



# THE BRANCH

Poughkeepsie Branch of the  
American Association of University Women, Inc.  
P.O. Box 1908, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601



February 2026

[Poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net](http://Poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net)

## Coming in March

**When the World Came to Poughkeepsie  
The 40<sup>th</sup> Council meeting of the  
International Federation of University Women at  
Vassar College, 1958**

**PLUS: A CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY**

**March 12 at 7pm**

**Location: Vassar Alumnae House,  
161 College Ave, Poughkeepsie**

**Guest Speaker: Ronald Patkus, PhD,  
Head of Special Collections and College Historian**

In August 1958, nearly 100 women from 38 countries arrived in Poughkeepsie for the IFUW's 40<sup>th</sup> Council meeting, held at Vassar College. Council members and observers were distinguished educators, lawyers, economists and social scientists from the United States, Europe, Latin America, Canada, India, Africa, and the Far East. Prof. Patkus will discuss the history and mission of this organization and how Poughkeepsie AAUW and the local community welcomed the delegates and introduced them to the region.



**Ronald Patkus** serves as head of the Archives & Special Collections Library and is the College Historian. A member of the History Department, he also holds the Frederick Weyerhaeuser Endowed Chair in Biblical Literature and Bibliography. He is the Library Liaison to the departments of German Studies and Italian. At Vassar since 2000, his teaching and research interests focus on the history of books and printing, and the history of Vassar.

**Join our virtual program**

## **A NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE: AAUW's Priorities, Issues & Projects**

**February 12 at 7:00 pm; on Zoom**

**Registration required:**  
<https://shorturl.at/GK3yR>

**Guest speaker: Meghan Kissell,  
AAUW Senior Director of Policy and Member  
Advocacy**

We are all members of the National AAUW organization through our membership dues. But do we know the work AAUW does on the national level to promote our AAUW mission and to assist our nationwide branches?



Meghan will discuss the current AAUW issues and priorities and how they are addressed through their work. She will tell us more about how their strategic plan is "leading the charge to equity" and the various ways they are assisting women pursuing higher education.

We will hear how the staff uses lobbying and grassroot efforts to push forward policies supporting our issues and how our members can help them in this effort to affect legislation.

**Meghan Kissell** is the Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy at AAUW. She leads AAUW's non-partisan and mission-driven public policy at the federal level and supports the grassroots advocacy work of AAUW's membership network. *Meghan's bio continued on page 4.*

Contact: Barbara Van Itallie  
[program.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:program.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

## FEBRUARY CALENDAR

Online Calendar: <https://poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net>

Calendar listing: Beth DeFiglio

To contact interest groups: [interest.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:interest.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

**2 Word Games: 1:30 pm**

Coordinator: Sharon Fleury

**3 World Travelers: 7:00 pm**

The Baltics

Presenter: Kathy Martin

Coordinator: Bonnie Auchincloss

**6 Expanding Girls' Horizons: 6:30pm-8:00pm**

First Aid Cadette Badge

Cafeteria at R.C.Ketcham High School

Coordinator: Peggy Kelland

**9 All those books...: 2:30 pm**

*The Red and the Black* by Stendhal

Presenter: Peggy Kelland

Coordinator: Carol Loizides

**10 Reely Together: 7:30 pm on Zoom**

Discussion of the film *Marlee Matlin: Not Alone Anymore*

Coordinator: Jackie Vierno

**12 Trekkers: 10am-12 noon**

Brickyard Walkway, Kingston, NY

Coordinator: Mary Scalise-Annis

**12 Monthly Program; 7pm on Zoom**

**14 Days for Girls Poughkeepsie NY Team**

Work session: 1:30-4:30 pm

Poughkeepsie United Methodist Church

Coordinators: Judy Longacre and Sabashnee Govender

**16 Manderley Literary Society: 4:30 pm**

*The Mountains Sing* by Nguyen Phan Que Mai

Coordinator: Joan Kimmel

**17 Cuisine: Noon**

Italian menu

Coordinator: Barbara Van Itallie

**18 Bridge I: 1:00-4:00pm** Cancelled if Wappingers or

Arlington schools close due to weather

Coordinator: Susan Fink

**19 Adventures in Soleil: 10:00 am**

Tour of Mesier Homestead, Wappingers Falls, NY,

Followed by lunch

Leader: Denise Herberger

Coordinator: Linnea Masson

**20 Poetry and Plays: 1:00pm**

Poetry of James Baldwin and Cornelius Eady in honor of Black History month

Coordinators: Maria DeWald and Jackie Sweeney

**23 Craft 'n' Create: 1:30 pm**

Contact coordinators for project

Host: Mary Ann Williams

Coordinators: Mary Ann Williams and Pat Luczai

**24 Contemporary Literature: 7:30 pm on Zoom**

*Heartwood* by Amity Gaige

Coordinator: Linda Freisitzer

**25 Mah Jongg: Noon - 4:00 pm**

Dutchess Diner (Rt 9)

