

# NERS 544 Project Report

Aaron Graham, Mike Jarrett

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# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this project was to apply Monte Carlo simulation techniques to some semi-realistic problem. The problem selected for this purpose was eigenvalue calculations for a pin cell. The pin cell had a radius of 1.5 cm and a height of 100 cm. The pin cell had reflecting boundary conditions radially and vacuum boundary conditions axially, making this problem an eigenvalue calculation for an infinite lattice.

The eigenvalue was calculated using both track-length and collision estimators in the fuel region, as well as a “rough estimate” of the eigenvalue calculated from the number of fissions caused by each generation. Additionally, current estimators were placed on the top and bottom surfaces of the pin cell to calculate the leakage out of the pin cell. These calculations allowed observation of the behavior properties of Monte Carlo methods as applied to an infinite lattice calculation.

## 2 Code Description

The code used for this project was written using C++. It was broken into five distinct pieces in order to maintain organization and a moderate degree of abstraction. Each of these pieces will be described in sections 2.1-2.5.

### 2.1 Utils

This module contains functions which will be needed throughout the code and are not tied to any specific functionality. Some of these functions are as follows:

- *double drand(void)* – This function uses the intrinsic C function *int rand()* to return a random double precision number between 0.0 and 1.0.
- *double Watt(void)* – This function returns a random energy for a fission neutron, sampled from the Watt spectrum.
- *bool approxeq(double, double)*, *bool approxge(double, double)*, *bool approxle(double, double)* – These functions are used for  $=$ ,  $\geq$ , and  $\leq$  operators, respectively, for floating point double precision numbers.

In addition to these functions, the header file for Utils also defines many constants for use in the code, such as pi, the mass of a neutron, the Boltzmann constant, and others used for various parts of the code.

The header file is found in Appendix A, and the source code in Appendix B.

### 2.2 Geometry

The second module is the geometry module. This defines all the functions required for two main classes: *cell* and *surface*.

The *surface* class has two sub-classes: *plane* and *cylinder*. The *plane* class assumes that the plane is perpendicular to one of the three coordinate axes. This assumption could easily be generalized, but was made to simplify this problem. The plane is then defined by a point on the plane and the normal vector for the plane. The *cylinder* class assumes that the cylinder has some origin, a radius, and an axis which extends parallel to the *z*-axis. Thus, no rotation of the cylinder is allowed.

Both sub-classes of the *surface* class implement several important functions:

- *double distToIntersect(double\*, double\*)* – This function takes a position and direction as input arguments. It then calculate the distance from the position to the surface along the given direction. The distances might be negative.

- *void reflect(double\*, double\*)* – This function takes a position and direction. The direction is modified as if it had reflected off the surface.
- *int getSense(double\*)* – This function takes a 3D point and returns 1 or -1, depending on where the point is. For a *plane* class, 1 denotes being on the “positive” side of the plane and -1 on the “negative” side (with respect to the axis that the plane is perpendicular to), while for a *cylinder* class, 1 denotes being outside the cylinder and -1 denotes being inside it.

The *cell* class is defined mostly in terms of surfaces. It contains a vector of *surface* ID numbers, *iSurfs*, and *senses*, which contains a 1 or -1 for each surface to indicate which side of the surface the cell is on. It also contains a *material* ID number, and a *distToIntersect* function, which simply calls the corresponding function on each of the *cell*’s *surface* classes and returns the minimum positive distance.

This module also contains two vectors of pointers: one for each *surface* that has been created, and the other for each *cell* that has been created. The routines *getPtr\_cell(int)* and *getPtr\_surface(int)* each return a pointer from one of these lists when given an ID number.

The header file is found in Appendix C, and the source file in Appendix D.

## 2.3 Materials

This module contains definitions for the *moderator* and *fuel* classes. While these classes technically share a superclass *material*, it ended up being simpler for them to be mostly separate.

