

Social Responsiveness Award 2013: Citation

Prof Pierre de Vos

Prof Pierre de Vos holds the Claude Leon Foundation Chair in Constitutional Governance in the Department of Public Law at the University of Cape Town. Over the past 10 years Prof De Vos has utilised his expertise as a constitutional law scholar with a strong commitment to social justice in three distinct but interrelated ways.

First, he consistently provides both printed and electronic media (as diverse as the *New York Times*; *Daily Voice*; *Al Jazeera*, *CNN*; *Power FM*; *Radio Pretoria*; *SAFM*; *SABC*, *ETV* and *Radio Sonder Grense*) with analysis, insight and explanation on both narrowly focused constitutional law questions and broader socio-political questions relating, amongst others, to colonialism and to various oppressive views and practices relating to race, sex, gender and sexual orientation, thereby assisting to inform debate and enhance democratic deliberation in South Africa. The ultimate aim of this intervention is to provide accurate analysis of constitutional law questions, to promote constitutionalism and to popularise the values of human dignity, equality and freedom that underlie the South African Constitution.

Secondly, he publishes *Constitutionally Speaking*, a widely read and influential Blog that aims to provide in-depth, nuanced, but easy to understand, explanations of Constitutional Court and other court judgments as well as explanations and analysis of current constitutional law questions. The aim of the Blog is, first, to inform the public (including journalists, lawyers, judges and politicians) about the constitutional project in order to deepen debate, and to assist in the development of theoretically nuanced but practically relevant insights about the way in which power operates in a constitutional democracy and, second, to help frame debates and legal arguments in the media as well as in court processes and Parliament.

Third, he utilises his knowledge and skills as a constitutional lawyer to work with and assist non-governmental organisations working in the human rights and constitutional law field and to contribute to various projects run by these organisations. As chairperson of the Board of the Aids Legal Network (ALN) he provides strategic direction to the organisation and takes part in its activities to enhance its effectiveness and deepen its engagement with human rights based approaches to issues around discrimination of people living with HIV or Aids. He plays a similar role as a member of the Board of the Triangle Project and as a member of the Advisory Council of the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution (CASAC). He has also been involved in activities of Equal Education. The aim of the involvement with these groups is to utilise his skills, knowledge and insight to build institutional capacity, to deepen understanding in these organisations of the human rights issues that directly affect their work, to provide advice, and to take part in joint activities with such institutions. This involvement is based on a belief that while litigation and other legal processes are important to advance social justice concerns, social change also depends on active participation by citizens and by non-governmental organisations and social movements in political and social processes.

These activities are also aimed at improving his work as a teacher in two distinct ways. First, the activities enhance his knowledge base and practical understanding of constitutional and broader social issues and therefore enrich his undergraduate and graduate teaching. Consistently excellent teaching evaluations by students provide indirect evidence of the contribution made by the social responsiveness work to the quality of his teaching.