Report

of the Qualitative Research to Support
the Strategic Planning of American University of Armenia

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Contents

Research Methodology

The Turpanjian Center for Policy Analysis (TCPA) at the American University of Armenia (AUA) has conducted research to support the development of the new strategic plan of AUA. Research methods included qualitative data collection techniques, namely focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with the following target groups: AUA alumni, parents and teachers of potential AUA applicants, high school administrators, and leading employers from five sectors including public, private, international non-governmental organizations (NGO), local NGOs and foreign agencies. See Table 1 for the basic descriptors of qualitative data. See the composition of focus group discussions and interviews in Table 2. The discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis. The data was collected during months of October and November 2015. The analysis was completed on January 27 2016. Focus group and interview guides were developed for each target group (see Appendices Appendix 4, Appendix 5, Appendix 6, Appendix 7). The guides included open-ended questions, which were clustered into following categories regarding AUA:

1. General perception
2. Academics
3. Finances
4. Social life and networks
5. Facilities
6. Career
7. Summative questions

Questions in each category were indexed (see **Error! Reference source not found.**) and coded for urther data analysis using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software.

Table 1 Qualitative data basic descriptors

Average	
1. Number of focus group participants	7
2. Age of focus group participants	36
3. Length of focus group discussion	1h 37m
4. Length of interview	35m

Table 2 Composition of focus groups and interviews

Composition	Number
1. Focus group with AUA alumni	3
2. Focus group with teachers and parents	1
3. Focus group with high school administrators	1
4. Interviews with employers	10

General Selection Strategy

The target groups for primary data collection consisted of four groups: AUA alumni (three focus groups), high school parents and teachers (one mixed group), high school administration (one focus group), and employers (ten interviews with representatives of private and public sectors, local and international NGOs, foreign agencies).

Alumni Selection Strategy

The database of alumni was provided by the Alumni Relations office. Overall number of AUA alumni graduates during years of 1993 to 2015 and permanently living (residing) in Armenia (by October 2015) is 1,928. The alumni list (sorted by the graduation year) was divided into three roughly equal groups, with the year of graduation as a cutoff, thus creating the following ranges: a) 1993 – 2004, b) 2005 – 2011, and c) 2012 – 2015. From each of those groups ten participants were selected, aiming at maximizing diversity. The criteria for selection of the participants included gender, year of graduation, and program. The principle of selection was the maintenance of gender balance and variety of programs from different years. The specific procedure for selecting the ten participants for each focus group discussion was the following: the first person was selected randomly (using an online random number generator www.random.org). Each next person was also selected randomly, unless there was a duplication of an already selected program or year of graduation (for example, if a randomly selected person number three was a graduate of MBA, but there already was a graduate of MBA among the first two selected, the MBA candidate was replaced by someone from a program not yet included in the selection).

Selection of Teachers and Parents

Two-staged selection was conducted for this focus group: the selection of high schools and recruitment of participants (teachers and parents) from schools with a big number of applicants to AUA, and high schools with no applicant or one applicant to AUA.

Stage one: selection of high schools

The list of high schools of AUA applicants was requested from the AUA Admission office. The purposive sample was selected from the list of high schools located in Yerevan and with the biggest number of applicants to AUA. The number of applicants (not less than ten) was selected from the top six schools (see Appendix 3).

In addition, and in order to have a variety of opinions about AUA, six high schools with one or no applicant to AUA were selected. The selection was done from the same district as the first group of high schools. In case when there was no school with corresponding criteria in the district, the nearest district was considered. Thus, the participant schools were selected in pairs from the same district (or from the nearest district): one with applicants and one with no applicants.

Stage two: recruitment of parents and teachers from selected high schools

One parent and one teacher of a pupil in the graduating class were selected from each high school (see Appendix 3) to participate in the discussion. The number of focus group participants was eight, with four coming from applicant schools and four from non-applicant high schools. A total of four parents and four teachers participated in the discussion.

Recruitment of High School Administrators

With similar logic applied for the selection of schools, four administrators (principals) were selected from top six applicant high schools and four from high schools with no applicants located in the same district as the first group of schools.

Selection of Employers

The list of employers of AUA alumni was provided by the AUA Alumni Career Development Office (ACDO). The list of employers was grouped into five categories including private sector, public sector, local NGOs, international NGOs and foreign agencies. The purposive sample was selected taking into consideration the number of AUA alumni employees (more than four) working in organizations. In this manner, the interviews were conducted with representatives of AUA alumni leading employers (see Appendix 6). The interviewees were the immediate supervisors of the alumni.

