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The Current

A publication of the LaCrosse, WI AAUW Branch

[Volume 65, Issue 3] November 2025

President's Perspective?



Education as a Bridge to Opportunity

by Lema Kabashi, Branch President

At our November meeting, we will hear from representatives of Project Proven, a local initiative that provides educational and career support to individuals impacted by the justice system. Their work highlights something we at AAUW deeply value, the transformative power of education to create equity and expand opportunity.

As a professor of special education, I have had teacher candidates complete their field experiences at the Juvenile Detention Center in La Crosse. Teaching in this setting is both humbling and inspiring as it offers a rare and profound learning experience, one that challenges assumptions and reveals the resilience of young people with and without disabilities. Many of these youth have faced significant challenges, including disabilities or interrupted schooling, that make learning difficult. Yet when given individualized support and a teacher who believes in them, they engage, grow, and begin to see new possibilities for themselves.

This is precisely where the mission of AAUW, to advance equity for all through education and advocacy, comes to life. Equity is not only about access to schools or classrooms; it is about ensuring that every person, regardless of background or circumstance, has a genuine opportunity to learn and succeed. Whether it's young people in detention, adults pursuing literacy skills, or women returning to education later in life, the thread that unites all of these efforts is the belief that learning can break barriers and open doors.

reach beyond traditional boundaries. It must extend to those who have been marginalized, underestimated, or forgotten. Each time we support programs that educate, mentor, and uplift, we live out AAUW's mission—working toward a society where equity is not an aspiration but a reality.

I invite you to join us for this month's program and to reflect on how our collective efforts as AAUW members can continue to foster opportunity for all learners. When we invest in education where it's needed most, we not only transform individual lives—we strengthen our entire community.

November Meeting



Project Proven presentation by Colin Walsh

NOVEMBER 8, 2025

9:30am Registration, 9:45am Brunch, 10am Meeting; 10:30am Program

Viterbo University School of Nursing, Rm 195, 10th & Jackson Sts, La Crosse

(parking available in the lot next to the building)

You are cordially invited!

Bring a guest and join us to learn more about Project Proven from program manager Colin Walsh of Western Technical College. The program “aims to reduce recidivism by assisting individuals who are impacted by the justice system transition to the community through career and educational opportunities. Project Proven provides both current and formerly incarcerated individuals with education, employment assistance, and connections to other community partners to help increase the likelihood of a successful transition from jail into the community” (<https://www.westerntc.edu/re-entry-services>).

Goals: Community building, stabilizing lives, decreasing recidivism, providing dignity and jobs, reducing barriers to re-entry to society.

We encourage all to invite a friend, colleague, or acquaintance to share the morning with us and learn about AAUW.

Brunch: Cost \$13; pay with cash or check (note price adjustment)

Menu: Breakfast taco bar with fresh fruit, coffee (regular and decaf), tea, and hot water with tea bags. Gluten-free and meat-free options provided.

Please **RSVP** to the email which will be sent from Robert at 608.788.0595 or richards.rob2@eagle.uwlax.edu.



Email RSVP by Robert Richardson

Sunday prior to the Saturday meeting, October thru May. We need all members to reply so we know how many members/guests plan to attend and how many request the meal. On Monday, we need to report both numbers to the catering service. Aramark prepares food/beverages in a quantity that aligns with the latter number, and the Branch is invoiced based on that number. Program committee members arrange seating based on the total attendance number.



invites you to our
November Program

Project Proven:

**Helping Formerly Incarcerated People Find
Their Path Back Into the Community**

Project Proven's goal is to reduce recidivism by assisting justice-involved individuals transition to the community through career and educational opportunities. Project Proven is a service of Western Technical College



Presenter: Colin Walsh,
Project Proven Manager at
Western Technical College

Colin coordinates jail programming at La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, and Jackson County jails and works with individuals as they transition back into the community upon release. Prior to working at Western, Colin worked in the La Crosse County Jail for 11 years.

JOIN US!
Free program! Open to all.
Brunch available for \$13.

For more information and to RSVP
by Nov. 2, please contact us at
aauwlacrosse@hotmail.com

**November 8, 2025
9:30am-11:00am**
Viterbo University School of
Nursing Atrium and Rm 195

 www.aauwlacrosse.org

 <https://www.facebook.com/aauwlacrosse/>

Treasurer's Report?

by Andrea Hansen & Noreen Holmes

September 1-30, 2025:

Starting Balance: \$ 8,204.22



September 30 ending balance: \$8,077.12

Checking account balance as of **October 24, 2025**: \$8,719.90

Scholarship Bridge Balance (8/1/25 - current): \$360.00

Membership News

by Barb Fischer, VP Membership



Passing of one of our Honorary Life Members:

We were informed by Eagle Crest that Jean Knorr passed away. Details will be shared in the next newsletter.

