



Living our Vision of Equity for All

Should We Eliminate the Degree Requirement?

Key Talking Points

- AAUW's vision is 'Equity for All' and our membership practices should align with our vision. AAUW promotes and advocates for equity, yet we do not allow those without a degree to join our organization.
- One of AAUW's values is inclusivity and our membership practices should align with our values.
- AAUW does not qualify for grants from companies and foundations that value diversity, inclusion and equity. We are losing out on funding that could help us move forward with our mission and vision.
- There are many paths to education beyond colleges and universities. Education comes in many forms, including Career Technical Education, on-the-job training, and similar education routes. We are missing out on valuable contributions by people who are just as passionate as we are about our mission and values.
- You do not need a degree to believe in or advocate for our mission.

Members May Ask

If we drop the degree requirement, how can we say that we still care about education?

Education is foundational to our mission and will remain a focus for AAUW. Dropping the degree requirement will only impact who may join our organization, not the work we do.

Don't we need to honor the legacy of our founding mothers by retaining the degree requirement?

Times have changed since the founding mothers began the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) which later became AAUW. Just like our founding mothers, we can be role models for positive change in the world. But we cannot have the impact we seek when our membership criteria don't match our mission and values.

The only reason members support dropping the degree requirement is to gain more members, isn't it?

Eliminating the degree requirement will bring membership in AAUW into alignment with our mission and values. This will allow AAUW to qualify for grants from corporations and foundations that value diversity, inclusion and equity that we are not qualifying for today.

Won't dropping the degree requirement end what is unique about our organization?

Unfortunately, AAUW might be more unique for its exclusionary practice of requiring members to have a degree. We believe strongly in equity, diversity and inclusion, yet we are not practicing these values with this membership requirement.

Won't we have to change our name if we drop the educational requirement?

No. AAUW has brand recognition and, in fact, the initials have not represented our organization for a long time. We work internationally, we are more than an association, we allow members with associate degrees to join and we have allowed men to join since 1987!

I joined AAUW to be with like-minded women – won't allowing non-degreed members change that?

Shared values do not come with a college degree.

It's not that hard to get a degree these days. Why can't they just get one?

Barriers to education still exist.

While college is an option for many, others face significant barriers, like skyrocketing educational costs, childcare, elder care, transportation, working multiple jobs, and language barriers. And some may simply opt to pursue careers that do not require a college degree. This doesn't make them less interested in equity or less susceptible to the bias and discrimination that women face.

At AAUW's founding, women who lacked a degree had limited career options. In the 21st century, that's no longer true. Women today are firefighters, pilots, entrepreneurs, artists, politicians, manufacturers, and so much more.

Having a degree does not exempt women from discrimination, just as not having one does not make women unqualified to advocate for equity and fair treatment. Those on the receiving end of discriminatory treatment often make the strongest and most convincing advocates for the change we need.