



DEPARTMENT OF MATHEMATICS
Spring 2025 MATH Colloquium Series

Divergent Series

Speaker: Ken Yanosko,
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Abstract:

“On the whole, divergent series are the work of the Devil and it’s a shame that one dares base any demonstration on them. You can get whatever result you want when you use them, and they have given rise to so many disasters and so many paradoxes. Can anything more horrible be conceived than to have the following oozing out of you: $0 = 1 - 2n + 3n - 4n + \text{etc.}$ where n is a whole number? Risum teneatis amici.”

—Niels Henrik Abel, Letter to Bernt Michael Holmboe (Jan. 1826)

“I told [the London Professor] that the sum of an infinite number of terms of the series: $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + \dots = -1/12$ under my theory. If I tell you this you will at once point out to me the lunatic asylum as my goal.”

—Srinivasa Ramanujan. Letter to Godfrey Harold Hardy (Feb. 1913)

We live in an age of misinformation. Mathematics is not immune to this phenomenon. We will look at some outrageous statements, try to understand how they originated, and see whether there is any grain of truth behind them.

April 24th, 2025
THURSDAY

4:00 PM
BSS#166

FOR MORE INFO GO TO [HTTPS://MATH.HUMBOLDT.EDU/GET-INVOLVED/MATHEMATICS-COLLOQUIUM](https://math.humboldt.edu/get-involved/mathematics-colloquium)

WE CORDIALLY INVITE YOU TO THE PRE-COLLOQUIUM TEA IN BSS#312
AT 3:30 PM