

UF Professor Gets Key Position at National Science Foundation



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The National Science Foundation has selected a University of Florida engineering professor to serve as assistant director for the Directorate of Engineering, where he will oversee nationwide engineering research programs with an annual budget of \$800 million.

Pramod P. Khargonekar, a professor in the department of electrical and computer engineering at UF, will start his NSF position in March. Since September, he has been deputy director for technology at the U.S. Department of Energy's Advanced Research Projects Agency-Energy. Both positions are based in Washington, D.C.

Khargonekar still will serve as a UF professor, coming to Gainesville on a monthly basis and supervising doctoral students.

"I'm just delighted to have been selected for this wonderful opportunity," Khargonekar said about his NSF appointment.

During Khargonekar's career, he has done research in many areas, including semiconductor manufacturing, smart grid and renewable energy and the modeling and control of neural systems. He received both his master's in mathematics and his doctorate in electrical engineering from UF. Originally from India, he received his bachelor's in engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology.

NSF Director Subra Suresh, in a media release, said, "Dr. Khargonekar brings to NSF extensive leadership, creativity and initiative in engineering research. He has helped pioneer interdisciplinary efforts between the biological and engineering research communities and demonstrated a deep appreciation for developing the STEM workforce, which is a NSF priority."

Khargonekar said attracting students to study STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines is one of his longstanding goals.

"This is a workforce issue for the nation," he said. "Our students compete all around the world. We need to ensure they are prepared to be part of this global economy."

Khargonekar is particularly dedicated to the recruitment of women and minorities to engineering fields, retaining first-year college students, and inspiring interest in STEM fields among high school students.

He said that the NSF, through fellowships for students, plays "a significant role" in engineering education.

In Khargonekar's new position, he will help provide funding and oversight to academic research institutions for cutting-edge engineering research projects, he said.

"A major emphasis is on interdisciplinary research," he said, adding that, "I will be also working with other federal agencies to enhance engineering research throughout the country."