

AGBU PROGRAMS

BY ROBERT TEMBECKJIAN

In June 1991, when I applied to the U.S. Government for a Fulbright Scholarship to teach constitutional law in Armenia, there was no American University of Armenia. Indeed, the Soviet Union had not yet dissolved, and Armenia itself was not yet an independent country. Permission had to be granted from Moscow before an American could travel to Yerevan, or anywhere else in the USSR, to teach at a state university.

What a difference a year made. By the time my application was approved in 1992, AUA had been founded and was already operating under joint sponsorship of the AGBU, the University of California and the government of the newly independent Republic of Armenia. Its first graduate students had begun formal masters degree studies in engineering and business management. And, by the 1993-94 school year, as I prepared for my journey to Yerevan, degree and certificate programs had also been organized in political science and public policy and management.

What was the inspiration in creating an American University of Armenia? By 1991, the Soviet system was in shambles, and Armenia was participating more and more on the international scene. If the newly independent Republic were to survive and flourish, it would have to do business, politically and economically, with America, Europe and other Western nations. Armenia would also have to make the best use of modern technology and solutions in such areas as energy production and use, housing management, international finance and business development. Both the Armenian government and diasporan leaders believed that, in addition to the fundamental education provided by the country's traditional universities, Armenia needed an institution which could provide qualitative training and experience in Western ideas and methods. Thus, AUA was established as a graduate-level institution — not to replace Armenia's traditional universities but to supplement them; not to indoctrinate students with Western ideology but to train them in proven Western techniques which they, in turn, could contribute to Armenia's progress and future.

I had been to Armenia twice as a tourist before the 1988 earthquake, for exciting two-week visits to the ancestral homeland. And of course I well knew that Armenia has been in severe economic depression for five years, not only because of the earthquake but because of the blockade of its borders by Azerbaijan and Turkey as a result of the conflict over Karabakh. While I hoped for an experience as uplifting as my first two trips, I was prepared to be disheartened by the harsh conditions which my kinsmen were enduring.

Nothing could have prepared me for

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA

The AUA Experience: *A Visiting Professor's Perspective*

the exhilarating and inspirational experiences I was to have in Armenia and at AUA. Here are an entire people struggling through extreme deprivation yet extraordinarily generous with what little they have. And here is a country confronting monumental adversity yet optimistic enough about the future to debate a constitution, privatize land and dwellings, and nurture a new graduate university.

I joined the AUA faculty as Visiting Professor of Political Science, to fulfill my Fulbright Scholar obligation by teaching courses in Citizenship & Public Ethics, and Public Management. I also gave lecture series at both AUA and Yerevan State University on Constitutional Law & Development.

There is no institution like AUA anywhere in Armenia. It is unique in acclimating Armenia's present and future leaders to the outside world which they will have to master if Armenia is indeed to have a future. For example, Dr. Michael Kouchakdjian, AUA's Director of Administration and a Professor of Business Management, requires his students to plan and develop a hypothetical business, with identified sources of capital, market projections and performance evaluations. One of his students is determined to make her hypothetical business into a reality — Armenia's first Chinese restaurant! Another AUA Professor, Dr. Vaughn Huckfeldt, had his students study the operations of Yerevan's Zvartnots Airport, for a report to the government on how to make much-needed improvements in the management of the facility. As a lawyer, I lost track of the number of times people asked me to interpret an American or British contract proposal for them, or to discuss the rudiments of banking and commercial transactions, or to advise them on how to negotiate and deal with Western companies.

My business faculty colleagues had similar encounters with Armenian entrepreneurs who came to AUA for



**Dr. Nikol Shahgaldian,
Ambassador Harry Gilmore and
Robert Tembeckjian, Esq.**

advice and exposure to the world beyond the Caucasus. One association of trade merchants, for example, sought our advice on how to establish contacts with similar associations in America and Europe, and how to negotiate export-import contracts with Western businesses. Accumulating professional experience in these areas is essential if Armenia is to find lucrative markets for its goods and services and become a place where Western businesses will feel comfortable investing capital.

