INTERDISCIPLINARY STEM SEMINAR SERIES

(Science Technology Engineering Mathematics)

The Fermi Plague:
Why Haven't We Detected Extraterrestrial Civilizations,
And Why Should We Care?

Wednesday, October 10th, Reuter Center, Room 206
4:30 PM to 6:00 PM

Speaker:

Stanley Schmidt, OLLI

Science suggests that life should be fairly common in the universe, and that technological civilizations should be detectable even across interstellar distances. Why haven't we seen any? Physicist Enrico Fermi asked this question, now known as the Fermi Paradox, in 1950.

This lecture will review the "paradox"—why we think other civilizations should exist and we should have seen them—and the many possible explanations that have been proposed, before concentrating on one that is relatively new.

Most of the proposed explanations of the paradox are only partial answers. One may explain why we haven't seen one civilization, another may work for another, and so on. Is there a single destructive phenomenon highly likely to occur in any advanced technological civilization? The question may seem academic, but if the effect is real, the problem becomes very practical: How can we keep it from happening to us?