

CITATION: PROFESSOR STUART JOHN SAUNDERS

Professor Stuart John Saunders was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1931.

After graduating with an MBChB at the University of Cape Town (UCT), Professor Saunders undertook post graduate work at the Royal Post-Graduate Medical School at Hammersmith in London, and at Harvard University in United States.

Saunders has been a specialist physician in Cape Town since 1960, and returned to UCT in the late 1960s. He co-founded the university's Liver Clinic and Liver Research Unit (now the Liver Research Centre). It was in this medical field that he wrote some two hundred articles and co-authored a study that has become a classical reference. In 1971 he took up the position of Head of the Department of Medicine until 1980.

In 2002 Saunders received one of the highest honours that can be conferred on a South African when he became a Grand Counsellor of the Order of the Baobab, bestowed by the then President of South Africa.

His memoirs were published in 2000 by David Phillip, Cape Town, and were entitled, Vice-Chancellor on a Tightrope.

During the last decade Saunders continued to contribute in a number of areas of importance to South African higher education. He has been active in conducting studies in higher education policy. He is a trustee of several foundations and trusts, including, the Claude Leon Foundation; the Fox Foundation; the Webb Trust; and the UCT Trust in the U.K.

He is a past trustee and chair of the Friends of Valkenburg (the psychiatry teaching hospital of the University of Cape Town), a trustee of the University of Cape Town Trust in the United Kingdom, and a past Fulbright Commissioner. He was president of Convocation of the University of Cape Town from 1998 to 2011.

Saunders also served on the Advisory Council for National Orders from 2002 to 2005. In the last decade Professor Saunders returned to his role as a sessional consultant physician to Groote Schuur Hospital, as a specialist in liver diseases.

He was a founder and chairman of TENET (the Tertiary Education Network) until 2007, a not-for-profit company which pioneered higher education digital connectivity. He also served on the National Working Group established by the Minister of Education to report on the restructuring of Higher Education (2001). Saunders was a member of the Council for Higher Education (2002–2010), including serving as deputy chair for a term between 2008 and 2010. He has also been involved in conducting studies in higher education policy.

Currently Saunders is senior adviser to the Andrew W Mellon Foundation of New York (a generous benefactor of South African higher education research projects). His engagement with the world of international philanthropy has been driven by the principle and belief that independent fund raising for South African universities is part of an essential need to win resources to enable them to continue with their commitment to independent research and the practice of academic freedom.

The University of the Witwatersrand has benefitted enormously from the philanthropic work and support of the Mellon Foundation, in research areas such as Public Health, Archaeology, Environmental Affairs, Indian Studies, African Studies, Public Intellectual Studies - to name but a few. The long-term commitment, effort and hard work of Stuart Saunders, as a philanthropic player have benefitted research, teaching and postgraduate studies at Wits.

Stuart Saunders has been a major influence and participant in higher education for half a century in ensuring that the spirit and values of a liberal education survived in South Africa before 1994, and since 1994, in finding and channelling international resources to promote and enable research at South African Universities.

Saunders has been honoured by a number of universities. He has been awarded honorary doctorates from six institutions: the Universities of Aberdeen, Sheffield, Rhodes, Cape Town, Princeton and Toronto. He is a Fellow of the College of Physicians of South Africa, the Royal Society of South Africa and of the Royal College of Physicians London. He is an honorary fellow of the College of Medicine.

In recognition of his sterling contributions, both to the medical field as well as the higher education sector Wits University considers it a privilege and an honour to award Professor Stuart Saunders with an honorary doctorate.