Lunch at 12 noon, play from 1:15 to 3:45ish

Coordinator: Blanche Bergman

**26 Bridge II: 11:45am or 1:00pm**

Meet at a local restaurant for lunch, play at 1:00

Collegeview Towers Community Room, 141 Fulton Avenue

Coordinator: Sandy Goldberg

**27 Art on the Go**

Contact coordinator for details

Coordinator: Mary Coiteux



### POUGHKEEPSIE BRANCH OFFICERS 2025-2026

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Poughkeepsie Branch: <https://poughkeepsie-ny.aauw.net>

**MISSION:** To advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

**VISION:** Equity for all.

**VALUES:** Nonpartisan. Fact-based. Inclusive. Intersectional. Empowering.

Poughkeepsie AAUW values and seeks an inclusive membership, leadership team, and board of directors. Though we are nonpartisan, we are not values-neutral. We fight to remove the barriers and biases that stand in the way of gender equity. We advocate for federal, state and local laws and policies to ensure equity and end discrimination.

**THE BRANCH** is published ten times a year, September through June, by the Poughkeepsie Branch of the AAUW, Inc. Submit articles to Cyd Averill, editor, by the 10<sup>th</sup> of the month preceding publication.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Celia Serotsky [president.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:president.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

In this message I will highlight some of the programs and activities that our National organization provides us. I will also mention some of the activities our branch is doing and events that will be held in the upcoming months.

As you see on the front page of this newsletter, our program speaker for this month is Meghan Kissell, AAUW Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy. I have attended several webinars and meetings at which Meghan has spoken and have found her information to be very helpful to advancing the work of our branch. When you register for this month's Zoom program, you will be able to hear Meghan speak and to have her answer any questions you may have regarding National AAUW. Often, we may wonder how our National dues money is working for us. Meghan will give us that information and I have listed some programs and activities that will be offered this month by National.

**February 18<sup>th</sup> Member Gathering (virtual)** – 4:30pm ET / 1:30pm PT. Invitation and registration link was sent in January. Please register for this program if you have not already done so. It's a wonderful opportunity to hear from our National leadership and other members across the country.

**Annual Branch Survey:** I have completed this survey beginning in 2022, when I first took the office of President. The responses I gave to the various questions resulted in our being awarded four stars for the Five Star Program. This program "...is designed to help branches like yours align with AAUW's strategic priorities and advance our mission of achieving gender equity for women and girls." We have been awarded a star for completing criteria in the following areas: Public Policy and Advocacy; Governance and Sustainability; Programming; Communications and External Relations. The only area that we have not been awarded a star is that of "Advancement," but we continue to work on that.

**Inclusion and Equity Committee:** this committee has been meeting regularly online and our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Chair, Gwen Higgins, has been attending those sessions. Gwen will be informing us of this work through articles in the *Branch*. Look for that information as it is very important to our advancing equity for women and girls.

As for our own branch activities, here are a few that I would like to note:

**Annual Meeting Planning Committee:** We are required by our Bylaws to hold two business meetings each year. The first of those meetings was held in November at our regularly scheduled program meeting. The second business meeting is our Annual Meeting held in June. The committee has begun its work of organizing the program for that meeting. You will be hearing more about it in the coming months. Save the date: Wednesday, June 10, 2026, at the Villa Borghese.

**Nominating Committee:** This committee was approved at our November business meeting and has been working since then to seek candidates to fill officer positions. This committee's work is extremely important to the health and

continuation of our branch. If you are approached to accept the nomination for one of the positions, please know – first, it is an honor to be asked and second, it means that you are highly regarded by many of your fellow members who have suggested you as a possible elected officer.

**International Committee:** Jackie Vierno is the chair of this committee, and she has been working the past few months seeking help from other members to assist her in celebrating International Women's Day in March and publicizing the programs offered through the UN International Committee on Women. Look for that information in this issue of the *Branch*.

**Woman of Year Committee:** This committee began its work a few months ago and has selected a woman who has given so much of her attention, time and energy to benefitting our community. Watch for articles about this event that will take place in April.

**New York State Annual Meeting:** I don't have information about this meeting at the time I am writing this, but you will receive details about it in March. The meeting will be held in April rather than in June as has been the case the past couple of years and will be only via Zoom. This year the policy that was changed and voted on at last year's meeting will be enacted: one member one vote. It would be great if a majority of our members could attend the meeting and show our support for the work of the New York State leadership.

