

TO: AAUW and Foundation Boards of Directors
State and Branch Presidents
State Membership and Bylaws Chairs

FROM: Caroline Pickens, AAUW Bylaws Chair
Coco Siewert, AAUW Parliamentarian

DATE: August 1, 2005

RE: Associate or Equivalent Degrees as Criteria for AAUW Membership

What do the AAUW Bylaws now define as the criteria for membership in AAUW?

As amended by the delegates to the 2005 Convention, the AAUW Bylaws now admit to membership “a graduate holding an associate or equivalent...degree from a qualified educational institution.” The Bylaws define qualified institutions as “educational institutions that offer recognized associate, baccalaureate, or higher degrees and that have full regional or appropriate professional association approval.”

What is the definition of an associate degree?

The American Heritage Dictionary defines an associate degree as “an academic degree conferred by a two-year college after the prescribed course of study has been successfully completed.” J.R. Whittstruck in *Requirements for Certificates, Diplomas and Associate Degrees* (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 1985) states, “An associate’s degree is a degree awarded by community colleges, junior colleges and bachelor’s degree-granting colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada upon completion of a course of study equivalent to the first two years in a four-year college or university. It is the lowest in the hierarchy of academic degrees offered in these countries.” The associate degree includes associate of arts (AA), associate of science (AS), associate of applied science (AAS), associate of arts and science (AA&S), and associate of applied arts (AAA, usually in music or commercial art). The most academic are the AA and the AS, and these programs are usually geared toward a student expecting to transfer on to a 4-year college. However, all are qualified associate degrees.

What is the equivalent of an associate degree?

The equivalent of an associate degree is an academic degree or diploma awarded by a qualified institution such as a business college or a hospital, which may not be called “associate degree” but has the same academic requirements or greater. A qualified institution is one that has full regional or appropriate professional association approval. Examples of an equivalent degree are two- or three-year RN diplomas, usually based in a hospital or a community college, and business college/school associate degrees (usually an AAS in business-related fields). A certificate awarded by a business college normally does not qualify. For example, many business colleges offer either an associate degree (usually an AAS but some AA degrees) or a certificate in the same field (common examples are accounting and marketing). However, the course requirement for a certificate is not equal in academic credits to those required for the associate degree, and it is not the equivalent to two years of courses or the common 60 hours as the two-year standard. Furthermore, a certificate is not generally accepted by four-year colleges as equivalent to an associate degree for the purpose of transfer. Therefore, our conclusion is that “equivalent” is usually going to apply to the RN diploma and to associate degrees awarded by business colleges/schools. The latter are still going to be called “associate degrees.”

Are those with more than two years of college but no degree or diploma as defined in the previous paragraph eligible for AAUW membership?

No. AAUW remains an organization whose members have completed academic work and have been awarded a degree or diploma from a qualified educational institution.

Will those members with AA degrees be eligible for IFUW membership?

No. IFUW members are women with baccalaureate or higher degrees, so just as our male members are not members of IFUW, our members with associate degrees will not be IFUW members.

What happens to student affiliates who receive an associate degree but continue on in their schooling toward a bachelor's degree?

At the time of receiving an associate degree, student affiliates will have a choice in the way they remain affiliated with AAUW. They can choose to become a full member with the privilege of voting and holding office. Or they can choose to remain a student affiliate if they continue work toward a bachelor's degree and not have a vote nor be able to hold office.

What if prospective members are not certain if they qualify for membership? Or if a program qualifies as equivalent to an associate degree?

Questions regarding eligibility and qualification can be addressed to MemberCriteria@aauw.org or the AAUW Helpline at 800/326-2289. Queries will be handled by the Membership Department, the Membership chair, the Bylaws chair, or the AAUW parliamentarian as appropriate.

Note: The AAUW Board of Directors approved the Membership Criteria clarification as presented in this document on July 31, 2005.