

# American University of Armenia

## Educational Effectiveness Review

### 2. Narrative

**Submitted to WSCUC**

June 23, 2014

The AUA Accreditation Steering Committee

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## Abbreviations

APR Guidelines	–AUA Academic Program Review Process: Self-Study and Self-Study Audit Guidelines
ALO	– Accreditation Liaison Officer
ARCDO	– Office of Alumni Relations and Career Development
AUA	– American University of Armenia
AUAC	– American University of Armenia Corporation (US entity)
AUAF	– American University of Armenia Fund (Armenian entity)
CFR	– Criteria for Review
CPR	– Capacity and Preparatory Review (submitted November 16, 2011)
EER	– Educational Effectiveness Review (this document, due June 23, 2014)
IP	– Institutional Proposal (submitted May 10, 2010)
IRO	– Institutional Research Office
OAA	– Office of Assessment and Accreditation
RoA	– Republic of Armenia
SLA	– Student Learning Assessment
SLAP	– Student Learning Assessment Plan
SLAR	– Student Learning Assessment Report
SLC	– Student Learning Committee (formerly SLS)

# American University of Armenia

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## Educational Effectiveness Review

### Background

AUA-2014 is a much different place from AUA-2009 when this reaffirmation of accreditation began five years ago. Founded in 1991 on the day Armenia became independent, AUA launched a mission to make American education accessible to the citizens of this post-soviet country and the region. It has contributed to Armenia's educational milieu and the country's development as a free, democratic state, in numerous ways through teaching, research and example. For its first 20 years, AUA was solely a graduate institution, although undergraduate education had long been an aspiration. Pursuant to its Strategic Plan 2011-2017, the university embarked on a major expansion into undergraduate education, which has been exhilarating and arduous. This fall is the second year of this expansion, which, when completed in 2017, will result roughly in a quadrupling of the student body to 1600 students, with commensurate growth in faculty and staff. At the same time, the university has faced a number of challenges: resource and budgetary constraints, gaps and turnover in senior leadership, including the post of Dean of the College of Business and Economics, which has not had a permanent holder since 2010, and the pending departure of the President, Provost and Vice President for Institutional Advancement during the summer of 2014, each for unrelated personal reasons. Due to the support of dedicated faculty, staff, board members and donors, AUA has been able to meet these challenges, and will start the 2014-15 academic year with roughly 1100 students, 111 full- and part-time faculty, under the leadership of a seasoned interim President, who is a founder, dean and trustee of the university, supported by a returning interim AUA Provost, assuring a smooth transition in the year ahead, as permanent appointments are pursued. [CFRs 1.1, 1.6, 3.9, 4.1, 4.3]

### 1. Description of the EER Approach

#### 1.1. History of Process at AUA

As noted above, when the current reaffirmation of accreditation process began, AUA was solely a graduate institution and had just begun exploring the feasibility of undergraduate education. At that time, pursuant to the WASC 2008 Accreditation Handbook, a working group consisting of faculty and administration selected the thematic approach for the accreditation review and prepared AUA's Institutional Proposal (IP), which was accepted by WASC in 2010. Shortly after the IP submission, AUA engaged in a broad-based institutional strategic planning effort. In February 2012, WASC made its Capacity and Preparatory Review (CPR) site visit. Simultaneously, in fall 2011 and spring 2012, AUA submitted a structural change and substantive change proposals in connection with the offering of three undergraduate and one additional graduate degree, all of which were approved by the Commission in July

2012. The Commission also extended the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) phase of AUA's accreditation review, to include the new undergraduate program, setting the EER site visit for September 2014. As reflected in this report, the 2008 WASC Handbook and standards govern AUA's reaffirmation of accreditation. AUA has begun to take the 2013 WASC Handbook and standards into account in its institutional processes and is preparing for fuller implementation of the 2013 standards for the next round of accreditation review (*See Section 6.3.4 below*).

Overview Timeline of Reaffirmation of Accreditation	
2009	Preparation for Institutional Proposal
2010	Institutional Proposal Report Submitted
2011	Capacity and Preparatory Review Report Submitted
2012	Capacity and Preparatory Review Site Visit
2014	Educational Effectiveness Review Report Submitted
2014	Educational Effectiveness Review Site Visit –September 16-18

Throughout this period, in addition to the reaccreditation process, members of the working group were actively involved in AUA's strategic planning, student learning assessment, program reviews and policy improvement efforts. AUA admitted its first freshman class of 280 students in fall 2013. Currently, AUA offers 8 graduate degrees and 3 undergraduate degrees:<sup>1</sup>

2013 Degree Program Snapshot			
	Started	Total Graduates as of June 30, 2013	Fall 2013 Enrollment
Master of Business Administration (MBA)	1991	761	210*
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (MA TEFL)	1997	126	58
Master of Political Science and International Affairs (M PSIA)	1994	382	58
Master of Engineering in Industrial Engineering and Systems Management (ME IESM)	1991	326	37
Master of Science in Earthquake Engineering (MS EE)	1991-1998	34	–
Master of Science in Computer and Information Science (MS CIS)	2001	147	53
Master of Public Health (MPH)	1997	173	26*
Master of Laws (LL.M.) ( <i>incl. Master of Comparative Legal Studies</i> )	1996	280	60
MBA-MPH dual degree			7
Master of Science in Economics (MSE)	2013	<i>Expected 2014</i>	16
<b>Total Graduate</b>			<b>524</b>
BA in Business	2013	<i>Expected 2017</i>	168
BS in Computational Sciences	2013	<i>Expected 2017</i>	50
BA in English & Communications	2013	<i>Expected 2017</i>	63
<b>Total Undergraduate</b>			<b>281</b>
<b>Total (unduplicated headcount)</b>		<b>2229</b>	<b>805</b>

*\*Includes one student enrolled in both MBA and MPH programs separately.*

AUA entered this new phase after extensive and inclusive strategic planning from 2009 to 2011, which drew upon a study of AUA and Armenian higher education by McKinsey & Co. To further its

<sup>1</sup>Two degrees, Comparative Legal Studies (2007) and Earthquake Engineering (1998), were phased out due to the changing needs of Armenia and market demand.

mission of making American education accessible to students in Armenia and the region, AUA is expanding from approximately 400 graduate students in 2009 to 1600 total students (graduate and undergraduate) by 2017, adding 300 undergraduates a year, while continuing to provide graduate degree and research programs. This expansion is an opportunity to build a larger, more diverse, more robust faculty, student body, and institution to better achieve AUA's mission. It is also well-suited to our themes for reaffirmation of accreditation.

The reaffirmation of accreditation themes were identified by the working group using the institutional inventory exercise outlined in WASC's Inventory of Educational Effectiveness Indicators. The two themes that emerged were directly related to the university's experience as a graduate institution and the challenges of expanding into undergraduate education:

- Theme 1: Institutionalizing Student Learning Assessment
- Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars

As conceived in 2010, these themes entailed:

**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.

**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.

By and large, these themes have remained the same throughout this extended process, and the goals set for each have been achieved, as more fully described in Sections 2, 3 and 6 below. They have also informed many of AUA's ongoing institutional processes, including the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report and Site Visit (Feb. 2012), the four substantive change proposals approved by WASC in the spring of 2012 (BS in Computational Sciences, BA in Business, BA in English & Communications, and the MS in Economics), and the design and implementation of the undergraduate program. These themes also assisted the university in updating the university's faculty hiring, retention and promotion policies, revising its academic program review guidelines, reorienting research and scholarship at AUA and making them more integral to the life of the university, and recruiting new faculty for the undergraduate and graduate programs. *[CFRs 1.1, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1]*

## 1.2. Working Groups based on Themes

As a small institution, AUA has been able to involve many members of the institution directly in the reaccreditation process, including administration, faculty, staff, support units, students, and alumni. In addition to periodic university-wide coordination meetings that attract broad participation, the ALO and Office of Assessment and Accreditation (OAA) have provided a regular series of Accreditation Coordination Letters to keep the university informed of accomplishments, activities and assignments.

Two broad-based working groups were established at the beginning of the process in 2010 based on each theme. Two committees were also formed: 1) the Research & Scholarship Taskforce, a temporary body that surveyed international best practice for similar institutions and tailored a new definition of research and scholarship based on the Boyer principles; 2) the Student Learning Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate with broad representation from academic programs, which in conjunction with the OAA, has organized regular workshops and seminars on such subjects as:

- syllabus and rubric development
- developing student learning outcomes
- use of technology in the classroom
- addressing the specific needs of undergraduates
- integrative teaching strategies
- student learning assessment methods

These activities took place against the backdrop of the university's expansion into undergraduate education. In preparation for undergraduate education, the university was reorganized into three colleges and a school in 2012-13. The university also transitioned from a quarter to a semester system. These were both opportunities to rethink how things are done at AUA. With the greater demands of growth, the role of the IRO and OAA expanded and became more integrated into program planning and assessment. The switch to semesters required all syllabi to be restructured and provided an opportunity to reemphasize student learning outcomes in accordance with a new course syllabus template. *Attachment 1.2.a. Course Syllabus Template*. While fundamental renovation of the curriculum required a great deal of effort, it also provided faculty and administrators an opportunity to think things through anew. A system for monitoring compliance with credit hour policies in line with federal requirements was also instituted. The switch to semesters prompted small but important adjustments to degree requirements, curricular maps, course content and capstones with the aim of improving educational effectiveness. Appropriate self-study and student learning assessments were designed and implemented to evaluate effectiveness of these adjustments. In short, this has been an intensive period of development for AUA, closely aligned to Theme 1 – Institutionalizing Student Learning Assessment.

The activities of the two thematic working groups have directly contributed to this report, and the work of the two committees has produced a number of tangible benefits for AUA:

- An updated Policy on Appointment, Retention, and Promotion and Faculty Titles *Attachment 1.2.b. Policy on Appointment, Retention and Promotion and Faculty Titles*.
- A program for awareness and plans for recognition that reflects a more comprehensive definition of scholarship and research
- New emphasis on collaborative research involving students, faculty and researchers



- An enhanced teaching and learning page on the university's webpage, facilitating the sharing of institutional expertise across faculty of different programs
- Improved articulation and alignment of course-based student learning outcomes in syllabi supported with rubrics and other tools
- Renewed emphasis on annual student learning assessments by programs, with special attention to closing the loop
- More than 12 faculty development workshops and brown bag discussions, several led by outside experts

In the past two years, more than twelve steering committee, working group, and university-wide coordination meetings have been held for the reaffirmation of accreditation process. Three academic program reviews have taken place using the guidelines which were revised and then adjusted in 2012 and 2013. Eleven student learning assessment plans and eight student learning assessment reports have been prepared.

As AUA has grown, it has been necessary to make adjustments to existing university bodies. The main activities outlined in the IP, as updated through the CPR, were carried out and completed during the extended reaccreditation period. Adjustments involved rebalancing the Student Learning Committee and the Curriculum Committee and more fully integrating the IRO and the OAA into the student learning assessment process, significantly enhancing the capacity of AUA's faculty to handle the ongoing demands of the graduate programs while taking on the new responsibilities of developing and delivering the undergraduate program.

To assure the effectiveness of the General Education program, the university appointed an experienced faculty member with education specialization to serve as Associate Dean for General Education. A General Education Committee was also formed. Both measures underscored the importance of General Education, raising awareness of its value, and facilitating sharing of best practices in curriculum design, rubric use, and assessment across the university. The Associate Dean for General Education, like other AUA administrators, also has a part-time teaching load, which keeps her in close touch with the classroom. [CFRs 2.4, 3.11, 4.5, 4.6, 4.8]

## 2. Significant Engagement and Analysis of Educational Effectiveness

The EER has been a university-wide effort coinciding with AUA's undergraduate launch and expansion. The confluence of these two major efforts was both a challenge and an opportunity. As a small, growing institution, structural and personnel changes were required as well as start-up funds for expansion. Because so much had to be designed anew for the undergraduate program, tools, processes and mechanisms to assure educational effectiveness were integrated into the university's daily operations in a way that would have been hard to achieve had the university remained solely a graduate institution. It was a period of frequent training, workshops, hands-on and continuous interaction between educational specialists in accreditation and assessment and faculty, especially, undergraduate faculty. Cultivating a community of scholars created numerous synergies between EER activities, undergraduate expansion and AUA's two EER themes. The extended period for the EER set by the WASC Commission also facilitated the dissemination of new practices in educational effectiveness across the university at the undergraduate as well as graduate level, by both individual faculty and degree program leadership.

The EER effort involved many core and adjunct faculty members and virtually all upper-level administrators. It engaged academic support units, as well as students, alumni, employers, external stakeholders, and AUA Extension. This effort had its roots in the broad-based strategic planning effort which coincided with the CPR in 2011 and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university's founding. It brought heightened interest from alumni, who made a major donation to the university in 2013, for their 20<sup>th</sup> reunion. Since 2009, the university has engaged in regular reflection on how better to fulfill its mission. With a more stable and growing community of scholars and more institutionalized student learning assessment, reflection on educational effectiveness has begun to be a more organic part of the teaching and planning processes of the university.

The following is a description and analysis of the major activities for each theme. *Attachment 2. Timeline of EER Activities. [CFRs 4.1, 4.6, 4.8]*

### 2.1. Theme 1 – Institutionalizing Student Learning Assessment

The major activities for Theme 1 – Institutionalizing Student Learning Assessment – have centered on two core processes already in place at AUA since the first accreditation cycle in 2006-7: academic program reviews and annual student learning assessment. In 2014, AUA added academic support unit reviews covering the library, Information & Communication Technologies Services, Center for Student Success, Office of Admissions, Office of the Registrar and Institutional Research Office.

#### 2.1.1. New Guidelines for the Review of Academic Programs

In 2012, AUA completed its second cycle of Academic Program Reviews (APR), conducted in accordance with AUA's 2008 Guidelines. These guidelines were updated through a faculty-led process to reflect previous experience and the *WASC Resource Guide for 'Good Practices' in Academic Program Review (2009 WASC Good Practices Guide)* through a series of meetings with the Faculty Senate, the Curriculum Committee, academic program leadership, Student Learning Committee, Provost, IRO and OAA. As reflected in the CPR, updating the guidelines to align with the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide* had been postponed until the full cycle of self-studies was completed in 2012 to assure fairness and commensurability of assessment results.

