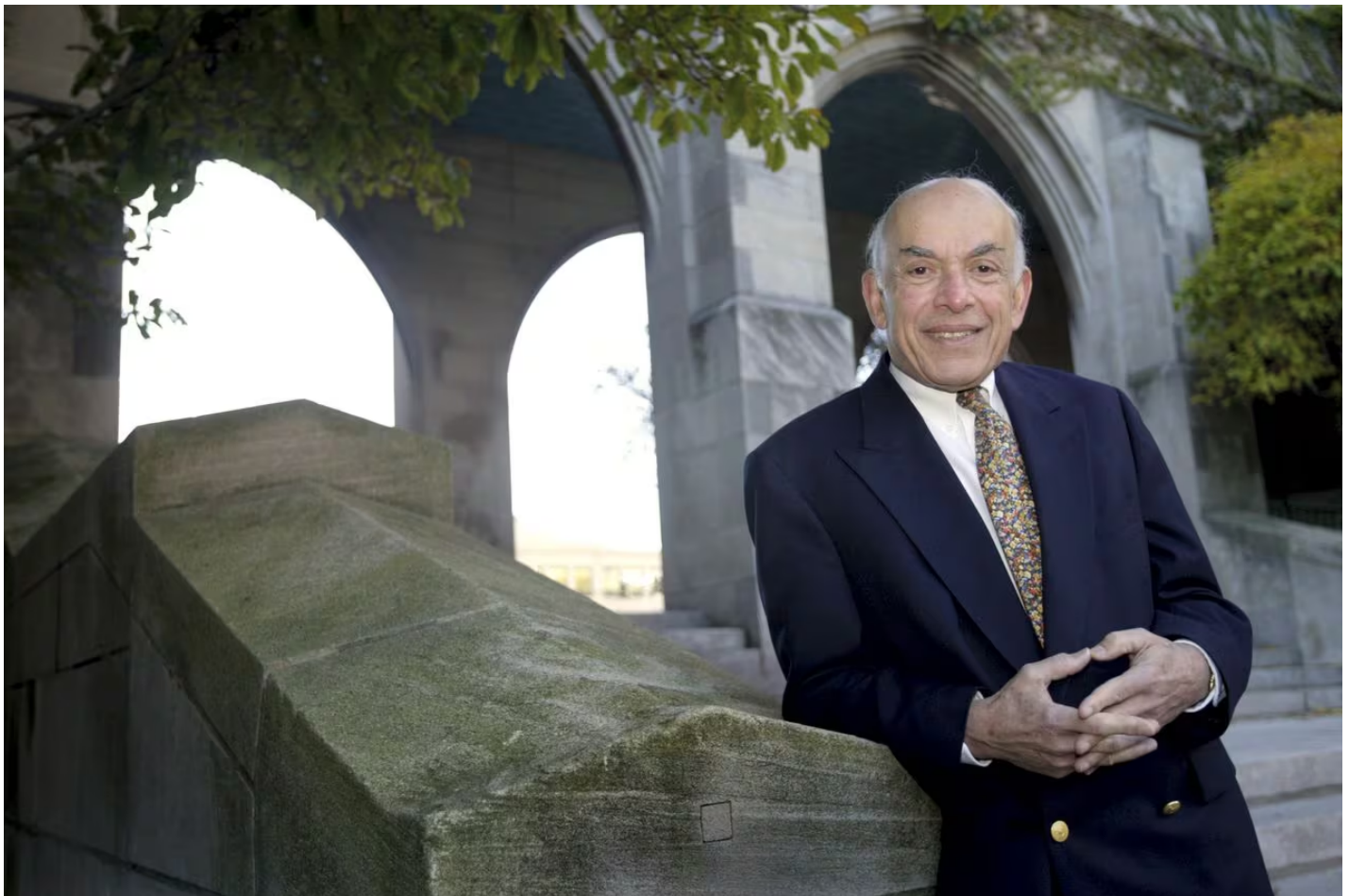


# Dr. Aram V. Chobanian, president who calmed BU at a troubled time, dies at 94

By [Bryan Marquard](#) Globe Staff, Updated September 5, 2023, 5:19 p.m.



Dr. Aram V. Chobanian outside Marsh Chapel on the Boston University campus in 2004. TURNER, LANE GLOBE STAFF

An internationally respected cardiologist, Dr. Aram V. Chobanian was nearing retirement [as dean](#) of Boston University's medical school when he was asked to take on a new patient: the university itself.

In late October 2003, when former NASA administrator Daniel S. Goldin was supposed to start as BU's new president, the university's Board of Trustees drew unwanted national

attention by announcing it had rescinded the job offer. The Boston Globe reported that BU paid Goldin \$1.8 million to step away.

That same day, the trustees appointed Dr. Chobanian — an adept administrator and proven fund-raiser known for his calming presence and his ability to get things done — to serve as BU’s interim president.

“I have, I’m told, a certain style that doesn’t aggravate people,” he told the Globe a few days later, “but I tend to be a decisive person.”

Dr. Chobanian, who made national news again last year when the medical school was renamed in his honor, courtesy of a longtime friend who [donated \\$100 million](#) to the institution, was 94 when [he died](#) Thursday in his Natick home, just weeks after his health started to fail.

[A researcher](#) who formerly directed the National Institutes of Health’s Hypertension Specialized Center of Research, he began leading BU when the college remained divided over the longtime reign of [John Silber](#), a previous president whose shadow still loomed large over the trustees and campus.

