

**VICE-CHANCELLOR'S DISTINGUISHED SENIOR
RESEARCH MEDAL**

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour of presenting to you
Laurence Stuart Wright,
Professor of English and
Director of the Institute for the Study of English in Africa,

for the award of the Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Senior Research Medal.

There can be no doubt that Professor Wright is widely acknowledged as one of South Africa's most distinguished researchers in the field of English Literature, and is particularly acknowledged as the most prominent scholar on Shakespeare in Africa. This is not only the opinion of his colleagues at Rhodes but is also that of international referees and critics from Perth to Bali.

One referee describes his work as "profoundly considered", while another uses the words "original, insightful, and lucidly argued". A third states that "He has brought lustre to the reputation of Rhodes University as an institution of outstanding scholarship."

We can be proud, Mr Chancellor, that Professor Wright is a prominent example of our claim that Rhodes University is an intellectual space where leaders learn. He started his career here as an undergraduate student, sitting at the feet of such mentors as Professor Guy Butler. Equipped with an honours degree from Rhodes University, Professor Wright won a Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a Masters degree at the University of Warwick, followed by a Rhodes Scholarship to complete his D.Phil at Oxford University. Other honours in recognition of his academic excellence include research grants from the CSD, the NRF, and PANSALB¹, including an Oppenheimer Award (2007) later in his research career.

Among his publications are 9 books of which he has been author, editor, or major promoter, a further 16 contributions to scholarly books, as well as over 70 pieces in peer-reviewed and scholarly forums.

A recent major publication by Professor Wright, which has attracted considerable acclaim, is a volume of essays focussing upon Shakespeare in Southern Africa and published as a special issue of the prestigious *Shakespearean International Yearbook*. Another hot-off-the-press accomplishment is a special issue of the journal *Multicultural Shakespeare*, forthcoming in Poland later this year, a collection which examines Shakespeare in the Australasian region.

Other research outputs that were particularly pinpointed for high praise from referees are a piece in the Shakespeare Society's journal, *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, in which he reports on the "Spread of Shakespeare" project, his essay entitled *Umabatha: Global and*

¹ CSD (Centre for Science Development), NRF (National Research Foundation), PANSALB (The Pan South African Language Board)

Local, published in a special issue of *English Studies in Africa*, and his article on Archdeacon Merriman and the Cattle-Killing, published in *African Studies*.

Professor Wright is known not only for his personal scholarship, but also for the range of projects he has initiated to promote the use and understanding of the English language, for the variety of publishing and mentoring opportunities he has created for younger scholars, for his research leadership through international and local research and development projects, and his editorship of a range of publications.

Alongside his scholarly activity and enterprise, Professor Wright displays an acknowledged talent to write excellent discursive prose, to communicate his ideas elegantly and cogently, verbally and on paper, and to create a relaxed scholarly atmosphere from which others may benefit.

To return to the words of some of his referees:

“Professor Wright’s powers in collecting – and collaborating with – the work of others mark him as a dynamic force of great prominence. Without the widespread intellectual respect and personal regard he commands internationally, the success of his projects would have been impossible.”

And from another, who writes:

Your “essay is a beautifully pondered meditation, which you have obviously been writing or preparing to write for the last fifty years. Magnificent!”

And yet another:

“There is little doubt that Wright is currently the leading research scholar in the field of English literary studies in Southern Africa.”

I will end with the words of an international referee, who states: “I have been deeply impressed by all of the recent work [of Professor Wright], and by his passionate devotion to the place of literature in schools as well as Universities. Indeed, I have come to regard him as one of your country’s national treasures! I very much hope that you will be able to reward his remarkable achievement.”

Mr Chancellor, we do indeed acknowledge his remarkable achievement, and in doing so I request you to award the **2009 Vice-Chancellor’s Distinguished Senior Research Medal to Professor Laurence Stuart Wright.**