

HOW DOES THE UNIVERSITY BRAND AFFECT  
ON STUDENT RECRUITMENT?

by

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## **Introduction**

Many people associate their future life with higher education and university degree. They choose a higher education institution and program that is the most suitable to their preferences, perceptions and needs. Most of us also might consider the prestige of an institution, and apply for a program because the institution is popular and has advantages over other universities.

American University of Armenia (AUA) is comparatively new higher education institution in Armenia; it was established in 1991. Moreover, the university has been providing the undergraduate degree for the latest four years (since 2013). Thus, the purpose of this project is to identify how to attract more students to the bachelor's degree of AUA.

Branding a higher education institution has become popular in recent years. Different higher education institutions offer the same or similar programs, and each of the institutions tries to differentiate themselves from others. A part of the research is to find out whether AUA does well to differentiate itself from other universities in Armenia or not. The answer is partially encapsulated in the statistical data such as, how many students apply for the program, or is there increase or decrease of the number of applicants year by year. On the other hand, the surveys planned to be conducted will help understand what current or prospective students of AUA think about this university. The results will show what they think this higher education institution has that other local institutions do not.

The ultimate goal of this research is to find whether branding, promotion, and communication have influence on student recruitment or not. This research is worth conducting because, as mentioned above, AUA is a comparatively new university. Research of this kind has not been done for AUA before. Moreover, AUA needs to strengthen its visibility in the market

and recruit more students.

## **Literature Review**

Choosing a higher education institution is one of the important decisions we make in our life. We want to choose the one that best suits our needs, expectations, and dreams because we associate higher education with our future life, career and success. Whereas, choosing a higher education institution is not an easy task because there are many universities providing with the same program, major and degree. That is why we do our best to choose the university that has more advantages. Besides the opportunities a university offers, we want to enter the one that is considered to be the most prestigious. But how or why a university is considered prestigious? PR and branding are the elements that shape our mind. So, this review focuses on the ways that universities use for promotion and identity of a building.

As the revised literature suggests, student experience with the university has a big role in university branding, and building a good identity. Sung M. and Yang S. U. put emphasis on the interaction between students and their university. They specifically focus on 4 key factors in their study: "1) students' communication behavior with the university, 2) perceived quality of educational experience, 3) evaluations of the relationship with the university, and 4) university reputation." The authors examine how higher education institutions manage their relationships with students and how the perception, that the students have about the university reputation, influences their intentions to support their university.

The authors of this paper, like Pinar et al, highly emphasize the importance of student-university interaction and relationship. The results they come up with show that the active communication behavior, the perception of university reputation, and the educational experience

have vital role in university identity and brand building. Throughout the whole paper Sung and Yang discuss the organization and stakeholder good relationship importance highlighting the importance of university-student relations in.

Pinar M., Trapp P., Girard T., and Boyt T. E. explore in their paper how to develop a branding strategy for higher education institutions. Meanwhile, as Sung and Yang, they have the student experience and perceptions in the center of their research and results. According to them student experience and "academic services as the core value creation" are the important elements in build a university brand. Consequently, they find that all the activities aimed at creating values are interrelated and have big role in creating a "strong university brand." The authors focus on proposing a structure, brand ecosystem, which, according to them, is the way that universities can build identity. They highlight the importance of students and their education experience in branding process. That is why Pinar et al put the students in the center of the branding ecosystem and then position other important elements around "students."

In contrast to Sung and Yang, Pinar et al discuss expectation-perception gap between students and the university: knowledge gap ("the difference between what a student expects and what the institution thinks the student expects"), standards gap ("the difference between the institution's understanding of students' expectations and the development of the service designs and standards"), delivery gap ("the difference between the development of the service designs and standards and the actual delivery of the services"), communications gap ("the difference between the delivery of the service and the institution's external communications"), and ideological gap ("the difference between designing the service towards fulfilling student's expectations and designing the service towards what the institution believes that students should experience"). In order to minimize these gaps, the universities should concentrate on internal

branding. “The goal is to convey the brand associations and value proposition to the university personnel.” This will be helpful for universities to understand what the university brand promises, which, in turn, can “facilitate communication between administration and the academic and supporting units, as well as development and delivery of a coherent and consistent brand identity for the university.” Also, besides focusing on only the importance of student experience with the university, Pinar et al mention several other things that are important for branding the university: activities of student life, such as sports and community activities, faculty-student and student-student interactions, and supplementary services, such as application process, fee payment, and campus facilities.

Sandlin J. K., and Peña E. V.’s discuss university branding from a different angle. Their research focuses on prospective college students’ perceptions of "social media authenticity," and the influence their perceptions have on the college experience expectations. The ultimate goal of the paper is to understand what impact social media has on postsecondary students, and how to attract and recruit more students.

Unlike the other research papers studied for this project, this paper puts emphasis on social media and its impact on prospective students. The authors show how social media shapes the prospective students’ mind about the university. If they find personal stories and feelings disclosed by the blogger they tend to believe what is written. If they do not find all that, they perceive the read information as advertisement controlled by the university administration.

Although this research is another kind of approach to how build credibility and university identity, it is important to note that student experience is important in shaping others minds, as Sung and Yang and Pinar et al suggest.

The other kind of approach that Drori G. S., Delmestri G., and Oberg A. have about

university branding is not focused on students' personal experiences or social media use. Unlike the other authors, Drori et al try to reveal why universities engage in the process of branding. They discuss what branding does for higher education institutions, what role the university brand has on creating identity, and how iconography can change people's perception about the higher education institution. In their research the universities are perceived as organizations, and higher education is commoditized. For example, they try to find out whether a building can take a symbolic role or not, or what role iconography has in brand building. The authors emphasize that universities have switched from "emblems" to "logos." Logos are simplified ideograms that are "intended to promote public recognition." In contrast to the previous authors, Drori et al also mention that branding has become a "ritual." All universities, regardless of their size, scope and status apply to branding to follow the modern trends of our times. Then they come up with the idea of commodification as "professionalization (managerialism), rationalization (performance and ranking), marketization (commercialization), and mediatization (promotional) encapsulated in the iconographic artifacts of universities."

As discussed above, Dori et al mention about marketization, and university branding as "ritual." Similarly, Aula H. M. and Tienari J. introduce through their study that branding leads the universities to subjection to marketization. They also mention that the "need to become a "world-class" university" becomes an incentive.

Aula and Tienari aim to explore reputation-building process, as well. Their study seeks to find out how the reputation-building is done, and how issues related to reputation are constructed in different ways. The difference between this research and the others discussed for this project is exploration of the identity-building process for specifically a new university. The other differences that Aula and Tienari discuss, unlike the other authors, is ranking and accreditation

which are good for university visibility fostering. Meanwhile, Aula and Tienari bring the counter argument to the ranking issue. They explain that ranking may be criticized for “using criteria that favors the universities already on the list at the expense of those who are not listed.” One more thing that the authors above do not talk about is anticipating future and not being stuck in the past.

The short article by Newbold J. looks like a small summary with main points of the researches discussed above. The author provides specific tips how to allure students. The 5 tips are the following: "Establish a link between interests and careers," "Don't talk down to prospective students," "Put out your messages on multiple channels," "Use creative that aligns with young people's lives," and "Don't be stuck in the past – anticipate the future." The main difference of Newbold's work is the format; the works of other authors were research papers, while this is a small article.

Newbold's article is not the only source with a different format. “AUA Strategic Plan” differs, as well. This is not an article or a research paper. This is a report and a plan that clarifies the intentions of the university for which this project has been initiated. The report states AUA vision connected to all the academic programs in the university, the faculty and students, the financial issues, and obstacles that the university has on the way of conducting its mission. The report also helps understand how AUA differs from other universities in Armenia. The major difference between AUA and the other local universities is the AUA's being the only higher education institution “providing American-style higher education that is integrated into the global academic network.”

The final source refers to the higher education in Armenia. This document created by EACEA describes how the higher education system works in Armenia, introduces the types of

education institutions existing in the country, financial issues, admission, challenges and needs that higher education institutions face in Armenia. This document is similar to the “AUA Strategic Plan” because this is not an article or a research paper, but a report similar to the document created for AUA. Both documents touch upon similar issues, such as education system financial issues, and challenges that the institutions face. The difference between these documents is that the AUA report is specifically created for one university, and the document of higher education in Armenia is common for all Armenian institutions.

To summarize, the aim of this review is to explore and find out the ways of university branding and identity building. All sources have similar statements about different elements of brand building. The review shows that student experience with the higher education institution has a focal role in contributing to the university promotion. Social media is another way to shape people’s and especially prospective students minds and contribute to the university. Iconography, in turn, is another way to differentiate the university from other universities. Another point discussed in this review is the commodification of the education institution in modern era. Besides, two of the authors mention that branding a university has become a trend that all institutions follow. All these sources help understand how to contribute the university identity creating or strengthening. Furthermore, the two documents, the AUA report and the report about higher education in Armenia provide specifics for comparison of AUA and Armenian higher education. In general, all these sources result in serving as framework for understanding what AUA does well and what needs to be changed for promoting the university and alluring many more students. All this research serves as basics for pinpointing the advantages AUA has over the other higher education institutions in Armenia.

