

Looking at Ourselves: Weighing Up UB-TRS' Research Outputs

A Brief Report

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12 April 2019

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1. Introduction: TRS in Context

Over the years, it may be argued that the University of Botswana's Department of Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) has been one of the Faculty of Humanities' significant active departments; while much of its focus at an earlier stage was on teaching, its portfolio has since change to bring about a balance between teach and research. This is an aspect that has been stressed by the university administration as part of its strategic plan; in other words, it desires to enhance its research portfolio in each and every unit across the university.

Since it began its earlier life as a teaching department, it was thus concerned with its teaching programmes; ones that were constructed and offered to students who had an interest in theological education, religious studies, and philosophical understanding. From the time it was established, the numbers of students grew steadily and this was witnessed throughout the 1990s into the first decade of the new millennium when the numbers reached their peak. This coincided with the period when the country encountered an economic meltdown and that resulted in its shrinking financial coffers at all levels. The outcome affected the reduction in funding for the university that had only started to lay emphasis on research since it was understood that the country was moving in the direction of drawing from a knowledge economy. Since the university was financially being affected, each of its structures was also negatively affected. Moreover TRS has contributed to the University of Botswana recommended research themes such as health, gender etc, which are actually national concerns

The TRS, being an integral part of the Faculty of Humanities that used to attract streams of students, has suffered like other departments the sharp drop in student numbers from 2010 onwards. This may partly be attributed to the fact that some officials – many of whom ironically have been graduates from UB's Faculty of Humanities - in the government seemed to stress the position that the Humanities programmes are no longer significant and hence their negative stance towards this Faculty and their withdrawal of sponsorship for students wanting to pursue certain programmes that are still on offer. As a consequence it was observed that over the past few years, the student numbers dwindled and remained conspicuously low.

At present, the FTEs are low departmentally and across the faculty; efforts are, however, ongoing to revise current programs and courses as well as to construct fresh ones; the idea behind this important exercise is to make the department's revised and fresh offerings relevant

and meaningful so that its graduates can become employed and contribute towards the country's economy in whichever way possible. Alongside these developments, one should add that some of its staff members, who have been involved in engineering new programs, have also made efforts in obtaining grants for certain projects. As a result of these inputs it had thus placed the department in a unique position as compared to its sister departments in and outside the Faculty.

In addition to these and in spite of the department and the faculty's concern regarding the low student numbers, the TRS staff members have generally ploughed their energies into undertaking research in important areas of focus. Though the department has well over fifteen staff members, it consists of a team of full professors; each of them has done excellent research work in their particular fields of specialization. One may therefore argue that they have conducted research as part of their personal portfolio long before stress was laid on the fact that staff members should conduct serious impactful research.

In this regard one may state that the department boasts of, at least, three scholars who have been champions in their respective areas. From among the three it cherishes the substantial inputs of Professor James Amanze over more than two decades. Since the 1990s Prof. Amanze has made an indelible impression internationally and has become well-known for his diverse research outputs in Christian and Ecumenical studies. Alongside Prof. Amanze is Professor Lovemore Togarasei; the latter has been the principal investigator for more than one project since he joined the department and during this period he has completed various theological studies in Christianity.

The department too boasts of having Professor Musa W. Dube, who is a Biblical scholar of note, as one of its key teachers and researchers. She has indeed led by example and as a result of her commitment to HIV and AIDS research as well as related areas she was recognized by various stakeholders for her sterling academic contributions. She was acknowledged by NGOs such as BOCAIP and she was given due recognition by universities such as the University of Stellenbosch for her outstanding research work; indeed, her outputs have touched and influenced many allied projects. One can, however, summarize the inputs of other staff members too but it suffices one to restrict the discussion to these ones since their names feature prominently in this report.

While these are our analytical observations, we are living in the age information technology, where whatever we do is picked up by the cyberspace sites and the data are analyzed accordingly. The quality, quantity and impact of our research is, therefore, an open secret to the whole wide world. The data below indicates how Google Scholar has documented how TRS scholarly work has been cited worldwide.

