

NEWS RELEASE

UP scientist selected to attend Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings



Dr Bertus van Heerden selected to attend prestigious Lindau Nobel Laureate Meeting in Germany

PRETORIA - Dr Bertus van Heerden, who graduated recently with a PhD in Physics during the University of Pretoria's (UP) 2024 autumn graduation season, has been selected to attend the Lindau Nobel Laureate Meetings in Germany, which will be held between 30 June and 5 July. He is one of just eight young scientists from South Africa who was selected to participate in the meeting dedicated to physics.

These meetings are a forum for young scientists from around the world to engage with Nobel laureates on research and career management aspects. As the official partner of the Lindau Foundation, the Academy of Science of South Africa, with funding from the national Department of Science and Innovation, nominates young scientists from South Africa to attend the meetings.

"I'm very grateful and excited to be selected to attend this event," says Dr Van Heerden, a postdoctoral researcher in the Biophysics Research Group at UP. "I know this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that very few in my position get to experience. I am passionate about science, and so this is a dream come true. This

means a lot to me as a young scientist, as I will get the opportunity to interact with scientific leaders and other passionate young scientists. I believe this will be a wonderful learning experience for me and an opportunity to make new connections.”

Dr Van Heerden graduated from UP in April 2024 with a PhD in Physics. His thesis is titled ‘Studying single plant light-harvesting complexes in near-native environments’.

“I am immensely proud of Dr Van Heerden,” says Professor Tjaart Krüger, the young scientist’s PhD supervisor. “From the beginning, he’s been an academic trailblazer. He exemplifies all the qualities of an outstanding scientist: independence, critical and scientific thinking, creativity, excellent communication skills, teamwork, mentorship, and a dedicated, meticulous work ethic. His PhD thesis was highly praised by expert examiners and accepted without any recommended changes, something I haven’t experienced before.”

Dr Van Heerden is the recipient of several accolades. At the 2023 National Research Foundation Awards, he received a Research Excellence Award for Next-Generation Researchers in recognition of his extraordinary contributions to the field of data analysis in physics. In the same year, he won an award for the best PhD talk in laser spectroscopy at the 67th annual conference of the Institute of Physics. Additionally, UP’s Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute awarded him a prize for the best first-author publication by a PhD student for a 2022 paper that was published in the journal *Small*.

A Fulbright Visiting Student Researcher scholarship from September 2022 to May 2023 gave him the opportunity to spend nine months of his PhD studies in the US.

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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