Ryan M. Nefdt

Personal Data

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Academic Positions

Jul 2019 - Present	Professor - Department of Philosophy **University of Cape Town**
Sep 2024 - Sep 2027	Senior Research Fellow - Department of Philosophy **University of Bristol**
Sep 2023 - Jan 2024	Acting Deputy Dean of Research - Faculty of Humanities **University of Cape Town**
Jan 2018 - Jun 2019	Andrew Mellon Senior Lecturer Department of Philosophy **University of the Western Cape**
Jan 2017 -Dec 2017	Oppenheimer & UCT Post-Doctoral Fellow in Philosophy Department of Philosophy **University of Cape Town**

Academic Focus

AOS: Philosophy of Linguistics; Cognitive Science; Philosophy of AI
AOC: Philosophy of Language; Logic; Philosophy of Science; African Philosophy

Education

Jan 2014 - Dec 2016	PhD in Philosophy *University of St Andrews and University of Stirling, United Kingdom* **Thesis: The Foundations of Linguistics: Mathematics, Models, and Structures** Supervisors: Dr. Ephraim Glick (St Andrews) and Prof. Josh Dever (Texas, Austin) Examiners: Prof. Zoltán Szabó (Yale) and Assoc. Prof. Patrick Greenough (St Andrews)
Aug 2011-Aug 2013	Master of Science (MSc) in Logic and Linguistics *Institute for Logic, Language and Computation (ILLC), University of Amsterdam, the Netherlands*
Feb 2009 - Jun 2011	Master of Social Science (MSocSc) in Philosophy - *Cum Laude* *University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa*
Feb 2008 - Dec 2008	BSocSc (Honours) in Philosophy - *Cum Laude* *University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa*
Feb 2005 - Dec 2007	Bachelor of Social Science (BSocSc) in Philosophy and Political Science, minor in Greek *University of Cape Town (UCT), South Africa*

Research Positions

Oct - Nov 2022	Visiting Fellowship, Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution **Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology**
Sep 2022 - Nov 2022	Visiting Fellowship, Department of Translation & Language Sciences **Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona**
Nov 2021 - Apr 2022	Visiting Fellowship, Department of Linguistics & Philosophy **Massachusetts Institute of Technology**
Jan 2021 - Apr 2021	Visiting Fellowship, Center for the Philosophy of Science **University of Pittsburgh**
Nov 2018 - Jan 2019	Visiting Professorship, Interdisciplinary Center for Global Change **University of Minnesota, Twin Cities**
Oct - Nov 2018	Research Scholar, Department of Linguistics **University of Edinburgh**
Mar - May 2016	Visiting Scholar, Department of Philosophy **Yale University**
Jul -Nov 2015	Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy **University of Texas at Austin**
Jun -Sep 2012	Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy **University of Leeds**
Dec 2010 -May 2011	Rackham Non-degree Student in Philosophy and Linguistics **University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**
Aug 2009 -May 2010	Research Scholar, Department of Philosophy **University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**

Selected Scholarships, Awards, Grants

2024	University of Bristol 3 year Senior Fellowship
2021	Carnegie New York African Diaspora Project Award
2021	JCI Top 10 Outstanding Young South Africans
2021	Dean's Teaching Award
2021	Vice Chancellor's 2030 Vision Fellowship (2021-2026)
2021	NRF Presidential rating Researcher (2021-2026) [highest rating for under 35s]
2021	HSRC Medal for Emerging Researcher in Humanities and Social Science
2020	UCT College of Fellows Young Researcher Award
2020	UCT Grant Seeker Excellence Award
2019	UCT Humanities Emerging Researcher Award
2018	AW Mellon Visiting Professorship at University of Minnesota
2017	Harry Oppenheimer Postdoctoral Fellowship
2015	Arché Research Scholar Award
2015	CAPOD Conference Award - provided by University of St Andrews career centre
2015	St Leonard's Doctoral Scholarship - tuition award administered by St Andrews
2014	Golden Key International Summit Travel grant - provided for accepted workshop
2014	St Andrews and Stirling Scholarship (SASP) - PhD maintenance scholarship
2014	National Research Foundation (NRF) Doctoral Abroad Scholarship
2011	Erasmus Mundus Scholarship for Study in the Netherlands (2011-2013) - MSc award
2010	Harry Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Scholarship
2009	Reese-Miller International Scholarship (2009-2010) - UCT to Michigan
2009	McKinsey & Company's Golden Key Chapter Award Winner for Academic Merit

Research and Publications

Monographs

June 2023 *Language, Science & Structure*.
New York: Oxford University Press

April 2024 *The Philosophy of Theoretical Linguistics*.
Cambridge University Press

May 2025 *Linguistic Relativity: A guide to past debates and future applications*.
(With Jeff Pelletier)
Oxford University Press

forthcoming *The Philosophy of Linguistics*.
Cambridge Elements Series in the Philosophy of Science

Edited Volumes

forthcoming Nefdt, R., Dupre, G., & Stanton, K. *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Linguistics*.
Oxford University Press.