The *moderator* class contains variables for the oxygen and hydrogen number densities and cross-section (scattering and absorption) parameters. It also has a function *void modMacro(double, double\*, double\*, double\*)* which, given an energy, returns the total cross-section, the probability of interaction with hydrogen, and the total absorption probability. These are used to correctly move particles around and perform the interaction physics in the moderator.

The *fuel* class has similar information, but for oxygen, U-235, and U-238. It also contains fission cross-section and resonance information, which the *moderator* class does not require. This class has three main methods defined:

- *void fuelMacro(double, double\*, double\*, double\*, double\*, double\*)* – Similar to its *moderator* counterpart, it returns the total cross-section and other information about interaction probabilities.
- *int sample\_U(double\*, double\*)* – This function uses a random number to sample an isotope in the fuel off of which the neutron scatters.

In addition to these class definitions, this module also contains a routine *void init\_materials(int<sup>63</sup>, int<sup>63</sup>)* which sets up the fuel and moderator materials. It also defines a function *void elastic(const double, int, double<sup>63</sup>, double[3])*, which performs elastic scattering off a material. There is also a *getPtr\_material* function which ended up not being used due to how the materials were defined.

The header file is found in Appendix E, and the source is in Appendix F.

## 2.4 Particles

This module contains a definition of the *particle* and *fission* classes. The *particle* class contains the position, direction, and energy of the neutron. It also contains a logical value *isAlive* to indicate when the simulation of the particle should stop, and some information about the interaction probabilities and track-length and collision estimators. It also contains a method *int simulate()*, which simulates the entire life of the particle. The return value can represent one of three possible quantities, depending on what range it falls in:

- *return == 0* – Particle was absorbed, so nothing is done with the result.

- *return* > 0 – The particle caused fission, and the return value contains the number of fission neutrons which it produces.
- *return* < 0 – the particle escaped, and the return value contains the negative of the surface ID across which it leaked.

The *fission* class contains a position of the neutron which caused the fission, which can be used to generate a new *particle* class for the next batch of simulations. This prevents having to pass the entire particle around once its simulation is over.

There are also two important functions defined in this module:

- *void makeSource(std::vector<fission>& , std::vector<particle>& , int)* – This function takes in the fission bank which was generated by a previous iteration and populates the new source bank with neutrons. If the fission bank is too large, it randomly samples it to get the correct number. If it is too small, it randomly samples extra fission locations from the fission bank. In either case, the resulting source bank will be a constant size.
- *double calcEntropy(std::vector<fission>)* – This function takes in the fission bank and calculates the Shannon entropy for the previous iteration.

The header file is found in Appendix G, and the source in Appendix H.

## 2.5 Driver

The driver contains the actual iteration logic to solve the problem. The problem was solved by performing a power iteration beginning with an initial source bank of neutrons which were uniformly sampled within the fuel region. Since the neutrons are representative of fission neutrons, their direction was sampled isotropically and their energy was sampled from the Watt Spectrum. After the first iteration, the source bank was populated from the fissions occurring in the previous iteration. The full algorithm for the code is shown below:

### Iteration Algorithm

- |     |  |
|-----|--|
| 1.  | Seed random number generator using current time              |
| 2.  | Accept user input of pin pitch                               |
| 3.  | Set up materials   |
| 4.  | Set up geometry  |
| 5.  | <i>batch_size</i> = 10 <sup>5</sup>                          |
| 6.  | <i>for i = 1 to batch_size, do:</i>                          |
| 7.  | Randomly sample position, direction, and energy for neutron  |
| 8.  | Add neutron to source bank                                   |
| 9.  | Initialize estimators to 0                                   |
| 10. | <i>active_cycles</i> = 180; <i>inactive_cycles</i> = 20      |
| 11. | <i>for i = 1 to active_cycles + inactive_cycles, do:</i>     |
| 12. | <i>while source bank is empty, do:</i>                       |
| 13. | Remove neutron from bank and simulate it                     |
| 14. | If neutron caused fission, add fissions to fission bank      |
| 15. | Accumulate k-eff estimators for this iteration               |
| 16. | Destroy particle   |
| 17. | Calculate Shannon Entropy                                    |
| 18. | If <i>i</i> > <i>inactive_cycles</i> , accumulate estimators |
| 19. | Output updated results                                       |
| 20. | Make source bank and empty fission bank                      |
| 21. | Exit.  |

All of these steps are performed using functions described in the earlier modules. The track-length and collision estimators are accumulated for each neutron as it moves throughout the pin cell and interacts with

the materials. The leakage estimators and number of fission neutrons are calculated using the return value of the `particle::simulate()` routine.

