



History of AAUW

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In 1881, [Marion Talbot](#) and [Ellen Swallow Richards](#) invited 15 alumnae from eight colleges to a meeting in Boston to create an organization of women college graduates. Their purpose was to assist women in finding greater opportunities to use their education, as well as promoting and assisting other women's college attendance.

This organization, Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) — officially founded January 14, 1882 — worked to improve education standards for women so that men and women's higher education was more equal in scope and difficulty.

A branch in Washington D.C., founded in 1884, was followed by branches in New York City, San Francisco, and Philadelphia in 1886.

In 1885, the organization took on its first major project. The first research report of many conducted during AAUW's history. A common belief held at the time was that a college education would harm a woman's health and result in infertility. A questionnaire was developed and sent to 1,290 members. The data, demonstrated by the 705 replies, showed that higher education did not harm women's health.

In 1889, the Western Association of Collegiate Alumnae (WACA) merged with the ACA. In 1921, the ACA merged with Southern Association of College Women to create the American Association of University Women (AAUW).

Other Notable Events:

- 1907: First study of equal pay.
- 1919: ACA raised \$156,413 to purchase a gram of radium for Marie Curie and her experiments.
- 1938: Report on discrimination in academia.
- During the 1940s, money was raised to assist female scholars who were unable to continue their work because they were displaced by the Nazi-led occupation.
- 1945: Support of the first legislation for federal pay equity.
- 1981: Legal Advocacy Fund established as a separate corporation.
- 1993: Support of the Family Medical Leave Act
- 2009: Support of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.