2020 Nefdt, R., Klippi, C., & Karstens, B. (2020). *Philosophy and Science of Language: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Palgrave Mcmillan, UK.

Special Issues

2025 Nefdt, R. (with Brett Reynolds, Chris Potts & James McDonald)
English Language and Linguistics: Articles in Honour of Geoffrey Pullum
The Journal of Linguistics.

Entries

2022 Philosophy of Linguistics. *the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (with Geoff Pullum and Jeff Pelletier).

2024 Compositionality. *MIT Open Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science* (with Chris Potts).

Peer-reviewed Publications

2025 Chomsky, Naturalism, and Conceptual Engineering.
The Monist. (forthcoming)

2024 Pullum's philosophy of linguistics: a unified account.
Journal of Linguistics.

2024 *Theoretical Linguistics* and the Philosophy of Linguistics.
Theoretical Linguistics.

2024 Concepts and Conceptual Engineering.
Inquiry 67(1): 400-428

2023 Motivating a Scientific Modelling Continuum: The case of natural models in the Covid-19 pandemic.
Philosophy of Science 90(4): 880-900

2023 Biolinguistics and Biological Systems: a complex systems analysis of language
Biology & Philosophy 38:12

2023 Notational variants and cognition: the case of dependency grammar
Erkenntnis (with Giosuè Baggio)

2022 Conceptual Engineering: A Roadmap.
Philosophy Compass (with Gustavo, M & Koch, S), 17(10): e12879

2022 Are Machines Radically Contextualist?
Mind & Language 38(3): 750-771

2021 Scientific Models and Political Theory: The Ideal Theory Debate Revisited
Theoria 87(6): 1585-1608.

2021 Structural Realism and Generative Grammar.
Synthese, 199: 3711-3737.

2020 A Puzzle concerning Compositionality in Machines
Minds and Machines 30: 47-75.

2020 Formal Semantics and Applied Mathematics: An Inferential Account.
Journal of Logic, Language and Information, 29(2): 221-253.

Research and Publications (continued)

2019 The Philosophy of Linguistics: Scientific Underpinnings and Methodological Disputes.
Philosophy Compass 14(12): e12636

2019 The Ontology of Words: A Structural Approach.
Inquiry, 62(8): 877-911.

2019 Why philosophers *should* do formal semantics (and a bit of syntax too): a reply to Cappelen.
Review of Philosophy and Psychology, 10(1): 243–256.

2019 Infinity and the Foundations of Linguistics.
Special Issue on Infinite Idealizations in the Sciences, *Synthese*, 196(5): 1671–1711.

2018 Structuralism and Inferentialism: A Tale of Two Theories.
Logique et analyse, 61(244): 489-512.

2016 Scientific Modelling in Generative Grammar and the Dynamic Turn in Syntax.
Linguistics and Philosophy, 39(5): 357-394.

2016 Linguistic Modelling and the Scientific Enterprise.
Language Sciences, 54: 43-57.

Book Chapters

2025 Real patterns: causality and discreteness (with H. Kincaid).
In Ross, D., & Millhouse, T. (eds) *Real Patterns in Science and Nature*. MIT Press.

2025 On Formalization in Linguistics (with M. Kac).
In Nefdt, R., Dupre, G., & Stanton, K. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

2025 Sociolinguistics as de-idealisation (with R. Mesthrie).
In Nefdt, R., Dupre, G., & Stanton, K. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Linguistics*. Oxford University Press.

2025 Formal Language and Philosophy.
In Okere, J., & Whitaker, M. (eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Language, Logic, and Metaphysics: African and Western Approaches*.
Bloomsbury Press.

2020 The Role of Language in the Cognitive Sciences.
In Nefdt, R., Klippi, C., & Karsten, B, (eds.), *Philosophy & Science of Language: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Palgrave Mcmillan

2019 Linguistics as a Science of Structure.
In McElvenny, J. (ed) *Form and Formalism in Linguistics*.
Berlin: Language Sciences Press.

