Gamma-Ray and AntiMatter survey(GRAMS) experiment

August, 2025, TAUP 2025

Jiancheng Zeng
Northeastern University
On behalf of GRAMS collaboration

What is GRAMS?

GRAMS = Gamma-Ray and AntiMatter Survey

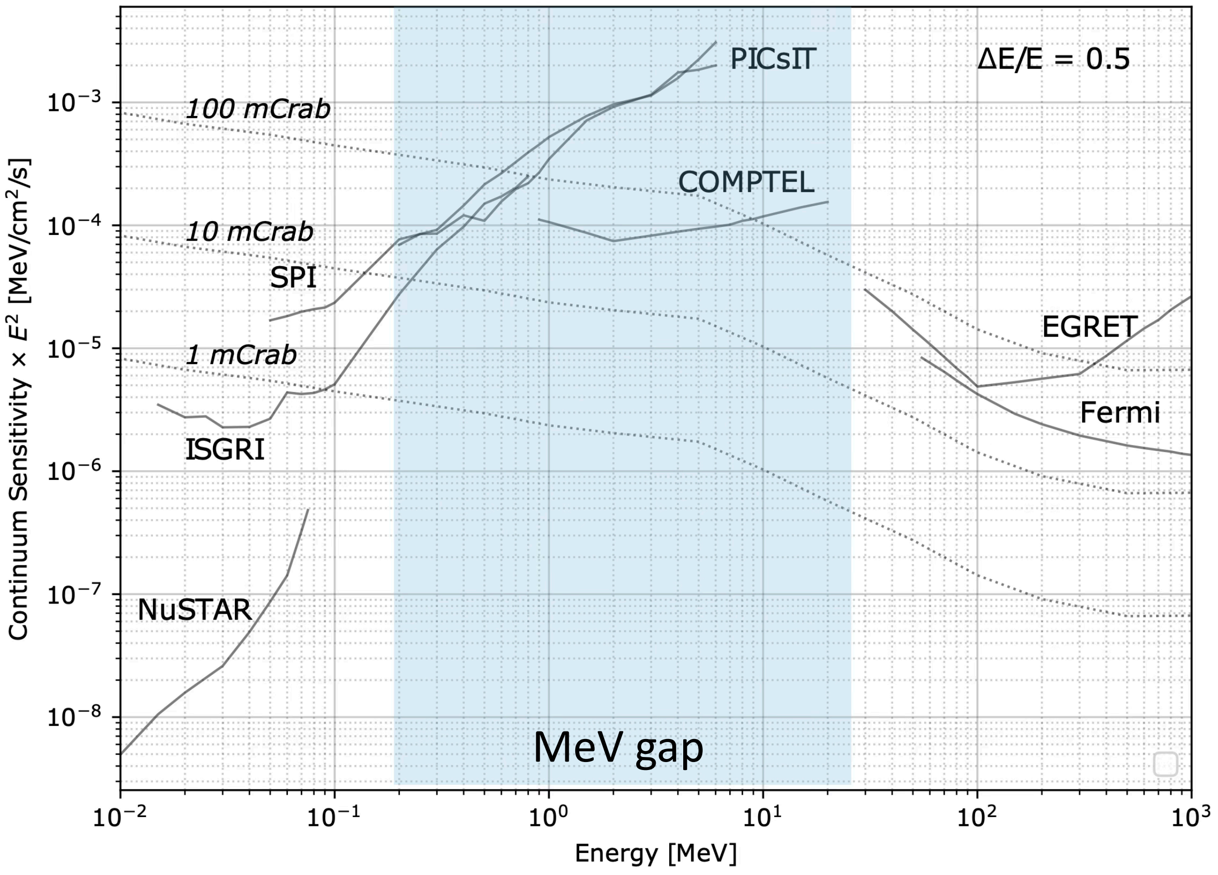
- First balloon/satellite experiment to target both
  - Astrophysical observations with **MeV gamma rays**
  - Indirect dark matter searches with **cosmic antinuclei**

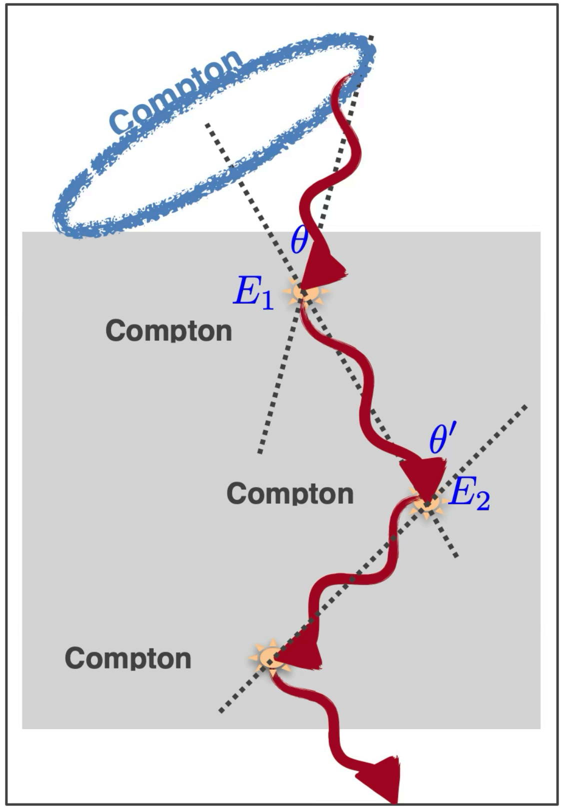
- First balloon/satellite mission with a low-cost, large-scale **LArTPC** (liquid argon time projection chamber) detector

- Funded by **NASA** as a **Physics of the Cosmos** suborbital experiment

MeV Gamma-Ray Observations

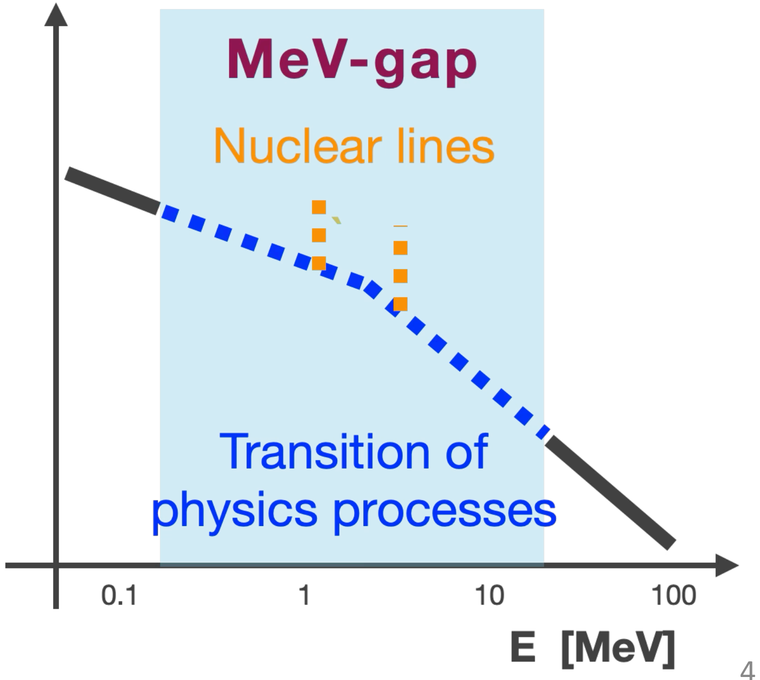
- MeV region is poorly measured due to domination of Compton scattering. Detectors require good spatial and energy resolution





MeV Gamma-ray Science

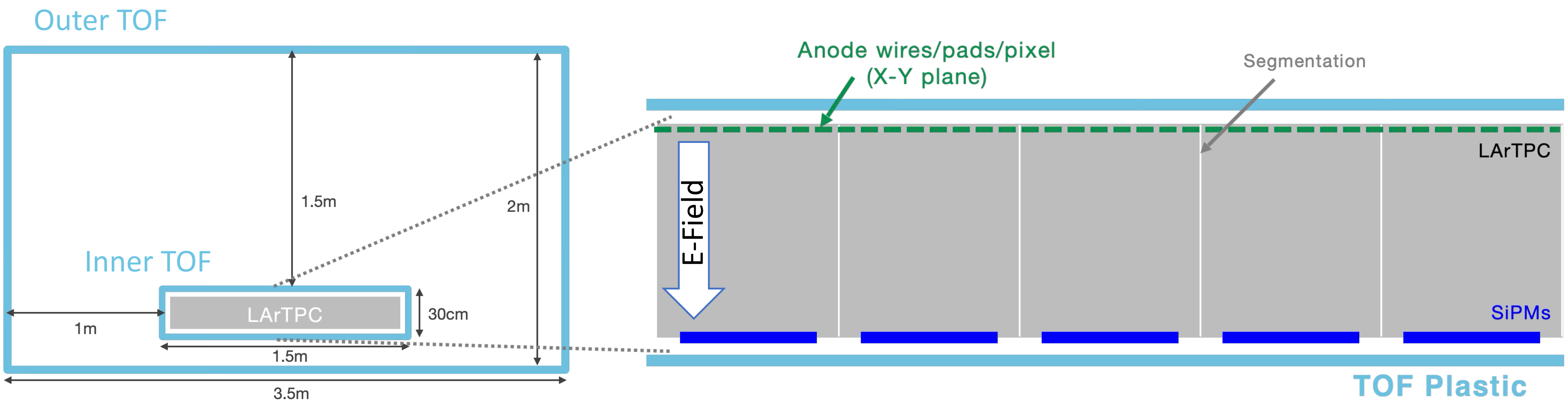
- **Physics processes/nucleosynthesis**
  - Transition of physics processes in MeV
    - Particle acceleration in Pulsar Wind Nebula
    - Relativistic flows in stellar/super-massive BHs, pulsars, magnetars
  - **Nuclear lines** from radioactive isotopes in astrophysical environments
    - Galactic center, classic novae, SNe, etc
    - r-process for the origin of heavy elements
- **Multi-messenger astrophysics**
  - MeV gamma rays + GWs
  - MeV gamma rays + high-energy neutrinos
    - NS/BH mergers, GRBs, SNe, AGNs
- **Indirect Dark Matter and PBH searches**



GRAMS detector design

- Large-scale, low-energy threshold LArTPC has been **well-studied** and **widely-used** in underground **dark matter** and **neutrino** experiments

Charged Particle   Gamma Ray: Compton Scattering   Pair-Production



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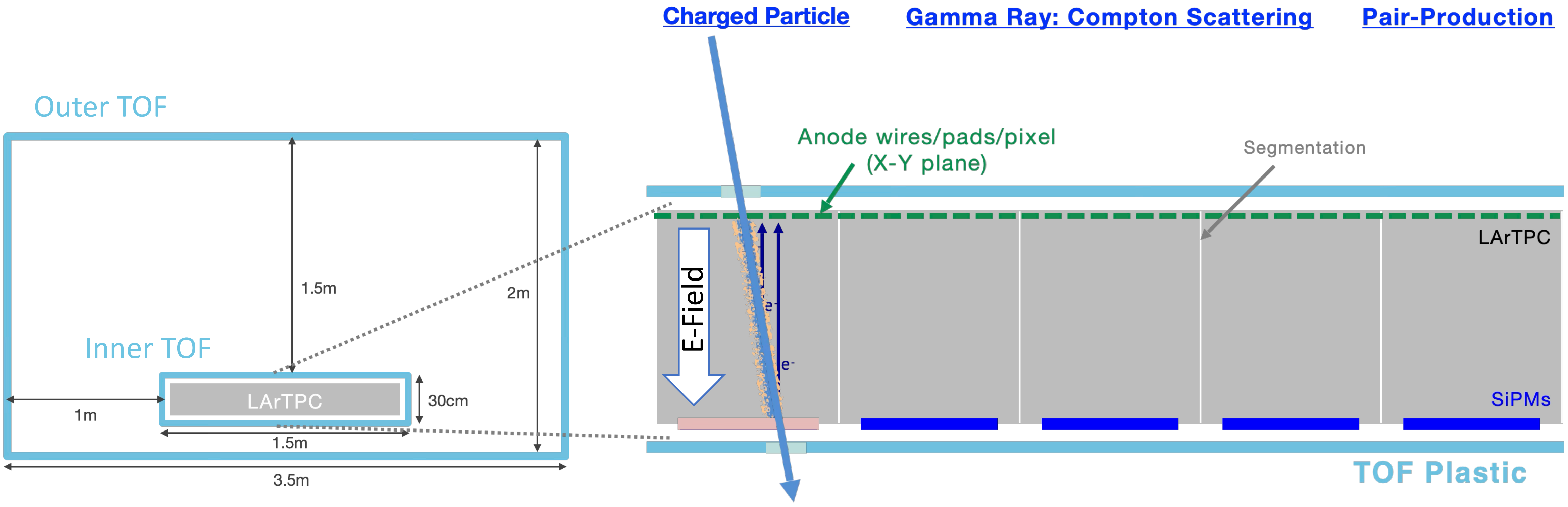

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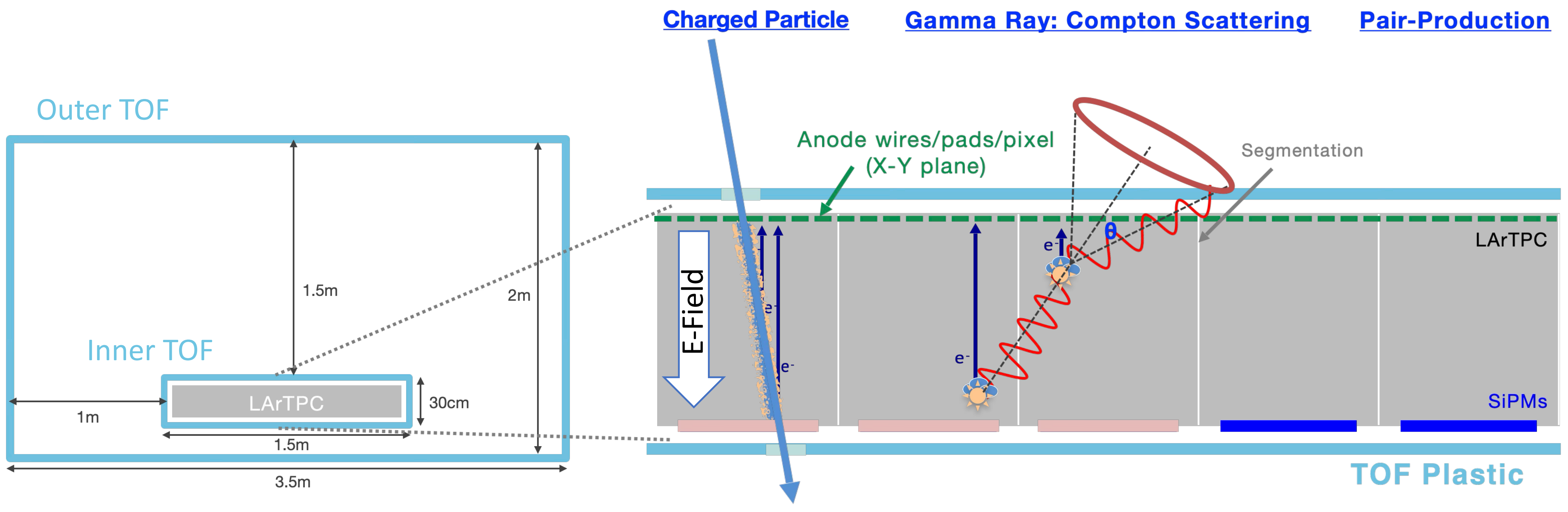

GRAMS detector design

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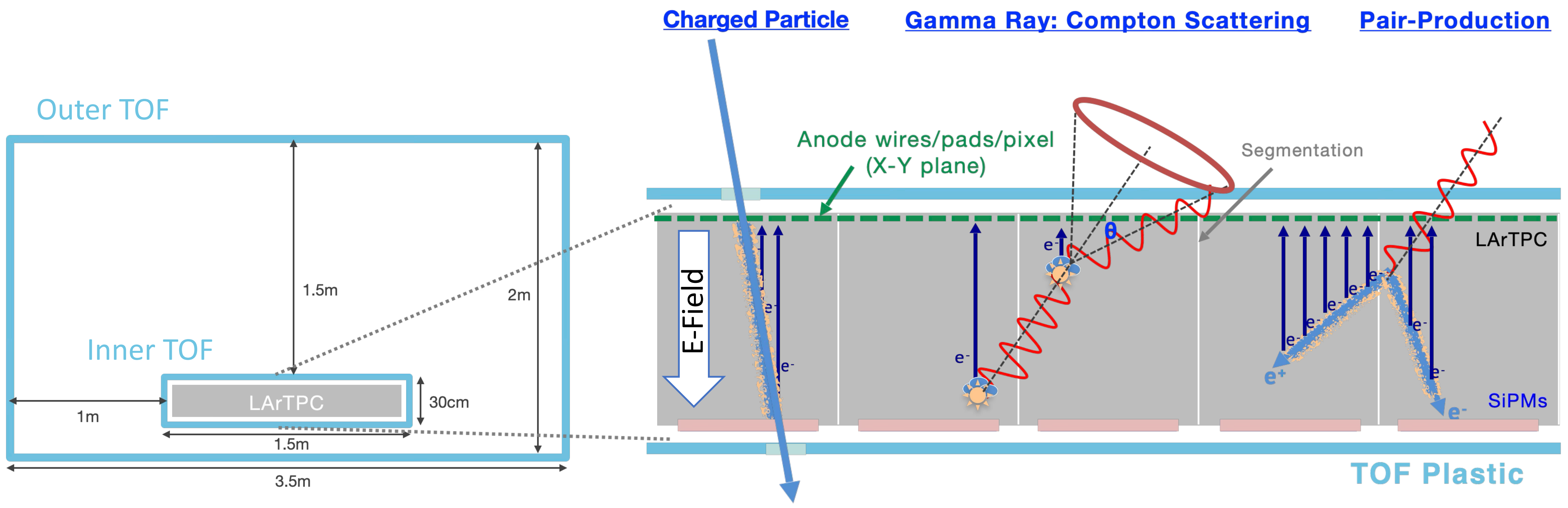
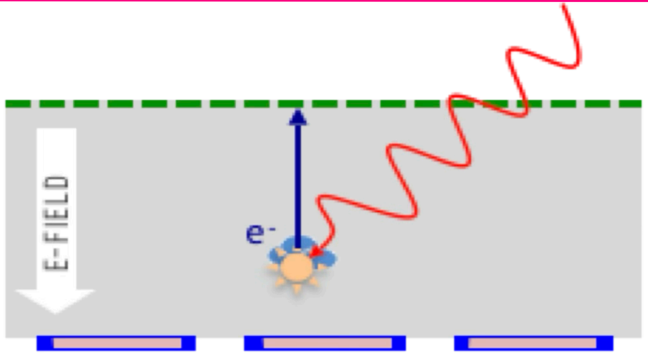
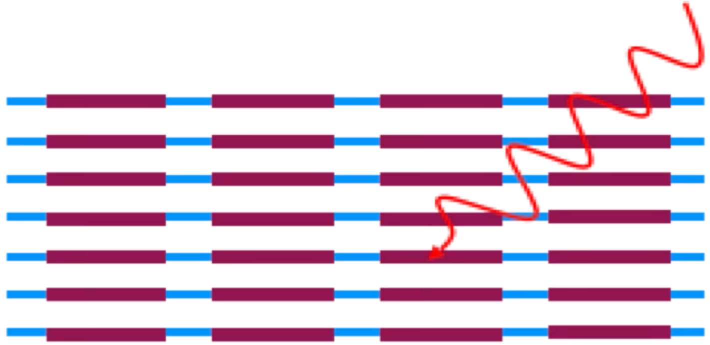


Why LArTPC?