## **Research Question**

The ultimate goal of this research is to find out how promotion, branding and identity building influence on recruiting more students. Yet, to promote the university visibility a research should be done, answering the following question:

**RQ:** How does the university brand affect on student recruitment?

To find the answer of this question the research has been led by several ways through answering several sub questions:

**SQ 1:** What do the current students at AUA like about the university services and education?

**SQ 2:** What do the current students at AUA dislike about the university services and education?

**SQ 3:** Why do the current and prospective students of AUA chose this university over other universities in Armenia?

**SQ 4:** How did the current and prospective students of AUA heard about the undergraduate degree offered by the university?

The answers to these questions along with the conducted research help understand whether the following hypothesizes are true or false.

**Null:** PR and Branding do not have any effect on the university identity building.

**H1:** PR and Branding crate the university identity.

**H2:** Students apply to AUA because they want have quality education.

**H3:** Students apply to AUA because AUA is a prestigious and US-accredited university.

**H4:** Students apply to AUA because they think AUA will pave an easy way for applying to foreign universities.

### **Methodology**

Student recruitment is the main goal of every university. That is why it is important to understand what AUA offers, what services AUA provides to the students, and what advantages, also disadvantages AUA has that other higher education institutions in Armenia do not do or have. The research question, all the sub questions, and hypothesizes guided in the process of collecting and analyzing the data necessary for this research.

One of the ways to collect information is designing surveys. I have created an online survey through Google Forms. The survey has a short introduction revealing the purpose of the survey. The questionnaire comes next. It is not very long, because people get bored, do not bother or do not have enough time to fill in surveys with a very long list of questions. The same is with the questions asking to write paragraphs. The questionnaire has two sections. The 1st section is formed of 11 multiple choice and short answer questions regarding the university choice and education. The second section is formed of 6 questions asking the age, sex, study year, program, country and city the respondents are from.

The target audience of the questionnaire is the current undergraduate students of AUA and prospective students currently studying at high schools. The survey has been sent the AUA

students through the university mail (@edu.aua.am) created in gmail.com. The survey has been sent to all the undergraduate students of AUA; freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors majoring in both BA English and Communications, and BA Business, and BA Computational Science. I will need the cooperation of The Registrar's Office because I need to know the university mail addresses of all AUA undergraduate students in order to send my survey to all of them. The survey has been sent to all the undergraduate students' Gmail accounts thanks to the cooperation with the Program Chairs of all the 3 departments.

Prospective students' opinions that are currently studying at high schools are important because we need to know why they might consider entering AUA, what they know about AUA, and where they know from. The questionnaires for high school students have 9 questions, the purpose and content of which are quite similar to the AUA undergraduate students' questionnaire purpose and content. The paper-based questionnaires have been distributed at 3 schools in Yerevan because as AUA Admissions Office Director referred to the data published by AUA Institution Research Office (IRO) majority of the applicants is from Yerevan. The questionnaires were distributed during a regular class, which took 3 to 5 minutes to fill in. The survey among the high school students was conducted after having the permission of the deputy directors of the schools (Yerevan High School N29 Named after Andranik Margaryan, Physics and Mathematics Specialized School Named after Artashes Shahinyan, and Yerevan High School N42 Named after Taras Shevchenko).

Another way I have collected information is cooperation with the Admissions Office and Communications Office. I have found out statistical data concerning the number of students now and in 2013 at the Admissions Office. The Communications Office helped find answers to some questions concerning the techniques used for AUA publicity.

A third way to learn how to recruit more students is to study the existing literature. The literature review done over the relevant sources serves as a framework of building brand and promoting the university visibility. Different elements such as, university logo, student experience at university, or opinions about a specific university in social media are ways of promotion. To have the desired results, that is to recruit more students, these techniques and elements should be applied to.

### **Research Findings and Analysis**

#### *Survey among Undergraduate Students*

A survey was conducted among all Undergraduate students of the American University of Armenia (including Freshmen, Sophomores, Juniors, and Seniors from BA in English and Communications, BA in Business, and BS in Computational Science). The survey was shared through the university Gmail accounts by the program chairs of each department. The Number of respondents is 120 which is a good response rate for a small student project.

The questionnaire consists of 16 questions asking about why the students preferred to apply to specifically AUA, what they like or dislike about the university, and what is their age and sex.

The first question is the following; “How have you heard about AUA?” The aim of this question is to find out where the students get information about the university, which media channels are popular among the applicants in order to develop sharing information about the university through that source of information.

As we can see from the chart (see fig. 1), most of the students have learned about AUA

Undergraduate program admissions from their friends (69 out of 120 chose this option, which is the 57.5% of the respondents). The second popular answer is the option "Parents." Fifty-five students out of 120 (45.8 %) were informed about AUA Undergraduate admissions from their parents. The third most popular answer is the option "Presentation by AUA at my school." Fourteen students out of 120 (11.7%) has been informed of AUA from the presentations performed at their schools. The fourth most chosen option is "Teachers at school." Twelve students out of 120 (10%) chose this option confirming that the teachers were their source of information. The fifth comes the option "Educational Fair" which is answered by 8 people out of 120 (6.7%). The sixth place share the options "TV Program" and "Other." Both have 7 respondents out of 120, which is 5.8% in proportion. Among the specified answers (in question 2) to the option "TV Program" come the following: "Advertisement," "Interview with the AUA President," "News Release," and "Do not remember." Among the specified answers (in question 5) to the option "Other" students clarified where they learned about AUA Undergraduate degree: "Attended Experimental English Classes," "Learned from the English tutor," "Radio," "I was living abroad when my grandparents told me about AUA," "From my uncle," "Elder brother, who is a student at AUA." The option "Social Media" comes next by the number of responses (6 students - 5%). Two of them specified their answer in the question 4 saying that the social media they learned about AUA is Facebook. And the last option by the number of respondents is "On-line media." This option has 3 respondents out of 120 (2.5%), 2 of which specified in the question 3 that their source of information was Facebook, again, and 1 of them learned about AUA while searching for information about Armenia.

## 1. How have you heard about AUA? (Choose all that apply) (120 responses)

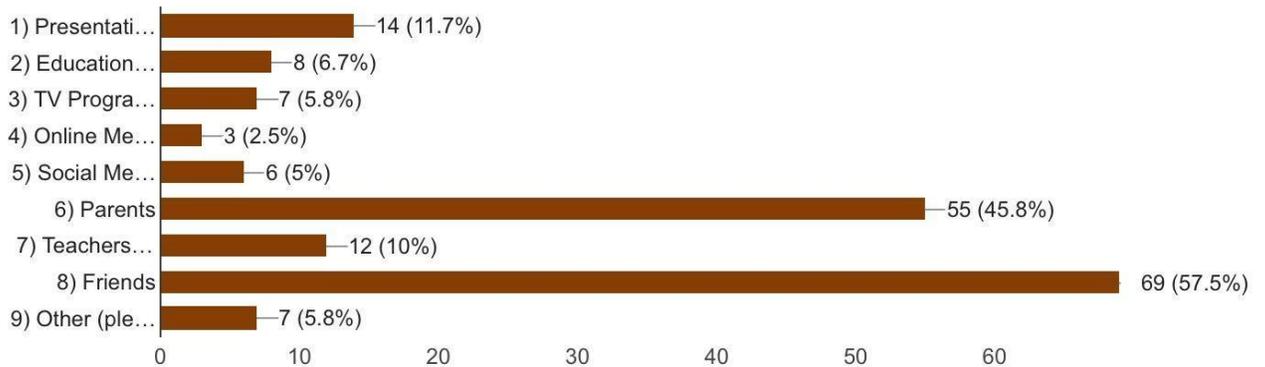


Figure 1

The questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 are the sub questions of question 1, and the answers to these questions are discussed in the paragraph above. Question number 6 asks, "What encouraged you to choose AUA over other universities?" The aim of asking this question is to understand how this university allured the undergraduate students. As we can see from the chart 2 (see fig. 3) The overwhelming majority of the respondents, 97 students out of 120, which is the 80.8% in proportion, answered that chose AUA for "Good reputation." The second most popular option is "US-accreditation." Eighty-five students out of 120 (70.8%) applied to AUA for US-accreditation. Then the third most checked option comes, "Bridge to enter universities abroad." This option was checked by 83 respondents (69.2%). "Parents' advice" was essential in decision making for 41 respondents, who are the 34.2% in proportion. "Financial aid" is the next important service that attracts students. The chart shows that 35/120 (29.2%) chose this option. The fifth most chosen option is "Financial aid availability." This service provided by the

university encouraged the students to apply for the Undergraduate degree at AUA. The sixth comes the option "Other" which has 24 respondents (20%). They chose AUA for different reasons, which are the following: "the only university providing the preferred profession," "the best undergraduate program in Armenia," "clean bathrooms," "affordable, best in the region," "to avoid testing system at local universities," "opportunities," "have rights protected as a gay student," "justice, no corruption," "high quality of education," "desire to improve English," "format of the entrance exams," "free choice of schedule," "availability of technologies," "the only university counting the senior year in the USA as opposed to other universities." If we categorize these answers, the picture will be the following: students applied to AUA because it is the best university in Armenia and in the region, it provides with high quality and innovative education, gives opportunities to students, as well as this institution is free of discrimination and corruption. Next, comes the option "Poor knowledge of Armenian," which is chosen by 16 students (13.3%). This is followed by the "Army deferment" option. Five respondents (4.2%) chose it. And the option "Desire of repatriation" concludes this list. This option is checked by 4 students (3.3%).