The number of active and inactive cycles used is an inexact science. The values we selected were determined from running several different problems and observing when the Shannon Entropy and leakage estimates seemed to stabilize. Running 20 inactive cycles seemed to be enough to get any bias out of the results. After 20 inactive cycles, 180 active cycles were run to obtain estimates of desired quantities with sufficiently low uncertainty.

The driver source code is found in Appendix I.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 Eigenvalue Estimators

One of the most important results of interest for this problem is how  $k$ -eff changes as the pin pitch is modified. This result is shown on the next page in Fig. 1. Out of the simulations that were run, the maximum  $k$ -effs are  $1.07066 \pm 0.00036$  (track-length) and  $1.07174 \pm 0.00030$  (collision), which both occur at a pin pitch of 4.5 cm.

The shape of the curve is due to the fuel-to-moderator ratio. At the smallest pin pitches, there is little moderator to slow down the neutrons, so they usually just get absorbed in the fuel instead of thermalizing and causing fission. This effect would be mitigated some if fast fission in U-238 were considered in this model, but it is not. For the largest pitches, there is a greater chance of neutrons being absorbed in the moderator, or simply never returning to the fuel after thermalizing. Beginning at a pitch of 4.75 cm, this effect begins to dominate the benefits of moderation.

The reported uncertainty on the track-length estimator ranged from 31.4 pcm to 36.7 pcm. For the collision estimator, they ranged from 27.2 pcm to 30.5 pcm. In this case, it appears that both estimators are approximately equivalent. If surface crossings were more prevalent (e.g. if axial or radial divisions were included), then the track-length estimator would be much more effective than the collision estimator. However, because there are only two distinct spatial regions in the problem (fuel and moderator), the collision estimator works very well. There is actually less variance with the collision estimator because the natural variance in track lengths is incorporated into the track-length estimator. For most cases, the difference between the track-length and collision estimates of  $k$ eff is less than 100 pcm. This is not surprising, considering that the estimated  $1\text{-}\sigma$  uncertainty in the estimators is about 30 pcm each, and we know that this is an underestimate due to correlation between cycles.

### 3.2 Leakage Estimators

A second quantity of interest is the leakage out of the pin cell, which is shown in Fig. 2. The leakage curves have some fluctuation in them, but generally have the same shape and similar magnitudes. This is to be expected, since the problem is axially symmetric. It also decreases with increasing pin pitch. This occurs because the increase in the amount of moderator slows down the neutrons more effectively, which decreases their mean free path and reduces the probability of escaping the pin cell.

For both figures, error bars are included, but too small to be easily visible. For Fig. 1, this might be acceptable, but for Fig. 2 we would expect to see the two curves lying within each other's uncertainties. However, in lecture it stated that the uncertainties which are reported are usually much lower than they should be. This is due to the fact that all the neutrons in the active cycles are correlated to their predecessors, but uncertainty calculations assume completely independent samples. Thus, this correlation makes the distributions appear more exact than they are. This, combined with how relatively few scores occur on each of these estimators, explains why there is some discrepancy between the top and bottom leakages.

