members are not there yet. This resolution takes a gradualist approach to first broaden membership to those with two years of a baccalaureate degree or an associate degree or higher. This requirement seems to satisfy those members who want some standard in preference to a totally open membership. This step is a promising first step towards greater inclusion and may be taken now. Perhaps greater inclusion will come later.

In contrast to organizations such as teachers, doctors or lawyers, and many others, AAUW is not a professional organization that requires a level of performance proficiency. Instead we are a voluntary and civic organization. The range of knowledge and talents from non-degreed women who will commit to AAUW can be expected to be just as useful and welcome as that of present members. We will always encourage continued education and degree completion among women whether they are members or not and regardless of their educational level.

Our mission states that we are for equity for all women and girls, lifelong education, and positive societal change. Our diversity policy states that in principle and practice we value a diverse membership and that there shall be no barriers to full participation in the organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability, or class. We will give a stronger message and support to these claims if we admit members by disregarding the degree requirement that often differentiates current members from the other named socio-economic characteristics.

If AAUW membership is a reward for women who have gained baccalaureate degrees, that reward is not working. While there are approximately 25 million women in the U.S. population with 4 or more years of college education, AAUW membership is below approximately 110,000 and continues to fall. Many of us know several women college graduates in our communities who perceive AAUW nationally as elitist because of our stand on the membership requirement. They, therefore, chose not to participate with us on that basis.

The bachelor's degree is not the only route to education and participation. Many people, chiefly women, have not been able in the past to obtain a four-year degree. Often their own careers have had to be put on hold while they helped husbands and other family members obtain their degrees. Often in the past, women were not encouraged or assisted to receive degrees as their brothers were. Some careers have had different patterns, such as nurses who have had three-12 month programs (36 months) instead of four-9 month programs (36 months). Some women have begun teaching under provisional licenses, gone to school their whole teaching careers, had credits equivalent to a 4-year degree but never got a degree because they haven't done student teaching under supervision. They may even have supervised other student teachers but were not supervised themselves.

We should not prevent women from AAUW membership because of some outside bureaucratic convention.

Many women without degrees are women who want to join us, but think they are prevented by lack of a degree. Through the community partners program, some branches may have up to 5% of their total membership women who have not completed a degree. For example, in Red Wing, Minnesota, two of 50 current members are community partners. One is the senior reporter of the local daily newspaper and a prominent feature writer who attended community college. Another is a woman with a three-year nursing degree, a recipient of our Citizen of the Year Award, who founded the battered woman's shelter program in Red Wing. Women throughout the U.S., especially in towns where there are few other organizations for women than AAUW, are eager to participate with us.

The question of what will happen with a change in membership cannot be fully predicted. We should remember that when the question of admitting men was debated, opposing arguments predicted that the organization would change and that men would take over. Presumably AAUW is always evolving and changing gradually, and a change in membership requirements fits better with the changes we have made in our diversity policy than does the present situation. People come into AAUW now because they identify with AAUW's mission and want to support it. Why would we suspect that people would join AAUW in the future to change it any more than they do presently?

It is not the graduation requirement that makes us different. No other organization is like AAUW because of our mission. We stand for the interrelated combination of three things: equity for women and girls, lifelong education, and positive societal change. Other organizations may also be for one or two of these things, but not all three in the combination that AAUW integrates. In the *Encyclopedia of Associations* where tens of thousands of organizations in the United States are listed, not one of them is like ours in mission. Our foundations characterize us further and set us apart. The Educational Foundation is historic and no other foundation matches its size and scope in supporting education for women, related research and community projects. The Legal Advocacy Fund is unique in aiding women across the country at the academic level in fighting discrimination and in recognizing academic institutions that proactively work for women's rights. These essential characteristics of AAUW would remain.

**III.** Suggested text of change:

Amend ARTICLE IV, Membership and Dues  
                                Number  Title  
                                Section 3, a. (1), Individual Member/ Eligibility  
  Number  Title

Striking out after "A graduate holding": a

Inserting or adding following:

an associate or equivalent,

**IV.** Submitted by:

Name of member Roger Sween

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Red Wing MN 55066-4103

AAUW office, if any Administrative Assistant, Minnesota State Board

Name of branch, state, or committee proposing this change, if applicable

Passed by the membership of AAUW-MN, May 2, 2004,  
presented by Red Wing Area Branch