

For Immediate Release:



**Armenian Studies Program
California State University, Fresno**

**“The Origins of the Armenian Community in New England
and the Construction of Armenian-American ‘Cultural Congruence’”
by Dr. Simon Payaslian**

Dr. Simon Payaslian, holder of the Charles K. and Elizabeth M. Kenosian Chair in Modern Armenian History and Literature at Boston University, will give a talk on “The Origins of the Armenian Community in New England and the Construction of Armenian-American ‘Cultural Congruence,’” at 7:30PM on Friday, September 12, in the University Business Center, Alice Peters Auditorium, Room 191, on the Fresno State campus.

The lecture is the first in the Fall Lecture Series of the Armenian Studies Program and is supported by the Leon S. Peters Foundation.

This lecture discusses the origins and development of the Armenian community in the United States, with a focus on the New England region, from the 1880s to the 1920s. The early Armenian immigrants to the New World, having fled Ottoman oppressive rule and economic depression, were confronted with the twin, and often conflicting, tasks of preservation of Armenian traditions, values, and mores of the homeland while seeking rapid integration and assimilation into American society. The case of the Armenian community in the United States demonstrates the dynamic nature of, and the complexities involved in, the construction and evolution of a diasporan community and identity. Armenian community institutions not only functioned as instruments for self-preservation but also sought to cultivate a positive self-image of the community in the host society.

A comparative analysis of the Armenian-language newspaper *Hayk* and the English-language *Armenia* journal reveals the deep tensions between the imperatives of self-preservation and the imperatives of cultural integration and rapid economic growth. *Hayk* emphasized preservation of Armenianness against foreignization and sought to instill a sense of community belongingness and cultural authenticity. It urged community institutions and leaders to protect the newly arriving family members and compatriots from what its authors considered the dangers of drifting and assimilating into the dominant culture.

On the other hand, the *Armenia* journal promoted the idea of “cultural congruence” between Armenian and American values. It represented those sectors in the Armenian community who felt compelled to guarantee economic survival and success, to strive to create favorable impressions of Armenia and the Armenians among their American hosts, and to lobby for favorable U.S. foreign policy towards the homeland. The promotion of “cultural congruence” between Armenian and American values and identities as cultivated by the *Armenia* journal in the early part of the twentieth century emerged as the dominant paradigm for the Armenian communities across the United States by the 1940s and has survived largely uncontested since then.

Dr. Simon Payaslian is holder of the Charles K. and Elizabeth M. Kenosian Chair in Modern Armenian History and Literature at Boston University. He is the author of a number of books, including *The Political Economy of Human Rights in Armenia: Authoritarianism and Democracy in a Former Soviet Republic* (2011) and *International Political Economy: Conflict and Cooperation in the Global System* (co-authored with Frederic S. Pearson) (McGraw-Hill, 1999; Chinese translation, Peking University Press,

2006). His articles and book chapters include “Diasporan Subalternities: The Armenian Community in Syria,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 16:1/2 (2007 [2012]): 92-132, and “Imagining Armenia,” in *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*, edited by Allon Gal, Athena S. Leoussi, and Anthony D. Smith (Brill, 2010).

The lecture is free and open to the public. Free public parking is available after 7:00PM at Fresno State Lots P5 and P6, near the University Business Center.

For more information about the lecture please contact the Armenian Studies Program at 278-2669, or visit our website at www.fresnostate.edu/armenianstudies.