

**PRESS RELEASE**

November 22, 2002

American University of Armenia Corporation  
300 Lakeside Drive, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94612  
Telephone: (510) 987-9452  
Fax: (510) 208-3576

Contact: Gohar Momjian  
E-mail: [gohar@ix.netcom.com](mailto:gohar@ix.netcom.com)

**AUA SETS PRECEDENT - WASC GRANTS 'CANDIDATE FOR ACCREDITATION' STATUS**

The American University of Armenia (AUA) reached an historic milestone in its institutional development when the accrediting agency, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), recognized AUA as a 'Candidate for Accreditation' in November 2002. Not only is it the first time that WASC, one of the six regional accrediting associations covering the United States, has ever considered a university outside territorial United States, but also the first time that AUA was evaluated by an external professional organization that judges the overall quality of a university's academic programs and management.

"As a young institution that carries the traditions of Western higher education to Armenia and its region, we passed with flying colors," said President Haroutune Armenian. "AUA has a very important responsibility of attaining the highest possible standards in education and academic management. The accreditation process has provided us with an opportunity to evolve towards the highest standards that we seek. As we continue to grow, we believe that this process will also help us to find innovative solutions to managing an institution operating under a number of constraints. Thus, accreditation has become one of the core activities for institutional development at the AUA."

AUA began its pursuit of accreditation in 1998 following a strategic review process. Academic and administrative leaders agreed that after 8 years of initial program growth, it was time for AUA to take stock of its accomplishments, consolidate its finances, academic programs, and internal organization, thus creating the necessary educational infrastructure to seek accreditation from an U.S. regional accrediting body. With the allocation of a grant for this purpose by the United States Information Agency, AUA was able to move forward.

The accreditation process itself is lengthy and entails three phases: eligibility, candidacy, and accreditation. Institutions, such as the AUA, which have been recognized as Candidates for Accreditation are given the opportunity to establish an initial but formal and publicly recognized relationship with the WASC Commission. This indicates that the institution has achieved initial recognition and is progressing towards accreditation, allowing time for the University to further organize operations, establish sound policies, procedures, management, improve quality, and demonstrate its effectiveness in achieving its goals.

AUA Accreditation Steering Committee Co-Chair, Theony Condos, remarked, "This achievement is truly remarkable when one considers the educational and cultural challenges involved in introducing a new educational model at the time of Armenia's independence." A

former Associate Director of the University of California's Education Abroad Program, Condos continued, "Armenia's long and vibrant intellectual tradition provides the context within which AUA has been able to carry out its mission of contributing to sustainable development of Armenia and its region."

In order to achieve Candidacy status, AUA underwent a 2 year process of conducting and documenting an institution-wide, intensive period of self-study and examination of strengths and weaknesses. Students, faculty and staff participated in the process by serving on task forces and participating in various meetings focusing on the standards of accreditation and AUA's unique attributes and challenges. In June 2002, nine WASC representatives, including senior university faculty and administrators, visited AUA to examine the educational quality of its programs, organizational management and stability, and future viability. The team met in open and private meetings with every imaginable constituency of AUA, from faculty, academic departments, students, staff, alumni, employers of alumni, and Armenia's Minister of Education.

Their findings, as described in the evaluation team's final report, were extremely positive, stating that 'AUA's degree programs would align well with expectations for comparable programs in most American Universities', and that 'students are well prepared for work in their fields upon graduation'. AUA's Dean of Faculty, Dr. George Jakab, who has been charged with leading the next phase of the accreditation process, said, "As noted by WASC, our focus for the next few years will have to be on establishing systems to measure educational effectiveness, and engaging broad faculty participation in University governance and planning."

AUA Accreditation Liaison Officer, Gohar Momjian, remarked, "Candidacy is just one mark of AUA's continuous efforts to evolve and progress. The University sets an example for academic excellence and inevitably plays a leadership role in the development of higher education and human capital in the region. It is a tribute to the founders of the University, today's leadership, the sacrifice of AUA's faculty and administration, and ultimately the success of AUA's students and alumni, that AUA has been able to effectively graft the best practices of western education into a cultural environment which produces a highly motivated and educated workforce, thus participating in, and stimulating Armenia's economic and social transformation."

Since its establishment in 1991, the American University of Armenia (AUA) has conferred close to 1000 Master's Degrees, in an increasing number of programs including Business and Management, Industrial Engineering, Computer and Information Sciences, Political Science and International Affairs, Health Sciences, Law, Comparative Legal Studies, and Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), in addition to Certificates in TEFL, Health Care Management and Environmental and Conservation Sciences. AUA's use of English as the language of instruction is intended to facilitate communication between graduates of AUA and their colleagues throughout the world and to attract an international faculty cadre and student body. Parallel to its academic programs, AUA has established six research centers to promote research and service in conjunction with graduate teaching. As a public service to the community, AUA also provides courses through its Extension Program. AUA is an affiliate of the University of California, which provides administrative guidance to AUA, and has received continuous generous support from the AGBU since AUA's inception.