

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

SPONSORED BY THE AGBU AND AFFILIATED WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

A New Beginning

BY DR. MIHRAN AGBABIAN
President of AUA

The American University of Armenia, AUA, was founded to address the long-term needs in Armenia and the region as a whole. Its mission is to educate and train a new generation of leaders in the best tradition of American Universities and Graduate Schools. With the financial and organizational support of the Armenian General Benevolent Union and the academic and institutional affiliation granted by the University of California, together with land grants, facilities and subsidies provided by the Government of Armenia, AUA has a solid foundation as it begins to fulfill its educational mission.

On September 23, 1991, the day Armenia declared independence, AUA opened its doors with 101 enrolled graduate students. Intensive courses in English and computer applications prepared the students to enter their chosen fields in Business and Management, Earthquake and Industrial Engineering. With faculty members drawn from some of the best American universities, instruction is conducted in English according to the highest standards of comparable U. S. universities.

The second academic year started

on September 21, 1992, with the enrollment of 140 new students. A University Extension was also organized to offer intensive courses to specialists and

government officials and training programs for people in the work place who cannot afford the time to become full time students. Two Research Centers, Center for Business Research and Development and the Engineering Research Center, provide Research Assistantships to students who work with faculty and local scientists on projects that contribute to the advancement of the economy and lifestyle of Armenia and the surrounding region. A Center for Environmental Management and Science, affiliated with the Engineering Research Center, provides environmental sensitivity and awareness programs to the students in the regular extension programs.

AUA plans to establish degree programs in Public Policy and Political Science, Public Health Care Management, and Agricultural Sciences. A new campus is being planned on land located on a hill in the suburbs of Yerevan. □



Students and Faculty in front of the Bagramian Street AUA building.

Changing the System:

Education in Armenia

BY LOUISE MANOOGIAN SIMONE

For most Americans many aspects of higher education are taken for granted. Up-to-date textbooks, reference books, periodicals, journals, visual aids and computer programs are only a few of the readily available learning tools for the eager student. American university administrators and professors are expected to move with the times in order to prepare students who will be aware of the latest and best technical, educational and human resources.

The Soviet higher educational system, on the other hand, was designed to serve the Moscow Central government's main priority - producing scientists and technocrats who would respond to a command system; their output always geared to advance the arms race or space program or whatever else was on their five year government plan.

Unlike the United States, where scientific and technological advances in military/space programs are passed down to industry, medicine, communications and a variety of fields, the general public in

the former Soviet Union never reaped the benefits of modern discoveries and production.

It is now a new era; one in which each republic's government and citizens are free to learn and to advance according to their ability and resources. But how does one begin in a previously closed society where education was controlled, books banned, privatization illegal and technology thirty years out of date?

The concept behind the American University of Armenia was to introduce new educational systems and materials that would help speed the pace of progress. With a Master's Degree program comparable to any top American university, entrance exams that identify high-caliber students, American professors recruited from the best colleges and universities and the latest in textbooks and computer programs, AUA has begun the retraining of graduates in Armenia who can one day modernize and expand the economy of the country.

It hasn't been easy. It is an expensive program, \$1,200,000 a year for salaries, travel, housing, equipment, and educa-

tional publications for two hundred and thirty students in graduate courses and several hundred others who attend special extension programs. All text and library books, computers, copiers, television monitors for educational videos, slide machines, even paper, pens and chalk for the blackboards have had to be imported from the United States.

The University, unlike almost every other institution in Armenia, remained in operation throughout the winter. Equipped with generators, classes were on schedule every day. The fact that over thirty-five American professors, visiting lecturers and administrative staff endured the drastic living conditions of no heat, electricity or hot water is ample evidence that they find considerable satisfaction in being part of the historic change of the educational system in Armenia.

A new environment has been created. The relationship between American staff and Armenian students, in and out of the classrooms, has established an atmosphere that promotes independent thinking, individual talents and self-confidence.

Hasmig Kevontian, a student in the Business and Management program, reflects on the changes in her life. "I view everything differently now," she says. "My vision and interests have expanded. I find myself analyzing my daily problems, my life in general and my future

career. I know I have the right to choose; the right to set my own standards in everything I do." Edward Manookian, a June graduate gives a small example of the new vision, "We often visit local factories and meet the directors during field trips. I can see the difference between what we are learning and what is actually happening."

Some students initially find themselves confused by the American system. Timed, monthly exams were startling since the old system allowed unlimited hours to complete infrequent tests. Questions during class were considered taboo, a mark of ignorance, and informal relationships with professors, a sign of disrespect. Others admit they could drift all year in their local universities, cram the last ten days and still pass. Now they are stimulated by the challenge of having to work and learn every day of the academic year.

Armed with new knowledge, fluency in English and computer capability, AUA students are being eagerly courted by foreign embassies, joint venturers and humanitarian agencies. Working part-time they often receive high salaries from their employers. The UN representative in Yerevan has hired two students and says "without question they were the best out of 100 applicants."

It's a new day for the students of AUA. □