Findings

1. General perception and image of AUA

Overall, the respondents have positive attitude towards AUA. It is perceived as a leading and prestigious university in Armenia, known as an institution with advanced academic and cultural environment and integrity. Among strengths of AUA, the features were mentioned such as being challenging and free from any type of political and other pressures, having high standards of education, developing students' freedom of both thought and speech, as well as being positively different from other higher education institutions. Many respondents think that AUA is the best educational institution existing in Armenia nowadays. It is a role model for local universities. Among other advantages, such as the policy on penalizing plagiarism and AUA's emphasis on the development of critical thinking were mentioned.

While talking about AUA weak sides, the respondents (employers, school administrators, and alumni) often mentioned that recently AUA has become more accessible for every applicant. A frequently mentioned wording used was *"It is not as good as it was before"* (referring to the period of its establishment). This tendency may endanger AUA's status of a high standard university. According to participants, AUA remains in rather stable good condition, however it does not improve and develop its activity.

In alumni and school administrators' opinion, it has now become easier to study at AUA than it was before. There is a tendency to adjust programs and admission criteria to local reality. Once admitted to AUA, students are sure they will graduate without putting much effort in their studies. For many students AUA becomes a jumping-board to study abroad, thus AUA indirectly stimulates brain drain, which is not desirable for Armenia today.

Different opinions were heard about AUA's role and contribution in Armenia. Apart from setting high standards of education and being a role model, it also serves as a *"business card"* of higher educational institutions in Armenia on international level, brings new level and quality of academic methods. The words, most frequently associated with AUA include quality, internal culture, integrity, hope, light, networking (of students and faculty), future, hard work, challenge, academic values, flexibility, inspiring, and leading.

1.2 Admission procedure and requirements

According to teachers, high school administration and potential students, AUA admission criteria are very fuzzy, more precisely, the potential applicants cannot define the reason why they have not succeeded to enter AUA (which criteria were missing or insufficient for admission).

The participants often referred to admission exams as *"unfair"*, stating that well prepared candidates received same scores as others (allowing a possibility of thinking that others might have known the correct answers in advance). Therefore, the exams gave the impression of being unfair. The respondents stated that more clarity and transparency in admission criteria is needed. The parents expressed their discontent about information provision during the recent open house. The lack of proper translation and lack of detailed presentation of tuition fee related topics made them feel restricted and confused. Since parents of the candidates are often the ones to pay the tuition, they are more likely to be present at open houses with their children. The lack of Armenian language flyers and materials creates fuzziness and gaps of information on admission and financial procedures. Participants agreed that exams were at a reasonable level of difficulty for their pupils and children.

1.2 General criteria on university choice

According to teacher and parent respondents and high school administrators, the first and the foremost criterion for choosing a university is the profession the students wish to pursue. The choice of profession is made before joining high school. As the teachers and school administrators mostly stated, professions of parents and family members have a great impact on children's choice of career, and they have a tendency to continue the traditions of the family.

Knowledge and abilities of a student is also a criterion for recommending a university. Teachers and parents take into account the depth of knowledge and educational abilities of a student and the preparedness to apply to a certain department and university. The results show that the profession plays a decisive role in university choice, as students orient according to program availability at a given university rather than university choice itself.

Nevertheless, there were factors directly affecting potential pupils' university choice. These include personal contacts with the representatives of certain universities. The respondents agreed that posters and advertising material of university programs do not have as much influence as live presentations at schools by representatives or alumni of universities.

1.3 Recommendations to choose AUA

Teachers and parents as well as school administrator consider AUA as a good starting point for their children and students' career. In case of availability of a program at AUA and at other universities in Armenia, parents and teachers would consider AUA as an option of priority. The reason is that in their opinion: *"AUA will provide education of a good quality"*. Apart from this, AUA sets high requirements for students, which, in their opinion, is the guarantee for good academic standing. As to other options, French University and Polytechnic University (for technical program applicants) were mentioned.

Referring to the choice between AUA and foreign universities, teachers and school administrators stated that they would abstain from giving advice on this matter to a student as it is a big responsibility for them, while parents named a few countries (Germany, Finland or university in any other European country, United Arab Emirates) as alternative to AUA. The restricted number of departments at AUA was mentioned as a disadvantage and a factor hindering applicants' choice to select it.

