



Since its founding in 1881, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has been committed to making the dream of higher education a reality for all women.

Higher education is no longer a luxury—it's a necessity. At current rates, the U.S. will add over 16 million jobs by the year 2020 that require at least some postsecondary education.¹ Moreover, the number of jobs requiring a graduate degree is estimated to grow by at least 2.5 million by that same year.²

As the skill requirements of jobs continue to increase, so too should access to postsecondary education for all students. Even in these difficult economic times, it is critical that we invest in higher education, which is the most direct route to innovation, job creation, and long-term economic self-sufficiency.

Four-year college degrees are held by about 30 percent of Americans age 25 and older. Among undergraduates, 57 percent of the student body in 2010 was female, up from 42 percent in 1970.³ The proportion of female graduate students grew from 35 percent to 59 percent during this same period.⁴

The most dramatic change occurred in medicine, law, and business, where the proportion of women shot up from 9 percent in 1970 to around 47 percent in 2009-2010.⁵ During the 2009-2010 school year, women earned 57.2 percent of all bachelor's degrees, 60.3 percent of all master's degrees, and 51.7 percent of doctorate degrees.⁶

Securing Pell Grant Funding

In 2010-2011, 60 percent of Pell grant funds went to financially independent undergraduate students. Among dependent Pell grant recipients, 60 percent came from families with annual incomes below \$30,000⁷ and about 38 percent of all Pell grant

recipients were classified as independent (for tax purposes) with dependent children.⁸

Today, the maximum Pell grant covers only 31 percent of total costs at a public four-year institution versus 41 percent of those costs 20 years ago, and only 14 percent of the total cost at a private four-year institution.⁹ The maximum Pell grant for the 2014-2015 school year is \$5,730. Congress must ensure that the maximum Pell grant is maintained. Though the program was excluded from sequestration in 2013, Pell grants must be protected if those cuts continue.

Managing Student Debt

Because student aid and family incomes have not risen at the same rates as college tuition, the dream of a college education has become more of a challenge in recent years, prompting about two-thirds of college graduates to borrow.¹⁰ In 2011-2012, undergraduate students received an average of \$12,455 in financial aid, including \$6,932 in grants and \$5,056 in federal loans.¹¹

The average student loan debt of graduating seniors was around \$26,600 in 2011, a 5 percent increase over 2010. About one-fifth of graduates' debt is made up of private student loans.¹² Further, nearly 25 percent of undergraduates use credit cards to their bills, increasing their debt load even more.¹³

Loan repayment is a significant burden for women, who earn less on average over the course of their lives than their male counterparts.

A recent AAUW report – *Graduating to a Pay Gap* – found that the median student loan debt burden was slightly higher in 2009 for women than men. In addition, in 2009, nearly half (47 percent) of women one year after college graduation were paying more than 8 percent of their earnings toward student loan debt. Only 39 percent of men were in the same position. Further, 53 percent of women and 39 percent of men were paying a greater percentage of their income toward student loan debt than they could afford.¹⁴ This emphasizes the importance of income-based and income-contingent loan repayment plans, which allow struggling graduates to customize loan repayments.¹⁵

Additional Resources

AAUW's Position on Higher Education.

American Association of University Women

www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/position-on-higher-education.pdf

Employment Projections: 2010-2020 Summary.

U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics

bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm

Graduating to a Pay Gap.

American Association of University Women

www.aauw.org/GraduatetoaPayGap/index.cfm

Trends in Student Aid 2013.

The College Board

www.trends.collegeboard.org/student_aid

Women in Community Colleges: Access to Success.

American Association of University Women

www.aauw.org/resource/women-in-community-colleges/

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research. Since 1881, AAUW has been one of the nation's leading voices promoting education and equity for women and girls. AAUW has a nationwide network of more than 170,000 members and supporters across the United States, as well as 1,000 local branches and 800 college and university partners.

¹ U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (February 2013). *Employment Projections: 2010-2020 Summary, Table 9.*

bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.nr0.htm

² Ibid.

³ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (September 2011). *Digest of Education Statistics, Table 203, Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of enrollment, sex of student, level and control of institution, and attendance status of student: 2010.*

nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_203.asp

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (September 2011). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011, Table 215.* Retrieved May 14, 2013, from nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_215.asp

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (November 2011). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011, Tables 304 and 309.* Retrieved May 14, 2013, from nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/2011menu_tables.asp

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (July 2011). *Digest of Education Statistics, 2011, Table 283.* Retrieved May 14, 2013, from nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/tables/dt11_283.asp

⁷ U.S. Department of Education. (2012). *2010-2011 Federal Pell Grant End-of-Year Report. Table 13, Table 6.* Retrieved May 14, 2013, from www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-2010-11/pell-eoy-2010-11.html

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The College Board. (2012). *Trends in Student Aid 2012.* www.trends.collegeboard.org/student_aid

¹⁰ *The New York Times.* (April 11, 2011). *Burden of College Loans on Graduates Grows.* www.nytimes.com/2011/04/12/education/12college.html?_r=2&hp

¹¹ The College Board. (2012). *Trends in Student Aid 2012.* www.trends.collegeboard.org/student_aid

¹² The Project on Student Debt. (2012). *Student Debt and the Class of 2011.* Retrieved May 14, 2013, from projectonstudentdebt.org/files/pub/classof2011.pdf

¹³ *Time Magazine.* (August 20, 2008). Retrieved May 14, 2013, from www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1834160,00.html.

¹⁴ AAUW. (2012). *Graduating to a Pay Gap: The Earnings of Women and Men One Year after College Graduation.* Retrieved May 14, 2013, from www.aauw.org/GraduatetoaPayGap/index.cfm

¹⁵ AAUW. (August 10, 2012). *AAUW Comments on the Department of Education's Proposed New Rules for Income-Contingent Repayment and Income-Based Repayment Plans.* Retrieved June 6, 2013, from www.aauw.org/files/2013/02/Comments-to-the-DOE-regarding-student-loan-repayment.pdf