

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Department of Nuclear, Plasma,
and Radiological Engineering

214 Nuclear Engineering Laboratory
103 South Goodwin Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801-2984



5 March 2001

Dr. Kenan Unlu
Director, Ward Center for Nuclear Sciences and
Adjunct Professor of Materials Science and Engineering
Cornell University
105 Ward Center
Ithaca, NY 14853

Dear Dr. Unlu:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to write a letter in support of the continued operation of the Cornell nuclear reactor facility. This is an issue of particular interest to us since we continue to suffer from the recent decision to transfer our reactor, the University of Illinois Advanced TRIGA Reactor, from operating status to possession only, non-operating status. This was a decision opposed by the faculty in our department, and a large number of outside entities, including the nuclear utilities in Illinois, national laboratories, and the Department of Energy. The loss of the use of the reactor continues to be a source of concern for our undergraduate and graduate students and for our alumni. Our reactor played a central role in our research and teaching mission, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. It was also routinely used to meet components of our service mission including utility reactor operator training, running demonstrations and experiments for area schools and community colleges, and to promote general public awareness of nuclear reactors and power in our state.

The loss of the reactor has impacted our program in a number of ways, some expected and others completely unexpected. In a time when we are trying to attract and build our undergraduate student numbers, the status of the reactor is the most often asked question. It had a major place in our undergraduate educational program, and was used by the University recruiters as a major attraction at Illinois. It has also affected our abilities to attract first-rate graduate students. In addition to its value as a teaching and research facility, it also was a symbol of commitment to excellence for our Department and the University as a whole. I hear frequently from all quarters: students, alumni, professional colleagues, as well as members of the general public, that the reactor was seen as a symbol of the University's stature as a major research institution and that the loss of the reactor has diminished that stature. It has also had a major negative impact on faculty and student moral in the Department.

It is important to mention a more practical note that the major local motivation for closing the reactor seems to have been to save money. Our annual base operating costs were about \$130,000. Almost all of this was personnel cost. To date, there has been no recovery of the costs of shutting down the reactor, and thus no benefit for the Department, the College of Engineering or the campus.

We have high hopes that we can reverse the decision to close the reactor. We have widespread external support from the Illinois utilities and other Illinois constituencies to do this. We are looking forward to a more enlightened view from the University administration that would permit us to move forward with an application to relicense. This will be a long up-hill battle. We support your efforts to maintain your facility, and not to undergo the major negative impact of shutting down an important facility.

Sincerely yours,



James F. Stubbins
Professor and Head