Information Regarding Members:

- Diana Moran Sanchez Thundercloud's new address is: N 4392 Ester Drive, Onalaska, WI 54650. Please make the changes in your directory.
- Erica Koonmen phone number change. Erica no longer has the number that is listed in the directory (608-366-2509); her new number is 608-406-8452 (cell).
- Barbara Newcomer was moved to Eagle Crest. She is in memory care so special arrangements must be made to visit her. A helpful number is 608-881-0200.
- Please make a note in your directories that Sarah Stuber's correct email address is: sarahstuber5234@gmail.com.
- Robert Richardson and Catherine Roraff have both recently had knee surgery. Robert said he has never before owned, used, or carried a backpack. However, due to this surgery he now has one. Catherine just had her second knee surgery. Both are doing well. We wish them a swift healing process.

Membership Committee Meeting:

We will be meeting at Java Vino on Wednesday, **Oct. 29 @ 3:30 pm**. Everyone is welcome to attend.

More Mentors Needed:

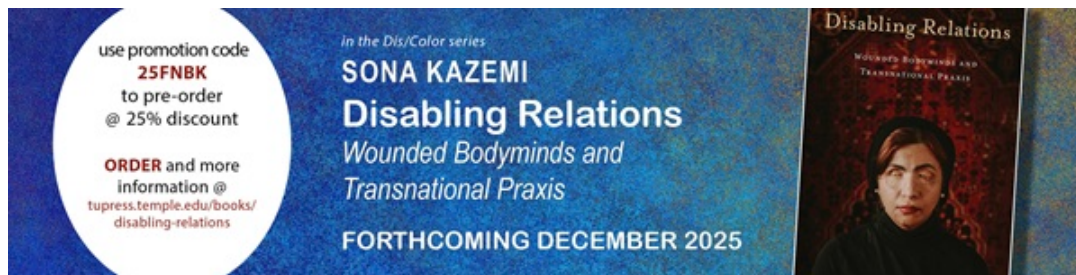
If any of you are willing to become a mentor for new members, please let me know and/or join us at the "New Member Gathering" after our Nov. 8th meeting.

A Gathering for New Members, Mentors, Chairs and Anyone Who Wants to Attend:

A "New Member Gathering" is planned for after our upcoming meeting on November 8th. This gathering is being held so that new members can meet each other, learn more about AAUW, and connect with mentors. It should only last for about 35 to 45 minutes. All are welcome to join this gathering. Hope to see you there.

Sona Kazemi, PhD, would like to meet with us after our December meeting to talk about her new book, *“Disabling Relations - Wounded Body-minds and Transnational Praxis”* that focuses on Woman, Life, and Freedom. Her book can be ordered at a discount during this meeting. (Or order on your own and use promo code **25FNBK** for 25% off!) Ordering the book before it is out helps her to get more publicity from her publishers. Sona Kazemi is an Assistant Professor at UWL in Race, Gender & Sexuality Studies and a AAUW National and Branch member.

Book Discount for AAUW



Sona Kazemi, PhD, Assistant Professor, UWL Race, Gender & Sexuality Studies. Sona is an AAUW Branch member and our RGSS colleague.

Get a discount with your pre-print order of **Sona Kazemi's** book - major contribution to Disabilities Studies! Use **promo code 25FNBK** for 25% off!



Disabling Relations

Wounded Bodyminds and Transnational Praxis

Forthcoming Fall 2025

Bears witness to disabled survivors of violence in Iran from war, incarceration, acid attacks, and torture.

We encourage AAUW members to pre-order with the discount code.

FYI: The more pre-print orders, the more resources the publisher will put into promoting the book.

More publications by Sona...

Sona has authored the chapter "Transnational Disability Praxis: Archiving Survival, Resistance, and Resilience Amid Ongoing Emergencies" in "Crippling the Archive: Disability, history, and power," published by University of Illinois Press. This project represents an ambition to imagine and create something like a digital living archive designed toward maximizing accessibility across various ages, disabilities, bodyminds, languages and other differences.

