

## **A. SETTING THE INSTITUTION’S CONTEXT AND RELATING THE PROPOSAL TO THE STANDARDS**

### **1. INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT STATEMENT**

Established with the unique purpose of introducing an American model of higher education to Armenia, the American University of Armenia is approaching the end of its second decade and continues to be the only provider of American education in the region. From the very start, AUA has benefited from the support of the University of California through a formal agreement. The University opened its doors on September 21, 1991, in a building provided by the Armenian government that was up to that time the Communist Party’s training and conference center. That same day, Armenia declared its independence from the Soviet Union.

Those early days of institution building were difficult for both faculty and students due to the severe challenges of working in a country that was quite literally undergoing revolution in both its political and economic systems. Among the significant challenges were shortages of electricity and water, the inability of some students to afford the cost of attending AUA, the need to train students in English, shortages of office and classroom space, and communication that depended on the old Soviet operator-based telephone system. At the same time, and even though AUA had the support of the Armenian government, the University had to find its place in the Armenian system of higher education as the very first private university. Nevertheless, the founders of AUA saw the opportunity to make a substantial contribution to the development of Armenia and the region where others might have seen insurmountable challenges.

From those early days of its establishment, the University has introduced many “firsts” that have had a significant impact on Armenia and the region. AUA brought the first U.S. master’s degrees to Armenia and continues to be the only university in the region offering an American education, is the only university in the country that focuses on student centered learning, is the only English language university, brought hundreds of faculty with American and Western educations to Armenia, established the first university extension program for continuing adult learning, created the first computer labs for students, was the first to bring WIFI and videoconferencing to a college campus, and created the first and only university library open to the public at large with open stacks and electronic collections. AUA was even the first university to introduce graduation ceremonies to Armenia.

AUA established the first student loan and need-based tuition assistance programs in Armenia as a means of fulfilling the University’s commitment that no qualified student will be turned away because of financial need. These many firsts have provided effective alternative models for higher education in Armenia and the region based on American values and pedagogy.

Through AUA’s academic programs and institutional environment, students learn to critically assess and analyze information, formulate responses, and communicate and defend their reasoning – all firsts for the Armenian university classroom. In addition to its academic programs, each college has established a research center that focuses on applied research related

to development issues. AUA is not only a center for disseminating knowledge, but also a locus for innovation and service: AUA's graduates have become Armenia's change agents and entrepreneurs for the development of the nation.

Since those early days of its establishment, AUA has grown from two to seven master's degrees plus several professional certificates.<sup>1</sup> The University has extensively renovated the original building and inaugurated a new state-of-the-art academic facility in October 2008. The new four-floor Paramaz Avedisian Building includes classrooms, lecture halls, reception areas and faculty offices. The old Main Building is currently being upgraded again with USAID funds and the result will be modern facilities throughout campus. Beyond its two academic buildings, AUA operated facilities include a hotel/office complex and a conference center/office complex both of which provide revenue streams for the University.

AUA is a graduate institution of higher learning that offers master's degrees in areas that were chosen originally to complement, not to duplicate, programs offered in local institutions of higher education. However, that strategy has evolved over the years as Armenia and the region have changed; before the current global economic crisis, Armenia had the highest economic growth rates in the former Soviet Union. The Armenian government has adopted the American system of degrees with state universities offering bachelor, master's, and doctoral degrees. The Armenian government has signed on to the European Union's Bologna Process, and it is in the process of reforming university education so that it meets the requirements of the European Credit Transfer System. Degrees once offered only at AUA are now available in Armenian universities and in universities in the region. In addition, AUA is no longer the only university in Armenia with a foreign affiliation. Adjusting to a rapidly changing environment, AUA has evolved from the early years of its complementary approach to a focus on providing excellence in education in a competitive market.

AUA's impact on Armenia has been significant, not only through its more than 1,800 graduates, over 70% of whom are currently employed in the country, but also through the significant development work carried out in its research centers. AUA's student centered educational model and student-faculty ratio (8:1) encourage open discussion in class, access to faculty, and problem solving. Students comment favorably on all three characteristics in annual exit surveys and remark on how different AUA's educational approach is to those of their undergraduate universities in Armenia (*see Appendix 1*).

Issues surrounding diversity require a unique approach for the University. AUA strives for diversity in gender, regional origin, and socio-economic background. About 70 percent of

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<sup>1</sup> AUA has eliminated one degree since the last accreditation review, the Masters in Comparative Legal Studies, which was introduced in 2001. Circumstances have changed in a number of significant ways since then with the number of licensed attorneys tripling and the Law Department embarking on a more focused recruitment effort which has resulted in increased LL.M enrollment. The Law Department proposed eliminating the MCLS based on extensive research for its 2008 Self-Study and the proposal was approved by approved by the Curriculum Committee (2009), the Faculty Senate (2010) and the Board of Trustees (April 2010).