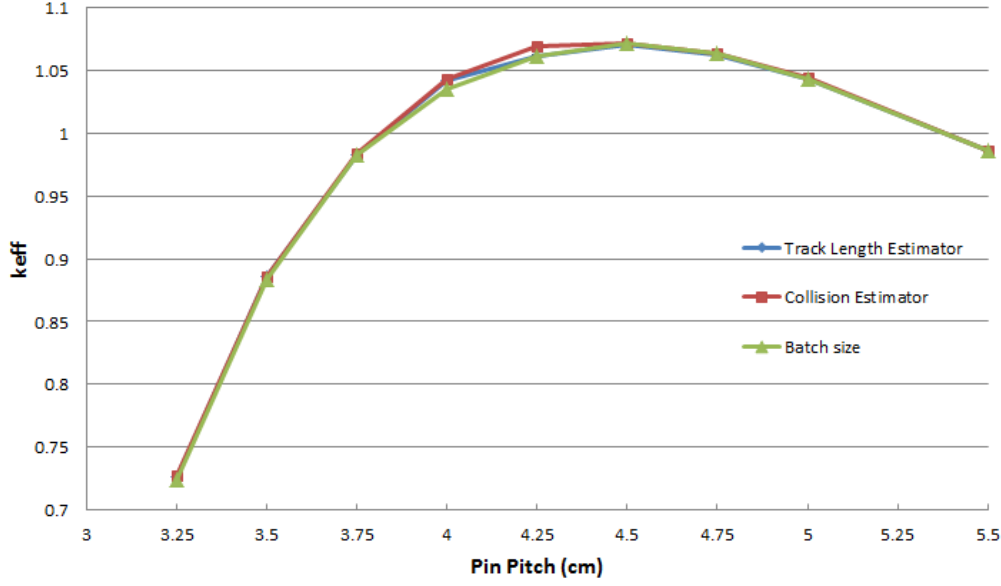


Figure 1: Plot of track-length (blue) , collision (red) , and batch size (green) estimators of k-eff versus pin pitch

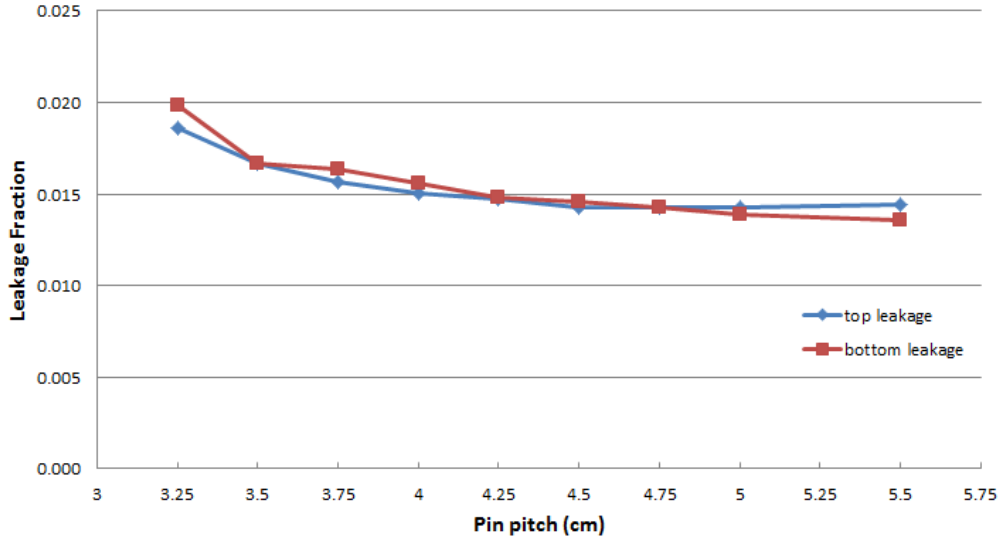


Figure 2: Plot of top (blue) and bottom (red) leakages versus pin pitch

### 3.3 Fission Source Convergence

The Shannon Entropy of the fission source was used to determine convergence. As shown in Fig. 3, the entropy decreases as the source converges from the initial flat guess to the dominant eigenfunction. The Shannon entropy converges close to a mean value after about 15-20 iterations, so we chose to use 20 inactive cycles. Each run used  $10^5$  particles per batch, with 200 total cycles (20 inactive and 180 active). The mesh used to calculate the entropy had 10 radial divisions and 100 axial divisions. Azimuthal divisions were not used because the problem is nearly (not quite) symmetric azimuthally. The source should vary weakly azimuthally compared to the variation in the radial and axial directions within the pin.

