

CAITLYN SHEA



Caitlyn Shea is standing in front of a poster in the McConnell Building Foyer, delivering a talk on Initial Studies of the Mechanisms of Oxidation of Hydrophobic Silicon before a small group of onlookers and professors.

A staple in the world of science, poster sessions allow researchers to give succinct presentations about their latest work; in this case, it's a collaborative, interdisciplinary study with Professor Kate Queeney of the Chemistry Department. Although poster sessions are generally informal, they can be demanding tests of communication skills. Shea deftly fields detailed questions about how this research could be used to optimize the cleaning of silicon wafer chips for the computer industry.

It's hard to believe that less than 14 hours ago Shea, president of the local chapter of the Society of Women in Engineering, or SWE, was standing in a spotlight onstage in the basement of a downtown nightclub, playing bass guitar in a punk tribute band. True to punk tradition, the music of The Justice League made one's sternum vibrate. Her boyfriend and friends in the mosh pit didn't seem to mind.

"It's going to kill my hearing," says Shea, who has managed to pursue her avocation while studying chemical engineering. She adds, jokingly, "I know I don't look like a punker . . . but I 'stole' my brother's bass in the name of punk."

Shea relishes the opportunity to break the pocket-protector-garbed, Dilbert stereotype that often afflicts engineering. Playing in a punk band has turned out to be one more way to help change the perception of engineers on campus—much like the public outreach events Shea has organized for SWE, which include panel discussions, Introduce a Girl to Engineering Day, and Engineering Movie Nights. (Apollo 13 and October Sky were big hits.)

Shea discovered that she shares an interest in what she terms the "classic punk" of The Clash and The Ramones with at

ratio were two of several features that won over Shea to Smith College's Picker Engineering Program. Ironically, the school was not high on her list at first. Shea grew up a few hundred yards from Smith's front gates and thought she should get away from home and explore new turf.

Fate intervened.

In high school, Shea got hooked on the applications of science and enrolled in advanced placement classes. After a taste of Smith's offerings in a summer science program for high-school women, she investigated the proposed engineering school and compared it to others she was considering. A generous grant offered to Northampton natives aided in her decision, but Shea lists other factors that made her study here: Picker Engineering students have a broader education than many of their peers, there is more emphasis on the social context behind any engineering project they build, and they have much more freedom in selecting classes. (Of the 32 courses required for a B.S. in engineering from Smith, 10 can be outside math, science, or engineering.) Her initial impressions were confirmed when she compared notes with engineering students at other colleges.

There's also a strong sense of teamwork and collaboration among Picker students. "Three nights in a row in the engineering design studio until 4 a.m. will do that,"

she comments.

Shea also likes the fact that she can indulge her interests in history, English, economics—and of course, music.

Her mother has her own opinion about Shea's interest in music: "Her band is very loud."

least one of her engineering professors who listened to similar music as an undergraduate in the '80s and played bass for a band called Cheezgump. The two sometimes discuss music when they're not talking engineering.

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