James P. Bagian

James P. Bagian was born on February 22, 1952 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Bagian spent the entirety of his youth in the City of Brotherly Love, and expressed early interests in fields involving mathematics and the sciences. After receiving his bachelor's degree, Bagian gained experience in many professions, including working as a mechanical engineer, flight surgeon, and mountain rescuer. After completing more schooling, Bagian became a NASA astronaut. Bagian is currently the Director of the Center for Healthcare Engineering and Patient Safety and a professor in the Department of Anesthesia and the College of Engineering at the University of Michigan.

Bagian graduated high school in 1969, and immediately began to pursue his ambitious endeavors. Bagian excelled during his college years, as he obtained a Bachelor of Science degree in mechanical engineering in 1973, while graduating first in his class, and a Doctor of Medicine degree from Thomas Jefferson University in 1977, where he became a member of Alpha Omega Alpha, a highly prestigious honors society for med students. Bagian also completed courses at the USAF School of Aerospace Medicine, graduating first rank in his flight surgeon class.

During his fifteen year career at NASA, Bagian served on two separate missions, logging over two weeks of accumulative spaceflight. Bagian flew on the crew of STS-29 and STS-40, which were both tremendously successful. On the STS-29, Bagian and his crew deployed a Tracking and Data Relay Satellite, while performing various secondary experiments. These secondary objectives provided NASA with significant pieces of information, which have affected the standard for care for the control of SMS in Shuttle crews, and has since become a norm. Furthermore, the crew captured over 3,000 photographs of the Earth during the duration of the expedition. On the STS-40, Bagian served as the Lead Mission Specialist. The mission was launched with the intentions of exploring how the heart, blood vessels, lungs, kidneys, and hormone-secreting glands respond to microgravity. In addition, the crew conducted experiments which uncovered several causes of space sickness and alterations in muscles, bones, and cells in humans which take place during expeditions in space. Bagian acted heroic in this expedition, as he personally repaired malfunctioning experiment hardware during the flight, which allowed for longer travel times and all objectives to be completed. To this day, Bagian is the only person of Armenian descent to have been to space. After leaving NASA in 1995, Bagian was awarded membership to the National Academy of Engineering and the Institute of Medicine. Bagian then became the first and founding director of the Veterans Affairs National Center for Patient Safety and the first Chief Patient Safety Officer for the Department of Veterans Affairs. Through these executive positions, Bagian was able to develop several tools and programs that have been utilized all over the world which promote patient safety. Bagian currently empowers the youth through his role as a professor at the University of Michigan in the College of Engineering and Department of Anesthesia. He is also the active Director of the Center for Healthcare Engineering and Patient Safety at the university as well. Through his esteemed careers, Bagian has been distinguished with a myriad of awards. These awards include the U.S. Army ROTC Superior Cadet Award, Sikorsky Helicopter Rescue Award, NASA Achievement Award for developing treatment of space motion sickness, NASA Space Flight Award, NASA Exceptional Service Medal, Society of NASA Flight Surgeons W. Randolf Lovelace Award, American Astronautical Society's Melbourne W. Boynton Award, and several others.
I too, like Bagian, especially excel in both mathematics and the sciences. I have expressed an extreme interest in exploring a career related to engineering, and am currently pursuing my endeavors. Bagian broke boundaries previously untouched, as he is the first and only person of Armenian descent to have been in space. Through this, Bagian has personally shown me how success is often the product of hard work and determination. Bagian persevered through long years of schooling, and gained experience through subsequently working many tiresome occupations. To achieve my aspirations, I shall fully apply myself and work diligently like Bagian.

It’s impossible to exactly measure the overall impact Bagian has had. However it’s necessary to acknowledge the empowering effect he’s had on the young minds he’s taught and inspired. Bagian has also profoundly affected space travel, as many of the methods and technology he helped develop are still used today.

Left: James P. Bagian (top left) with members of his crew of the Space Shuttle Mission STS-29
Right: Bagian on board the STS-40