UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

November 26, 2007
Andrea Estrada

UCSB Conference Celebrates Life and Work of 18th-Century Mathematician

A prolific writer who published more papers than any of his contemporaries in 18th-century Europe, the Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler also spoke at least three languages fluently and was at home in Switzerland, Russia, and Germany. On the 300th anniversary of his birth, a conference will be held at the University of California, Santa Barbara to examine the central role that the description, calculation, and analysis of sites or places played in Euler's life and work.

Titled "Science as Navigation: Leonhard Euler's Journeys," the day-long conference will begin at 9 a.m. on Friday, November 30, in the McCune Conference Room, 6020 Humanities and Social Sciences Building. It is free and the public is invited to attend.

"The conference investigates Euler as a polymath—well traveled, present in three major European centers of learning, fluent in several languages, and active in a breathtaking variety of different disciplines from mathematics to navigation," said Sven Spieker, an associate professor of Germanic, Slavic, and Semitic studies at UCSB and director of the conference.

"It examines the important role that computation plays in the humanities, including music, art, and even literature."

Speakers include Brian Hopkins, an associate professor of mathematics at St. Peter's College in New Jersey; Wladimir Velminski, a researcher at Humboldt University in

Berlin; Matthew Wickman, a professor of English at Brigham Young University; Jocelyn Holland an assistant professor of comparative literature at UCSB; Julian Havil, a professor of mathematics at Britain's Winchester College; John Glaus, an independent Euler scholar; and Stacy G. Langton, a professor of mathematics and computer science at UC San Diego. The conference concludes with the United States premiere of Velminksi's film, "Leonhard Euler: In the Scholar's Paradise."

Hopkins will discuss "The Beginning of Graph Theory" while Velminski speaks on "Leonhard Euler's Strategies of Visualization." Wickman's talk is titled "Burns's Nature, Euler's Path," and Havil will discuss "Euler: The Basel Problem, the Polyhedral Formula, and 'Proof'." Glaus will speak on "How Leonhard Euler Balanced the Three Fundamentals of People, Places, and the Sciences" and Langton will discuss "Euler as Popular Science Writer: The Shape of the Earth."

"Euler was no stranger to changes in location and to the negotiation of different cultural and scientific contexts and their respective rhetorical, cultural, and scientific conventions," said Spieker. "However, Euler's more specifically scientific activity in mathematics, astronomy, geometry, engineering, and philosophy is also linked, in more ways than one, to the problem of topoi and their notation."

During his stay at the Petersburg Academy in St. Petersburg, Euler carried out important work in cartography. In addition, he wrote some 200 letters to the Princess of Anhalt-Dessau in Germany, in which he provided instruction in elementary science topics such as light, sound, gravity, logic, language, magnetism, and astronomy.

"Euler's diverse writings are building blocks for a comprehensive topology of culture founded on exact science and the ideals of the Enlightenment," said Spieker.

For more information on the conference, visit www.gss.ucsb.edu/Euler.html

Related Links

Science as Navigation: Leonhard Euler's Journeys

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community

of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.