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Renu Khator has been provost at the University of South Florida for four years.

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UH regents agree on choice for new president

Garnering praise as a scholar, leader and fundraiser, Florida provost Renu Khator is the only finalist for the job

By MATTHEW TRESAUGUE

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A highly praised educator who has served as second in charge at the University of South Florida for the past four years is the only finalist for the top job at the University of Houston, regents said Monday.

The governing board's unanimous selection of Renu Khator all but ended a five-month search for a replacement for Jay Gogue, who left UH to become president of Auburn University, his alma mater. State law requires the regents to wait 21 days before finalizing the appointment.

The regents hailed Khator, 52, as a noted scholar, proven fundraiser and strong leader popular with faculty, students and lawmakers alike. She has served as the chief academic officer, or provost, at South Florida since 2003.

"She is a superstar," said Welcome Wilson, chairman of the UH System's governing board. "She is exactly what we need. She is going to take us to flagship status."

Landed \$34.5 million donor

Khator, if approved, would be swapping one aspiring public university for another.

South Florida is the nation's ninth-largest university, with more than 45,000 students on four campuses, including a medical school. UH enrolls roughly 34,000 students.

RESOURCES

PERSONNEL FILE

Biographical high points for Renu Khator, in line to become the next University of Houston president and UH System chancellor:

- **Age:** 52
- **Education:** Bachelor's degree in liberal arts, Kanpur University in India; master's degree and doctorate in political science, Purdue University.
- **Experience:** Professor, University of South Florida, 1985-present; dean, College of Arts and Sciences, USF, 2000-2003; provost, USF, 2003-present.
- **Family:** Married, with two daughters. Her husband, Suresh, is an engineering professor at USF and is expected to join the UH faculty. Their daughters, Pooja and Parul, are ophthalmologists.
- **Hobbies:** Yoga, travel, reading, writing fiction and poetry, watching football.

Despite their size, both universities exist in the shadows of older and better-known schools in their states.

Even so, Khator recruited top faculty and more students from diverse backgrounds while raising millions from government and private sources. During her four years as provost, South Florida's sponsored research grew by 22 percent, from \$255 million to \$310 million.

She also took the lead reeling in the university's largest donation ever, a gift worth \$34.5 million from a Tampa couple.

"When I saw her name, my heart leaped," said Michael Rierson, UH's chief fundraiser, who previously held a similar position at South Florida.

Khator has been approached by other universities, including Mississippi State, Nevada-Las Vegas and Temple, over the past two years. She turned them down, citing unfinished work at South Florida.

The Houston job, which carries the dual title of university president and UH System chancellor, appealed to her partly because of the similarities to South Florida, Khator said.

"The University of Houston is a great university," she said. "It has so much potential, and that makes me excited."

Khator is expected to start her new job in January, as campus leaders move forward with plans to raise the school to the ranks of the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M University.

Gogue, who earned an annual salary of \$423,392 at UH, left before the completion of most of his biggest projects. He started an ambitious makeover for the University Park campus, but departed before the launch of a major fundraising campaign and amid talks about a new medical school in partnership with The Methodist Hospital and Cornell University.

Wilson, the board's chairman, said he expects Khator to increase the university's sponsored research from \$90 million to \$150 million within three years, attract more high-caliber professors and project a vision for the institution that excites the faculty and community.

Ralph Wilcox, South Florida's vice provost and a former UH professor, predicted that Khator will succeed.

"This is a young institution that has lived in the shadow of the University of Florida and Florida State University in much the same way as UH has in the long and historic shadow of UT and A&M," Wilcox said. "Khator is not one to be intimidated."

High marks in classroom

Her style can be tough and abrupt, and she angered unionized faculty members during contract negotiations. But faculty leaders acknowledged that South Florida's stature improved with Khator as provost.

"We made more progress than I would have thought, given the external constraints," said Susan Greenbaum, an anthropology professor and past president of the faculty senate.

Khator also earned high marks by returning to the classroom this fall after Florida tightened the budgets of its 11 public universities because of an estimated \$1 billion shortfall in state tax revenues. To help cut costs, she chose to teach a beginner's-level class in the Hindi language.

Khator was born and raised in India and met her husband, Suresh, less than three weeks before their arranged marriage. With his encouragement, she earned a master's degree and doctorate in political science at Purdue University in Indiana.

He later took a job as an engineering professor at South Florida, and she followed. Over the next 22 years, she climbed from visiting professor to provost to the doorstep of a university presidency.

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** Gogue, who earned an annual salary of \$423,392 at UH, left before the completion of most of his biggest projects. He started an ambitious makeover for the University Park campus, but departed before the launch of a major fundraising campaign and amid talks about a new medical school in partnership with The Methodist Hospital and Cornell University. **

It's good to see this mentioned, since many recent Chron stories have omitted it. Reference specifically to the Master Plan would have been nice, though.

10/16/2007 11:22:36 PM

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Eljefe007 wrote:

Congratulation to Dr Renu Khator.

Word of advice, stay away from Priscilla Slade.

10/16/2007 4:08:31 PM

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ShastaFanatic wrote:

The Dr. sounds as though she will be the right person to handle the 2 biggest things that need mending or help, and that is working with State Lawmakers and raising money. The campus is on track for the masterplan, but the lawmakers just seem reluctant to step forward and put the cash that atm and ut get. We are the 4th largest city in U.S. this is the big push for Flagship status.

10/16/2007 6:44:20 AM

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