## 6. What encouraged you to choose AUA over other universities? (choose all that apply)

(120 responses)

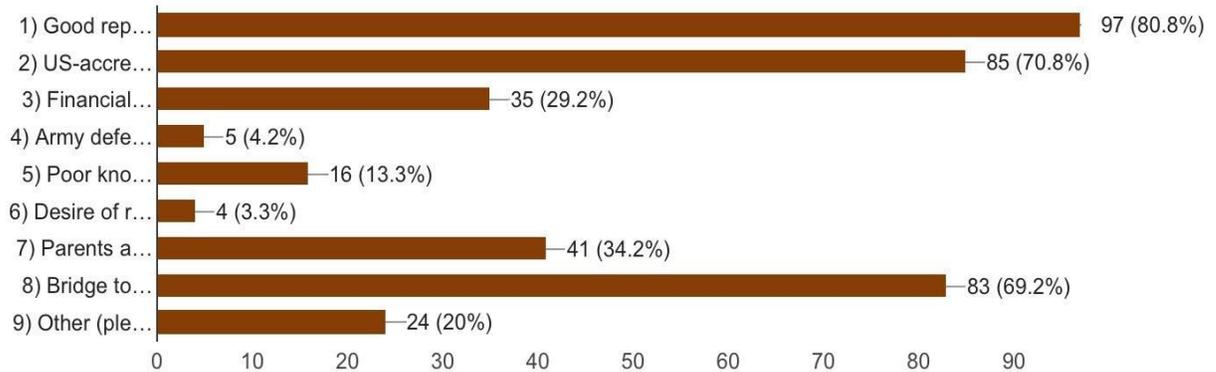


Figure 2

Question number 7 is the sub question of question number 6 which is discussed above.

The next question, number 8 (see fig. 8), asks, "What do you like at AUA the most?" This question aims to find out what attracts the students at the institution for using that data to recruit more students. Two options share the first place; "Instructors," and "Library and labs." Eighty-six students out of 120 (71.7%) chose these options. The second comes the option "Offered courses" which does not fall behind very much; 84 students (74%) chose this answer. The option "Community" comes next. It has 76 respondents out of 120 (63.3%). The fourth most chosen option is "Cafeteria." Fifty-one students out of 120 (42.5%) chose this answer. And the last comes the option "Other." This answer has 14 respondents (11.7%). The respondents specified in question 9 what exactly they like at AUA. The answers are the following: "The cozy

atmosphere,” “The sofas in the 3rd floor, Green Bean,” “Interesting things, places and opportunities that other universities do not offer,” “The friendly, sweet environment,” “Educational system, available resources,” “Everything,” “Discipline,” “Some sort of useful connections,” “Official language is English,” “The studies are done according to international academic standards. You learn about methods people use in the world, not only in Armenia,” “Knowledge I get,” “Almost everything,” “The fact that we are given the chance to study in the campus till late night,” “We are encouraged to give feedback, and sometimes it is taken into consideration.” If we generalize all these answers, we will have broad categories of what students like at AUA: education system, opportunities the university gives the students, the environment and discipline at the university.

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#### 8. What do you like at AUA the most? (choose all that apply) (120 responses)

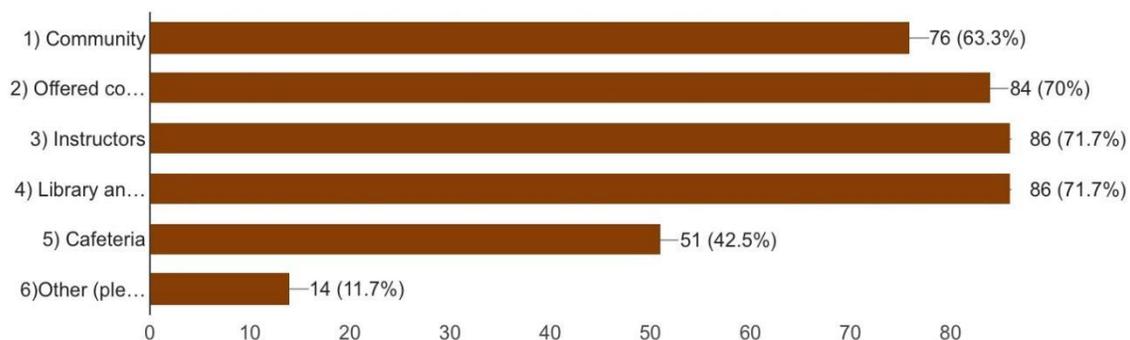


Figure 3

Question 10 asks, “What do you dislike at AUA the most?” The question aims to reveal what students do not like at the university in order to know what to improve in order to maintain the high status, and do not use that information while targeting the target audience. The question

is open-ended, and has 120 responses. If we group the answers, they will be the following: nothing, parking, cafeteria, free space problem because of the university crowdedness, spending more time on general education than on major courses, the Security employees and entrance of non-AUA students to the university freely, some group of students' behavior, unreasonably high prices for education and cafeteria, some low-quality instructors and badly organized classes.

The next question, question 11, is the following, "If you had an opportunity, what would you change at AUA?" This question requires open-ended answers, as well, and has 120 respondents. The answers are quite similar to the answers of the previous question because, logically, if students do not like anything they would change it. So, their answers in a grouped form look as the following: nothing, general education requirements, adding more major-related courses, cafeteria, high prices, security and parking issues, easy admissions because a group of students with improper behavior and unwillingness to study affect the university image, also some unqualified instructors.

Question 12, which has 120 respondents, helps understand what the proportion of respondents from different undergraduate programs is. As the figure 4 shows, 57.5% (69 respondents out of 120) are from BA in Business, 36.7% (44 respondents out of 120) are from BA in English and Communications, and 5.8% (7 respondents out of 120) are from BS in Computational Science.

12. What academic program are you currently enrolled in? (120 responses)

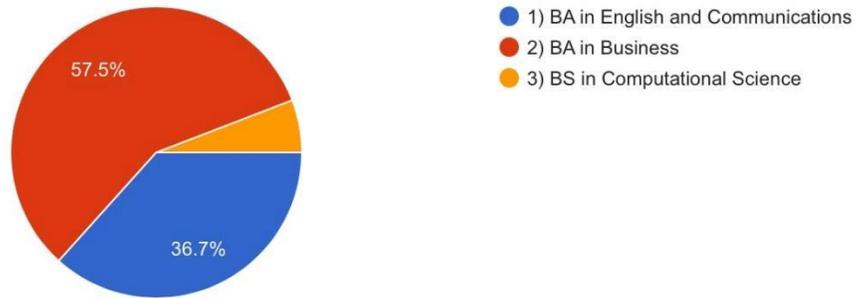


Figure 4

Questions 13 aims to clarify the respondents' year of study in proportion. As the figure 5 shows, 30% of the respondents (36 out of 120) are Freshmen, 31.7% (38 out of 120) are Sophomores, 21.7% (26 out of 120) are Juniors, and 16.7% (20 out of 120) are Seniors.

13. What is your year of study? (120 responses)

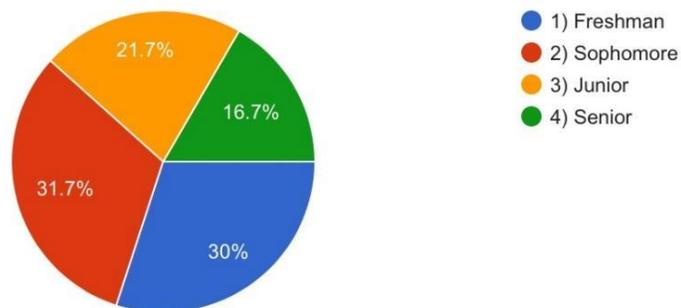


Figure 5

Question 14 shows what country the survey respondents are from. As the calculations show, most of them are from Armenia (105 out of 120), Others are from Russia, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Nagorno-Karabakh, Kazakhstan and Zimbabwe. This data shows that AUA is popular not only among Armenians but also prospective students abroad know about the university and apply to.

Question 15 asks what city/town the respondents are from. According to the calculations, the overwhelming majority of them are from Yerevan (98 out of 120). The other respondents are from different cities/towns of Armenia and other countries. The respondents from Armenia are from Gyumri, Vanadzor, Noyemberyan, Alaverdi, Abovyan, Tsaghkadzor, Yeghegnadzor. Others are from Russian cities (Moscow, Voronezh, Tula), from the capital city of Lebanon (Beirut), from Syria (Aleppo), and from the capital city of Zimbabwe (Harare). This data shows that although most of the applicants are from Armenia, there are also students who apply for AUA instead of other local universities.

Question 16 asks the age of the participants. As the figure 6 shows, the age of the students studying at AUA varies. Most of them are from 17 to 21 years old. Yet, there are elder students who are 22,23,24,28 years old. This means that AUA gives opportunity and creates friendly atmosphere for all those who wants to study regardless of the age.