1.4 AUA student characteristics and transition to American classroom

Throughout interviews and focus group discussions the idea was circulating that students who apply to AUA have special characteristics different from applicants to other local universities. Among the characteristics features such as being clever, different, goal-oriented, and knowledge craving were mentioned. Quote: *"Those who study at the American University are not just random students."* (High school principal, male)

Interestingly, the opinion of alumni was different from general opinion. Many alumni mentioned having changed their perception after admission. Before entering AUA they thought students at AUA might be highly competitive in terms of their talents and knowledge, while the reality showed that AUA was accessible to students with mediocre capacity and knowledge background.

The transition from Armenian high school or from other universities to American classroom happens easily. This is explained with the fact that students are young, also flexible, thus they easily adjust to new conditions, language and teaching methods.

The alumni, in their turn, stated that at AUA they became more mature and organized. Other factors mentioned include differences in culture and requirements of professors, interpersonal relations between students and their lecturers (i.e. calling professors by name,

discussing topics openly, and doing individual work). These have changed essentially the mentality of students, making them more self-confident. Some alumni said that AUA changed their behavior: they became more sociable and open to different ideas. As for study-related workload, it was heavy but feasible to overcome, according to alumni.

2. Academics

Alumni expressed their critical opinion about AUA academics. In their opinion, the obvious advantages of AUA academic part are the methods of teaching and the faculty, while weak sides are poor English of certain lecturers and limited number of foreign professors and guest lecturers at departments.

Group works are considered as the most effective, memorable, practical and motivating part of academic methods. In addition, discussions and presentations were effective and involving for the alumni during their education at AUA. These methods were highly appreciated. They are considered as an advantage compared to local universities' methods of teaching, characterized as restricted to dictating of materials from books.

The alumni also have spoken with admiration about the faculty (remembering the names of their professors) and especially about foreign professors from popular universities abroad who had practical experience in their fields and worked at international organizations. Often times, the attitude towards AUA was quite personalized (i.e. the department was good because a certain person was chairing etc.).

As for the weaknesses, it was often mentioned that the classes of several lecturers were hard to digest. According to alumni, the reasons behind that were the grammatical mistakes and poor English of several local professors. Another weakness mentioned throughout discussions was the low number of foreign guest lecturers at departments.

The alumni of 1995-2005 recalled their AUA years with admiration and with sense of nostalgia, but they often described their AUA experience as very hard and intensive, referring to the workload of assignments and pressure of deadlines. One of the alumni expressed it in the following wording: *"Sometimes I thought I will not see the day to throw my cap in the air. But we all reached that day."* (MBA alumna, 2001)

The graduates of 2005-2011 put the emphasis on some changes faced during their education (i.e. faculty staff and tuition fee changes). They highlighted that they were highly satisfied by quality of their education, but at the same time they were not sure if the quality

would be sustained after those changes. The alumni of 2011-2015 mentioned that the workload was feasible and mostly emphasized the poor quality of English of Armenian tutors and small number of foreign lecturers teaching.

The alumni of CIS and MBA departments had comments about admission without proper consideration of applicants' background. For example, the CIS students without technical background had unpleasant and stressful experience during first months of their study at AUA. They felt disadvantaged compared to the classmates with technical backgrounds. As a result, they either failed or had very low grades. The alumni of MBA department who came to AUA with no work experience stressed that the previous requirement to have a work experience was reasonable. They explained that application of theory to practice incurs problems, which would not appear if they had work experience before getting the MBA degree.

Highlights on the undergraduate program:

Few opinions were voiced regarding the undergraduate programs. The high school principals expressed that they had big expectations in relation to the launch of undergraduate programs at AUA. They expected that undergraduate programs would be very different from other universities' programs in terms of quality and courses. However, the launch of bachelor's degree *"did not shake"* the educational system tremendously. Based on their former pupils' (now AUA undergraduate students) opinion, the study is too easy for them and they have lots of spare time out of classes. This fact seemed as disappointing to high school principals.

3. Finances and Tuition Fee

According to potential applicants' parents and teachers, as well as alumni and school administrators the tuition fee is a hard load for Armenian residents, considering the economic condition of the country and low wages. It is hardly affordable and expensive for some parents and students; several alumni had to work to pay their tuition fee at AUA.

Nevertheless, many participants admitted that it is natural to pay high fees for high quality education. The tuition was considered expensive but reasonable. In the words of an alumna: *"...the fee that you pay and what you receive actually... the facilities, networks, everything. It is justified for me."* (MBA, 2015)

Many alumni agreed that in terms of contribution to career, the tuition fee is justified. In addition, financial aid opportunity is a big help to students and makes the financial burden of tuition easier.

