

International student remembers coming to Tulane 50 years ago

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For new students, the first week of school may be a bewildering blur of getting one's bearings, finding classes, locating eating places and making friends. For international students arriving in the United States for the first time, the additional culture shock can create a lifelong impression.



H.N. Ramaswamy stands in front of McAlister Auditorium on his graduation day in 1967. Ramaswamy's PhD in chemistry led to a 42-year career in industry and fulfillment of the American dream for him, he says. (Photo from H.N. Ramaswamy)

"I was surprised to see children and women walking around in bikinis," recalls H.N. Ramaswamy, who came to Tulane University from India in 1963 to pursue a PhD in chemistry ? a goal he achieved in 1967. He had no idea about what to expect at Tulane.

During his first stroll through campus, he says, "I walked slowly, sweating profusely, by many dormitories, the football stadium, McAlister Auditorium and a green grass playground where students were playing and throwing Frisbees."

After spending the night in Monroe Hall, Ramaswamy made his way to the chemistry department in the Richardson Building, where he found his mentor, professor Hans

B. Jonassen, who guided him through the registration process and coursework selection.

His first year was the hardest as he adjusted to the new culture and land.

“Homesickness and sometimes loneliness made me wonder why I traveled away from my home.”

But, life on campus eventually became “most enjoyable,” says Ramaswamy. He was awarded scholarships and assistantships. He published and presented his research in prestigious journals and at national meetings.

Ramaswamy held a National Science Foundation postdoctoral fellowship at the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Southern Regional Research Laboratory on Lakeshore Boulevard in New Orleans for two years. He then moved to Atlanta, where he worked in industry for 42 years until his retirement. He now teaches at Southern Polytechnic State University in Atlanta.

Through the years, Ramaswamy has conveyed to his family the positive impact that Tulane had on him. And, recently, his son funded a five-year travel grant for doctoral students in the [Tulane School of Science and Engineering Department of Chemistry](#) to provide opportunities for them to attend academic and industrial conferences.

Looking back, Ramaswamy concludes that it was “worth it to cross the ocean and leave known surroundings and culture.”

“I am convinced now that Tulane opened my eyes, gave me a good education and helped me to prosper in the country, realizing the American dream.”