To this end, AUA has already established a number of first-rate research institutes, including the Center for Business Research & Development, the Engineering Research Center and the Environmental Science & Management Center. These institutes, operated by full-time professionals as well as graduate students, are issuing provocative and imaginative reports not only on the present state of affairs in Armenia, but on the means to change and improve. Their projects have generated debate within the Armenian governmental and business communities. Their business and economic assessments are equal or superior to anything available from the various international organizations operating in Armenia.

These are a few among the many important activities underway at AUA, the likes of which are not happening elsewhere. There are lots more.

A new certificate program in public health and health care management, which is desperately needed in Armenia, has been initiated under the guidance of Dr. Harutune Armenian, Professor and Chairman of the Department of Epidemiology of the School of Public Health and Hygiene at Johns Hopkins University. The program, which concentrates on preventive health care, is attracting local doctors, nurses and scientists in the field.

A grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development was awarded in the summer for AUA and the Ministry of Economy of Armenia to establish jointly a center for economic policy, research and analysis.

An international visiting faculty has been assembled, with professors of various nationalities such as American, Egyptian, Israeli and Belgian, giving AUA a professional diversity and vitality that most other institutions lack.

In part because of the stimulating

AUA EXPERIENCE - continued

environment created by these and other accomplishments, important international conferences on Armenia's energy and ecological needs have been held at AUA, with the active and enthusiastic participation of the Armenian government.

Evident from all of this is one of AUA's most important missions, as often articulated by AUA President Mihran Agbabian: outreach to the Armenian community and nation beyond the AUA campus. "One measure of AUA's success will be how well it is integrated into Armenian life," Dr. Agbabian has said. "We do not want to build an isolated, academic ivy tower. Our goal is for AUA and its graduates to live up to their potential and play a meaningful role in Armenia's development and progress."

Perhaps there is no better example of AUA's success at outreach than its Extension Program, coordinated by Sona Hamalian. Extension offers non-degree courses in public affairs to people from various walks of life — government professionals, private entrepreneurs, homemakers and students. The Extension class which I taught in Public Management, for example, had a doctor, a lawyer, several housewives, an architect, a sociologist, a banker, several scientists and a music teacher. Extension professors not only lecture at regular AUA classes but take their show on the road, conducting seminars at such places as Yerevan City Council, Parliament, various ministries and other universities. Extension also invites stimulating guest speakers such as Artashes Toumanyan, the Vice Chairman of Parliament who spoke to one of my classes about the legislative debate on a new constitution.

By all accounts, AUA is meeting Dr. Agbabian's public service and outreach goals. Among the first 56 AUA graduates are a group who recently organized a new, independent radio station in Yerevan; several who work for the national or local government; one who has started a small book-translating and publishing company; and several who have pursued other ventures, such as working for a trade association or a bank.