SCAN TO PRE-ORDER



which was published by Routledge. What steps are necessary to achieve transnational solidarity in the fight against various imperial forces, and what would you like your colleagues in the Global North to know if they want to become allies?

AAUW In Action (AIA)

Wednesday, Nov. 12 @ 6:30 pm via ZOOM



Erica will send out an agenda and Zoom link prior to the meeting.

AAUW In Action (AIA) is up and running! To carry on the momentum of Banned Book week, we'll be collecting banned books and putting them in Free Little Libraries around the area. ***If you have any of the books on the list (see a short list below or check online for more) in your personal collection that you'd like to donate, please bring them to the November 8th meeting!*** We'll put a "Donated by AAUW La Crosse" sticker in each one. Also as part of this awareness campaign, we're designing a bookmark that will list banned books and put those in the Free Little Libraries too.

Thank you to everyone who has signed up to provide a meal for the Self Sufficiency Program this semester! November 13 is still available if you were thinking about it. Please go to <https://www.mealtrain.com/trains/yye1ll> to sign up.

Our Focus for the Year project—joining the push to remove state taxes on period products and diapers -- is still in the information gathering stage. We hope to work with Rep. Jill Billings and local university student groups to coordinate this.

We'd like to be more active in promoting our branch activities on social media so we are looking for someone with the skills and interest in making Facebook or Instagram Reels or exciting animated posts for our social media. We are only on Facebook and Instagram, no Tik-Tok! Please contact Erica if you'd like to do that.

We are looking ahead to March for Women's History month activities. We'd like to offer 2 different events:

1. Intergenerational Women speed talks (*working on a better title!*) where we'll team up with students at UWL and Viterbo to spend some time talking about women's history, using prompts. Partners will have 3-4 minutes with each other and then switch. We envision this as a faster-paced way of getting to know each other while sharing historical information!
2. For branch members, we'd like to sponsor a Women's History Trivia afternoon. Fun, food and camaraderie will be had. More info in future newsletters.

Please join us!

50 **BANNED** Books

- ☐ *Gender Queer* by Maia Kobabe
- ☐ *All Boys Aren't Blue* by George M. Johnson
- ☐ *This Book Is Gay* by Juno Dawson
- ☐ *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky
- ☐ *Flamer* by Mike Curato
- ☐ *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison
- ☐ *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* by Jesse Andrews
- ☐ *Tricks* by Ellen Hopkins
- ☐ *Let's Talk About It* by Erika Moen and Matthew Nolan
- ☐ *Sold* by Patricia McCormick
- ☐ *Looking for Alaska* by John Green
- ☐ *Lawn Boy* by Jonathan Evison
- ☐ *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie
- ☐ *Out of Darkness* by Ashley Hope Perez
- ☐ *A Court of Mist and Fury* by Sarah J. Maas
- ☐ *Crank* by Ellen Hopkins
- ☐ *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas
- ☐ *Beyond Magenta* by Susan Kuklin
- ☐ *George* by Alex Gino
- ☐ *Stamped: Racism, Antiracism, and You* by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds
- ☐ *All American Boys* by Jason Reynolds and Brendan Kiely
- ☐ *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson
- ☐ *Something Happened in Our Town* by Marianne Celano, Marietta Collins, and Ann Hazzard, illustrated by Jennifer Zivoin
- ☐ *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee
- ☐ *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

Also:

1. THE CATCHER IN THE RYE, by J.D. Salinger
2. A CLOCKWORK ORANGE, by Anthony Burgess
3. A FAREWELL TO ARMS, by Ernest Hemingway
4. ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN, by Mark Twain
5. LORD OF THE FLIES, by William Golding
6. BRAVE NEW WORLD, by Aldous Huxley
7. THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, by Ray Bradbury
8. NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR, by George Orwell
9. THE SHINING, by Stephen King

For more information, please email Erica at moogs56@hotmail.com.

Scholarships & Grants

by Robert Richardson, Co-Chair



By **November 1**, AAUW scholarship applications will be posted on our [website](#) and will be sent to all area schools and colleges. Completed applications are due early-February.

Members, please consider all the collegiate students you know; we offer a scholarship for a female, non-traditional student. Only AAUW members can nominate individuals to apply for the Joan Koonmen scholarship.

The SGC is looking for other branch members who would like to read scholarship applications during February. A member could review applications as a member of one or two subcommittees: Non-traditional students' paper applications, graduating high school seniors' paper applications, holistic nursing students' paper applications, Viterbo students' paper applications, or UW-L student's electronic applications.