The new guidelines were discussed and adopted by the Faculty Senate in June 2012 and approved by the Administration in July 2012. Incorporating the shift in emphasis from "input-based" to "output-based" assessment outlined in the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide*, the 2012 AUA Academic Program Review Process: Self-Study and Self-Study Audit Guidelines (APR Guidelines) were implemented for the first time in 2012-13. Based on feedback from the academic programs and external reviewers following the first two program reviews under the new guidelines various adjustments and improvements were made as further explained in Part 3.2. below. *Attachment 2.1.1. AUA Academic Program Review Process: Self-Study and Self-Study Audit Guidelines.*[CFRs 2.2, 4.4, 4.8]

#### 2.1.2. New SLA Materials

New student learning assessment materials were developed through the collaborative efforts of the Curriculum Committee, Student Learning Committee, Associate Dean for General Education, IRO and OAA. This effort fostered sharing of best practices within AUA, clarification of methods and kinds of evidence and updating of skills and knowledge about current trends in student learning assessment. It also reemphasized the need to close the loop by implementing, monitoring and assessing results of improvements once implemented, and assembled a more useful set of definitions and tools to support academic programs in annual student learning assessments. [CFRs 4.4, 4.6, 4.7]

#### 2.1.3. Student Learning Assessment Plans

In 2011, the graduate programs adopted multiyear student learning assessment plans (SLAP) to assure coherence and systematic assessment of key student learning outcomes for each program. These were developed with the help of the OAA for each program and designed to provide input into ongoing curriculum improvements and program reviews. The SLAPs also helped clarify the use of evidence, assure balance between indirect and direct evidence in annual assessments, and encourage broader participation by faculty in the process by breaking the annual student learning assessments into components and phases. The APR Guidelines were revised to include multiyear assessment plans as a part of the review process.[CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7]

#### 2.1.4. Student Learning Assessment Reports Online

Student Learning Assessment Reports (SLAR) along with the SLAPs produced by the academic programs are currently available on an internal online archive which facilitates use and reference to the reports by faculty and administration encouraging dissemination of best practices and cross-fertilization among programs. The online archive also assures continuity, orients new instructors to program goals, problems and recommendations, and helps focus faculty on the program's diagnoses and recommendations to better meet students' needs. [CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 4.4]

#### 2.1.5. Curricular Maps – Updated and Accessible Online

Degree programs have been developing and updating student learning outcomes and curricular maps periodically since AUA's 2006-7 accreditation effort. During this EER period, curricular maps were updated and adjusted in conjunction with (a) the transition from quarters to semesters, which required reallocation of content and skill instruction among courses, (b) the influence and demands of developing the undergraduate curriculum and preparing syllabi and instructors, particularly in General

Education, but also in the major courses, and (c) greater awareness of educational effectiveness as a concern of faculty and programs as a result of the EER and undergraduate program launch, including hiring new faculty and staff who are attuned to educational effectiveness. [CFRs 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6, 3.1, 3.2]

#### 2.1.6. University-wide Undergraduate and Graduate SLOs – Alignment with Mission

As the university developed the undergraduate program, university-wide program goals and student learning outcomes (SLO) were designed taking into account core competencies as well as student learning outcomes specific to the major. The university is moving toward alignment across all programs as to the following two overarching goals.

##### **University-wide Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

**Goal 4: Develop articulate, conscientious leaders and problem solvers who are committed to contributing to their fields and society.**

- 4.1 Produce and deliver written and oral presentations, and communicate with specialists and non-specialists using appropriate media and technology.
- 4.2 Think critically and creatively, conceptualizing real-world problems from different perspectives.
- 4.3 Work productively in diverse teams and solve problems collaboratively.

**Goal 5: Provide students with a broad foundation of knowledge and skills and cultivate a commitment to life-long learning.**

- 5.1 Use common software and information technology to pursue inquiry relevant to their academic and professional fields, and personal interests.
- 5.2 Weigh evidence and arguments, and appreciate and engage in diverse modes of inquiry characteristic of historical, cultural, political, economic, and quantitative disciplines.
- 5.3 Properly document and synthesize existing scholarship and data, keep current with developments in their field conduct independent research, and discover and learn new material on their own.

*Note: Goals 1 – 3 are reserved for program specific goals. Goals 4 and 5 are university-wide program goals.*

These program goals and student learning outcomes were formulated through a collaborative process which engaged faculty and staff, taking student, alumni, and employer views into account. A key concern has been aligning the university's mission with specific goals and learning outcomes applicable to both undergraduate and graduate students.

For AUA's graduate programs, with their distinctive disciplinary and professional orientations, formulating cross-cutting, university-wide student learning outcomes has been an incremental process. The graduate programs, following their academic program reviews, e.g., Political Science, LL.M., MPH, are adjusting their SLOs to converge with university-wide outcomes, e.g., written and spoken communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, social responsibility, environmental awareness, research and information literacy, life-long learning, team-work and sensitivity to diverse cultural and disciplinary perspectives. [CFRs 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.6]

#### 2.1.7. Undergraduate – Assoc. Dean for General Education and General Education Committee

The introduction of the undergraduate program has been a catalyst for many structural, policy, faculty, staff, and student learning assessment improvements at AUA. The wider range of course offerings and faculty for General Education in particular necessitated coordination among colleges. This has been accomplished through the appointment of the Associate Dean for General Education and the formation of the General Education Committee, whose work enhances and complements the Curriculum Committee. Since 2006 the main university body for developing policy and fostering good practices in student learning assessment has been the Curriculum Committee, joined more recently, by the Student Learning Committee, established in 2010, and the Office of Assessment and Accreditation in 2011. By stressing assessment and instructional methodology and applying integrative and interdisciplinary perspectives, General Education has influenced university curriculum, instruction, and assessment in various ways, especially in articulating course learning outcomes and better alignment of classroom and home assignments with course and program outcomes. The General Education Committee continues to evolve as the undergraduate program grows. In spring 2014, sub-committees were formed to coordinate and develop offerings in each of the three General Education sectors – Quantitative Sciences, Social Sciences, and Arts & Humanities. [CFRs 2.2, 2.4, 2.6, 3.11, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7]

#### 2.1.8. More Resources on [www.aua.am](http://www.aua.am) – Rubrics

The university substantially expanded and updated the resources available on its website in order to promote a common understanding of tools (e.g., rubrics, direct and indirect evidence evaluation, and portfolios of student work) and to service the larger number of courses, faculty and programs. An online repository of resources and information facilitated sharing institutional knowledge and promoted consistency and commensurability of evaluations. [CFRs 2.2, 2.3, 2.5, 2.6, 4.4]

- Teaching and Learning Resources, <http://iro.aua.am/teaching-and-learning-resources/>
- Materials and Resources from Trainings/Workshops, <http://iro.aua.am/faculty-workshops/>

#### 2.1.9. Trainings/Workshops

The OAA, in consultation with the Student Learning Committee, organized a series of trainings and workshops focusing on various aspects of teaching, learning and student learning assessment. A highlight of the series was an in-service workshop attended by almost all core faculty and many adjuncts in October 2013, led by Prof. Jim Lang, author of *On Course* and *Cheating Lessons*. Topics of trainings and workshops have included:

- Course syllabus design, rubric development and use
- Student learning outcomes
- Aligning activities, assignments and outcomes
- Student work portfolios as direct evidence
- University-wide survey data as indirect evidence
- Technology in the classroom
- Closing the Loop – how to implement and monitor improvements
- Moodle and online resources in the classroom
- University resources to support learning and assessment (Center for Student Services, Library, Information and Communication Technologies Services, IRO)
- Integrated teaching strategies

To reach faculty who are not on campus, in 2012 the university began videotaping workshops. Video distribution was hampered by technical challenges and alternatives are being explored. [CFRs 2.4, 3.4, 4.4]

#### 2.1.10. Improvements and Expansion of Ongoing University Evaluations and Surveys

AUA includes stakeholder feedback as an integral part of activities and services. Since the university's founding, students have been encouraged to give feedback on instruction through anonymous course evaluations not only for regular degree courses, but also for most other training and workshops. Similarly, the opinions and suggestions of faculty have regularly been solicited through evaluations and surveys in connection with faculty trainings on such topics as student learning assessment, facilities, and support for AUA's educational mission. The undergraduate program implementation plan incorporated a number of supplementary evaluations at critical points in the first semester and first year to assure that problems could be identified and addressed early. The dean, program chair, and the faculty member teaching the course receive course evaluations including student comments, positive and negative, shortly after grades are submitted. These are used to diagnose and address problems including student learning, teaching methods and content, and inform ongoing mentoring for faculty.

Regular student exit surveys, alumni surveys, and employer surveys (and for the undergraduate program, entering student surveys) have provided a rich base of data that helps the university track trends and improve the educational effectiveness of its academic programs. To make this data more useful for student learning assessment, during this EER period, the Faculty Senate adopted a new course evaluation form designed to elicit more useful information for student learning assessment, and more learning-oriented questions were added to student exit, alumni and employer surveys. Aligning data collection more closely with the needs of academic programs has produced more useful indirect evidence for student learning assessment.[CFRs 1.2, 1.8, 3.4, 4.4, 4.5]

#### 2.1.11. University Management System, Course Management System

While AUA has used Moodle successfully as a course management system for nearly 7 years, in 2013-14, the university made a major investment in a new centralized information management system, which when fully implemented is expected to contribute to the university's educational effectiveness in a number of ways. After considering more expensive standard software packages, the university opted for specially commissioned software better suited to AUA's unique needs and resources. The university management system (UMS) is partially deployed for testing and should improve efficiency, transparency and tracking for a wide-range of considerations including real-time reports on grading, class scheduling, student interests and preferences, minimizing course conflicts, increasing student options, assisting the IRO in data collection and optimizing faculty and facility use. The university has subscribed to Turnitin, which is being used by both undergraduate and graduate courses as an enhancement to Moodle to help reduce plagiarism. Moodle is now used for nearly all undergraduate courses, facilitating classroom community building; frequent and tailored interaction between students and instructors; efficient distribution of new materials, sample answers and other useful content; automation of certain kinds of class preparation exercises; confidentiality in grading, and timely feedback delivery. [CFRs 1.2, 1.8, 3.6]



## 2.2. Theme 2 – Cultivating a Community of Scholars

AUA's growing community of scholars has been galvanized by the start of the undergraduate program. Not only has this given many faculty the opportunity to expand their commitment to the university through greater and more varied teaching opportunities, it has also attracted new faculty that complement existing faculty members' interests, skills and expertise, enhancing the community in the process. The increased diversity of subjects and perspectives has rejuvenated the institution. As the undergraduate program comes into full operation, the university expects to have a core faculty of approximately 120 in 2016-17, in comparison with the core faculty of approximately 50 in 2012-2013. *Attachment 2.2. Faculty Profile.*

With more core faculty it becomes easier to carry out the range of student learning and normal functions expected of a university. Gradually, workloads, especially for university committee work and service, are being spread and balanced, making for a more robust and engaged institution with broader awareness of university-wide concerns and goals. The experience of starting a new venture has brought its share of camaraderie, but has caused some growing pains as well. The faculty and administration expansion has required rebalancing roles and functions and a new model of shared governance which is evolving. Some roles formerly handled by faculty committees are gradually shifting to administrative functions, creating a more scalable institution. One of the key challenges in the coming several years will be orientating new faculty and administrators and teambuilding. To address this, the university will need to direct more attention to hiring, new faculty orientation, mentorship, support services for new faculty and accessibility of information and policies (e.g., newly adopted Policy on Policies and a new online comprehensive database of academic and administrative policies). <http://www.aua.am/policies2/>. [CFRs 1.7, 2.1, 2.8, 2.9, 3.1, 3.2, 3.8]

The main steps taken to cultivate a community of scholars are as follows:

### 2.2.1. Multiyear Contracts

In 2011, the university began to issue multiyear contracts by giving two-year contracts to some core faculty and academic administrators as an expression of the mutual commitment of the faculty member and the university to growing the institution together. Currently 12% of the faculty have such contracts with the longest term being 2 years, which is lower than was originally anticipated due to budgetary constraints and the need for flexibility to meet evolving student needs during this period of expansion. As of May 2014, the faculty population is skewed toward newly appointed faculty for the undergraduate program which roughly doubled the student body and courses offered in 2013-14. Starting July 2014, several three-year contracts are slated to be issued to core faculty. Currently, 21% of the faculty have been at AUA for at least five years and the percentage of long-term core faculty is expected to grow and stabilize once the undergraduate programs are in full operation in 2016-17, with a corresponding increase in the number of multi-year contracts. [CFRs 3.2, 3.4]

### 2.2.2. New Definition of Scholarship

As outlined in the Institutional Proposal, faculty had long identified the need for a definition of scholarship and research tailored to the realities of AUA and its developmental mission in a critical post-soviet region. In 2010-12, leading up to the CPR, the Research & Scholarship Task Force conducted discussions and investigations involving faculty, researchers and administrators. Student perspectives

were also solicited through meetings with the Student Council and student focus groups. The result was a new definition of scholarship and research based on the Boyer model (*Scholarship Reconsidered*) as further developed by the Carnegie Corporation and various WASC universities, whose experience was studied as a benchmark for AUA.

Creative scholarship is the substantive contribution to new knowledge or significant new applications of knowledge:

- (1) scholarship of discovery,
- (2) scholarship of integration,
- (3) scholarship of application, and
- (4) scholarship of teaching & learning.

