



January 30, 2004

Biocomplexity Faculty Search Committee,
c/o Prof. Rob de Ruyter van Steveninck,
Biocomplexity Institute,
Indiana University,
Swain Hall West 117,
Bloomington, IN 47405-7105

Dear Search Committee members

I am writing this letter in support of the application by Dr. Osman Akcikir for a faculty position in your department. I am very pleased to provide this letter for Osman, who is a capable young physicist with interests in biological aspects of his discipline.

Osman has received his Ph.D. degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana, working under Professor Enrico Gratton. His research experience involved optical physics, with strong emphasis on instrumentation and methodology. For his postdoctoral training Osman decided to join the laboratory that Professor Duncan Steel and I share at the Biophysics Research Division, the University of Michigan. The motivation for this choice was Osman's interest in developing physical tools and applying them to study biological systems. Professor Steel and I have had a long-standing collaboration in this general area with specific interests in the "protein folding problem".

Osman has spent two years working on the application of single molecule spectroscopy to the study of the folding of a protein domain that has previously been shown to be weakly stabilized and may, therefore, be expected to inter-convert between the folded and unfolded states with reasonably high frequency and without the need to use denaturants. He adapted the single molecule spectrometer to his specific needs, and ran all needed controls. Osman had no prior experience in protein expression, purification, fluorescence labeling and handling, and had to acquire this knowledge. He made a remarkable progress in this area and has successfully produced all the labeled protein samples to allow him to detect the folding-unfolding transitions. Unfortunately due to the ending of funding for this project Osman may not be able to bring his research to fruition, though I hope he will have enough data for one publication.

Overall I consider Osman to be a capable young physicist with excellent training and high motivation. He now also possesses a good working knowledge in the area of protein chemistry and protein folding. On a personal level Osman is a pleasure to interact with, a good team player and possesses good communication skills.

Sincerely,

Ari Gafni
Professor of Biological Chemistry
Research Professor of Biophysics