The Math Colloquium
Department of Mathematics
San José State University

John Stillwell

Univ. of San Francisco

ET Math: How different could it be?

September 12, 2012, MH320

Abstract: If we hope to detect extraterrrestrial intelligence by looking for signals that seem like math, we need to be aware of the different ways in which math may be expressed. Consider the idea that "multiplication is commutative," which we usually express by the equation $ab = ba$. Even this simple idea has been understood in hugely different ways by human mathematicians, as we hope to show in this talk, so ET math may be hard to recognize.

Background: High school math, plus some familiarity with the general idea of proof (e.g., Math 42).

About the speaker: John Stillwell received his Ph.D. from MIT in 1970, and since 2002 he has been professor of mathematics at USF. He has written and translated numerous books on mathematics and its history, including the appropriately titled *Mathematics and Its History* (3rd edition, Springer 2010).

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/