February is a month that flies by us sometimes, because it is so short. Please note the events' dates I've mentioned above on your calendars and try to attend them. Doing so will keep you informed of all the great work our National organization does, as well as our branch.

## MEMBERSHIP COUNTS

Kathy Prisco and Maureen Tremblay  
[membership.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com](mailto:membership.aauw.poughkeepsie@gmail.com)

We hope everyone's 2026 is off to a good start after a pleasant holiday season and some actual winter weather. Our little committee has been working on the new directory, which should be available very soon. We have also revamped the Member Profile to simplify and shorten the form and may be asking you to revisit your form.

We have gained several new members in the past few months. If you know of anyone who may be interested in joining us, please put her in touch with either Kathy Prisco or Maureen Tremblay.



## February Birthdays:

Carol Barmann, Susan Holland, Muriel Horowitz, Ruth Kava, Sandy Lash, Leslie Leventhal, Linda Lurie, Linnea Masson, Marta Newkirk, Eileen Nye, Dawn Schwenke, Gail Sisti

## DEVELOPMENT

Sandy Rankin, VP Development

### Spotlight On: Days for Girls

Our local team of Days for Girls is affiliated with an international group focused on eliminating the stigma and limitations associated with menstruation, so that women and girls have improved health, education and livelihoods. The main activities of our chapter are to sew and package up menstruation kits to be sent overseas or used locally. A menstrual care kit is sustainable and consists of an outer drawstring bag, a transport bag, 2 shields, 8 liners, 2 pairs of underwear, one wash towel and a bar of hotel size soap. The kits last 3-5 years and allow menstruators to attend school or work. The kits we make are sent to 16 countries and hybrid kits have been distributed locally.

The ongoing costs for this work include fabrics of various types, ribbons, thread, cutting blades, pins and clips as well as the underwear, wash towels and soap that we have to buy. We have to pay for the cost of shipping the kits to our regional affiliate in Pennsylvania. Our goal is to make about 100 kits per year.

The costs of materials are going up dramatically. Since Joann Fabrics went out of business we are paying a lot more for fabrics. We are able to get some fabric donations from local members of the American Sewing Guild, but we still have to buy additional fabrics. The fabrics must be cotton or cotton/poly of quilting quality (heavier weight), be medium to dark colored, and cannot have animal prints. There are two other types of fabrics we use that we have to buy from a wholesaler. The cost of the other kit components is rising as well.

A donation of \$25 dollars can buy enough materials to make 2 kits, and additional funds can be used to maintain our sewing equipment or help pay for shipping. It costs about \$40 to ship 25 kits.

These kits can last for 3-5 years, allowing girls to attend school and women to work without interruption. The kits and associated education help improve the lives of young women locally and around the world.

### PROGRAM NOTES: Meghan Kissell Bio

Meghan has more than 20 years of nonprofit policy and issue experience, developing and implementing targeted social impact strategies designed to engage key stakeholders and policy makers to advocate for positive policy outcomes.

Prior to joining AAUW, Meghan worked on state and local health policy with the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids and led efforts to expand LGBTQ equality in the Deep South with



the Human Rights Campaign. She also worked for the Conservation Lands Foundation to help lead local and national campaigns in the Western United States resulting in the successful protection of more than five million acres of public land. She was previously AAUW's Field Director, supporting local advocacy engagement and a volunteer for get out the vote efforts.

Meghan has a Master's degree in Social Work with a focus on community organizing from Howard University and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Allegheny College in Pennsylvania.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Jackie Vierno

### IWD#2026 Theme: #GiveToGain

#### HELP NEEDED:

**International Women's Day 2026 will be celebrated at our March 12, 2026 Program Meeting.** Members are needed to plan the specific refreshments and messaging for this event. **Your voice and skills are needed for this committee.**

If interested please contact Jackie Vierno, International Relations Chair at [jmv129@optonline.net](mailto:jmv129@optonline.net). Many hands make light work!



Individuals, organizations or community groups can support the **IWD 2026 Give To Gain** campaign. At work, at home, and in the community, there are many ways to overtly advance women.

#### GIVE:

respect; donations; visibility; knowledge; funding; justice; resources; a voice; protection; truth; equal pay; celebration; sponsorship; mentoring; credit; budget; introductions; workshops; opportunities; safety; training; stretch assignments; momentum; role models; growth; access; time

More information about **IWD 2026** can be found at this link: <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/Theme>

## PUBLIC POLICY

Patti DeLeo

### When a Gap Becomes a Gorge

When Cynthia Erivo and Arianna Grande negotiated their “Wicked” contracts, they sat down together and made sure, line by line, they were satisfactorily and equally compensated and rewarded for their work. Why? They learned from their predecessors; negotiate and don’t fall victim to the gender pay gap.