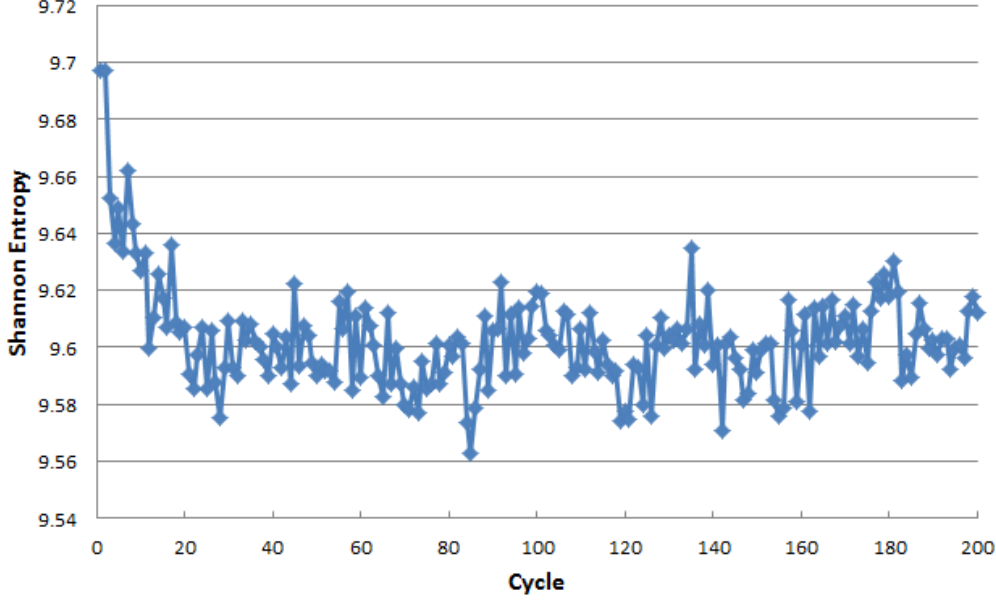


Figure 3: Convergence of Shannon Entropy to a mean value

### 3.4 Energy Spectrum

One of the biggest advantages of using Monte Carlo for reactor physics problems is the capability to do continuous-energy transport. While this problem used a relatively simple functional form for the cross sections instead of a large table of hyperfine/continuous energy cross sections, the energy spectrum is still of great interest. In the figures below, we can see the two large peaks at either end of the spectrum: the peak in the fast flux from the Watt spectrum, and the peak in the thermal flux from neutrons reaching thermal equilibrium. In the slowing down range, where the flux would be flat without absorption, we can see a slope due to absorption during slowing-down. The 3 resonances that were defined for U-238 can be seen clearly in the fuel spectrum, and if the pitch is small enough, the dip also appears in the moderator spectrum (although less pronounced).

The energy range from 3 meV to 30 MeV was divided into logarithmically-spaced bins, and the flux in both the fuel and moderator regions was tallied using 200 cycles and  $10^4$  neutrons per cycle. The pitch was varied between 3.5 cm and 5.0 cm to demonstrate the effect of fuel-to-moderator ratio on the energy spectrum.

With the pitch at 4 cm, the fast flux is much higher than the thermal flux because there is not enough moderation <sup>4</sup>. Because we are not modeling fast fission in this problem, there will be a reactivity penalty for a lack of moderation (namely, more absorption in the fuel before reaching thermal energy). For the 5 cm pitch (Fig. 7, there is plenty of moderation: the relative size of the thermal flux peak to the fast flux peak in the fuel is increased from approximately 1:5 to about 1:3. However, the moderator spectrum goes from a 1:2 thermal to fast flux peak to a slightly higher thermal flux peak. Because absorption in the moderator is stronger at thermal energies, the absorption in the moderator is much higher at a pitch of 5 cm. At the same time, however, the slope of the spectrum in the slowing down range is shallower with the larger pitch, indicating less absorption in the slowing-down energy range. This makes sense because there is effectively more moderator between each fuel pin in the infinite lattice, so the fuel will see fewer of these neutrons and fast/epithermal absorption will be lower.