3.1 Financial aid

Provision of the need-based financial aid is considered unfair according to focus group participants (teachers, parents, school administrators and AUA alumni). The alumni remembered many cases when their classmates with good academic standing and high GPA scores did not receive financial aid. On the contrary, those who had low GPA scores and did not put much effort in their studies received financial aid.

This inequality was disappointing for many students and had negative impact on interpersonal relations between students. One alumna recalled when her classmates became antagonistic towards one student with low grades who received high percent of financial aid from university. In their opinion, students with high GPA scores should be prioritized and motivated by financial aid; otherwise, it is frustrating for students with good academic standing.

According to teachers and school administrators, the principle of need-based financial aid will provoke the loss of talented students: firstly, on the stage of admission and secondly, after becoming AUA student. They think that the priority for financial support should be given to students with good academic standing (for example, champions of Olympiads).

The opinions diverged among alumni and other participants (teachers, parents, school administrators). The latter did not have enough information, or the procedure on financial aid opportunities is not clear to them (also during open houses). This hinders their applying to AUA as they think that they will not be able to afford the tuition. As for alumni, they were satisfied by flexibility of financial aid opportunities. Even a small percent of discount was remembered with gratitude.

3.2 Alumni Endowment fund

All alumni either had their contribution to the Alumni Endowment fund or expressed their wish to have their input in the future. Concerning the areas of fund expenditure, most of the participants said they would like it to support talented students who cannot afford tuition, in other words, to provide financial aid and scholarships to students. By saying so, they explained that education is the most important way of contribution, and it will change the life of students in future, as they will become good professionals in their chosen fields. Other suggestions were all

related to raising the image of AUA. For this purpose participants mentioned invitation of foreign lecturers, support to AUA research centers and to give opportunity to students to have a practical experience in research. Most of the respondents were confident in trusting AUA with the usage of their funds.

4. Social Life and AUA Community, Student Networks

The alumni reflected on their student life, which was organized completely by themselves. Due to loaded schedule, most of the students did not take part in workshops and cultural events at AUA. According to them, student clubs and cultural events would be interesting for undergraduate students, while for graduate students it has little importance. Most of them referred to the lack of time due to the workload, assignments or family. Several graduates of 2005-2007 could not remember any club events except for the movie club.

As for events, several alumni mentioned the football match played between students and professors. This was a memorable experience for alumni and they considered it as an effective way for spirit building among students and faculty. Alumni told that there was not much chance to interact and socialize with students from other departments since they had different schedules of programs.

The question about social and student life at AUA was mostly associated with the time spent with classmates: gatherings at student lounge, discussions and interactions at the library, organizing activities and games in the classroom, studying together at university until late hours etc. The alumni focus groups participants shared that studying at AUA had also expanded their networks. They have built their networks with professors and guest lecturers. Moreover, up until present they interact with their classmates and professors. Many of alumni stressed that they met their best friends at AUA, thus acquiring not only knowledge and degree at AUA, but also friends for life.

According to parents, teachers and school administrators, AUA social and student life is interesting and active. Their perception was based on opinion of their friends and other alumni. The fact of healthy and good environment at AUA inclines them to advise it to their children or other students. Yet, the availability of a program and specialization was set as a priority.

5. Facilities

The first impression in relation to AUA often referred to facilities and good conditions inside of the building. The Papazian library is the most frequently mentioned among AUA facilities. The alumni expressed their content about full-equipped classrooms, laboratories and possibility to access internet. AUA is very welcoming: it is open 24 hours and everything is designed to create an appropriate academic environment for students. The provision of electronic versions of documents, books and other learning materials, as well as availability of laboratories were considered as an advantage.

The only discontent concerned the lack of enough space at the library (i.e. permanently reserved discussion rooms and not enough desks) and at laboratories. This was explained with the launch of the undergraduate programs and the increasing number of students.

For some teachers, parents and school administrators' good conditions of facilities would be an additional reason to recommend a study at AUA, while for others the specialization would be more important than comfortable and modern facilities of university.

6. Career and Post-AUA Life

According to respondents, AUA is a good starting point for the applicants. Most of the alumni applied to AUA with expectation to find a well-paid job and to change their specialization. In their words, AUA was an important and useful contribution to their career. The alumni often mentioned that they acquired studying culture, work style and necessary skills rather than knowledge. One of the first AUA alumni mentioned that before joining AUA, her classmates did not even have basic computer skills, but today they work at international organizations occupying high positions.