{Note: Our scholarship recipients at WTC are selected via WTC's internal processes}.

Interested to be added to the reader-cadre? Contact [Sharon DeCicco](#) or [Robert Richardson](#) <[Learn more](#)>

Equity and Belonging Committee Corner

by June Reinert, Equity and Belonging Chair

We want to further introduce our new committee name. We have chosen to call the new committee the Equity and Belonging Committee. This is an essential concept for AAUW as we strive to attract a more diverse membership and address inequities within our community, ensuring that girls and women have access to all the benefits of a thriving society.

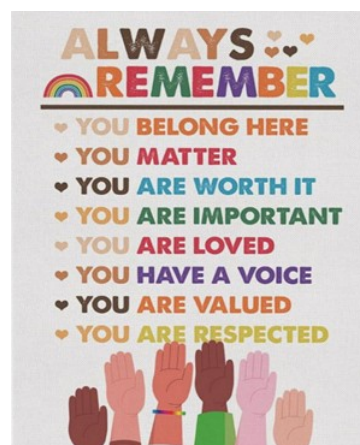
WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF EQUITY?

Last month, we examined the word "Equity". According to the equity definition, it involves meeting communities where they are and allocating resources and opportunities based on individual needs to create equal outcomes for all community members.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF BELONGING?

This is a revised version of Verna Myers' quotation. It incorporates the idea of belonging.

"Being invited to the party or being asked to dance is a one-way power relationship. The person must be invited by someone else. The person must be asked to dance by



Let's look at the underlying meaning of her words.

An invitation to a party or a dance request reflects a one-sided power dynamic. The person must be invited by someone else. The person must be asked to dance by someone else. The person might be included, but someone else has the decision rights on whether that will happen. It's your turn.

Belonging assumes a 2-way or reciprocal relationship. You don't have to wait for someone to ask you to dance. You can determine with whom you want to dance and initiate the invitation. You can influence the choices for the playlist, even if your musical preferences might be different than anyone else's. You are not only accepted for who you are, but you are expected to be who you are.

All three of these concepts—belonging, diversity, and inclusion—are inextricably linked and need to coexist for a person to have the best experience possible.

What does belonging look and feels like in an organizational setting? To feel you belong does not mean you fit in because you are just like everyone else. It means you fit in because your uniqueness is part of what makes your group, team, or organization more effective.

When people feel like they belong in an organization, they will be more confident in their ability to represent themselves authentically. People who “belong” feel comfortable expressing their ideas, sharing experiences, and contributing to a group when they know their input is valued.

When someone joins a team or an organization who is ‘different’, whether it be gender, race, or disability, the person with the ‘difference’ has work to do to be accepted.

When people feel like they belong in an organization, they will be more confident in their ability to represent themselves authentically. People who “belong” feel comfortable expressing their ideas, sharing experiences, and contributing to a group when they know their input is valued.

We all need psychological safety: the ability to make a valuable contribution without fear of being ridiculed or rejected. We also need our colleagues to be more aware of the subtle, and often unintentional, ways they create exclusion through their words and actions.

A sense of belonging can be jeopardized by acts of exclusion from co-workers/colleagues through micro-or macro-aggression, such as talking over or shutting colleagues down when they try to contribute, and devaluing their contributions. This is often done unknowingly through unconscious bias.

the unconscious tendency we each have that pulls us toward people who are like us. It's easier to spend time with people who have similar interests, experiences, and backgrounds. As a result, our professional networks -- the people we turn to for advice, professional development, and new opportunities -- tend to be very homogeneous. It takes more effort to build relationships with people who are different from us. But that is the only way to make a culture of belonging and to create sustainable change.

In a culture where people feel psychologically safe and like they **belong**, they will feel confident enough to put an idea on the table and know that if it isn't accepted, it was not because of anything inherent to them. Individuals who experience psychological safety are confident that others will extend them the benefit of the doubt. That they can ask questions and raise issues without fear. They can be vulnerable to others and be authentic. Belonging creates the trust needed for people to share their best thinking and put their craziest, and perhaps least popular, ideas on the table. Not feeling like they belong renders people silent. In psychologically safe spaces, people learn and grow together, push back against the status quo, and innovate.



around La Crosse

November is:
Native American Heritage Month
Transgender Awareness Month

Nov 4 & 11: Self Defense Class, 6-7pm,
The Center: 7 Rivers LGBTQ Connection

Nov 10: Change not Charity: Americans
with Disabilities Act UWL Film discussion
6-8:30pm, Student Union Theatre, 120 Student Union