This definition aims to value a broad spectrum of scholarship which allows for AUA to tailor recognition of faculty activities and efforts to match the unique qualities and strengths of the university and each academic program. Scholarship of discovery means the traditional concept of scholarship vetted in peer reviewed journals and monographs. Scholarship of integration values cross-disciplinary work which produces or presents new, creative and innovative perspectives, including textbooks and reference works. Scholarship of application values the application of theory to practice in a specific or novel context which results in a new, creative and innovative understanding of universal knowledge. Scholarship of teaching values creative and innovative pedagogical approaches to curriculum, instruction and assessment including curriculum design or other activities beyond routine teaching responsibilities. (From *Policy on Appointment, Retention, and Promotion and Faculty Titles*)

The new definition was approved by AUA's Faculty Senate in 2011 and adopted by the administration later that year. The implementation of the new definition has been multifaceted:

- updating of the Appointment, Retention, and Promotion and Faculty Titles policy
- updating of the Faculty Evaluation policy and related forms (in progress)
- awareness campaign about the new definition and the varieties of scholarship – via posters, faculty meetings, faculty orientation
- recognition program is under consideration by the Faculty Senate to acknowledge various categories of scholarship

The new policy is still being absorbed by the faculty, students, research center staff and administration and will take some time to become rooted in AUA's culture, which had heretofore been held to the scholarship and research criteria of much larger, research universities in the United States. It is to be applied for the first time in the 2014-15 cycle of contract renewals for retention and salary increases. [CFRs 1.4, 1.5, 1.8, 2.1, 2.8, 2.9, 3.3]

### 2.2.3. Research

Procedures for research grant approval and management have been formalized and are being equalized across colleges, schools and research centers. AUA continues to attract a range of research projects from public and private sponsors which engage faculty, dedicated researchers, and students. While administration and faculty identify and share information about grant opportunities, on the whole, grant writing and management are primarily carried out at the program level. As discussed further in Section 6.2.4 below, the creation of an office for sponsored research was considered, but deemed unviable at this time. With the undergraduate program and the growing need for institutional research, there have



been opportunities for graduate student and alumni involvement in university policy research (e.g., MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language students' involvement in evaluating the impact of the pre-matriculation Academic Writing Course for graduate students). Capstones continue to provide the broadest opportunity for student-faculty research collaboration and are expected to grow with the undergraduate program. To assure sufficient support for AUA's research mission, the university has implemented more effective data collection for research activities including an online form. [CFR 2.9]

#### 2.2.4. Promotions

During this EER period, promotions were discussed for several faculty members from Assistant to Associate Professor. While the policy is in place, it has not yet been fully incorporated into the faculty evaluation, promotion and salary increase processes for standardized decision-making. As a consequence, although there are a number of faculty members who are ready for consideration, only one promotion was successfully completed. In this instance, the Provost organized a committee to review the candidate's dossier, which included the evaluation and recommendation of peers as well as the supporting statements of the candidate's program. The process is still evolving and procedures still need to be adopted to facilitate faculty career paths. [CFRs 1.8, 3.3]

#### 2.2.5. Faculty Workload

As AUA's course offerings expand for undergraduate study, more and more faculty members are expected to become full-time core faculty of the university. In connection with this expansion, the university adopted a standardized approach to workloads to assure that faculty members are able to balance their teaching, administrative and research responsibilities and bring clarity and equity to the faculty contracting and teaching assignment process. The concept of a Teaching Credit Point (TCP) was introduced in 2012. Full-time faculty members are expected to carry 18 TCPs annually (up to 21 TCPs for undergraduate instructors primarily engaged in teaching, in particular those with multiple sections of the same class). The adoption of the workload policy and its implementation in conjunction with multiyear contracts has brought clarity to the notion of core faculty and community of scholars, and helped quantify and recognize the significant contributions and commitment to the university made by those who perform essential university service through academic leadership. [CFR 3.3]

#### 2.2.6. Orientation

While AUA has had many years' experience orienting short-term local and visiting adjuncts on an individual basis within its graduate programs, with the undergraduate expansion the need for a more systematic orientation program for new faculty and staff was deemed essential for the smooth operation of the university. The OAA in conjunction with deans, program chairs, faculty and academic support units, developed an orientation checklist for new staff and faculty. Orientation covers policies and procedures, facilities, introduction to co-workers, services, guidance on living in Armenia, as well as university history, practices, and expectations for new faculty and staff. Orientation has facilitated new faculty transition to AUA and helped foster a sense of community through a more informed welcome to the institution. The orientation checklist is reviewed periodically for adjustment. [CFRs 2.4, 3.4]

### 2.2.7. Community Meetings, Retreats, Coordination Meetings

During the undergraduate expansion, the administration held university-wide meetings to apprise faculty and staff of developments and solicit feedback. In addition, in fall 2013 the university held a faculty retreat and some programs hold regular faculty retreats. These foster team building as does the long tradition of university holiday gatherings and the annual summer picnic. The periodic coordination meetings for the reaffirmation of accreditation held by the ALO and OAA have also helped facilitate the development of a culture of consultation and conferral in university decision-making and implementation of new policies. [CFRs 2.4, 3.4]

### 2.2.8. E-bulletin, Website Upgrade, Social Media

Another innovation in the sphere of community and communication has been the regularization of the *AUA Insider*--the university's e-bulletin--and the news/upcoming events sections of AUA's redesigned website, both of which raise awareness of accomplishments and activities of programs and help create collegiality and shared institutional memory by breaking down barriers that sometimes arise when people are too busy and focused on their own work. The university as well as various subunits also engages in Facebook and other social media.

### 2.2.9. University-wide Public Lecture Series

A series of lectures was initiated in 2012 by President Boghosian to celebrate the kinds of innovative thinking and attitudes valued at AUA. The university hosted speakers from diverse spheres such as MIT Media Lab to Innovations Lab Kosovo to International Human Rights, enriching intellectual life for students, faculty, staff and the broader community. These lectures also gave the university the opportunity to collaborate with other local institutions such as the Luys Foundation and the British Council. These public forums helped AUA project its vision of intellectual vitality and to encourage a new spirit of scholarship in the community. This series complemented the public lectures, seminars and conferences in which academic programs and research centers regularly engage, including the conference held on the occasion of AUA's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary dedicated to trends in higher education featuring speakers such as Jud King, Director of Center for Higher Education at UC Berkeley. [CFRs, 2.8, 2.9, 4.6]

### 2.2.10. Co-curricular Activities

With the inauguration of the undergraduate program, there are many more opportunities for students, faculty and staff to interact and engage in group activities in spheres ranging from tree planting and park clean-up to sports, music, debate, and other kinds of collegiate clubs based on student interest. In addition to giving students the opportunity to develop leadership and teamwork skills, these also provide faculty and staff a venue to act as role models and to mentor students, sharing interests outside of the classroom and promoting the AUA goal of well-rounded student-citizens. In this regard, the Center for Student Success, established to support the undergraduate program, has played an important role in helping to organize co-curricular activities. This poses a challenge for a commuter campus in a country that does not have a strong tradition of co-curricular activities as part of university life. The role of the faculty as a community of scholars in helping to model and shape an American university environment has been rewarding for faculty, reinforcing the sense of community on campus. In the first year of

undergraduate education at AUA, there were nine student-founded clubs that engaged faculty advisers and which also received modest financial support from the university. In addition to the sports clubs, the university fielded several intercollegiate teams through its physical education program. The Center for Student Success also organized several events such as Student Orientation, Welcome Week, International Education Week, and National Youth HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. The Center for Student Success is further discussed in Section 4.4. below. [CFRs 2.9, 2.13]

#### 2.2.11. The Changing Profile of AUA's Community of Scholars

Over the course of AUA's 23-year history, the community of scholars has gone through a significant transformation from mostly long-distance academic leadership and visiting faculty to a full-time resident president, provost and academic leadership, with a solid core of resident faculty, many of whom are full-time or on trajectory for full-time work as the university expands. Much has changed in this EER period. In 2007, the university had a part-time non-resident president, a resident provost, 2 resident and 4 non-resident deans, 21 full-time faculty, and 58 part-time faculty. In 2014, the picture is remarkably different: a full-time resident president, a resident provost, a resident chief operating officer, resident chief financial officer, 2 resident deans (out of 4), 2 resident associate deans, 9 resident program chairs, 30 full-time faculty, and 81 part-time faculty. This profile is expected to evolve even more dramatically in the coming two years as the full range of instructors and courses are phased in for the undergraduate program. This is a rare opportunity to build a community. The challenge will be to grow, attract and select the kinds of faculty and academic leaders who are suited to this stage in the institution's development and are able to grow with the institution as it stabilizes and matures. As evidenced by the long vacancies in some of its programs (MBA, Bachelor in Business), there are still gaps in academic leadership which have impeded the cultivation of a community of scholars in these disciplines. This has resulted in unevenness in faculty development and participation in assessment and other university processes such as student advising and committee work. At present, the university is concluding its search for a College of Business and Economics Dean. [CFRs 1.5, 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.10, 4.2]

### 3. An Analysis of the Effectiveness of the Program Review Process

#### *History of Program Review at AUA*

Academic Program Reviews are in their third cycle at AUA. The process has evolved significantly since the first self-studies in 2006, as has the capacity of the faculty and the institution to use evidence (direct and indirect) to diagnose the strong and weak points of programs, to formulate recommendations to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses, to monitor the effectiveness of the improvements implemented, and to make additional adjustments as required. Building institutional capacity and accruing institutional memory, AUA has now embarked on its third cycle of academic program reviews and its first cycle of academic support unit reviews.

Through this maturation process, self-study has become part of the vocabulary and day-to-day management of AUA programs, systematically guiding and focusing efforts at continuous improvement, as the emphasis shifted from input-based to an output-based approach to evaluation outlined in the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide*.

#### 3.1. Three Cycles – 2006, 2008-12, 2012-present

AUA's first cycle of self-studies in 2006 predated AUA's WASC accreditation and was the preparatory baseline for later self-studies. This cycle covered all graduate programs. The process was newly established and the institution had little experience with such evidence-based evaluation methods. Reviews were conducted by the program deans/associate deans in conjunction with the faculty. There was some support from the administration and the newly formed IRO. The format was input-based, and audit/external review was done primarily by colleagues from other AUA graduate programs.

The second cycle, from 2008-2012, post-WASC accreditation, falls within the current reaffirmation of accreditation and includes not only the graduate degree programs, but also AUA Extension and the instructional programs for the university-wide, mandatory environmental course offered by AUA's Acopian Center for the Environment (ACE). During this period the process was organized by the Curriculum Committee, a standing committee of the Faculty Senate, with oversight by the Provost. The review consisted of three phases:

- Self-Study
- Audit (External Review) (with the participation of an extramural reviewer)
- Wrap-Up Session with the Provost and President, during which the baseline recommendations for the coming five years were agreed.

The process drew on the university's Factbook and more extensive data collected by IRO and included a number of opportunities for stakeholders to be heard on the record, including a right of response for the program under review, if the program deemed it necessary to clarify or otherwise document concerns regarding the review or wrap up recommendations. The third cycle of self-studies commenced in 2012-13, as further described below. [CFRs 2.1, 2.7, 3.11]

#### 3.2. Self-Study Guidelines Evolution and Development

The academic review guidelines in force for the period covered by this reaffirmation of accreditation were adopted in 2008 and remained in force through 2012. These guidelines were adapted by the Provost for the self-studies of AUA's two non-degree instructional programs, the Acopian Center

for the Environment and AUA Extension, in 2010-11. In the midst of the 2008-2012 self-study cycle WASC issued the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide* signaling a change in emphasis from input-based to output-based evaluation.

After considering how to adapt AUA’s existing Guidelines to the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide*, the Curriculum Committee, in consultation with the Provost, determined that it would be more consistent if AUA completed the 2008-2012 cycle of academic program reviews with the existing guidelines rather than change the guidelines mid-stream; thus, revisions to the AUA guidelines on the basis of AUA’s experience with the first cycle and with the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide* were postponed until 2012, as explained in more detail below.

Although external reviewers have always been part of AUA’s review process, the university’s resources had not always allowed site visits by external reviewers. In 2010, with the appointment of AUA’s new President, site visits were conducted for two of the three academic program reviews underway at the time. This gave AUA the opportunity to determine whether the added expense and logistics of a site visit for external reviewers resulted in benefits to AUA and improvements in educational effectiveness. In addition, based on their collective experience, the AUA Board of Trustees Educational Policies Committee in 2013 recommended that two external reviewers be engaged in academic program reviews.

With the conclusion of the second cycle of academic program reviews, the university embarked on a broad discussion of how to improve the self-study process taking into account the *2009 WASC Good Practices Guide*, the university’s experience, and the feedback received during the WASC CPR Site Visit in February 2012. This was a two-staged process: the initial revisions (2012) and adjustments to the revisions (2013) after the first two reviews. The initial revisions drew upon feedback from academic programs, external reviewers, administrators, and extensive benchmarking.

2012 Revision of Academic Program Review Guidelines- Timeline	
April 18, 2012	Distribution of memo to deans. Request program faculty discuss existing Guidelines, solicit feedback
April 18, 2012	Solicitation and comments from previous extramural reviewers
April 25, 2012	Initial /facilitated brainstorming session during Curriculum Committee meeting. Faculty asked to send additional comments, suggestions by end of first week of May.
Through end of May	One on one follow up as needed
April 25 – May	Draft revisions prepared and circulated taking into account: <i>2009 WASC Good Practices Guide</i> Benchmarks with other universities Feedback from faculty and Administration
May 16, 2012	Draft revisions presented and discussed at Curriculum Committee
May 16, 2012	Adjustments made based on Curriculum Committee input
May 18, 2012	Approved by Curriculum Committee
May 23, 2012	Presented to and Approved by Faculty Senate
May 23, 2012	Present to Administration (Faculty Senate sent to Provost)
May 29, 2012	Provost input and approval
June 6, 2012	Redistributed to Faculty Senate for e-vote
June 13, 2012	Additional E-vote of Faculty Senate Based on Provost’s Recommendations
September 7, 2012	Approved (again) by Administration

The newly adopted Guidelines were put into effect with the 2012-13 LL.M. and MPH reviews, launching the third cycle of reviews as described further below, with the intention of making adjustments, if needed, based on feedback from these programs, reviewers, and others.

Starting in November 2012, feedback was gathered and analyzed resulting in adjustments to the Guidelines for the remaining reviews in the third cycle as approved by the Administration in 2014. The process was broad-based, drawing on on-campus experience and expertise as well as the recommendations from the Board of Trustees Educational Policies Committee as outlined in the attached Timeline. *Attachment 3.2.Timeline: Revisions of Guidelines for the Review of Academic Programs 2013. [CFRs 2.7, 3.11, 4.4]*

### 3.3. Preparedness/Support for Self-Study

#### 3.3.1. Faculty Development – Workshops in Student Learning Assessment

AUA's capacity for self-study has grown significantly since the university's last EER in 2007. Faculty development has played a large part in this growth. New faculty members have been hired with educational assessment in mind. Moreover, existing faculty have enhanced their skills and knowledge of educational assessment both from working on self-studies and student learning assessment reports and through university-organized workshops in student learning assessment.