AUA's students are female,<sup>2</sup> 20% of the students from Armenia are from less developed regions outside the capital, and 10 percent are international students.<sup>3</sup> Equal access to education, regardless of ability to pay, is a key diversity issue for AUA and the University prides itself on never having turned down a qualified applicant due to inability to pay tuition. The University has been proactive in addressing this diversity goal by creating the country's first loan and need-based tuition assistance programs, without which many students would not be able to pursue graduate education. About 25 percent of AUA's current students receive need-based tuition assistance. Regional diversity, including international students, has been a focus of intensified recruitment efforts over the past three years, with a number of recruitment trips to Russia, India, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Iran, and other countries and an intensified recruitment effort outside Yerevan, the capital city in which approximately half the country's population lives.

These efforts are yielding results and furthering AUA's mission, enriching the student body with the perspectives and experiences of a more diverse campus. AUA's alumni include international graduates from Russia, Iran, India, Moldova, Brazil, China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mongolia, Syria, Ukraine, the U.S., and Uzbekistan along with study abroad and visiting students from the U.S. and Denmark.

AUA is about the transformation of the individual and through the individual the communities with which he or she interacts. This transformation is achieved through an emphasis on personal value systems and through assisting students to understand the options available for their own and society's development. AUA provides an educational environment for students and staff unique in Armenia and that is entirely free of corruption. Students learn that they are responsible primarily for what they take away from the University and that their achievements are based on their own merits.

Student enrollment is at its highest level since the establishment of the University due to an intensive recruitment effort and the introduction in 2009 of a more traditional September to June academic calendar.<sup>4</sup> The calendar change was introduced in order to facilitate recruitment of both faculty and students by decreasing the length of time between admission of students and the beginning of classes and by making AUA's academic year compatible with U.S. institutions from which most part-time faculty are drawn. In the current year, the AUA faculty totals 61 instructors: 23 full-time and 38 part-time.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Yerevan State University, the largest institution of higher learning in Armenia, reports that about 60 percent of its undergraduate and graduate students are female. Mandatory military service is one explanation.

<sup>3</sup> The National Statistical Service of RoA reports that about three percent of all university students nationwide are international.

<sup>4</sup> Under the previous academic calendar, the three terms started at the end of February and ended mid-November with the annual break taking place in the Winter months.

<sup>5</sup> Faculty numbers will be higher when full cohorts of first and second year students are enrolled starting with the 2010-2011 academic year. Numbers are lower now because the shift to the new academic calendar translated into some terms without first or second year cohorts.

AUA's mission is to prepare students to address the needs of Armenia and the surrounding region for sustainable development in a setting that values and develops academic excellence, free inquiry, scholarship, leadership, and service to society.

AUA's strengths include its cadre of dedicated faculty and academic administrators, its impact on Armenia, and its reputation for quality and integrity. At the same time the University must recalibrate for the next phase of growth in light of the changing higher educational landscape in Armenia, regionally and globally, and taking into account the impact of the world-wide economic crisis. The two themes selected, Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning and Cultivating our Community of Scholars, encompass both the strengths of the University and some of the challenges it must address during its third decade.

#### Response to Earlier WASC Review Recommendations

The WASC Commission letter granting initial accreditation highlighted three issues: A full-time president, reviews of the president, and multi-year faculty contracts. Upon Dr. Haroutune Armenian's announcement in April 2009 that he would be stepping down as President of AUA, the Board of Trustees began an international search with the assistance of an outside consulting firm for a full-time resident president. The process culminated with the Board of Trustees' appointment in April 2010 of the University's third President, Dr. Bruce Boghosian of Tufts University, who will begin work with the 2010-2011 academic year. (*CFR 3.10*) The AUA Evaluation Plan now requires that the president be evaluated by the Board of Trustees every five years. There is consensus on the need for multiple-year faculty contracts, however the global financial crisis has temporarily put this issue on hold. AUA is fortunate to have dedicated faculty and academic administrators who continue to serve the University at full force despite financial cuts. (*CFR 3.2*)

The major recommendations of the Educational Effectiveness Team report focused on enrollment management, planning, fiscal stability, on-site leadership, faculty development, and student learning assessment. The University has made progress on these and other important matters since the last accreditation reviews.

AUA has made significant progress in student recruitment and enrollment management (*see Appendix 2*). Applications increased by 75 percent to 356 for the 2009-2010 academic year from the previous year. Of the 265 students admitted, 242 registered for classes (a yield rate of 91 percent) which represents a 65 percent increase from the previous three year average for first year student enrollment. Overall, the enrollment plans of the academic programs exceeded targets set for 2012-2013 while maintaining admission criteria levels (*see Appendix 3*). Retention rates of students moving into the second year of study is high at 92 percent, and the three year graduation completion rate is 80 percent. (*CFR 4.1*)

