

## Home Study: AUA students get Armenian education & American diploma

By Julia Hakobyan  
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Armenian students who wish to have an American diploma can now get it without leaving the country. For the first time, a university in Armenia got acknowledgement by the United States' educational institution.

The Yerevan based American University of Armenia (AUA) has finally got an accreditation from the U.S based Western Association of Schools and Colleges, a long awaited status that makes the AUA's graduates status equal to those in United States.

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), one of the six regional accrediting associations covering the United States, for the first time accredited a university outside the territorial United States. Besides, AUA became the first university in the region (Caucasus and ex-soviet territory) that was accredited by the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities of WASC.

Haroutune Armenian, president of

AUA says that the accreditation became one of the core activities for institutional development of the university.

"The accreditation will encourage students' interest from the region and the Diaspora to come to Armenia, earn the graduate degree and form lifelong linkages to Armenia."

Diana Danelian, AUA's accreditation coordinator says the accreditation process which entailed three phases lasted for nine years during which the AUA's criteria were led to standards that corresponds to educational system in the United States, from education process to faculty quality from administrative management to the logistics. In 2002 it received the candidacy status for accreditation, which Danelian says was already a victory - a true indication that the institution achieved initial recognition and has chances for getting accreditation.

"The accreditation is an event of great importance not only for the AUA but for the whole educational system

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of Armenia, since AUA has become an incentive for the development of education in Armenia," Danelian said. "It can serve as a model for other institutions of the country and prompt them to make higher their quality and education standards to apply for accreditation as well."

Danelyan says that with the accreditation the AUA will have many benefits, such as increased opportunities to obtain funding, to attract more international students and the best professors from abroad for full-time work.

The AUA was founded in 1991 by the group of American scholars of Armenian origin who united their efforts to introduce an entirely new, American style graduate institution. It was opened due to the support of two major US institutions- the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) which provided necessary funding to launch a university, and the University of California.

Now the affiliate of University of California, AUA's two year academic program provides graduate education in eight sectors, such as Political Science, Comparative Legal Studies, Information and Communication Technologies, Business and Management and others.

During its 16 years, AUA has turned out 1,500 graduates. Currently it has 261 students; 31 of them are from abroad, including students from Europe, Middle East and CIS states. One academic year costs 930,000 dram (\$2,600) for the local students. However, the full annual amount per student is 3,300,000 dram (\$9,400), the balance for local students is paid by donors, mostly AGBU. International students pay the whole sum.

The new accreditation is valid for seven years, after which AUA must re-apply for a 10-year accreditation.