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Students, faculty want new UH president to improve parking, academics

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With the selection of a finalist for UH System chancellor and president to start in January, students, faculty and staff have voiced what they want from the new president.

"I think it would be nice to have more on-campus living so there will be more school spirit," biology freshman Andrea Kells said. "It would raise school spirit if more kids were living on campus. It would make going to school here more fun."

The sole finalist, Renu Khator, was presented to the UH System Board of Regents on Monday morning and unanimously approved.

Currently, Khator is the provost and senior vice president at the University of South Florida - an institution that has similar characteristics to UH.

USF is ranked as one of the top 63 public research universities and has more than 45,000 students, according to the university's Web site.

Economics professor Steven Craig said that her professional background could be seen both positively and negatively.

"I'm optimistic because the University has been growing pretty rapidly, and she has 'real academics' and has been at USF her entire career," he said. "I'm pessimistic because USF is not a University that we aspire to be like. She needs to envision how to make things better."

Mark Clarke, associate professor of health and human performance and chair of the faculty affairs committee for Faculty Senate, said her professional background will only help Khator as UH System chancellor and president.

"I think one of the positive things is that she's had experience at a similar institution that will have given her some insight to the academic side," he said."

What's most important for Clarke is that the University continues to grow.

"Continuity is key," he said. "I think the last couple of presidents had a certain mindset of where the University was going - not just saying, but had some concrete steps. I think we need to continue a thrust toward 'Tier I,'" he said.

Damon Camille, training assessment and statistics coordinator of UH libraries, said he has similar hopes.

"I would like to see the new president keep us on the same track as past presidents," he said.

Student concerns range from dining to parking-all of which students say should be addressed or reviewed by Khator.

"The food here definitely needs improvement," Kells said. "I think there can definitely be healthier choices around campus. Students would do better if they're eating healthy."

Parking is the biggest problem the University is facing, accounting freshman Christo Abraham said.

"I think it should be improved," he said. "We need more parking spaces and places to park. The satellite parking isn't

well known, and it's kind of a far distance from the University. We need closer spaces to our classes."

Parking is a familiar problem for Khator, who was at USF when 46,000 parking permits were sold this year and only 20,500 spaces were actually available at the Tampa campus, according to an It's Your Times letter to the editor.

Parking became such a problem that students created a Web site called "USF Parking Services: Extortion at its Finest" where students could blog their "horror stories."

"Parking is number one out of anything," UH political science sophomore Peter Sayzded said. "Everyone is out there like piranhas trying to find a spot. The satellite parking is too far for me. I want something close to my classes."

Students, like mathematics graduate student and calculus teaching assistant Timothy Rainone, just want the administration as a whole to show an interest in the students.

"The bureaucracy is horrible," he said. "The departments don't care about the students; it's poor bureaucracy. They don't help students get what they deserve."

Khator said she was aware of the parking problems but could not come up with a viable solution without all the facts.

"We have the same issue here as well," she said. "Actually, it's hard to find a university in a major city where parking is not an issue. It's a good thing; it shows the university is growing."

Khator said during her time as provost at USF, parking and other problems have been alleviated.

"At USF we have had enormous parking problems," she said. "When I joined as provost we had two years of declining enrollment, we had low graduation and enrollment rates and we turned it all around."

Kinesiology junior Mary Tran wants to see improvements with University security.

"As a student, I think services like security should be better," she said. "Even though security seems like it's really enforced, it's actually not. I think security needs to be stepped up a bit more."

Another issue has been with the personnel in the Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid, financing freshman Katurah Stovall said.

"There should be more advisors for financial aid," she said. "Usually there's an influx of students and not enough advisors. They should hire more financial aid advisors to better serve the students."

When asked about these issues, Khator said she wasn't sure what the specifics were and could not assess the problem appropriately, but she is ready to get started on a solution.

"We'll have plenty of time for specifics," she said. "When I face an issue I need to see the facts and data - what strategies have been in place, what strategies have been possible - and then take a course of action to fix it."