Strategic planning continues to improve and new plans include timelines and individuals responsible for tasks and obtaining targets. Planning for the future has taken on special significance as AUA moves into its third decade of achievement. In order to support AUA's

planning efforts, the Board of Trustees commissioned McKinsey & Company to conduct analyses, with the participation of the university's academic leadership, on AUA's options for growth and models for financial stability in light of international higher education benchmarks. Development of the AUA strategic plan for 2011-2015 will be the responsibility of the new President who will lead a participatory effort. While emergency measures were adopted to manage the impact of the global financial crisis, AUA did not come through the global financial crisis unscathed. Decreases in academic and administrative budgets were made in both 2009 and 2010 with on-going and consistent monitoring to ensure that budgets are adhered to and that educational quality is not compromised. Most programs had to postpone or reduce curriculum offerings and equipment and educational/research acquisitions; in addition, operations were streamlined and reductions were made in support staff. To address fiscal challenges more effectively, regular monitoring of the budget and development is in place under the direction of the President, Provost, the Finance Committee and the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees. Despite this difficult situation, fundraising for the Paramaz Avedisian Building was completed in 2010 for a total of \$17.3 million. (CFRs 4.2, 4.3)

AUA has focused on the assessment of student learning and has in place a multi-year process in which each academic program systematically evaluates learning outcomes. The assessment of student learning works in tandem with the three-year cycle of self-studies and audits conducted by each program, which includes the participation of internal and external reviewers. Support for faculty development in learning assessment, the refinement of AUA's learning assessment procedures, the institutionalization of broader participation, and the deeper understanding and more effective use of student learning assessment results are now priorities. (CFRs 2.11, 2.9, 2.7, 2.4, 2.3) Progress on investing directly in new forms of faculty development has been slowed because of the financial situation; however, it is a recognized priority and the institution is determined to tackle the issue of core faculty, multi-year contracts, and scholarship and research as a theme demanding attention and creative thinking over the next several years. (CFRs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4) Both the assessment of student learning and faculty development are priority areas for AUA and comprise a significant part of the themes chosen for this reaccreditation process.

*Appendix 1: 2009 Exit Survey of Students*

*Appendix 2: 2009-2010 Enrollment and Student Recruitment Strategy and Plan*

*Appendix 3: AUA Enrollment and Student Recruitment Final Report for 2009-2010 Academic Year*

## **A2. PRELIMINARY SELF-REVIEW UNDER THE STANDARDS OF ACCREDITATION**

The key issues arising under the Standards were finalized by employing both the "Worksheet for Preliminary Self-Review under the Standards" (*see Appendix 4*) and the "What Really Matters on Your Campus" exercise, which assisted AUA in developing the themes for accreditation. A sub-group of the AUA Accreditation Steering Committee conducted analyses for the preliminary self-review under the standards and presented its initial findings to the Steering Committee and then to the Board of Deans for discussion. Discussions surrounding the matters important for

AUA took place in meetings of the Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate and among the faculty, students, and staff. These exercises were the culmination of on-going discussions of the Board of Deans and the committees of the Faculty Senate over the past two years.

#### Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives

AUA is meeting this Standard in most areas with the University having in place well-defined educational objectives and a clear understanding of the important purpose of the institution in the development of individuals and the nation. Especially valuable is the working model AUA provides for Armenia as an institution of higher learning that upholds academic freedom and the highest standards for integrity across all University functions. Educational objectives are clearly defined by the academic programs, are reflected in specific outcomes for every course taught at AUA, and communicated to students in student handbooks and course syllabi. One area that needs to be addressed is the development and operationalization of institutional level objectives based on the University's mission statement. The other major area that needs improvement is the formal review process of deans; although the formal procedures and forms have been created and agreed to by the deans and administration, the process has not been fully implemented.

#### Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives Through Core Functions

AUA is meeting its core objectives for teaching and learning based on the evidence available in reports from earlier and current rounds of academic program self-study and review, which include a section dedicated to the annual assessments of student learning. One of the main areas the University needs to address under this Standard is its approach to research and scholarship as criteria for the evaluation of faculty. AUA is a graduate institution that relies on a large number of highly qualified visiting and adjunct faculty. What is needed is the identification of a model for scholarship, for both faculty and students, that meets the mission and goals of the University. A related area that needs improvement is faculty development, both in providing resources for improved teaching and student learning and in scholarship through support for research and its dissemination. Another area that has been identified is the development of formal analyses at the university-wide level of how AUA is meeting its needs for qualified faculty for the disciplines taught at AUA. A separate issue that has emerged from the preliminary self-review is what to do about applicants to AUA's graduate programs who possess three-year undergraduate degrees. This has become an issue over the past four years, as AUA has moved into the international recruitment of students and as the Armenian government joined the Bologna Process, with the University deciding to make such admissions decisions on a case-by-case basis after having researched how other U.S. universities deal with this issue.

#### Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability

AUA continuously compiles data on the qualifications of faculty to ensure that both U.S. and other faculty meet the mission of the University and the objectives of the academic programs, with about three-quarters of all faculty holding the Ph.D. or equivalent degree. A substantial part

of the faculty have a continuing commitment to the University with about 80 percent considered core faculty members, and many of these core faculty participate in University governance and decision-making. AUA continues to offer the only campus with WIFI and remote internet access and libraries open to the public with open stacks and electronic collections. The major improvement to facilities since the last WASC accreditation visit to campus, and in the history of AUA, has been the addition of the Paramaz Avedisian Building which is a new state-of-the-art facility adding 100,000 square feet of classroom, office, and meeting space. One main area that must be addressed surrounds issues regarding the faculty including development resources, formal orientation for visiting faculty, and multiple-year contracts. A paramount area that will be addressed by the new president will be the restructuring of development and the funding model for AUA's core operating budget.

#### Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

During its first two decades, AUA has established a solid and stable institution of higher learning founded on the principles of American graduate education and Western research, and it did so in a difficult environment under remarkable historical circumstances in which everything from facilities to curricula and the organizational structure itself had to be built from scratch in a country just freed from the Soviet Union. The assistance provided through the agreement with the University of California continues to provide essential support. Also fundamental to AUA's success has been its commitment to quality assurance which is demonstrated in its evaluation, review, and planning processes and the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. One of the areas that needs to be addressed under this Standard is "closing the loop" in the evaluation process at the Board of Trustees level so that institutional planning at this highest level takes into consideration the self-study and review processes of the academic programs. The other area that will need to be addressed immediately by the new president is the development of the strategic plans for 2011-2015, including the participatory processes for their formation.

#### *Appendix 4: Worksheet for Preliminary Self Review under the Standards*

### **A3. PROCESS FOR PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT AND LEADERSHIP INVOLVEMENT**

In preparation for the Institutional Proposal, President Armenian established an AUA Accreditation Steering Committee whose membership includes the President, Provost, Faculty Senate Chair, Curriculum Committee Chair, and the WASC ALO. Support to the Steering Committee is provided by the Institutional Research and Assessment Office and an administrative assistant. The Steering Committee developed a list of activities and timeline to ensure that core faculty, students, and staff engage in and understand the reaccreditation process and that there is broad consensus on the themes developed for the four-year process in which the AUA community will participate.

It is important to note here that even as procedures have been institutionalized, as a developing institution there has always been on-going discussion about the direction of the University.

There has been a significant amount of discussion among the faculty over the past two or three years especially focused on how AUA will meet new challenges as it moves into its third decade of achievement. The studies performed for initial accreditation are still fresh in many minds, a new building that more than doubled AUA space with modern facilities, the search for a new president, and the global economic crisis all contributed to this focus on how to move forward with meeting the AUA mission while making an even greater impact on individuals and society.

Two of the first activities of the Steering Committee were to (1) review all recommendations of the WASC Commission and the Educational Effectiveness Review and Capacity and Preparatory Review Team reports, along with AUA's own recommendations, from the initial accreditation process and (2) assign a sub-group to perform an initial audit of how AUA is doing in meeting the WASC Standards using the Worksheet (*see Appendix 4*). Members of this sub-group are faculty members directly involved in academic administration and operations and responsible for many aspects of assessment at the academic program and institutional level. Institutional data was reviewed and each of the CFRs was analyzed for AUA performance in meeting WASC standards. Parallel to this activity, members of the Curriculum Committee of the Faculty Senate participated in the "What Really Matters Exercise." The initial findings of both activities were presented to the Steering Committee for discussion along with several possible themes that had emerged for the CPR and EER.

In addition to the activities summarized above, in 2009 the Board of Trustees commissioned McKinsey & Company to conduct a study focused on specific institutional issues regarding financial sustainability and areas of future growth for the University which included possibilities for new academic areas and degree levels. The McKinsey team spent about six weeks on campus and conducted weekly meetings for the participation of faculty and academic and administrative heads to review the progress of the study. As is natural, the McKinsey report pointed to some of the same issues that have emerged in the preliminary work of the University for the reaccreditation process. It is expected that the results from the unique data collection methods of McKinsey & Company will be used in the CPR.

Before opening discussions with the broader AUA community of faculty, students, and staff, the Steering Committee engaged the Board of Deans in the process through meetings dedicated to the reaccreditation process. Participants were provided with information about the institutional review process, the AUA accreditation timeline, the "Handbook of Accreditation," "Expectations for Two Reviews," the "Worksheet for Preliminary Self-Review under the Standards" and "What Really Matters" findings, and the draft themes for the CPR and EER which had already undergone several revisions and versions. In order to enrich the outcome of the discussions, these Board of Deans meetings were expanded to include associate and assistant deans and directors of research centers who do not hold dean titles.

Members of the Steering Committee held separate sessions with the faculty and staff to fully introduce the accreditation process, the roles of faculty, staff, and students in the four year process, the history of AUA accreditation, and the three proposed themes that came out of the expanded Board of Deans meetings. The draft themes, along with specific outcomes for each,



were discussed in open sessions which included issues and alternative approaches to the themes volunteered by the participants of the meetings. Consensus emerged on the significance of the draft themes and several suggestions were made for revisions to the outcomes of each theme. The approach to the student meetings was different with a less detailed introduction to the reaccreditation process and with more time spent on what matters to students based on the perspective of the draft themes. In addition, the AUA accreditation website was updated to include archives from the initial accreditation process, documents and resources for the reaccreditation process including information such as the slides used in presentations to the AUA community.