2018 Languages and Other Abstract Structures.
In Behme, C. & Neef, M. (eds) *Essays on Linguistic Realism*.
John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam.

Book Reviews

2019 Review of *Recursion: A Computational Investigation into the Representation and Processing of Language* by Lobina, D. (OUP)
Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 69, No. 274: 206-209.

2019 Review of *Review of Semantics, Metasemantics, Aboutness* by Ori Simchen (OUP). Philosophical Quarterly Vol. 69, No. 277: 871-874.

2019 Review of *The Social Evolution of Human Nature: From Biology to Language* by Harry Smit (CUP). Philosophical Quarterly, No. 277: 874-877.

Public Engagement

2023 Real patterns and the structure of language
Oxford University Press Blog

2018 Translating Non-Western Philosophy
Public Seminar

2017 Decolonizing Philosophy
Africa is a Country

Selected Keynotes and Conferences

Nov 2024	Linguistics department seminar, **University of Geneva**, "LLMs and Impossible Grammars"
Oct 2024	Philosophy of Linguistics Workshop **Durham University**, "LLMs and Impossible Grammars"
Feb 2024	Construction of Meaning seminar, **Stanford University**, "LLMs and Theories of Meaning"
Oct 2023	Computational Linguistics Seminar, **University of Pisa**, "Real Patterns and Large Language Models"
Sep 2023	Faculty of Science Reasoning seminar, **University of Lisbon**, "Mental Imagery and the Transformer Revolution in AI"
Sep 2023	SOPhiA-2023-Workshop on the Philosophy of Linguistics **University of Salzburg**, "Natural Languages and Biological Systems"
Aug 2023	Workshop in honour of Geoff Pullum, **University of Edinburgh**, "How to be neutral about linguistic infinity: the Pullum Paradox"
May 2023	Book launch for *Language, Science, and Structure*, **Yale University**.
Jan 2023	Cape Town Philosophy of Social Science Workshop, **University of Cape Town**, "Intersectionality and Mereology"
Nov 2022	Invited Talk, **Norwegian University of Science and Technology**, Trondheim. "What is a Possible Human Language?"
Mar 2022	Miami Philosophy Colloquium, **University of Miami** "Biolinguistics and Biological Systems: a complex systems analysis of language"
Mar 2022	Kleiner Lecture Series, **University of Georgia, USA** "Biolinguistics and Biological Systems: a complex systems analysis of language"
Feb 2022	Sante Fe Workshop on Real Patterns, **Sante Fe Institute** "A Localist Approach to Real Patterns: Causal and Discrete Structures" (with H. Kincaid)
Jan 2022	Durham Centre for Humanities Engaging Science seminar, **Durham University** "Biolinguistics and Biological Systems: a complex systems analysis of language"
Nov 2021	New York Philosophy of Language Workshop, **New York University** "Real Patterns and Natural Language"
Nov 2021	MIT Work-in-progress seminar, **MIT** "Real Patterns and Natural Language"
Mar 2021	Lunchtime Talk, **Center for the Philosophy of Science**, "Structures and the Special Sciences: The case of linguistics"
Mar 2021	The Implementation Challenge II, **University of St Andrews** "I-language: Linguistics as a Case Study of Successful Implementation"
Feb 2020	HUMA Seminar Series, **University of Cape Town** "Logic versus Learning: What the paradigm shift in AI means for Africa"
Sep 2019	Workshop on Language, Concepts & Science, **University of Johannesburg** "A Puzzle about Compositionality in Machines"
Jan 2019	Semantics Seminar, **Yale University** "Structural Realism and Formal Linguistics"
Dec 2018	Brownbag Seminar Series, **University of Minnesota** "Ideal Theory in Politics"
Sep 2018	Philosophy of Linguistics Seminar, **University of Edinburgh** "Ontology of words"
Aug 2018	Form and Formalism in Linguistics Workshop, **University of Edinburgh** "Linguistics as a Science of Structure"
May 2018	Philosophy of Biology and Cognitive Sciences Workshop **Complutense University of Madrid** "Scientific modelling in Linguistics and the Cognitive Sciences"