16. What is your age? (120 responses)

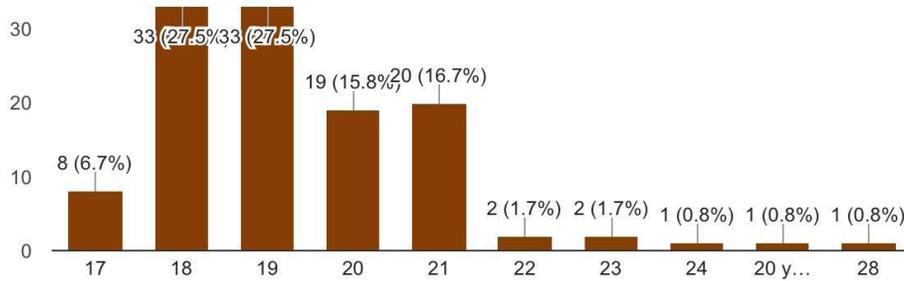


Figure 6

The last question in this survey, number 17, asks the sex of the respondents. According to the figure 7, majority of the respondents, 71.7% (86 out of 120) are females, and males are 28.3% (34 out of 120).

17. What is your sex? (120 responses)

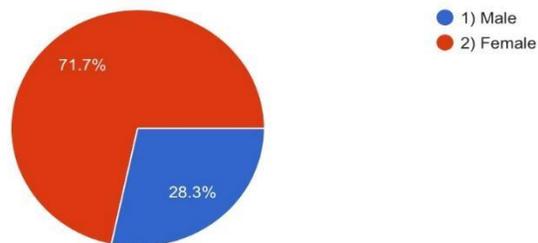


Figure 7

*Survey among Yerevan High School Students*

The survey discussed above was conducted among AUA Undergraduate students.

Another survey is conducted among 100 High School students in Yerevan to find out what they think of the university, how they have learned about the undergraduate programs the university offers and whether they plan to apply to the Bachelor's degree at American University of Armenia or not. The questionnaire has 9 questions in total.

The first question asks whether the respondents consider applying to AUA or not. The Figure 8 shows that 16 respondents out of 100 want to apply and the remaining 84 do not.

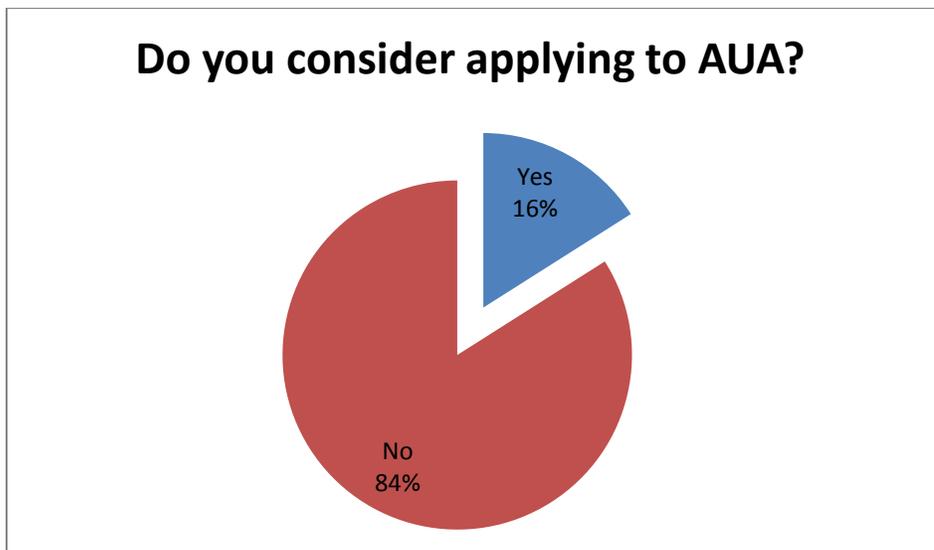


Figure 8

The next 2 questions aim to find out the reasons why the High school students consider applying to or do not plan to apply to the American University of Armenia. Question 2 asks, "If yes, then what encouraged you to choose AUA over other universities?" As overall 16 respondents from all the 3 schools checked the box "yes" in the 1st question, the number of respondents to the 2nd question is 16 (see fig. 9). Twelve respondents out of 16 chose the option "Bridge to foreign universities." The 2nd most chosen option is "Good reputation." Seven

respondents out of 16 checked good reputation as a factor stimulating them to apply to. Next comes the option "US-accreditation" by the number of respondents. This option has 3 responses out of 16. Two responses out of 16 has the option "My friends studying at AUA advised me to do so," and "options Financial aid availability" and "Other" have 1 response each. The respondent who chose the option "Other" specified that he wants to apply for Business program, and the best choice is AUA.

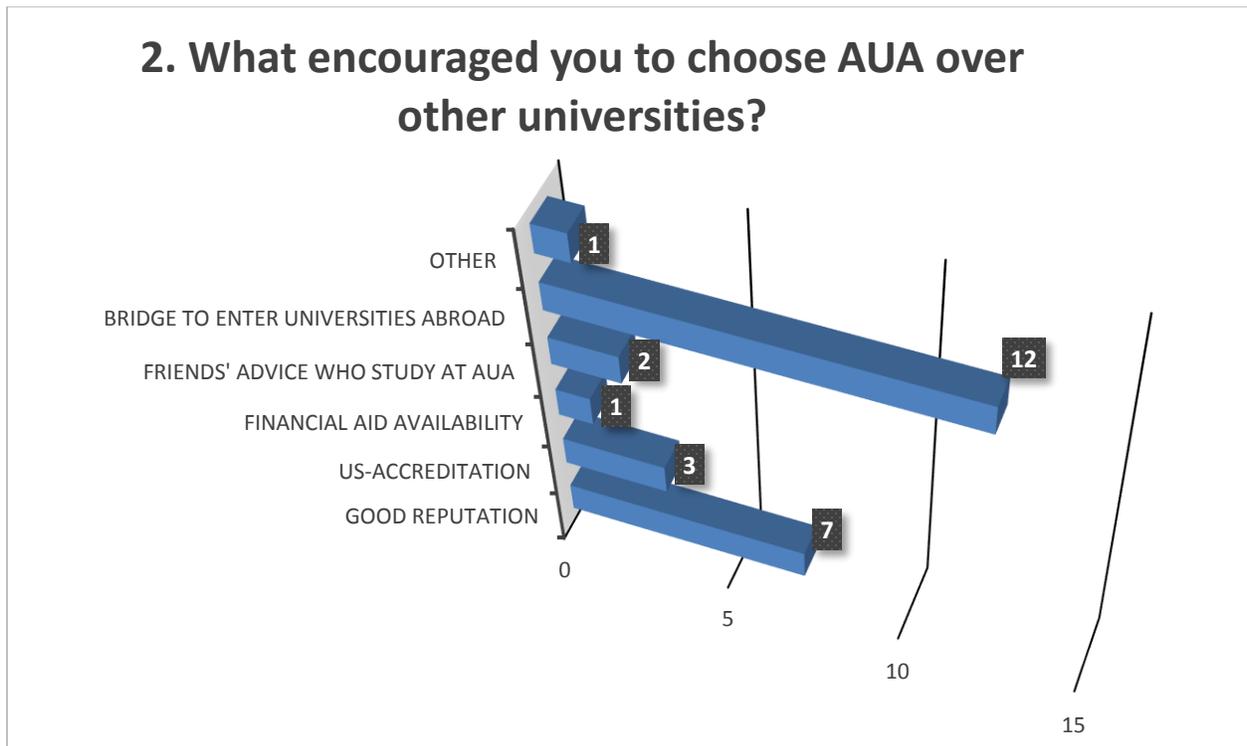


Figure 9

The 3rd question asks, "If not, what is the reason?" (See fig. 10). This question aims to find out why those respondents, who answered "No" to the 1st question, do not plan to apply to AUA. Eighty-four respondents answered "No" to the first question. Thirty-seven of them chose the option "The program I prefer is not available at AUA" as clarification to why they do not want to apply to AUA. The second most popular option is "Other." The respondents (18 out of

84) specified the reason of not applying to AUA, and the answers are the following: "I just prefer Yerevan State University(YSU)," "I just do not want," "I just do not want," "AUA is not a good university," "I want to apply to other university," "I am planning to apply for the Master's degree, but I prefer to enter a state university for my Bachelor's degree," "I prefer other university," "I want to have a state diploma," "I prefer other university," "I do not want," "I am leaving Armenia," "Issues for deferment, and very high points for entrance," "I think YSU is more proper for me," "I do not want," "I prefer other university," "I am leaving Armenia," "I just do not want," "The discipline and education atmosphere are not satisfactory," "I prefer other university for deep specialization." The next option by the number of respondents is "My knowledge of English is not enough," which is chosen by 14 high school students. Seven students out of 84 chose the option "I cannot afford to pay for the tuition fee." Six students out of 84 chose the option "My parents do not advise me to do so," and 2 respondents out of 84 chose the option "My friends who study at AUA do not advise me to do so."

