

Tulane University names acclaimed psychologist Anita Raj as executive director of Newcomb Institute

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roger@tulane.edu



Mississippi native Anita Raj, a renowned psychologist, author and researcher, is the new executive director of Tulane University's Newcomb Institute. (Photo by Erik R. Jepsen)

Anita Raj, PhD, a distinguished scholar and research scientist trained in developmental psychology and public health with a multi-disciplinary research focus on gender equity in global health and development, has accepted the appointment

as the new executive director of Tulane University's [Newcomb Institute](#), effective July 1, 2023.

A native of Jackson, Mississippi, Raj comes to Tulane from the University of California San Diego, where she is an inaugural Tata Chancellor Professor of Society and Health and founding director of the Center on Gender, Equity and Health. She holds joint faculty appointments in the School of Medicine and School of Social Sciences.

Her research, including epidemiologic and intervention studies, focuses on sexual and reproductive health, maternal and child health, women's empowerment and gender inequalities, including gender-based violence and child marriage. Raj has approximately 300 peer-reviewed publications. Her work has been featured in major media outlets in the United States, the United Kingdom and India.

In a [joint message](#) announcing the appointment, Tulane President Michael A. Fitts and Provost Robin Forman hailed Raj as an innovative leader, author, researcher and voice for racial and gender inequalities, violence prevention and public health initiatives. Raj will also serve as the Nancy Reeves Dreux Endowed Chair at the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

"I could not be more thrilled to be at Newcomb. It is like coming home," said Raj, who enrolled in Newcomb College as a 16-year-old student in 1987 before earning a bachelor's degree in biology from Mississippi College in 1991. "We are already planning new cross-campus collaborative research focused on violence and mental health in Louisiana. I look forward to connecting with the students, faculty, the local community and our alumni to learn what issues they want to see Newcomb address in our changing world."

At UCSD Raj created and led the EMERGE platform, which provides open access to evidence-based measures on gender equality and empowerment for tracking progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 5, one of [17 Sustainable Development Goals](#) established by the United Nations in 2015 as part of its "blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet." She also created and led the California Study on Violent Experiences (CalVEX), which involves state-wide survey research and supportive qualitative data on violence and health in California. She will be bringing this work to the Newcomb Institute and expanding its focus to Louisiana.

Raj has served as an advisor to UN Women, a United Nations entity working for gender equality and the empowerment of women. She has also served as an advisor for UNICEF, the World Health Organization, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the David and Lucille Packard Foundation. She spoke at the UN General Assembly on the issue of child marriage and serves as advisor and grantee to Blue Shield of California Foundation and Kaiser Permanente on matters of social and health policies for California, based on the work of CalVEX.

Recognized as a top leader in research on women and girls' empowerment for achievement of global and national health and development, Raj helped spearhead two groundbreaking journal special issues on Gender Equality and Health in 2019 for the *Lancet* and for *Social Science and Medicine-Population Health*. She is currently co-leading, with scholars from the National Institutes of Health, a special issue of *Social Science and Medicine* on structural sexism and health. Raj is also co-chair of the National Academy of Science, Engineering and Medicine's pioneering committee on Women's Empowerment, Population Dynamics and Socioeconomic Development.

Raj earned her master's (1995) and PhD (1996) in psychology from the University of Georgia. She completed a postdoctoral fellowship with the Association of Teachers of Preventative Medicine STI/HIV and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and the University of Georgia in 1996-97. She was also a postdoctoral fellow at Boston University, where she obtained her first faculty position and served as a faculty member from 1998-2011.

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- Anita Raj, new executive director of Tulane's Newcomb Institute