Table 1: Google Scholar Citation Site

TRS Research in Google Scholar Citations

Name of Scholar	Overall Google Scholar citations	h-index	i10 index
James Amanze	434	-	10
Musa W. Dube	2799	26	61
Mohamed Haron	521	11	12
Lovemore Togarasei	391	-	11
Fidelis Nkomazana	139	-	3
Joseph Gaie	260	-	5
Ibanga Ikpe	24	-	1
Malebogo Kgalemang	16	-	-
Mmapula Kebaneilwe	7	-	-
Rosinah Gabaitse	11	-	-
Elizabeth Motswapong	4	-	-
Moji Ruele	12	-	-
Senzokuhle Setume	3	-	-
Abel Tabalaka	19	-	-
Jennifer Madigele	As yet	-	-
Stephen P. Nawa	As yet	-	-
Doreen Sesiro	As yet	-	-

The i10index measures the number of articles that have 10 or more citations

The **h-index** is an author-level metric that attempts to measure both the productivity and **citation** impact of the publications of a scientist or scholar.

The table above should, however, be complemented by other information that are available on related sites. For the purpose of this report, the relevant formation has been extracted from two significant research sites; the one is Academia Edu and the other is Research Gate. Both sites have contributed immensely to scholars' visibility online and a few UB scholars have made use of these facilities. The tables below thus assist to provide yet another perspective; the tables should be of interest not only to our institution that is rated as a result of its staff members' online presence but they are also of interest to various other stakeholders.

Table 2: Research Gate Site

TRS Research at the Research Gate

Scholar	Number of Works Uploaded	Research Interest	Reads	Recommendations	Citations	Overall Score
Musa W. Dube	72	234.5	10, 382	50	340	16.69
Muhammed Haron	62	35.5	1934	3	55	16.93
Joseph Gaie	4	71.4	764	3	133	3.38
F. Nkomazana	9	7.1	187	-	9	4.34
E. P. Motswapong	5	4.0	479	1	-	1.70
M. D. Kebaneilwe	5	4.3	439	1	1	2.31
M. T. kgalemang	1	2.6	181	-	-	-
S.D. Setume	4	5.2	285	-	4	1.75
Abel Tabalaka	2	3.8	1.760	-	1	-
T. J. Madigele	5	5.4	336	-	-	1.21
S. P. Nawa	-	-	-	-	-	-
TRS Depart 12 ppl						

Table 3: Academia Site

TRS Research in Academic Edu

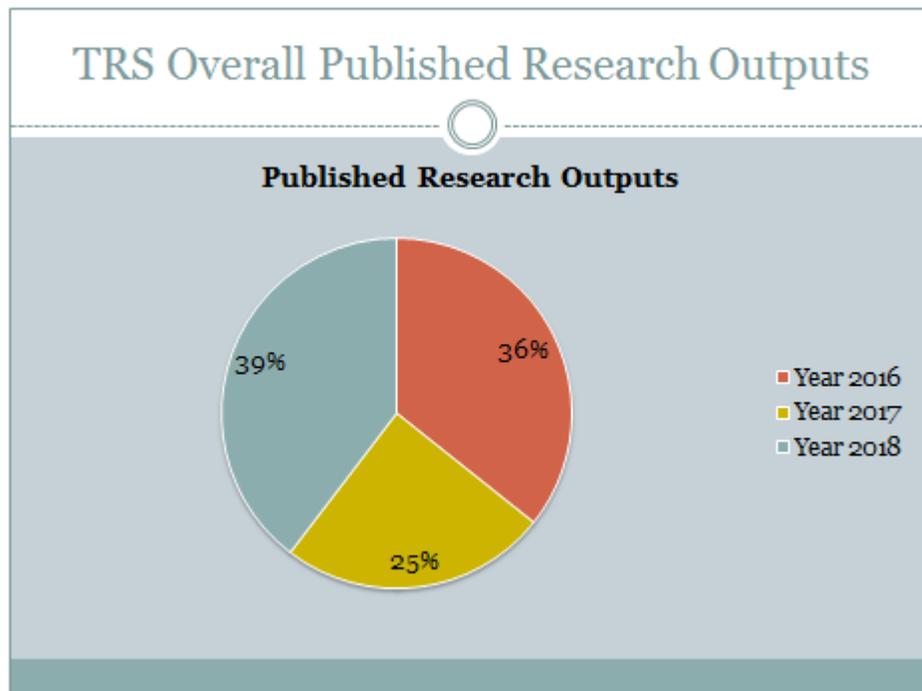
Scholar	Number Uploaded Research	Followers	Viewers	Public Mentions (citations)	Rating
M. Haron	82	247	10 114	83	Top 3%
M. W. Dube	66	493	12 643	487	Top 1%
J. B. Gaie	9	19	140	-	-
Abel Tabalaka	2	32	129	-	-
F. Nkomazana	1	5	130	-	-
**	-	-	-	-	-
Department, TRS	164				