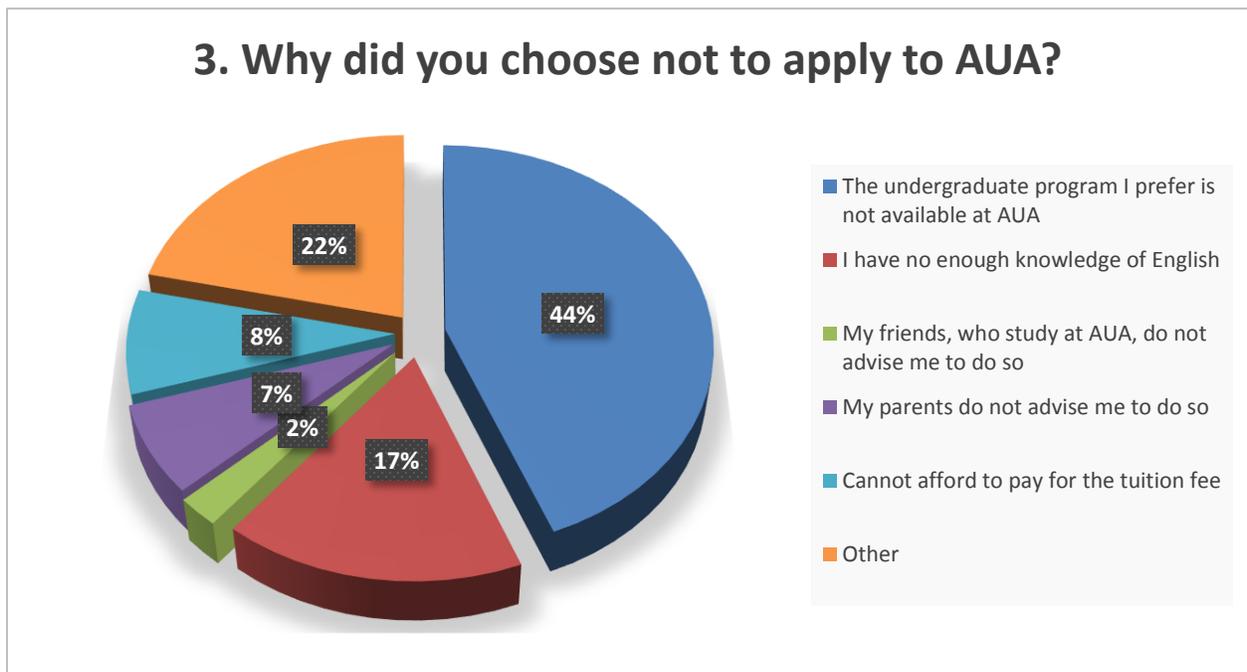


Figure 10

Question 4 asks, "How have you learned about AUA Undergraduate admissions." This question is asked to clarify what media channels and what sources are reachable to the prospective students so that to use that ways to communicate with them. As the figure 11 shows the most popular option specifying the respondents' source of information is "Friends," which is chosen by 51 students out of 100. The second most popular option is "Social media." This option has 20 responses out of 100. The third comes the option "Parents," which is chosen by 18 students out of 100. The option "Teachers" comes next. It has 11 responses out of 100. Six students checked the option "Other," and specified their choice answering that some of them had preparatory courses at AUA and some of the respondents had not known about AUA before the survey I conducted among them. By the number of respondents the option "Presentation by AUA at my school" comes next which has 4 respondents. Then the option "Educational fair" comes next which has 4 respondents. Then the option "Educational fair" comes along with 3 respondents. The last place share the options "TV-programs" and "Online media" with 2 respondents each.

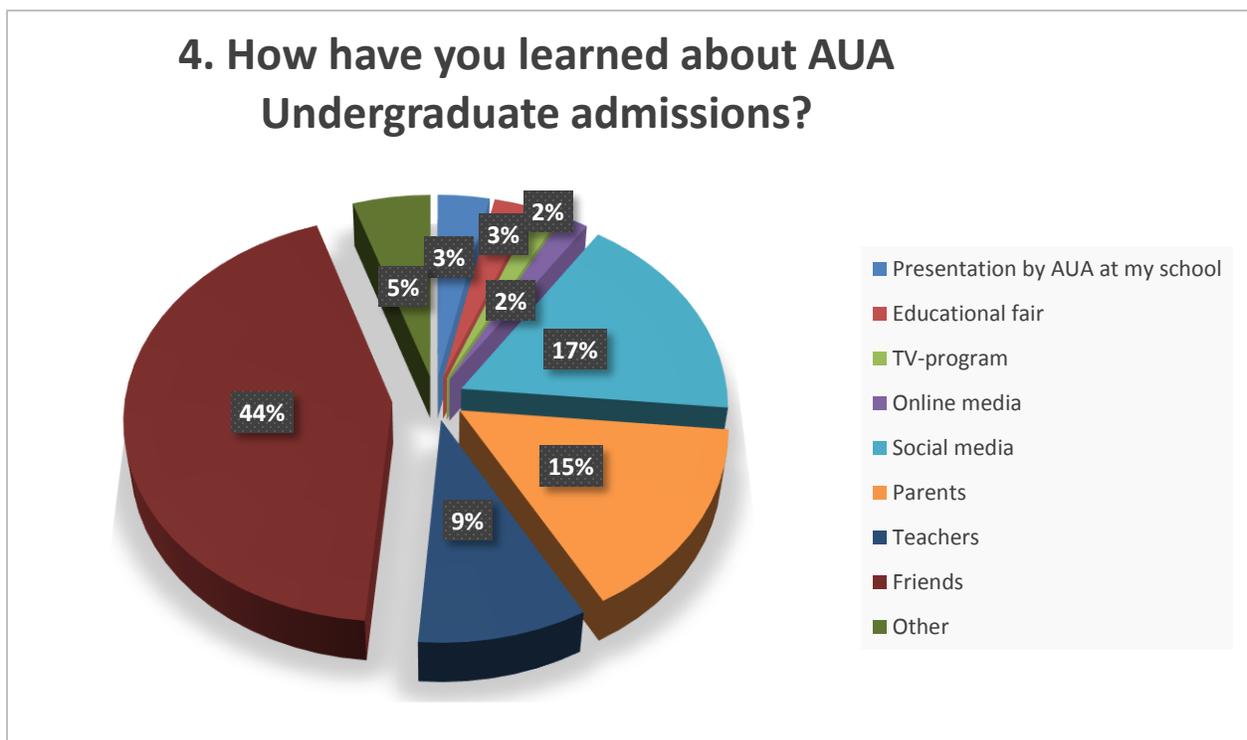


Figure 11

Question 5 asks, "Where are you from?" (See fig. 12). This is to find out whether the perspective students are mostly from. Although the survey was conducted only in Yerevan because most of the applicants of AUA are from Yerevan (as the survey among AUA undergraduate students shows, and the head of the AUA Admissions Office, Arina Zohrabian told) the figure shows that there is 1 respondent who is from Nagorno-Karabakh and 1 who is from Iran.

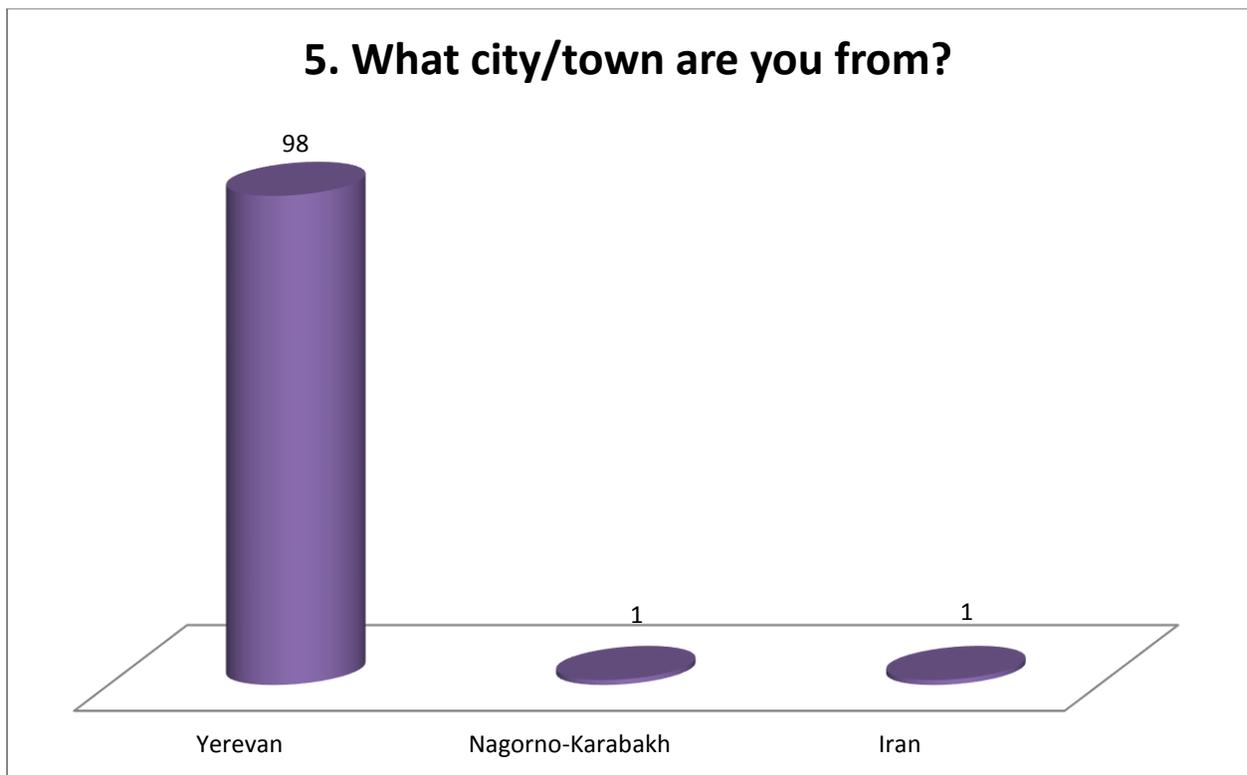


Figure 12

Question 6 asks what school the respondents attend. As the figure 13 shows, 32 out of 100 are from Yerevan High School N29 Named after Andranik Margaryan, 34 out of 100 are from Physics and Mathematics Specialized School Named After Artashes Shahinyan, and another 34 respondents are studying at Yerevan High School N42 Named After Taras

Shevchenko.

