

## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S BOOK AWARD

Mr Chancellor, I have the honour of presenting to you  
**Herman Wasserman,**  
Professor and Deputy Head  
of the School of Journalism and Media Studies,

for the **Vice-Chancellor's Book Award.**

One of the core purposes of a University is to produce new knowledge that enhances humanity's understanding of the natural and social worlds.

The Vice-Chancellor's Book Award seeks to recognize a recent book published by a current staff member, that advances knowledge and understanding, and brings undoubted credit to the University by virtue of the contribution it makes to scholarly literature, or the discipline within which it is authored.

Professor Wasserman's research centres around the intersections of media, culture and social change within post-apartheid South Africa as a transitional democracy in the era of globalisation. Within this broad theme, he works on three more specific topics: 1) normative media ethics, 2) popular journalism, and 3) the construction of cultural identity. He is co-leader of Rhodes University's Humanities Research Focus Area in *Media and Citizenship*. His past research outputs include more than 20 book chapters and more than 40 peer-reviewed articles in journals, as well as several edited collections. He is editor of the academic journal *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, and he has been rated by the National Research Foundation as a researcher who enjoys considerable international recognition by his peers for the high quality and impact of his research outputs.

From his interest in popular journalism the book *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!*<sup>1</sup> was born, a 218 page monograph of original research, published jointly in 2010 by Indiana University Press and UCT Press. In this book, the author presents a ground-breaking study that has elicited praise from leading scholars in the field of African media studies. It represents the first book-length study into the growth since 1994 of the popular mass-market tabloids in South Africa. In this book Wasserman draws on the breadth of his research interests, incorporating an investigation and critique into dominant media ethical frameworks in post-apartheid South Africa as these have been challenged by the popular tabloids. It analyses the relation between these tabloid media, their audiences, and discourses of democracy, and includes an ethnography of tabloid journalists and audiences to highlight the ways in which their various identities shape their production and consumption of these newspapers.

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<sup>1</sup> Wasserman, H , *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!* (2010, Bloomington: Indiana University Press and Cape Town: UCT Press)

It usually requires a year or two for reviews to appear in sufficient number and depth to attract the attention of the Vice-Chancellor's Book Award committee, but this book has attracted a wide range of critical reviews locally and internationally in a relatively short time since its first publication.

One such review refers to the book as "A much needed media history and political and social assessment of a genre that is currently very much the subject of conjecture."

Another reviewer praises the book's "sound research and keen analysis", and a third notes that "Wasserman, a former print journalist and now a seasoned academic with expertise in global journalism, has deft and effortless control of conceptual and historical intricacies useful at different junctures of the book. He marshals the connections between issues and multiple but pertinent stakeholders with finesse". The book has further been predicted to become a standard work that "seems set to define the ground for further research into the field".

The topicality of the book has also been frequently highlighted. As one reviewer puts it: "It is not often that a book comes off the press when it is most needed. *Tabloid Journalism in South Africa: True Story!* by Rhodes University media studies Professor Herman Wasserman, enters the South African book market at a time when people here need to seriously consider what it is that they have in a free press; and what it is that the press does in constituting a free society".

For his outstanding writing and broad contribution to the humanities, Professor Wasserman is a worthy recipient of this award.

So, Mr Chancellor, I request you to award the **2011 Vice-Chancellor's Book Award to Professor Herman Wasserman.**