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Visiting Astronomer to Present 'Stars That Go Bump in the Night'

Apr-08-2009

A visiting astronomer will explain what happens when stars collide as part of Eastern Illinois University's celebration of the International Year of Astronomy.

Robert D. Mathieu, professor and chair of the Department of Astronomy at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, will speak about "Stars That Go Bump in the Night!" at 7 p.m. Wednesday, April 22, in the EIU Physical Science Building's Phipps Lecture Hall (Room 1205).

"We are fortunate, indeed, to have a scientist of Dr. Mathieu's stature speaking at EIU," said James Conwell, the EIU physics professor who is organizing EIU's IYA events. "The topic of colliding and merging stars and the exotic objects that come forth should fascinate people of all ages."

The lecture is free and open to the public.

"The distances between the stars are vast, and until recently, collisions between stars seemed highly unlikely," Mathieu said. "Now we think they happen quite frequently, particularly when binary stars encounter each other within clusters of stars, and create stars that as yet are unexplained by standard stellar physics."

"These events bring together two classical fields of astronomy, stellar dynamics and stellar evolution. I will introduce the audience to the basics of both, and then embark on a journey into the wonderful worlds of star clusters and stellar collisions."

The event is the latest in EIU's yearlong celebration of the International Year of Astronomy, a worldwide commemoration of many historic astronomical achievements, including the 400th anniversary of Galileo's first look through a telescope and the 40th anniversary of man's first steps on the moon.

Mathieu was educated at Princeton University and the University of California at Berkeley, after which he became a fellow of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics.

He has served as president of the Board of Directors of the WIYN Observatory, and now chairs the University Committee of UW-Madison. His research involves the formation and evolution of binary stars and the dynamics of star clusters.

He also directs the National Science Foundation Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning (<http://www.cirtl.net>), whose mission is to prepare STEM graduate students to be both forefront researchers and excellent teachers.

Mathieu is also the principal investigator of an NSF project to upgrade the Student Assessment of Learning Gains instrument into a robust online tool suitable for evaluation use by individual instructors, entire departments, and developers of new teaching and learning approaches.



Mathieu