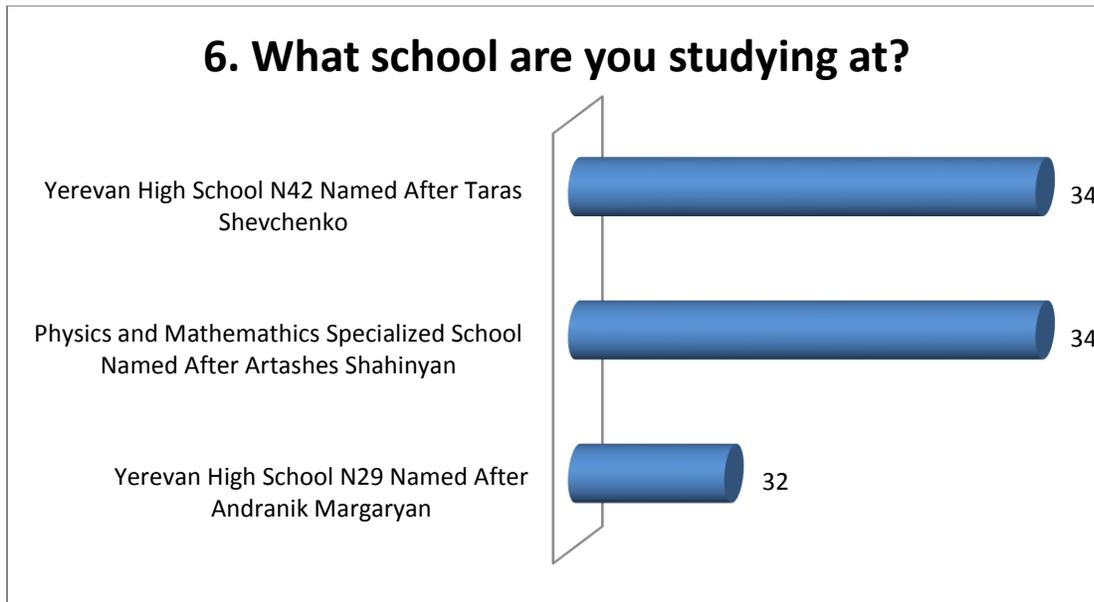


Figure 13

Question 7 clarifies which grade the respondents are currently studying at. The figure 14 shows that the proportion of respondents from both grades is equal: 50% are from 11th grade, and the other 50% are from 12th grade.

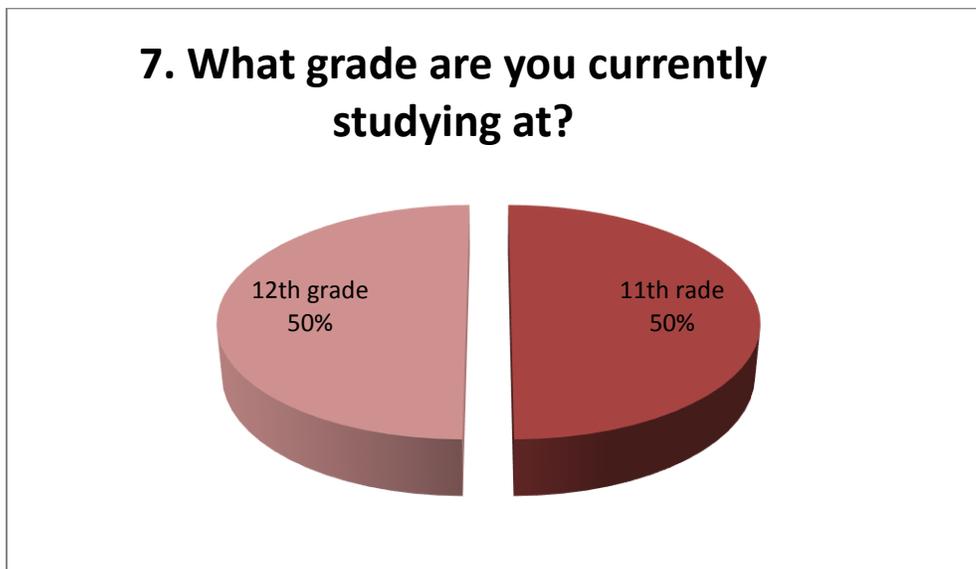


Figure 14

Question 8 asks the age of the respondents. The figure 15 shows that the respondents' age varies from 15 to 18. Three responds out of 100 are 15 years old, 47 out of 100 are 16 years old, 49 out of 100 are 17 years old, and only 1 respondent out of 100 is 18 years old.

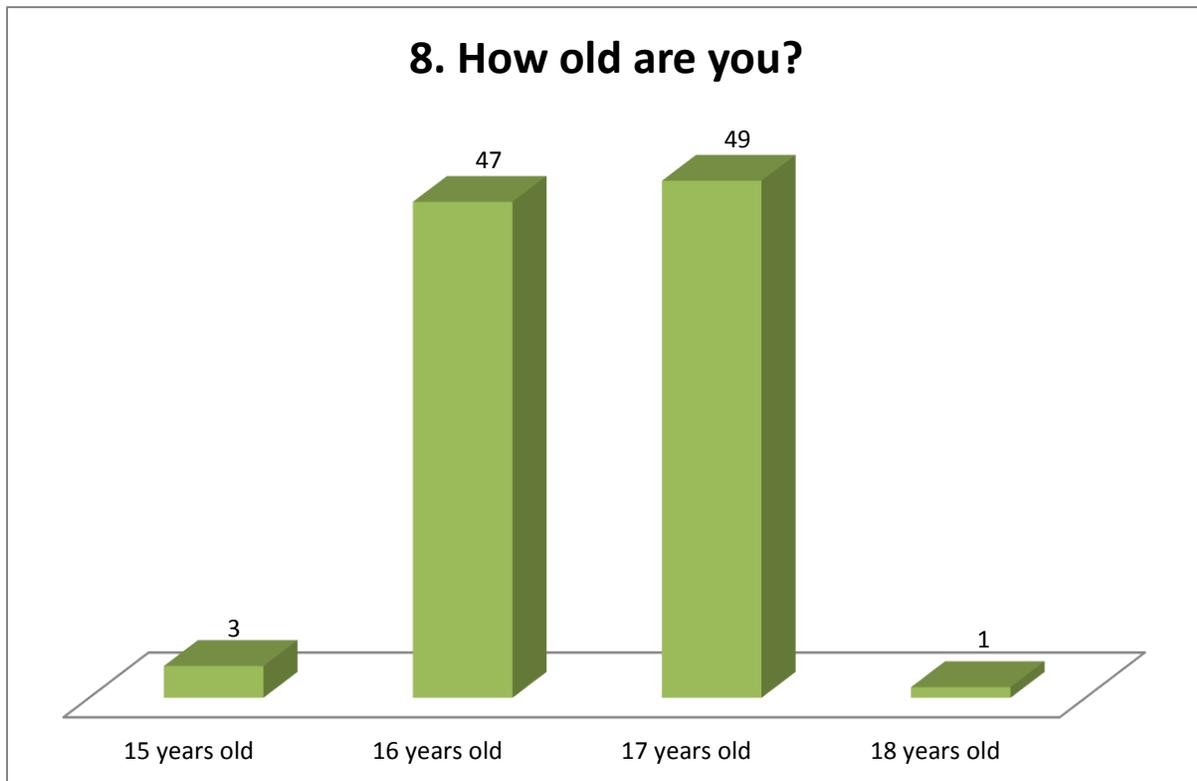


Figure 15

The last question in the survey, number 9, asks the sex of the respondents. According to the figure 16, 45 out of 100 are males, 52 out of 100 are females, and 3 respondents out of 100 did not answer the question.

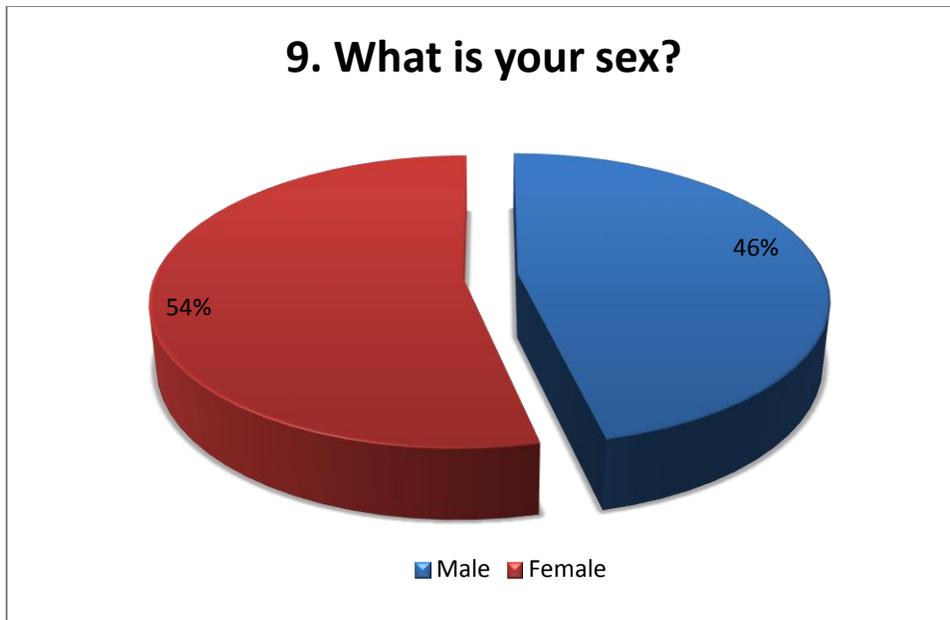


Figure 16

#### *Interview with AUA Communications Office Director*

The purpose of the interview with the AUA Communications Office Director, William Bairamian, was to discuss and find out how American University of Armenia reaches the audience, what kind of PR campaigns the Communications Office launches to grab the public's attention, and how the effectiveness of those efforts is measured. Mr. Bairamian was asked several questions, which are the following along with the summary of his answers:

##### 1. What media channels does AUA use to reach the audience?

AUA uses any media to reach the audience. The primary platform is AUA website where all the information concerning to the university is put on. Besides the website, AUA uses Social Media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as YouTube. Traditional media, such as TV and newspapers, are another way to reach the public, the target audience and raise the

visibility of the university. AUA also creates calendars and reaches the public through email marketing.