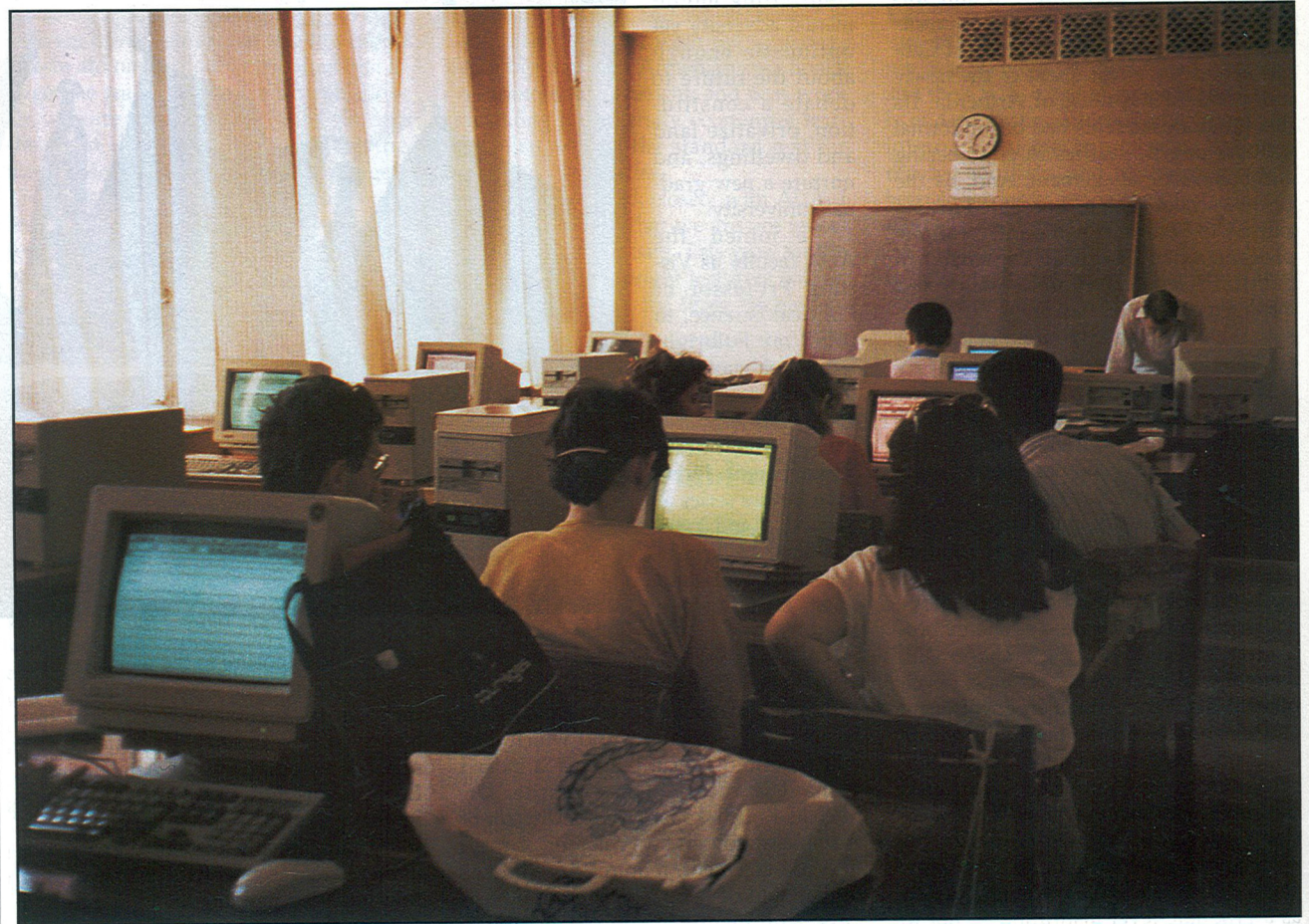
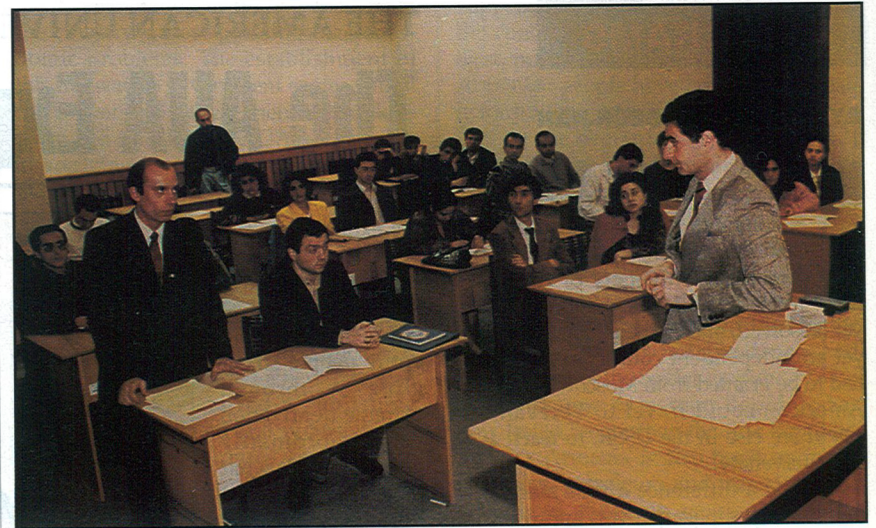
AUA, and education in Armenia, are growth industries, of the type that are essential for Armenia to survive these brutally hard times and flourish in a diverse international environment. AUA is one of the few places in Armenia where the atmosphere is upbeat, the energy is palpable, and the future of the country is hopeful. You can see Armenia's possibilities at AUA, and you can feel the pulse of students who want to contribute to their homeland.