Nov. 13: Committee for Citizens with
Disabilities monthly meeting.
9am, City Hall

Nov 13: Indigenous Film Series:
Sugarcane
5:00 PM Rivoli Theater

Nov 15: STAR Try It Day Adaptive Sports
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm, Central HS

Nov 20: GLADC ANNUAL CONFERENCE
7:45 am - 3:00 pm, WTC Lunda Center
The Greater La Crosse Area Diversity Council (GLADC)

Nov 22: Rooted Holistic Healing & Wellness Fair
10:00AM-5:00PM ,La Crosse Center

Nov 25: Pearl St. Books LGBTQ+ book club: Tranny:
Confessions of Punk Rock's Most Infamous Anarchist
Sellout
5:30-6:30 pm, Pearl St. Books

Nov 11:
Veterans Day

Nov 13:
World Kindness
Day

Nov 20:
International
Transgender Day
of Remembrance

Nov 25:
International Day
for the Elimination
of Violence Against
Women

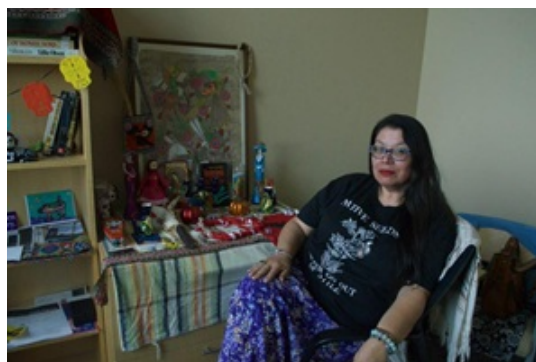
Brought to you by the
Equity & Belonging
Committee
of AAUW La Crosse

AAUW
LA CROSSE (WI)

STEM Student Empowerment & Mentoring Committee

by Diana Elena Moran Sanchez
Thundercloud, New STEM
Coordinator/Chair

Dr. Diana Elena Moran Sanchez
Thundercloud is the new STEM
Coordinator/Chair for our AAUW-LaCrosse
Chapter. She has experience working on
the AAUW Policy and Law Committee and



Committee years prior.) To prepare for the new STEM Coordinator role she applied for some professional development. Diana was accepted for "STEM Leadership & Mentoring Training" through Texas A&M University. The professional development training was part of a National Science Foundation (NSF) Grant to focus on bilingual (English/Spanish) students in STEM areas of study -- Latinas in K-12 & Higher Education. Diana previously taught at three Historically Hispanic Universities (El Paso Community College, University of Texas at El Paso, and Texas A&M International-Laredo). UTEP is a tier one research university focused on the retention and academic success of first generation college students -- majority are Latino.a.

Majority students are bilingual and bicultural living in the US/Mexican Borderlands region. UTEP also has a high rate of Veteran Students as UTEP is the home of Fort Bliss. UTEP is a doctoral research institution with various STEM initiatives over the years. Dr. Moran Thundercloud is bilingual in English and Spanish. She has been part of Mentorship for Latinas and Native Students for many years. She is a Wisconsin licensed English and Spanish teacher too. She has worked in Community Education, K-12 Education, and Higher Education. Diana is currently an Independent Researcher & Writer. Photojournalist. Consultant/Lecturer. She acts as a Master's Level and Dissertation Advisor (USA/Latin America). Her book and project(s) are focused on "Las Americas". Her home bases are Wisconsin/USA, Mexico, Chile, and Peru. She works remotely many times while traveling.

Diana is a Citizen Scientist. Her goal through STEM work -- is for all girls and women to feel empowered in STEM areas of study and in living life, She is a trained Educational Researcher, She has a background in Curriculum/Instruction, Ecological Restoration, & Watersheds through Edgewood College, UW-Arboretum, and UW-Madison Nelson Institute of Environmental Education. She is a trained Wisconsin Master Naturalist Teacher Trainer. She has done advanced work in Environmental Stewardship & Ethics and Sustainability Community Education and Leadership. Her work hopes to support other girls who are interested in various roles of STEM in our lives. Her passion is Natural Sciences, ARTS, and Society, She has taught a course at UW-LaCrosse on "Native Americans and the Environment" and a graduate course at UW-Madison in Literacy & the ARTS. Her academic training is interdisciplinary and will help support future STEM students -- collaboration within many groups! Diana is excited to support workshops that are STEM related and innovative for the 21st Century. She has mentored Social Innovation and Leadership in the past!