- LArTPC is **cost-effective** and easily expandable to a **larger scale,** Almost **no dead volume** and **high detection efficiency**

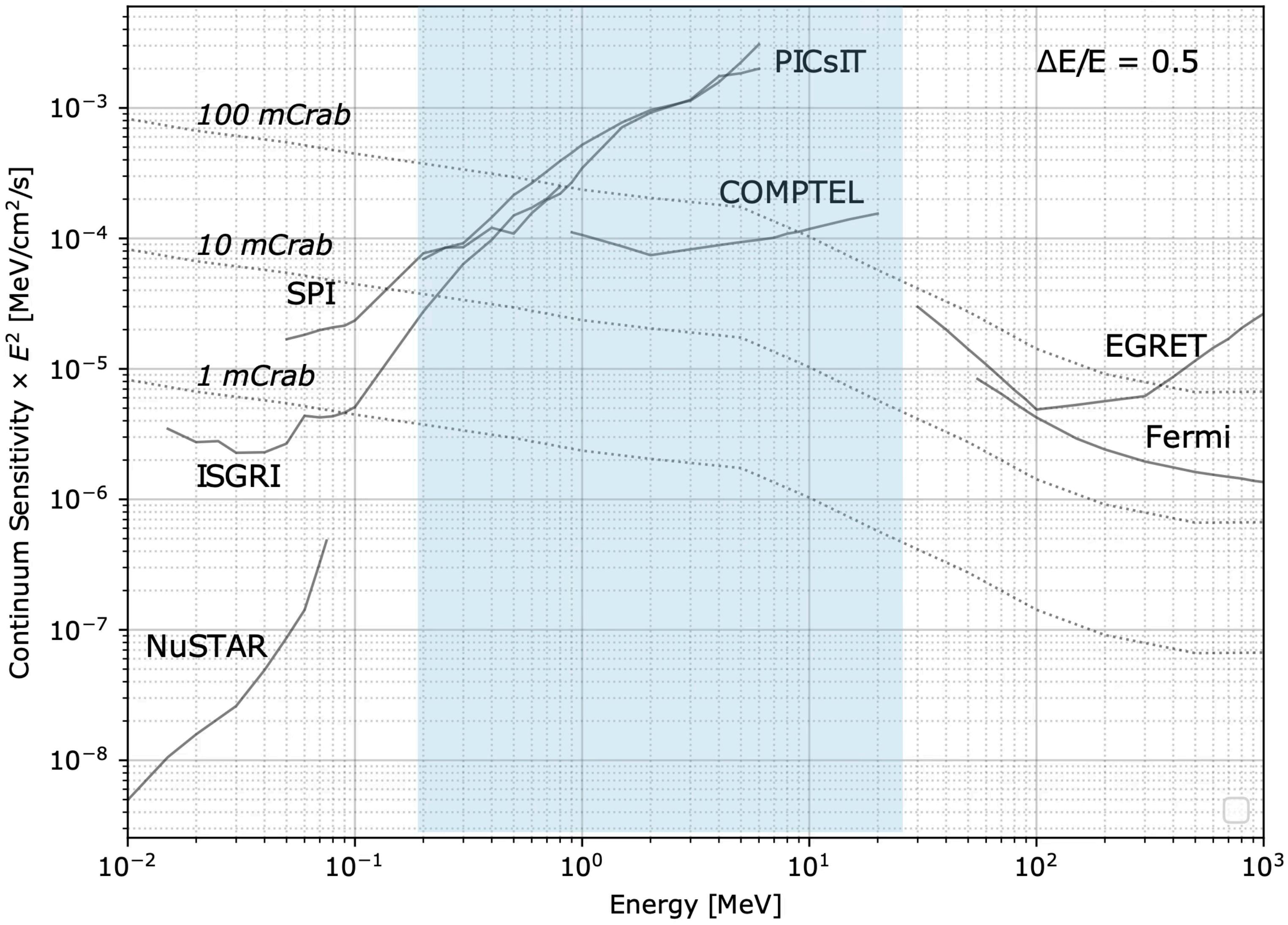
	LArTPC	Semiconductor/Scintillator
ρ (g/cm³)	1.4	2.3/5.3 (Ge/Si)
$T_{operation}$	~80K	~240K/~80K
Cost	$	$$$
Signals	Scintillation light + ionization electrons	Electrons, holes
X, Y positions	Wires/pads on anode plane (X-Y)	Double-sided strips
Z position	From drift time	From layer #
# of layers	Single layer	Multi-layers
# of electronics	#	###
Dead volume	Almost no dead volume	Detector frame, preamps
Neutron bkg	Identified with pulse shape	No rejection capability





MeV Gamma-ray Observations

- **Single balloon** flight:
  - Order of magnitude improved
- **Satellite** mission:
  - Comparable to future missions



T.Aramaki et al 10.1016/j.astropartphys.2019.07.002

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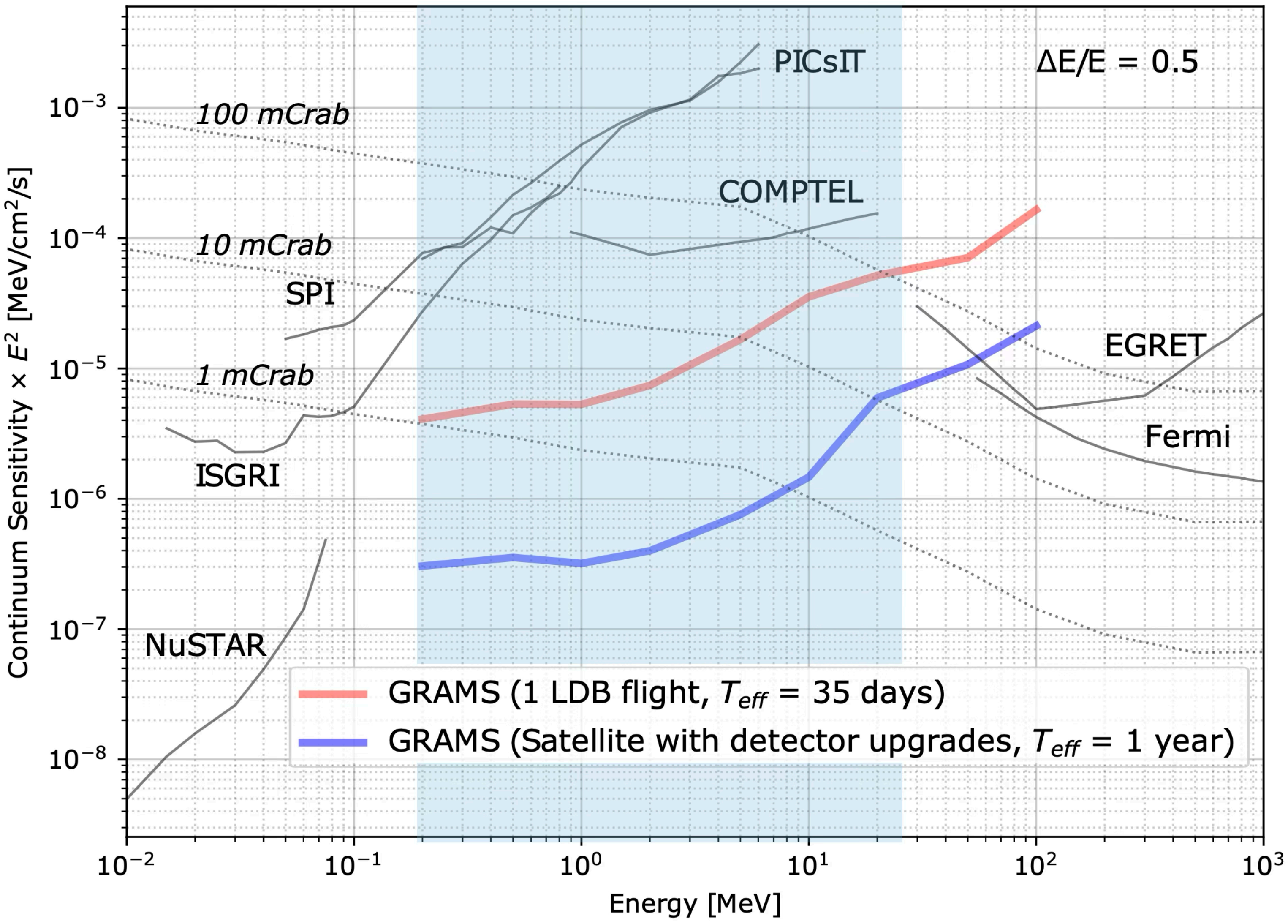

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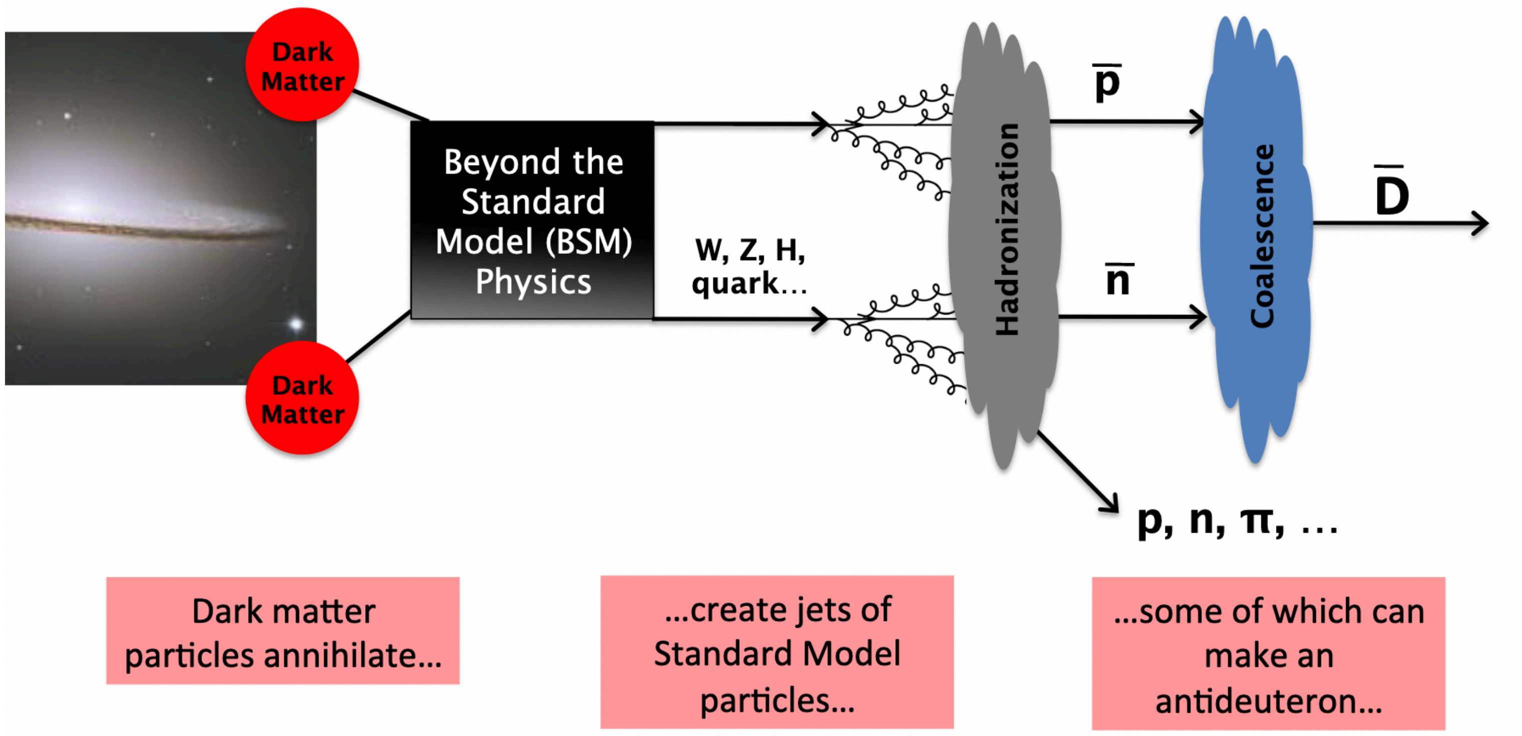
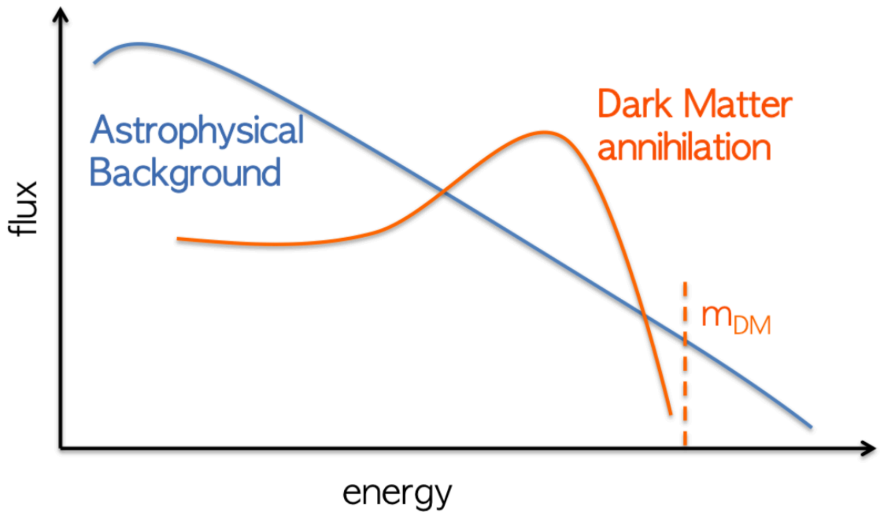
Indirect DM Searches

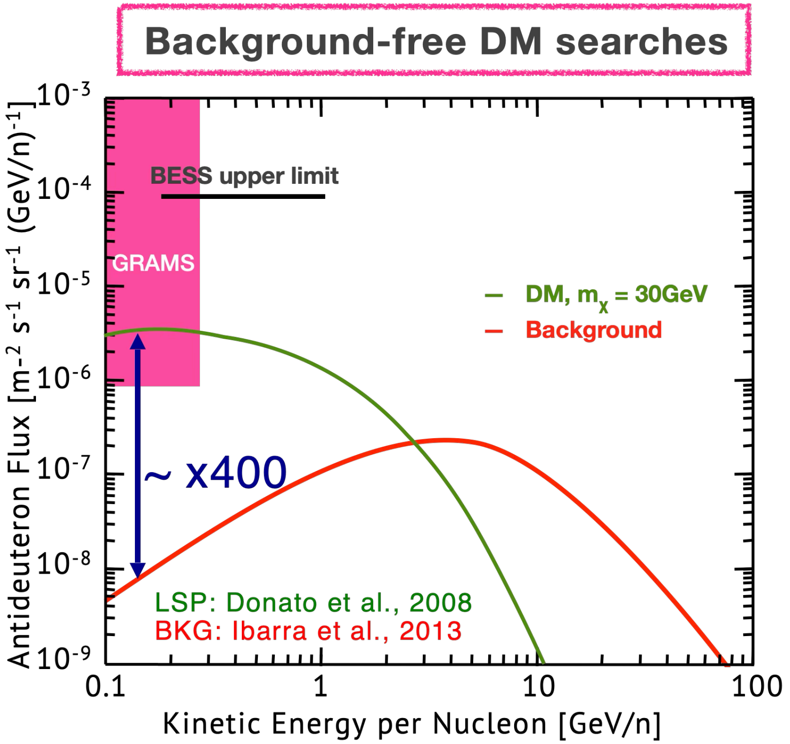


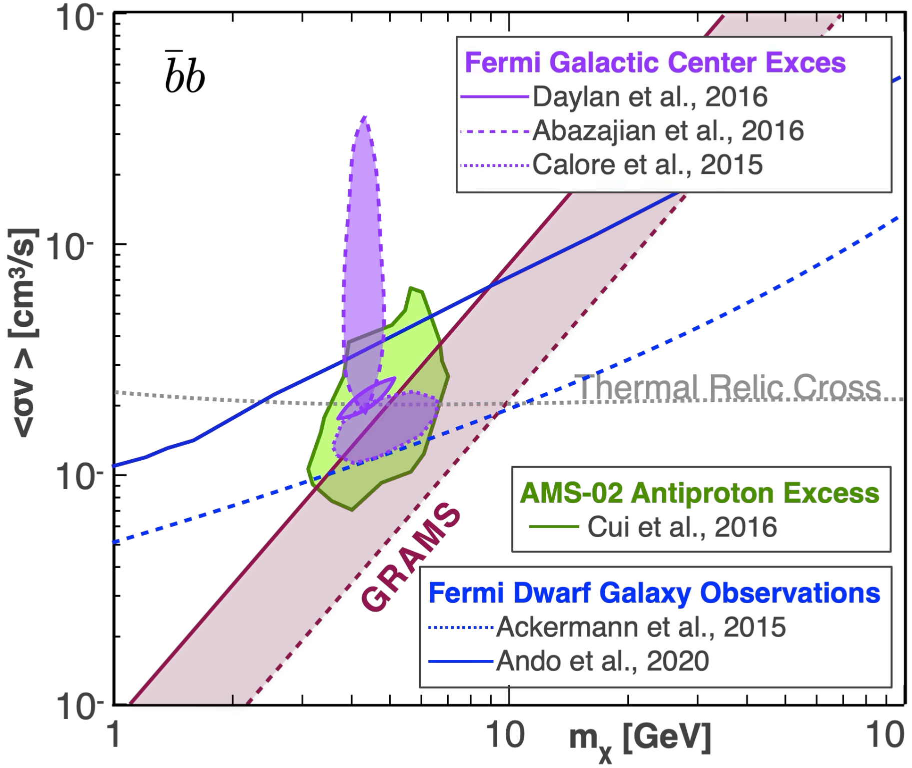


Finding products generated by DM self interaction

GRAMS Antideuteron Sensitivity

- ❑Low energy $\bar{D}$ gives an essentially background-free signature
- ❑Extensively explore DM parameter space and validate Fermi/ AMS-02 results

