

9 UP academics nominated for NSTF/South32 Awards, SA's 'Science Oscars'

By [Masego Panyane](#), issued by [University of Pretoria](#)

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Nine eminent University of Pretoria (UP) academics and researchers have been named as finalists in the [National Science and Technology Forum \(NSTF\)/South32 Awards](#).

Supported and endorsed by the national Department of Science and Innovation (DSI), the awards honour outstanding contributions to science, engineering and technology (SET) and innovation. Popularly known as the 'Science Oscars', the awards are the largest and most prestigious public SET and innovation accolades in South Africa.

UP's nine researchers have been nominated in eight of the 13 categories, including the Lifetime and Special Annual Theme categories.

Professor Tawana Kupe, vice-chancellor and principal of UP, said he is proud that the university's contributions have been acknowledged on the national stage. "At UP, we pride ourselves on being at the forefront of research that is aimed at changing the lives of our people for the better," he said. "To receive external validation for the work we do is the cherry on top. I wish to celebrate and congratulate all our finalists – you are what makes UP the powerhouse that it is."

Winners will be announced at a ceremony held at a hybrid awards gala event with two gala dinners taking place simultaneously in Cape Town and Johannesburg while broadcasting live to an online audience from both cities. The broadcast of the event will be via the NSTF YouTube channel. The dinners and live broadcast are scheduled to take place on Thursday, 21 July 2022.

UP's finalists for the NSTF/South32 Awards are:

Lifetime Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation over a lifetime (15 years or more). UP has two finalists in this category:



Professor Bob Pattinson

- **Professor Bob Pattinson** (emeritus professor, UP Research Centre for Maternal, Fetal, Newborn and Child Health Care Strategies; director of the Maternal and Infant Health Care Strategies Unit at the SA Medical Research Council), who is also a finalist in the Management Award category.

"I'm delighted and honoured to have been nominated for these awards; however, none of the things that have been achieved could have been achieved without the excellent teams I have worked with. Gone are the days when individuals can change science – it's all about collaboration and teamwork. These nominations are really for these teams and recognition of their groundbreaking work. They are the ones who should be and are being honoured."

- **Professor Brenda Wingfield** (DSI-National Research Foundation [NRF] South African Research Chairs Initiative [SARChI] chair: Fungal Genomics; professor in UP's Department of Biochemistry, Genetics and Microbiology, and at the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute).

"A nomination for an award such as this is always set against the background of many people having contributed to my research outputs. A nomination for the NSTF award is recognition of the fantastic work that has been done by my many collaborators and students over the years. It is also recognition of the support that I have received for more than two decades from UP



and the Forestry and Agricultural Biotechnology Institute, which is the base for my research activities. I am hugely grateful to my colleagues for the nomination.”

Professor Brenda Wingfield

TW Kambule-NSTF Researcher Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation through research and its outputs over a period of six to 15 years, from the commencement of the research career, predominantly in South Africa. UP has three finalists in this category:



Professor Michael Olawale Daramola

- **Professor Michael Olawale Daramola** (head of UP’s Department of Chemical Engineering), who is also a finalist in the Engineering Research Capacity Development category.

“It is an honour to receive nominations from the NSTF, a prestigious organisation that recognises excellence as its primary criterion. It is evident that hard work pays off, whatever you do. I thank God Almighty for the strength and the gift of life to me. Also, I thank my students, colleagues and my family, to whom I dedicate these nominations. I am because they are. I am grateful to UP for supporting my nominations.”

- **Professor Wanda Markotter** (director of the Centre for Viral Zoonoses; DSI-NRF SARCHI chair: Infectious Diseases of Animals [Zoonoses]; research chair: People, Health and Places, Future Africa Institute).

“The current Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the effect of the spill-over of novel viruses from a potential animal source. My research investigates viral diversity in bats in Africa and drivers of spill-over. The programme is inter- and transdisciplinary, and includes expertise in several disciplines. I am pleased to have been nominated; this nomination highlights how important it is to follow a One Health approach to prevent future pandemics. This research recognises that the health of humans, domestic and wild animals, plants and the wider environment are closely linked and interdependent, and cannot be studied in silos.”



