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Colleges

Provost at USF on yoga, budget

She recently wrote a book about the forces of globalization.

By SHANNONCOLAVECCHIO-VAN SICKLER, Times Staff Writer
Published September 17, 2007



[John Pendygraft | Times]

Renu Khator is in her fifth year as the University of South Florida's No. 2 administrator, a job that is only getting more difficult as the state forces colleges to cut their budgets by tens of millions of dollars.

TAMPA - Renu Khator is in her fifth year as the University of South Florida's No. 2 administrator, a job that is only getting more difficult as the state forces colleges to cut their budgets by tens of millions of dollars.

Khator, 52, also is teaching a class for the first time in four years, helping 25 USF students learn her native Hindi. And she just finished writing a book on how countries are dealing with the global economy and development's impact on their environments and resources.

The Times recently spoke to the USF provost about her job's challenges, the all-nighters she pulled to finish her book and the daily yoga that keeps her calm.

How much more difficult is your job now that the state's budget situation is so dire?

It always becomes more challenging because our commitment to students does not drop. And it's not just me; the job becomes more difficult for everyone here. So we have to make sure the mission of the university is further clarified, and the operations are more streamlined. In the short run, it's very painful, but in the long run I am hopeful the state of Florida will recognize the value of higher education.

Talk about your decision to teach Hindi this semester.

Students have been asking for quite some time that the university offer a course in Hindi, and that's because India has become so prominent economically. And I could not find anybody qualified here to teach it. Then the budget reductions came, and I thought, it is only prudent that the administrators go back to the classroom to pick up some of the load. I thought it was only right that I be the first.

What's it like after four years away from the classroom? Is it different?

It is a thrilling experience. Every time I walk out of that classroom, I feel so energized and gratified. You see the sparkle in students' eyes. They're hungry for learning something new, and you can see that they feel more empowered now than when they first came in. So it's wonderful.

Do you think they feel more pressure taking a class from the provost?

They may have felt that the first day, but I don't think so today. We have a great rapport in the classroom. They're very free with me; I am free with them.

You always seem so calm and collected. What's the secret?

Professionally, I believe in the people I have around me, and I also believe in the faculty and the staff. Because I am only one person. Their trust and their faith keeps me going. Personally, I do meditation and yoga. Every morning, I spend 30 minutes to 45 minutes.

Where do you do it?

We live on a lake, and it's right on the deck. I go out there every morning with my yoga mat.

How important is that time for you?

Oh, that's the first thing, I wake up with that thought, that I want to be with myself. And then in the evening I like a feeling of freedom, like I am flying, so I go bike riding.

Really? Why do you like to feel as if you're flying?

I don't know. I just like the feeling of flying, of the freedom, of just being out there. But I also find time for family. They live far away, but almost every day I talk to them. I think at the bottom of it all is the feeling that the people are with you, and that you can believe in each other.

So tell me about your book.

It's called Managing Development in the Global Context, and it really talks about the forces of globalization and how the different countries are responding to those forces as they try to grow.

How did you find time to finish?

It took me two years. I have had the discipline to pull an all-nighter every Wednesday night. It's the only way to get it done, because you really need five or six hours at a time, uninterrupted. It's been a very good and thrilling experience. I feel really very good.

Shannon Colavecchio-Van Sickler can be reached at svansickler@sptimes.com or 813 226-3403.

FAST FACTS

Renu Khator

Age: 52

Personal: Lives in New Tampa with husband Suresh Khator, a USF engineering professor. She followed him to USF more than two decades ago when he got a teaching job, then moved up the ladder herself.

Children: Daughter Pooja, 29, is an ophthalmologist in Sarasota. Daughter Parul, 26, is finishing her residency in ophthalmology at Emory University.

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by USFSTUDENT 09/17/07 01:45 AM

Great woman. I have much respect and admiration for her. She is definitely an asset to the university.

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