One such student whom I had in my class was Varuzhan Hoktanian, a nuclear physicist who has been out of work since the Metsamor nuclear power plant was closed after the earthquake in '88. Dr. Hoktanian told me that his four closest physicist colleagues from the Yerevan Polytechnical Institute had left the country in the last three years to take lucrative

jobs in foreign lands. Hoktanian himself is afraid that, without work in his field, he is losing his professional edge and may not be qualified to return should the nuclear plant re-open. But rather than leave Armenia, he chose to stay and pursue a new career. So he entered the AUA graduate degree program in political science, hoping to enter the foreign service. His fluency in French and English should be a major advantage.

"Why did I stay?" he asks rhetorically. "Because Armenia is my home. I want to do whatever I can to help it survive. I do not want to be helpless and watch it die from Russia or Germany.

"Besides," he adds, "my friends who were unhappy to be here are now unhappy to be away."



In long hours of conversation, we discussed what it was about AUA that attracted him to it.

"Everything about AUA is fresh and spirited," Hoktanian said. "The courses are stimulating and relevant to Armenia's needs. And the teachers come from many cultures and have different ideas.

"After years of very rigid, Soviet-style education, AUA is like a breath of clean air. The give-and-take between teachers and students, the Western way of looking at things, give you energy. You can challenge a professor and be challenged right back. You can go to his office and debate for hours, then go to lunch together. This is astonishing for us. Our old institutions gave a very good basic education, but they were not diverse and did not prepare us for dealing with the

world outside. AUA is just the opposite. It is, for many of us, a great hope."

A FAMILY EXPERIENCE

As difficult as the living conditions are in Armenia, my wife Barbara and I felt that, since so much of the Armenian experience is family oriented, we would miss something valuable if we did not go together. So we packed ourselves and our 14-month old daughter Sarah and took on Yerevan as a threesome. It could not have been more rewarding.

Not that it was easy climbing up and down five flights of apartment stairs several times a day with a toddler, stroller and assorted paraphernalia, or constantly boiling water to mix with powdered milk, or to bathe. (Most people have no hot running water, and in most places,

even cold running water is strictly rationed.) But these are inconveniences that the entire Armenian population somehow endures every day, so it did not seem too consequential for the Tembeckjian family.

Sarah became an unofficial mascot at AUA, better known than I was and readily adopted by students, staff and neighbors. My AUA office became something of a day care center, with Sarah making friends and sharing dolls with other children, who materialized in increasing numbers as word got around that there were children's books and toys in Bob Tembeckjian's office. Among the benefits to her, of course, is that she started speaking Armenian words. Her favorite was and still is "aclore," for the rooster which a neighboring family had and whose

cockadoodledoo Sarah imitated all day long.

There were benefits to her parents, too. There is nothing quite so moving as revisiting Armenia's landmarks with a happy child and her friends. The sounds of children giggling and filling the air with songs at the breathtaking mountain monastery at Geghard, for example, added a beautiful note of innocence to the already heavenly environment. Sarah's bah bah bah imitation of a sheep that was being blessed at Khor Veerab charmed even the priest who was performing the solemn duty. (Needless to say, I was relieved that she was too young to understand the meaning of Madagh — or as Barbara turned to me and said, "Is this lamb going to be lunch?") And the Martyr's Memorial, which I had visited numerous times in the past, never seemed so personal or awesome as when I stood there holding my own toddler and thought about the two babies my grandmother lost in 1915.

