Alfred P. Sloan Foundation names 3 UCI faculty as 2022 Sloan Research Fellows

Distinction is awarded to assistant professors in Earth system science, mathematics.
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UCI's Connor Mooney, assistant professor of mathematics, Benis Egoh, assistant professor of Earth system science, and Asaf Ferber, assistant professor of mathematics, (from left) are among the 118 early-career researchers selected as Sloan Research Fellows this year by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Picture Credit:
UCI

Irvine, Calif., Feb. 15, 2022 – The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation has named three University of California, Irvine faculty members as 2022 Sloan Research Fellows. Benis Egoh, assistant professor of Earth system science, Connor Mooney, assistant professor of mathematics, and Asaf Ferber, assistant professor of mathematics, are

among 118 early-career researchers to be recognized this year by the foundation.

“The entire UCI School of Physical Sciences community is proud of professors Benis Egoh, Connor Mooney and Asaf Ferber being named Sloan Research Fellows for 2022,” said School of Physical Sciences Dean James Bullock. “The distinction is a testament to the excellence of the research happening in our school, and I am confident that it will stimulate great discoveries by these early-career scientists.”

Awardee Egoh earned a master’s degree in conservation biology at the University of Cape Town and a Ph.D. in zoology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. She is an interdisciplinary scientist who has conducted pioneering research in ecosystem services – how the environment provides humans with food, shelter, clean water, culture and recreational opportunities – and the interaction between humans and the natural world.

An author of research papers that have been cited hundreds of times by leaders in the scientific and policymaking communities, Egoh is working on projects addressing environmental injustice from a scientific point of view. She is currently investigating the impacts of the palm oil trade on biodiversity and people in collaboration with more than 50 partners around the world, as well as the benefits of restoring forests in California, funded by the California Strategic Growth Council’s Climate Change Research Program.

Michael Prather, Distinguished Professor emeritus of Earth system science, who supported Egoh’s nomination for the fellowship, said: “Dr. Egoh is an outstanding researcher working in an emerging Earth system science discipline that is clearly critical in this age where ecosystems are being ravaged, either directly for human use or inadvertently by climate change. She has the expertise and global perspective in ecosystems that hold value in both policy and research communities.”

Awardee Mooney, who earned a B.S. in mathematics at Stanford University and a Ph.D. in mathematics at Columbia University, has served postdoctoral research fellowships at the University of Texas at Austin and at ETH Zurich, in Switzerland. His primary research area is nonlinear partial differential equations.

In his letter recommending Mooney to the Sloan Foundation, Michael Cranston, UCI professor and chair of mathematics, said that the young mathematician “has already established himself as a leading figure in the regularity theory for fully nonlinear partial differential equations. I am very impressed that at such a young age he has

an optimal regularity result for solutions of the Monge-Ampere equation. He has also followed in the footsteps of Hilbert, De Giorgi and Nash in clarifying regularity for minimizers of variational integrals."

Awardee Ferber, who earned a Ph.D. at Israel's Tel Aviv University, was a postdoctoral scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Yale University before coming to UCI. His work in combinatorics has involved the notoriously difficult problems in Ramsey theory, according to Cranston, who also recommended Ferber to the Sloan Foundation.

In addition to his groundbreaking work in mathematics, Ferber is a dedicated and effective mentor who has provided guidance to numerous high school students, college undergraduate and graduate students, and postdoctoral scholars, Cranston said: "He has become a key member of our probability and combinatorics group, playing a key role in the seminars and directing graduate students."

Bestowed on promising young scientists in the United States and Canada, Sloan Research Fellowships provide recipients $75,000 to be used at their discretion for equipment and laboratory improvements, conference travel expenses, paying staff and data services. Among the most competitive and prestigious awards available to early-career researchers, they are often seen as indicative of the quality of an institution's science faculty and proof of success in attracting the most promising junior researchers to its ranks.

Since UCI was founded in 1965, 64 of its faculty have received Sloan Research Fellowships, including this year's three winners.

About UCI's Brilliant Future campaign: Publicly launched on Oct. 4, 2019, the Brilliant Future campaign aims to raise awareness and support for UCI. By engaging 75,000 alumni and garnering $2 billion in philanthropic investment, UCI seeks to reach new heights of excellence in student success, health and wellness, research and more. The School of Physical Sciences plays a vital role in the success of the campaign. Learn more by visiting https://brilliantfuture.uci.edu/uci-school-of-physical-sciences.

About the University of California, Irvine: Founded in 1965, UCI is the youngest member of the prestigious Association of American Universities and is ranked among the nation's top 10 public universities by *U.S. News & World Report*. The campus has produced five Nobel laureates and is known for its academic achievement, premier

research, innovation and anteater mascot. Led by Chancellor Howard Gillman, UCI has more than 36,000 students and offers 224 degree programs. It’s located in one of the world’s safest and most economically vibrant communities and is Orange County’s largest employer, contributing $7 billion annually to the local economy and $8 billion statewide. For more on UCI, visit www.uci.edu.

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