**TRS scholars who have opened accounts, but who have never posted a paper, are not added here.

2. TRS Overall Research Outputs 2016-2018

Having offered a general view of the TRS within the university context and having in the end pin-pointed to at least three scholars that have contributed towards a fairly attractive research profile departmentally, it is perhaps instructive to reflect on the department's research outputs. Here not much focus will be given to TRS staff members' conference attendance and seminar presentations within UB and elsewhere. It, however, behooves one to make the point that annually the department has been actively involved with sister departments at the University of Swaziland and the National University of Lesotho in jointly organizing a conference; these presentations would, by and large, be revised and find their way into the *BOLESWA* journal that is still under Professor Amanze's editorship. Apart from that particular conference, Professor Amanze has also been responsible for having organized the ATISCA conference under the auspices of the department during 2018. All of these academic activities indicate that the department has been actively involved in promoting research and encouraging its staff to present papers at different platforms.

Figure 1: Venn diagram

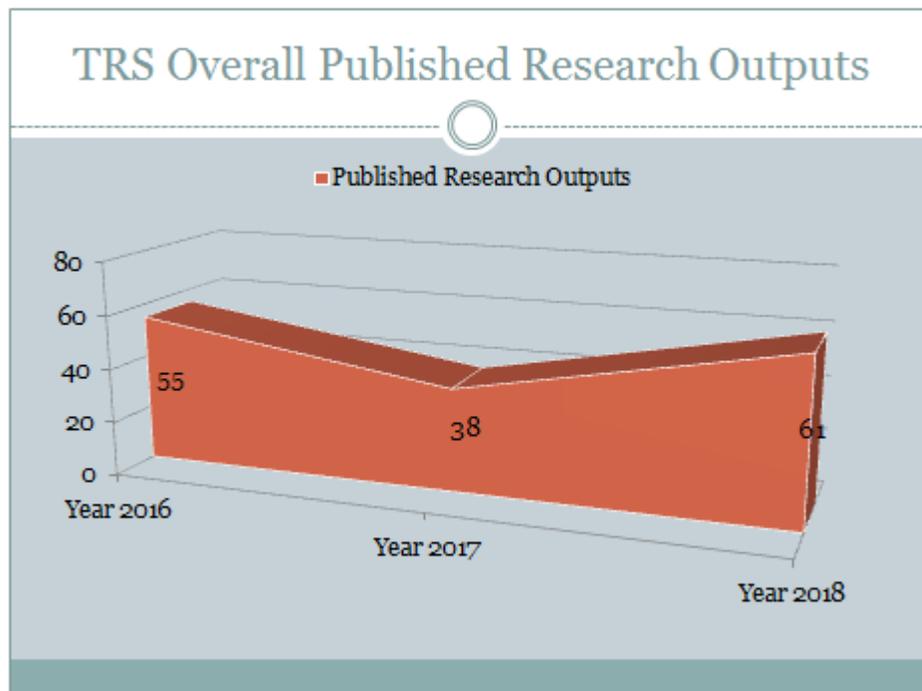


Factoring in these developments, one may now offer an overview and an insight regarding the research output of the TRS staff members. As mentioned earlier, this evaluative report does not intend to include their participation in various conferences nationally and internationally; even though these forums may be considered as ways of demonstrating their commitment to research, this report wishes to give particular attention to their published outcomes. Texts that demonstrate that they went through the peer reviewed processes and that

have complied with international standards. When one glance at Figure 1 below, it tells the story of the staff published outputs over a three year period; it tangibly captures annual outputs and it shares basic info as regards the output for the past three years starting in 2016 and ending in 2018.

In Figure 1 above the Venn diagram captured the outputs over the past three years in terms of percentages; in real numbers, the percentages may be translated as follows: during 2016 the collective output was 54 items and during 2017 there was a slight decline in output; compared to 2016 there was a drop from 54 to 38. During 2018 the overall output, however, almost doubled the output of registered in 2017. One may argue that having bounced back in the manner they did underscored their general passion and commitment for research. One may look at and compare the Venn diagram with the Area graph that reveals a different dimension of the overall published outputs for the three year period.