On Saturdays, we showed Disney movies like Dumbo and Beauty & The Beast to an overflow crowd of kids in the AUA auditorium. In a country with rationed electricity and no operating cinemas, these little shows were an enormous hit and among our happiest moments. "My children ask each morning how long before the next Saturday," one of my students said of her two young boys, who

logistical difficulties we had to overcome. In fact, Barbara was so impressed and motivated by the journalism students she met that she now plans to apply for a fellowship from a U.S. journalism foundation in order to return to Yerevan and teach for a full semester next year. Pack your bags, Sarah; we're going back!

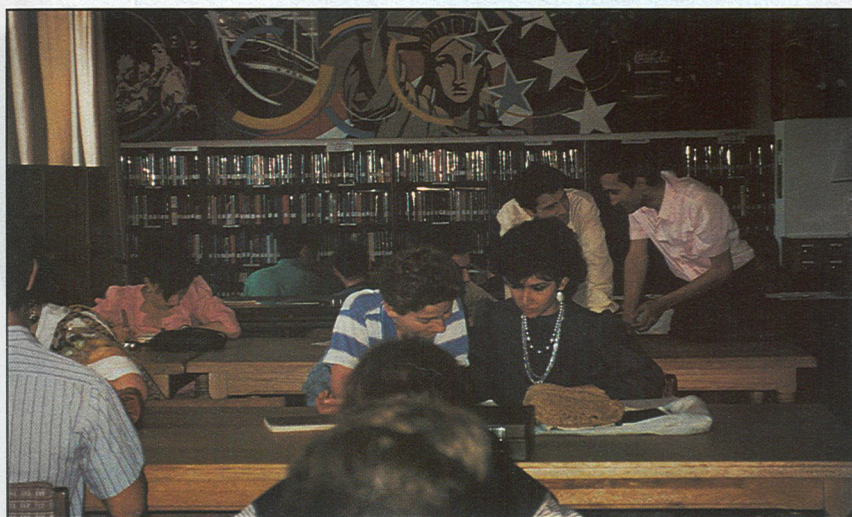
THE AMBASSADOR COMES TO CLASS

Ambassador Gilmore literally did his homework.

Harry D. Gilmore has been U.S. Ambassador to Armenia for more than a year and has tirelessly coordinated the American humanitarian assistance effort in Armenia.

In April, he expressed interest in attending my political science class at AUA. Unlike many public figures, who tend to use such occasions to arrive late, give a speech and then leave, Ambassador Gilmore said he wanted to really participate. So, I sent him the reading assignment for the session he was going to attend, which included a discussion of relations between Armenia and Turkey, based on a hypothetical I had prepared for the students to debate.

Not only did the Ambassador arrive early and stay for the entire class, but he sat with AUA President Mihran Agbajian at a student desk and discussed the issues with the class like a regular, if



presented Sarah with a rendering of the Armenian alphabet that now hangs in her room.

Actually, Sarah wasn't the only one in demand. My wife Barbara, who is a political reporter for the *New York Daily News*, gave lectures on press and government relations at Parliament, AUA and Yerevan State, in a series co-sponsored by AUA and the U.S. Embassy. (Her appearance at Parliament was reported on television, but we couldn't see it because our apartment had no electricity that night! Armenia is like that, sort of a constant Hovhannes Toumanian parable: You can never get too swelled a head, because conditions will humble you sooner than you think!)