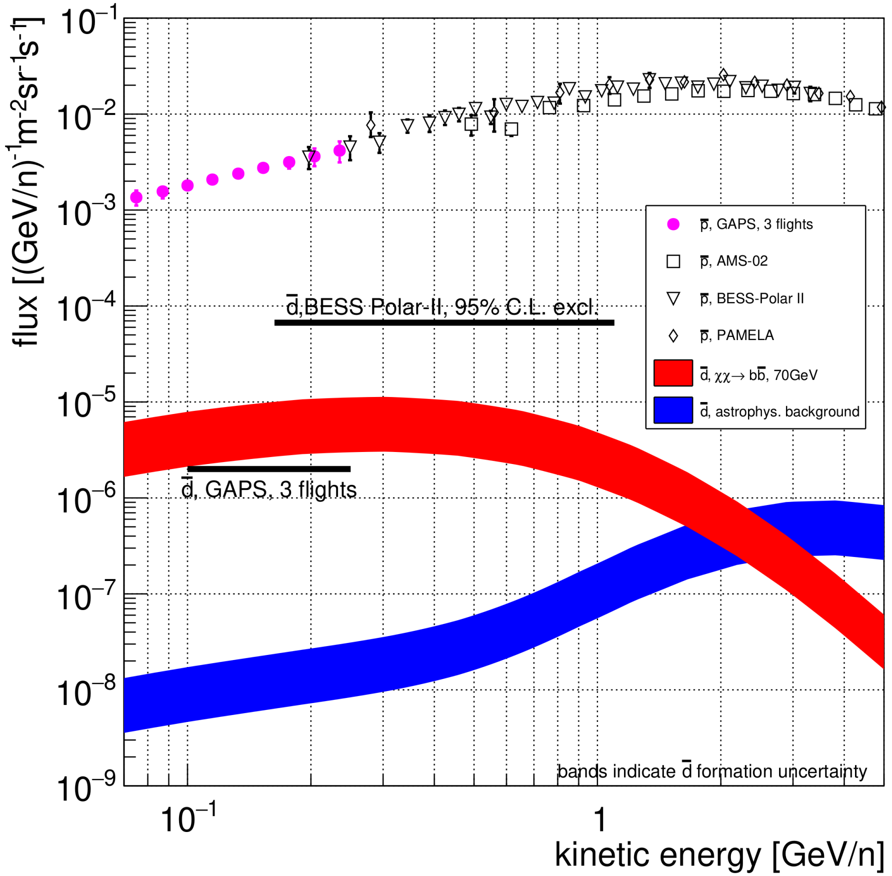


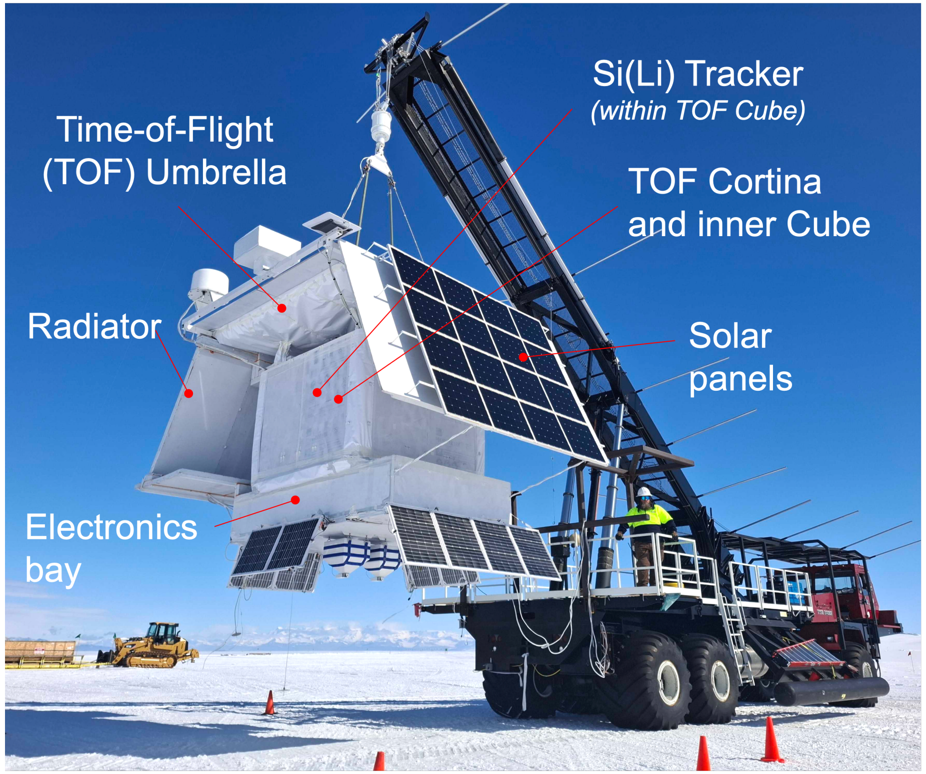


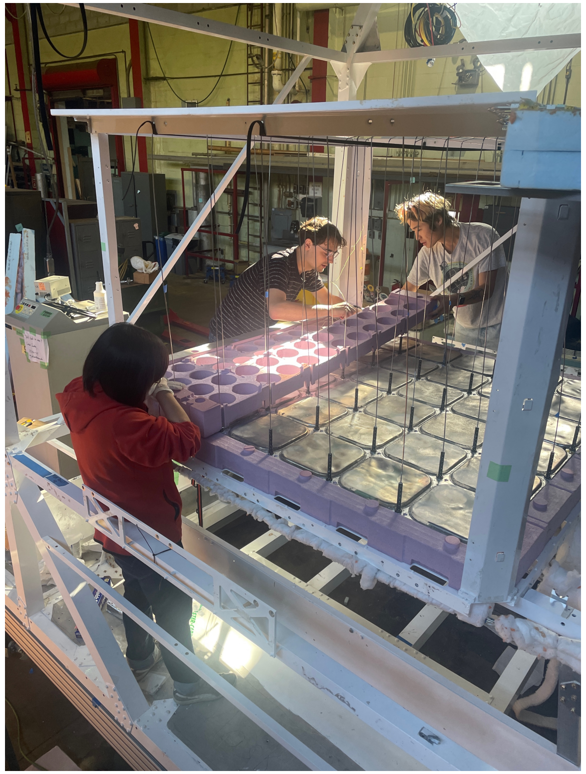
Next generation measurement beyond GAPS

General AntiParticle Spectrometer

- Current generation low energy antiparticles experiment





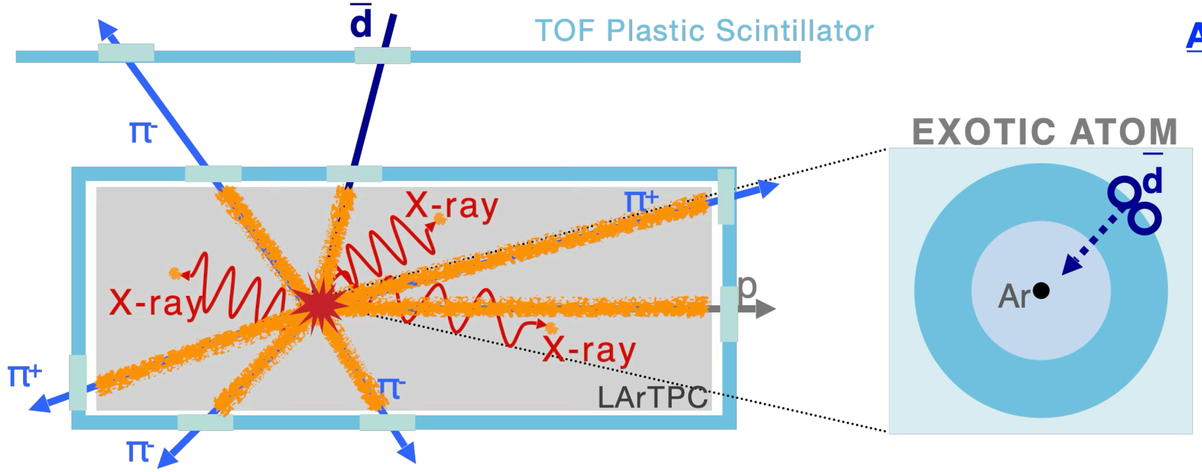


Mengjiao Xiao's talk [Search for Cosmic-Ray Antinuclei from Dark Matter with the GAPS Antarctic Balloon Mission] yesterday

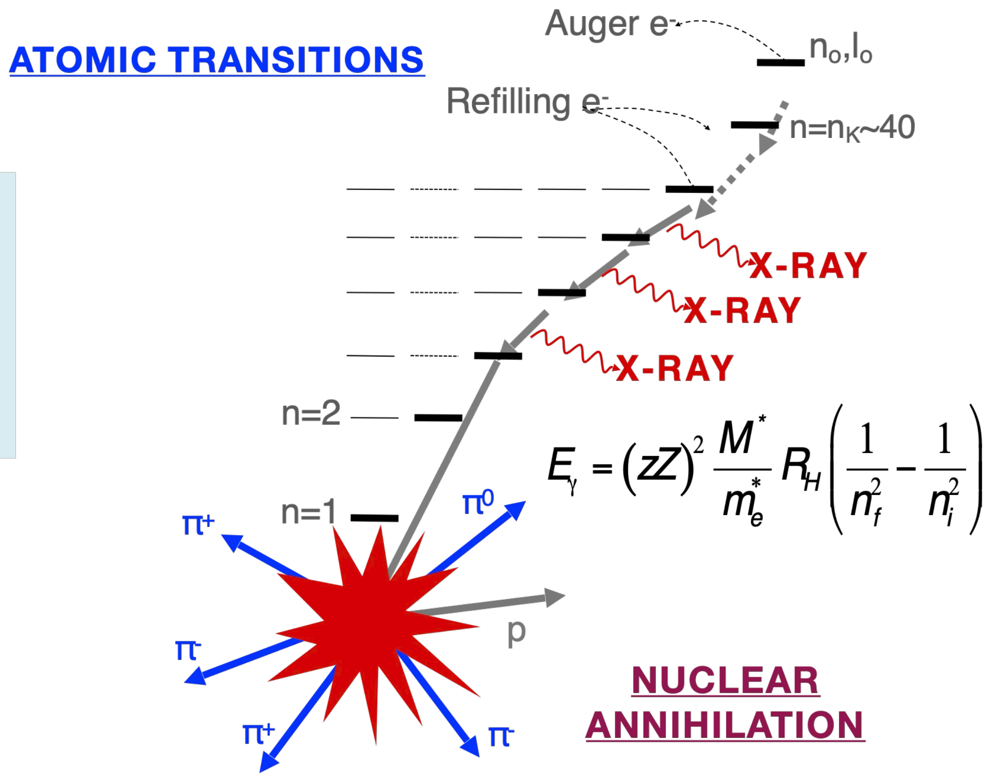
GAPS instrument is READY in Antarctica planed for flight in late 2025

GRAMS Antimatter detection

Measure atomic X-rays and annihilation products



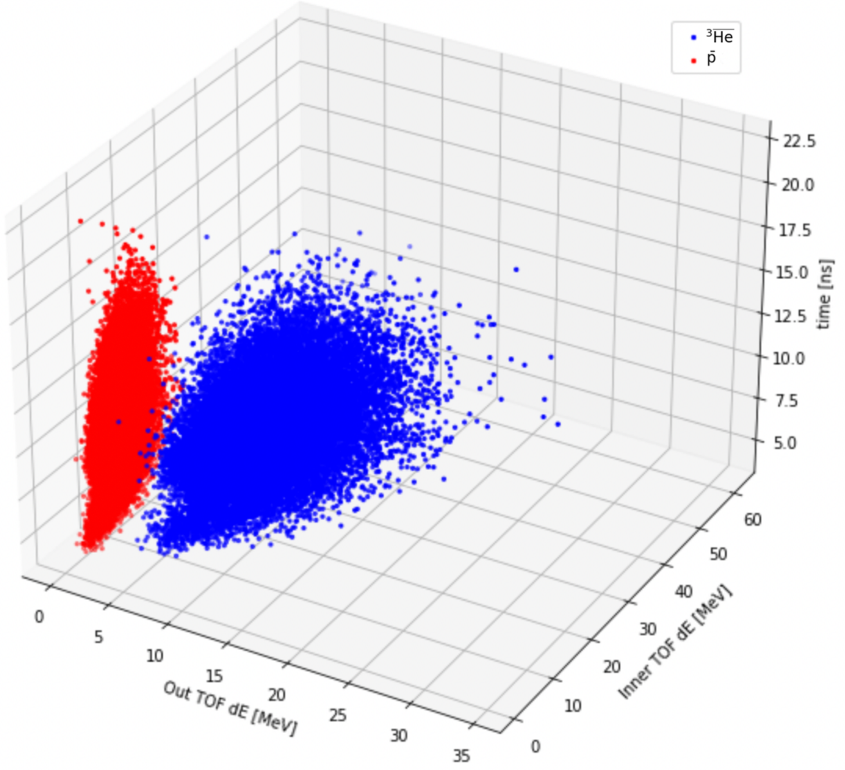
- A time of flight (TOF) system tags candidate events and records velocity
- The antiparticle slows down & stops, forming an excited exotic atom
- De-excitation X-rays provide signature
- Annihilation products provide additional background suppression



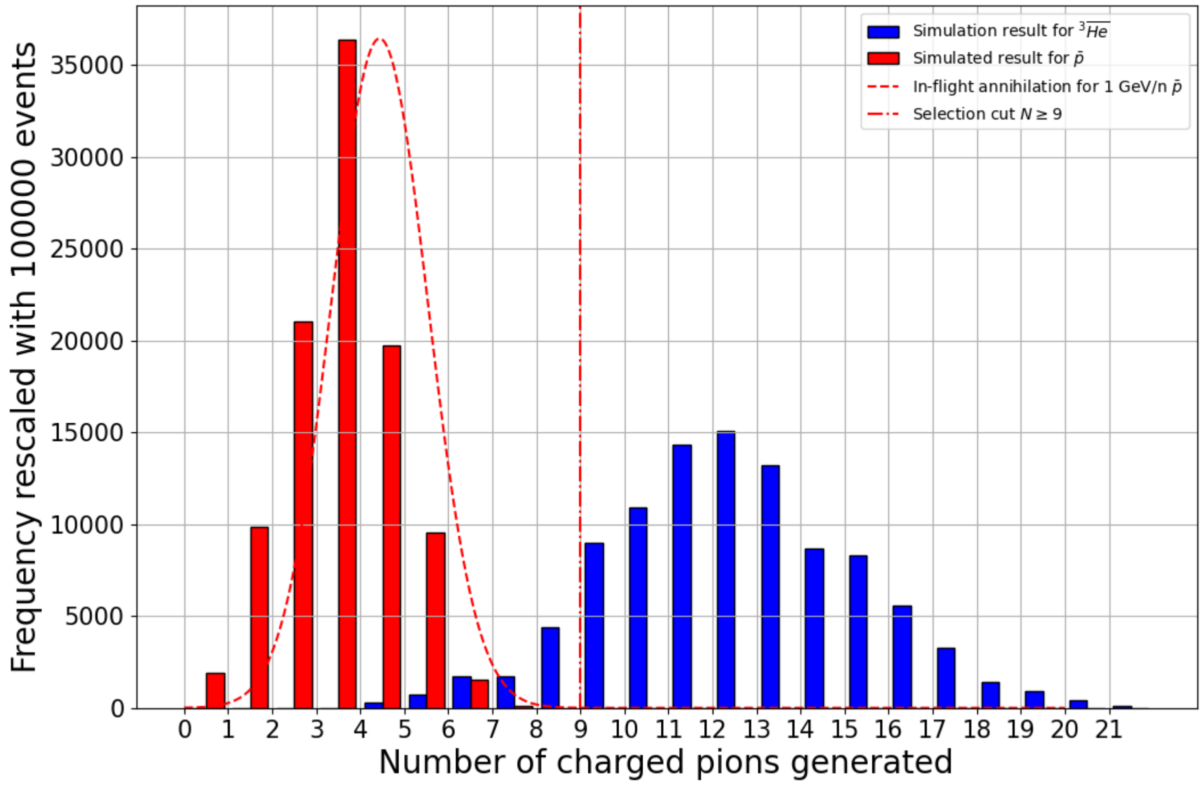
Particle identification with the combination of
TOF timing, stopping range, pion/proton multiplicities, energy depositions in plastic/LArTPC, atomic X-rays

GRAMS Antimatter detection

- Aside from unique X-Ray peak, Antihelium-3 or Antideuteron has unique behavior in LArTPC detector