During the second cycle of reviews (2008-2012), each review involved approximately 10 faculty and administrators and many stakeholders. For the current cycle (2012-20), each review involves approximately 15 faculty and administrators and scores of stakeholders through surveys and focus groups and dissemination of recommendations. *[CFRs 2.1, 2.4, 3.4, 4.4]*

#### 3.3.2. Institutional Support

In addition to enhancing faculty skills and capacity, AUA has expanded the IRO, improved databases, created more standard procedures for conducting academic program reviews, and established a new Faculty Senate committee—the Student Learning Committee which works closely with the IRO and the Office of Assessment and Accreditation. The Administration has also provided funds for site visits by external reviewers. Starting with the 2014 amended Guidelines, the Provost's Office has assumed coordination responsibility for academic program reviews. The IRO has also made the entire process more efficient by assembling the data packet for the program, including in-depth, program-specific information on student performance, putting on line all the self-studies, student learning assessments, and additional assessment resource links, and regularizing the data in the AUA Factbook for more reliable longitudinal and trend analysis. *Attachment 3.3.2.IRO Data Packet for Academic Program Reviews. [CFRs 1.7, 4.4, 4.5]*

#### 3.3.3. Policies & Processes – Syllabus Template, SLA Plans, Credit Hour Monitoring

In conjunction with training and new institutional resources, AUA has significantly upgraded its policies and processes in the area of assessment and curriculum design. Policies and guidelines are now better organized and more easily accessible on the redesigned AUA website. Moreover, spurred by the WASC CPR recommendations, the demands of the undergraduate program, and the transition from a



quarter to a semester system, a new syllabus template was developed that emphasizes program and student learning outcomes and rubrics, in order to help faculty and students track progress and assure alignment of the goals of the course and program. *See Attachment 1.2.a. Course Syllabus Template.*

Multiyear student learning assessment plans for all instructional programs was introduced calling for annual student learning assessments as part of ongoing academic program review. SLAP and SLAR templates were also developed to facilitate the process. Finally, OAA consultations are now a regular feature of both self-study and student learning assessment, providing hands-on guidance to programs, improving efficiency and fostering skill development and dissemination of know-how.

A syllabus review process was introduced, addressing both content and compliance with policies (e.g., credit hour policy). *Attachment 3.3.3.a. Credit Hour Policy.* When the 2012 CPR Site Visit took place, AUA was in transition from a quarter to a semester calendar adopted in anticipation of the undergraduate program. Since that transition, compliance with the credit hour policy has been more rigorous and easier to monitor. Within the context of course and syllabus development, the university has implemented a credit hour compliance monitoring system. *Attachment 3.3.3.b. Credit Hour Compliance Monitoring including Course Syllabus Checklist.*

The introduction of University Management System software is expected to facilitate monitoring, course scheduling and credit-hour policy oversight. In the meantime, the Course Schedule Builder with standard blocks, introduced by the Provost and administered by Registrar's Office, has led to scheduling standardization. [CFRs 2.6, 3.7, 4.4]

### 3.4. Application

As Cycle 3 has just begun, for the purposes of reaffirmation of accreditation the educational effectiveness analysis of AUA's APRs focuses on Cycle 2.

#### 3.4.1. Cycle 2 – Post-Accreditation APR – Full Cycle of Instructional Programs

The second cycle of academic program reviews (2008-2012) was significantly more rigorous and benefited from the advice and recommendations of the WASC accreditation visit and review leading up to AUA's accreditation in 2006. A plan was established to review each instructional program once every 5 years, roughly 2 programs per year. The plan included the Acopian Center for the Environment (ACE), which delivers courses in environmental studies mandatory for all graduate degrees, and AUA Extension, which does not deliver degree courses but affects thousands of students and potential applicants to AUA's degree programs. The Guidelines were developed based on the parameters in force in 2007 for WASC academic self-studies. The first self-studies were performed on time, but there were delays in some later self-studies. The last of the second cycle of self-studies was completed in 2012, two years behind schedule, in part due to the intervening changes in AUA's administrative leadership and the demands of the undergraduate launch.

<b><u>Academic Program Review Schedule Cycle 2</u></b>	
2008	Master of Laws Master of Public Health
2009	Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language Master of Engineering in Industrial Engineering and Systems Management Master of Science in Computer and Information Science
2010	Master of Business Administration AUA Extension
2011	Master of Political Science and International Affairs

External review (Audit) was conducted through a mix of auditors from the university but external to the program and from outside the university ("extramural" auditors). The Audit Committee was appointed by the Curriculum Committee and the entire self-study and audit was submitted to the Curriculum Committee, which then made a presentation together with the Program to the Provost and President for the Wrap-Up session. One of the main challenges was to find an extramural reviewer from a similarly situated institution, whose frame of reference and perspective would produce relevant and useful audit recommendations. To address this challenge and to work within the university's resource constraints, the extramural reviewers selected for the first six audits were familiar with AUA, but not directly engaged at AUA during the review period. The extramural reviewer typically had visited AUA, but not contemporaneously with the audit. The review was conducted based on a document packet and several video-conferences/conference calls. The extramural reviewers were required to give their recommendations on the discipline-specific aspects of the program – primarily curriculum, instruction and assessment – and encouraged to comment on any other aspect of the program as they saw fit. As this cycle was largely an input-based review, it was more suitable for the external reviewers from the university to address those issues specific to AUA policy, market, and local conditions.

This process produced eight reviews which the programs and administration found useful and which the 2012 CPR Site Visit team commended.

### 3.4.2. Cycle 3 – 2012-2017

The third cycle of academic program reviews is currently underway and covers the graduate programs as well as the new undergraduate programs over a slightly longer cycle. Based on the experience of the prior cycle and to complete the next cycle before the next strategic planning, two academic program reviews per year are scheduled. As further discussed in Section 3.6.2., academic support units will also be included in the review process for the first time starting in 2014-15.

<b><u>Academic Program Review Cycle 3: 2012-2017</u></b>	
2012-2013	Master of Public Health (MPH), Master of Laws (LL.M.)
2013-2014	Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (MA TEFL) / AUA Extension – <i>in progress</i>
2014-2015	Master of Science in Computer and Information Sciences (MS CIS) Master of Engineering in Industrial Engineering and Systems Management (ME IESM)
2015-2016	Master of Business Administration (MBA) / Acopian Center for the Environment (ACE)
2016-2017	Master of Political Science and International Affairs (MPSIA) / Master of Science in Economics (MS E)
2017-2018	Strategic Plan

<http://iro.aua.am/self-study-guidelines/>



The first of the graduate program self-studies in the third cycle took place in 2012-13, after which, as planned, the new 2012 Guidelines were adjusted based on broad-based feedback. Further program reviews under this cycle are underway as this report is being written. For the undergraduate program, academic program reviews are scheduled for 2017-2018 after the first graduating class. In the meantime, various components of the undergraduate program will be subject to rigorous and frequent student learning assessment to identify and correct problems early. The aim is to have all the program reviews completed in time to provide useful input to the university's next Strategic Planning effort in 2018, when the current strategic plan concludes.

### 3.5. Case Studies in Closing the Loop

[CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, 4.4, 4.7]

#### **Closing the Loop Case Study 1: Industrial Engineering and Systems Management (IESM)**

As a recommendation of the Academic Program Review (2011), the IESM program devoted the 2011-2012 SLAP to revising and recalibrating its Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), and the 2012-2013 SLAP to an initial assessment of the resulting changes.

The 2011-2012 SLAR found that the existing SLOs were too vague, difficult to measure, and not well tailored to the discipline. As a consequence, SLOs were not very helpful to faculty or students. They were not effectively integrated into the teaching and learning process or useful for curricular and instructional adjustments. As a result of the SLAR, the IESM program developed SLOs which were applied across the curriculum with special emphasis on the Capstone experience, previously identified by both faculty and students as a problem area. Subsequently, the SLOs were translated into measurable rubrics for the Capstone experience.

In fall 2012, the new SLOs and rubrics were implemented and applied to the Capstones and the impact of the new approach was reviewed in the 2012-2013 SLAR. The SLAR drew upon both direct and indirect evidence. The direct evidence involved review of Capstones based on the new SLOs by a committee of faculty and alumni. The indirect evidence involved student survey responses.

The SLAR found that the rubrics based on the new SLOs provided

1. more effective guidance to students and faculty as students engaged in the Capstone process in regards to topic selection, work planning, timely submission and overall quality,
2. a more useful framework for feedback and assessment,

In addition, the SLAR identified issues regarding the Non-Thesis Option Capstone Experience which will merit further investigation.

### **Closing the Loop Case Study 2: LL.M.**

Written and oral advocacy are core skills for legal professionals. It is difficult to develop these in one's native language, let alone in a second or third language. These skills have posed a challenge for AUA's LL.M. program, from which students, alumni and employers have demanded better English skills, particularly written legal English.

To this end, since 2007, the program has tried and evaluated various measures focusing on English language advocacy, particularly written legal English. At the same time, the English language proficiency of entering students has continued to rise. Some have found legal English classes useful, while others think they should be an elective, preferring to devote more time to substance or other lawyering skills. The transition from quarters to semesters entailed a reduction in the number of courses from 18 quarter courses to 10 semester courses, resulting in consolidation of some content and an elimination of some overlaps.

During this EER period, the program has devoted three annual Student Learning Assessment Reports specifically to written legal English or closely related advocacy skills:

- 2007 – International Legal English introduced as a required introductory courses for LL.M. students
- 2008 – SLAR – Graduate Exit Interviews – “More Emphasis on English” requested by “most, but not all” respondents
- 2009 – SLAR – Investigation of Advocacy, SLO 3.2
- 2010 – SLAR – Legal Writing and Advocacy – Revision of SLO 3.4
- 2011 – SLAR – Recommending, among other things, more emphasis on legal writing, based on Student Exit and Alumni Survey results
- 2012 – LL.M. Program Self-Study – recommending writing, advocacy, legal research and analysis skills across the curriculum, phase-out of International Legal English as a separate course
- 2013 – SLAR – “Graded Writing Assignments” – Introducing writing across the curriculum
- 2014 – Introducing 1<sup>st</sup> Year Legal Career and Skills Seminar – A focus of which is writing (non-credit)
- 2015 – Revised Student Learning Assessment Plan – “Evaluating the Legal Career and Skills”

From 2007-2012, the program offered separate skills courses, including International Legal English and Legal Research & Analysis. The impact of these courses was reviewed in the 2009-2011 SLARs, culminating in the 2012 Program Self-Study, which recommended integration of writing, advocacy, legal research and analytical skills across the curriculum. In response to this curriculum adjustment, graded writing assignments and legal analysis tools (such as IRAC – Issue-Rule-Analysis-Conclusion) were introduced into courses, as appropriate. In addition, a new 1<sup>st</sup> Year Legal Career and Skills seminar is being introduced in 2013-14 to supplement and orient students to the habit of continuing legal educations including advocacy skills. This dovetails with the Armenian Bar requirement of 24 hours of continuing legal education annually for all licensed attorneys. The 2013-15 LL.M. SLAPs call for evaluation of these curriculum changes in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 SLARs.

### Closing the Loop Case Study 3: Development of Freshman English 1

Freshman English (FE), part of the university's General Education program, is one of three two-course sequenced signature foundation courses required of all students. FE is grounded in AUA's Mission and provides an especially appropriate domain for assessment of student learning across programs.

In line with the university-wide student learning outcomes, the Freshman English Program aims to:

- Introduce students to AUA's core values through the university's mission and academic standards.
- Develop oral and written communication skills through engagement in a rigorous learning community.
- Empower students with the skills necessary to address the needs of Armenia and the region through ongoing inquiry, critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration.
- Inspire and support students to be life-long learners and contributing members of society through self-reflection, research, mentorship, and access to university resources.

Freshman English was developed through a collaborative iterative process – a series of university-wide meetings, discussions, and feedback & assessment opportunities which included:

- Reviewing AUA Mission, Program Goals, and Curriculum Map (June 2012)
- Determining Structure and Overarching Theme of Freshman English (summer 2012)
- Brainstorming Expected Population (summer 2012)
- Benchmarking and Brainstorming Content and Course-based Student Learning Outcomes (fall 2012)
- Developing Assignments Aligned with Course-based Student Learning Outcomes (fall 2012)
- Designing Syllabi and Course Outlines (fall 2012 – winter 2013)
- Administering and assessing a "pilot" Freshman English 1 course in spring 2013
- Adjusting course based on information gathered from students, instructor, and pilot team (summer 2013)
- Administering Freshman English 1 in fall 2013
- Engaging in weekly Freshman English faculty meetings (fall 2013)
- Diagnostic and Exit Writing (fall 2013)
- Administering a Mid-Term and End-of-Term Student Survey (fall 2013)
- Administering signature assignments (fall 2013)
- Administering course evaluation (end of fall 2013)
- Administering Instructor survey on course content and materials (end of fall 2013)
- Adjusting course based on information gathered from students and instructors

A similar process was used for developing and adjusting Freshman English 2.

What was learned and adjusted?

- a. During the spring 2013 Pilot, student and instructor feedback indicated that the syllabus was too burdensome in terms of assignments, instructor feedback, and student learning outcomes; that there was not enough time for appropriate scaffolding; and that rubrics were too cumbersome.
- b. Adjustments were made to the syllabus, course content, assignments, and rubrics prior to fall 2013.
- c. During fall 2013, entrance and exit writing, student surveys, course evaluations, instructor surveys, and instructor feedback provided direct and indirect evidence indicating that the newly revised rubrics still needed minor adjustment but were more effective and useful, scaffolding was adequate, minor adjustments to readings and other course material were called for.

What's next?

- Set up a faculty working group to revise the course syllabus for Freshman English 1 for fall 2014, in particular to adjust the rubrics and readings – *in progress*.
- Thorough review of surveys, course evaluations, student portfolios as part of assessment process

### 3.6. Continuing Efforts at Integration of Student Learning Assessment

AUA is engaged in continuing efforts to assure the effectiveness of program review processes and to integrate them into the institution's day-to-day management and operations. Self-studies and reviews, in particular the recommendations agreed upon at the Wrap-up Session, are regularly used to guide programs and make program improvements. They are also reconsidered from time to time to respond to changing circumstances and program needs.

#### 3.6.1. More Frequent SLA during Undergraduate Ramp-up

A key feature of AUA's undergraduate program ramp up is more frequent student learning assessment during the critical first years to assure that programs are properly designed and timely adjusted. Especially since undergraduate education is new terrain for AUA, it was deemed essential to obtain feedback early and often to permit effective intervention. The following is the current revised seven-year Student Learning Assessment Plan for undergraduate programs:

- Year 0 (2012-2013): Building Capacity for Undergraduate Assessment
- Year 1 (2013-2014): Student Preparedness for English as Language of Instruction
- Year 2 (2014-2015): Lower-Division General Education Courses
- Year 3 (2015-2016): Lower-Division Major Courses
- Year 4 (2016-2017): Upper-Division General Education Courses
- Year 5 (2017-2018): Capstone Course
- Year 6 (2018-2019): Academic Program Review / Self-Study
- Year 7 (2019-2020): Graduate Preparedness

Most AUA programs begin each year with a faculty meeting to review the student learning assessment plan and adjust it accordingly. This practice encourages faculty, students and staff to engage in educational effectiveness as a shared responsibility and high priority. Anticipating the need for timely adjustments also helps to keep academic leadership and faculty agile and alert to the need for special care in the early stages of the undergraduate programs' development. [CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.7, 4.4, 4.7]

#### 3.6.2. Academic Support Units

Academic support units include Library, Information & Communications Technology Services, Center for Student Success, Office of Admissions, Office of the Registrar, Office of Alumni Relations and Career Development, and the Institutional Research Office. Although strategic planning, stakeholder satisfaction surveys, and other evidence-based management techniques have been a part of the university's processes for many years, AUA's academic support units did not have a formal review process. In 2013-2014, in collaboration with the heads of academic support units, guidelines were developed for their review. Through the guideline development process, academic support units also had an opportunity to review and revise, as appropriate, their own unit mission statements and objectives. The development of review guidelines was a broad-based, iterative process, informed by best practices benchmarking and involving not only the unit leadership and administrative supervisors, but also stakeholders. *Attachment 3.6.2. Guidelines for the Review of Academic Support Units, also at <http://iro.aua.am/self-study-guidelines/>.* These annual reviews will focus on one key aspect of the unit's

operation with the goal of comprehensive review every few years. The OAA is charged with assisting academic support units with this process.