The rewards of being in Armenia as a family far outweighed the considerable

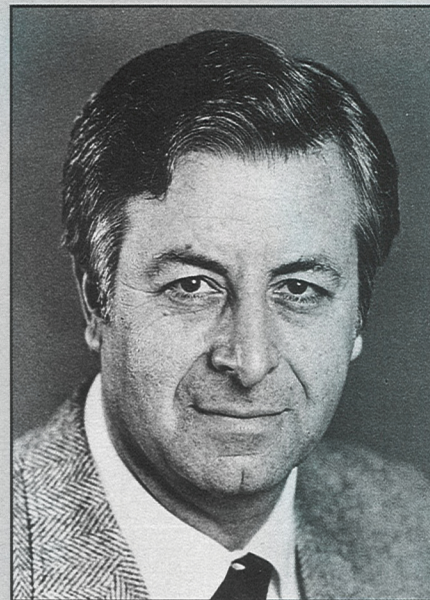
somewhat more world-experienced, graduate student. It was evident that he had done the reading and had given some serious thought to the subject. Afterward, he complimented the students on their insights and preparedness, answered their many questions on U.S. policy toward Armenia and the region, signed autographs and posed for pictures.

The class agreed in return to exempt him from the final exam! □

Robert Tembeckjian, an attorney, is Deputy Administrator of the New York State Commission on Judicial Conduct. He spent the Spring 1994 semester in Yerevan, teaching courses in law and political science on a Fulbright Scholar Grant from the U.S. Government.

IN MEMORIAM STEPAN KARAMARDIAN, FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE

BY MIHRAN S. AGBABIAN



Stepan Karamardian's life had its beginnings in a remote part of Northern Syria and it ended suddenly in the San Francisco Bay Area. We have been fortunate to be his friends and colleagues, and to be able to appreciate the breadth and depth of his accomplishments.

A Greek Philosopher in the third century B.C. has said; "The happiest person is the one who has discovered that what he could be doing and what he is doing are the same thing." Stepan had discovered this in his life's work.

Stepan was devoted to education throughout his entire life. Overcoming many hardships that many others would have been unable to face, he persevered in Kessab and the seaport town of Latakia, Syria, to obtain an edu-

cation that would prepare him to continue his studies in the United States until, at Berkeley, he successfully completed his university studies and obtained his Ph.D. degree. His career was in education and research, and as Professor and Administrator, he achieved his goal of educating the youth of several generations. He knew that his students moved on to high accomplishments, and that gave him considerable satisfaction.

A turning point in Stepan's career came in 1988. The earthquake in Armenia and its aftermath shook him into the realization that Armenia, so remote by political and geographical barriers, and yet so close to his heart, was calling for help. I knew Stepan before the Armenian earthquake, but it was in the early months of 1989 when he expressed to me that he had a strong urge to serve Armenia in the field he knew best - in education. At first independently, Armen Der Kiureghian and I were developing our plan for a Technical University, but Stepan had conceived the need in Armenia for a Business and Management leadership program. We came together and we united our hopes and efforts for an educational mission that would help Armenia build itself as a vibrant and dynamic country. With the support of the University of California, the Armenian General Benevolent Union, and the Government of Armenia, a new university was established, the American University of Armenia.

For the past five years Stepan pursued the goal of providing a graduate education in Business Administration that would produce leaders in the government and the private sector in order to meet the new challenges Armenia would face in its transition to a democratic country and in its establishment of new ties with the outside world.

No one could miss seeing the happiness on Stepan's face during the first Commencement of AUA in October, 1993, in Yerevan, as he read the names of the graduates and handed them their diplomas.

The Center for Business Research and Development at AUA was also Stepan's brainchild. He knew that opportunities had to be created in Armenia to develop new enterprises, and the mechanism for this was through a Center where projects could be developed and carried out. I first heard from Stepan the word "incubator" in connection with Business Management. A project is initiated at the Center, it incubates and then it is launched in the business world as a mature business. In other words, the venture is nurtured by the scientists of the Center until it is ready to be launched. Stepan took great satisfaction in conceiving such a program, and it created great enthusiasm among the faculty and students.

Commitment, dedication, and devotion to a mission: these words express Stepan's life. He served at AUA as a member of the Board of Trustees, Dean of the College of Business and Management, and Director of the Center for Business Research and Development. We all know that Stepan's life during the last five years was the fulfillment and culmination of his career as an educator and a scientist.