

President's Annual Report

The 2020-2021 membership year was undoubtedly a unique one, with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting our branch operations from start to finish. Nevertheless, despite in-person gathering restrictions, our organization - with the creativity and indomitable spirit of its members - remained active, albeit virtually, throughout the year. Members had the opportunity to stay connected through the monthly BYOLs offered by Membership; through the monthly program meetings organized by Program; and through interest group and community service initiative activities that were adaptable to Zoom or other formats that permitted work to be done in a socially distant manner. Regrettably, several of our annual events, specifically Woman of the Year and A Novel Affair, could not be held.

While my term officially started on July 1st, I convened a Zoom chat with interested members on June 30, 2020 to discuss the proposed but tabled bylaws amendment to merge the Diversity & Inclusion (DI) and International Relations committees. About fourteen members as well AAUW-NYS Board member Suzanne Young-Mercer participated in a robust discussion about the importance of having a DI committee; participants also used the forum to suggest activities that could fall under the auspices of a reconstituted DI group. With this input and in light of national events, the decision was ultimately made to keep Diversity & Inclusion (subsequently renamed Diversity Equity & Inclusion) as a separate committee and Gwen Higgins graciously agreed to chair it. The President's Letter for the September Branch addressed this topic. Notably, appointing a new chair to the International Relations committee was placed on hold.

During the summer months, I also had the opportunity to meet individually with several Board members to familiarize myself with the work that each was doing (if returning) or anticipated doing (if incoming) in their positions. I met virtually with Barbara Durniak, Communication's Vice President; Pat Luczai, Treasurer; Margaret Nijhuis, Secretary/Bylaws; Vivian Rose, Community Service Initiatives Liaison; Celia Serotsky, Public Policy Chair; and Mary Scalise-Annis and Sheila Zweifler, Membership Vice Presidents. These were informative and helpful conversations, and I am appreciative to each member for taking the time to speak with me.

Board meetings commenced in August and were held through June, skipping the month of January; all took place over Zoom. We had a quorum at each meeting which allowed us to carry out official business, as needed. Mary Coiteux, in her role as Facebook Manager, began to attend the board meetings to stay informed of issues and events that needed to be publicized.

In lieu of a board meeting in January, an ad hoc committee met to review and update both the branch's Strategic Plan and the Working Rules. Barbara Durniak, Betty Harrel, Margaret Nijhuis, and Vivian Rose volunteered to serve with me on this committee. We took a comprehensive approach to evaluating the content of each document, considering national's updated Strategic Plan, and ultimately forming two subcommittees to develop Privacy & Security guidelines and Archival guidelines to incorporate into the Working Rules. Barbara Durniak chaired the former and Barbara Hespenheide led the latter, each meeting with their respective groups over the course of several months and presenting proposed guidelines back to the larger committee. It is anticipated that final revisions to the Strategic Plan and the Working Rules will be presented to the Board for approval at its June meeting.

In March, given the uncertainty of the pandemic, the Zoom subscription for the branch was renewed; this would allow flexibility to meet virtually in the fall if needed. Notably, in November, we had accepted a \$100 Zoom subsidy from AAUW-NYS. In doing this, we were asked to include our monthly program meetings on the state calendar of events so other branches could participate. This served as a great way to reach people who would not otherwise be able to attend our traditionally in-person gatherings.

The monthly newsletter, wonderfully edited by Cyd Averill, continued to be a key vehicle for communicating with the membership. President's letters were drafted for each edition, September through June. Through these writings, efforts were made to keep members apprised of key state and national AAUW events, to reflect on various issues related to gender equity, recognize accomplishments of members, and provide updates on any Board decisions that affected the general membership. In addition to these regular publications, letters to the members were also provided for the Membership Booklet, the Membership Directory, and the membership renewal mailing.

Despite the significant progress that has been made in controlling the pandemic, we will hold the Annual Meeting via Zoom again this year. It is scheduled for Thursday, June 10th at 7pm. In addition to conducting our general business meeting and honoring members, Lisa Maatz, former AAUW Vice President of Government Relations and Advocacy, will be the guest speaker.

For details about the impressive achievements of our Board and Community Service Initiatives during this challenging year, I direct you to their individual Annual Reports posted on our website. I would, however, like to extend a special thank you to two teams who worked on the migrations of our membership database and our website. These were significant undertakings, and both dealt with managing resources that form the backbone of how our organization stays connected and communicates. These teams successfully completed their respective projects in a remarkable amount of time. My sincere gratitude goes to the Membership Database committee comprised of Sheila Zweifler, Mary Scalis-Annis, Donna Augustine, Margaret Nijhuis, Darlene Yerdon, Claudette Hennessy and Barbara Durniak as well as the Website Migration committee consisting of Margaret Nijhuis, Diane Jablonski, Cyd Averill, Mary Coiteux, Joanne Scolaro, Claudette Hennessy, as well as Barbara Durniak.

Respectfully submitted,

Monique Jones
Poughkeepsie Branch AAUW President
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