

NEWS RELEASE

UP launches Banned Books exhibition



Department of Library Services at UP launched its Banned Books exhibition.

PRETORIA – In celebration of National Book Week, the [Department of Library Services](#) at the [University of Pretoria](#) (UP) recently launched its Banned Books exhibition at an event held at the Merensky 2 Library auditorium. The event featured a series of enlightening talks about the history and implications of censorship and book banning in South Africa.

The exhibition seeks to reveal how censorship has been employed to suppress dissent and control public discourse.

The featured speakers included [Professor Thula Simpson](#) of UP's [Department of Historical and Heritage Studies](#), who explored The Oxford History of South Africa and its portrayal of censorship and historiography under apartheid; [Prof Willie Burger](#) of UP's [Department of Afrikaans](#), who spoke about the banning of André Brink's Kennis van die Aand; and [Prof Molly Brown](#) of the [Department of English](#), who addressed current trends

in book banning, particularly concerning young adult literature in American schools. Additionally, representatives from the National Library of South Africa offered insight into their extensive collection of banned books.

“It’s important to recognise how critical access to these sources is for our intellectual and academic freedom,” Prof Simpson said. “Many banned works, including South African classics, didn’t genuinely threaten the regime but were suppressed, hindering the creative and scholarly potential of future generations. This fear of censorship led to a significant loss in our intellectual heritage.”

Banned books often acquire an allure and status that can sometimes overshadow their actual content, she added. This process of suppression paradoxically enhances their appeal and influence, as the very act of banning can generate increased curiosity and interest. As a result, these books can shape societal attitudes and conversations around freedom of expression in profound ways, making their messages even more impactful.

Understanding the history of book banning provides valuable insight into how past restrictions have shaped the current landscape of freedom. It serves as a reminder to appreciate and safeguard our present freedoms, ensuring that we do not take them for granted. By reflecting on historical censorship, we can better address contemporary challenges related to censorship and maintain vigilance over our rights to free expression.

Academic and professional communities play a crucial role in raising awareness about literary freedom and the perils of censorship.

“Exhibitions like this are good for raising awareness,” Prof Thula Simpson added. “Also, UP publications help to create a permanent literary record of opposition to the control of thought.”

The exhibition served as a reminder of the impact of censorship on our intellectual and cultural heritage. By examining the historical and contemporary issues surrounding book banning, the event underscores the importance of safeguarding our freedoms and understanding the value of unrestricted access to information.

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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