The peak in  $k_{eff}$  occurred at a pitch of 4.5 cm (Fig. 6, where there is a good balance between moderation and thermal absorption in the moderator. With a pitch of 3.5 cm, there is more fuel than moderator, so the thermal flux is very low compared to the fast flux (Fig. 4), and  $k_{eff}$  is very low as a result. Also, there is

less difference between the fuel spectrum and the moderator spectrum when there is less moderator.

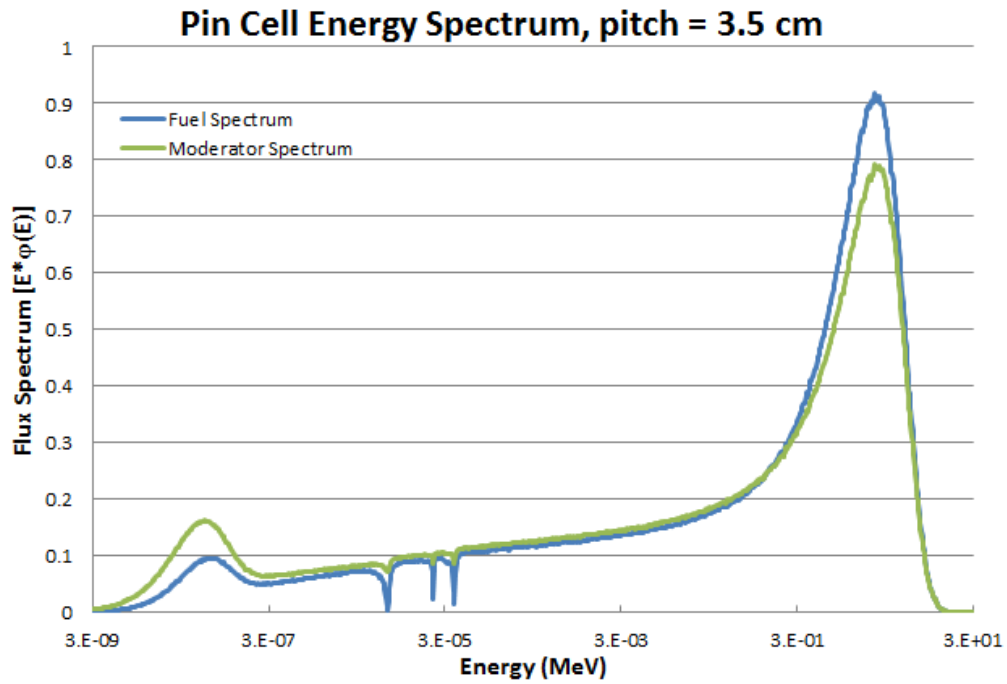


Figure 4: Flux Spectrum with pitch = 3.5 cm (low moderation)