For some alumni, AUA was a transition from one profession to another. Before entering, they believed that AUA would give them new opportunities for career growth. According to many, two years spent at AUA had paid off their further career. One of the participants described it in the following words: *"Entering AUA was my right decision."* (Electrical Engineering Alumna, 1996)

Although, several participants acknowledged that they were employed on good positions or had salary raise (thanks to AUA degree), others thought that AUA degree decreased their chances to be employed. For some employers, AUA degree means a demand of a high salary.

Therefore, potential employers dismiss candidacies of AUA applicants considering them too demanding and arrogant.

6.1 Metrics for valuating AUA degree

The question regarding the valuation of AUA degree was the most difficult for alumni and for employers. While alumni tried to express their opinions in different words, most of the employers were reluctant to answer this question or simply requested to skip it.

Alumni did not stick to certain metrics, but mostly called their degree a useful contribution to their career and life, skills and cultural values they acquired during education, benefits acquired after graduation. As for monetary valuation of degree, some named random numbers from five thousand to one million Armenian drams (noting however that it is just a random number and not counted properly). Others mentioned that their degree was worth as much as the cost of their tuition.

As was mentioned above, employers were reluctant to answer this question and to give certain value to the degree of their employees. They were more inclined to talk about their general skills and competencies rather than link their talents to having an AUA degree. As for any metrics, the answers were limited to definition of AUA alumni as clever and responsible, prospective employees with good potential.

6.2 Recruitment preferences

Although employers do not exclude the possibility of hiring interns from AUA, they see several difficulties for organizing a proper internship. As it was stated, hiring interns is resource intensive and time consuming. It takes time to coach an intern and to guide the tasks and assignments. Besides, according to the existing law,[1] interns should be registered as temporary employees and be rewarded at least with minimum wage, which requires availability of finances from organization. In addition, the employers pay much attention to assignments given to interns and do not want them to be just a formality. There were also respondents who never had an intern at their institution and did not consider hiring one in the near future.

Although employers have positive opinion about AUA alumni, they take into account the experience and skills of the candidate rather than his/her diploma or degree. The respondents named the position of administrative assistant for the newly undergraduates. As their practice showed, the holders of graduate degrees from AUA lose their motivation in lower positions: they

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[1] The Armenian Labor Code, Article 102 , available at www.parliament.am

either ask for promotion, or quit the job. The only criteria for promotion or for raising employee's salary are the performance and merits. Having degree from AUA does not anyhow impact employers' decision.

Many cases to support an employee to become an AUA student were mentioned. By "*support*", the respondents meant providing flexible work hours without decrease in the salary. None of the respondents have ever provided or plan to support their employees with financial aid for covering tuition fee (neither fully nor partially).

6.3 AUA alumni employees and networks

The results of interviews show that there is an established stereotype about AUA alumni. Most of employers characterize AUA alumni as open-minded, creative, sociable, competitive and promising employees. In addition to these features, advantages such as good knowledge of English, advanced computer competencies, good research and writing skills, and information collection skills were mentioned. Their candidacy is very competitive: in equal conditions, they have advantage over other job applicants. The overall opinion about AUA alumni can be illustrated with a quote: *"AUA alumni employees are different. It is obvious that they come with their values, ideas and their own mentality."*(Employer, private sector, male)

The employers were satisfied with AUA alumni: they always meet deadlines, have good time management skills and critical thinking. Nevertheless, the employers tend not to link all the talents and positive features of their employees to the fact of having an AUA degree. Some employers highly praised communication and presentation skills of their employees, while others expressed discontent and marked it as a weakness.

Among other frequently repeated weaknesses, arrogance and an extreme self-confidence were mentioned. Employers expressed it in the following words: *"They think holding a degree from AUA should mean something by default."* Also, *"Yes they have good background and have right to demand high salary, but they should understand that it is not always possible in Armenia".* (Employer, International NGO, female)

In comparison to other employees, AUA alumni have broad networks and good relations with current and former colleagues and classmates, which is helpful for organizations' activity. In the opinion of employers, AUA alumni are flexible in building networks and it helps in making their work easy (i.e. have professional advice, find necessary information etc.).

7. Extension Program and Beneficial Courses

Employers think that courses offered by AUA Extension program are too expensive. Thus, institutions need to provide certain amounts from their budget for their employees to attend additional courses, which is not always possible. Moreover, low number of employees in similar positions would not justify the expenses made for their training. Several employers referred to the lack of time that employees have to participate in courses organized by the Extension office. Others stated that several trainings are conducted within their organization free of charge. Some respondents agreed that trainings are good occasions for improving the effectiveness of the staff, but at the same time, they found it hard to measure the benefits from courses.