The expanded Board of Deans again reviewed the three draft themes taking into consideration the results of the discussions with the AUA community of faculty, students, and staff. The expanded Board of Deans decided to focus on two of the three draft themes. The Steering Committee moved forward with a draft of the Institutional Proposal, which was reviewed and revised by the deans, associate and assistant deans, and selected faculty who employed the “WASC Rubric for Evaluating Institutional Proposals.”

*Appendix 4: Worksheet for Preliminary Self Review under the Standards*

## **B. FRAMING THE REVIEW PROCESS TO CONNECT THE CAPACITY AND EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEWS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Analyses and discussions of how AUA will approach the next phase of its development has been on-going through a diverse set of processes and the University’s preliminary self-review as it prepares for reaccreditation.

After two successful decades marked by accreditation by WASC and the qualitative and quantitative improvement of facilities, AUA is poised to build a more robust institution that is on sound and sustainable financial footing, that reaches a broader spectrum of students through the introduction of innovative new academic programs to the region, that cultivates a community of scholars and research agendas encompassing the collaboration of students and faculty, and that institutionalizes the assessment of student learning as a model of quality assurance for Armenia and the region. As the University moves into its third decade, there is keen awareness of the need to advance and to develop the resources necessary for the University to broaden its already significant impact on the development of Armenia and the region. AUA is tackling these questions while transitioning to a new president who is bound to make his own significant mark on AUA’s future through new leadership.

## **B1. OVERVIEW AND GOALS FOR THE ACCREDITATION REVIEW PROCESS**

AUA's longer term goals for the accreditation review process are aligned with the outcomes specified by WASC. AUA is working toward the following institutional outcomes through the accreditation process:

- 1) A recalibration of AUA's institutional mission and goals. (*CFRs 1.1, 1.2*)
- 2) A focus on student learning across the institution and the development of more diverse and effective methods of assessment. (*CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.10, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6*)
- 3) The alignment of research and scholarship with teaching at a graduate institution focused on impacting the development of a nation. (*CFRs 1.3, 2.1, 2.2, 2.8, 2.9*)

The specific outcomes and products of these goals are discussed later in this Proposal. The accreditation review process over the next four years provides the University with the opportunity to focus on two themes, that have been identified through an inclusive process as important and appropriate frameworks for the CPR and EER, in order to achieve these institutional outcomes.

### **Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning**

(*CFRs 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, 3.4 3.8, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8*)

AUA has set a standard of educational excellence in Armenia and strives to maintain and continuously improve its academic programs. Quality assurance, through the assessment and evaluation of teaching and student learning, has been key to achieving this goal. During the past two decades, and particularly over the past five years, AUA has formalized and systematized assessment and evaluation processes.

As it matures into its third decade, AUA needs to refine and institutionalize the mechanisms used for assessment and evaluation of student learning and the goals and objectives of the academic programs. This alignment will assure consistency from year to year within academic programs, across disciplines and departments, and with academic program assessment processes and the career needs of students. The results of student learning assessment will be used consistently, efficiently, and effectively in order to make appropriate, well-documented, timely, and tailored improvements in the delivery of education.

AUA needs to develop the resources and mechanisms required to diffuse an understanding of these issues and concepts so that assessment and evaluation become an integral part of the day-to-day activity and mindset of each member of the AUA faculty, including faculty with adjunct and visiting status.

### Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars

(CFRs 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 2.2b, 2.8, 2.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.10, 3.11, 4.2)

Given its history and geographic location, AUA is searching for a research model consistent with its institutional mission that encompasses both development studies and theoretical work, that complements the effective teaching that already exists at AUA, that is sustainable, and that has the greatest impact within the parameters of the University's resources. As an institution of higher learning providing master's level education in a country undergoing both economic and democratic development, AUA has been meeting its mission through its faculty and through the research centers of the academic programs. To date, and in harmony with and in response to the developmental mode of the University's immediate environment and region, in many disciplines research and scholarship have meshed closely with community service, public administration, and economic and policy development.

Cultivating a community of scholars is a cumulative process that requires a critical mass of resident faculty and a supportive institution with long-term reciprocal commitments to each other. As the University grows into its third decade, there is a need to develop the University as a community of researchers and scholars, one that includes faculty, students, and researchers, and the need to foster more creativity throughout the University to successfully compete for students, faculty, and resources in a world of rapidly changing and continuously rising standards of educational excellence.

Specific outcomes for both themes are discussed in the next section.

## **B2. APPROACH FOR THE CAPACITY AND PREPARATORY REVIEW**

The preliminary self-review performed for the Institutional Proposal led to consensus for the selection of two themes for the reaccreditation process: (1) Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning and (2) Cultivating a Community of Scholars. The self-review included the University's capacity to sustain its current activities and for growth into its third decade.

