**Commendatio: Prof George Claassen**

Prof George Nicolaas Claassen can rightly be called the father of science communication in Africa. This former Head of the SU Department of Journalism and deputy editor of *Die Burger* had a profound impact on both journalism as a profession and as a field of study – training hundreds of students over at least four decades.

Among many others, he excelled in science journalism and the ombud system as important spheres of contemporary journalism.

He was the first journalism academic in South Africa to develop a course in science and technology journalism. The importance of this genre in journalism is self-evident: modern humans live in a technologically advanced environment, with science advancing daily, but journalists are not trained up for the task of bringing news and information about this fast-advancing environment to target markets.

It is safe to say that Claassen shaped the thinking of a whole generation of journalists operating in South Africa and beyond, **imparting** his knowledge on science communication and **implanting** in journalists a keen sense of detecting fake news and pseudo-science. He has an ability to see into the media future and has been preparing journalists accordingly, including for the explosion of social media, fake news and propaganda appearing on our screens.

In many regards, Claassen led the charge in countering the impact of this onslaught on, in and from the media and it came as no surprise that he was the organiser of the first international conference on quackery and pseudoscience.

He further advanced the cause of science communication by establishing the Centre for Science and Technology Mass Communication (CENSCOM), based in the Department of Journalism at SU and served as its first Director.

His influence in training students, guiding the media and educating the public extends far beyond the borders of the University and he has, for example, presented numerous courses in science and technology journalism for UNESCO in Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Pretoria and Stellenbosch. He spoke at and/or organised numerous conferences and seminars on a global scale and his peers at American universities specialising in science and technology journalism consider his work to be the best in this field.

Claassen is a former President of the South African Science Journalists’ Association (SASJA); the organiser, presenter and facilitator of numerous courses on science communication at various universities, including the highly successful *Science Meets the Media in Stellenbosch* workshop, held at regular intervals over the last decade, with the objective of teaching scientists how to communicate with the media and journalists how to communicate with scientists.

Claassen dovetailed science journalism with establishing the first comprehensive course in cultural and scientific literacy in SU’s journalism programmes – enhancing journalism students’ general knowledge. This he complemented by co-authoring *In the Know* and *Goed om te weet* – an expansive reference work on cultural literacy.

Claassen, however, did not only focus on science journalism. He developed new main modules as part of the graduate BPhil and Honours programmes, including courses in media ethics and media management, while paying close attention to advancing environmental journalism and reporting on climate change – a subject matter close to his heart.

A celebrated researcher in own right, Claassen is the promoter for and examiner of five PhD students and more than 40 master’s theses. And as if that is not enough, he is the author or co-author of 14 books, notably *Kwakke, Kwinte en Kwale: Hoe ’n onsinverklikker jóú lewe kan red* (a book on quackery in Africa) and *Scamsters, Fraudsters and Health Ghouls – How Quackery Endangers the Lives of Africans –* in recent years.

Claassen is also synonymous with the media ombud system on the continent. He established the media ombud system in Media24 and is currently, after his retirement from this company, still ombud for the company's community newspapers and the public editor of News24. He has served as a board member of the International Organisation of News Ombudsmen and Readers’ Editors since 2011; he is a columnist on the subject and organiser/speaker of various conferences and symposia on an international scale.

At age 70, Claassen seems to show no signs of slowing down. Apart from his work as ombud, he is a science correspondent for the SABC and still teaches at SU’s Department of Journalism.

Recognition for his work came, among others, in the form of being the first winner of the SAASTA South African Science Communicator of the Year Award, presented by the National Science and Technology Forum in 2007.

Prof George Claassen can be considered the doyen of science communication on the African continent and is a worthy recipient of Stellenbosch University’s inaugural Media Lifetime Achievement Award.