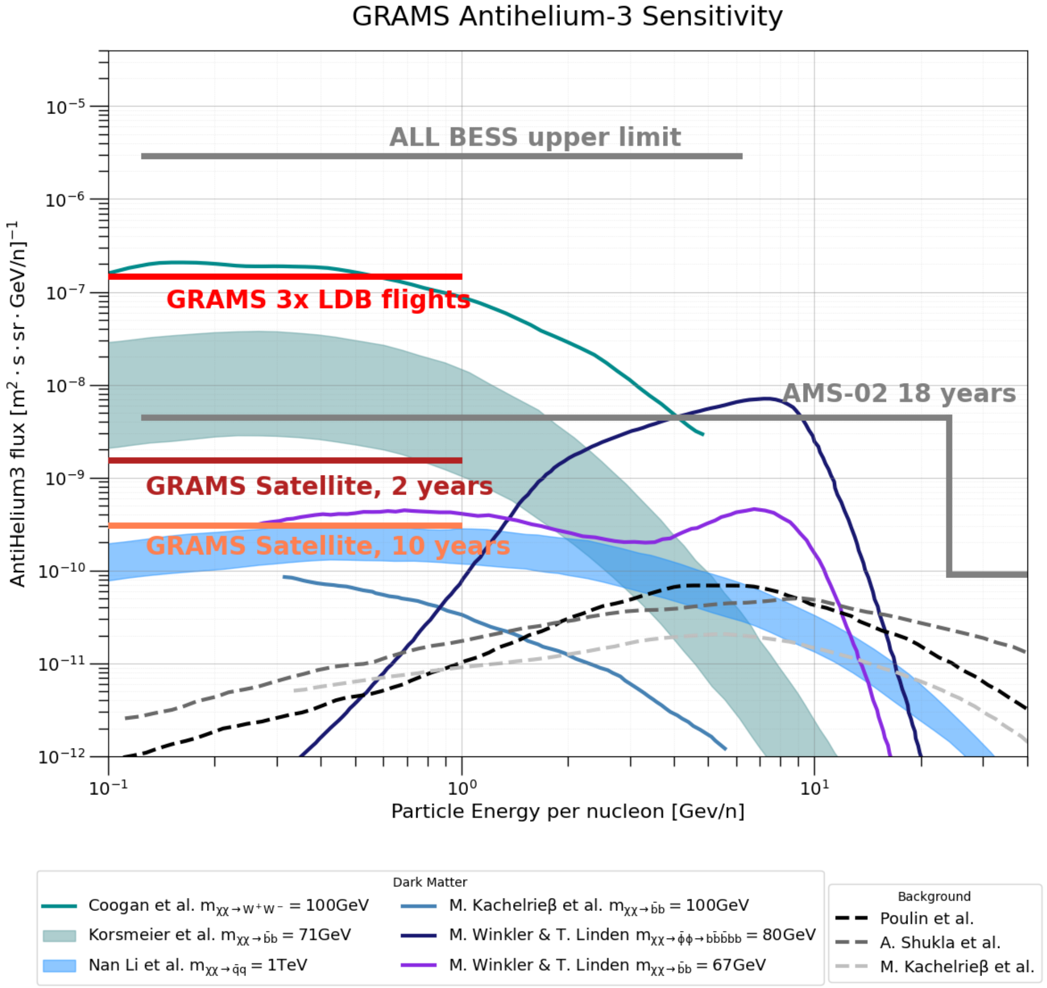
Charge-2 CRs particles tend to deposit more energy in TOF detector



J. Zeng et al, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.astropartphys.2025.103152

GRAMS antihelium-3

- GRAMS could investigate a variety of DM models, complementary to AMS-02



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Antihelium-3 sensitivity for the GRAMS experiment

J. Zeng [1,*], T. Aramaki [1], K. Aoyama [2,3], S. Arai [4], S. Arai [2], J. Asaadi [5], A. Bamba [4], N. Cannady [6], P. Coppi [7], G. De Nolfo [6], M. Errando [8], L. Fabris [9], T. Fujiwara [10], Y. Fukazawa [11], P. Ghosh [6], K. Hagino [4], T. Hakamata [10], N. Hiroshima [12], M. Ichihashi [4], Y. Ichinohe [13], Y. Inoue [10,14,15], K. Ishikawa [2], K. Ishiwata [10], T. Iwata [4], G. Karagiorgi [16], T. Kato [4], H. Kawamura [10], D. Khangulyan [17,18], J. Krizmanic [6], J. LeyVa [1], A. Malige [16], J.G. Mitchell [6], J.W. Mitchell [6], R. Mukherjee [19], R. Nakajima [2], K. Nakazawa [21], H. Odaka [10], K. Okuma [21], K. Perez [16], N. Poudyal [1], I. Safa [16], K. Sakai [20], M. Sasaki [6], W. Seligman [16], J. Sensenig [16], K. Shirahama [10], T. Shiraishi [22], S. Smith [23], Y. Suda [11], A. Suraj [1], H. Takahashi [11], S. Takashima [4], T. Tamba [4,3], M. Tanaka [2], S. Tandon [16], R. Tatsumi [10], J. Tomsick [24], N. Tsuji [22], Y. Uchida [25], Y. Utsumi [2], S. Watanabe [23], Y. Yano [2], K. Yawata [26], H. Yoneda [27], K. Yorita [2], M. Yoshimoto [10]

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ABSTRACT

The Gamma-Ray and AntiMatter Survey (GRAMS) is a next-generation balloon/satellite mission utilizing a Liquid Argon Time Projection Chamber (LArTPC) detector to measure both MeV gamma rays and antinuclei produced by dark matter annihilation or decay. The GRAMS can identify antihelium-3 events based on the measurements of X-rays and charged pions from the decay of the exotic atoms, Time of Flight (TOF), energy

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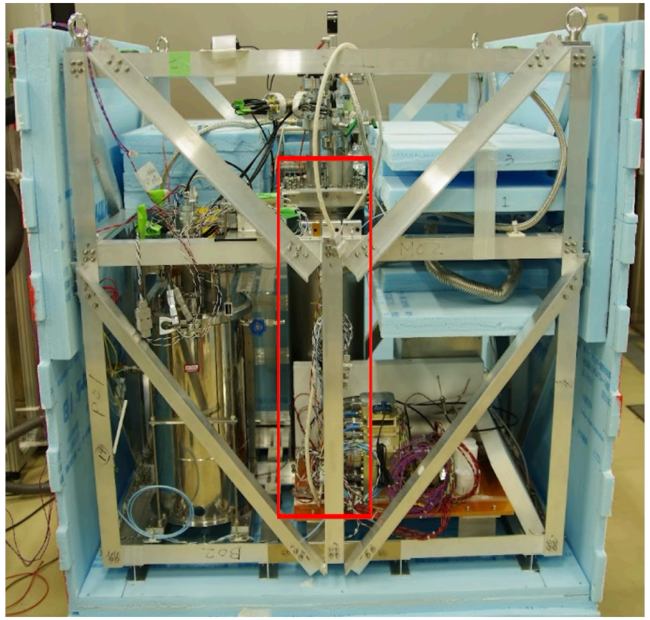
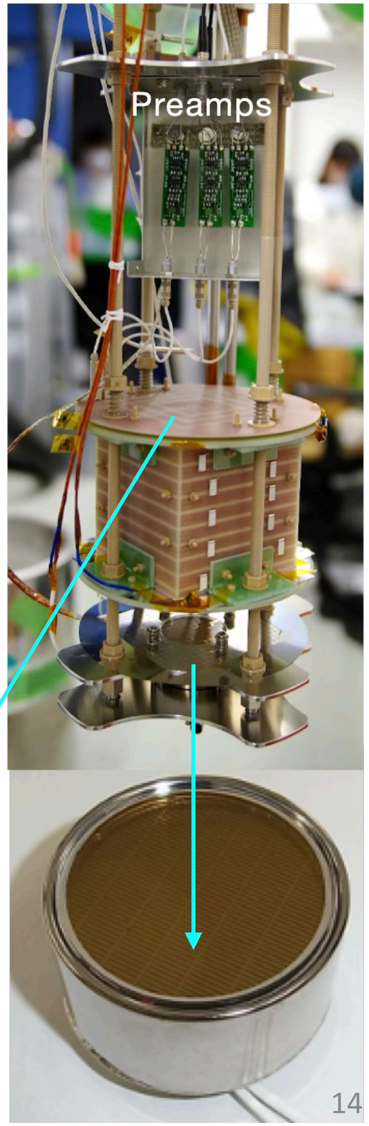
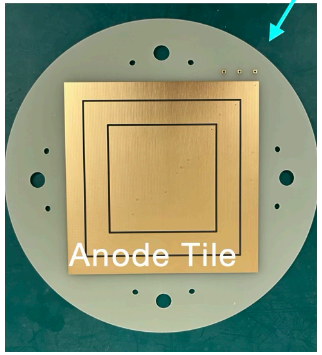
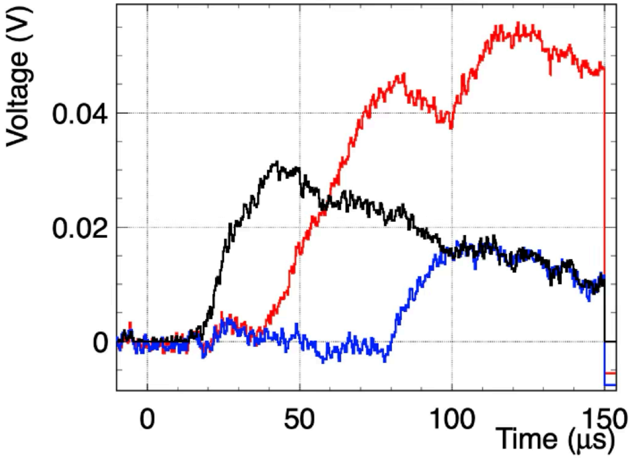
Engineer flight eGRAMS

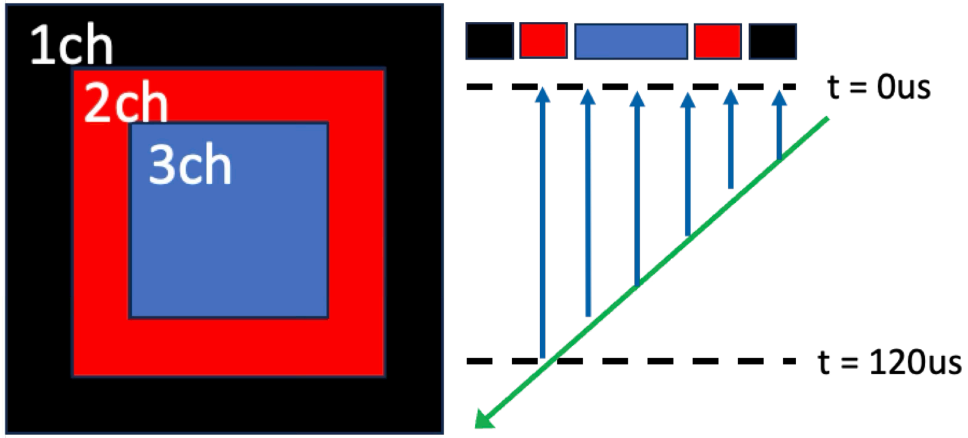
- **Successful engineering flight @JAXA TARF**
  - **First** LArTPC operation at stratosphere
  - TPC: 10 x 10 x 10 cm^3
    - 1 PMT (Hamamatsu R6041-06) at the bottom
    - 3 charge channels (pGRAMS preamps)
    - No cooling/circulation system
  - Pressure vessel for RPi/DAQ
  - Obtained ~400k stable events with light + charge







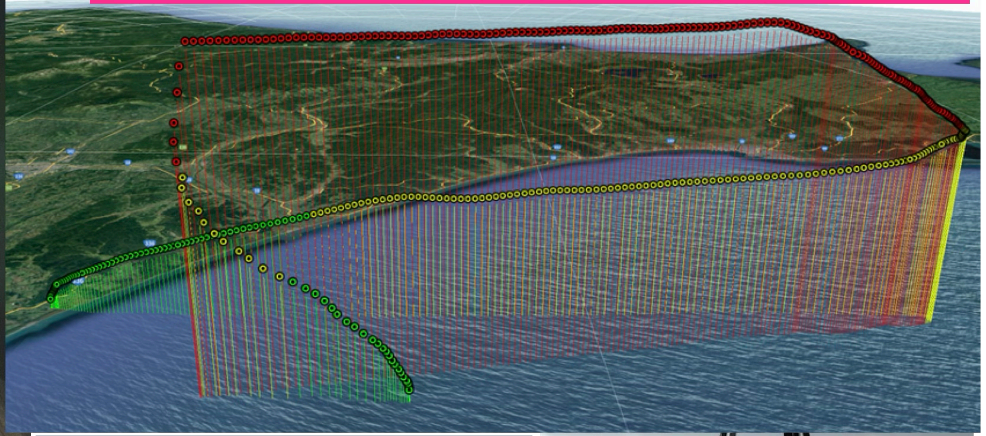


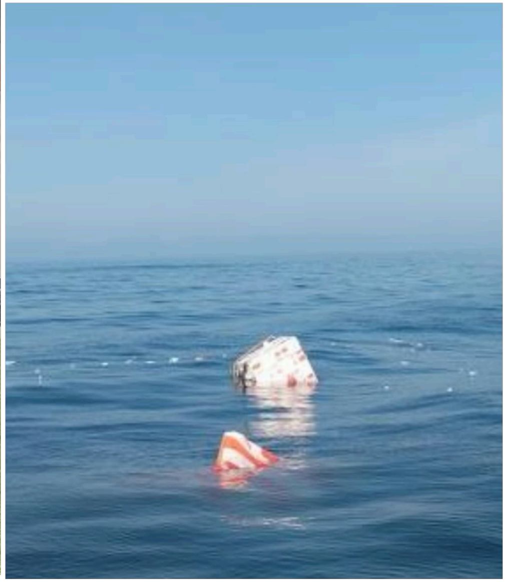


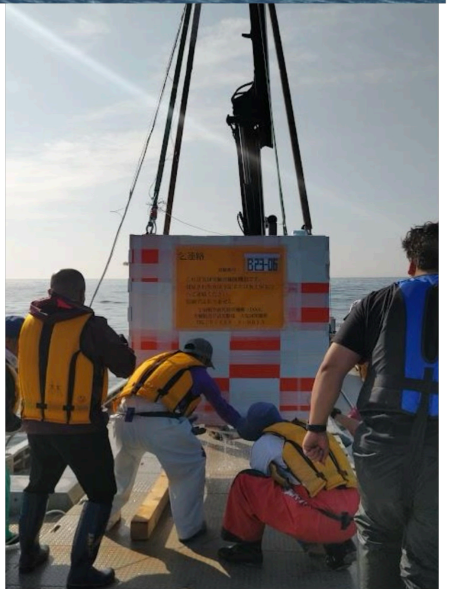
R. Nakajima, *et al.* 10.1093/ptep/ptae179

eGRAMS in July 2023

Led by the GRAMS Japanese team



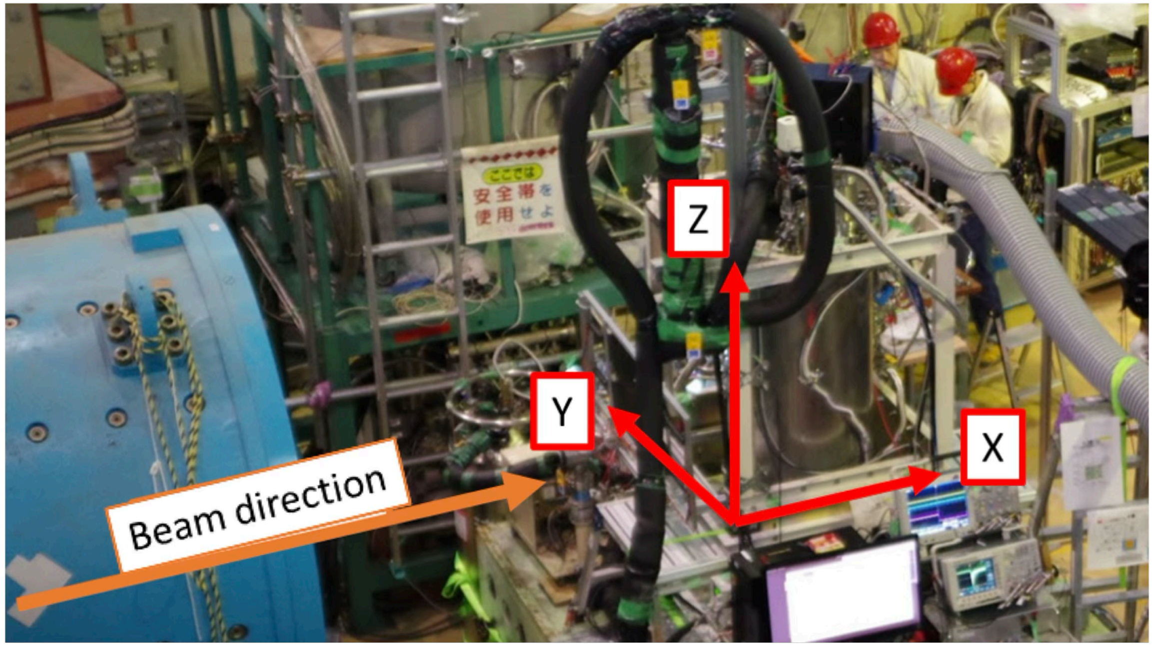


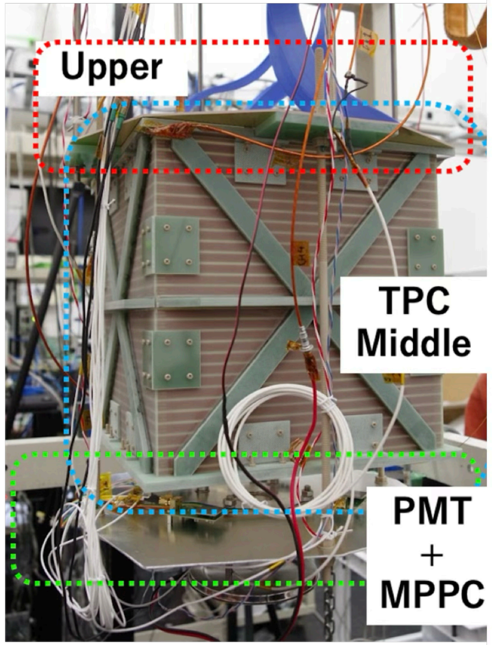


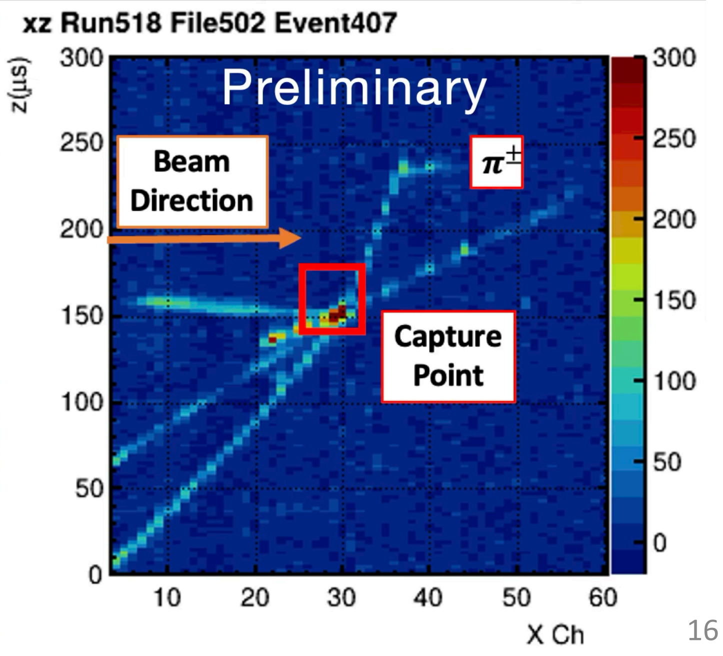
Antiproton Beam Test at J-PARC, February 2025