Although identified as a need in the 2011 strategic planning process, the formalization of the review process for academic support units was delayed due to preparations for the undergraduate launch and only took place after the restructuring of the university with a full-time Chief Operating Officer.

In addition, beginning in 2011, the university initiated 360° performance reviews of senior administration covering the President, Provost, and Vice Presidents. [CFRs 1.3, 1.8, 2.11, 2.13, 3.1, 3.6, 3.9, 3.10, 4.1, 4.5, 4.6]

### 3.6.3. Annual Student Learning Assessment

Student Learning Assessment Plans (SLAP) are designed to ensure systematic, continuous and comprehensive assessment of all program outcomes. Except for the undergraduate student learning assessments, which are more frequent, each academic program selects one topic for investigation each year, drawing on issues identified in program reviews, prior student learning assessments, and ongoing deliberations among the program faculty about educational effectiveness.

SLAPs are subject to adjustment based on documented justification if a program's faculty determines that another topic requires more urgent investigation. An example is the LL.M. program's 2012-13 SLAP, which, as a result of the 2012-13 academic program review, was amended to address the new capstone design, introduced the prior fall. This amendment permitted the LL.M. program to make timely adjustments to its capstone syllabus to improve the educational effectiveness of the LL.M. capstone, based on student and faculty feedback. Student Learning Assessment Plans and Reports are accessible to the AUA community through the internal webpage (<http://iro.aua.am/student-learning-committee/>) helping faculty share experience and expertise although not all faculty are equally engaged. *Attachment 3.6.3. Annual Student Learning Assessment– Current Status as of May 31, 2014.*

The Student Learning Committee (SLC) of the Faculty Senate provides a forum for discussion and sharing of experience and expertise and helps to set expectations and standards for assessment. The entire process is supported by OAA through workshops and presentations, individual consultation and periodic follow-up. See also Section 2.1 above. The role of the SLC has evolved, as several of its functions are now better served through other mechanisms, e.g., institution-wide workshops, OAA consultation, monitoring and reporting, and less frequent committee meetings. Thus, in line with a general trend at AUA as it expands, these functions have been institutionalized and professionalized, permitting the faculty and programs to focus on student learning assessment and decision-making relating to improving educational effectiveness.

A number of measures have been implemented to foster good practices in student learning assessment including:

- Regular meetings among deans, program chairs, IRO, OAA
- Faculty professional development workshops and brown bag discussions
- Teaching and Learning resources online
- Newly opened Moodle page for faculty with student learning resources (under construction)
- Syllabi Template and course design support
- Annual Student Learning Assessment Plan and Report templates
- Academic Program Review schedule cycle established, published and underway
- Development of Guidelines for Review of Academic Support Units
- Improved monitoring – website and follow up

Improving skills and raising awareness of student learning assessment have been a priority of the OAA and IRO. With more core resident faculty resulting from undergraduate launch, a critical mass of faculty has developed these skills and awareness. To reach visiting faculty who are not on campus, in 2012 the university began videotaping workshops. Due to technical challenges and limited resources, video distribution was not entirely effective. Moving forward, the university is exploring alternatives for distribution of materials.

The number of faculty members who are versed in student learning assessment practices is growing and program chairs are better attuned to the integral role that assessment plays in ongoing curriculum development and adjustments to degree requirements, as well as improved teaching, learning and evaluation methods in the classroom. Nevertheless, progress is uneven and some programs have fallen behind in annual assessment.

Greater efficiency in collection, presentation and distribution of information and data has also improved AUA's assessment processes. The IRO created several new data collection and analytic templates and processes to more efficiently track student success. Enhanced data reporting provides programs and academic support units with program-specific information including retention and graduation rates disaggregated by variables such as gender, citizenship, and region of residency (for Republic of Armenia citizens). The university's IRO office presents data both in publication form (online and in print) and in university-wide presentations geared to academic programs and academic support units. In 2013, the university began the implementation of an integrated university management system (UMS) which is expected to provide more systematic access to student data from admission through graduation and facilitate institution-wide investigations and analyses. The UMS implementation process is still underway. [CFRs 1.2, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 2.7,3.6, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7]

## 4. Further Development of Student Success Efforts

### 4.1. Defining Student Success and Challenges

As part of the university's design of the undergraduate program, University-wide Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes were developed to foster student success inside and outside of the academic program. Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes were formulated through a collaborative process which engaged faculty, staff, students and alumni in thinking strategically about the university's mission and determining how best to align the university's mission with specific goals and learning outcomes applicable to AUA graduates. These university-wide Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes (*See Section 2.1.6. above*) are an explicit component of each undergraduate program and are being integrated into the Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes of graduate programs.

For discussion of academic support units see Section 3.6.2. above. While academic support units have formulated or revised mission statements and objectives, they are just beginning their reviews in 2014.

Student Success is further defined by student and alumni satisfaction with achieving career advancement and further education goals. This is measured through student, exit, and alumni surveys, and focus groups. It is further corroborated by employer satisfaction with AUA graduates as measured through surveys and academic program reviews. Data show high student and alumni satisfaction rates. While academic program reviews draw on employer feedback, more frequent and systematic feedback from employers as well as alumni is necessary and is on the IRO agenda.

For the graduate programs, alumni continue to report high levels of satisfaction with the education they received at AUA, noting that their AUA degree helped them to achieve their career and further educational goals (see 2012 AUA Alumni Survey, <http://iro.aua.am/files/2012/03/Alumni-survey-for-the-web2012.pdf>, page 20). Similarly, on exit surveys, graduating students are overwhelmingly satisfied with their education (see <http://iro.aua.am/files/2012/03/2013-GSES-report.pdf>, page 14). Feedback from the marketplace, both in terms of applicants to the graduate program and employer satisfaction with AUA graduates, is positive. With the undergraduate program the Alumni Relations and Career Development Office is expanding with additional capacity for more frequent monitoring.

More generally, AUA pays special attention to retention rates, and advisers work with students who are on academic probation to help them regain good standing. The Factbook contains disaggregated data (by gender and citizenship) on graduation and retention rates which aims to help monitor trends and formulate appropriate learning support. (For more information on graduation and retention rates, see Section 4.3 below.) For undergraduates, the prominently located Center for Student Success provides a range of study-skills workshops as well as individual guidance and its services have been integrated into the Freshman English curriculum and other first-year courses to encourage students to familiarize and avail themselves of the Center's services (See Section 4.4 below). The relatively small number of faculty who are able to provide sufficient student advising for the BA in Business posed a challenge in this first year and will be addressed as the faculty grows. [CFRs 1.7, 2.4, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12, 2.13, 4.8]



#### 4.2. Institutional Research Office (IRO)

The IRO is responsible for collecting, compiling, presenting and disseminating institutional research for analysis and strategic planning and assessment and has recently expanded with the growth of the university.

The IRO maintains a page on the university's website to publish reports, surveys, data, and other institutional information and research. <http://iro.aua.am/>. In addition to the public space, an internal page is allocated to faculty and staff for annual Student Learning Assessment Plans and Reports, Academic Program Reviews, and other material.

The IRO regularly conducts surveys related to academic programs and support services, including

- Graduate Student Exit Survey (annual)
- Periodic Alumni Survey (2007, 2012)
- Employer Satisfaction Survey (2010)
- Staff Survey (2013), and
- Entering Freshman Survey (2013, annual thereafter)

In addition, the IRO compiles and reports institutional data in an annual Factbook, posted and publicly available on the AUA website: <http://iro.aua.am/factbook/>.

In an effort to make data and information more readily available to faculty and staff, survey reports are published on the university's website and presented at faculty and staff meetings for discussion. Program-specific reports are provided to academic programs highlighting relevant information and comparisons. As a follow-up to the survey and report presentations, Academic Programs and academic support units are asked to complete a data/report usage form indicating how data and information is utilized in assessment, what information is most useful, and what additional information and/or data would be helpful in future surveys and reports. *Attachment 4.2. Report on Use of Report Data and Information Form*. Presentation of reports as well as feedback has helped improve reporting.

The IRO prepares a data packet for academic program reviews and responds to program requests for additional data information as well as feedback to improve the process and contents of the data packet. One continuing challenge for the IRO is presenting the information in accessible ways so that programs and units will more effectively utilize the information in their efforts to improve programs and services.

[CFRs 1.2, 2.5, 2.10, 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5]

#### 4.3. Graduation and Retention Rates

In order to identify potential support needs and manage resources, Graduation and Retention Rates are disaggregated by program, gender, and citizenship. Efforts are under way to further report rates by time to degree and disaggregate rates by geographic area within the Republic of Armenia. This information, when available, will be particularly useful to the Center for Student Success, academic advisers, faculty, staff, and students in efforts to overcome regional development and other differences and their potential impact on student success. The first-year attrition rate for the first undergraduate class is projected to be higher than originally expected, close to 15%, which varies from the graduate programs. Approximately 83% of graduate students complete their degrees within 3 years of matriculation.

AUA includes in its Factbook, aggregated and disaggregated (by gender, citizenship, and degree program) retention and graduation rates for its graduate programs and plans to do the same for the new



undergraduate degree programs, as data become available, as well as expand reporting to include time-to-degree for all degree programs. *Attachment 4.3. Graduation and Retention Rates, excerpted from 2012-2013 Factbook. [CFRs 1.2, 1.5, 1.7, 4.4, 4.5]*

#### 4.4. Undergraduate Student Success Efforts

In fall 2013, AUA administered its first Entering Freshman Survey collecting information about the high school experience and expected first-year university experience of AUA's first freshman class. The information was reported to undergraduate program chairs, faculty, and student support staff. Further, in some courses such as the mandatory Freshman English courses, students complete mid-term and end-of-term surveys. The surveys aim to solicit feedback to improve teaching and learning while identifying support needs. Moving forward, longitudinal data from these surveys should assist in planning.

In summer 2012, the university engaged a program development fellow to evaluate the university's current capacity and needs for effective student success support, particularly in preparation for the launch of the undergraduate program.

In early 2013, the university hired a Student Services Coordinator who was charged with launching the university's Center for Student Success. The Center, the first of its kind in Armenia, opened in July 2013 and provides academic advising, disability support services, learning and well-being workshops, math and writing center, and student clubs. In 2013-2014, more than 30 workshops were organized including:

- Understanding the writing process
- How to use a syllabus
- Time management
- Healthy lifestyles
- Citing sources – avoiding plagiarism
- Active listening
- Note taking
- Public speaking tips
- Starting student clubs including constitution writing
- Reading tips
- Presentation skills

In addition to ongoing support services, workshops, and presentations, the Center for Student Success also organizes events such as Welcome Week and International Education Week. The Center for Student Success also maintains a virtual space on the university's website with resources and information. In coming years, the Center for Student Success is expected to add guidance on summer, study abroad programs, and further education.

In addition to the Entering Freshman Survey the university also collects, compiles and reports information about its new undergraduate experience in others ways including

- Freshman English Mid-Term Survey
- Freshman English End-of-Term Survey
- Freshman Exit Survey, and
- Course evaluations. *[CFRs 2.5, 2.10, 2.13]*

#### 4.5. Alumni Relations and Career Development Office (ARCDO)

The university's Alumni Relations and Career Development Office was restructured in 2013 to better respond to the needs of alumni and students. The alumni relations function aims to develop, coordinate and promote programs to engage alumni with the university and with one another, and to create a culture of philanthropy by encouraging alumni to contribute their time, talent and resources to the advancement of the university. Toward this end, the ARCDO launched an annual summer reunion program, the first of which was held in 2013 for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first graduating class. This brought together alumni from around the world who expressed their appreciation for the university's contribution to their career success by launching an Alumni Scholarship Fund. Plans are under way for regular 5-, 10-, and 20-year class reunions. As the first alumni of the undergraduate program enter the work force and/or pursue further education in 2017, the ARCDO expects to expand its career development function to provide services and support and gather data and information about alumni success and challenges. [CFRs 2.10, 2.11, 4.6, 4.8]

#### 4.6. Further Education and Life-Long Learning

Many students come to AUA with the goal of further education upon graduation. Faculty members are the first line of support for students, providing guidance and contacts to help them reach their goals. AUA also organizes guidance sessions for students interested in further study. Alumni surveys show that 36% of students pursue further education, of whom 75% study abroad and 28% pursue PhDs. For many students, satisfaction with their AUA education is measured by success in attaining further education goals. As students advance through the undergraduate program to their junior and senior years, AUA anticipates expanding guidance for those interested in pursuing further education.

Alumni report high degrees of satisfaction with the educational foundation they received at AUA for life-long learning and their ability to adapt to changing workplace demands. Some pursue continuing education at AUA Extension, take part in university workshops, collaborate with faculty members on research, and utilize the university's library resources. The 2012 alumni survey provided feedback to academic programs and AUA Extension on skills and courses graduates deemed most valuable. [CFRs 4.4, 4.8]

#### 4.7. Faculty Professional Development

In 2011, the university began a series of workshops, presentations and brown bag discussions on assessment, teaching methods, and learning strategies. Presentations and materials from workshops are available on the university's website facilitating accessibility for off-campus faculty or those unable to attend.

As part of its commitment to faculty professional development, in 2013 and 2014, the university arranged for recognized international specialists to present professional development workshops. Well received by faculty, similar workshops are planned at least annually. In 2014, in response to faculty demand to increase opportunities for sharing ideas, the university organized more frequent faculty brown bag discussions on teaching and learning. The university's increased emphasis on hiring faculty with expertise in curriculum, instruction and assessment has expanded capacity for in-house workshops and training. In addition, a faculty Teaching and Learning Moodle page is under construction. [CFRs 2.4, 2.6, 3.4, 4.6]

#### 4.8. Integration of SLOs, CLOs into Syllabus Template

The new, more detailed syllabus template adopted in 2012 as part of the undergraduate launch has had an impact across both undergraduate and graduate programs. *See Attachment 1.2.a. Course Syllabus Template.* The template, as shown in the excerpt below, provides specific guidance on aligning (a) program goals, program learning outcomes, and course-based learning outcomes, (b) assessment methods with outcomes, and (c) course delivery methods with substance and skills.