There is consensus among the key constituents of the University community that AUA has the capacity to achieve the outcomes specified in this section. The infrastructure for successfully addressing the outcomes of the two themes is in place in terms of faculty, organizational structures and decision-making processes, and facilities. Moreover, consensus emerged through discussion of the themes that the outcomes of the themes should be strongly linked in the CPR and EER, that is, throughout the four year accreditation process.

### Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning

As determined by the preliminary self-study under the WASC standards, the academic programs at AUA have in place (1) clearly defined educational objectives that meet the mission of the University and that undergo periodic review under self-study and audit review processes and (2)

educational objectives that are reflected in specific course outcomes and that are communicated to students in handbooks and course syllabi. The AUA procedure for the assessment of student learning comprises a four-year cycle during which the academic program objectives are studied using direct and/or indirect evidence. The information from these studies comprises one part of the self-study and audit review process.

The challenge for AUA over the next four years will be to refine and to develop the resources needed to institutionalize the assessment of student learning and success so that it reaches and is used by all faculty, including visiting faculty.

The specific outcomes for the CPR, which will be completed by Fall 2011, are:

- 1) A **Student Learning Committee will be established** as a subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee that will work in coordination with the Institutional Research and Assessment Office and the Provost.
- 2) The Student Learning Committee will complete, in cooperation with the academic programs, an **evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the current processes** for the assessment of student learning.
- 3) Resources will be in place to strengthen the assessment of student learning. Two areas that have already been identified are **faculty training** and **orientation to AUA's commitment to student learning and assessment for visiting faculty**.

## Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars

The AUA Mission Statement states: *As an institution of higher learning, the American University of Armenia provides teaching, research, and service programs that prepare students to address the needs of Armenia and the surrounding region for sustainable development in a setting that values and develops academic excellence, free inquiry, scholarship, leadership, and service to society.*

AUA is meeting its mission through its degree programs which have produced more than 1,800 graduates with master's degrees since 1991, the research and service of its faculty and centers, its open libraries, and an extension program that has provided continuing education to thousands of Armenia's residents. The AUA research centers have throughout the years contributed in significant ways to Armenia's development. While faculty research is one of the criteria for hiring and advancement in AUA's policies, standards for meeting this criterion have not been developed.

As it matures into its third decade, AUA is in need of a new model for research and scholarship that meets the requirements of a master's level graduate institution, that accounts for the contributions of faculty and students to the development of Armenia and the region, that has broad consensus among faculty and students, and that is more fully recognized and better integrated with current policies for hiring, retention, and promotion.

The specific outcomes for the CPR are:

- 1) The faculty and students will participate in shaping the **AUA standards for research and scholarship.**
- 2) The **standards for research and scholarship for faculty** will be defined and policies for hiring, retention, and promotion will be revised.
- 3) Processes will be developed for the **recognition of excellence** in teaching and scholarship.
- 4) Core faculty contracts will shift from one-year contracts to multiple-year status.

The outcomes of the two themes for the CPR are linked directly to the EER; that is, the outcomes of the EER will grow out of the outcomes achieved during the CPR phase.

### **B3. APPROACH FOR THE EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

The University's goals for the EER phase of the accreditation process are to (1) successfully address the issues and problems, as discussed in this Proposal, surrounding the two themes it has selected for study, (2) successfully address the recommendations made by WASC during initial accreditation, and (3) work toward addressing weaknesses identified in the preliminary self study and the studies for the CPR and EER to ensure that all WASC Standards are met to the greatest extent possible.

The completed Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators can be found in the data exhibits, and it and AUA's selection of Theme 1 demonstrate AUA's core commitment to educational effectiveness.

The outcomes of the EER are an integral part of the outcomes AUA is setting for itself for the CPR and are listed below.

Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning

(CFRs 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.2b, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, 3.4 3.8, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8)

- 1) The **Student Learning Committee will be institutionalized** and be **an integral part** of teaching, curriculum review, and academic program review.
- 2) The faculty, including visiting faculty, will **integrate the assessment of student learning** on a regular basis in teaching.
- 3) The faculty of the academic programs will **use the results of the ongoing assessment of student learning** to improve teaching, courses and the curriculum in order to meet the mission of the University.

Some of the research questions that will be addressed during the CPR and EER include:

- a. How is the current four-year cycle for the annual assessment of student learning working?

- b. Does the data collected by the Institutional Research and Assessment Office meet the needs of the academic programs?
- c. How are the findings of the assessments being used to improve student learning?
- d. How are faculty engaged in the process of assessment?
- e. How are the mission, objectives, and specific course outcomes of academic programs communicated to and understood by adjunct and visiting faculty?
- f. What kinds of resources, especially for faculty, are needed to institutionalize the assessment of student learning?

#### Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars

(CFRs 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7, 2.2b, 2.8, 2.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.6, 3.10, 3.11, 4.2)

- 1) There will be a **broad understanding and consensus** among faculty, students, and researchers on what constitutes research and scholarship as a community of scholars at AUA.
- 2) The **standards for research and scholarship will be applied in the evaluation** of faculty and research staff.
- 3) There will be **more faculty and student collaboration** on applied and theoretical research and scholarship.
- 4) **More core and full-time faculty** will be in place to support teaching, research and scholarship.

