group so acting, a Participating Research Team (PRT), will be allotted exclusive use for an agreed-upon period of a certain fraction, as much as three-quarters, of the scheduled beam time. The remaining fraction will be available for general users.

We are asking for expression of interest or intent from members of the scientific community who wish to take advantage of the capabilities of the NSLS either as general users or as members of a PRT, which in some cases could be formed by our bringing together researchers having common interests. Responses should be addressed to Dr. Martin Blume, Department of Physics, Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, New York 11973. A reply is desired by 31 December 1978.

A description of the facility, outline specifications of beam lines being planned, and a statement of the Policy for the Instrumentation and Utilization of the NSLS are available on request from the project secretary, Mrs. C. Albert, NSLS Project, Building 911C, Brookhaven National Laboratory.

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## Preventing Blackouts

The article in the 15 September issue (News and Comment, p. 994) on the New York City blackout of 13 July 1977 omits what I feel was one important aspect that might have, relatively easily, prevented the extended blackout.

On 12 July 1978 I wrote a short letter on this to the *New York Times* after they had published articles on the blackout. My letter was published on 20 July. This has led to an interesting correspondence file. My point was as follows: The night in question was a hot, muggy evening when millions of Con Ed's customers, including my family, had air-conditioners operating and were watching television. I have been involved for about 30 years with nuclear particle accelerator installations which use a few megawatts. I am all too aware of the possibility of operational failure of high-power equipment. A logical response when imminent system failure seemed possible because of overloading would have been to send messages to all local radio and television stations to request that they broadcast the message to their viewing-listening public that the system was temporarily endangered because of accidental causes. They could then have requested that air-conditioners, and other heavy power drains, be turned off temporarily until a message was broadcast that initially limited use (higher-temperature thermostat settings) could be resumed. In all that I had read about the blackout, there was no mention of that option. I believe that enough customers would have heard the message then, and enough would have cooperated, to give a large reduction in power usage without massive load-shedding or the system failure that actually occurred. I suggested that the New York State Power Commission, the New York City mayor, Con Ed, and the radio and television stations establish effective procedures for this purpose. Subsequent correspondence indicated that such machinery had not been set up, but that it may by now have been done. The other features mentioned in the article are, of course, also very important.

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## "Released Time"

Those of us who are part of academia applauded Brewster C. Denny's editorial (25 Aug., p. 677) on "renegotiating the society-academy contract." I suggest, however, that the university's stance vis-à-vis the government in particular could be immeasurably strengthened if the universities were to speak more convincingly of their own commitment to research than they do at present. I am referring to the nefarious practice of charging time spent in research by academic personnel to a grant as "released time." This practice, which was not permitted by federal agencies until comparatively recently, essentially denies any stake on the university's part in a scientist's research; indeed, it raises the question whether authors should even identify themselves with their institution in publications reporting their work, since it was in effect carried out on their "own" time.

The practice has not only served to undermine the university's traditional position as an institution devoted to the encouragement of research, and the creation of an atmosphere conducive to it, but has had some all too familiar tail-wags-the-dog side effects. For the institution now has a financial vested interest in the research of its faculty and tends to give support or rewards for it, not in relation to the intrinsic worth of the work, but rather in terms of the amount of money brought into it in the form of released salary, along with indirect costs. Indeed, in some institutions released-time moneys are counted on for the operating expenses of a department, putting the faculty under intense pressures to apply for large grants that permit such released-time payments. This is not true of many smaller grants administered by foundations and other private agencies.

It is unrealistic to expect university administrators to push for this much-needed reform. But it is surely in the interest of the researcher to do so, if only to make the ever-shrinking total pie of available research support stretch further—that is, distribute the limited resources among a greater number of investigators. Particularly in the social sciences, where salaries frequently constitute a major portion of research grant budgets, this reform could result in a significant increase in research support. It would, furthermore, greatly improve the climate for the conduct of research and the researcher's motivation for seeking out grant support. But first and foremost, it would reaffirm the university's primary commitment to scholarly activity for its own sake. Clearly, until such a step is taken, we who are part of academia are in a very weak position to complain about external control or interference in the affairs of the university.

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## Houston Transportation System

On page 1216 of the 29 September issue of *Science*, the reader is directed to page 1213 for a map indicating the locations and distances between the hotels used by AAAS for program activities and housing during the next annual meeting in Houston (3–8 January 1979). I was surprised to find on page 1213 only a map of the United States, which also provides information on airlines serving Houston. I wish to assure those readers of *Science* who plan to attend the AAAS meeting that most of the hotels mentioned on page 1216 are within walking distance from each other and that plane reservations are not required to get from one hotel to another.

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