<p><b>Learning Outcomes:</b> The following chart shows alignment between course-specific and program learning outcomes and goals as identified in Program Curriculum Map. <i>[Note: in determining course-specific outcomes, it is important to review the curriculum map to relate the appropriate skill level if specified (e.g. beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Outcomes should be clear, attainable, and measurable.)</i></p>		
<p><b>Course-Based Student Outcomes</b></p>	<p><b>Program Student Learning Outcomes</b> Students will be able to:</p>	<p><b>Program Goal</b></p>
<p>[For example: Identify the basic methods used to study the interrelations among language, culture and social interaction, including ethnography of communication, conversation and discourse analysis, and dialectology.]</p>	<p>[For example: 2.4 Identify and describe the nature and function of language as a human attribute, including language acquisition, language and society, language and culture, language and thought. <i>(Beginner Level)</i>]</p>	<p>[For example: 2. <i>Equip student with analytical skill in linguistics, communications and literary criticism.</i>]</p>

With the undergraduate expansion in particular, many new courses are being developed. This is a multilayered process which involves deans, program chairs, faculty, Associate Dean for General Education, the General Education Committee, Curriculum Committee, OAA, and students. As part of course-delivery, syllabi are updated every year and are reviewed through an iterative process. Faculty members are encouraged to seek advice and support from the program chair and the OAA, as well as from colleagues who have taught the same, similar and related courses, and to take into account course evaluations and international benchmarking. A teaching and learning webpage provides faculty with resources and ideas, and is a means for sharing institutional experience. Because of the cross-cutting nature of its offerings, the General Education program has played a major role in the dissemination of institutional best practices in course development and syllabus design. The appointment of an Associate Dean for General Education with background in educational methodology has further enhanced the impact of the General Education program on promoting best practices.

The OAA hosts periodic meetings with program chairs to facilitate the sharing of ideas, experiences, and resources. In addition, the OAA organizes workshops and presentations on various aspects of course and syllabus development. *[CFRs 2.3, 2.4, 2.6, 4.5]*

## 5. Undergraduate Expansion

The realization of the long-time aspiration to expand into undergraduate study has had a major impact on all aspects of the university, from academic offerings, to faculty hiring, facilities, policies, processes, co-curricular activities, library resources and administrative staffing.

The undergraduate program required upgrading of capacity across the university including expansion of the Offices of the Registrar, Admissions, and Information and Communication Technologies Services, renovation of the Library and Cafeteria, and the opening of an on-campus fitness center and a new Center for Student Success. There were structural changes as well: the re-organization of the academic programs into three colleges and a school, the separation of the admissions and registrar's functions, the enhancement of development and communication functions, and expansion of the executive committee.

At the same time, university policies, handbooks and catalogs required tailoring to an undergraduate student population. Policies relating to probation, grading, academic integrity, and ethics needed review to assure institutional capacity to handle a growing institution. Course development processes and capacity also improved in connection with the curriculum demands of the undergraduate programs as described in Section 2.1.7. above. Some of these new situations demanded more human and financial resources than originally expected, prompting adjustments in planned activities such as the review of academic support units and the implementation of the faculty evaluation policy.

General Education was an innovation for AUA, Armenia and our students. In line with typical U.S. undergraduate programs, in the first two years, students take many General Education courses. All undergraduate students take three year-long foundation courses (Freshman English I & II, Armenian Language & Literature I & II in the sophomore year, and Armenian History I & II in the junior year, the latter two required by Republic of Armenia law). These three courses are particularly well suited for assessing student learning at three distinct stages across the undergraduate program. The foundation courses are complemented by a wide range of General Education electives, in three broad disciplinary sectors (Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences and Quantitative Sciences). The first class of 280 students was offered 25 different General Education courses, covering a wide range of disciplines, balanced among the three sectors. The variety of offerings will increase each year as the university grows. This effort called for the appointment of an Associate Dean for General Education and the establishment of a General Education Committee to oversee this important component of the undergraduate program.

Special attention has been placed on recruiting qualified students and providing guidance and academic support to ensure student success. As mentioned in Section 4.3. above, first-year attrition in the undergraduate program is projected to be higher than expected. Although a single year's performance is not conclusive, preliminary analysis indicates several factors that affected undergraduate, more than graduate programs, and may account for the higher attrition rate: Armenia's universal conscription for 18-year-old males, maturity and seriousness of purpose, unevenness of high school preparation, and misaligned expectations as to academic demands due to differences between AUA and other local universities. As attrition rates are related to admission processes, the quality and size of the admissions pool, and the university's effectiveness in supporting student success, all factors will continue to be reviewed. The situation may adjust itself after a few years of operation through enculturation, reenrollment of conscripts upon completion of service, evolving expectations and seriousness of purpose. The number of applicants for this year is currently 32% higher than last year. The university is studying

the factors affecting attrition in order to adjust support services including those for returning conscripts, and admissions standards.

In addition to formal annual student learning assessment as described in Section 3.6.3., the undergraduate program was a catalyst for faculty, staff and students to offer feedback and contribute to the success of this new undertaking. Entry and exit surveys were conducted for all freshmen to gather additional evidence to make improvements for the next entering class. Ongoing data collection was complemented by informal consultations and discussions throughout the first year. General Education faculty met monthly to coordinate assignments and discuss student progress, challenges and effective teaching methods. Freshman English instructors met weekly to review current progress, brainstorm ideas and share resources for the coming week's assignments, calibrate grading, and discuss adjustments to the course delivery. In addition to university-wide course evaluations which take place at the end of the semester, the Freshman English program has incorporated course reflections, mid-term course feedback forms, and pre- and post- diagnostic and progress writing. Based on that feedback and evaluation, a number of adjustments have been made to the course with regard to timing of assignments, number and selection of readings, rubrics and approaches to grading.

Such opportunities for frequent review permitted timely adjustments and interventions to address problems as they arose. For example, to support students who experienced difficulty in Calculus I, instructors and the Center for Student Success provided extra instruction through the problem-solving sessions and the Math Center. Nevertheless, a number of freshmen still had problems in their first term due to many factors including inadequate high school math background, adjustment to the rigor of university courses, methods and contents of the course, and the fact that classes mixed Business and Computational Sciences students, the latter of which in general fared better in their math classes, as might be expected. As a result, starting in fall 2014, BA in Business students will take Calculus I in their second term using a curriculum with more business-oriented problem sets.

The development and implementation of the undergraduate program resulted in further institutionalization of student learning assessment at the university through:

- more faculty involvement,
- more frequent assessment,
- more frequent evidence-based adjustment and follow up on adjustments to curriculum,
- adjustments to admissions criteria, and
- more targeted academic support for students both from instructors, advisers, and the Center for Student Success

To assure the success of the undergraduate program, faculty and staff have identified several areas which will require ongoing attention and resources: student advising, more effective dissemination and awareness of policies, delivery of teaching materials, onsite leadership in the BA in Business program, and further development of the Quantitative Sciences sector of the General Education program. *[CFRs 1.6, 1.8, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5, 2.10, 2.12, 2.13, 3.1, 3.3, 3.5, 3.6, 3.7, 3.8, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.8]*

## 6. An Integrative Component

AUA selected 2 themes for its EER in 2009-10, before the institution had made the decision to expand into undergraduate education. Nevertheless, the EER and the expansion into undergraduate education produced synergies that enhanced both processes.

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

For Theme 1, Institutionalizing the Assessment of Student Learning, AUA set three specific, observable objectives and substantially realized all three:

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

- 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.

(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)

#### 6.1.1. Theme 1 Objective 1: The Student Learning Committee will be institutionalized and be an integral part of teaching, curriculum review, and academic program review

The Student Learning Committee (SLC) was established in 2010. Its role has evolved with the institutionalizing of assessment at the institutional level and in the programs. With the addition of the Accreditation and Assessment Director in 2011 and expansion of the IRO, student learning assessment was integrated into syllabus development, curriculum review, teaching methodology and academic program review through workshops, resources, and hands-on consultation. In spring 2014 it undertook a review of its charge to better reflect the needs and growth of the institution which had made constituency-based member unwieldy. The SLC was redefined as a standing Faculty Senate committee and charged with coordination on issues of student learning, such as planning, identifying resource and training needs to support faculty assessment efforts, and sharing of experience and expertise. *Attachment 6.1.1. Student Learning Committee Charge*. Together with the OAA and IRO, the SLC organized over a dozen workshops in the course of the past two academic years, attended by both core and visiting faculty from across programs, and oversaw the preparation of student learning assessments.

The SLC provides support for various assessment activities. However, the assessment activities themselves are the primary responsibility of various university bodies. Annual Student Learning Assessment is a core function of academic programs. The academic program review process is overseen by the Provost. New curriculum proposals are handled by the Faculty Senate Curriculum Committee. Faculty training in assessment and teaching and learning as well as oversight of annual student learning assessments are handled by the OAA. As AUA grows, it is expected that the SLC will have a vital role in sharing information and faculty development and the Curriculum Committee will remain a consultative body focused on curriculum design and development. [CFRs 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8]



6.1.2. Theme 1 Objective 2: The faculty, including visiting faculty, will integrate the assessment of student learning on a regular basis in teaching

Through the concerted efforts of the college and school deans, associate deans, program chairs, Student Learning Committee, Curriculum Committee, OAA, the General Education Committee and Associate Dean for General Education, almost all syllabi at AUA now contain a statement demonstrating alignment of course-based student learning outcomes with program goals and student learning outcomes, as well as rubrics to help students and faculty measure student performance and track student progress. The transition from quarters to semesters and the new syllabus format, adopted for the undergraduate program and further developed after the CPR visit, helped spur a university-wide rewriting of syllabi. With the new syllabi, student learning assessments became more systematically connected to the curriculum, as the outcomes were now fully articulated in the primary document, faculty, students and program chairs use as a point of reference when thinking and talking about courses. At the same time, curricular maps for programs have been made more accessible and have been adjusted for the semester system and the new syllabi.

This is an ongoing, iterative process, especially for the undergraduate program which is in its early stages. Each instructor and program chair is refining and adjusting course content and outcomes to assure balance and proper sequencing of courses. Adjuncts and visiting professors are contacted months in advance about syllabi and student learning outcomes for the program and courses they are to teach. The program chair, OAA and Associate Dean for General Education work closely with faculty members to assure that student learning outcomes and assessment are integrated into course design and instruction. As the undergraduate program grows, the number of visiting professors is expected to decrease. Some will become core faculty, who will, of course, have more institutional knowledge and understanding of how their courses and teaching fit into the mission of the university, the goals of the program, and the contents and coherence of the overall curriculum. This growth of core faculty dovetails with the second theme of cultivating a community of scholars more fully described below. [CFRs 4.6, 4.7]

6.1.3. Theme 1 Objective 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

The EER and undergraduate expansion have engaged more faculty in student learning assessment although as with any institution some faculty are more receptive than others to outcome-oriented approach to teaching and learning. Thus, some programs have progressed further than others in integrating assessment into course development and delivery. Faculty and programs design their offerings with the expectation that they will be reviewing the results and using that review as a basis for refining and adjusting teaching methods, courses and curriculum. Virtually every program, graduate and undergraduate, has used evidence-based assessment to systematically improve teaching, and these improvements are monitored on an ongoing basis by program chairs and college deans, and periodically studied in depth through annual student learning assessments and academic program reviews. Over the last two years, many courses have been adjusted based on course evaluations and evidence-based student learning assessment. Improvement of courses, especially allocation of course content, is handled through direct, ongoing interaction among students, instructors and the program chair. In courses with multiple sections, a special effort is made to assure basic uniformity of content and outcomes, coordination and mutual enrichment of sections drawing on instructors' experience and perspectives. Based on the first

year of undergraduate operation, a guideline was developed to address the specific challenges of multiple-section course assessment. *Attachment 6.1.3.Methods of Evaluation for Multiple-Section Courses.* [CFRs 2.4, 4.4, 4.6, 4.7]

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

Similarly, for Theme 2: Cultivating a Community of Scholars, three of the four goals set in the Institutional Proposal have been realized, and the other is underway.

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

- 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.

(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)

- 6.2.1. Theme 2 Objective 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

Over a period of nearly two years, the university engaged in a participatory process to develop and build a consensus and awareness of a new model of research and scholarship tailored to AUA's reality. This effort was led by the Research and Scholarship Task Force, a mixed committee of faculty, researchers and administrators, with input from students and other stakeholders. The taskforce investigated AUA's current research activities and studied best practices at other comparable institutions. Based on these investigations a draft policy with supporting evidence and rationale was widely circulated and discussed, resulting in adjustments to the definition and clarifications on its application. The new definition was approved by the Faculty Senate and incorporated into the Policy on Appointment, Retention, and Promotion and Faculty Titles by the university administration. The policy is in the process of being integrated into the faculty hiring and evaluation process. Awareness is being promoted through faculty orientation, e-bulletin coverage, posters and plans for university recognition for outstanding research. *See Attachment 1.2b. Policy on Appointment, Retention, and Promotion and Faculty Titles.* [CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.3]

- 6.2.2. Theme 2 Objective 2: The standards for research and scholarship will be applied in the evaluation of faculty and research staff

Starting in 2012-13, faculty members in most graduate programs were evaluated in accordance with the new definition of research and scholarship. Development of an evaluation form and process for non-teaching research staff was envisioned as part of this objective. However, due to the small numbers involved and the already existing evaluation processes for faculty and staff, some of which overlap, the development of a separate policy was postponed. Self-evaluation is a core component of performance evaluation, followed by observations from supervisors, and in some cases colleagues, as well as



consideration of other more general performance indicators (e.g., course evaluations, surveys). With plans for the introduction of a new system of salary increases and promotions for faculty and research staff, the evaluation is expected to take on new significance, laying the groundwork for a more equitable, scalable personnel policy for the community of scholars. [CFRs 2.8, 2.9, 3.3]

6.2.3. Theme 2 Objective 3: There will be more faculty and student collaboration on applied and theoretical research and scholarship

Due to the generally long timeframe for sponsored research, it is still too soon to measure the impact of the new definition of scholarship and research on faculty and student collaboration. At the graduate level, the capstone is a natural vehicle for student-faculty collaboration on research and scholarship, and in many programs, e.g., TEFL, Computer and Information Sciences, Industrial Engineering and Systems Management, Political Science and International Affairs, and Public Health, students are more readily inducted into the ongoing research of the program faculty. In others, such as Business Administration and Law, that kind of absorption has been more sporadic and will be monitored and studied by faculty, program chairs, and deans to determine how it can better be fostered. It has been a long-term goal and practice of the university to engage students in faculty research; however, comprehensive data has not been collected to date. Starting in 2013-2014, the IRO is gathering data on student and alumni involvement in faculty research. With undergraduate capstones starting in 2016-2017, opportunities for increased student-faculty collaboration will be explored. As further explained in Section 6.2.4 below, the university has had relatively little direct grant writing and management support. [CFRs 2.8, 2.9]

6.2.4. Theme 2 Objective 4: More core and full-time faculty will be in place to support teaching, research and scholarship

The number of core and full-time faculty has already increased with the launch of the undergraduate program and is projected to continue to rise through 2016-2017. While the emphasis in hiring and work assignments in the past two years has been on curriculum and instruction, a track record of scholarship and potential for scholarship has also been an important factor in hiring, especially for those involved in both graduate and undergraduate programs. Two years is too soon to measure development in scholarship and research activity; however, the increase in core and full-time faculty is expected to generate more research and position the university to seek out larger, multi-disciplinary projects. With larger projects there should be more subtasks appropriate for student engagement.

