

Leading Scholar Will Teach Armenian History

By Melinda Marks
Contributing Writer

Hoping to develop a more comprehensive program, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies has collected enough funds to hire a leading authority to teach Armenian history.

"Berkeley has a renowned Eastern European and Slavic program with its history, language, and politics. One missing link has been Armenian studies. Armenia is closely linked with all these areas' studies," said Professor Armen Der Kiureghian, chair of the advisory committee for the program's endowment.

With the endowment, the committee selected UCLA professor Richard Hovannisian as the first William Saroyan Visiting Professor, a position given to a preeminent scholar in Armenian history.

Hovannisian is a professor of Armenian and Near Eastern history and has been a faculty member at UCLA since 1962. He has given more than 1,500 lectures for universities, community, and radio and television audiences.

Hovannisian has written numerous books and articles and served on several history councils including the Armenian Assembly of America, which he founded.

"We solicited names and then we picked Hovannisian," said Der Kiureghian. "He's a well-known, important figure in terms of Armenian History."

"He stood out among the applicants because he's a senior scholar. There are some upcoming dynamic people but he's a senior," said

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Der Kiureghian, a civil engineering professor.

"We wanted to start our program with someone with long-known experience and we knew he would attract interest in the studies," he added.

In the past, the center lacked a strong program in Armenian studies. But this fall, Hovannisian teaches History 100, or "Modern Armenian History: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." Because the class was created too late to be included in the schedule of classes booklet, the center is trying to draw more students to the class.

The course will deal with Armenian history and focus on its modern history from the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Armenia became a part of the Romanov Empire, to its declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991.

"This is a modern history course. It covers (Armenia's) recent formative stage, the genocide of 1915, its 1918 to 1921 short-lived republic

and its Soviet rule until 1991," Der Kiureghian said.

Although the focus is on Armenian history, the course also covers important historical issues that are of general interest, Der Kiureghian said.

"This course should not be viewed as an Armenian Studies course. Other Soviet countries are having similar problems. It's an interesting exposure to a unique set of circumstances," he added.

He added that Hovannisian will also help organize projects and give lectures to boost the Armenian Studies program.

"I hope any students interested in that era, Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Byzantine Period and the history of Christian Peoples will come," Der Kiureghian said of the scheduled lectures.

However, Hovannisian's visit is only one facet of the long-term project to improve Armenian studies here at UC Berkeley. In the future, the endowment will bring other scholars to the program.

"Each year we will have a visiting scholar, but maybe in a different area, like architecture."