Nevertheless, the respondents named several courses that might interest their organizations in the future. They named courses on development of communication and advocacy skills, time and project management, leadership, team building and so on. Some also expressed their wish to receive offers of courses specifically designed according to organizational needs.

8. Recommendations by Participants

The participants shared their opinions on development areas of AUA. The main areas that require attention are as follows: academic standards, image of AUA, and cooperation with educational institutions.

According to respondents, AUA should keep and improve its status among higher educational institutions, work strategically to improve the quality of education and image of AUA. The expectations of the respondents also included importance of seeing AUA free from political pressures, educating open-minded generation, and having more qualified alumni.

The most frequently mentioned recommendations are presented below:

- Set high standards of education and more strict requirements for admission. Several respondents advised not to avoid expulsion of the students with very low grades and failures.
- Cooperate with other educational institutions.
- Set a long-term goal of alignment with top universities, in order to become one of the best universities in the world.

Some other recommendations include:

- Keep networking with alumni, and invite them to deliver speeches during commencement ceremonies.

- Have a clear ratio of foreign and local lecturers at departments.
- Support students to have their internships at international organizations abroad.

Cooperation format with high schools

In terms of AUA cooperation with high schools, the principals suggested to invite the high school members and pupils to the events, as well as get them involved into admission procedures. They also considered having representatives of AUA programs at high schools, in order to guide the pupils in admission procedures and details of the programs. The overwhelming majority of high school principals stated that cooperation will be more effective if AUA representatives directly interact with potential applicants: engage them into activities (for example, sports/culture, presentations), by making AUA more open to youth.

9. Recommendations

- **Consider conducting surveys among potential applicants to compile a list of AUA competitors**. (scenario 1) A relatively easy but imperfect approach is to incorporate a question on *other universities applied to* in the application package. This will give AUA some idea about other places considered by our applicants. The downside of this approach is that it will give us no information about those who do not even apply to AUA. (scenario 2) A more comprehensive approach is to conduct a systematic survey among the last year high-school students. This will be the best way to obtain a realistic list of AUA competitors.

- **Conduct focus groups with program representatives and alumni in order to define concrete needs of each department.** The research showed that alumni's opinions mostly derived from the perception of their own program specificities. Same can be stated about employers. Since AUA alumni belong to different programs and have different backgrounds, employers' opinion refer to certain sphere of specialization and related skills of their AUA alumni employees.

- **Use the power of the alumni** and their success stories during strategic events of AUA (i.e. promotional tours, commencement ceremonies, presentations at high schools).

10.   Additional Notes

- **Lack of AUA promotional materials in Armenian language**. In preparation to focus-groups with teachers and parents we contacted the Admission office to request the Armenian language flyers, or other promotional material. It turned out that there are no up-to-date promotional materials in Armenian language. The lack of materials in Armenian language made focus-group participants feel excluded and unable to fully participate in their pupil/child's decision to choose a university. We have noticed the same pattern during the most recent undergraduate open house. We felt it was important to bring this issue up for discussion.

- **Potential importance of learning the perspectives and attitudes of applicants from Diaspora.** There is no way for us at TCPA to gauge attitudes and perceptions of potential applicants outside of Armenia (they are likely to be a very different group). Promotional tours organized by admissions are a perfect platform to organize data collection. Focus groups with Diaspora Armenian prospective applicants could be organized during the promotion tours. *What would attract them to come to AUA? What holds them back?* and similar questions could be discussed.

Appendix 1: Indexing scheme

1. **Perception of AUA**
   - Strengths
     (a) Image A
     (b) Associated words
   - Weaknesses
   (a) Image
   (b) Associated words

2. **Recommendation to child/pupil to study at AUA**
   - Yes (why?)
   - No (why?)
   - Other universities
   - Places (country, town)

3. **Academics**
   - Strengths
   - Weaknesses
   - Admission procedures and requirements
   - Transition to American classroom

4. **Facilities**
   - General information
   - Importance for making decision

5. **Social life and networks**
   - AUA community
   - Influence on advice to enter AUA
     (a) Yes (why?)
     (b) No (why?)
   - Student/ alumni networks

6. **Finances**
   - Tuition fee
   - Financial aid
   - Contribution to Alumni Endowment Fund
     (a) Yes (why?)
     (b) No (why?)