Currently, the burden of grant identification, writing, management and reporting is on the researchers themselves which is a challenge in an institution without doctoral programs. As the university grows, it is anticipated that more staff dedicated to these functions can be financially justified, thereby freeing some of the researchers' time currently occupied with administrative matters for research and scholarship. After deliberations at the academic council and within the executive committee, it was determined that a dedicated office for sponsored research is not yet viable. Individual programs and research centers are encouraged to share administrative support staff for grant management. [CFRs 2.1, 2.8, 2.9, 3.2]

## 6.3. Challenges and Opportunities Ahead

### 6.3.1. Overview

A common thread throughout this EER period and AUA's recent experience has been that the launch of undergraduate education was more than a simple quantitative expansion of the university – more students, more faculty, more courses, more services. It has been the catalyst for a number of qualitative changes that have affected all aspects of the university, degree programs at the graduate and undergraduate level, non-degree instructional programs, research centers and research activities, academic support units, and administrative structure of the university. This initiative has posed new challenges and brought new opportunities for AUA. AUA's Boards of Trustees have become more actively involved in university life, with an increase in the number of board members visiting campus, more frequent meetings and board committee engagement. Consistent with AUA's developmental mission for Armenia and the region, courses continue to stress real-life problems and practical skills along with giving solid theoretical knowledge. Of particular relevance to our two themes have been the following:

- more systematic and thorough faculty orientation
- expansion of faculty workshop and retreats
- more student support services
- continuous course and syllabus development, assessment and alignment through formulation of course-based student learning outcomes, and syllabus development
- more interdisciplinary and cross-college cooperation with the introduction of undergraduate General Education requirements

Each has contributed significantly both to institutionalizing student learning assessment and to cultivating a community of scholars. Growth has required and justified more structured faculty orientation, with attention to assuring that student learning is an integral part of curriculum and syllabus development and to preparing faculty accustomed to master's students for the differences and special needs of undergraduates. Faculty orientation continues throughout the year via regular teaching and assessment workshops, brown bags lunches and retreats. A highlight of the past academic year was the fall workshop on Student Learning Assessment with Prof. Jim Lang, which was attended by nearly the entire faculty. At AUA, as at most institutions, faculty members are concerned about how to assure academic integrity and design assignments to minimize cheating and plagiarism. Dr. Lang's research and experience in this field proved interesting and valuable.

Expansion has also permitted the recruitment of faculty that have specialized experience and expertise in student learning assessment, instruction and curriculum development, which they are encouraged to share with colleagues during workshops, brown bag discussions and academic committee deliberations. These workshops and the introduction of nearly 20-30 courses a year have provided many opportunities for faculty members to re-think, re-tool and share ideas about teaching and learning. The intensive planning for the substantive change proposals for undergraduate degrees demanded more focus on curriculum design and underscored the need for continuous monitoring and adjustment, increasing and institutionalizing capacity for student learning assessment.

Undergraduate General Education, which is new to AUA, was yet another opportunity to cultivate community, foster interdisciplinary collaboration and disseminate best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment across various program faculty, who until then were more focused and limited to their own discipline and program curriculum. Having an Associate Dean for General Education, Office

of Assessment and Accreditation, and a General Education Committee to lead this effort have promoted a more consistent and informed approach to various aspects of curriculum, instruction and assessment, which had a spill-over effect on the graduate programs as well. There is increasingly more consistency, rigor and awareness of standards in course design and delivery, including syllabus form and content, credit hour monitoring, course-based student learning outcomes, rubrics for various activities, kinds of assignments, and sequencing, reinforcement and dovetailing of subject matter among courses.

This has been further enhanced by weekly meetings of the Freshman English faculty and monthly check-in meetings among the other General Education faculty, where instructors calibrate, share ideas, propose improvements and reflect on effectiveness of assignments, materials and methods. Undergraduate student advising has also given faculty from various disciplines and programs more occasion to interact as they share ideas, identify students who need additional support and guide students in their General Education elective selections. Students also receive group and individual advising on course selection during pre-registration from program faculty. Students are also encouraged to explore the support services at the Center for Student Success through visits integrated into General Education course work and assignments.

Overall, the undergraduate launch energized and accelerated the processes already underway on both themes.

### 6.3.2.Challenges

This section will reflect on some of the challenges AUA faces and its capacity to meet those challenges for its sustainability and continued growth. Educational effectiveness and quality of the educational experience are key to maintaining AUA's competitiveness among educational institutions in Armenia and the region. One of the reasons students and faculty are attracted to AUA is its commitment to transparent, effective education, which prepares them for career advancement and further education. In order to maintain its position and build on its reputation AUA will need to continue to secure adequate resources to sustain an attractive environment for learning and scholarship. While AUA's facilities are relatively new and well-maintained, growth and diversity of activity will require further thought on maximizing use of these facilities as well as options for facility expansion. Similarly, many of AUA's systems and processes have recently been upgraded, but will probably require further upgrading to keep up with competitors and the needs of its growing and increasingly demanding student body.

If students a few years ago were choosing between AUA and another Armenian university, more and more, students will be choosing between AUA and universities around the world. Global competition demands that AUA stay sharp and become more innovative. A vibrant community of scholars will help AUA in this regard, as will university leadership with the experience, skills, flexibility and vision to take Armenia to the next level. As the nearly 3-year interim situation in the College of Business and Economics (both dean and program chair level) and the turnover in the President and Provost's Office attest, AUA continues to face challenges in attracting university leaders who combine the agility to build in a transitional environment, university administration skill and experience, long-term commitment to the institution, understanding and appreciation of American university traditions, local knowledge and global perspective.

Resources are essential to any institution's ability to achieve its mission. In this regard, AUA has made some progress but still faces challenges. With the increased number of students, the contribution of tuition to the university's operational budget has increased and is projected to continue to increase as shown in the chart in Section 7 Question 5 below. At the same time due to efficiencies and economies of

scale, the cost per student has decreased by 38% from \$ 15,744 to \$9712 bolstering the university's viability. With the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university approaching in 2016, a capital campaign to increase the university's endowment is being explored. At the same time the university has progressively reorganized its development efforts most recently with the establishment of specialized Communications and Development Offices. These efforts have resulted in increased outreach, fundraising, and several major gifts reducing the reliance on individual large donors.

AUA's pursuit of educational effectiveness is framed by these larger forces and trends. The personal commitment of each member of the community to the success of the others, the institution and the students is an essential ingredient for educational effectiveness. In this regard, especially as the institution grows and more new personnel are brought on board, it is important to stay focused on organizational dynamics and employment conditions within the institution, which contribute to the morale and commitment of the faculty and staff on whom AUA's mission depend. As the institution moves into its third decade, more faculty and staff will be moving into retirement. In its third year of salary equalization adjustments, the university has taken steps to address salary equity. In addition, in 2013, the university introduced health care benefits for staff and faculty. The basic socio-economic compact between the institution and its personnel requires competitive wages and benefits, salary equity, and career paths at AUA. Attitude and morale contribute significantly to educational effectiveness. Commitment to employees and their career advancement, including promotions, faculty and staff development, generation change and retirement are becoming more pressing issues. The institution must assure resources and conditions conducive to risk-taking and innovation in order to become robust in regional and global competition.

### 6.3.3. Looking Forward

While dealing with these larger issues, AUA still has work to do with the two themes it selected for reaffirmation of accreditation. These themes were more than a vehicle for the review. They were the product of long, hard consideration of the institution's current stage of development and served as core insights into its ongoing challenges. They came to frame campus discussion throughout the reaffirmation of accreditation process and undergraduate expansion and are now lenses through which AUA looks at itself and its future.

Although much has been gained by separate analysis of these two themes, there is, in fact, significant overlap between them. Cultivating a community of scholars with an eye toward educational effectiveness, scholarship of application, integration, discovery and teaching, and experience in student learning assessment contributes directly to the institutionalizing of student learning assessment. And institutionalizing student learning assessment helps build a common vision of professionalism and educational effectiveness that draws this community of scholars together.

Looking forward, on Theme 1, Institutionalizing Student Learning Assessment, AUA is keenly aware of the need to assure that program reviews and student learning assessments are effective and fully integrated into the teaching, learning and research activities of the university. As the faculty grows and the excitement surrounding undergraduate education competes for the university's attention and resources, it is incumbent on the academic leadership to assure balance between undergraduate and graduate education, and especially, to assure that student learning assessment continues to have adequate support and prominence in faculty workloads, program work plans, and staffing at the institutional level. Monitoring and support for implementation of recommendations, including periodic self-checks by programs, with the participation of deans and academic leadership, will be key to maintaining the

momentum of the past several years. With so many new courses and faculty coming on board, developing quick and effective responses and cross-program sharing of solutions for shortcomings will be essential. As this is new ground for AUA and Armenia, it is vital that the community of scholars be reinforced with a balance of faculty who have experience and long-term commitment to AUA and bring fresh ideas and student learning assessment know-how to the institution.

Finally, with so much new build-out, adjustment and refinement going on simultaneously, coordination and expertise in assessment will be even more critical than in the design, planning and launch phases, especially to gather and analyze evidence to monitor the consequences of such changes, address unintended consequences, and recalibrate for improved educational effectiveness

Looking forward on Theme 2, *Cultivating a Community of Scholars*, hiring and recruitment over the next several years will play a critical role for the community of scholars at AUA. Cultivating student learning assessment skills in current faculty and making it a factor in new hires will continue to institutionalize student learning assessment. With undergraduate education, opportunities for attracting a more diverse faculty, as well as diversifying the student body with more international and exchange students, will add vibrancy to the campus and classroom. The university will need to develop both support systems and infrastructure to meet the needs of this larger, more diverse faculty and student body. While the new model of scholarship and research has been developed and enjoys a broad consensus on campus, implementation will be the next challenge. The Faculty Senate formed an ad-hoc committee to develop a recognition program for faculty research based on the policy which is still working on an appropriate mechanism for selection and award.

The new definition of scholarship still needs to take root, earn university recognition, and be reflected in hiring, evaluation, promotion and salaries, awards and appropriate administrative support. An office of sponsored programs or additional staff to support scholarship and research could help achieve this, as the OAA and expanded IRO did in the field of student learning assessment. Finally, community development, from the highest levels of academic leadership to the novice instructor, will need systematic attention. Faculty need to know that their efforts are valued and to be shown that their commitment, expertise, experience and perspectives are respected. In a world where knowledge knows no borders and students and faculty enjoy unprecedented mobility, AUA will need to assure global connectedness, competitive conditions, salaries and benefits, and offer real incentives to make a career at AUA in order to continue to build on its accomplishments in cultivating a community of scholars.

#### 6.3.4. Looking toward the 2013 Handbook

Although AUA is one of the last institutions to engage in the reaffirmation of accreditation process through the 2008 Handbook, the university has begun looking forward to the changes in the 2013 Handbook by incorporating the following elements into its processes:

1. *Response to Previous Commission Actions.* The university specifically addressed previous Commission Action in both the Institutional Proposal (2010) and the Capacity and Preparatory Review Report (2011). In this report, Commission Action is addressed throughout as relevant and specifically in Section 7. We anticipate continuing to address the recommendations emerging from this Review.

2. *Compliance with Standards: Self-review Under the Standards; Compliance Checklist.* As part of the IP and CPR, AUA engaged in a process of initial reflection by completing the *Worksheet for Preliminary Self-Review Under the Standards*. This process helped identify areas needing attention and helped clarify the university's thinking regarding quality assurance and best practices. Throughout this report, Standards are referenced by the relevant CFRs and we are preparing to apply the new Standards as set forth in the *Review under WSCUC Standards and Compliance with Federal Requirements* worksheet. The four federal compliance checklists are being submitted with this report as are the Summary Data Form for Accredited Institutions and the Inventories on Educational Effectiveness Indicators and Concurrent Accreditation.

3. *Degree Programs: Meaning, Quality, and Integrity of Degrees and Educational Quality: Student Learning, Core Competencies, and Standards of Performance at Graduation.* As mentioned in Section 2.1.6. above, a key step toward defining the meaning, quality, and integrity of degrees, was the development of a university-wide framework for program goals and student learning outcomes. The undergraduate Program Goals and Program Student Learning Outcomes were developed through a collaborative process drawing on faculty and staff, student, alumni, and employer views. The university-wide program goals and outcomes align with program-specific goals and outcomes which are calibrated with the university's mission. At the graduate level, AUA has underscored its commitment to environmental awareness through a university-wide requirement reflected in all graduate degrees. As the graduate programs cycle through the academic program reviews, they are bringing their existing program goals and student learning outcomes into alignment with those applicable university-wide.

Annual Student Learning Assessment—including assessment of Capstone experiences, cyclical Academic Program Reviews and ongoing surveys (alumni, employer, graduate exit) all aim to provide evidence upon which the university and its degree programs can evaluate the quality and integrity of the degrees and assure their meaningfulness for students as they pursue their career goals and further education.

Moving forward AUA will need to enhance these processes to further articulate the meaning, quality, and integrity of its degrees through comprehensive and coherent analysis of its mission and degree programs.

4. *Student Success: Student Learning, Retention, and Graduation.* As discussed in Sections 4.2 and 4.3. above, AUA has increased its data collection and reporting capacity, places high priority on student success and continues to enhance its ability to monitor student learning, retention and graduation through more detailed data collection and analysis. In order to keep abreast of developments, the OAA, IRO and faculty have attended ARC conferences and the university plans to increase its participation.

