The Math Colloquium
Department of Mathematics
San José State University

Philip Matchett Wood

Stanford University

Mathematical block stacking

OCTOBER 13, 2010, MH320

Abstract: If you have a set of rectangular wooden blocks, can you stack them on the edge of a table so that at least one block is completely off the table? If so, what is the farthest overhang you can build stacking N blocks? This is a very simple question that, remarkably, was completely answered only recently, in 2007 by a team of mathematicians: Paterson, Peres, Thorup, Winkler, and Zwick. In this talk, we will take a constructive approach to talking about mathematical block stacking, discussing recent overhang results and some new questions.

Background: No particular background knowledge is required.

About the speaker: Philip Matchett Wood is a NSF postdoctoral scholar at Stanford University. He completed his Ph.D. at Rutgers University in 2009 under the direction of Van Vu. His research interests include probability and combinatorics.

SNACKS IN MH331B AT 2:30 PM
TALK STARTS AT 3 PM

For more information, see our full schedule at:

http://www.math.sjsu.edu/~hsu/colloq/