2. What kind of techniques do you use to attract students not only from Armenia, but also from the Diaspora.

AUA uses all the means of communication listed above, as well as personal outreach not only in Armenia but also through the world to interact and communicate with the public outside Armenia personally.

3. What PR Campaigns has AUA used since 2013 (the announcement of AUA Undergraduate programs)?

AUA uses different types of PR Campaigns, such as Design, info graphics, short videos, flyers for physical distribution. Yet, not always direct PR is used. Different specialists are invited to the university from around the world, different public events are organized so that the potential students visit and get acquainted with the environment and atmosphere of the university.

4. How the effectiveness of the PR Campaigns launched by AUA is measured?

The best way to measure success is the response from public, the number of applications got from schools, responses on social media, Facebook in particular, and the big number of people attending the events held at AUA.

5. What future plans do you have to increase AUA visibility?

As PR, Marketing and Advertising are fast moving fields, the main goal is to maintain the baseline of the work done by the Communications office and make progress, change and adapt

the new ways of communication to be current in delivering message.

6. AUA is popular in Armenia. What does AUA do different than other Armenian universities?

Communication, of course, has big importance, yet, it would not be possible to produce all the great work AUA has done so far without the valuable body of people at AUA. It is important to communicate with the world so that the public knows about all the research and work done by the university.

*Interview with AUA Admissions Office Director*

The purpose of the interview with the Admissions Office Director, Arina Zohrabian, was to discuss and find out statistical data about the number of applicants to AUA Undergraduate degree. The questions and the summaries of the answers are the following:

1. How many students does AUA currently have?

As the Institution Research Office (IRO) has published on the official website of AUA, the university currently has 1316 undergraduate students.

2. Has there been increase or decrease of the number of applicants since 2013?

According to the statistics provided by IRO, the number of undergraduate applicants has increased year by year. (See figures 17, 18, 19, and 20).

3. Where are the AUA applicants mostly from?

The majority of the applicants are from Yerevan.

**Table 1. Enrollment – Graduate and Undergraduate<sup>1</sup>**

For Fall 2013

College/School Name	Program	First-Time, First-Year Degree Seeking <sup>2</sup> N (%)		All Other Degree Seeking N (%)		Total Degree Seeking N (%)		
		Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time <sup>3</sup>	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
Undergraduate								
College of Business and Economics	BAB	168	0	-	-	168	0	168
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	BA EC	63	0	-	-	63	0	63
College of Science and Engineering	BS CS	50	0	-	-	50	0	50
<b>Total Undergraduate Headcount</b>		<b>281</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>281</b>

Figure 17

**Table 1. Enrollment by Time Status<sup>1</sup>**

For Fall 2014 – Undergraduate

College/School Name	Academic Program	First-Time, First-Year Degree Seeking <sup>2</sup> N		Second Year Degree Seeking N		Total Degree Seeking N		
		Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
Undergraduate								
College of Business and Economics	BAB	212	N/A	146	N/A	358	N/A	358
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	BA EC	89	N/A	56	N/A	145	N/A	145
College of Science and Engineering	BS CS	85	N/A	40	N/A	125	N/A	125
<b>Total Undergraduate Headcount</b>		<b>386</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>628</b>
Study Abroad in AUA	N/A				N/A	1	N/A	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>386</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>628</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>629</b>

SOURCE: The Office of the Registrar

Figure 18

**Table 1. Enrollment by Time Status<sup>1</sup>**

For Fall 2015–Undergraduate

College/School Name	Academic Program	First-Time, First-Year Degree Seeking <sup>2</sup> N		Second Year Degree Seeking N		Third Year Degree Seeking N		Total Degree Seeking N		
		Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
College of Business and Economics	BAB	206	N/A	195	N/A	137	N/A	538	N/A	538
College of Humanities and Social Sciences	BA EC	85	N/A	85	N/A	50	N/A	220	N/A	220
College of Science and Engineering	BS CS	115	N/A	72	N/A	38	N/A	225	N/A	225
<b>Total Undergraduate Headcount</b>		<b>406</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>983</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>983</b>
Study Abroad in AUA	N/A									3
<b>Total</b>		<b>406</b>		<b>352</b>		<b>225</b>		<b>983</b>		<b>986</b>

SOURCE: The Office of the Registrar.

Figure 19

## AUA 2016 FALL SUMMARY FACTS

Last updated January 10, 2017

### 2016 Fall Enrollment

**Undergraduate** - 1316  
Male-538; Female-778  
RoA citizens-1227 (38)\*;  
Non-RoA citizens-89

**Graduate** -480  
Male-176; Female-304  
RoA citizens-433 (9)\*;  
Non RoA citizens-47

**Certificate, non-degree, study  
abroad at AUA-30**  
Male-9; Female-21  
RoA citizens-27;  
Non RoA citizens-3

\* Numbers in parenthesis are a subset of the number of RoA Citizens and indicate naturalized RoA citizens who also hold dual citizenship (one of which is RoA citizenship). They are not counted in the number of Non-RoA Citizen.

### 2016 Fall Admissions

#### Undergraduate

Early applicants - 240  
Admits out of early applicants - 215  
Regular applicants - 327  
Admits out of regular applicants - 206  
Rolling applicants - 106  
Admits out of rolling applicants - 21  
**Total number of applicants - 636**  
Male-307; Female-329  
RoA citizens-588;  
Non RoA citizens-48  
**Total number of admits - 442**  
Male-200; Female-242  
RoA citizens-417;  
Non RoA citizens - 25  
**Enrollees-395**  
Male-168; Female-227  
RoA citizens-373;  
Non RoA citizens - 22

#### Graduate

**Applicants-326**  
Male-116; Female-210  
RoA citizens-292;  
Non RoA citizens - 34  
**Admits-249**  
Male-87; Female-162  
RoA citizens-224;  
Non RoA citizens-25  
**Enrollees-232**  
Male-80; Female-152  
RoA citizens-210;  
Non RoA citizens - 22

Figure 20

To sum up all the information gotten from the surveys and interviews, AUA does good job in terms of visibility and awareness rising about the university. As reviewed literature also highlight, social media is a good way to shape people's mind and target the prospective students. Besides this, the literature highlights the role of branding in terms of contribution to student recruitment. As we can see from the research results the number of applicants increases year by year, which can be measure of successful results of Communications, PR and Branding. According to the results of the surveys, respondents choose AUA for good reputation and US-accreditation. This is a way of differentiation from other universities in Armenia and in the region. Differentiation, in turn, is a way of Branding and PR. This, again, proves that AUA is on the right track in terms of shaping public's mind. Another way of raising awareness and sounding reliable is face to face communication and sharing personal stories as the reviewed literature suggests. AUA again does well, because the university representatives travel to different places not only in Armenia but throughout the world, and present AUA to the public. Consequently, Branding, PR and Communications do have big role and affect on mind shaping. This, in turn, results in having more and more applicants.

After conducting the research and collecting all the necessary data, the answers of Research question, Sub questions, and Hypothesizes can be specified:

**RQ:** How does the university brand affect on student recruitment?

PR and the university brand help increase the number of applicants. As it is obvious from the data provided by IRO, the number of applicants rises year by year. In addition to this, 80.8% of AUA undergraduate students and almost 50% of high school students tell they have chosen this university for its good reputation.

**SQ 1:** What do the current students at AUA like about the university services and

education?

According to the results of the survey conducted among AUA Undergraduate students, they like the education system, opportunities the university gives the students, the environment and discipline at the university.

**SQ 2:** What do the current students at AUA dislike about the university services and education?

As the results of the survey show, the students are bothered with lack of free space because of the university crowdedness, spending more time on general education than on major courses, some group of students' behavior, unreasonably high prices for education and cafeteria, some low-quality instructors and badly organized courses, and so on.

**SQ 3:** Why do the current and prospective students of AUA chose this university over other universities in Armenia?

According to the data collected during the research, most of the current and prospective students choose AUA for good reputation and US-accreditation.

**SQ 4:** How did the current students at AUA heard about the undergraduate degree offered by the university?

As AUA Communications Office does good job in terms of AUA visibility raising, the target audience learns about AUA from different sources, such as friends, Parents and Teachers, Online and Social Media, TV programs, Educational fairs and presentation at schools done by AUA.

