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RENU KHATOR

Renu Khator leaves USF for University of Houston

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USF Provost Renu Khator's colleagues weren't at all surprised by Monday's news that the veteran educator and administrator was leaving the University for president and chancellor positions at the University of Houston (UH).

"I just think that in terms of her career trajectory, it was appropriate for her to be in the market," said Vice Provost for Faculty and Program Development Dwayne Smith, who earned his bachelor's and master's degrees at the University of Houston.

Dr. Ralph Wilcox, vice provost of Policy Analysis, Planning and Performance also agreed that recruiters were drawn to Khator's talent when filling key positions.

"There's no question that Dr. Khator has been viewed as a higher education leader throughout her tenure," he said. "Regrettably, I have to say it was just a matter of time before she was picked off to lead another one of the nation's premier public metropolitan research universities."

Even Khator's husband, professor of industrial and managerial engineering and director of engineering computing Suresh Khator, pointed out that the average tenure for a provost is four years. Renu Khator has been provost for four years and seven months.

"That's the next course for provost, to be the president," he said.

UH announced Khator's next course Tuesday, after the UH System Board of Regents - which governs the system's four universities and two upper-level and graduate 'teaching centers' - named USF's second-ranking official as the sole finalist for UH's president and chancellor, positions now filled by an interim president.

Under the UH system, the president runs the main UH campus.

The presidents of other UH campuses report to the chancellor, who is charged with overseeing the whole UH system.

Although Khator has been selected as the sole finalist, Texas law requires a 21-day waiting period before her employment is finalized, during which contract negotiations and networking with UH officials take place.

At the end of the period, the UH System Board of Regents will meet again and vote on Khator, whose confirmation appears to be a mere formality.

Khator said she was surprised about UH's decision, despite being courted by "head hunters" who contacted her and sought to draw her to other universities for two years.

"Even though I know this might be the next move for my career, now that it's happening, there are a lot of emotions," she said.

Khator has worn many hats during her 22-year tenure at USF, including visiting assistant professor in political science, associate professor, full professor, program director, dean of Arts and Sciences and president of the faculty senate, in addition to provost.

Her husband said his employment at UH is not part of any negotiations. He plans to stay at USF until the summer, and said he is not sure what work he will take up in Houston.

Two of a kind

Khator said one of the draws to UH was its similarity to USF: The UH system is comprised of several colleges and campuses, both universities' student bodies are diverse and both universities are rising to prominence in their respective states.

Also, she said, UH shares USF's drive for excellence, saying that it had a similar vision to be a nationally recognized public top-tier research university.

Leroy Hermes, the former chair of the UH System board of regents and the chair of the search committee that selected Khator, said the similarities between USF and UH - and the extensive work Khator has done at USF - gave her an edge over her competitors.

"We're at a point in that area of research where we're breaking through to becoming a major research institution," Hermes said. "She has a great deal of experience in elevating the University and bringing it to a top-notch research institution."

Khator's co-workers and employees at USF agree that her work has been a success.

Under her tutelage as provost, she worked to increase access to education, improve graduation rates, expand the size of and improve the quality of the student body and attract top research faculty and research grants.

During this same period, USF was named by the Carnegie Institute as among the top 63 public research universities, and the make up of the 2007 freshman class reflects greater selectiveness in admissions compared to when Khator assumed the provost's office.

Smith attributed Khator's push to recruit research faculty and gain national recognition to the way she developed as a professional - as an educator who climbed the University ranks from the bottom up rather than as a career administrator.

About 200 people applied for the position for which Khator was eventually selected, UH spokesman Eric Gerber said, and the search process began early this summer.

Previous UH president Jay Gogue held both positions as well, according Gerber.

Though Khator's deal with UH is all but set in stone, her salary has not been determined, Gerber said. She now earns \$295,388 at USF.

Gogue, who left to assume the role of the president at Auburn University, made \$415,000 a year in salary and \$150,000 in deferred retirement benefits. Current UH interim president John Rudley takes home \$450,000 per year, Gerber said.

Parting is such sweet sorrow

Khator's success at USF, in large part, makes her move to UH all the more bittersweet.

Smith, a UH alum, was glad Khator picked a school with which he felt a kinship.

"I'm very pleased that she's headed somewhere that I have an attachment," he said.

University President Judy Genshaft stated she and the USF family, "greet the announcement from the University of Houston with very mixed emotions: thrilled at this exciting opportunity for such a gifted educator, but with full realization of the loss we will experience."

Khator also described the USF community as a family, and said that uprooting the personal and professional life she made at USF will be the most painful part about her move to UH.

"It's going to be leaving your friends and all the people that make it such a special place," she said of her departure. "I know it is time for me to go and improve, but leaving them is going to be like leaving family."

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