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To: Coordinators of Programs in Biological Physics  
Subject: Concerning Short-Term Visitors & Speakers

We encourage participants in KITP research programs to make long-term visits to allow time for them to accomplish work while here. We especially want to facilitate people getting to know others and forming new collaborations, with the hope of generating ideas that are outside the norm and transforming a field for years to come. These are some of the reasons we have established a policy of minimum three-week visits for theorists. Experience has shown that this is about the minimum time needed to accomplish anything more than to report on one's own efforts or to find out what others are doing. These are some of the ways in which our programs differ from one-week, intensive Gordon conferences or short-term Aspen workshops.

Since its inception, KITP has encouraged the participation of experimenters/observers in its programs. As these people often have co-workers or laboratories which they cannot abandon for extended periods, KITP established its "experimenter-of-the-week" program to allow theorists to gain insight and to probe important new results in some depth. We also welcome those experimenters who wish to stay longer.

KITP is committed to the development of the growing field of "biological physics." We have hosted pedagogical miniprograms as well as longer programs to help introduce new systems, ideas and methods to physicists and biologists alike, with the hope that their interactions will provide insights and foster new approaches to problems of common interest. One characteristic of our biological physics programs is that they necessarily involve many more external speakers. Although this inevitably leads to higher costs, KITP makes every effort within its budgetary constraints to provide organizers with the flexibility necessary to meet the scientific needs of each program, maximize the effectiveness of the program, and attract the highest caliber participants.

However, experience with past biology programs at KITP has shown that managing extensive numbers of short-term visitors is challenging. Some of our coordinators have brought in a different seminar speaker for each day of the program, most of whom stayed for one or two days. The speakers were asked to give an introduction and a more technical talk, which in most cases was understood as two seminars, and lead to three-hour talks every morning. Quite understandably, many participants felt overloaded. Little opportunity was left for additional talks by the participants themselves, and many of the long-term participants felt they didn't have time to interact with each other get any work done. These issues had a flip side: some short-term visitors have complained that they were essentially ignored outside of their seminar. Participants did not spend time with them in discussions, and they took their dinners alone. Seminar speakers generally like to feel hosted and appreciated, especially if they have traveled a long way to stay for only a day or two.

## Concerning Short-Term Visitors & Speakers

We are very flexible in our approach and recognize that different research communities have somewhat different cultures, styles, and needs. However, for all the reasons above, we strongly advise that there be no more than three outside speakers per week. Each such short-term visitor should spend at least one day in residence beyond the day of their seminar, and this must be communicated to them when they are invited. To ensure the maximum benefit from each visit, we request that each such visitor be assigned a specific host, who will take responsibility to arrange for scientific discussions and, possibly, social settings in which program participants will interact with the visitor. If coordinators prefer to orchestrate a focus week with more than three external speakers, it should be balanced by another week in which there are fewer. This latter organizational paradigm was very successful for some of our past programs, which held mini-workshops 2-4 days in duration every other week. These miniworkshops brought in up to 10 short term participants/speakers staying for the duration of the mini-workshop and had up to 3 talks per day. This mode of organization was effective in attracting short-term participants, because it enabled them to have intense interactions with the participants and with each other, and left more unstructured time for the long-term participants.

We encourage program organizers to consider the experience of the past programs (and perhaps consult their organizers.) We also expect the organizers to present a carefully thought out plan for managing short-term visits. This plan must also respect our budgetary constraints.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Gross". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

David Gross  
Director

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