

## From the Houston Business Journal

### Q&A

# UH President Renu Khator sees bright future for school after prestigious research designation

## On tweets and tier one

By Barrett Goldsmith, Reporter

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**Renu Khator** has had a lot to Tweet about of late.

Khator, the University of Houston president, and chancellor of the six-campus [University of Houston System](#), has already ensured a banner year for herself and her university now that the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching bestowed Tier One research status on UH earlier this month.

Her Twitter feed has kept up with all of it, the good and the bad:

“Congratulations Cougars ... your UH is now Tier 1 according to Carnegie report released today!” — Jan. 18.

“Excited to be appointed to the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas Board ... just attended 1st meeting in Dallas.” — Jan. 13.

“Proposed house budget means \$65m base cut for biennium for UH ... same as defunding 7,000 students ... ouch!” — Jan. 24.

In the three years since Khator moved into the Wortham House, the UH president’s official residence, the university has seen its annual fundraising nearly triple — to \$102 million from \$38 million — and its faculty research grants reach a figure — \$115 million — more than twice that of a decade ago. More than 3 million square feet of the UH main campus is under major renovation.

But challenges are squarely ahead. The budget issue poses no small threat, and the university’s six-year graduation rate — 45.6 percent — is below the state average.

Houston Business Journal Reporter Barrett Goldsmith spoke with Khator to about how she sees the university's future unfolding.

**What does the Carnegie Foundation's Tier One designation mean for the university?**

It tells the students, faculty, community and the nation that the university is in the top tier in the nation. There are so many benefits. (It will) make our faculty more competitive when they go for research grants. Student diplomas will have national recognition. We will be able to recruit a stronger pool of talent in terms of faculty.

**What needs to change for UH to achieve full Tier One status?**

We have unfinished business. The No. 1 goal is our student success, our college completion rate. We have to serve and support our students in every way possible, in a much stronger way, so they can get their degrees. Second, we have to sustain the excellence and keep our research capacity growing. We have to continue to be innovative.

**How did your appointment to the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas come about?**

**Jim Hackett** (chairman/CEO of Anadarko Petroleum Corp.) nominated me, and I went to visit. What an incredible group of people. I felt so humbled. It's quite a bit of time commitment, but it's so good for me and for the university, and I'm enjoying it.

**What will be the impact of the proposed state budget cuts on the University of Houston?**

The proposed House budget is an absolutely drastic reduction. It means the funding for 7,000 students. It means closing down five colleges. It means 1,000 fewer courses. It means 300 fewer faculty. That does not mean we will do these things, it is just to give a picture.

I am hoping that, as the time passes, our legislative leaders would see the value of higher education and see the value of that investment. We will do everything possible to bring more efficiency, effectiveness and consolidation, but we've done a lot of that in two previous budget cuts.

Our goal is to be nationally competitive and to serve Texas in the best capacity, and that goal is non-negotiable.

**You're clearly a big fan of Cougar sports. What is the state of the UH athletic program?**

First of all, I'm excited about (football quarterback) Case Keenum gaining another year of eligibility. He is such a role model. I am excited about women's basketball — 6-0 in conference — and men's basketball.

We need Tier One facilities. We are raising funds right now. I hope we can soon build a new stadium and new arena. I want to make sure our athletics are also nationally competitive. On Fridays our campus has so much red, it's really heartwarming — really something great.

**As the first Indian-American president of a major U.S. university, what kind of response have you received from that community here in Houston?**

Houston has 150,000 Indian-Americans, and they are well-educated and prosperous. They have adopted and embraced me in a big way. We have had major gifts from Indian-American graduates, and they've helped us in taking students to India on study-abroad programs. We have an Indian studies center, and we're offering courses in Indian languages. (When I was appointed), the news channels in India had a scroll all day. I feel so humbled. I want to be a source of pride and inspiration for young people.

**You are quite an active user of Twitter and other social media. What do you enjoy about Tweeting, what was your most memorable Tweet?**

In this day and age, it's a unique method to reach out. I Tweet from my Blackberry, from wherever I am. I'm actually Tweeting about this interview right now. My most memorable Tweet was the (Oct. 2009 UH football) game against Texas Tech. I kept screaming. It took me a few minutes to calm down and Tweet.