

North-West University honours its outstanding researchers

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The NWU honoured the best of its best researchers and innovators during a virtual awards evening on 3 December 2020.

Many outstanding staff members were acknowledged at the event for achieving excellence in research during 2019, including researchers with new NRF ratings.

The winners of the vice-chancellor's medal for the best master's-degree student in all faculties and the S2A3 medal for the best student in either the Faculty of Engineering, the Faculty of Health Sciences or the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences were also announced, and these medals will be presented at the next faculty graduation ceremonies.

This year was a first not only because it was a virtual awards ceremony, but also because the research achievers were acknowledged in new categories. For the first time researchers were also saluted in a runner-up category.

Just like last year the Faculty of Theology took top honours, with Prof Marius Nel winning in the prestigious Most Productive Researcher category. Prof Nel was also the winner in this category at last year's awards ceremony.

The focus of his research is African Pentecostalism and its hermeneutical perspectives. Prof Nel investigates the influence of African Pentecostalism on different ways of reading and interpreting the Bible.

Prof Danie Meyer, a development economist and former director of the Trade and Development research entity in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, was recognised as the runner-up in the Most Productive Researcher category.

Prof Ruan Kruger was the winner in the new category for Most Productive Emerging Researcher. Prof Kruger is the research leader of the NRF SARCHI Research Chair in Early Detection and Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease in Africa, hosted by the Hypertension in Africa Research Team (HART) centre for excellence. His research focuses on the early detection and prevention of hypertension and early vascular ageing, especially in children and early adulthood.

The runner-up in this category was Dr Zandri Dickason-Koekemoer of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences. Prof Dickason-Koekemoer specialises in financial risk management, with her main focus on financial risk tolerance, depositor and investor behaviours, behavioural finance, and the financial well-being of investors.

Prof Leenta Grobler of the School for Mechanical Engineering and Dr Henri Marais of the School of Electronic and Computer Engineering in the Faculty of Engineering received the Innovation Impact Award for their contributions with regard to digital health-related engineering innovations.

Dr Aurelia Williams of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences was the winner in the category for NWU National and International Recognitions and Memberships. Dr Williams was listed among the Mail & Guardian's top 200 young South Africans for 2019 in the Science and Technology category.

It was not only the researchers and innovators that were the stars of the night. Students also shone, with Liezel Naidoo and Christelle van Zyl who were announced to be receiving the vice-chancellor's medal in the category for the most outstanding master's-degree student in the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences respectively.

Renier Timothy Hough was announced to be receiving the S2A3 bronze medal (for original research at master's-degree level) as the most outstanding master's-degree student in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences.

For a full list of winners click here http://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/files/i-news/electronic_newsletters/From-VC/2020/VCResearch-awards-2020.html

NWU researchers overcome Covid-19 challenges

Reflecting on the current state of research at the NWU, Prof Frans Waanders, acting deputy vice-chancellor for research and innovation, said that despite the impact of Covid-19, research at the NWU had continued in most cases. "During recent meetings with our faculty deans it was clear that the writing and submission of journal articles even improved compared to 2019."

He said that the link in the research chain that had suffered the most from the pandemic was postgraduate students, as some of them were unable to enter a lab, do some hard-core research or bind a thesis or dissertation. "I trust the electronic submissions have helped to curb these frustrations. Extending the handing in of examination scripts to late in December was also a decision to assist them."

Prof Linda du Plessis, vice-principal and deputy vice-chancellor for planning and Vanderbijlpark campus operations, said that after having listened to all the achievements, words could not do justice to capture everything that had been accomplished and to express the gratitude for the perseverance and commitment researchers had towards their work.

"An event like this not only gives us a glimpse of the work done at our institution, but it is also an opportunity to thank every person who contributes to the research performance at the institution. A hearty word not only of congratulations, but also of thanks to every award recipient."

Vice-chancellor Prof Dan Kgwadi said that, although it was a pity that researchers had to meet virtually and not in person to celebrate their achievements this year, the virtual awards were by no means a lack of acknowledgement for the great work that the NWU's researchers and innovators were doing.

"As an institution we have improved our national and international positions in our rankings and ratings, and it is all because of your contributions. We thank you and your support systems — your spouses, deans, heads of departments and directors."

He said the NWU family was truly inspired by the hard work of researchers and he felt honoured to congratulate every researcher and innovator who had received an award.

"Thank you for making us proud," he concluded.

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