- **@J-PARC in Feb 2025**
  - **Antiprotons** with 0.7 GeV/c
  - **Validated** LArTPC performance as an antimatter detector
    - TOF + Aerogel Chrenkov detector to reject pion events
    - Waseda TPC: 30 cm x 30 cm x 30 cm
    - Measure annihilation products: pions (and protons)

Led by the **GRAMS Japanese team**



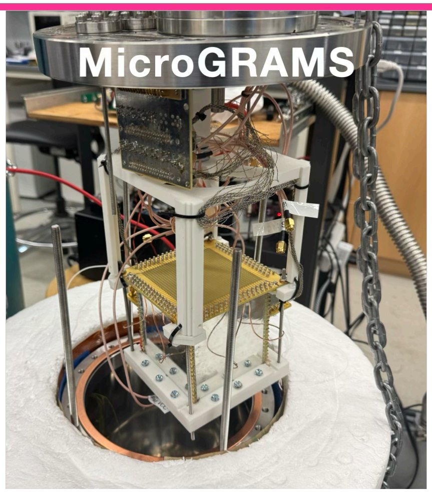


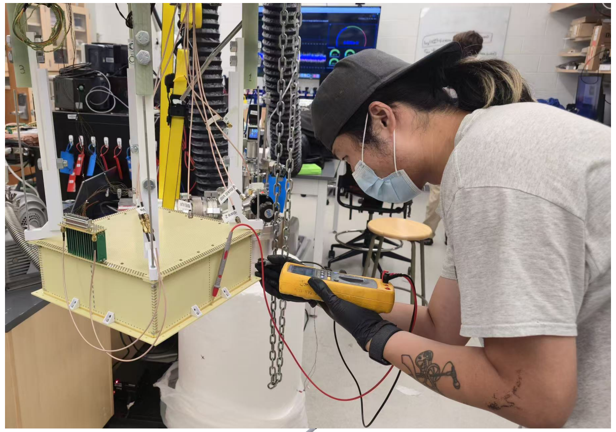


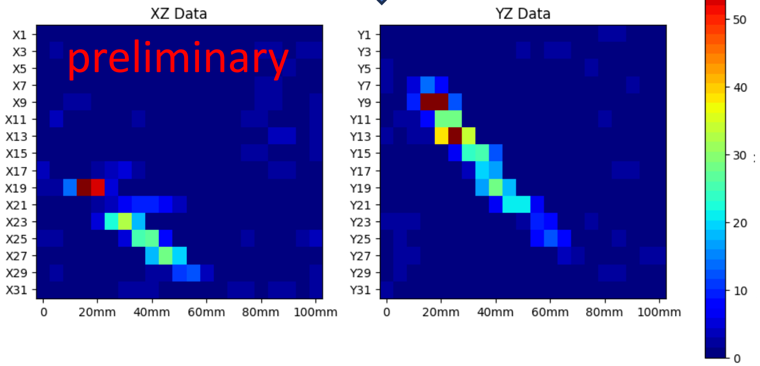
Prototype Flight (pGRAMS), Spring 2026

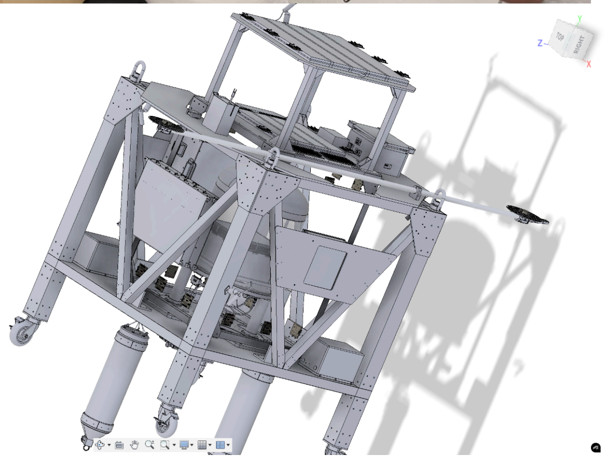
- ❑ Scheduled @Arizona in **Spring 2026**
  - ❑ Demonstrate LArTPC performance in flight
    - ❑ **Particle tracking** for charged particles
    - ❑ **Gamma-ray detection**
  - ❑ **MiniGRAMS**: 30 x 30 x 20 cm^3 segmented into **9 cells**
    - ❑ Tile/pads (~3mm pitch) for x/y directions
    - ❑ 180 charge channels, 36 light channels
  - ❑ Currently testing **MicroGRAMS** @Northeastern
    - ❑ TPC size: 10 x 10 x 10 cm^3
    - ❑ Demonstrate the particle tracking and event reconstruction
- ❑ Science flights with **MiniGRAMS**
  - ❑ One of the **largest** Compton cameras
  - ❑ Cooling/circulation system onboard

Funded by **NASA APRA2022**







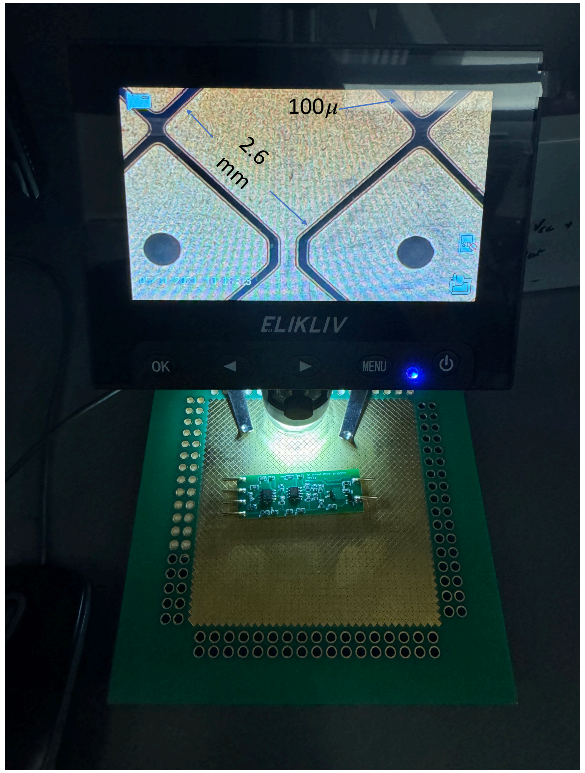


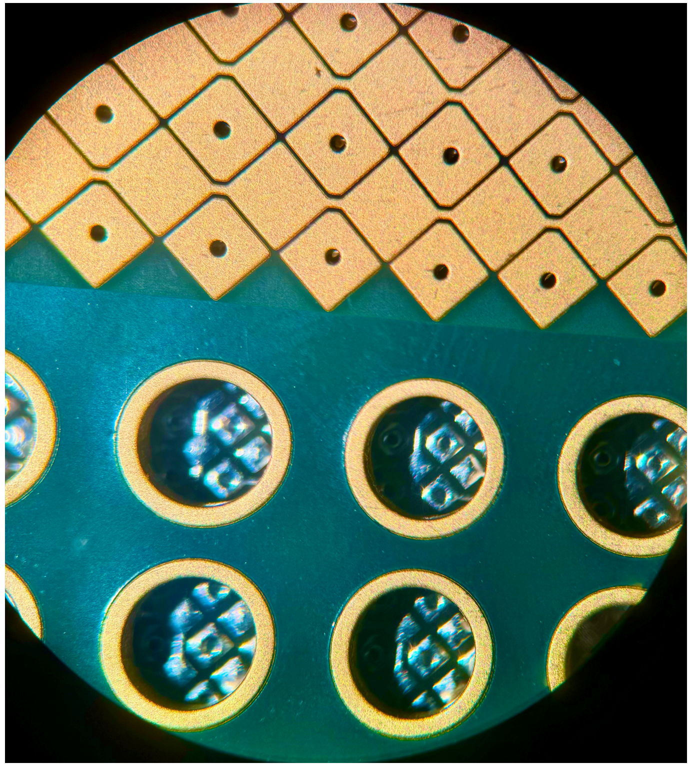
Gondola and cryostat designed by NASA GSFC group

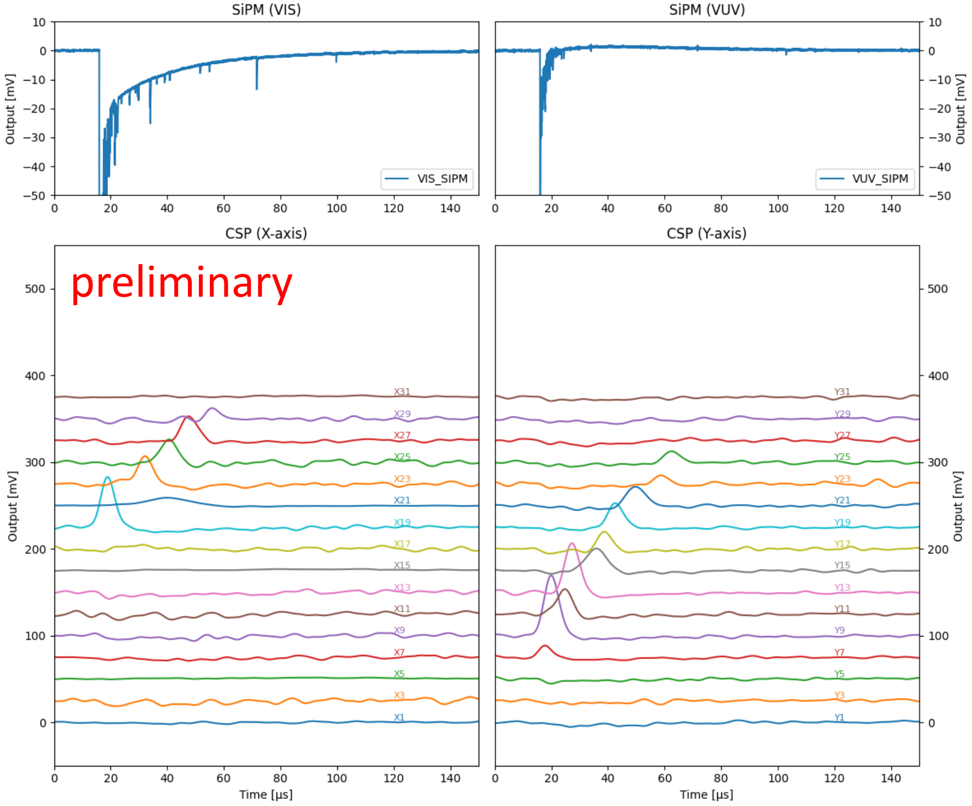
First science flight focus on MeV gamma-ray and particle tracking

Charge readout tile

- 2D readout tile
  - More stable than wire-mesh readout for balloon payload
  - Power saving comparing to pixel readout







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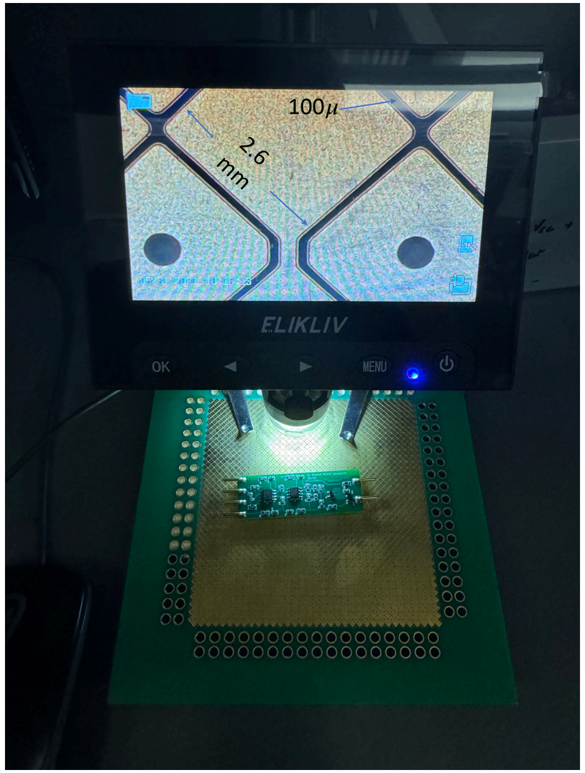
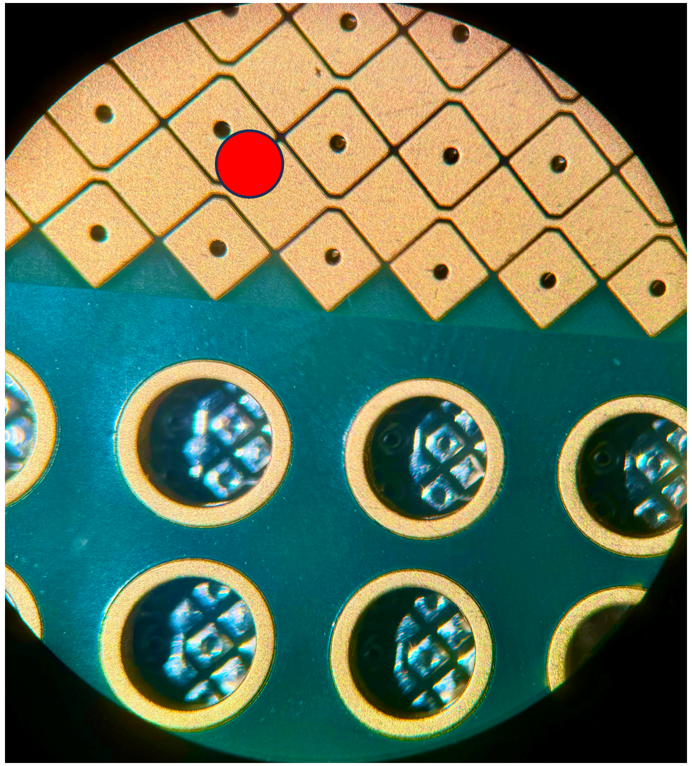
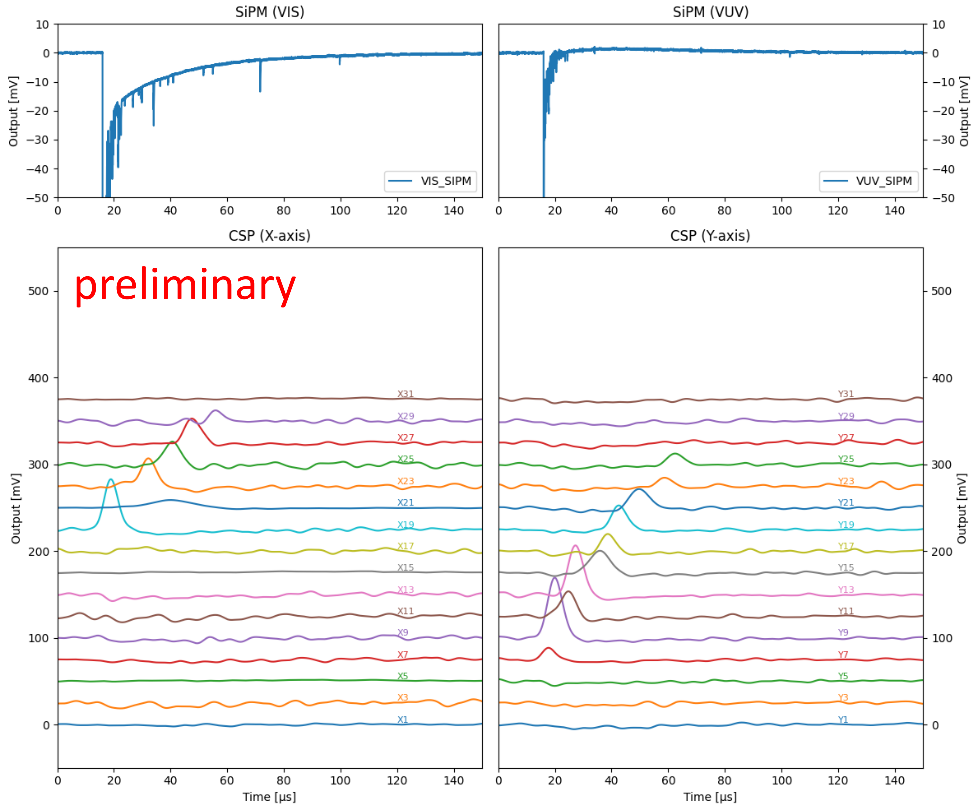
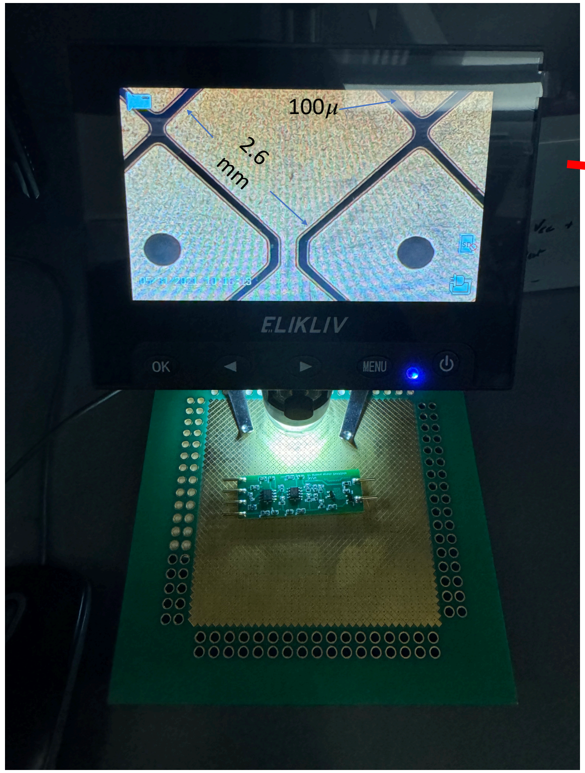


