

**Department of Physics and Physical Oceanography and The  
Harlow Shapley Visiting Lectureship Program of the American  
Astronomical Society  
Public Lecture**

**“The Nature of Extraterrestrial Civilizations  
or How to Search for Unicorns”**



**Robert T. Rood, Professor of Astronomy**  
University of Virginia

While there are many ways in which the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence (ETI) could be proven to exist, there is no way to prove the opposite. This lack of falsifiability sets the search for ETI (SETI) apart from most other scientific questions. There is a historical analog, the search for unicorns, which can illustrate how progress can be made. Unicorns “existed” for almost 2000 years even in the minds of scientists. No one ever proved that unicorns do not exist, yet there is now general agreement that that is the case. (At least unicorn searches are not funded.) How this change of opinion arose can be instructive both for the proponents of SETI and those who present arguments claiming to prove that we are alone in the Galaxy.

**Thursday, April 2, 2009  
7:00 PM  
DeLoach Hall, Room 212**