



An Educator Through and Through

Ani Shabazian draws on her past to improve the lives of children through education

AS A BEWILDERED kindergartener struggling with a language barrier in the classroom, Dr. Ani Shabazian could never have imagined that she would go on to devote her life to education.

Like many first-generation Americans, Shabazian, assistant professor of education at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles and the director of the University's Children's Center, spent her first five years in the cocoon of family life where the language of the old country reigned. Her parents—Armenian immigrants from Iran—only spoke Armenian at home. But at her

school in Marina del Rey, California, Shabazian was expected to speak English like the rest of her classmates.

"I was told I needed to leave my language at home and value this new one," said Shabazian. "I felt silenced and isolated, because no one spoke my language. That was my first introduction to schooling and it really set the trajectory for my whole career."

In the years that followed, Shabazian drew strength from the challenges she endured as a child and used that strength to take her education as far as it could go. She earned a B.A. in psychology and history from the Univer-

sity of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), an Ed.M. with a focus on human developmental psychology acquisition from Harvard University's Graduate School of Education and capped off her schooling by earning an additional MA and Ph.D in education from UCLA.

Shabazian's student years were not only spent deepening her academic interests, but also strengthening her connection to the Armenian community. As a college student, she was an executive member of the Armenian Students' Association at UCLA. She also participated in the [AGBU New York Summer Internship Program](#), where she worked for

the head of the United Nation's Oil-for-Food program.

Shabazian credits the AGBU with playing a fundamental role in shaping her relationship to the Armenian community. "The AGBU does a great job of connecting Armenians in different places and of different ages, moving us forward collectively and giving us a sense of belonging within the larger community."

In this larger community, Shabazian's heritage has informed her work at the university and beyond. "As an Armenian, you are in tune with issues of social equity and social injustice from a young age," she explains.

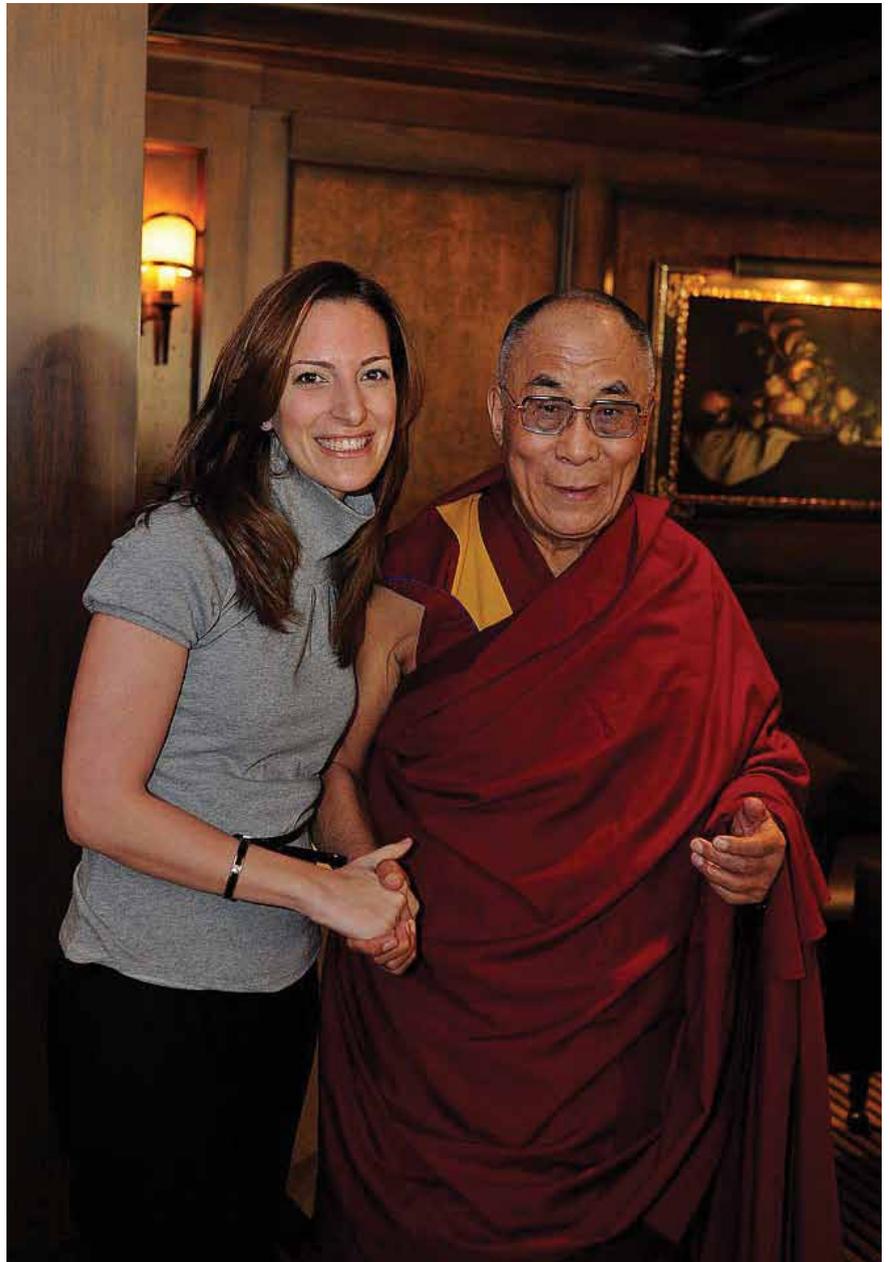
Her convictions led her to work with Whole Child International, a non-profit that aims to improve the quality of childcare in orphanages throughout the developing world. As a consultant for the organization, Shabazian studies children residing in institutions and helps orphanages, local universities, and governments improve their quality of care. "I'm drawn to my orphanage work in the developing world because it's a form of the same social inequity that my people have felt," Shabazian says. Her work with Whole Child International led her to represent the organization on a panel with the Dalai Lama in February 2010, where they discussed the needs of vulnerable children worldwide.

Back in the United States, Shabazian has also made her mark on her local community in Los Angeles. When she assumed the directorship of the Loyola Marymount Children's Center in 2008, the Center was in desperate need of reorganization. Under her leadership, the Center received NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accreditation—an accomplishment about which only 8% of childcare centers in the United States can boast—and boosted its enrollment significantly.

She has also made a profound impression on her students, earning Distinguished Faculty Teaching Awards at both Loyola Marymount and UCLA, where she was the youngest faculty member ever to receive the award. Recently, her dedication to students has extended outside the classroom through her involvement in the AGBU Access Program.

In the years to come, Shabazian will surely continue to be a positive force in education, drawing inspiration from her own experiences as a dazed kindergartener to improve the educational experiences of other children.

And one thing is for sure. Shabazian's work, her Armenian heritage and the AGBU will always remain inextricably linked. "The one steady thing in my life has been my Armenian culture," said Shabazian. "And I can't remember a time when the AGBU wasn't a part of my life." ☺



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