

NEWS RELEASE
UP researchers shine at SA's 'Science Oscars'



From left to right: Prof Themba Mosia (Interim Vice-Chancellor), Prof Mike Sathekge, Prof Bernard Slippers and Prof Sunil Maharaj

PRETORIA - Three researchers from the University of Pretoria (UP) have been honoured at the National Science and Technology Forum (NSTF)-South32 Awards, dubbed South Africa's "Science Oscars". The awards celebrate exceptional contributions to science, engineering, technology (SET) and innovation, and is endorsed by the national Department of Science and Innovation. They are widely acknowledged as South Africa's premier accolades in public SET and innovation.

Professor Bernard Slippers received the Management Award for fostering scientific excellence through collaborative team efforts. He holds a professorship in genetics within the Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology, and serves as Director of the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute at UP as well as Innovation Africa @UP.

“A very big thank you to the NSTF-South32 Awards for the support, but also for these kinds of events, which remind us to celebrate the ecosystems in which we can work,” Prof Slipper said. “Scientific achievement is never the outcome of an individual; it’s always a property of the ecosystems in which we work. I have been very privileged over my career to work at the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute at the University of Pretoria, with fantastic colleagues who have helped me and who have created an environment within which I can pursue my dreams and help others to pursue theirs.”

Professor Mike Sathekge, Chief Executive Officer of the NPC Nuclear Medicine Research Infrastructure (NuMeRI) and Head of the Nuclear Medicine Department at UP, received the Innovation Award: Corporate Organisation. He and his team were hailed as pioneers for their groundbreaking work at NuMeRI, which seeks to revolutionise medical research and patient care.

NuMeRI offers comprehensive medical imaging and a theragnostics facility, which is central to drug development and clinical research. Theragnostic care makes use of imaging technologies and targeted therapies to diagnose and treat diseases like cancer while monitoring patient responses. What distinguishes NuMeRI is its holistic approach, integrating pre-clinical imaging, radiopharmaceutical production, translational research, radiobiology, medical physics, clinical molecular imaging and theragnostics in a single facility. This integrated model bridges laboratory research with direct patient care, ultimately improving healthcare outcomes in South Africa.

Professor Roger Deane, an astrophysicist at UP, was part of the international team that captured the first image of a black hole. He was part of a group that received the joint Special Annual Theme Award: Fourth Industrial Revolution in South Africa for the work being done by the Inter-University Institute for Data-Intensive Astronomy (IDIA), a collaboration among UP, the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape. The IDIA’s advanced infrastructure enables global collaboration in astronomy, enhancing the ability of researchers to analyse intricate science, engineering and technology data, particularly radio astronomy data, with unparalleled effectiveness.

“We are deeply honoured and proud of our colleagues who have been recognised by the NSTF-South32 Awards, particularly as we prepare for UP Giving Day, part of our campaign to raise R100 million to support students to access quality education,” said Prof Sunil Maharaj, Vice-Principal of Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Education at UP.

“These accolades not only honour our dedicated researchers, but also underscore our commitment to advancing science, engineering, technology and innovation in our nation. They are also an inspiration to the hundreds of students who benefit from the Giving Day campaign, and serve to motivate our donors from around the world. This is an achievement that reaffirms UP’s pivotal role in shaping the future of these fields and our ongoing commitment to pushing the boundaries of knowledge.”

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ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

The University of Pretoria (UP) is one of the largest contact and residential universities in South Africa, with its administration offices located on its Hatfield Campus in Pretoria. This 115-year-old institution is also one of the largest producers of research in South Africa.

Spread over seven campuses, it has nine faculties and a business school, the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS). It is the only university in the country with a Faculty of Veterinary Science, which is ranked the best in Africa. UP has 120 academic departments and 92 centres and institutes, accommodating more than 56 000 students and offering about 1 100 study programmes. It has the most academic staff with PhDs (70%), NRF-rated researchers (613).

The 2024 Times Higher Education subject rankings placed UP first in South Africa in the fields of Law, Veterinary Science, Accounting and Finance; Agriculture and Forestry and Electrical and Electronic Engineering. Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) ranked the University among the top five in Africa, as part of their 2024 World University Rankings (WUR). UP was the only South African university featured in the 2023 World University Rankings for Innovation (WURI), falling within in the 101-200 range of innovative universities.

For more information, please go to www.up.ac.za