Diana has joined the newly formed STEM Student Empowerment & Mentoring Committee for AAUW Wisconsin State-Wide. Her goal is to focus on access and mentorship for K-12 Education. She plans to focus on Wellness & STEM, Ethics & Artificial Intelligence, Ecological Restoration & Conservation, STEM & the Arts, and Technology & Culture & Society. With the current climate in the USA and globally she hopes to support and collaborate to build relationships that ensure STEM opportunities for girls and women -- many that are marginalized in immigrant, refugee, and asylum communities. Her focus will be on Student Wellness & STEM, Social Emotional Learning during times of Unrest.

We can meet via ZOOM. We will have monthly meetings. Please contact [Diana Elena Moran Sanchez Thundercloud](#).

**Our first STEM Committee meeting will be:
Nov. 20 @ 6 pm-7 pm. ZOOM.**



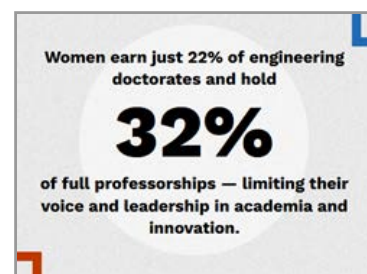
Empowerment and Equity for Girls and Women. STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Global Learning for Future Leaders in STEM.

Public Policy

by Silvana F Richardson

AAUW's 2025–2027 Federal Action Priorities

One key priority is: Education



To support equitable access to higher education—and to reduce the barriers that hinder women's advancement, especially women of color—AAUW advocates for:

- Reinstating Title IX rules that strengthen and clarify protections for student survivors of sexual harassment and assault, ensure accommodations for pregnant and parenting students, and affirm protections based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Defending inclusive education from attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Reducing barriers to postsecondary success, including increased financial support and manageable student debt.
- Addressing non-tuition barriers such as paid leave, childcare, and access to contraception, and abortion care.

Why It Matters

Women hold nearly two-thirds of all student loan debt, with Black women carrying the highest average balances, compounding financial insecurity. At the same time, congressional proposals to cut access to Pell Grants and eliminate Graduate PLUS loans threaten to make education even less attainable.

From assaults on Title IX and Title IV protections to sweeping efforts to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education, these attacks threaten to roll back decades of progress and leave women and girls more vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in schools and on campuses.

Challenges including affordable childcare, support for pregnant and parenting students, and access to reproductive healthcare disproportionately impact women

AAUW Two-Minute Activist

Please sign up for AAUW network so you can get action alerts and updates.



Advocacy Toolkit

Ongoing event!

Ongoing **Robert Reich** event in Sparta, WI.

Robert Reich is a former U.S. Secretary of Labor, an author, and a professor. Reich, a teacher for 42 years, discusses wealth inequality, bullying, and the importance of teaching.

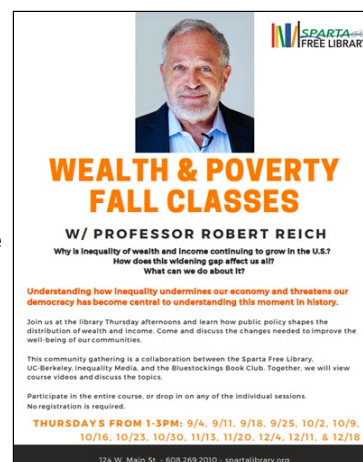
Wealth & Poverty Fall Classes w/Professor Robert

Reich @ the Sparta Free Library,

(www.spartalibrary.org/calendar). **Thursdays from 1-3**

p.m.: 10/30, 11/13, 11/20, 12/4, 12/11, & 12/18. Together we will view course videos and discuss the topics. Participate in the entire course, or drop in on any of the individual sessions. No registration is required.

These events are a collaboration between the Sparta Free Library, UC-Berkeley, Inequality Media, and the Bluestockings Book Club.



Thank You from SSP!

Thank you to Erica, AIA, and everyone who hopped on the MealTrain to provide suppers for SSP this semester! Look at the fun Noreen and Lynne had prepping ghoulish and spookie vegs! We are grateful for the Branch's support of AAUW, through advocacy, grants, scholarship and friendship! Thank you!





[Visit our AAUW-WI website to learn more about us!](#)



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