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Psychology Club hosts famous skeptic

By KATHY SUNG
Staff writer

Michael Shermer, author, publisher and self-pronounced skeptic, explained the foundation of and urged caution regarding many popular beliefs at his presentation “Why People Believe Weird Things,” before a sold-out crowd at the NUMMI Theater last Friday.

The talk, sponsored by the Psychology Club, covered a diverse range of topics, including miracles,



the theory of intelligent design, determining perceptions and an explanation of why people may conclude that a miracle has happened.

In order to be a true skeptic, Shermer recommended looking for the abnormal, relaxing one’s mind and trying to see the situation from a different perspective. He also advocated being aware of confirmation bias, having peer reviews and inviting constructive criticism.

Shermer is the publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, where they’ve gathered several weird claims and tried to debunk them. Some of the popular issues include pseudo-history investigations and explanations

about why 9/11 could not have been a plot devised by the Bush Administration. Highly entertaining, Shermer created a special circumstance, joking that he was hit by a Bible in the chest and was saved by the nine millimeter bullet in his pocket. With this attention-grabber, Shermer demonstrated that people are apt to believe weird things.

According to Shermer, we are not allowed to invoke the supernatural by definition because there is no way to take a miracle back to

the lab and test it. Shermer further explained away some of the weird phenomena that have been popular each century because certain miracles have fads.

Sleep paralysis makes people feel like they are floating or falling. Shermer explained that the explanation today may be a poltergeist while a hundred years ago, it may have been attributed to succubi. Shermer talked about near-death experiences coming from

Continued on Page 6

Math connects to art, nature

By ERIC DORMAN
Editor-in-chief

Life, imitates art, imitates... math?

If you thought connection between math and art—or even math and real life—seemed sketchy before you walked into Math Instructor Jeff O’Connell’s Brown Bag seminar on the Golden Ratio last Friday, you probably weren’t alone. But after O’Connell’s hour-long presentation connecting square roots and the quadratic formula to the Mona Lisa and sunflowers, the link between math and art was a hard one to ignore.

Whether you look in your favorite math tome or simply look at yourself in the mirror, the Golden Ratio appears, O’Connell explained before a standing-room-only crowd in 3201. Though derived through math, the Ratio lies at the heart of art, architecture, graphic design, nature and even the human body. “The Golden Ratio is everywhere,” said O’Connell.

O’Connell began the presentation with math. The Golden Ratio, he explained, can be arrived at in a number of ways. The ratio itself is simple: it describes the ratio between two lengths whose sum, divided by the length of the longer one, is equal to the larger sum di-

vided by the smaller one. O’Connell first evaluated the equation using the definition; calling the shorter length 1 and the longer one x and then evaluating the fractions using the quadratic formula. He also demonstrated how the ratio could be arrived at independently using certain infinite series—for example, an infinite number of square root 1’s, summed and nested within each other. Either way, the answer for the Golden Ratio was the same: 1 to an irrational number, about 1.618.

The Golden Ratio first appeared in written form in the mathematician Euclid’s 300 B.C. work *Elements*, the “best-selling math book of all time,” said O’Connell. Even after its discovery, though, the Ratio kept cropping up in unexpected places. The Fibonacci sequence, discovered by a mathematician of the same name in the 13th Century and made up of a sequence of numbers in which each number is made up of the sum of the two before it, also has a curious connection to the Ratio: as the sequence progresses, any given number divided by the previous one grows progressively closer to the Golden Ratio.

Interestingly enough, along with the Ratio’s numerous mathematic properties, it has incredible aesthetic qualities as well. Several scientific



Photo by Jeff Weisinger

Jeff O’Connell spoke at last Friday’s Brown Bag Seminar about the Golden Ratio. The talk included ties between the ‘Mona Lisa,’ the Volkswagen Beetle and even how the Ratio can be found in nature.

studies, one as early as 1876, have established that the vast majority of people prefer the look of the Golden Rectangle (a rectangle proportioned according to the Golden Ratio) over rectangles of other proportions.

Not sure what the Golden Rectangle looks like? Take a look at your driver’s license or credit card. Because of its aesthetically pleasing quality, the Golden Ratio has provided a template for artists, archi-

itects and other designers throughout history. The face of the Parthenon in Greece is a Golden Rectangle, and the profile of a Volkswagen Beetle fits within a Golden Ellipse (an ellipse

Continued on Page 6

Board approves follow-up report

By ZUHAL BAHADURI
Staff writer

The College Board of Trustees unanimously approved the accreditation follow-up report at their meeting Wednesday.

The report, which is due March 15, outlines specific ways the college aims to improve its program review process and employee evaluations. The accreditation commission, which determines whether colleges can maintain their accredited status, praised the college for its planning process and programs when it visited Ohlone last spring, but recommended that program review be better linked to

general college planning. The report was approved by the College Council on Monday.

Ohlone is currently on “warning” status from the committee, meaning that the college must turn in this report, as well another sent last fall, to maintain its accredited status.

Also during the meeting, California School Employees Association (CSEA) President Linda Evers expressed frustration concerning the CSEA contract. After returning from sick leave, Evers said she discovered six negotiable issues in the contract, three of which could result in unfair labor practice. She asked the Board to help her schedule a meeting with management, who she said had thus far been unresponsive.

Spring Break

So, got any interesting plans for Spring Break? Going anywhere fun? Beach, mountains, tourist spots?

If so, take pictures and tell us all about it when school resumes. If enough people share their adventures with us, the *Monitor* plans to do a two-page spread—something like “What I did on Spring Break.”

Of course, we are looking for “appropriate” material, if you know what we mean, and we think you do. Send jpegs and stories under 100 words to monitor@ohlone.edu. Or drop by Room 5310 for show-and-tell.