**Null:** PR and Branding do not have any effect on the university identity building.

As the Communications Office Director mentioned, AUA uses all possible ways to communicate with public (communication is one of the most important factors of PR and branding), and the Admissions Office Director proved with the statistics published by IRO, that the number of applicants is increasing year by year, we can assume that PR and Branding affect on the university identity.

**H1:** PR and Branding create the university identity.

The Research question answer proves that this hypothesis is true. Students apply to this university for good reputation, US-accreditation.

**H2:** Students apply to AUA because they want to have quality education.

This hypothesis is true because the respondents in the surveys mentioned that AUA is the best university in Armenia and in the region, it provides with high quality and innovative education, gives opportunities to students,

**H3:** Students apply to AUA because AUA is a prestigious and US-accredited university.

Prestige and US-accreditation are a part of the university identity and brand. Consequently, these are one of the major factors that attract the target audience. So, this hypothesis is true.

**H4:** Students apply to AUA because they think AUA will pave an easy way for applying to foreign universities.

This hypothesis is true, as well, because the data shows that the majority of students consider this factor while prioritizing this university over other local ones.

## **Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

Response rate is one of the most important elements of data collection through surveys. The number of respondents to the AUA Undergraduate students' survey is 120. The number of respondents to the Yerevan High School students' survey is 100. Although this rate of responses is good for small student, surveys with many more responses would be more representative of the whole undergraduate students and high school students.

However, this research shows that although AUA does good job in terms of branding, PR, Communication, and providing quality education and opportunities, the institution still has issues to handle with concerning the General Education system, Major courses and instructors' selection, as well as make the admissions conditions stricter in order to let enter only those students who really want to study.

To conclude, this research is not limitation but rather foundation for further research. This research is done only for American University of Armenia as this is a small scale project. This project can serve ground for future research as conducting the same research and collecting data from other local universities to compare the findings and have more precise information.

## **Appendix**

*Questionnaire for AUA Undergraduate students*

Higher Education Institution Choice (for AUA students)

This is a short survey, conducted within AUA students in the frame of Capstone project to find out why students prefer studying at AUA over other universities. The survey is completely anonymous. Please, find a few minutes to fill in the survey and contribute to my project. Thank you and good luck!

1. How have you heard about AUA? (Choose all that apply)

- 1) Presentation by AUA at my school
- 2) Educational Fair
- 3) TV Program (please specify in question 2)
- 4) Online Media (please specify in question 3)
- 5) Social Media (please specify in question 4)
- 6) Parents
- 7) Teachers at school
- 8) Friends
- 9) Other (please specify in question 5)

2. If you chose the option 3 in question 1, please specify the TV program you were informed of AUA from.

(short answer text)

3. If you chose the option 4 in question 1, please specify the the online media you were informed of AUA from.

(short answer text)

4. If you chose the option 5 in question 1, please specify the social media you were informed of AUA from.

(short answer text)

5. If you chose the option 9 in question 1, please specify where you were informed of AUA from.

(short answer text)

6. What encouraged you to choose AUA over other universities? (choose all that apply)

- 1) Good reputation

- 2) US-accreditation
- 3) Financial aid availability
- 4) Army deferment availability
- 5) Poor knowledge of Armenian
- 6) Desire of repatriation
- 7) Parents advice/ influence on decision making
- 8) Bridge to enter universities abroad
- 9) Other (please specify in question 7)

7. If you choose option 9 in question 6, please specify what encouraged you to choose AUA over other universities.

(short answer text)

8. What do you like at AUA the most? (choose all that apply).

- 1) Community
- 2) Offered courses
- 3) Instructors
- 4) Library and labs
- 5) Cafeteria
- 6) Other (please specify in question 9)

9. If you chose option 6 in question 8, please specify what do you like at AUA the most.

(short answer text)

10. What do you dislike at AUA the most? (please, specify in few words).

(short answer text)

11. If you had an opportunity, what would you change at AUA? (please, specify in few words).

(short answer text)

12. What academic program are you currently enrolled in?

- 1) BA in English and Communications
- 2) BA in Business
- 3) BS in Computational Science

14. What country are you from?

(short answer text)

13. What is your year of study?

- 1) Freshman
- 2) Sophomore
- 3) Junior
- 4) Senior

15. What city/town are you from?

(short answer text)

16. What is your age?

(short answer text)

17. What is your sex?

- 1) Male
- 2) Female

*Questionnaire for Yerevan High School Students*

**Բարձրագույն ուսումնական հաստատության ընտրության վերաբերյալ հարցում**

**1. Արդյո՞ք պատրաստվում եք դիմել Հայաստանի ամերիկյան համալսարան (ՀԱՀ):**

ա) Այո

բ) Ոչ

**2. Եթե այո, ապա ինչու՞ եք ցանկանում դիմել հենց ՀԱՀ: (Եթե ոչ՝ շրջանցեք հարցը:) (Ընտրեք բոլոր համապատասխան տարբերակները:)**

ա) Լավ համբավի համար

- բ) Ամերիկյան հավատարմագրություն ունենալու համար
- գ) Ֆինանսական օժանդակության համար
- դ) ՀՀ ԶՈւ-ում ծառայելու տարկետում ստանալու հնարավորության համար
- ե) Հայոց լեզվի ոչ բավարար գիտելիքներ ունենալու պատճառով
- զ) ՀԱՀ-ում սովորող ծնոթներիս խորհրդով
- է) Հետագայում արտասահմանյան ԲՈւՀ-եր ընդունվելու լավ կամուրջ հանդիսանալու համար
- ը) Այլ (խնդրում ենք մանրամասնել) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Եթե ոչ, ապա ո՞րն է պատճառը: (Եթե այո՝ շրջանցեք հարցը:) (Ընտրեք բոլոր համապատասխան տարբերակները:)**

- ա) Չեմ պատրաստվում դիմել որևէ ԲՈւՀ
- բ) Իմ նախընտրած մասնագիտությունը չի դասավանդվում ՀԱՀ բակալավրի ծրագրերի շրջանակներում
- գ) Անգլերենի գիտելիքներս բավարար չեն
- դ) ՀԱՀ-ում սովորող ծանոթներս խորհուրդ չեն տալիս
- ե) Ծնողներս խորհուրդ չեն տալիս
- զ) Ուսման վարձը վճարելու հնարավորության բացակայության պատճառով
- է) Այլ (խնդրում ենք մանրամասնել) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Ինչպե՞ս եքիմացել ՀԱՀ-ի բակալավրի ծրագրերի ընդունելության մասին:**

- ա) Իմ դպրոցում ՀԱՀ-ի կողմից անցկացված ներկայացումից
- բ) Կրթական տոնավաճառներից
- գ) Հեռուստածրագրերից
- դ) Առցանց ԶԼՄ-ներից
- ե) Սոցիալական կայքերից
- զ) Ծնողներիցս

է) Ուսուցիչներիցս

ը) Ընկերներիցս

թ) Այլ (խնդրում ենք մանրամասնել) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Որտե՞ղ եք բնակվում:**

Քաղաք/գյուղ \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Ո՞ր դպրոցում եք սովորում:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Ո՞ր դասարանում եք սովորում:**

1) 11

2) 12

**7. Նշեք Ձեր տարիքը:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**8. Նշեք Ձեր սեռը:**

ա) Արական

բ) Իգական

Q1. ա – 16	Q1. ք-84
Q2. ա-7 բ-3 գ-1 դ-2 ե-12 ը-1	Q2.
Q3.	Q3. ք-37 գ-14 դ-2 ե-6 զ-7 է-18
Q4. ա-1 բ-2 ե-3 գ- 5 ե- 2 ը-11	Q4. ա - 3 բ - 1 գ - 2 դ - 2 ե - 17 զ - 13 է - 9 ը - 40 թ - 6
Q5. Երևան – 16	Q5. Երևան – 82 ԼՂՀ - 1 Իրանի Իսլամական Հանրապետություն- 1
Q6. 29 – 7 Ֆիզմաթ – 4 42 – 5	Q6. 29 – 25 Ֆիզմաթ – 30 42 - 29
Q7. 11- 13 12- 3	Q7. 11 – 37 12 - 47
Q8. 15-2 16-11 17 - 2	Q8. 15 - 1 16 - 36 17 – 42 18 – 1
Q9. ա – 9	Q9. ա – 36 բ - 45

բ - 7	
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Total

<p>Q4. Total</p> <p>ա- 4</p> <p>բ- 3</p> <p>գ- 2</p> <p>դ - 2</p> <p>ե - 20</p> <p>զ - 18</p> <p>է - 11</p> <p>ը - 51</p> <p>թ - 6</p>
<p>Q5. Total</p> <p>Երևան - 98</p> <p>ԼՂՀ - 1</p> <p>Իրանի Իսլամական Հանրապետություն - 1</p>
<p>Q6. Total</p> <p>29 - 32</p> <p>Ֆիզմաթ -34</p> <p>42 -34</p>
<p>Q7. Total</p> <p>11- 50</p> <p>12 - 50</p>
<p>Q8. Total</p> <p>15 - 3</p> <p>16 - 47</p> <p>17 -49</p> <p>18- 1</p>
<p>Q9. Total</p> <p>ա- 45</p> <p>բ- 52</p> <p>-3</p>