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UCT records highest number of NRF-rated researchers in SA

Some 415 researchers at UCT achieve coveted national rating

The University of Cape Town has significantly boosted the number of National Research Foundation (NRF) ratings it has received over the past few years, passing the 400 mark for the first time.

The number of NRF researchers at UCT has climbed from 293 five years ago to 415 at present. UCT scooped 16% of the national ratings awarded by the NRF in 2012. This includes 44 first-time ratings and 74 re-evaluations.

UCT has the highest tally of NRF-rated researchers of any institution in South Africa.

The results are important to UCT's research endeavour because the NRF rankings focus primarily on the quality, rather than the quantity, of the applicant's research, said Professor Danie Visser, UCT's Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible for research.

"The NRF likes to say: 'We don't count, we weigh.' Important too, is the fact that an NRF rating gives access to funding, which, in these times of diminishing resources, is a considerable factor," Professor Visser said.

Research at UCT spans a range of disciplines, from urban planning and mental health to chemistry and geology.

Professor Visser attributed part of UCT's success to its Emerging Researcher Programme (ERP), which strives to transfer essential research skills from seasoned academics to promising young researchers.

"There is no doubt that there is a correlation between our growing numbers of NRF-rated researchers in recent years and the enabling environment we have been building at UCT, in which the ERP plays a vital role by supporting and nurturing academics to become leaders in their fields, both nationally and internationally," said Professor Visser. The ERP celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

Nationally the NRF awarded 27 A-ratings, comprised of re-evaluations and new candidates, of whom 12 were from UCT. Of these, four were new ratings at UCT and eight were re-evaluations. This brings UCT's total number of A-rated researchers to 33.

Professor Jack van Honk, a world leader and pioneer in the multidisciplinary field of hormones, the brain and human social-emotional behaviour, was awarded an A-rating, along with theoretical physicist, Professor Heribert Weigert. His research focuses on matter as it occurred in the early universe, very shortly after the "Big Bang", when the universe was more than 100,000 times hotter

than the centre of the sun.

Dean of the Commerce Faculty, Professor Don Ross, is the first dean from a commerce faculty in South Africa to achieve an A rating. Methodology is a motif in Professor Ross' research, bringing together economic methodology, experimental economics and econometrics, cognitive science and the philosophy of science.

Professor Harold Kincaid, from the School of Economics in the Commerce Faculty, has been awarded an A rating for his work, which includes the methodologies of social science. He has published on causal modelling, the philosophy of social science and medical models of addiction, among other themes.

Of the three P ratings awarded nationally, two were to UCT researchers. P ratings, or "NRF President Awards" are bestowed on young researchers, usually younger than 35 years old, who have the potential to become world leaders in their fields.

They include Dr Andrew Hamilton of UCT's Department of Physics, who was recognised for his continuing insights into the understanding of the universe at its most fundamental level, and Dr Ake Fagereng of the Department of Geological Sciences, who earned a P-rating for his research and studies in earthquake geology.

The new ratings will be recognised by the NRF at its award ceremony in September.

Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Professor Danie Visser and Dean of the Commerce Faculty, Professor Don Ross will be available for comment.

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