Some of the research questions that will be addressed during the CPR and EER include:

- a. What is the nature of the research and scholarship that is being conducted currently by faculty and students at AUA?
- b. What is the pattern for research and scholarship across the academic programs and research centers?
- c. What kinds of impact have research and scholarship had in Armenia and the region in meeting the University's mission?
- d. How are research and scholarship related to teaching in the classroom?
- e. How are research and scholarship used in making decisions on faculty hiring, retention, and promotion?

Both themes that will be studied during the reaccreditation process will strengthen AUA's commitment to student and organizational learning. Especially important will be (1) the review and improvement of the University's current self-study and audit review processes, (2) the review and improvement of the procedures used in the annual studies of student learning, (3) the review of how assessments of student learning are used to improve teaching, courses, and curricula and (4) providing the faculty with the knowledge needed to use the assessment of student learning to improve teaching.

### **C. DEMONSTRATING A FEASIBLE PLAN OF WORK AND ENGAGEMENT OF KEY CONSTITUENCIES**

#### **C1. WORKPLAN AND MILESTONES**

Upon submission of the Institutional Proposal, the AUA Accreditation Steering Committee will establish and appoint the members of the CPR and EER Working Groups. The Working Groups will work closely with the Provost and the Steering Committee in making sure that the activities for the self-studies are conducted in a timely manner, in analyzing data and findings, and in the writing of the CPR and EER reports.

While the focus will be on the two themes and the CFRs surrounding them, all WASC CFRs under the standards will be addressed over the four years. The plan is to create a new section on the AUA accreditation website that will list each of the standards on a separate webpage along with evidence of AUA progress toward meeting the Standards. The CPR and EER Working Groups, in cooperation with the Steering Committee, will be responsible for the web pages.

The workplan and milestones for the two themes are presented below and in Appendix 5 in project timeline format.

May 2010 through December 2010, focus on CPR:

*Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning*

- Student Learning Subcommittee (SLS) of the Curriculum Committee is established with charter and activities timeline. *(June 2010)*
- In cooperation with the Provost, the SLS finalizes research questions for studies and for approval of the Curriculum Committee. *(June 2010)*
- In cooperation with the Institutional Research and Assessment Office, the SLS designs for Curriculum Committee approval and conducts studies to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of current assessment processes. AUA research center staff provide assistance in data collection. *(July through December 2010)*

*Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars*

- Provost appoints Research and Scholarship Task Force made up of faculty and students and provides mission and goals. Provost and selected academic administrators are members of the Task Force. *(June 2010)*
- Task Force finalizes research questions for review of the Faculty Senate for its input. *(September 2010)*
- In cooperation with the Institutional Research and Assessment Office, the Task Force designs and conducts studies. AUA research center staff provide assistance in data collection. *(September through December 2010)*
- President decides which core faculty contracts will move to multiple-year status. *(November through December 2010)*

December 2010 through June 2011, focus on CPR:

*Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning*

- SLS report on studies is completed and includes set of recommendations and resources required for implementation of improvements. Curriculum Committee finalizes draft recommendations and submits report to the Faculty Senate and Board of Deans with consensus developed for final version of report. *(February 2011)*
- Provost with the President identifies and provides available resources needed to support the assessment of student learning. *(March 2011)*
- Recommendations of the SLS studies regarding changes to the current AUA procedures for the assessment of student learning are made by revising current processes. *(March through June 2011)*

*Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars*

- Series of meetings with faculty, researchers, and students to discuss Task Force findings and recommendations toward a new model of research and scholarship for AUA. *(February through March 2011)*
- Task Force report on studies is completed and includes recommendations and resources required. Recommendations include a new system for the recognition of faculty and student research. Report is distributed to Board of Deans, Faculty Senate, and Student Council for discussion and input for final report. *(April 2011)*
- Task Force develops draft of standards for faculty research and scholarship for consideration of a general and open meeting of Faculty Senate. Draft is made available online for comment of faculty not on campus. *(May 2011)*

June 2011 through June 2012, focus on EER:*Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning*

- SLS meets with the Board of Deans in series of meetings to introduce changes to AUA procedures for the assessment of student learning. *(July through September 2011)*
- New process cycle for the assessment of student learning in place for all academic programs *(September 2011)*
- SLS works with the Faculty Senate and the Board of Deans to introduce revised procedures for the assessment of student learning to core faculty. Videoconferencing employed for core faculty not on campus for these meetings. *(September 2011)*
- SLS and Office for Institutional Research and Assessment design learning assessment training modules for faculty. Module materials are made available online. *(July through September 2011)*
- Training of faculty in assessment of student learning, including orientation for new and visiting faculty. *(October 2011 through June 2012)*

*Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars*



- Task Force and Faculty Senate finalize new research and scholarship standards draft for faculty and sends to Board of Deans and President for discussion. (*June through July 2011*)
- President approves new standards for faculty research and scholarship and revises current AUA policies. (*September 2011*)
- Faculty contracts revised for implementation in 2012. (*October 2011*)
- Faculty evaluation form and process revised for implementation in 2012. (*November 2011*)
- Task Force and Provost hold series of meetings with faculty and students with participation of academic and research administrators on new model for scholarship and research and to come to consensus on methods for implementation. (*February through May 2012*)

June 2012 through September 2013, focus on EER:

*Theme 1: Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning*

- SLS conducts assessment at individual faculty and academic program levels of implementation of revised processes to determine how outcomes of Theme 1 are being obtained. (*September through December 2012*)
- SLS assessment report submitted to the Curriculum Committee. (*February 2013*)
- Final report submitted to the Faculty Senate and Board of Deans. (*March 2013*)

*Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars*

- Pilots for faculty-student collaboration on research and collaboration implemented; examples might be teaching and research assistant models for collaborative research, including utilizing the capstones. (*June through December 2012*)
- Resources and plans are in place for the hiring of more faculty for the 2013-2014 academic year and for faculty research support. (*June through October 2012*)
- Task Force and Institutional Research and Assessment Office conduct assessment of implementation of recommendations for (1) new model of scholarship and research for faculty and students and (2) new research and scholarship standards for faculty. (*November and December 2012*)
- Assessment report submitted to the Board of Deans and Faculty Senate. (*January 2013*)

*Appendix 5: CPR and EER Workplan and Milestones Timeline*

**C2. EFFECTIVENESS OF DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSIS SYSTEMS**

The Institutional Research and Assessment Office is responsible for the compilation of data on a regular basis, producing the annual AUA Factbook and revising the format to meet the needs of AUA administrators, providing support to the academic programs for data requests for their own self-studies and other needs, providing support to the academic programs for their assessments of student learning, and conducting regular surveys of graduating students, employers, and alumni. The current and archived Factbooks are available online to the entire AUA community (*see Appendix 6*).

One of the outcomes of the accreditation process under Theme 1 is to shift the oversight of the assessment of student learning process cycle from the Institutional Research and Assessment Office and the Provost to a new standing subcommittee of the Curriculum Committee.

In addition to the University-wide studies conducted by the Institutional Research and Assessment Office, the academic programs collect data through quantitative and qualitative studies that are used in the self-study process.

In order to better access data available in the Office of the Registrar, a new custom-made database is being designed for student records. It is expected that the new database will be implemented by the start of the 2010-2011 academic year.

*Appendix 6: AUA Factbook 2009-2010; the link to archived Factbooks can be found at <http://www.aua.am/factbook/>*

### **C3. COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE ACCREDITING REVIEW**

AUA is committed to the goals it has set for itself over the next four years for the reaccreditation process and believes that the two themes are important areas for the future success of the University. AUA has employed several task forces and working groups with success in the past to tackle major policy changes from need-based tuition assistance to the shift to a new academic calendar. As can be seen in the workplan outlined above, the task force and working groups will work closely with established AUA organizational structures. Technical support will be provided by the Institutional Research and Assessment Office and the staff of the research centers of the University.

Continuity is provided for the overall accreditation process as three of the current AUA Accreditation Steering Committee members served on the Steering Committee for initial accreditation.

Because AUA is located overseas, review team visits incur significant costs for the University. It is expected that approximately \$50,000 will be required for the two site review visits alone. Initial accreditation was supported through generous grants of the U.S. Embassy and USAID in Armenia. Discussion with the U.S. Embassy regarding support for reaccreditation has taken place and a proposal is being drafted to cover the costs of the WASC team visits, release time for selected faculty members serving on working groups and task forces, and a short course in the assessment of student learning for a group of faculty led by a U.S. expert.

#### **D. Presenting Appendices Connected to the Proposal**

##### **1. Data Exhibits**

A. Institutional type and organizational structure

- a. Mission statement, *see AUA Catalog 2009-2011 at [www.aua.am/catalog/x.html](http://www.aua.am/catalog/x.html)*
- b. Organizational Chart, *see Appendix 7*
- c. Catalog, *see AUA Catalog at [www.aua.am/catalog/x.html](http://www.aua.am/catalog/x.html)*
- d. Summary Data Form, *see Appendix 8*

B. Student Body Characteristics, *see Appendix 9*

- a. Enrollments by level
- b. Enrollments by full-time/part-time status
- c. Total degrees granted by level

C. Academic Programs

- a. List of academic programs currently offered, *see Appendix 10*

D. Faculty and Staff

- a. Faculty headcount (full and part time), *see Appendix 9*

E. Fiscal, physical, and information resources

- a. Financial ratios, *see Appendix 9*
- b. Financial audits for the last two years, *see Appendices 11a, 11b, 11c, 11d*

F. Educational Effectiveness Indicators

- a. Inventory of educational effectiveness indicators, *see Appendix 12*

### **3. Institutional Stipulations**

See Appendix 13 for the AUA Institutional Stipulations Statement.