

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at San Francisco State Presents:
A non-technical 6-week class with Professor Andrew Fraknoi

Aliens in Science and Science Fiction: Where Do We Stand in our Search for Intelligent Life Out There?

Wednesdays from 3 to 5 pm (Sep. 30 – Nov. 4, 2026)

For Students 50 and Over

Either via Zoom or in Person in the Humanities Building at SF State

Space is Limited: Register Early



Few areas of astronomy excite our imaginations as much as the search for alien life, out among the stars. It is a staple of science fiction stories and films, but recently it has also become a legitimate branch of scientific inquiry. In this non-technical class, we will take a look at why astronomers are more optimistic than ever that there must be life beyond the Earth, what intriguing experiments we are undertaking around the world to find or communicate with such life, and what we propose to do if we do find “them.” We’ll also look at some of the most imaginative science and science-fiction ideas about what such aliens will be like, why, despite recent media flurries, UFO stories have nothing to offer us, and what some legal and diplomatic concerns are about getting in touch with aliens. (No background in science will be required or assumed.)

Three easy steps to register:

1. Sign in or create a free account
at: <https://www.campusce.net/sfsu/account/signin.aspx>
2. Register for the in-person class at:
<https://www.campusce.net/sfsu/course/course.aspx?C=1379&pc=138&mc=0&sc=0>
or for the Zoom class at:
<https://www.campusce.net/sfsu/course/course.aspx?C=1380&pc=138&mc=0&sc=0>
3. If you do not yet have an Annual Membership (a modest fee) you will need to add one to your cart when you select the class. The Annual Membership is one of the choices in the catalog at the bottom, or at this link:
<https://www.campusce.net/sfsu/course/course.aspx?catId=14>

Andrew Fraknoi retired as Chair of the Astronomy Department at Foothill College in 2017. He was chosen the California Professor of the Year in 2007 by the Carnegie Endowment and has won several national prizes for his teaching. He is the lead author of OpenStax *Astronomy*, a free, electronic textbook, which is now the number one astronomy textbook in North America. Recently, he has been writing science fiction stories with good astronomy in them; 13 of his tales have been published so far, many of them about getting in touch with aliens. He appears regularly on local & national radio, explaining astronomical ideas in terms everyone can understand. The International Astronomical Union has named Asteroid 4859 Asteroid Fraknoi to recognize his contributions to the public appreciation of science. See: <http://fraknoi.com> for more information about his work.

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at San Francisco State is a community of inquiring adults, age 50+, offering non-credit courses, lectures, and interest groups. Many are held remotely, so you don't need to reside in San Francisco to participate. You must become a member of the Institute to take the class, but the cost is quite reasonable.