5. *Quality Assurance and Improvement: Program Review; Assessment; Use of Data and Evidence.* As discussed in Sections 3 and 4 above, AUA has devoted significant time, resources and energy to enhancing and institutionalizing evidence-based academic program reviews and assessment and gathering and disseminating the data necessary to perform these activities effectively. The Academic Program Review Guidelines were fully revised and updated to align the process with current good practices and the IRO and OAA provide expanded support to programs under review in the form of



comprehensive data packets designed to facilitate review and ongoing consultation on assessment methods. These innovations will require ongoing adjustments and resources as the university grows.

6. *Sustainability: Financial Viability; Preparing for the Changing Higher Educational Environment.*  
As discussed in Section 7 Question 5 below, AUA has made progress toward financial sustainability through increased tuition revenues, growth of the endowment, and streamlining and scalability of its institutional structures. As part of its growth strategy, the university engaged in a broad and inclusive strategic planning process that took into account national and international trends. The university established an Office of Institutional Advancement and is contemplating a significant capital campaign in connection with the upcoming 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the university's founding in 2016. The university's strategic thinking has been informed by its increased engagement in WSCUC conferences and workshops, its active involvement with Armenia's national accreditation board, and participation in several European and regional initiatives aiming to support innovation and modernization of higher education. These have led to a greater awareness and discussion on campus of the new opportunities, challenges and global trends in higher education.



## 7. Response to the CPR Review Recommendations and Progress Report Comments

### *Specific Recommendations from the July 10, 2012, Commission Letter*

During the CPR review WASC made six specific recommendations as set forth in the July 10, 2012, Commission Letter. AUA put these high on its agenda and has taken steps to address all of them. Similarly, a number of suggestions were made during the CPR Site Visit Team wrap-up session. These, along with items noted in the Site Visit report were extensively discussed, prioritized and addressed. As the suggestions overlapped with recommendations in many cases, updates on the suggestions are integrated in the report and responses below.

1. *Refining assessment practices and institutionalizing staffing and resources for educational effectiveness. Greater consistency is needed in AUA's assessment efforts to address the shortfalls in practice, noted above. In addition, the Commission recommends that AUA look at assessment results from an institutional perspective. As the team observed, by "aggregating and evaluating the meaning of program-level assessment results at the institutional level," AUA can determine its progress in achieving its mission and can use the information "for institutional planning and decision making." To ensure that AUA gathers, analyzes, and interprets data that can be used to improve educational effectiveness, the Commission expects to see robust, institutionalized, stable, and adequately funded assessment and institutional research capabilities by the time of the next visit. Further, the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER) team will expect to see evidence of student learning and the results and findings from assessment. (CFRs 2.3, 2.6, 2.10)*

*Accomplishments:* By selecting "Institutionalizing Student Learning Assessment" as an accreditation theme in 2010, AUA recognized the challenges it faced in this area and prioritized student learning assessment awareness and resources. As noted in Sections 2.1 and 4.2 above, the university enhanced and up-graded its institutional capacity and practices, including the creation of a cross-program committee of the Faculty Senate (the Student Learning Committee), the establishment of the Office of Assessment and Accreditation with a Director, 30% expansion of the Office of Institutional Research (with further expansion anticipated in July 2014), training for existing faculty, hiring of new faculty and staff with institutional assessment in mind, improved reporting and monitoring through various webpages, and more frequent attention to student learning assessment at faculty and administration meetings.

*Looking ahead:* Work remains to be done at both the program and institutional levels. Although all programs have devoted attention to student learning assessment, some programs, e.g., MBA, still have gaps in assessment systems and lag in annual student learning assessment due to absence of full-time resident leadership and being short staffed. Academic support units are scheduled to undertake program reviews, but have not done so yet, as explained in Sections 3.6.2 and 4.1 above.

2. *Implementing the new undergraduate degree programs. AUA has been authorized by the Commission to offer three undergraduate degree programs, beginning in Fall 2013, based on the strides the university has made identifying faculty, putting in place an organizational structure, developing educational plans, and budgeting appropriate resources. The Commission expects AUA to report on the progress of its undergraduate programs as part of its self-study in preparation for the Educational Effectiveness Review (EER), paying particular attention to the development of the general education program, including student learning outcomes and appropriate assessment*

*strategies. In developing the undergraduate degree, the university should be mindful of the upcoming revisions to the WASC Standards and processes that will place a greater emphasis on the quality and integrity of the degree and will require evidence of learning in the core competencies set forth in CFR 2.2a, in particular written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, information literacy and quantitative reasoning. (CFRs 2.2a, 2.3, 2.6)*

*Accomplishments:* The undergraduate program successfully completed its first year of operation and is admitting its second cohort for fall 2014. This effort has been supported by a new Associate Dean of General Education, a new General Education Committee, the development of a seven-year student learning assessment plan (which is already underway) which in its first years focuses on several of the core competencies and General Education as described in the April 2013 Progress Report and presented throughout the EER, in particular Sections 2.1.6., 2.1.7., 3.6.1., 4.4., 4.5., and 5 above.

*Looking Ahead:* As its substantive change proposals and degree design was developed prior to the new WSCUC standards, AUA will need to adjust its assessment and data collection parameters and processes accordingly. Because of constraints on staff and resources and the demands of launching the new undergraduate program, the new standards have only just begun to be discussed on campus. As far as core competencies, lacking traditional lab science facilities, assuring sufficient variety and depth of quantitative reasoning courses remains a challenge. The General Education Committee and its Quantitative Sciences Subcommittee and Associate Dean for General Education are working to address this in collaboration with the College of Science & Engineering, School of Public Health and Acopian Center for the Environment, and the faculty quality teaching quantitative sub-disciplines in the social sciences.

- 3. Promoting student success. The Commission expects AUA to complete work on a set of institutional objectives for student learning and develop a clear set of objectives for student success. In terms of student achievement, AUA's current three-year graduation rate of over 80% is "impressive for a relatively new institution." However, the team observed, and the Commission concurs that AUA would benefit from more detailed analyses that disaggregate graduation rates and time-to-degree data by variables important to the mission of the university. The Commission was pleased to hear from you about planned initiatives for more detailed data analysis. By examining disaggregated data, the university could identify performance gaps among various subpopulations, seek to understand any disparities, and develop and implement strategies to raise the rates in areas identified as needing improvement. In addition, the Commission expects AUA to use comparative data from other institutions to contextualize and understand its graduation and retention rates and related patterns. The commission also expects the university to routinely monitor aggregated and disaggregated retention and graduation rates for its new undergraduate degree programs, as those data become available. (CFRs 2.6, 2.10, 4.4)*

*Accomplishments:* As explained in 2.6.1., 4.1., 4.3., AUA developed university-wide program goals and student learning outcomes at the undergraduate level and is gradually integrating them at the graduate level in conjunction with the 2012-2017 academic program review cycle. At both the graduate and undergraduate levels, the university has made a commitment to assisting students to realize their goals for further education and career advancement through among other means the establishment of the Center for Student Success (see Section 2.2.10., 4.1., and 4.5., above). For the undergraduate program, it is too soon to draw conclusions.

As discussed in Section 4.3., the IRO compiles and reports Graduation and Retention Rates disaggregated by program, gender, and citizenship, and efforts are under way to further refine rates by time to degree and disaggregate rates by geographic area within the Republic of Armenia.

*Looking ahead:* Finding appropriate comparative data for retention and graduation rates has been a challenge especially for the graduate level and at the undergraduate level at AUA it is too soon for data to be available. Looking forward, three benchmark groups have been considered: (1) other Armenian universities, (2) US universities (particularly WSCUC accredited), and (3) other US-accredited universities abroad. Each group differs from AUA in a significant way.

For example, the American University of Bulgaria reports a 98% first year retention rate and an 89% six-year graduation rate for undergraduate; however it should be noted that American University of Bulgaria phased out mandatory military conscription in 2007 while Armenia continues to have universal male conscription. The California State system, which has similar admission standards to AUA, reports a 79.3% first year retention rate and a 51% six year graduation rate for the undergraduate program; however once again there are significant differences between the AUA and Cal State contexts. The OECD study, covering a range of developing and developed countries from around the world including a number of Eastern European countries similar to Armenia, reports an average graduation rate of 70% without specifying time to degree; however these numbers do not provide demographic data. Another source of data that AUA is exploring is the Council of Graduate Schools statistics and reports, which provide benchmarks for gauging AUA's performance at the graduate level.

4. *Reviewing academic support and student service programs. AUA's academic program review process "has been largely successful." However, the university has not yet undertaken systematic reviews of its co-curricular programs although it does collect student satisfaction data. Putting in place mechanisms for the routine evaluation of its academic support and student services will be particularly important as AUA begins its undergraduate degree programs. The Commission expects AUA to have a plan for evaluating co-curricular programs, with a timeline, guidelines, and a process, by the time of the EER. (CFRs 2.11, 2.13)*

*Accomplishments:* As described in Section 3.6.2. above, guidelines and a schedule for periodic review of academic support units have been developed.

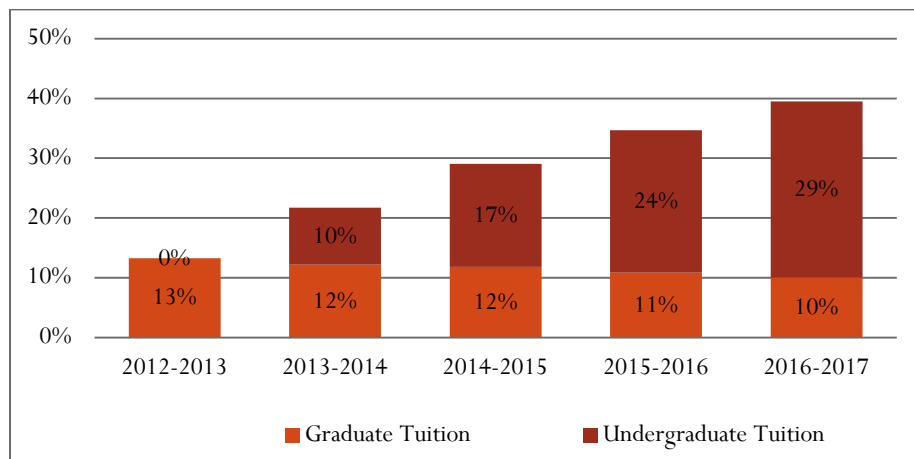
*Looking ahead:* Although routine management oversight and performance monitoring has been taking place and the guidelines and schedule are now in place, none of the academic support units have yet completed annual reviews. Despite the competing demands on academic support unit time and resources due to the undergraduate program ramp-up, AUA will need to make this a priority to assure quality and make timely adjustments and improvements in services.

5. *Strengthening the institution's financial position and capacity. AUA is dependent upon philanthropy and endowment earnings to balance its budget. Only 15% of AUA's revenue is derived from tuition. Given the unpredictability of fundraising and the challenges of the global financial crisis, the Commission expects continuous, ongoing, disciplined attention to financial operations and advancement, "while providing the resources necessary for institutional growth and development."*

*The Commission also expects to see multiyear faculty contracts in place by the time of the next visit. (CFRs 3.2, 3.3, 3.5)*

The University's financial position, as reflected in its audit reports, has been stable, but still highly dependent on large annual contributions from a few strong supporters of the university. The portion of revenue from tuition is growing with the introduction of the undergraduate program and by 2017 is targeted to reach nearly 30%, roughly doubling the institution's historic average, as shown in the chart below.

**TUITION REVENUE: as percentage of total budget increases by a factor of three**



The University hired its first full time Vice President of Institutional Advancement in April 2012 and has devoted more staff and resources to promotion of the university and outreach to potential donors, resulting in some diversification of donors. Recently to improve efficiency and more focus on development in the United States, the Office of Institutional Advancement was divided by functions into a Communications Office and a Development Office with resident directors in Armenia and the US respectively. In 2014, through targeted solicitation, the university attracted significant donations to its endowment. Overall, the endowment fund has increased 30% since 2007. With the university's 25th anniversary approaching in 2016, a capital campaign is under consideration. Alumni giving has also begun, with the first graduating class making a significant donation at its 20th reunion in 2013.

In 2012 the university embarked on the first cycle of two-year faculty contracts. Currently 13 faculty members (12% of all faculty and 43% of full time) have multiyear contracts, fostering greater stability and providing more predictability for budgeting and academic planning. In addition, as noted in Section 2.2.1 above, 21% of faculty have been with AUA for at least five years, and a number of three-year contracts for core faculty are expected to be issued for 2014-2015.

Although the university overall is expanding, various steps have been taken to streamline administration, including the creation of the college/school structure, which has reduced the number of deans and associate deans by more than half, while establishing a more collegial program chair structure within each degree program, focusing more on teaching and research and less on administration.

6. *Ensuring consistency of credit hour information. As AUA transitions to a semester system in Fall 2012, the university will need to conduct an analysis of its syllabi to verify that each course complies with WASC policy on the credit hour, and that procedures are established for the periodic review of credit hour assignments to ensure that they are accurate and reliable. (CFRs 1.9, 2.2, and Policy on Credit Hour)*

*Accomplishments:* As discussed in Section 3.3.3. and in Attachments 3.3.3.a. and 3.3.3.b., AUA's credit hour policy was already in compliance with federal standards, and with the transition to the semester system the university has implemented comprehensive credit hour monitoring procedures.

*Looking ahead:* In coming years, some of the graduate programs may require non-standard (evening and modular) schedules to accommodate the growing needs of working students and the availability of specialized faculty. In addition, as the number of courses grows in the undergraduate program, credit hour monitoring will become more complex. Both will require additional resources including appropriate UMS capabilities for scheduling and tracking.

7. *Response to Progress Report Comments dated June 6, 2014*

The above-referenced Comments include a request for an update on the status of the assessment plans for General Education and undergraduate majors. As noted in Section 3.6.1. above, a seven-year student learning assessment calendar is in place and the first phase is underway. In Year 0, in preparation for the launch of the undergraduate program, the university built capacity for undergraduate assessment through workshops and trainings as well as individual mentorship of General Education instructional staff as further noted in Section 6.1.2. In its first year of implementation, based on course evaluations and other faculty and student feedback, the Associate Dean for General Education has held individual consultations with instructors to close the loop and address shortcomings in first-year performance. In Year 1, the undergraduate programs are investigating Student Preparedness for English as the Language of Instruction, part of which has been completed (data collection: student surveys and faculty focus groups) with the balance (including analysis and recommendations) to be undertaken in the fall term. [CFRs 1.9, 3.4]