

NWU honours Prof Christa Rautenbach with the Chancellor's Medal

Her transformative leadership through her editorship of the Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal stands as a beacon of achievement in the vision and mission of the North-West University (NWU) to be a pre-eminent university in Africa. Her achievements in legal academia and journal development have earned Prof Christa Rautenbach the NWU Chancellor's Medal.

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Prof Christa Rautenbach

She received this honour during a graduation ceremony on 6 June. The Chancellor's Medal is awarded to people who show exceptional merit or have made significant contributions to society.

Under Prof Rautenbach's editorship, the Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal has evolved from a modest local publication to a globally recognised platform for legal scholarship. The journal is South Africa's top-cited, internationally accredited, open-access law journal. This has amplified the NWU's international standing.

"Receiving the Chancellor's Medal is an immense honour that humbles me deeply. It is recognition not only of personal dedication but also of the collective effort behind building a platform that amplifies African legal scholarship on the global stage. This award affirms the value of perseverance, innovation and mentorship in academic publishing, and it strengthens my resolve to continue fostering inclusive, high-quality legal research that advances justice and scholarship within and beyond South Africa," says Prof Rautenbach.

Her career is marked with astounding achievements. Driven by a passion for justice and legal scholarship, she achieved 46 distinctions across her BLuris and LLB degrees, and further excelled while earning her LL and LLD degrees.



From public prosecutor to professor

Since 1994, Prof Rautenbach has transitioned from being a public prosecutor to being a professor at the Faculty of Law of the NWU. Her ascent in academia was swift, rising from lecturer to senior lecturer, to associate professor and ultimately to professor in 2005. A globally recognised researcher, she holds a B+ NRF rating, which she received in 2021.

Since 2002, and especially as editor-in-chief since 2012, Prof Rautenbach led the exponential growth of the Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal – from an in-house publication with a limited authorship and readership to a respected global platform with over 1,000 published articles from authors around the world.

The journal has achieved indexing in major databases such as Scopus and the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), gaining the DOAJ seal of approval. She introduced sustainable financial models, secured international funding and spearheaded the digital transformation of the Potchefstroom Electronic Law Journal using open-source publishing software.

Another significant milestone was securing participation in a pilot project of the Kulisa Platform, which is hosted by the Academy of Science of South Africa, in 2015. This initiative uses the open-source software the Public Knowledge Project Open Journals Systems for managing peer-reviewed journals. Prof Rautenbach navigated the intricacies of developing the journal site and overseeing online journal processes. This included the meticulous task of uploading historical content.

Despite facing initial challenges with limited training and expertise, Prof Rautenbach took the initiative to develop and maintain all content on the journal's web page. This comprises vital information, policies, layouts, templates and more. Her recent inclusion of an artificial intelligence (AI) policy made the journal one of the first to do this.

Her commitment extends beyond publishing. Prof Rautenbach mentors young scholars and editors, trains teams across all three NWU campuses, and promotes diversity and excellence in academic publishing. Her hands-on approach ensures every submission meets high standards, and her editorial guidance supports emerging researchers and authors.

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