

ERIE PRESSIBLE March 2026

Women and Islamic Law

March is Women's History month. Our speaker, **Dr. Carolyn Baugh, is an Associate Professor of History at Gannon University.** This talk explores the depth and complexity of a range of gender issues in Islamic Law highlighting Muslim feminist activists and voices countering some common misperceptions.

This meeting is **open to the public** (bring your friends and those interested in joining our AAUW branch). We are co-sponsoring the event with Gannon University. It will be held **Monday, March 9th at 6:30 PM** at the **Gannon University in Room 2005 in the Polumbo Building.**

DARE TO KNOW *Sapere Aude*

10 Things About Women in Islamic Law
6:30 p.m. | March 9 | Palumbo 2005



Dr. Carolyn Baugh of the School of Public Service and Global Affairs will speak on an important and multifaceted topic. The talk explores the complexity of gender issues in Islamic law, the challenges Muslim women face in legal interpretation both regionally and globally, and the key role of Muslim feminist activists and voices.

AAUW
advancing women work life balance • national 1916

AAUW is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, research and philanthropy. Erie Branch contributes to this mission through fundraising for scholarships for non-traditional college women and for New American women, monthly life-long learning programs and public outreach for cultural diversity.



more information at
gannon.edu/speakerseries

Inspired by Aristotle, Kant's call to *Sapere Aude* — "dare to know" — this year's speaker series invites us to come together for critical reflection, courageous inquiry and civil discourse. Join us as we explore what it means to think and speak openly in the service of truth — a challenge as urgent today as it was in 1794.

GANNON
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President's Message

Friends,

As the AAUW Erie Branch begins seeking student applicants for this year's scholarship program, questions about the state of higher education naturally come up. Enrollment has been declining, public debate about the value of college is growing, and recent changes to student-loan policies have added new uncertainty for families planning their next steps.

One of the most significant shifts this year involves the Department of Education's proposed redefinition of what counts as a professional degree. Under this proposal, only a narrow set of programs would qualify for the higher federal loan limits traditionally associated with professional study. Many long-recognized fields — including nursing, architecture, accounting, and education — would no longer fall under that category. For students in these programs, especially those without family financial support, the change could mean reduced access to the borrowing levels they have historically relied on to complete their degrees.

These shifts do not affect all students equally. Lower-income students and those from marginalized communities are more likely to depend on federal loans as their primary means of financing higher education. When borrowing limits shrink or eligibility narrows, these students face tougher choices: taking on additional jobs, reducing course loads, delaying graduation, or stepping away from school altogether. Policy changes that appear technical on the surface can deepen existing inequities if we are not attentive to their real-world impact.

This is precisely why AAUW Erie's commitment matters so deeply. At a time when financial barriers are rising and pathways are becoming more complicated; our branch continues to stand firmly behind women pursuing their education. We know that when women are supported in completing their degrees — whether in four-year programs, two-year programs, or skilled-trade pathways — entire families and communities' benefit. Our scholarships are more than financial assistance; they are a statement that women's ambitions deserve to be nurtured, protected, and celebrated.



Sharmin Khundker

Coming from a country where only the wealthy could afford higher education, I'm especially mindful of how income inequality shapes access. My hope is that education in this country remains open to all — not just to those with the financial means to pursue it. As we reflect on Black History Month and the ongoing pursuit of equity, it feels even more important to support pathways that remain accessible and inclusive.

Moving through February, I am reminded of the strength we create when we support one another. Our scholarship program continues to be a simple yet powerful way to open doors for students in our community. As we launch the AAUW Erie Branch scholarship application cycle, I encourage all members to help spread the word so more students can access the opportunities they deserve. Thank you for all you do to keep possibility within reach for those who need it most.

Sharmin

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Public Policy Updates

The Trump Administration has made major changes to higher education financing options. As part of the ONE BIG BEAUTIFUL BILL ACT, significant changes were made to student loans including GRAD PLUS loans and other graduate level borrowing options. GRAD PLUS loans were specifically designed for graduate and professional students. These loans have been used to pay for the full cost of attendance minus any other financial assistance the student may receive. Like other federal loans, GRAD PLUS loans offer an automatic deferment while the student is in school and payments begin six months after graduation. These loans were commonly used for a wide variety of graduate programs including medicine, law, nursing, dentistry, and education to name a few.

Current guidance from the Department of Education strictly limits the programs that are considered "professional" for the purpose of student loan borrowing. Many programs which were previously considered professional have now been excluded meaning loans will be capped at much lower levels. Students in eliminated programs will no longer be eligible for the GRAD PLUS loan. Eliminated programs include Nursing, Social Work, Graduate Education, Physical Therapy, Physician Assistant, MBAs and many more.

These new federal loan limits are likely to cause some students to rethink their career paths. Many students may delay or even forgo graduate school. As fewer students are able to attend these programs, essential fields are likely to see worker shortages. Many of the targeted fields such as Nursing, Physician Assistant, Education and Social Work already experience worker shortages.

Proponents of the new law argue that the nature of the GRAD PLUS Loan contributed to inflation in college tuition as universities increased tuition costs because they knew that students could pay. Critics argue that the change will disproportionately impact students who do not have alternate loan possibilities to cover the cost of graduate education.

Gloria Blackwell, AAUW Chief Executive Officer, defines the problem in her statement that "This decision could change who gets to finish graduate school and this is how women get pushed out of graduate education. For students-especially women and students of color in graduate and professional programs, these details could determine whether they complete their degree or are forced to walk away just short of their goal."

