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## **UCT to honour heroes in teaching, reconciliation and computer technology**

**Psion founder David Potter, teaching legend Stella Petersen, UCT Emeritus Professor Martin West, and struggle and reconciliation leader Mary Burton to receive honorary degrees in 2011**

The University of Cape Town this year will award honorary degrees to David Potter, the founder of microcomputer systems companies Psion and Psion Teklogix; Cape Town teaching legend Stella Petersen; UCT Emeritus Professor Martin West; and struggle and reconciliation leader Mary Burton. The degrees will be awarded to Petersen and West during graduation ceremonies in June, and to Burton and Potter in December.

"This year's honourands were selected after careful consideration of what they have each contributed not only to their respective areas of expertise, but to education," said UCT Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price. "This could be through the provision of fellowships, as David Potter has done; encouraging transformation and reconciliation, as Mary Burton has done; service to UCT, in the case of Martin West; or contributing more directly with superlative teaching skills, as Stella Petersen has done."

The recipients of the honorary awards are described below.

### **Mary Burton: Honorary Doctorate in Social Science**

Born in Buenos Aires in 1940, Burton emigrated from Argentina to South Africa 1961. In the subsequent 50 years, she was involved first in the struggle for human rights in South Africa, then in national reconciliation in the post-Apartheid era. She has exceptional leadership qualities, displayed over several decades at the highest levels of organisations committed to human rights and civil liberties. These include the Black Sash, which she joined in 1965 and in which she served as president from 1986 to 1990; the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in which she served as a commissioner in the Human Rights Violations

Committee from 1995 to 1998; and various other bodies, such as the Surplus Peoples Project, the National Council of Women, the Civil Rights League and the SA Institute of Race Relations. In 2000 she helped launch the Home for All Campaign, which called on white South Africans to contribute to reconciliation in recognition of the benefit and privilege they had had under Apartheid. In 2003, the Order of Luthuli (Silver) was conferred upon her by President Thabo Mbeki. The following year she received the highest provincial award, the Order of Disa, conferred by Western Cape Premier Ebrahim Rasool, and the Reconciliation Award, conferred by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation.

### **Stella Petersen: Honorary Doctorate in Education**

A deeply revered and respected community figure, Petersen set high standards with her extraordinary dedication and commitment to her teaching. She holds a BSc in Botany and Zoology, an MSc in Science, a senior teaching diploma and a BEd degree, all from UCT. She secured a prestigious International Educational Fellowship in the USA and became the first South African to study at Syracuse University in New York, where she earned an MSc in Education in 1949. In 1970 she retired from her last teaching position, as a biology teacher, held for many years at Livingstone High School in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. By that time she had become one of that school's legendary educationists, embodying its disciplined approach to learning as well as its distinctively principled anti-apartheid ethos. Even in retirement, she remains a great propagator of knowledge to students. Until 2005 she served as an educational officer in the environmental centre of Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, where she achieved public recognition for her outstanding efforts in transmitting awareness of conservation. At every turn, she has championed principled beliefs in a future society of genuine non-racialism: a democratic and equal world.

### **David Potter: Honorary Doctorate in Engineering Science**

UCT wants to honour David Potter as a great inventor, entrepreneur and philanthropist who supports higher education in South Africa. He has also channelled some of the fruits of his success to support projects in education, research and Third World development. Born in East London in 1943 and brought up in Cape Town, David Potter was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a doctorate in mathematical physics at Imperial College London. In 1980, he founded software company Psion. Psion led the creation of the Organiser, Palmtop and PDA markets as a new market segment. Potter later founded Symbian Limited, which worked in partnership with Nokia, Ericsson, Motorola and Matsushita to create the operating system standard for mobile wireless devices. In the 1997 UK New Year's Honours list, Potter was named a Commander of the Order of the British Empire for services to the manufacturing industry. In 2001 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineers. Among his other distinctions he serves on the South African President's Committee on Communication and Information Technology. Potter is husband of journalist and writer, Elaine Potter. The David and Elaine Potter Foundation has established a fellowship programme at UCT, giving opportunity to motivated and academically excellent individuals to use their education for the betterment of the South Africa and civil society. So far more than 40 Master's and doctoral students have been supported through this initiative.

## **Emeritus Professor Martin West: Honorary Doctorate in Literature**

Professor West has made many contributions to UCT as an academic leader who embodied the values of scholarship, integrity and academic freedom. The award recognises in particular his role in governance and transformation of UCT in a time of transition. Professor West retired from UCT in 2008 after serving with distinction for 17 years as a Deputy Vice-Chancellor and later as Vice-Principal. Serving under four vice-chancellors, he made a vital contribution to changing governance at UCT during the first decade of the new democratic South Africa. He guided successful deliberations on several contested issues of governance in which the wider university reached consensus from an initial position of hostility and suspicion among the various sectors. Professor West also held the student affairs portfolio for over a decade, successfully managing a time of great change as the student body became much more representative. He played a major role in the transition in the residences, the unification and development of sport on the campus, and in leading the lengthy processes that resulted in the shift in student politics from mainly protest to a system of co-operative governance. In achieving this, he handled student protests and lengthy negotiations with skill and patience. He also set up an International Office, which significantly developed the international component of the student body. He played the key role in creating a unique staff development partnership that links six universities in Botswana, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe and UCT. Known as USHEPiA (Science, Humanities and Engineering Partnerships in Africa), this has become a model of a "south-south" co-operatively governed partnership that has strengthened the partner universities by training academic staff and developing research on the continent. Professor West's career started at UCT as a student in 1964. He joined the staff in 1971 as a lecturer, and became Professor of Social Anthropology in 1978. He is a former Director of the Centre for African Studies, and President of the UCT Staff Association. He is a recipient of the Vice-Chancellor's Medal for outstanding service.

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