Figure 2: Area diagram



3. TRS Specific Outputs: Towards an Assessment

Notwithstanding the overall outputs discussed in previous paragraphs, it is necessary to assess the different categories of outputs; unpacking each would give a fair insight as to the types that have been produced. They essentially show, among others, the topics that were investigated, the themes that were concentrated upon, the issues that occupied the researchers, the journals that were targeted for their outputs and the publishers that printed their edited or authored books.

In this section, the assessment opens with its attention being given to the Book category; within this category one can refer to authored books as opposed to edited books. One may also talk about books that consist of conference proceedings or books that are used as reference texts such as dictionary or encyclopedia entries. These, of course, vary in content and in terms of the entry's size such as the number of words. Nevertheless, here reference is made to Figure 3 that identified the various categories along which the sub-categories were also included. Since the conference presentations have been excluded and since the focus is purely on publications, the attention moves to the Book category first and thereafter it shifts to the journal category.

Figure 3: Three Year Output

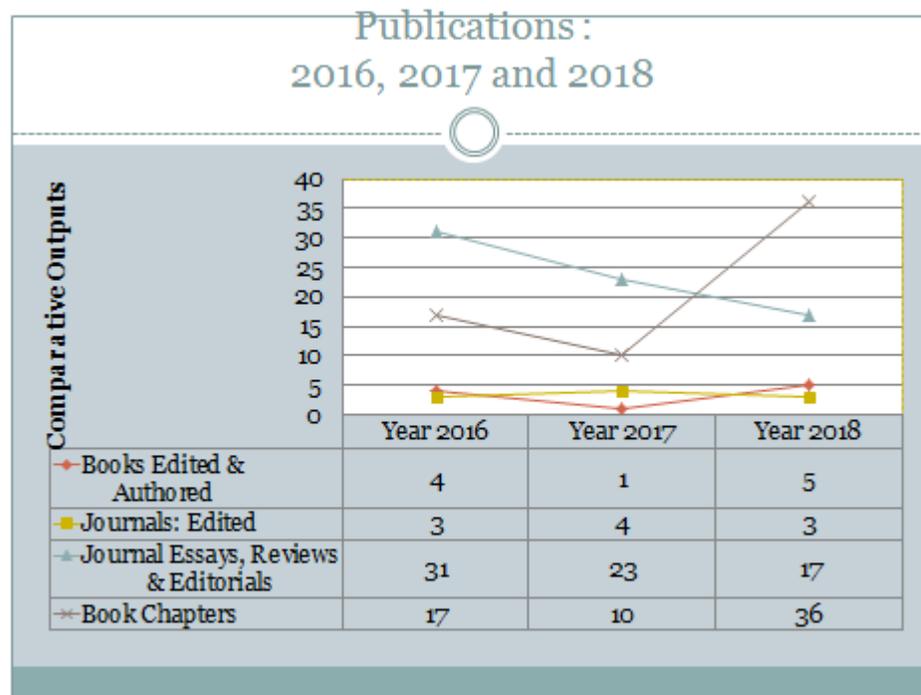


Figure 3 above provides a breakdown of each of the categories listed and that was mentioned earlier. The graph reflects the three year output and it identifies the various categories. The statistics, which have been slightly adjusted based on realignments of the categories, reveal the publications for each year.

3.1 The Book Category: Edited Texts and Book Chapters

When one compares the number of books that were produced during the three years (circa 2016-2018), then the following outcomes come to light: It is observed that on average three books were produced per annum. More correctly, however, is the fact that during 2016 four books were produced for the book market; importantly to note is the fact that three of the four edited texts were edited by one of the TRS staff members was a co-editor and in another instance he was a section editor in an edited work (Rephrase. Cut the sentence. Its too long and confusion).

By implication, he was also an editor of it though this did not appear as such. The fourth text was also a co-edited work.

Moving to 2017 one noted that only one edited work was published as compared to the four in the previous year. This situation, furthermore, changed during 2018 when the number of publications increased to five. Interestingly, during 2018 one observes that colleagues produced four edited texts and one authored book. The edited publications may be divided into two or three categories: the first is that one of the four was single-handedly edited as compared to the others; the second is that the one work was prepared by a non-academic writer and it was edited by a TRS staff member; and the third is that the other two works were basically co-edited texts.