Selected Activities

Jun 2023 - current	Member of the Holberg Prize Committee, **University of Bergen**
Jun 2023	Co-organiser Philosophy of Linguistics Workshop (with Zoltán Szabó) Sourced funding, invited speakers and arranged logistics **Yale University**
Jan 2023	Co-organiser Philosophy of Social Science Workshop (with Harold Kincaid) Sourced funding, invited speakers and arranged logistics **University of Cape Town**
Jan 2022 - current	Member of the Senate & Member of Transformation Committee **University of Cape Town**
Sep 2021 - current	PPE Undergraduate Convenor **University of Cape Town**
Sep 2020 - current	Board Member Executive member of the Ethics board for the centre's activities **Institute for Humanities in Africa, UCT**
Jun 2018 - Aug 2019	Co-organiser Arché 20th Anniversary Conference Sourced funding, invited speakers and arranged logistics **University of St Andrews**
Jun 2019 - Sep 2020	Invited research project reviewer for the Croatian Science Foundation & Czech Academy of the Sciences & The Polish Academic of Sciences
Apr 2017 - Jun 2019	Academic Fellow at the Centre for Humanities Research AW Mellon funded project on changing the political philosophy curriculum **University of the Western Cape**
Jan 2016 - Present	Reviewer for *Ergo, Analysis, Mind & Language, Language Sciences, Erkenntnis, Cognitive Systems Research, Philosophia, Synthese, Inquiry, Minds & Machines, Philosophical Quarterly, Thought: A Journal of Philosophy, Analytic Philosophy, Philosophy & Phenomenological Research, Philosophy Compass, Linguistics & Philosophy, Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics, South African Journal of & Philosophy, Croatian Journal of Philosophy, Philosophical Psychology, Philosophical Papers, Studies in the History & Philosophy of Science, Journal of Cognitive Science, Philosophy & Technology, Language & History, European Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Social Dynamics*
Feb 2017 - Dec 2021	Academic mentor for Mellon Mays scholarship for next generation black scholars (three times) **University of Cape Town**
Feb 2017 - Dec 2017	Member of the Transformation working group in Philosophy **Philosophical Society of South Africa**
Feb 2015- Feb 2016	Mentor for Women and Minorities Scheme in Philosophy **University of St Andrews**
June 2010- Feb 2021	Telluride Association in **Ithaca, NY**, USA Elected to Board of Trustees of 501(c)3 non-profit focused on higher education ($2M annual budget; $60M endowment) Managed Association's overseas exchange scholarship at University of Cape Town and University of Michigan
Oct 2011- Aug 2013	Master of Logic Oversight Committee **University of Amsterdam**, the Netherlands Student representative, Responsible for review and recommendations on course offerings and staff hiring for MSc programme

Selected Teaching Experience

Feb 2020 - Current	Lecturer, Introduction to Philosophy (PHI1024F) First year course in philosophy **University of Cape Town**
Aug 2019 - Current	Lecturer, Topics in Theoretical Philosophy (PHI5010S) Graduate course on philosophy of mind and cognitive science **University of Cape Town**
Aug 2019 - Current	Lecturer, Epistemology (PHI3024S) Third year course on epistemology **University of Cape Town**
Feb 2019 - May 2019	Lecturer, Philosophy of Language (PHI311) Third year course on language **University of the Western Cape**
Aug 2018 - Nov 2018	Lecturer, Epistemology (PHI3024S) Third year course on epistemology **University of Cape Town**
Feb 2018 - Jun 2018	Lecturer, Contemporary Philosophy (PHI735) Graduate course on current issues in philosophy **University of the Western Cape**
Aug- Dec 2017	Lecturer, Philosophical Texts (PHI4000H) Graduate course on Noam Chomsky's *New Horizons for the Study of Mind and Language* **University of Cape Town**
Aug- Dec 2017	Lecturer, Moral Philosophy and Political Theory 1st year course in Moral and Political Philosophy **University of the Western Cape**
Mar- Dec 2017	Lecturer, Philosophical Texts (PHI4000H) Graduate course in African Philosophy through the works of Kwame Appiah **University of Cape Town**
Mar - May 2017	Lecturer, Critical Thinking (PHI1025F) 1st year course in Critical thinking **University of Cape Town**
May-Jul 2016	St Andrews Foundation Programme Lecturer, Philosophy Designed curriculum, lectured and conducted tutorials for international student programme in political philosophy **University of St Andrews**, UK

Student Supervision

University of Cape Town	Sanelisiwe Ndlovu (PhD Philosophy)
University of Cape Town	Matt White (PhD Philosophy)
University of Cape Town	Jaimee Moore (MA Philosophy)
University of Cape Town	Keldt Schoeman (MA Philosophy)
University of Cape Town	Bianca van Zyl (MA Philosophy)
University of Cape Town	Adam Schroeder (MA Philosophy)
University of Cape Town	Bunmi Balogun (MA Linguistics)
University of the Western Cape	Kyle Seakgwa (MA Philosophy)