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Chemist New Sloan Fellow

Joan-Emma Shea, assistant professor of chemistry and biochemistry, has been awarded a prestigious Sloan Research Fellowship from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Shea is one of 116 outstanding young scientists and economists from 51 colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada who have been selected to receive the fellowships this year. Fellows are engaged in research at the frontiers of physics, chemistry, computational and evolutionary molecular biology, computer science, economics, mathematics, and neuroscience.

Shea's research spans the fields of theoretical chemistry and biophysics. She is studying protein folding and aggregation.

"Proteins are among the most important building blocks of life," she explains. "They play an essential role in a wide variety of ways, from antibodies fighting infection, to enzymes catalyzing biochemical reactions, to the structural collagen in our bones.

"Synthesized on the ribosome as chains of amino acids, proteins spontaneously assemble under physiological conditions into well-defined, biologically active, three-dimensional structures," she added. "How this 'protein folding' takes place is essential to understanding how they work. It is also one of the most important unsolved puzzles of biology."

Each Fellow's institution administers grants of \$40,000 for a two-year period. She plans to use the funds to hire graduate student assistants.

Last fall she was one of only 16 scholars nationwide to be selected for a Packard Foundation Fellowship for Science and Engineering.