

USF administrator is leaving

Provost Renu Khator says she will become president at the University of Houston.

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TAMPA - After years of being courted by colleges across the nation, the University of South Florida's No. 2 administrator finally said yes.

Renu Khator is poised to leave the institution where she began her career 22 years ago to lead the University of Houston and its five affiliated institutions.

Khator is the sole finalist for the dual title of president and system chancellor, UH spokesman Eric Gerber announced Monday. The UH System board of regents is expected to confirm her appointment after the 21-day public comment period required by Texas law.

Khator told her staff and college deans about the new job Monday morning, then sent an e-mail to the university community.

Chosen from a field of roughly 200 candidates, she'll go from leading day-to-day operations for Florida's third-largest university of 45,000 students to overseeing four campuses and two college teaching centers that enroll a total of 56,000.

"Dr. Khator is an educational superstar," said UH System regents chairman Welcome Wilson. "She brings a wealth of experience in moving a great university onto the national stage."

Headhunters for institutions including the University of Mississippi, Temple University and the University of Nevada tried in recent years to lure Khator to those presidencies, but she always declined. When Houston came calling this year, Khator decided it was time to answer.

"It's going to be a very emotional departure, because this place seems like home," said Khator, 52, who started at USF in 1985 as a visiting assistant professor. "But you know, the University of Houston is just so much like USF - a metropolitan university, very committed to student success, very internationally oriented, and very committed to rising in the national ranks. It just seemed like the right time."

Khator's husband is an engineering professor at USF, and she said he might stay at USF for a short time after she leaves.

USF spokesman Ken Gullette said the university won't decide on an interim replacement or the search process for a new provost until Khator's appointment is confirmed next month. Khator is expected to assume her new post by January.

UH officials did not release information about Khator's salary. At USF, she makes \$298,698 a year.

"We greet the announcement from the University of Houston with very mixed emotions," USF president Judy Genshaft said in a statement, "Thrilled at this exciting opportunity for such a gifted educator, but with full realization of the loss we will experience."

Students echoed that sentiment. "She's fun to be around, she has a great sense of humor, and she's such an intelligent woman," said student body president Garrin Flowers.

Khator moved to Tampa when her husband, Suresh Khator, got a job at USF, and by 1985 she was an assistant visiting professor in USF's political science department. From then on, her rise was strong and steady.

Khator was director of the environmental science and policy program, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, faculty senate president and faculty assistant to then-USF president Betty Castor. She became interim provost in 2003 and got the permanent job in 2004.

More recently, state budget shortfalls dealt Khator some of her greatest administrative challenges. The nearly 4 percent reduction in USF's budget for this year prompted Khator to freeze hiring, limit travel, and re-evaluate programs and course offerings.

Khator told administrators to head back to the classroom, and she led by example, teaching USF's first-ever Hindi class.

Khator said she hopes she is remembered for improving the academic experience for students.

"My philosophy has been to put the student at the center of every decision we make," Khator said.

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