During 2016 two of the publications were published in Kenya and two were published in the UK and in 2017 the one edited work was published in the USA. However, during 2018 three were published by UK based publishers, one a Swiss based publisher, and the third was printed in Botswana. The mere fact that these editors/authors were able to have their authored/edited/co-edited works published by known publishers underscores that they have attained and maintained international standards of scholarships and this thus placed the TRS book outputs in a competitive intellectual market.

Before one changes gear to focus on the journals, one should make the point that for further evaluation of each of the published edited, co-edited and authored texts one need to draw on book reviews; these will assist and give one an idea how specialists viewed and engaged with each of them and what they considered to be their weaknesses and strength. Indeed, book reviews place a central role in offering an insight into the work; its relevance, its importance, and its significance.

Since these are rather recent published works, this rapporteur did not consult online to see whether any book reviews were available. Important, however, to add is the fact that one should take cognizance of each of the editors/authors intellectual backgrounds. Though one does not intend to elaborate on these either, one wishes to emphasize that the mere fact that TRS editors/scholars have collaborated with scholars on the continent and beyond - to edit these and other works – tangibly illustrate the academic leadership that each of them have displayed as professors. They have, moreover, not only shown that as capable editors but as intellectuals who have contributed to fill the gaps; inserting their African voices where it has been noticeably absent and through these works and other activities they placed themselves onto the international stage alongside other established scholars.

Bearing in mind the important status of book reviews, this assessment turns to book chapters; a category that forms part of edited texts. One should note that when dealing with this category, one has to make a distinction between reasonably lengthy book essays and relatively short book entries. As regards the latter, one thinks of dictionary and encyclopedia entries that are decidedly descriptive rather than analytical.

Nonetheless, from the graphs one note that over the three years there have been and what may be described as see-saw developments. In 2016, TRS staff members published 17 chapters and quite a few appeared in an *Anthology of African Christianity* and one should recall that Prof. Amanze was the section editor for this volume. Three colleagues contributed to a text titled *Disability in Africa: A Resource Book for Theology and Religious Studies* and others contributed to other volumes. When browsing through 2017 the year during which fewer book chapter outputs were produced, one should delete one of the entries since it only appeared in 2018 and one should describe the encyclopedia entry is a relatively short descriptive piece as mentioned earlier. Interesting for the record to note is that colleagues published in different publications except for three entries that appeared in Dube's co-edited text.

Figure 4: Samples of Books – Edited and Authored



Now in 2018 the number of outputs jumped from the 10 in 2017 to 36 in 2018. This is indeed three times the number that appeared in 2017 and twice the number that appeared in 2017. The numbers were bolstered by Amanze's dictionary entries and they were given a boost by Togarasei's single edited text that included a few of his chapters; some of these were co-authored. And though from among Dube's list of entries three essays were reprints, it underscores the importance and relevance of her intellectual outputs in the eyes of the editors of those works. Much more can be commented on book chapter entries, but it is best to move on and give attention to the journals and its entries.

3.2 The Journal Category

For this section one wants to tackle it from three dimensions; the first is to comment on the journals edited by colleagues as a separate but related category; the second is to assess the various journal essays, and the third is to make a few remarks regarding those listed entries that should, in fact, be separated from the refereed journal articles.

3.2.1 TRS' In-House Regional Journal

It is an established fact that the *BOLESWA: Journal of Theology, Religion and Philosophy* has been and remains an 'in-house' regional journal; it is regional since it is shared by sister departments at the University of Swaziland and the National University of Lesotho. Though it did not appear regularly on an annual basis since its inception, it remained a pivotal platform for TRS staff members as well as others who have written and dealt with interconnected and pertinent themes. Under the journal category, this is one of the important academic outlets; it not only contributes towards the department and others' visibility but it may also be seen as one of the only journals that deal with theology, religion and philosophy in the country.

3.2.2 Guest Edited, Edited & Co-Edited Journals

Alongside this journal, one needs to state that two colleagues were invited as guest editors to edit/co-edit special issues of specialized journals; during 2016, Professor James Amanze, who is the Editor-in-Chief of the mentioned in-house regional journal, co-edited the first issue of the 20th volume of *Journal of Disability and Religion*; for this issue, many TRS colleagues made their contributions as will be noted from the 2016 list of entries. During the same year Professor M. Dube guest edited the second issue of the 30th volume of the well-established *Pula: Botswana Journal of African Studies*. A few colleagues from TRS published their articles in this issue too.

