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The Deans of the American University of Armenia are guiding their departments into active new roles, as the University nears the end of its first year of operation.

Dr. Armen Der Kiureghian, Dean of Engineering, and Dr. Stepan Karamardian, Dean of Business and Management, are creating research centers to assist Armenia in its transformation to a market economy.

Dr. Der Kiureghian said an Engineering Research Center has been set up to attract money for programs that would employ scientists in Armenia.

Discussions are already under way for joint projects with the Mechanics Institute of the Academy of Sciences and the Armenian Research Institute of Construction and Architecture.

"There are very many extremely talented scientists in Armenia who are on the verge of being unemployed because there are no funds for them, or they are under-employed," Dr. Der Kiureghian said.

"The University is now playing the role of funneling research funds from the United States and other countries to here by employing scientists."

Dr. Karamardian has established the Center for Business Research and Development at the University to provide accurate information of Armenia's economy.

A dozen students from AUA's School of Business, under the direction of the center's two associate directors, are already engaged in several projects.

These include the development of a computerized data bank for the textile industry, studies of the most suitable kinds of business training needs by Armenian entrepreneurs and government officials.

A joint project with the American CARE organization is being discussed to establish "business incubators" to provide financial and managerial advice for new companies.

Dr. Karamardian said the center also hoped to develop a computerized model of the Armenian economy, in partnership with Stanford University's department of operations research.

"The center's main purpose is to help in the economy development for the country by actually getting involved in business-related research," he said.

Both Deans, who have been together at the university for the first time this summer, said they were pleased with the AUA's first year.

Dr. Der Kiureghian is busy establishing the full engineering program, with 12 students enrolled in industrial engineering and six in earthquake engineering.

Intensive courses of five weeks' duration, instead of the normal 10, have been developed to enable the University to attract top professors in each field to teach in Armenia.

"We have had many problems, there is no question about that. But it is a major achievement to have started classes, to have students here, and to have top level teaching," said Dr. Der Kiureghian.

However, he expressed concern at the low numbers of students interested in earthquake engineering. "The irony is that this whole university idea came out of the 1988 earthquake, and originally it was to focus on Earthquake Engineering. Now we have the smallest number of students in Earthquake Engineering. The reasons for this are that all engineering jobs here have to do with the government and are low-paid," said Dr. Der Kiureghian.

"This country needs everything rebuilding from scratch, there are million homeless people, yet young people don't see a future in building construction and earthquake engineering. We have to change that".

Graduates of the AUA would be leaders in the task of rebuilding Armenia, he said, but first the government has to change the law to permit private companies to undertake construction work. Dr. Karamardian said 50 students had completed the first quarter of an American-standard MBA, with a full workload. Average results were a 3.0, or B grade, which is described as "quite encouraging".

The AUA has received more than 200 applications for entry into next year's courses, 140 of them in business. Dr. Karamardian said that he expected to offer about 60 places. "The competition is increasing," he said. "I am very pleased with the results of the first year, especially given the fact that all the students have gone through a completely different system of education.

"They have shown considerable talents in making this translation and adapting to the American system of higher education".

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