

The American University of Armenia Expands Curriculum and Creates New Opportunities for Students

ARTICLES BY LISA BOGHOSIAN

How do you develop and maintain a market-based economy in Armenia? What are the effects of privatization on the delivery of services in a developing nation? What are some of the internal and external events leading to the formation of a new Republic?

These are just a few of the questions being addressed by students studying in the new Political Science Department and researching at the new Center for Economic Policy Research & Analysis (CEPRA) at the American University of Armenia (AUA).

According to Mihran Agbabian, AUA president, "These programs were established in response to the Armenian government's request for AUA to educate and train students for future careers as diplomats and economists. Thanks to the foresight of an anonymous AGBU donor who established an endowment of \$1 million for the purpose of creating the Political Science Department, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) which provided funding to cover the expenses of CEPRA, these programs have become a reality."

Opened more than one year ago, the Political Science Department is already off to a resounding start. More than 51 students applied to the graduate program in its first year, and 27 students were admitted. This year, 75 students applied and 51 were accepted. According to Agbabian, "the selection process is very objective with the sole purpose of admitting a well prepared and qualified student body."

Nikol Shahgaldian, Ph.D. from Columbia University and former senior political scientist at the Rand Corporation, is acting dean for the Department. Permanent faculty include Professors Harry Izmirlian, Mhaer Alahydoyan, Esq., and Doctors Greg Gajevski and Michael Conrad. In addition, Robert Tembeckjian, Esq., was a visiting Fulbright fellow to the Department during its first year.

For the most part, professors conduct classes in an integrated manner. For example, in one class a professor created a mock-Parliament session with students debating a resolution on a current political issue. In other classes professors have invited prominent scholars and government officials to guest lecture to the students. U.S. Ambassador to Armenia, Harry Gilmore, guest lectured to Mr. Tembeckjian's class of Political Science students, commenting after that he was "very impressed by the maturity and intellect of the students."

In addition to the activity taking place in the Political Science Department, students interested in economic research can now apply to work at CEPRA. Jointly formed by the USAID and the Ministry of Economy of the Government of Armenia (GOA), CEPRA was established to conduct independent analysis on issues relating to the growth and stability of the Armenian economy. AUA was invited to be a participant in the Center under the agreement that students attending AUA act as research assistants and that AUA establish an educational program in Economics.

AUA is currently in the process of organizing both. Dr. Frank Breckling from the University of Maryland is the managing director of CEPRA; Dr. Gagik Bakshian, former deputy Minister of Economics for Armenia, is the current deputy director; and Dr. Greg Gajevski from the University of Maryland is the senior economist.

"CEPRA is like a think tank," according to Agbabian. "Economists on the staff and students from AUA research specific topics which the Ministry of the Economy or the Ministry of Finance can use to develop policy. The opening of a graduate economics program is a natural progression following the opening of a political science program. The next step for students after they study about a particular form of government, is to learn how the economy of that system works."

When AUA opened in September, 1991, there were approximately 100 students who applied to attend. This year there were close to 450. With the number of applicants quadrupling, the challenge for AUA is to "keep pace" with this growth. That means that AUA must continually look onward and venture into territories that will interest students as well as benefit Armenia. And with the opening of the Political Science Department and CEPRA, AUA has done just that. □

AGBU members with AUA graduates.



Astghig Shishmanian (1908-1994) Donates \$800,000 for New AUA Conference Center

Fathers influence their children in unexpected ways, and such was the case with Astghig Shishmanian.

Like her father Tateos Shedikian, Astghig devoted her life to the Armenian community until the day she died, especially to AGBU where she made an \$800,000 gift for the construction of a new conference center for the American University of Armenia (AUA).

"There are approximately three hundred Master's Degree students now enrolled and more than one thousand students and professionals who attend extension and certificate courses at AUA," says Mihran Agbabian, AUA president. "Combined with funding from the United States Agency for International Development, the Kevork and Astghig Shishmanian Conference Center will be constructed to include the AUA Business Center, classrooms, and housing for AUA visiting professors. We are indeed grateful for Mrs. Shishmanian's foresight and generosity."

Born in Aleppo, Syria in 1908, Astghig's beginnings were simple. In her early years, her time was devoted to education. In her late teens, she moved to Beirut to train as an apprentice in her uncle's sewing and tailoring school. And shortly after her return from that experience, she married an old friend and member of their household, Kevork Shishmanian, an orphan of the Armenian massacre who was taken into the Shedikian home.

Once the couple moved to Iran where Kevork's business was based, it became evident that their life would be devoted to helping others. They extended their home and hearts to the less fortunate; nurturing, sheltering and supporting orphans, homeless, divorcees and widows. They helped Armenian businessmen start their businesses and artists benefited from their generosity. Seldom would those in

need leave their home without food, clothing, cash and instructions from Astghig to go to AGBU in case they needed long-term assistance.

Astghig was one of the founding members of the ladies' auxiliary of AGBU in Iran and served as chairman starting in 1935. Later she was named honorary lifetime chairman. She was also one of the leading Armenian women in Teheran and was sought for membership in other Armenian organizations and to the Court of the Shah and Shahbanou.

Kevork's and Astghig's generosity was unlimited. Besides giving their time and energy to a countless number of organizations and people, they gave a cash gift to Armenia through Catholicos Vasken I, which made it possible for Armenia to purchase its first and only CAT-scanner. After Kevork died, Astghig donated a substantial piece of land in Teheran to the prelaty of Iran, the proceeds of which were earmarked for the construction of the Shishmanian school in the Armenian section of town.

It was just prior to her own death that Astghig made her gift of \$800,000 to AGBU. In her correspondence with AGBU she requested that the gift be designated in memory of her husband, and in recognition and support of the mission of AUA. Working with AGBU, she was able to finalize the agreement of the gift's use before she died.

When construction of the building is complete, a plaque reading the Kevork and Astghig Shishmanian Conference Center will be placed on the wall outside. Even though the Shishmanians will not be there to see the building's inauguration or watch its impact on the students and faculty, the plaque will serve as a lasting tribute to them for helping make AUA an invaluable resource to Armenia and the hundreds of students who attend. □

AUA SIGNS COOPERATION AGREEMENT WITH JOHNS HOPKINS

Baltimore - Johns Hopkins University will help the American University of Armenia set up a public health program, adding yet another specialty to the growing list of educational options in the only Western graduate school in the former Soviet Republic. Johns Hopkins has signed an agreement to assist AUA in the formulation and development of the academic curriculum as well as providing administrative and management support.

The agreement was signed by Dr. Alfred Sommer, Dean of the School of Hygiene and Public Health at Johns Hopkins University and Dr. Mihran Agbabian, President of AUA. The two parties also signed a document appointing Dr. Haroutune Armenian as the coordinator of the program. Dr. Armenian is Professor of Epidemiology and Director of the Master of the Public Health Program at Johns Hopkins. □



(l to r) Dr. Sommer, Dr. Armenian and Dr. Agbabian.