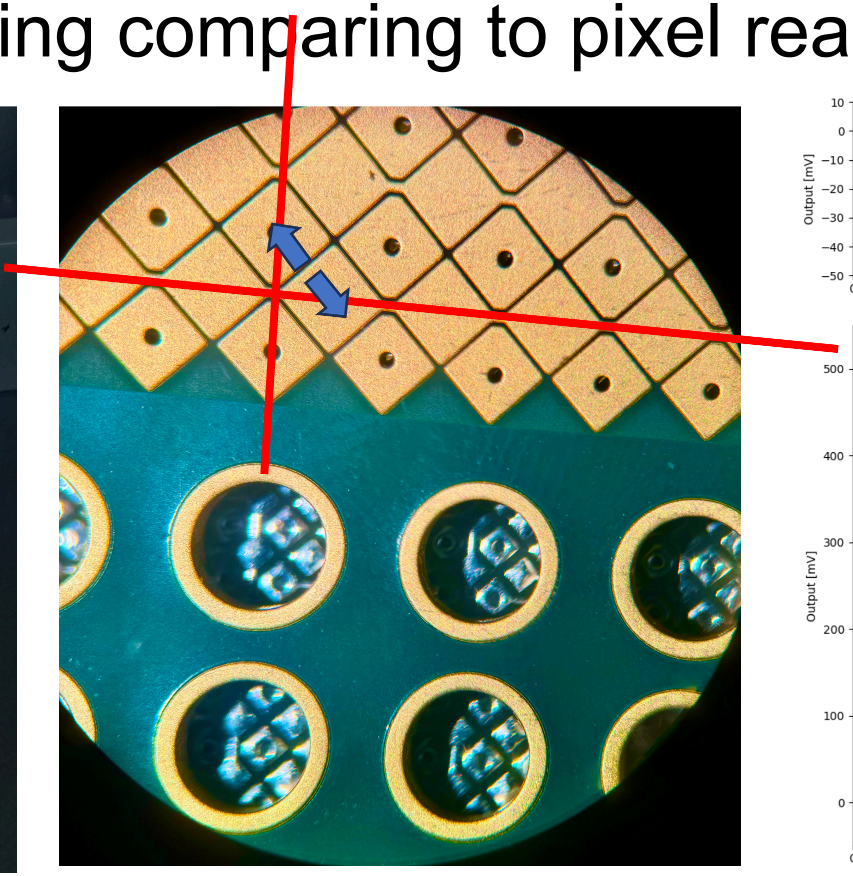


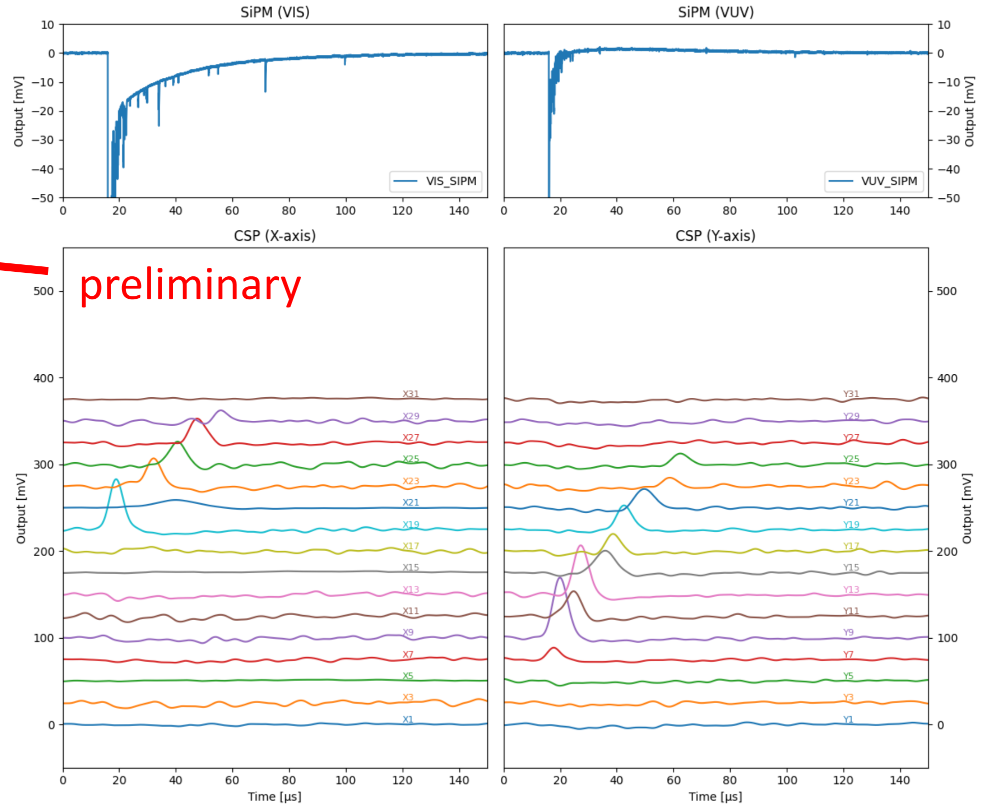


Charge readout tile

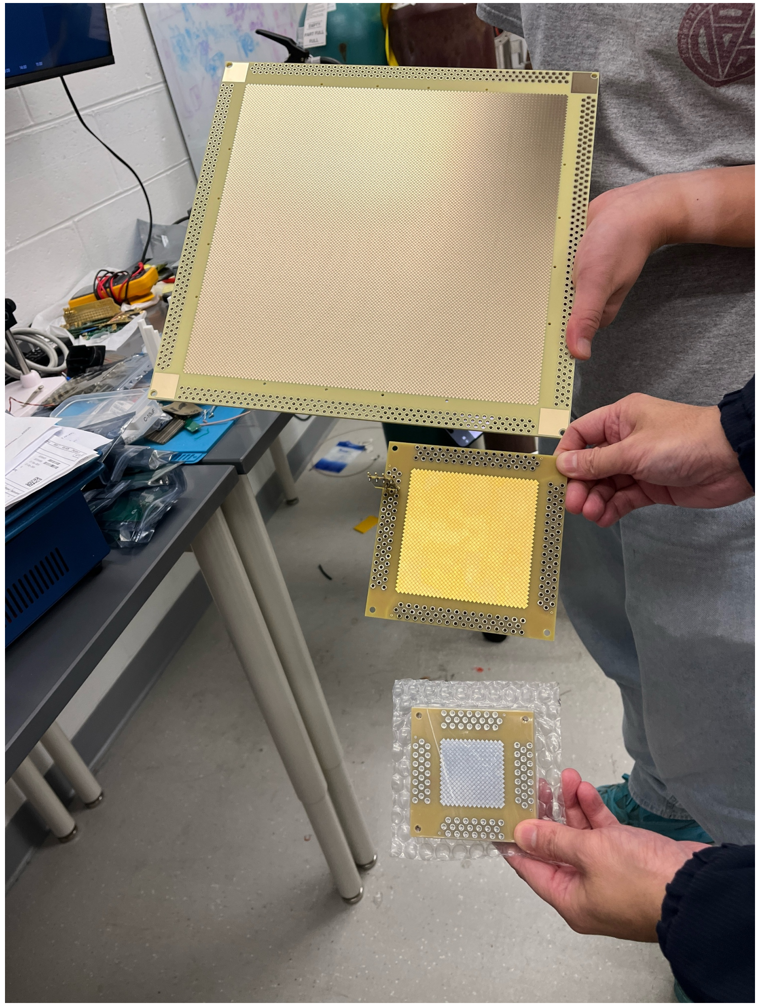
- ❑2D readout tile
  - ❑More stable than wire-mesh readout for balloon payload
  - ❑Power saving comparing to pixel readout

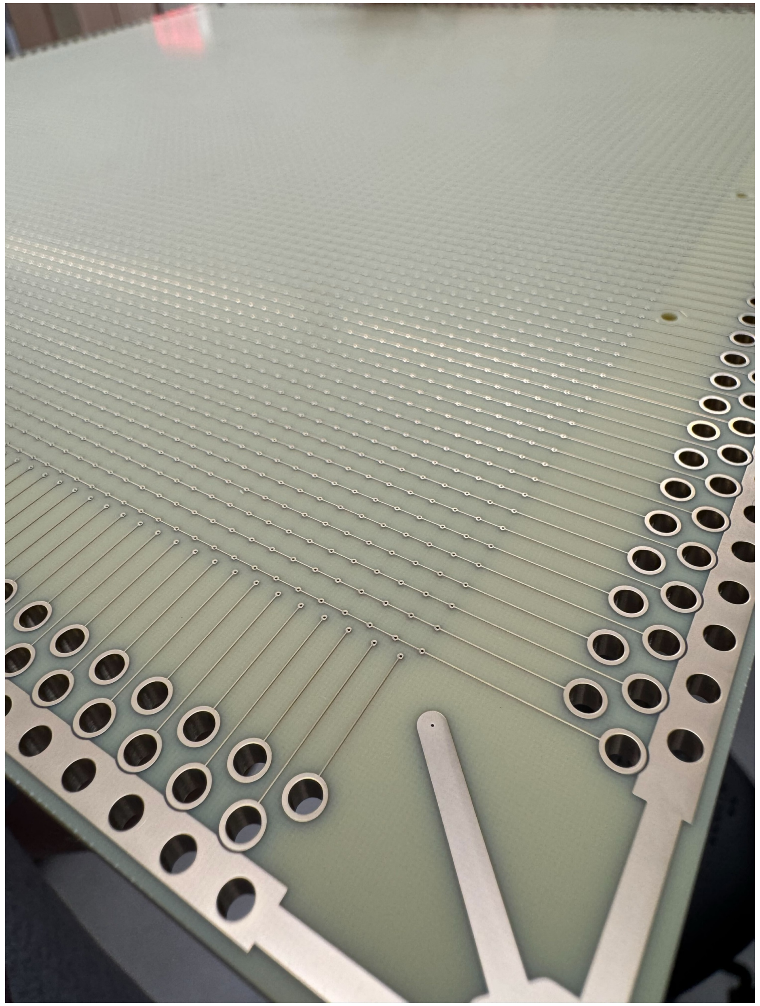


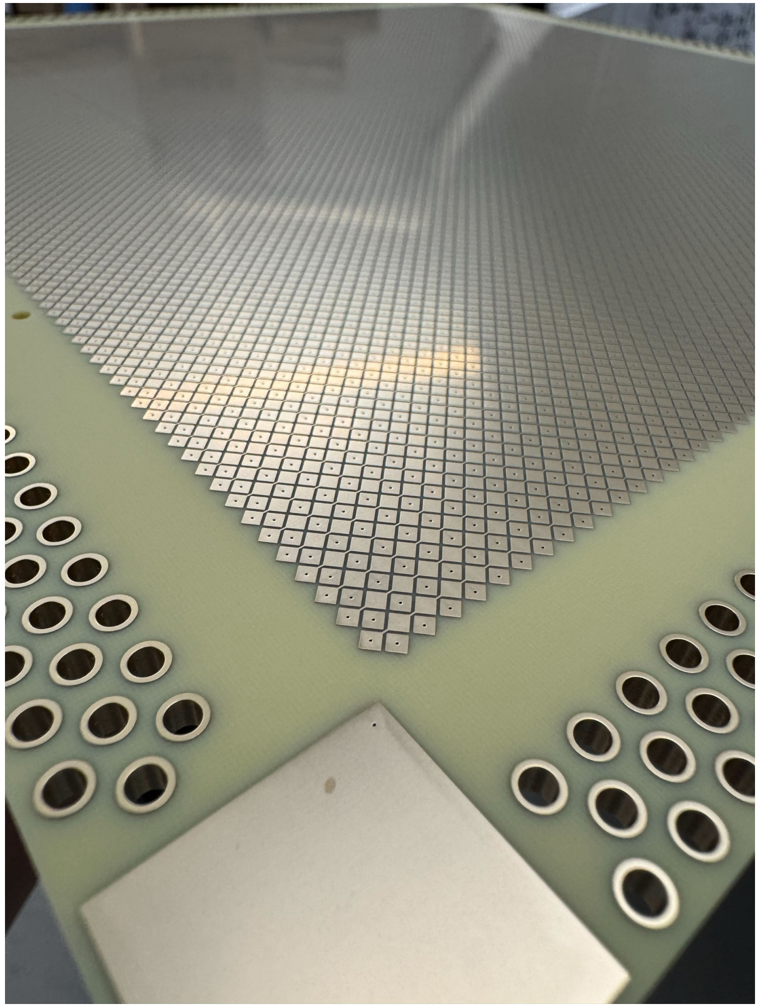




MiniGRAMS tile

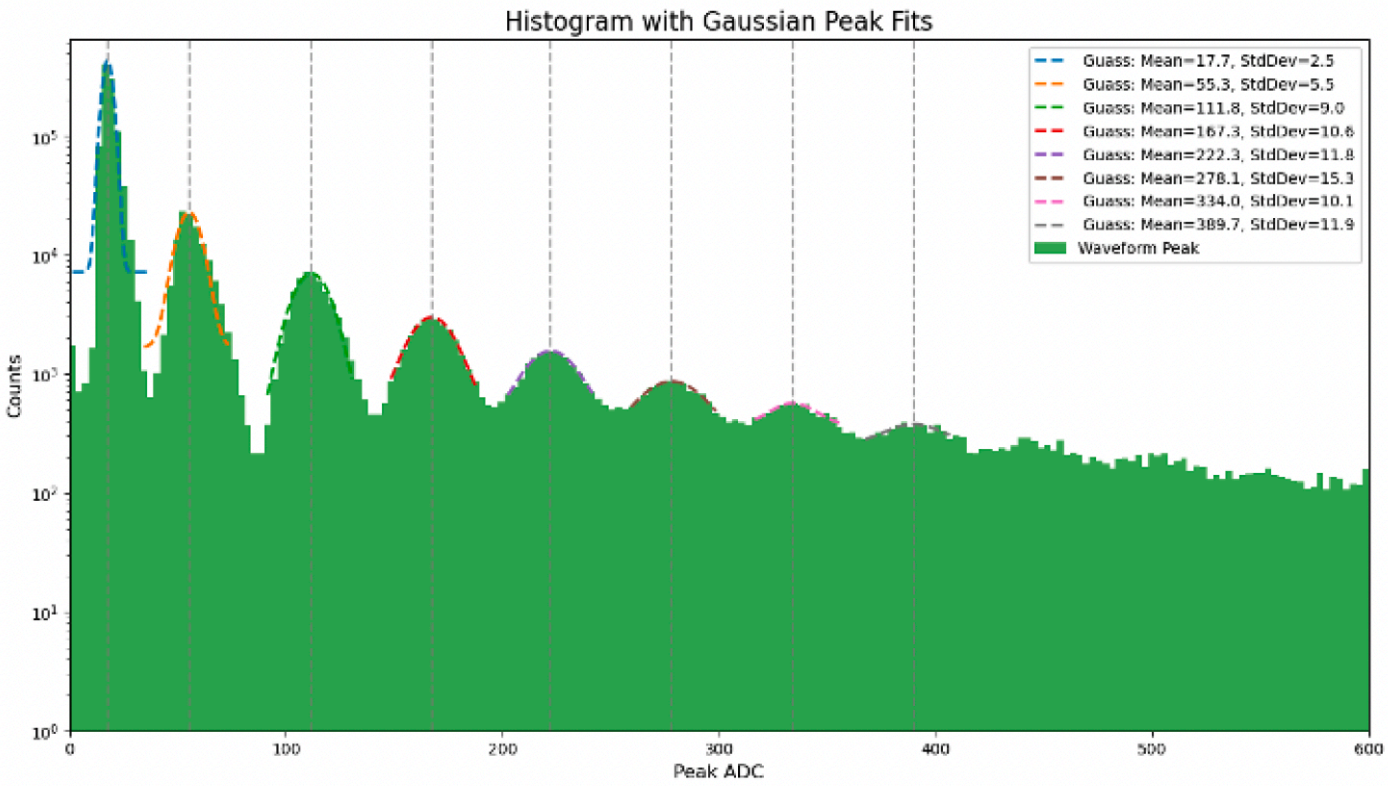




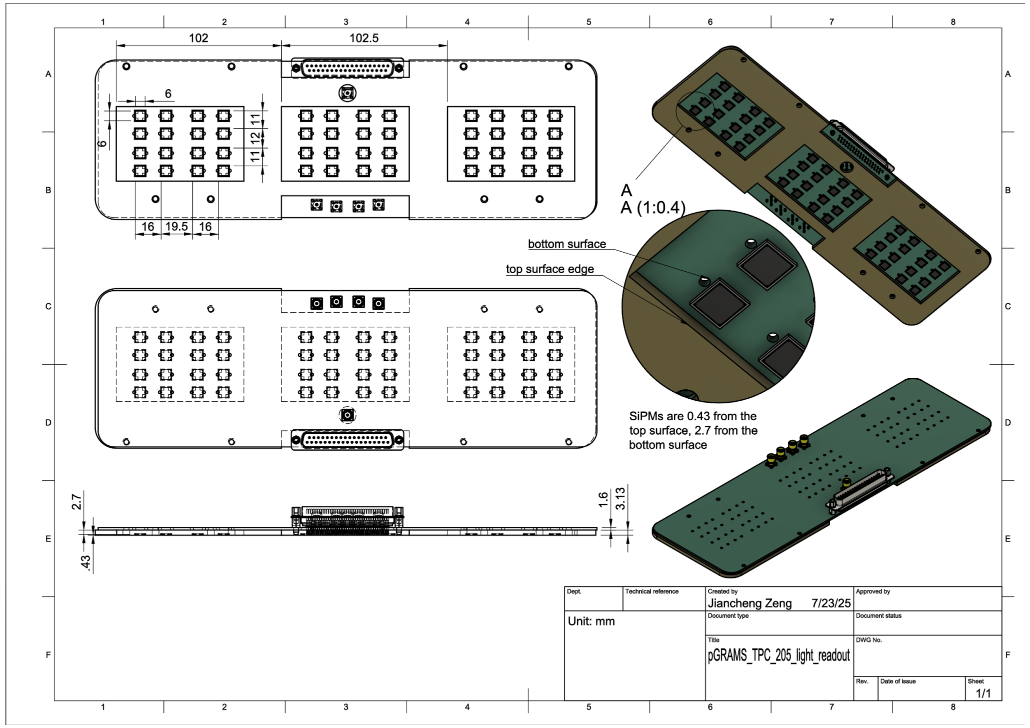


MiniGRAMS light readout

- 9x SiPM cell array
  - more compact than PMT



One VIS SiPM channel P.E spectrum, cr: Jon Sensenig



SiPM board designed by Jonathan LeyVa

GRAMS collaboration and timeline

International collaboration with different backgrounds/expertise

Gamma-rays, X-rays, Cosmic-rays, Neutrinos, Direct/Indirect DM searches

- **International**
  - Hiroshima University
  - IPMU
  - JAXA
  - Kanagawa University
  - Kyoto University
  - Nagoya University
  - National Defense Medical College
  - Osaka University
  - RIKEN
  - Rikkyo University
  - Tokyo University of Science
  - Universität Würzburg
  - University of Tokyo
  - Waseda University
  - Yokohama National University
- **USA**
  - Barnard College
  - Columbia University
  - Howard University
  - NASA GSFC
  - Northeastern University
  - Oak Ridge National Lab
  - University of California, Berkeley
  - University of Chicago
  - UT Arlington
  - Washington University
  - Yale University

2020 — 2025 — 2030

◆ eGRAMS flight

◆ pGRAMS flight

◆ Antiproton beam test

◇ Science flights

◇ Satellite

Summary

- ❑GRAMS aims for both **gamma-ray** observations in the **poorly explored MeV** range and **indirect dark matter searches** with **antimatter**. The project started with a **balloon** experiment and will be expanded to a **satellite** mission.
- ❑With a cost-effective, large-scale LArTPC detector, the sensitivity to MeV gamma rays can be **an order** (**two orders**) of magnitude improved with a **single balloon flight** (**Satellite**) compared with the previous missions.
- ❑GRAMS low-energy **antinuclei** measurements can be essentially **background-free** dark matter searches while investigating and validating the possible dark matter signatures indicated in **Fermi GCE** (Galactic Center Excess) and **AMS-02 antiproton excess**.
- ❑We successfully demonstrated the LArTPC detector performance during the **engineering flight** from the JAXA balloon facility and the **antiproton beam test** at J-PARC.
- ❑As a step forward for future science flights, we will have a **prototype flight** scheduled for Spring 2026, supported by the NASA APRA program.