Professor Wanda Markotter



Professor Theresa Rossouw

- **Professor Theresa Rossouw** (professor in UP’s Department of Immunology; president of the South African Immunology Society).

“I am honoured and humbled by the nomination. What makes this award so special is that it recognises that research does not occur in a vacuum, and acknowledges the importance of the foundation laid by predecessors as well as the critical role of collaboration.”

Management Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation through the management of SET and innovation, and related activities over the past five to 10 years. UP has one finalist in this category:

- **Professor Bob Pattinson** (emeritus professor, UP Research Centre for Maternal, Fetal, Newborn and Child Health Care Strategies; director of the Maternal and Infant Health Care Strategies Unit at the SA Medical Research Council), who has also been nominated for the Lifetime Award.

Engineering Research Capacity Development Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation by an individual over the past five to 10 years. UP has two finalists in this category:

- **Professor Evans Chirwa** (Rand Water Research chair: Water Utilisation; professor in UP’s Department of Chemical Engineering), who is also a finalist in the NSTF-Water Research Commission category.

“I chose the field of water and environmental engineering to contribute towards solving the existing and emerging water and energy problems in sub-Saharan Africa. Being a semi-arid region, we need to find ways to better manage our limited water and energy resources. I am grateful that this work is being recognised by peers in the sector. I am especially thankful to my postgraduate students, research team and support staff for their tireless effort in making sure that the results we obtain

in our research endeavour are unbiased and of unassailable quality. This award is encouraging – it gives us the motivation to lead the sector in training, research and technology development, and to redouble our efforts towards providing water security in the region.”

- **Professor Michael Olawale Daramola** (head of the Department of Chemical Engineering), who has also been nominated for the TW Kambule-NSTF Researcher Award.



Professor Evans Chirwa

NSTF-Water Research Commission Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation by an individual or an organisation in South Africa towards sustainable water management, knowledge generation and solutions over the past five to 10 years. UP has one finalist in this category:

- **Professor Evans Chirwa** (Rand Water Research chair: Water Utilisation; professor in UP's Department of Chemical Engineering), who has also been nominated for the Engineering Research Capacity Development Award.

Data for Research Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation by an individual or a team for advancing the availability, management and reuse of research data. UP has two finalists in this category:



Professor Nigel C Bennett

- **Professor Nigel C Bennett** (DSI-NRF SARCHI chair: Mammal Behavioural Ecology and Physiology; Austin Roberts chair of Mammalogy, UP; scientist in UP's Department of Zoology and Entomology).

“I was delighted to be nominated by Ms Veliswa Tshetsha and her colleagues at UP Library Services for a category that recognises scientists who are sharing data. It was a pleasant surprise to receive an email informing me of the finalist position. I am very happy, because in 2014/2015 I received the NSTF award for Research Capacity Development. Thank you to all at UP Library Services for believing in me and putting me forward for this prestigious award.”

- **Professor Dr Yves van de Peer** (professor at Ghent University in Belgium, UP's Genomics Research Institute and at Nanjing Agricultural University in China).

Communication for Outreach and Creating Awareness of SET and Innovation Award:

For an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation by a team or individual over the past five years. UP has one finalist in this category:



Professor Ryan Blumenthal

- **Professor Ryan Blumenthal** (senior specialist forensic pathologist and associate professor in UP's Department of Forensic Medicine), who is also a finalist in the Special Annual Theme category.

“The dead have so much to teach the living. I have never turned down an opportunity to talk about forensics, which is why I was so thrilled to hear about my nomination in both the Communication and Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development award categories. I feel a moral obligation to serve my immediate community and the greater community of humankind. I hope that some of my ideas will contribute to the well-being of my fellow human beings. Communicating the basic sciences gives me a sense of self-satisfaction.”



Professor Dr Yves van de Peer

Special Annual Theme Award:

Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development:

For 2021/2022, this award is for an outstanding contribution to SET and innovation from research and development in the basic sciences for sustainable development in South Africa. UP has one finalist in this category.

- **Professor Ryan Blumenthal** (senior specialist forensic pathologist and associate professor in UP's Department of Forensic Medicine), who has also been nominated for the Communication for Outreach and Creating Awareness of SET and Innovation Award.

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