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NRF awards P-ratings to three young researchers at UCT

Three researchers at the University of Cape Town have been awarded P-ratings by the National Research Foundation (NRF). P-ratings honour young scholars who demonstrate the potential to become future leaders in their respective fields. Only four P-ratings were awarded for the country as a whole in this cycle.

The three UCT researchers are Dr Shadreck Chirikure and Dr David Braun of the Department of Archaeology; and Dr Amanda Weltman, a physicist in the Mathematics and Applied Mathematics Department.

Dr Chirikure focuses on technology and social issues associated with pre-colonial mining and metal working, as well as heritage management in Africa. His current projects include a book on heritage issues in Africa.

Dr Braun's research interests centre on the basic question of how our earliest ancestors made a living using stone artifacts to gain access to resources. This work relates to the ecology of groups of hominin living in Africa millions of years ago. Much of this research is focused in eastern Africa (Kenya and Ethiopia) although he also directs excavations on the Western Cape, at a site called Elandsfontein.

Dr Weltman's work deals with the bridging of string theory, cosmology and gravity, and the chameleon mechanism (which allows the dark energy particle to change its behaviour depending on the environment), one of the hottest new topics in contemporary theoretical cosmology. While making up the largest component of the energy budget in our universe, dark energy is the least understood ingredient of cosmology today, so this work is an opportunity for South Africa to contribute at the cutting edge of this field. Dr Weltman's theory may be testable at MeerKAT and the Square Kilometre Array, which may be built in South Africa in the coming decades.

Professor Danie Visser, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor overseeing research at UCT, said: "NRF ratings confirm the international quality of South African-based research. The three P-ratings in particular are exciting, as they establish the reputation of new researchers whose work is already contributing to the global body of knowledge. Raising the next generation of

academics and researchers in Africa is one of the strategic goals of UCT, and these ratings demonstrate that we are making progress.”

95 UCT staff honoured in latest NRF ratings cycle

A total of 95 researchers at UCT received ratings in the most recent NRF round. Of these, 47 were first-time applicants and 48 were successfully re-evaluated. The latter group included Professor George Ekama of the Department of Civil Engineering and Professor Hans-Peter Künzi of the Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, who both kept their A-ratings and standing as world leaders.

Professor Ed Rybicki of the Department of Molecular and Cell Biology earned a new A-rating for UCT.

NRF ratings at UCT:

2011: New ratings

Y-rating	21
B-rating	6
C-rating	17
P-rating	3

2011: Re-evaluated ratings

A-rating	3
B-rating	21
C-rating	23
Unfinalised	1

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