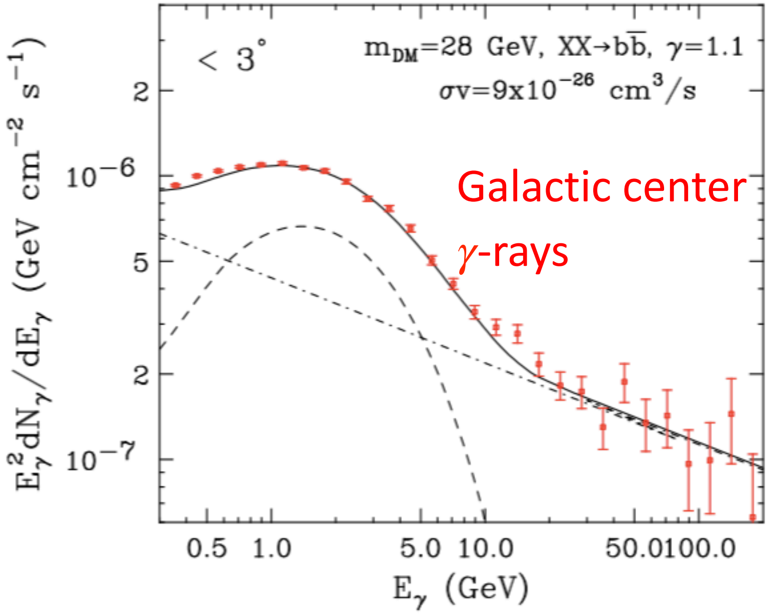
Thanks!

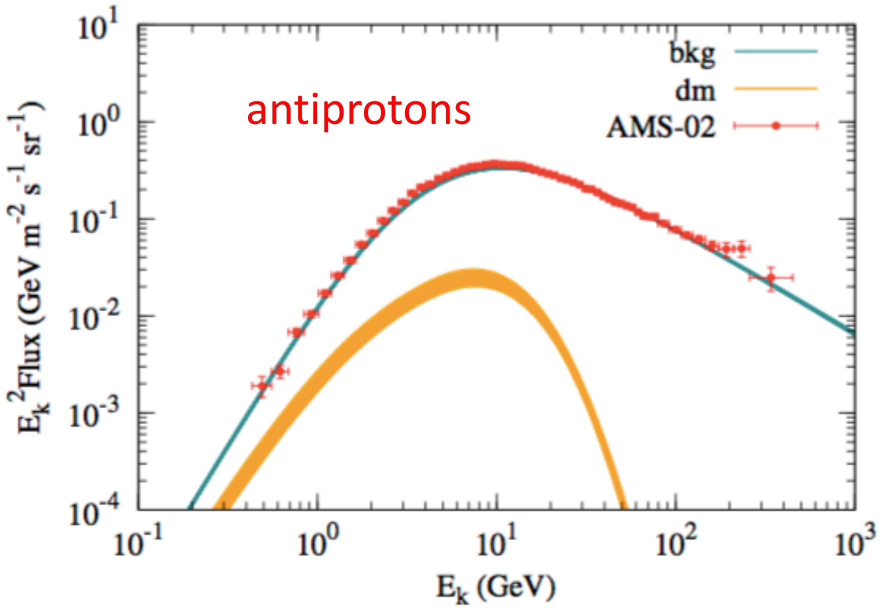
zeng.jia@northeastern.edu
JCZeng1412@gmail.com

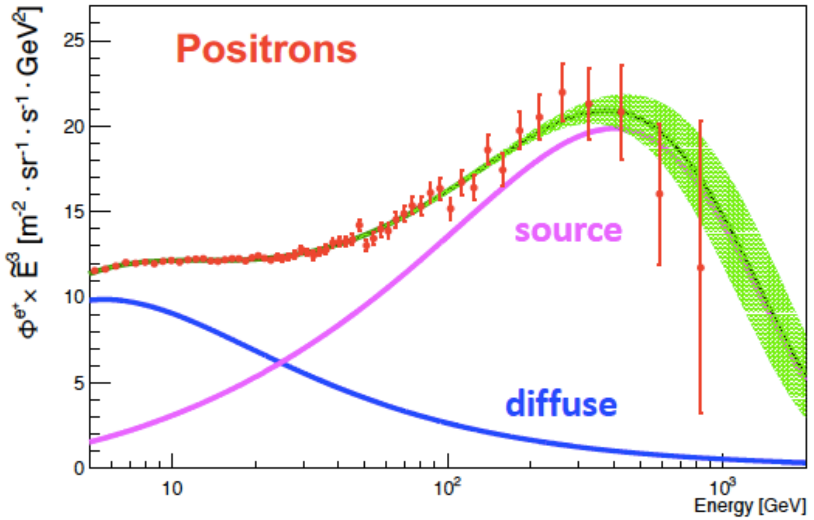
Backup slides

Indirect DM Searches

- Uncertain astrophysical backgrounds make indirect searches harder

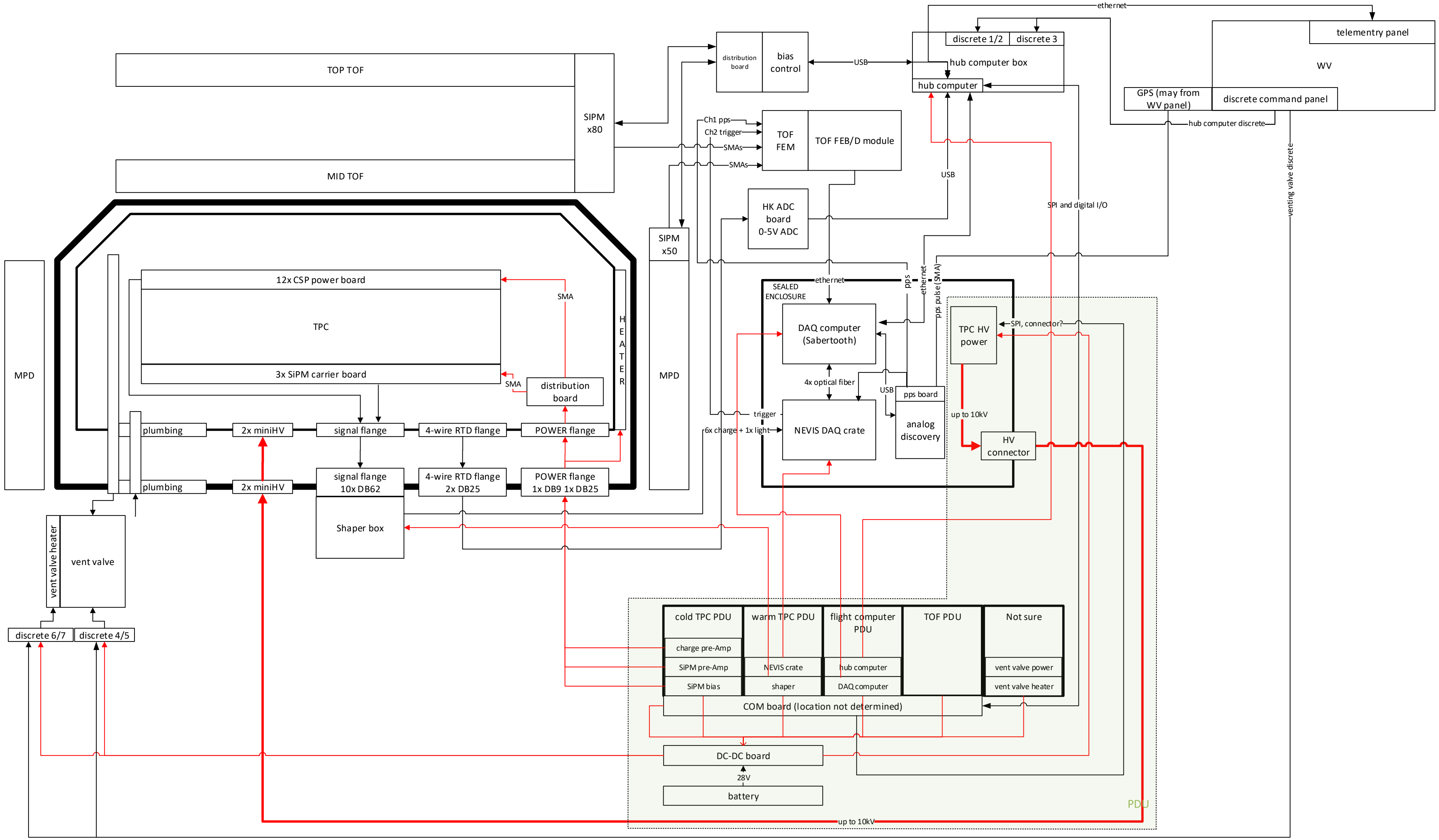




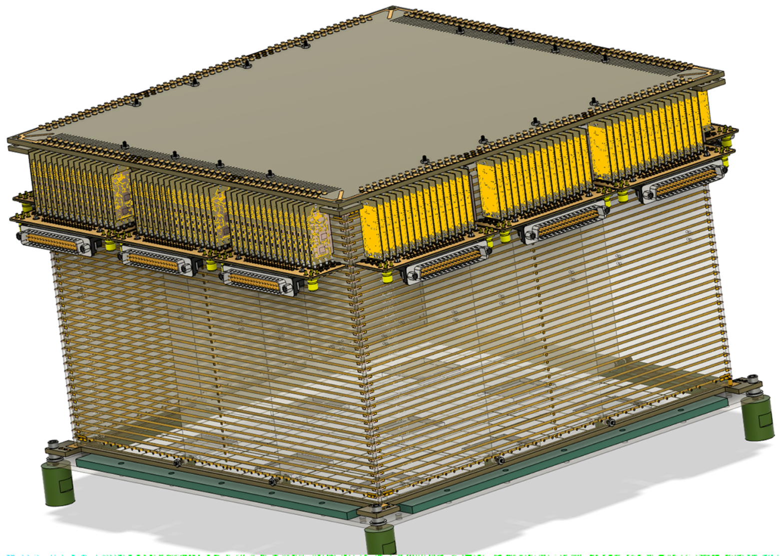


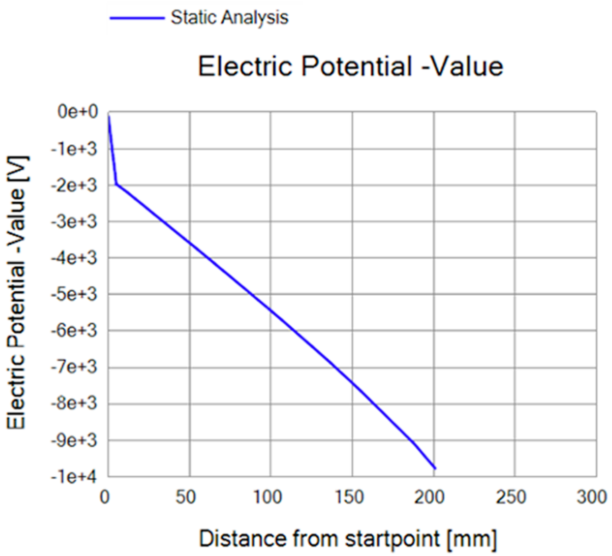
We need background-free searches!