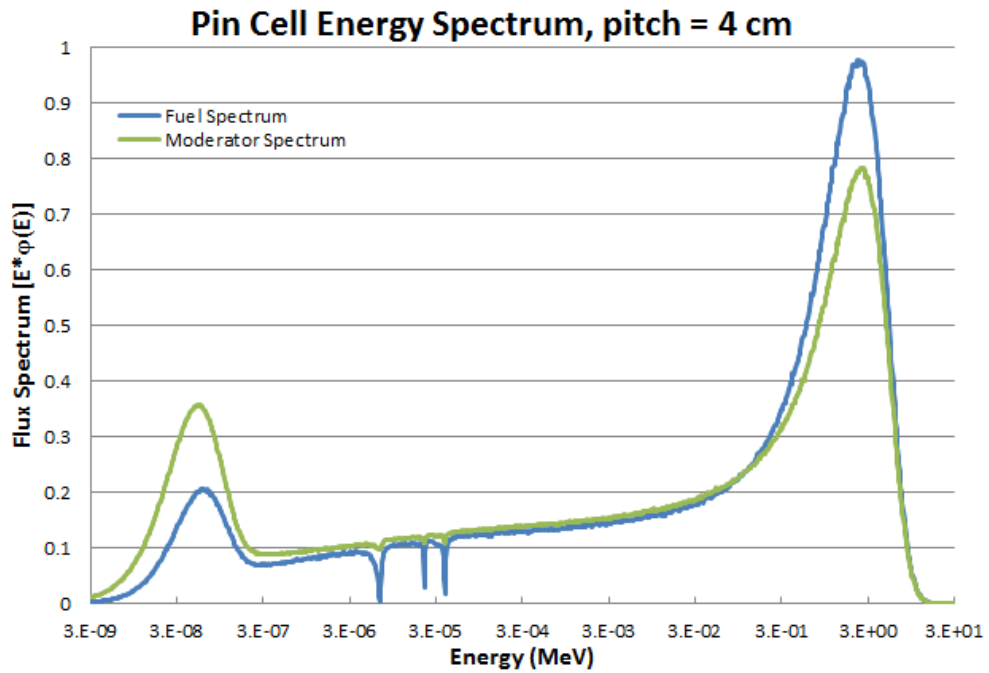


Figure 5: Flux Spectrum with pitch = 4.0 cm (medium low moderation)



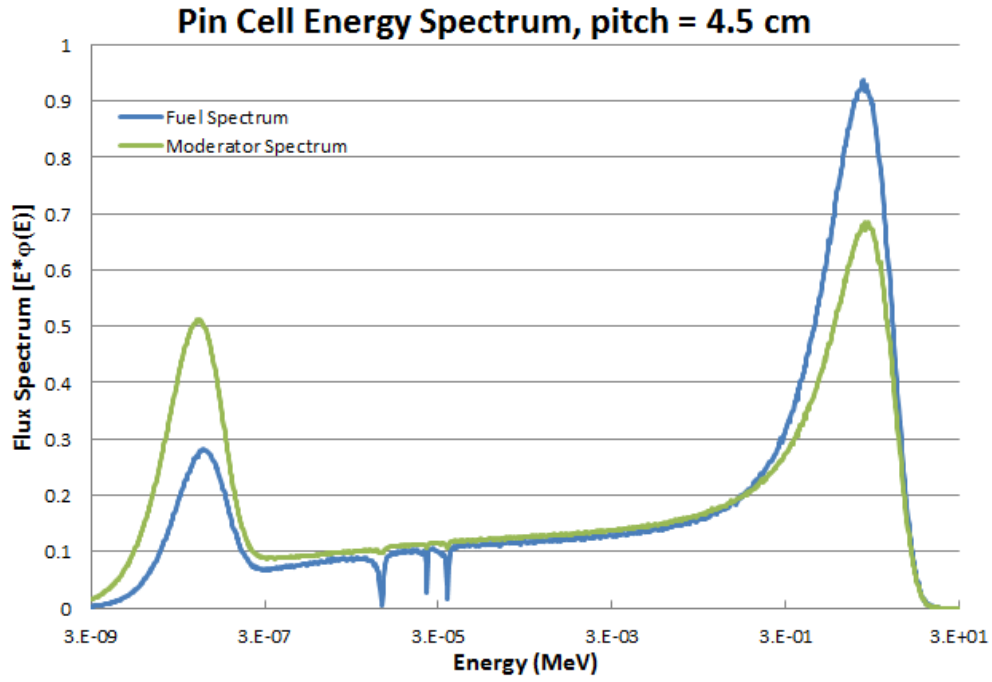


Figure 6: Flux Spectrum with pitch = 4.5 cm (medium high moderation)

