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Researchers bag THRIP honours

Two researchers in UCT's Department of Electrical Engineering have won category awards in the recent innovation competition of the Technology and Human Resources for Industry Programme (THRIP).

Professor Mike Inggs was named the winner of the Advanced Hi-Technology category, while Professor Pragasen Pillay took top honours in the Competitiveness of the Industry Partner section.

Inggs was honoured for his work on radar imaging technology. His main areas of research have been on the design, construction and signal processing of imaging radar technology.

Imaging radar is one of the most important tools for environmental monitoring, especially with global warming. It's also used to monitor volcano activity and the displacement of the surface of the earth (Paris and London, for example, are two cities sinking because of the use of subterranean water).

Over the last while, Inggs has worked with funders Sunspace and Information Systems and Denel to produce more compact radar imaging technology.

"Conventional radar equipment is the size of a large fridge, and we had to get it down to the size of two shoeboxes," says Inggs.

The project, however, is on hold for now.

Pillay, currently at Clarkson University in the US where he spends most of his year, won for his project on Drives for Industrial and Renewable Applications, in which he collaborated with partner Eskom. Pillay's work focuses on renewable-energy technology, looking at the use of wind turbines, traction motors for electric vehicles and storing energy in flywheels (thus avoiding the use of batteries that damage the environment).

According to the THRIP citation, the project shows high investment and commercial potential.

"The energy system as we currently have it is not sustainable," says Pillay. "We are also subject to the vagaries of Middle East politics. The development of local renewable alternatives is vital for our medium and long term energy security."

THRIP is a partnership programme sponsored by the Department of Trade and Industry and managed on their behalf by the National Research Foundation (NRF). Designed to foster collaboration between industry and researchers at higher-education institutions, THRIP aims to improve the competitiveness of South African industry by supporting research and technology development activities.

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