7. **Career**
   - AUA as a career starting point
   - AUA's contribution to career
   - AUA Alumni
     (a) Strength
     (b) Weaknesses

8. **Recruitment and hiring**
   - Support AUA student
   - Undergraduate/ Graduate/ Intern
     (a) Yes (why?)
     (b) No (why?)
   - Metrics for degree

9. **Extension program**
   - Benefit from courses
   - Useful courses

10. **Recommendations**
    - Areas to improve
    - Collaboration format

11. **Other remarks**
    - Interesting material
    - Quotes

Appendix 2: List of employers

1. Ayb Educational Foundation
2. Armenian Ministry of Defense
3. Armenian Ministry of Economy
4. Binder Dijker Otte & Co (BDO) Armenia Audit Company
5. Caucasus Research Resource Centers Armenia (CRRC)
6. Children of Armenia Foundation (COAF)
7. Embassy of Brazil in Armenia
8. Open Society Foundations Armenia (OSF)
9. Public Information and Need of Knowledge (PINK) NGO
10. Transparency International Armenia

Appendix 3: List of high schools

1. Academic High School
2. Ayb Educational Foundation
3. High school N189 after A. Gevorgyan
4. Lyceum after A. Shirakatsi
5. Quant Lyceum
6. Yerevan High School N97

Appendix 4: Focus group guide for AUA Alumni

General perception and image of AUA
1. What are your best memories about AUA?
2. What are your least pleasant memories about AUA?
3. What was your perception of AUA before studying and after graduating? Did it change? If so, how?
4. What are the three words in which you would describe your experience at AUA?

Academics
1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of AUA in this regard? *[Prompts: faculty, teaching, research]*

Social life and community
1. What was your social life back at AUA like? *[Probe: how important was it for you?]*

Finances
1. What is your opinion about AUA tuition fee? *[Prompt: was it affordable? Was it worth it? Does the quality of education justify the price?]*
2. How would you put a valuation on a graduate degree? *[Prompt: How would/should it be measured? What metrics?]*
3. An Alumni Endowment Fund is operating since 2013. Would you be willing to contribute? Why yes?
4. Why not? *[Prompt: If you were to donate money, then what would you want it spent upon? What are areas of need?]*

Career
1. How did AUA contribute to your career? Were you able to pursue your preferred career goals? *[Probe: Did you get what you were studying for? Did education at AUA fulfil your expectations in terms of career? Did it equip you with skills necessary for pursuing your career goal/s. Did you get a raise in salary/ a promotion/ new position within that organization, or a new position at a new organization?]*

Summative questions
1. What are the main strengths of AUA? What are the weaknesses of AUA?
2. What do you think AUA should prioritize now for its development?

Appendix 5: Focus group guide for teachers and parents

University choice
1. What would you recommend to a child/student while choosing a university? Which are the criteria for you to recommend a university to your child/student? *[Prompts: tuition fee/price/ availability of scholarship/ location/reputation/areas of specialization]*

General perception and image of AUA
1. Would you please share with us what is your perception of AUA? *[Prompt: Do you know any AUA alumni? What do you think about them?]*
2. Would you recommend your child/student to apply to AUA? If so, why yes? Why no?
3. What other universities would you recommend? Why? *[Prompts: Programs, career goals, language, cost, reputation, military deferments. Would you recommend a university abroad as an alternative? If so, where? Which universities? If your child/student is admitted, would you recommend those over AUA? Why? Why not?]*

Academics
1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of AUA in this regard? *[Prompts: faculty, teaching, research]*
2. What do you know about AUA admission/ entry requirements? What is your opinion about it? Is it easy/difficult? [*Prompt: Do your students meet the language and other requirements? Do you think that your students can make the transition to the American classroom and learning styles? If not, why?]*

Facilities
1. What do you know about AUA facilities? *[Prompt: Library, laboratories, classrooms, cafeteria, equipment]* How important do you think it is in making decision to apply to AUA?

Social life and community
1. What do you know about AUA as a community? *[Probe: Student clubs, cultural events, seminars, workshops]*
2. Would that influence your advice as a parent/teacher? If yes, why? If no, why?

Finances
1. What do you think about AUA tuition fee? *[Prompt: Do you think it is affordable? Do you think it worth it? Do you think, the quality of education will justify the price?]*
2. What do you know about opportunities of financial aid for students at AUA? What do you think about it?

Career
1. Do you think AUA is a good starting point for your child's/student's career?
Why yes? Why no? Please elaborate.

