

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY SPEAKER SERIES-2019

Madeline Muntersbjorn
The University of Toledo
Associate Professor
November 14, 2019 4pm
Clark Hall 206



"Algebra, from Popular Culture to Mathematical Literacy"

Algebra is not widely celebrated in our culture, being the frequent target of revealing memes and many jokes. On the one hand, presidents of community colleges and standardized test makers have called for an end to the algebra requirement for an associates degree on the grounds that so many students fail this course that it impedes social mobility. On the other hand, activists and educators behind such movements as "Algebra for All" urge that social justice depends upon early access to algebraic practices by as many students as possible. This talk will consider but reject the possibility that algebra is an arbitrary secret handshake of an exclusive elite. Instead, I conclude that the mastery of algebra is a complex key that unlocks several desiderata of mathematical literacy. I propose that an understanding of the obstacles faced by early practitioners of algebra may shed important light on contemporary curricular debates.

What is the Problem?

