

PHYSICS DEPARTMENT COLLOQUIUM

“PROBING THE MILKY WAY'S SUPERMASSIVE
BLACK HOLE”

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The centers of many galaxies harbor supermassive black holes; our own galaxy almost certainly has one, with a mass several million times that of our Sun. This exotic object gives us an opportunity to probe the physics of strongly curved spacetime in our own backyard. An effective probe turns out to be radio astronomy, especially the monitoring of polarization of radio waves from the galactic center, since the polarization signal is sensitive to the details of the hot accreting matter falling into the black hole. This polarimetric probing, and an improved understanding of the accretion, will help to reveal how this supermassive black hole came to be.

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