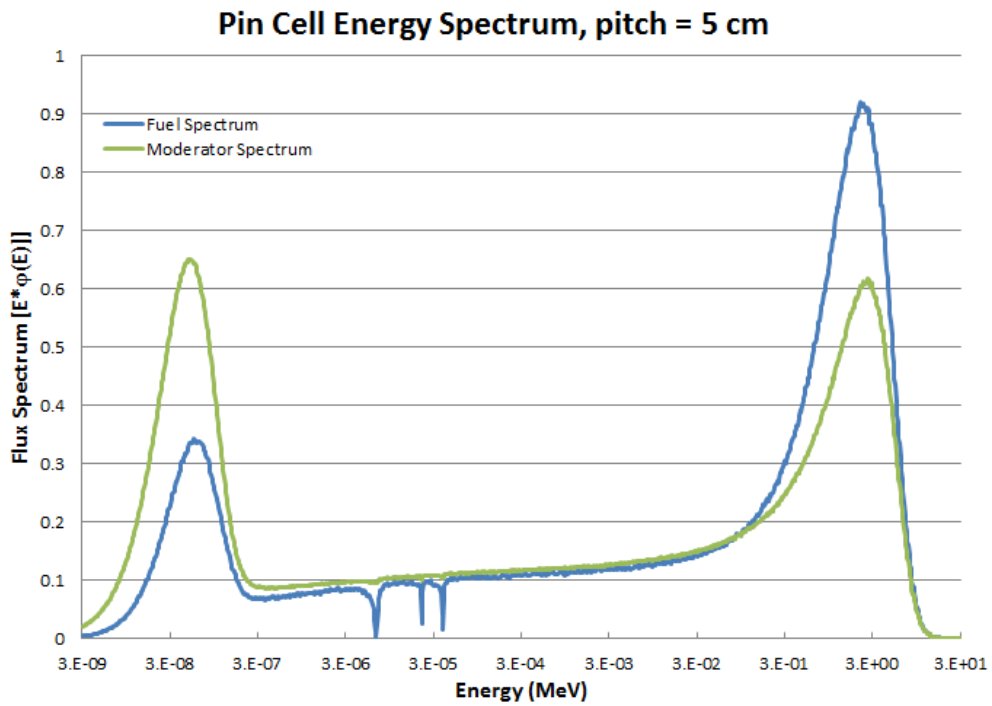


Figure 7: Flux Spectrum with pitch = 5.0 cm (high moderation)

## 4 Conclusion

The infinite lattice (pin cell) problem was successfully simulated using a Monte Carlo program. Estimators were used to determine the value of  $k$ -eff and axial leakages for the pin cell as a function of pin pitch. The values obtained were consistent with the expectations for this kind of problem, indicating that code is producing correct results. The effective multiplication is subcritical if there is too little or too much moderator in the problem. For pitches between approximately 3.75 cm and 5.5 cm, the infinite lattice is close to critical. The criticality peaks at approximately 1.071, near 4.5 cm.

The Shannon entropy proved to be a useful indicator of fission source convergence. In this problem, the neutrons have a mean-free-path of several cm, and most neutrons scatter at least a few dozen times before being absorbed. As a result, neutrons can travel over virtually the entire problem geometry during a single history, which allows the fission source to converge rapidly. In a large reactor problem, the dominance ratio might be very close to unity, in which case it would take many more inactive cycles to converge the fission source. However, for this small problem, 20 inactive cycles was deemed sufficient to avoid bias in the estimators due to the initial fission source guess.

The energy spectra in the fuel and moderator were tallied to give us more physical insight into the problem. The spectra help to explain the trend of effective multiplication as a function of pitch. With a very small pitch, the problem is undermoderated, and the thermal flux is very small compared to the fast flux. With a large pitch it is overmoderated, and the thermal flux is too high in the moderator, leading to absorption.

While this problem was highly simplified, we exercised many of the same fundamental functionalities of a production Monte Carlo code which were covered in lecture, such as surface tracking, macroscopic cross section calculation, anisotropic lab-frame scattering, reaction rate and flux tallies.