And during 2016 Professor M. Haron was brought on board to co-edit the *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* that is housed at the University of Cape Town. However, in 2017 he was asked to take over the editorship of the mentioned journal and he currently manages it. And in 2018, it reached the 15th issue/volume with the issue devoted to Southern African Muslim communities. At the end of 2016, he was approached by Duke University colleagues to become editor-in-chief of the online *Research Africa Reviews*. Since it was inaugurated during the beginning of 2017 with the first issue of the first volume having appeared during June that year, it is issued tri-annually. Over the past two years two volumes with six issues were produced and the third volume is being prepared for 2019.

Even though the latter is not an accredited journal as per regulation in South Africa, it has followed the rules of having its essays vetted and refereed by specialists in the field; however, it has also welcomed contributions that do not go through the peer review process but that goes through the editorial process. By implication, the journal has a set of essays that go through that process and another set of contributions that are editorially admitted as long as they comply with the in-house

rules. This brings one to the point that one needs to make a distinction between refereed and non-refereed essays; in the section that follows this issue will be further clarified since journal essays in the graph included both types.

3.2.3 Journal Articles and Other

Now in this sub-section one should distinguish between the various sub-categories as just mentioned; the reason for underlining this is that for the purpose of convenience all journal entries from editorials to book reviews to refereed articles/essays have been lumped together. Hence the list contains all types of categories. However, because of the different categories that do exist, one wishes to separate the three here so that one has a clear view of the collated entries that appear in the lists for each year.

As one scans, for example, the 2018 entries then one has to factor in the number of editorials and other categories that form part of this list. If one returns to the catalogue of entries, one notes that it consists of 8 entries; these have been classified as editorials (4), book reviews (1), and non-refereed entries (3). The last-mentioned have been refereed but they have not gone through the rigorous or stringent process of vetting as normally expected; hence their non-refereed status. And though 'editorials' do not go through the same evaluation system, they are then circulated among colleagues on the editorial board; after the board members made their respective inputs, the editorials are changed in accordance with the views that were shared or expressed. So technically though not refereed, they do go through a related process.

The graph in Figure 3 inserted a different category of entries that have been included along with the 9 refereed journal essays; this therefore brought the tally to 17. Similar distinctions were made when going back to the list of journal entries for 2017 and 2016 respectively. In the latter, there were no editorials but in the former this was the case. And during these two years book reviews were reviewed and these were thus added to the list of entries, Now, in order for one to arrive at the correct figure of refereed journal entries, one should then subtract the editorials and other categories from the overall number.

4. Towards a Conclusion: TRS in Online Research Engines

In conclusion, one needs to underline that by and large the TRS staff's outputs have been admirable. The academic leadership was displayed at different levels by some of the colleagues from the head of the department to some junior colleagues who have been involved in organizing local conferences. And when one returns to cyber space, one notes that TRS' research has not only become available but it has become clearly visible. Earlier in this report it was demonstrated to what degree TRS research has become exposed to the world; tables and graphs were inserted in this report to show that when one makes known one's writings through Research Gate and Academic Edu then one is bound to attract an interest depending upon the research one shares online. In addition, anyone who publishes in noteworthy journals is bound to be tracked up by Google Scholar; this site automatically picks up one's citations. One should state too that without

a scholar having an account with Research Gate or Academic Edu one will remain unknown and invisible as a scholar.

Since some TRS staff members realized the significance of these sites they kept their accounts alive by regularly uploading their research papers for accessibility to other scholars worldwide. As a consequence of these academic outcomes, this report included the tables that prove and show the current results. These tables essentially demonstrated how TRS staff have and are utilizing the cyber-space to make their research available and more accessible to others. One should also bear in mind that the department is also rated by outsiders when they view a scholar's accounts. To round off this report, one wants to therefore encourage all of us who are involved in research to utilize the online search sites and engines so that the department and others within UB becomes visible academically and be prepared to be rated through one's research outputs. And what each one should remember is that all of us are living in the Fourth Revolution, hence each of us can longer undermine the importance of the cyber-space for marketing one's research and for its impact.

TRS Final 12 April 2019