Currently the U.S. pay gap remains relatively dormant as women earn 81-85 cents for every dollar men earn. This varies significantly by race, age, and job, with gaps widening for women of color and older women. Women working full-time earn about 83% of what men earn. White women earn ~83%, Black women ~70%, Hispanic women ~65%, and Asian women ~93% of white men's earnings. The gap is smaller for young workers (around 95 cents for every dollar for ages 25-34) but widens significantly with age, particularly after women have children. Causes of the gap are mostly attributed to occupational segregation, the motherhood penalty and discrimination.

Broadway is a good microcosm of national pay gaps. Men outnumber women in the entertainment industry 3-1, especially in key creative and leadership roles like directing, writing, producing, and finance 4-1. With a majority of men in the profession, a majority of the money is controlled and distributed by them.

Celebrity status brings celebratory money. The average base pay for Broadway performances by Hugh Jackman, Lin Manuel Miranda, Daniel Radcliffe, Denzel Washington, Josh Grobin, and Ben Platt averaged \$33,400 per week. Bernadette Peters, Audra McDonald, Sutton Foster, Idina Menzel, Patty Lapone and Lea Michelle averaged \$27, 000 on the same stages. Women with celebrity status were paid exactly 83% of what celebrity status males were paid.

Contract negotiations allow for additional income opportunity: box office cuts, ticket sales, profit sharing, endorsements, related appearances, recordings, full house bonuses, merchandizing, commercials, vacation, limited weekly appearances, length of show run, living expenses, bonuses, transportation. It is reported that Bette Midler made over \$150,000 a week for “Hello, Dolly!” while Clooney banked \$300,000 a week for “Good Night and Good Luck.” Established “stars,” as opposed to celebrities, can negotiate over scale. A non-celebrity/star performer’s base is \$2,439. Regular cast members can make additional money by performing stunts (per event), moving props (paid per piece) being a swing or understudy (\$116 per week) and principals can be paid \$60 per week over scale.

So what does Broadway show us about the pay gap? Women need to aggressively negotiate salary and benefits. The



economics are designed to favor men who have more internal opportunities and control over income. Older women find limited roles and are offered less pay. Motherhood limits career opportunities and creates casting, earning and retirement gaps. The solutions include laws to guarantee equity, childcare coverage for working mothers, enforcement of civil rights laws, opportunities for women in Stem...

Eighty-three cents instead of \$1.00 doesn’t seem extreme until the multiplication factor comes into play: you are paid \$.83 on \$1.00; \$8.30 not the posted \$10; \$83 is not \$100; \$830 is not 1000; \$8,300 is not the \$10,000 the man next to you earned; \$17,000 disappears on \$100,000 because one is “guilty” of being born female. Would a millionaire agree to surrender \$170,000 rather than take his million? What starts as a pay gap turns into a pay gorge.

At the current rate of wage change, equity will not come until 2088. Despite civil rights laws and advancements in women's economic status, wage discrimination still persists in virtually every U.S. occupation.

May the lights shine equally on paychecks and may equal pay for equal work be the norm and not the exception. Close the gorge!

## CENTENNIAL ENDOWMENT FUND

Betty Harrel

### A Legacy that Shapes the Future

*Dutchess Community College is celebrating its many successes during 2025. In a recent alumni newsletter, **The Falcon**, the DCC Foundation published an article on the founding of the school, the long history between DCC and AAUW, and our recently enhanced scholarships.*

“After a year marked by impact and achievement, we reflect on what made it truly remarkable: the generosity and dedication of our friends and donors. That spirit has guided Dutchess Community College since its earliest days and continues to shape the opportunities we create for students today.



Women’s organizations were central to DCC’s founding. In the mid-1950s, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) and the Poughkeepsie League of Women Voters built public understanding and momentum for a community college through research, outreach, and advocacy, laying the groundwork for accessible higher education in Dutchess County.

That legacy of leadership continues through the Association of Women of Dutchess Community College (AWDCC), established in 1962 by faculty and staff devoted to scholarship support and service. This commitment is exemplified in the recent expansion of the AAUW Scholarships, awarded annually to DCC students maintaining a 3.0 GPA or higher. The award now extends beyond incoming students to include continuing and graduating students, broadening the reach and impact of this support.

