



# Young academic makes history at Tuks

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DR JOEL Modiri has earned the bragging rights of being the youngest person to ever hold the title of professor at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Law.

Modiri, who is also the acting head of the Department of Jurisprudence at the university, has paid his dues as an assistant lecturer, doctoral student, lecturer, senior lecturer and finally an associate professor – all at the age of 29.

He was also listed in the Mail and Guardian's 200 young South Africans list in 2018.

He credits his success to his commitment of being a radical black

scholar committed to the ideals that the dignity and freedom of black people should be the central consideration in creating the new South Africa.

Modiri said: "As I settle into this new role, my immediate goal is to complete the book I have been writing about black consciousness in post-apartheid South Africa and trying to show that this ideal as a radical tradition still has a lot to say about South Africa and offers an alternative philosophical paradigm for contesting the new way of doing things. What motivates me to continue doing this work is seeking to challenge the ways in which the figure and memory of Steve Biko are being enlisted by the ANC government and post-apartheid project and my research seeks to elab-



DR JOEL Modiri, the youngest person ever to hold the title of professor at the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Law.

orate that he fought for something deeper and bigger."

Modiri said that although there were more black academics entering

academia and pushing to reach doctoral level, the professorate was still largely white. He was concerned that as a country, after all this time South Africa was still not able to overturn the dominant knowledge systems in place which were also by and large still subject to white systematic authorities.

"My primary considerations culturally, ethically, socially, politically and personally, are of the idea that black lives are worthy and deserving of much more. We need to, as black people, take seriously the experiences of what we do – be it our practices of social living, personal, social and sexual relationships with an idea that the way black people have lived in the world has meaning, value and an unthinkable expansive archive from

which we can learn."

Modiri's career highlights leading to his becoming a professor include the Best Lecturer Award for First-Year LLB students for the years 2016 to 2018; while at the same time holding three fellowships with the Wits Centre for Applied Legal studies, the University of Oxford and the University of Columbia. He was also awarded the Juta Prize for Best Legal Education Paper titled Southern African Law Teachers Association in 2018 with a further two citations in South African Constitutional Court judgments, and being invited as a speaker at the 17th and 18th sessions of the UN Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action.



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