Summative questions
1. What are the main strengths of AUA? What are the weaknesses of AUA?

[Prompt: What impact is AUA having in Armenia?]

2. What do you think AUA should prioritize now for its development?
3. Please tell us three words that describe the image of AUA

Appendix 6: Focus group guide for high school administrators

University choice

1. What would you recommend to a pupil while choosing a university? Which are the criteria for you to recommend a university to your pupil? *[Prompts: tuition fee/price/ availability of scholarship/ location/reputation/areas of specialization]*

General image of AUA

1. Would you please share with us what is your perception of AUA? *[Prompt: Do you know any AUA alumni? What do you think about them? Is their education different from those from other Armenian universities? Do you think that employers or others perceive AUA alumni differently?]*
2. Is AUA different from other universities in Armenia, if so, how. Would you recommend your pupil to apply to AUA? If so, why yes? Why no?
3. *What other universities would you recommend? Why? [Prompts: Programs, career goals, language, cost, reputation, military deferments. Would you recommend a university abroad as an alternative? If so, where? Which universities? If a pupil is admitted, would you recommend those over AUA? Why? Why not?]*

Academics

1. What are the strengths and weaknesses of AUA in this regard? *[Prompts: faculty, teaching, research]*
2. What do you know about AUA admission/ entry requirements? What is your opinion about it? Is it easy/difficult? [*Prompt: Do your pupils meet the language and other requirements? Do you think that your pupils can make the transition to the American classroom and learning styles? If not, why?]*

Collaboration of institutions

1. Have you ever collaborated or do you collaborate with AUA? If yes, how? Which are the areas of collaboration. If no, why?
2. How do you image the collaboration with AUA? What is the most convenient pattern/format of collaboration, what is the most important element of collaboration?
3. What do you think university should do for collaboration with your school?

Facilities

1. What do you know about AUA facilities? How important do you think it is in making decision to apply to AUA?

Social life and community

1. What do you know about AUA as a community? *[Probe: Student clubs, seminars, workshops]*
2. Would that influence your advice? If yes, why? If no, why?

Finances

1. What do you think about AUA tuition fee? *[Prompt: Do you think it is affordable? Do you think it worth it? Do you think the quality of education justify the price?]*
2. What do you know about opportunities of financial aid for students at AUA? What do you think about it?

Career

1. Do you think AUA is a good starting point for your pupils' career? Why yes? Why no? Please elaborate.

Summative questions

1. What are the main strengths of AUA? What are the weaknesses of AUA? [Prompt: What impact is AUA having in Armenia?]
2. What do you think AUA should prioritize now for its development?
3. Please tell us three words that describe the image of AUA

Appendix 7: Interview guide for employers

Introduction, general questions, ice-breaking
1. Would you please share with us what is your perception of AUA?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of AUA as a university? *[Prompts: Critical thinking, independence, integrity, practical knowledge]*

Academics/professional
1. How satisfied are you with your AUA alumni employee? *[Prompts: What are main strengths and weaknesses?]*
2. *How many AUA alumni employees do you have under your supervision? For how long time?*
3. Do you need to train an AUA alumni employee when they start working at your organization? Are they lacking any skills, what skills? *[Prompt: application skills, experience]*
4. Is there any difference between AUA alumni employee and other employees? If there are, which are those differences? *[Prompt: Do you pay them more? Do you give them more responsible positions?]*

Finances
1. If your employee becomes an AUA student would you motivate or support him/her in any way? *[Prompts: flexible work time, financial support (covering part-all tuition fee), pay raise, promotion upon graduation]*
2. Do you know about AUA Extension? If yes, have you had employees take those courses, what were the outcomes? Do you have employees who could benefit from Extension courses? Which ones? *[Prompt: English skill courses, business-related courses]*
   Would you like the Extension to provide a course at your work site?
3. Would you be interested to hire an AUA undergraduate? For what kind of jobs? Why yes? Why no?
4. Have you, or would you be willing to have AUA students as interns? Graduate and/or undergraduate?
5. How would you put a valuation on AUA degree? *[Prompt: How would/should it be measured? What metrics?]*

Networks
1. What do you think about AUA alumni network? Has it been useful for your organization's purposes? Any specific examples?

Summative questions
1. What are the main strengths of AUA? What are the weaknesses of AUA? *[Prompt: What impact is AUA having in Armenia?]*
2. What do you think AUA should prioritize now for its development?
3. Please tell us three words that describe the image of AUA