

PURDUE Alumnus

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A portrait of Renu Khator, a woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling. She is wearing a bright green blazer with a black outline, a gold necklace with a large pendant, and gold earrings. The background is a blurred, warm-toned outdoor setting.

RENU KHATOR:
At the head of the class

At the Top of Their Game



For these three Purdue graduates, hard work and a passion for what they do has paid off. From heading a large corporation to managing the academic affairs of a university, these alumni have what it takes to be successful. On these pages, they share their journeys.

—Editor



Renu Khator: Embracing Education

At the age of 18, Renu Khator immigrated from Uttar Pradesh, India, to West Lafayette, Ind., after her parents arranged her marriage to a Purdue University student, a man she had met just three weeks earlier. Although she couldn't speak English, Khator found her new small-town home to be a wide and wondrous world, filled with freedom and opportunity.

"I remember the incredible liberation I felt as I walked unescorted down the street," says Khator (MS'75, PhD'85). "I was astounded by the possibilities before me." For many women in India at the time, marriage meant the end of a higher education. Khator realized this wasn't the case for her. Her husband, Suresh (IE'75), encouraged her to continue her studies. Having already earned her undergraduate degree in India, Khator immediately applied to graduate school.

The professors in the political science department encouraged Khator to try a couple of classes. "I've never worked so hard in my life," says Khator as she recalls taking her first classes while trying to learn English. "I will never forget the opportunities made available to me." She proved to be an outstanding student, continued to take classes and received her master's degree in political science two years later in 1975, then her doctorate in 1985.

Today Khator continues her passion for higher education as the provost and vice president of academic affairs at the University of South Florida (USF) in Tampa. "The most rewarding part of my job is giving students the same chance to succeed as I was given at Purdue," she says.

As provost, Khator faces a tight schedule of speaking engagements and meetings filled with intense discussions where critical decisions are made regarding the academic programs, staff and future of USF. "I love to work on strategic planning," she comments, "such as creating an environment where people can reach their maximum potential and developing policies to keep the university moving forward."

This year, USF celebrates its 50-year anniversary with more than 42,000 students and 2,400 faculty members. It recently was named in the top tier in the prestigious Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classification system. To Khator, this means she is doing her job successfully.



Since Khator's first visit to USF, she saw it as a university "ready to go places." She joined the staff as a visiting professor and moved up the ranks including professor of political science, director of the department of government and international affairs graduate program, and dean of the College of Arts and Science. In 2004 she became the first female provost at USF and the only Indian-born administrator at a major Florida university, and one of very few in the country. "It has been a delightful journey," she says. "I have been very fortunate to have the support of wonderful mentors and friends."

As a woman and an immigrant, she's always made the extra effort she felt was required to get ahead. "I put my entire heart and soul into everything I do. It's who I am," she says. "I also love challenges and enjoy a fast-paced lifestyle."

Showcasing a 25-page résumé, it is evident that Khator never sits still for long. She has made dozens of community presentations in the past five years and more than 50 conference presentations in her career. In addition, she's published five books, almost 50 book chapters and journal articles, and 20 book reviews, as well as received numerous awards and honors. "I usually work until midnight each night and pull an all-nighter at least once a week," Khator explains. She also credits her scholarly network in encouraging her research and pushing her to new heights.

Associate provost Kofi Glover has known Khator since she joined USF in 1985. "Renu is successful because she's a very hard worker with a lot of integrity and charm. She is also very empowering, an enabler, giving others the means and power to succeed, rather than being an obstacle blocking the way," he says.

In 20 years, Khator has left her footprints all over USF through her hard work, research and administrative decisions. The past two years as provost have given her even more of a chance to shape the future of higher education. "My dream is to put USF in the top 50 preferred universities in the country," she says. When she feels she has done all she can do as provost, she will move on to a new role.



COURTESY OF USF

RENU KHATOR

- appointed provost at the University of South Florida in April 2004
- originally from Uttar Pradesh, India
- pulls an all-nighter at least once a week
- proud mother of two daughters, both of whom are ophthalmologists
- published five books

“Renu is motivated by her desire to do everything the best she can possibly do,” says her husband, Suresh. “One day she will become the president of a university.” Kofi Glover agrees, “It’s not a matter of ‘if,’ but just a matter of ‘when.’”

Khator tells her two daughters and the thousands of students at USF to never ask life to be easy on you. Instead, demand that it be rewarding. “Then you will feel as gratified as I do.”

—*Sbari Gasper*