AAUW's dedication to equity and opportunity aligns closely with the mission of the Dutchess Community College Foundation and our shared belief in the transformative power of education. Through partnerships like the AAUW Scholarship, we are expanding access, empowering students, and carrying forward a legacy that continues to open doors."

## CENTENNIAL REFLECTIONS: Branch Hosts Community-wide Diversity Conference

Cyd Averill

On October 3, 2008, Poughkeepsie AAUW hosted a diversity conference,

**"Beyond the Rhetoric,"** which drew an overflow crowd of over 220 participants to the Casperkill Golf Club in Poughkeepsie.

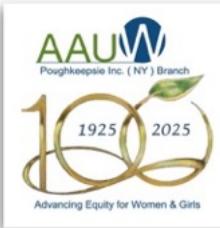


The conference was based on the premise that the presence of ethnic and racial diversity enhances all communities. Multiculturalism challenges people to create new, culturally versatile attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors. And in doing so, supports the development of a more vibrant, productive, successful and sustainable community.

Conference goals were to:

- Understand how ethnic and racial diversity is shaping the future of America and its communities
- Examine five key topics, Education, Healthcare, Business, Media and Cultural Competency through the prism of multiculturalism
- Consider the changes that individuals, businesses, government and other organizations will have to make in order to succeed in a multicultural community
- Become inspired to change their perspectives to create a vibrant and productive multicultural community

The keynote speaker was **David Tulin**, a Principal of Global Lead Management, an international consulting firm that offered diversity and inclusion training. The luncheon speaker was **Galen Kirkland**, Commissioner of the New York state Division of Human Rights, the agency responsible for enforcing New York's anti-discrimination law.



The five roundtables led by community leaders were Business Development, Cultural Competency, Education, Health and Human Services, and Media. These facilitators and panelists volunteered their time and expertise.

This was a major undertaking for the Poughkeepsie Branch, utilizing the talents of more than 40 branch members. Geeta Desai, conference chair, provided the guidance, coordination, writing, and solicitation of funds that made the conference possible. The roundtables were developed by Geeta, Wendy Maragh Taylor, Sherre Wesley and Gwen Higgins. Sherre was also responsible for the evaluation and follow-up. Lea Bishop and Geeta garnered publicity from the Poughkeepsie Journal and others sources. Margaret Nijhuis and Cathy Kinn were in charge of invitations and registration. Mary Coiteux designed the logo. The website was done by Geeta, Margaret and Mary King. Each of these people had a committee of AAUW members who assisted in so many ways. Financial support for the event came from the Dyson Foundation and the national AAUW.

Source: *The Branch*, Nov. 2008

[poughkeepsiejournal.com](http://poughkeepsiejournal.com) ONLINE EXTRAS PHOTO GALLERY: See more photos online in a gallery attached to this story. MORE CONTENT: Follow the diversity series online.

## Diversity gets fresh look

Jacqueline Goffe-McNish of Dutchess Community College writes down responses from members in a cultural competency group at the Beyond the Rhetoric conference at Casperkill Golf Club in the Town of Poughkeepsie on Friday. Institutions, companies participate in 'Beyond the Rhetoric'

Kathy McLaughlin/Poughkeepsie Journal

## Diversity is focus of Friday seminar

By Michael Woyton  
Poughkeepsie Journal

Understanding how ethnic and racial diversity can shape the future is one of the goals of a conference Friday sponsored by the Poughkeepsie branch of the American Association of University Women.

Diversity Chairwoman Geeta Desai said the time is appropriate for a conversation on diversity in light of a projection that by 2050, racial and ethnic groups will make up 48 percent of the total U.S. population.

"I think people are just thirsty for information and just want to talk about it," she said.

The daylong conference — "Beyond the Rhetoric: Understanding how multiculturalism can help your personal, professional and organizational growth" — divides the subject into five areas: business development, cultural competency, education, media and health and human services.

Participants will select an area for discussion and will have about three hours total over the course of the day to explore the subject.

The conference will be held at the Casperkill Golf Club in Poughkeepsie.

Desai said the presence of multiculturalism in a community challenges people to develop diversified attitudes and beliefs.

## SUPPORTERS OF THE BRANCH

Many thanks to our newsletter Patrons (\$25 or more) and Sponsors (\$10 or more). Their annual contributions help defray the expense of publishing **THE BRANCH** and other communication expenses. To add your name, send a check, payable to: **"Poughkeepsie Branch AAUW, Inc."** to Diane Jablonski.

**Patrons:** Ruth Aldrich Gau, Mary Ann Boylan, Sandra Goldberg, Shaileen Kopec, Margaret Nijhuis