Food and Friends volunteer for Sunday Supper



Volunteers include—L to R: Pat Tracy (Organizer of Sunday Supper), Asuman Baskan, Loretta Siegley, Claudia Mosso, Barb Hutzelman, Karen Miller, Mary Yonkers, Loretto Bellicini, Ellen DiPlacido, Sharmin Khundker, Matasha Murrell Jones - Front: Gloria Pulford and Anne Marie Kumhera.

Celebrate a “Tardy” Mardi

The Food & Friends study group invites all members to a ‘Tardy’ Mardi Gras Party on **Saturday, March 7th, 2 to 5 pm** at **3226 Rustic Lane** (Barb Hutzelman's house). Husbands are welcome.

We have masks, food, drinks, music, and beads. Just bring yourself and **\$10 to help fund the next Sunday Supper** for those in need. Let Barb know that you're coming via phone or text 814-881-7339 by March 1st.



Harding Elementary School — Winterfest Quilt

Several AAUW members worked on crafts with students at the Winterfest held at Harding Elementary School.

Joan Benson Cacchione had students draw snowmen/women on cloth. Later Joan sewed their drawings onto the quilt which is now hanging in the hallway at the school for all to admire.

Look at the pride on these student's adorable faces!



Branch Study/Interest Groups

AAUW Book Club meets the **first Thursday** of every month at **1-2:30 PM** at **Springhill**, 2323 Edinboro Road, Room 316. Cindy Belczyk is the coordinator for the group (814-873-5401 or BelczykCA@gmail.com). **Next meeting is March 5th.**

Upcoming book selections include:

- ***The Love of my Life*** by Rosie Walsh
- ***The Book Club for Troublesome Women*** by Marie Bostwick
- ***Miss Morgan's Book Brigade*** by Janet Skeslien

Games, Games, Games! Susan Roehrl is hosting the next Games meeting at her house, 626 Mohawk Drive on **Thursday, March 12 from 2-4 PM**. If you plan to come, please call Susan at 814-868-4537 to make your reservation.

Global Friends is an outreach program to immigrant women in our community. It is open to both AAUW members and immigrant women.

The topic for the **March 23** meeting will be **USCRI's work with the Erie School District** by **Tisha Ryden** (this is the program that we had to cancel in January). It will meet at our regular time of **7:00 PM** at Edie's home, **638 Vermont Ave**. Global Friends is chaired by Edie Cultu (814-397-2975, edie_cultu@yahoo.com).

Gourmet Join us for lunch at **The Erie Yacht Club** located at **1 Ravine Dr.** with our gourmet group on **Thursday, March 26th at noon**. Please R.S.V.P. to Candy Brown (814-873-0486 or candybrown1@gmail.com) on or before March 19.

Politalk is an unstructured discussion about domestic and international political events which leads to brainstorming about ways of coping with such events. Politalk meets the **3rd Thursday of the month from 1-3 PM and 6:30-8:30 PM** at chair Asuman Baskan's house 3838 State Street. (814-282-8277) (irrepressibleturk@gmail.com)

Finger foods will be served. Please rsvp when you receive the reminder email earlier in the month. (Feel free to switch between afternoon and evening groups as they will meet on the same day.)

Reminder — Ride Share Connections

Some of our members are unable to attend AAUW Branch meetings and events due to transportation challenges. To support one another and ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate, Membership is creating Ride Share Connections, a simple but meaningful way to help more of our members join in the programs, events, and opportunities our branch offers.

If you are interested in being part of the Ride Share Connection either as an occasional driver or as someone who may now and then need a ride — please contact Anne Marie Kumhera at annemarieku@gmail.com or 440-670-5899.

Together, we can make sure that transportation is never a barrier to participation.

March 2026



Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

1	2	3	4	5 Book Club 1-2:30 pm Springhill	6	7 Food & Friends Tardy Mardi
8	9 AAUW Speaker 6:30 pm Gannon Univ	10	11	12 Games 2-4 pm 626 Mohawk	13	14
15	16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18	19 Politalk 1-3 pm & 6:30-8:30 pm at Asuman's	20	21
22	23 Global Friends 7:00 pm Edie's home	24	25	26 Gourmet noon Erie Yacht Club	27	28
29	30	31				



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Erie Branch—Founded in 1902

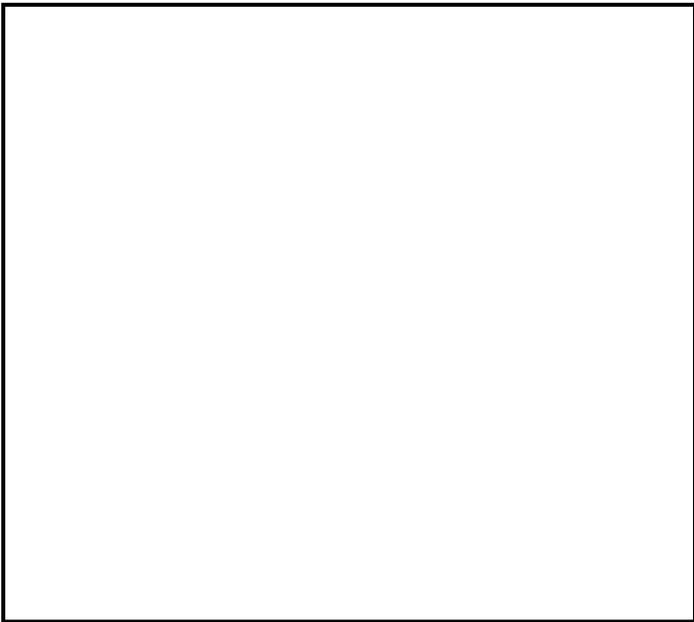
AAUW's Mission

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through education, philanthropy, and research. By joining AAUW you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance. In principle and in practice AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in the organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class.

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The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.
Contact us at: lwverie@gmail.com



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