“My priorities for the near term are to get some of the anxieties out of the way with faculty, students, and staff, and build bridges between myself and the various constituencies I will serve,” Dr. Chobanian said in his November 2003 interview as part of his first public comments after becoming interim president.

Dr. Chobanian “was called to serve Boston University as interim president at a crucial moment, and Boston University is better for his service,” [Kenneth Freeman](#), BU’s current interim president, said late last week as part of the [university’s tribute](#).

In 2005, at the end of Dr. Chobanian’s tenure, the trustees dispensed with the “interim” label and officially designated him [BU’s ninth president](#) in recognition of his accomplishments.

A different kind of designation arrived last year when Edward Avedisian, a friend who also had grown up in Pawtucket, R.I., donated \$100 million on the condition that BU's medical school be renamed to honor Dr. Chobanian.

The old friends were both sons of Armenian immigrants, and Dr. Chobanian insisted he wouldn't allow his name to be on the school unless it bore both their names, so it became the Boston University [Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine](#).

"I'm overwhelmed by the magnitude of the gift," Dr. Chobanian told the Globe in September 2022, "and by the fact that my friendship with him, which was very special, also led to a very special contribution to the institution."

Avedisian, a retired clarinetist who had performed with the Boston Pops and Boston Ballet Orchestra, [died in December](#). He made his fortune through careful investing and had funded numerous other projects, including hospitals and schools, insisting that his financial contributions honor others, not him.

In Dr. Chobanian, Avedisian met his humble match, though. They eventually compromised by having both of their names on the school, but that took some persuading on Avedisian's part.

Initially, Dr. Chobanian "was adamant — he did not want his name on this building," said his daughter, Lisa. "He was quite an amazing human being. He was steady and honest — an old-fashioned good guy."

The youngest of three brothers, Aram Van Chobanian was born in [Pawtucket, R.I.](#), on Aug. 10, 1929.

Dr. Chobanian's paternal grandfather was among relatives who were killed during the Armenian Genocide more than a century ago.

His father, Vahan Chobanian, escaped as a boy from what is now Van, Turkey, and as an adult worked in the Central Falls, R.I., mills as an expert dyer of threads and fabrics. His

mother, Marina Arsenian Chobanian, was a homemaker. Both emphasized education.

“I personally feel like my parents were the reason I’ve done what I’ve done,” Dr. Chobanian told the Globe in September 2022.

A studious boy, he was voted most reserved in his Pawtucket High School class superlatives, his daughter said.

At Brown University, from which he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in 1951, he reconnected with Jasmine Goorigian, who had been a couple of years behind him in Pawtucket.

Married [for 59 years](#) until she [died in 2014](#), “they had a beautiful love story,” their daughter said.

Jasmine, voted most popular in her high school class, “brought him out,” Lisa said. “He always said, ‘It’s good I had your mother around because I really had to come out of my shell to do these jobs.’ ”

A graduate of Pembroke College, then the women’s affiliate of Brown, Jasmine Chobanian was a talented painter who studied at the Boston Museum School and was a research hematology technician at Harvard University’s Thorndike Memorial Laboratory.

Dr. Chobanian graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1955 and joined the medical school faculty at BU in 1962.

His research helping establish the connection between hypertension and vascular disease brought [many honors](#), including a lifetime achievement award from the [Massachusetts Medical Society](#) and a lifetime achievement award in hypertension from the American Heart Association.

He formerly chaired the Joint National Committees on the Detection, Evaluation, and Treatment of Hypertension, and was founding director of the Whitaker Cardiovascular

Institute at BU's medical school in 1973.

In 1988, Dr. Chobanian was named dean of the medical school, and added provost of the medical campus to his titles eight years later.

As BU's president, he traveled throughout the country to speak with alumni groups, sought input from faculty, and had breakfast with students every week or two.

Making changes large and small, he pushed through adding sexual orientation to BU's nondiscrimination policy in late 2004 — responding to requests from students whose wishes weren't heeded by previous presidents.

As a result of Dr. Chobanian's actions, "students feel like they don't need to hide their sexual orientation as much as some might have in the past," a leader of a student LGBTQ group told the Globe then.

In addition to his daughter Lisa, Dr. Chobanian leaves another daughter, Karin Chobanian Torrice; a son, Aram Jr.; and two grandchildren.

A funeral service will be held at 11 a.m. Wednesday in St. Stephen's Armenian Church in Watertown.

A sports fan since childhood, when he impressed friends by rattling off Red Sox statistics, Dr. Chobanian also loved music, teaching himself to play the piano and, in later years, studying composition.

"He was devastated by his wife's death and poured himself into music," Lisa said.

As he composed [operas, songs, and musicals](#), Dr. Chobanian researched historical figures such as Isabella Stewart Gardner, whose life inspired one of his operas.

"He just loved music," said Lisa, who added that her father often played piano at holiday gatherings he and Jasmine hosted.

Dr. Chobanian also remained close to his grandchildren, Marc and Vanessa Torrice, and as BU president emeritus [hooded his granddaughter](#) when she graduated from the university's medical school in 2022.

“It was a very moving experience for me,” Dr. Chobanian, who was then 92, told BU in an interview then. “I never thought I would make it to the day when a granddaughter actually became a physician.”

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