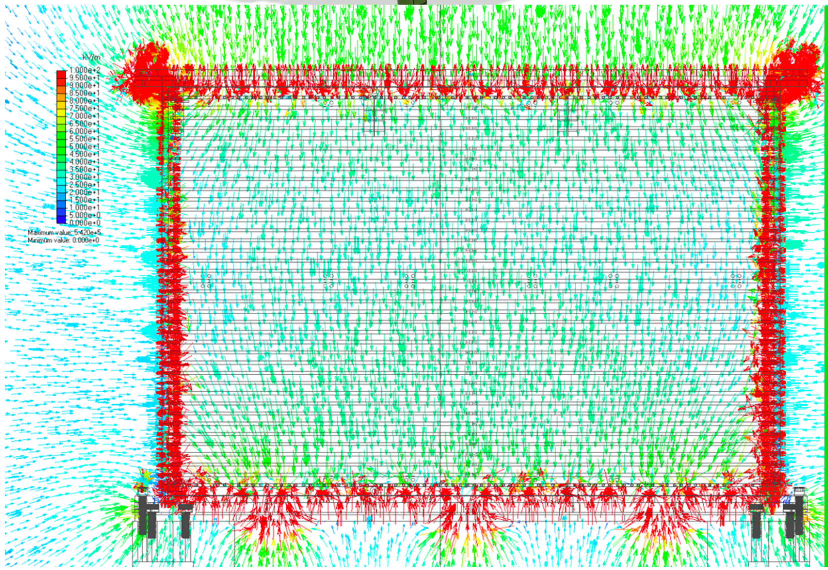
pGRAMS system diagram

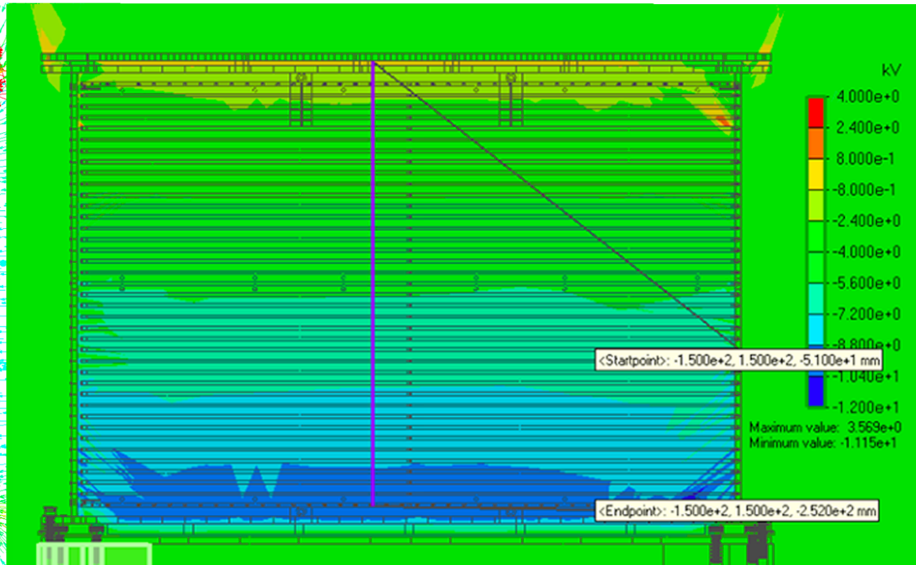


pGRAMS E-field



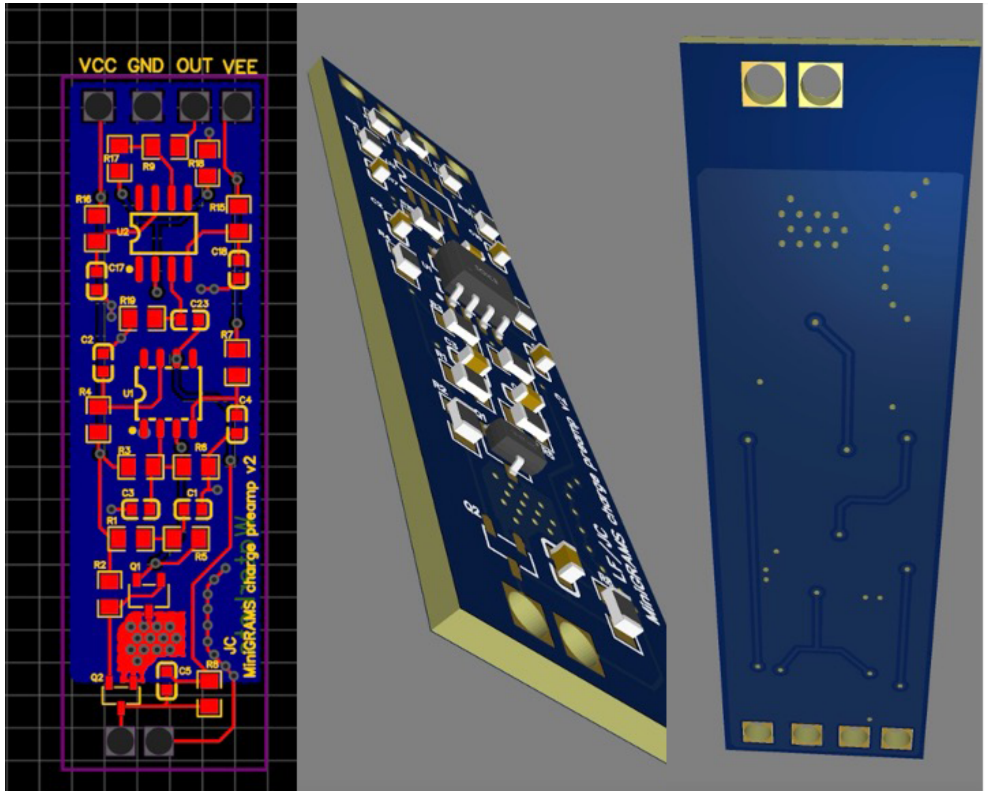


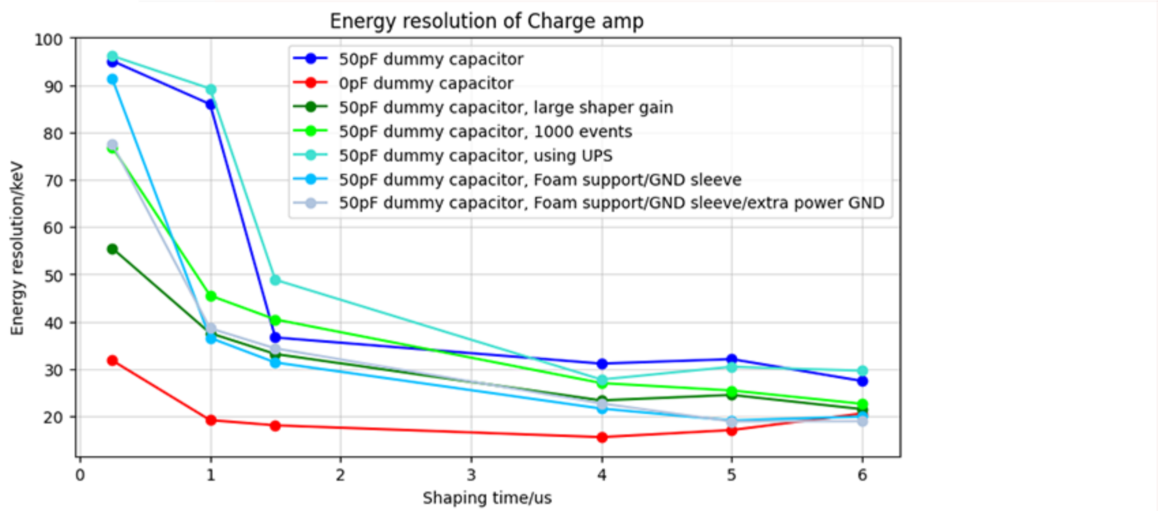




pGRAMS electronics

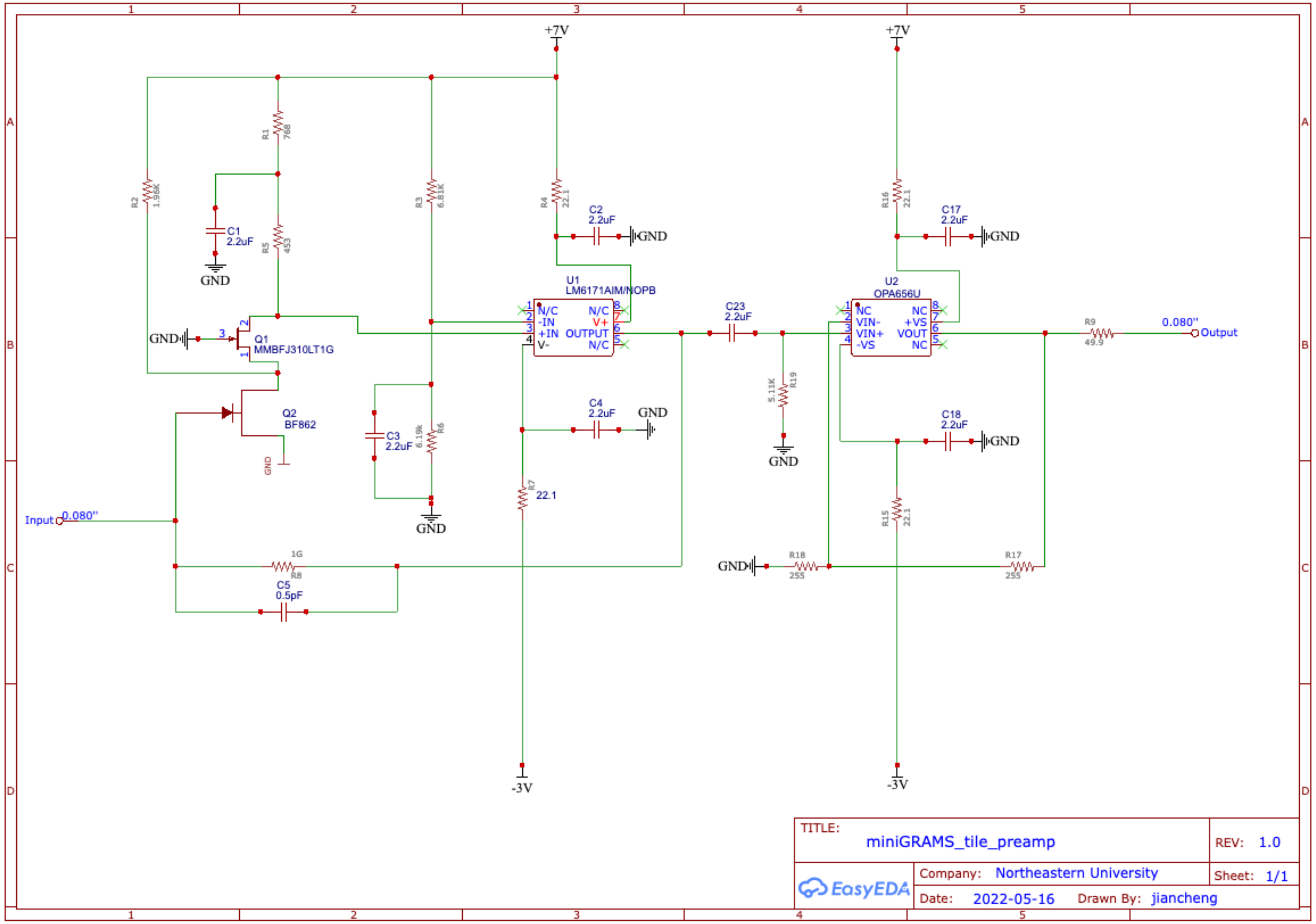
- Charge Sensitive Pre-amp(CSP) that works in cryo front end, minimize the pickup noise after readout tile





	0.25us/keV	1us/keV	1.5us/keV	4us/keV	5us/keV	6us/keV
0pF dummy	31.8	19.2	18.1	15.6	17.1	20.6
50pF dummy	55.517	37.58	33.165	23.363	24.528	21.523
50pF 1000 events	76.872	45.527	40.48	27.033	25.46	22.642
50pF no pump	185.83	43.64	47.49	25.89	21.3	21.35
50pF UPS	96.17	89.26	48.86	27.78	30.48	29.64
50pF celling GND	66.66	37.06	NaN	22.53	24.7	22.71
50pF foam/sleeve/celling GND	91.32	36.58	31.38	21.64	19.13	19.95
50pF extra power GND	77.54	38.6	34.35	22.72	18.92	18.98

S. Arathi preparing performance analysis paper


+7V
+7V
R1 768
R2 1.96K
R3 6.81K
R4 22.1
C1 2.2uF
R5 453
GND
C2 2.2uF
GND
U1 LM6171AIM/NOPB
N/C
-IN
+IN
V-
N/C
V+
OUTPUT
N/C
C23 2.2uF
U2 OPA656U
NC
VIN-
VIN+
-VS
NC
+VS
VOUT
NC
R16 22.1
C17 2.2uF
GND
R9 49.9
0.080''
Output
GND
Q1 MMBFJ310LT1G
Q2 BF862
C3 2.2uF
6.19k R6
C4 2.2uF
GND
R7 22.1
5.11K R19
GND
C18 2.2uF
GND
R15 22.1
Input
0.080''
1G R8
C5 0.5pF
GND
R18 255
R17 255
-3V
-3V
TITLE: miniGRAMS_tile_preamp
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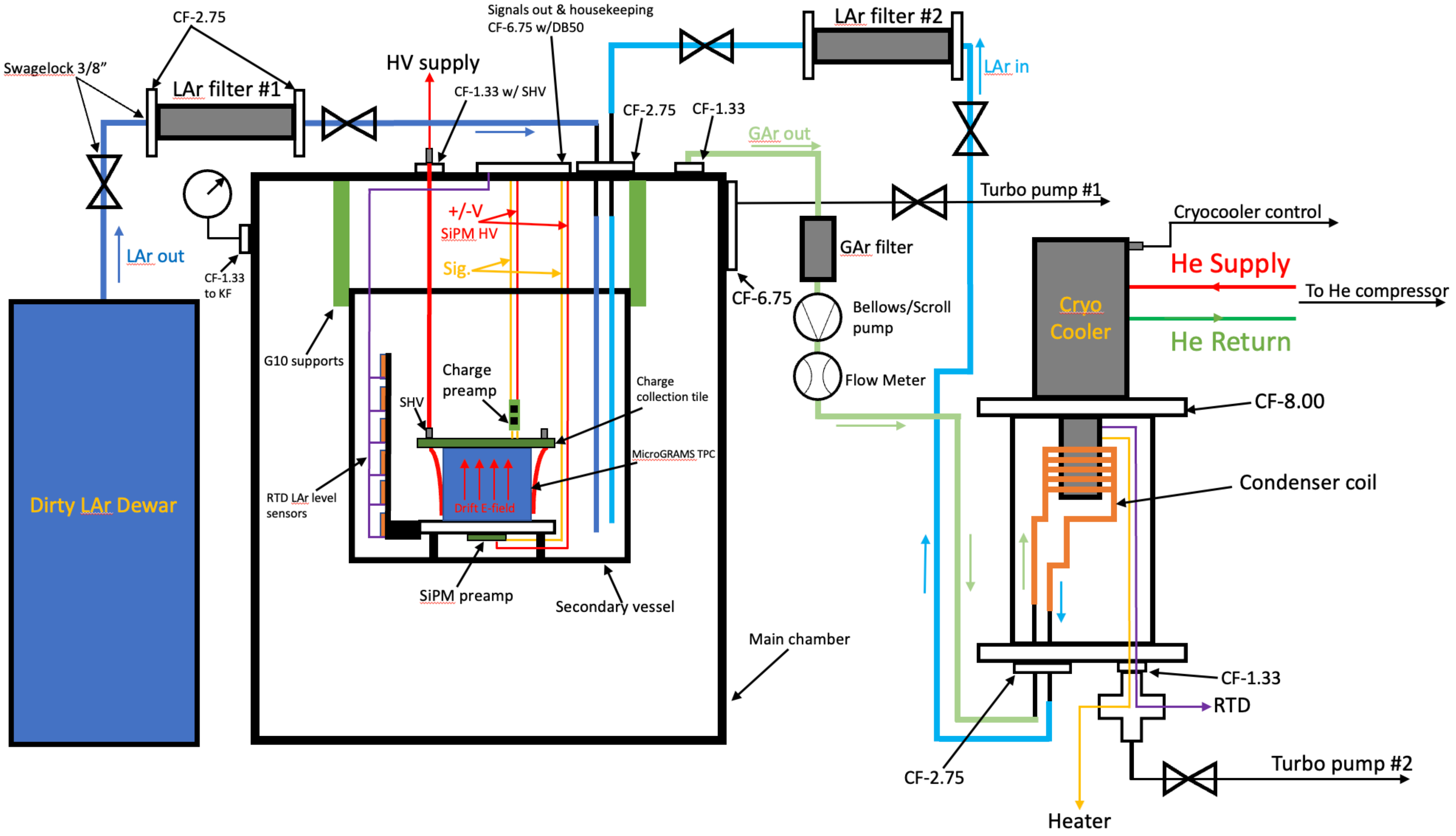
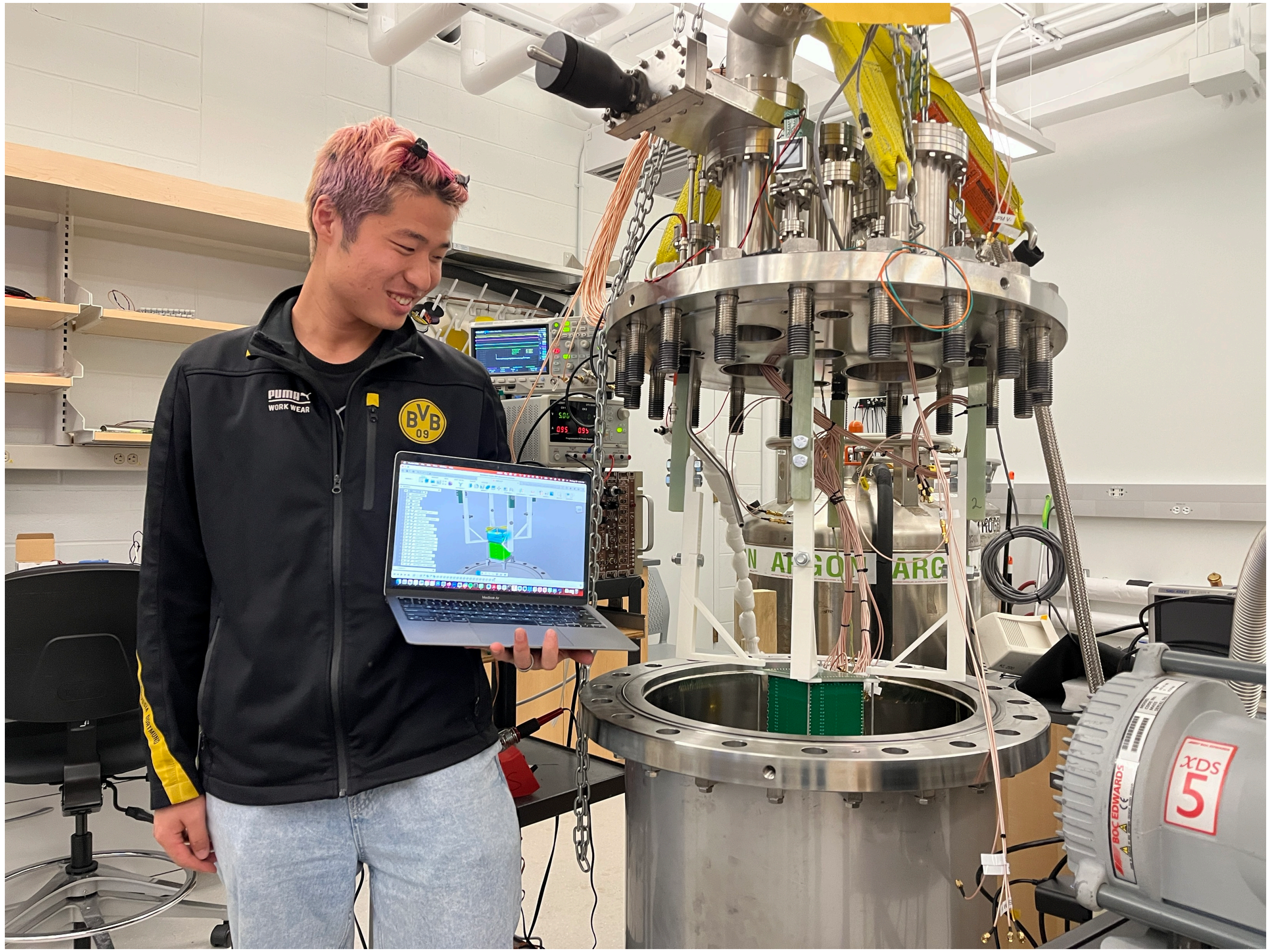
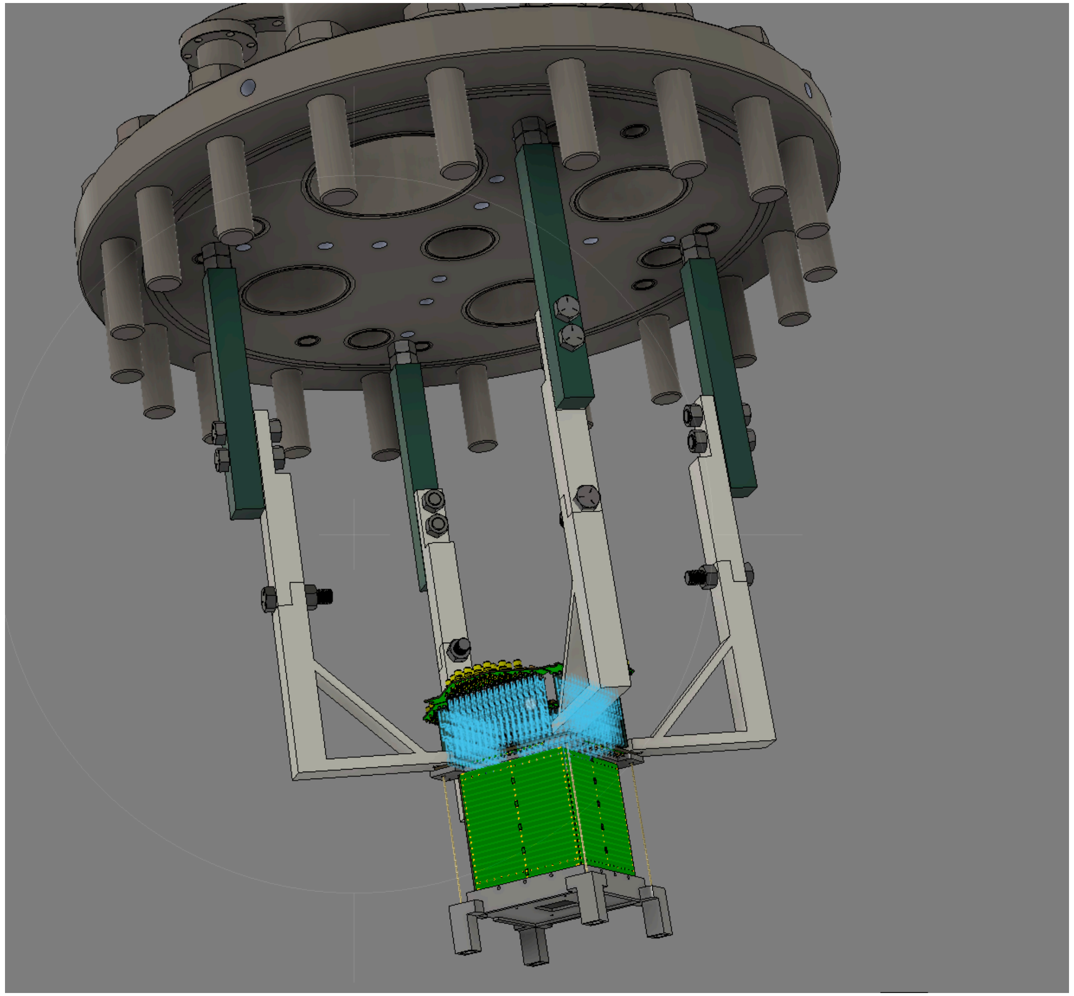
Company: Northeastern University
Sheet: 1/1
Date: 2022-05-16
Drawn By: jiancheng
EasyEDA

miniGRAMS



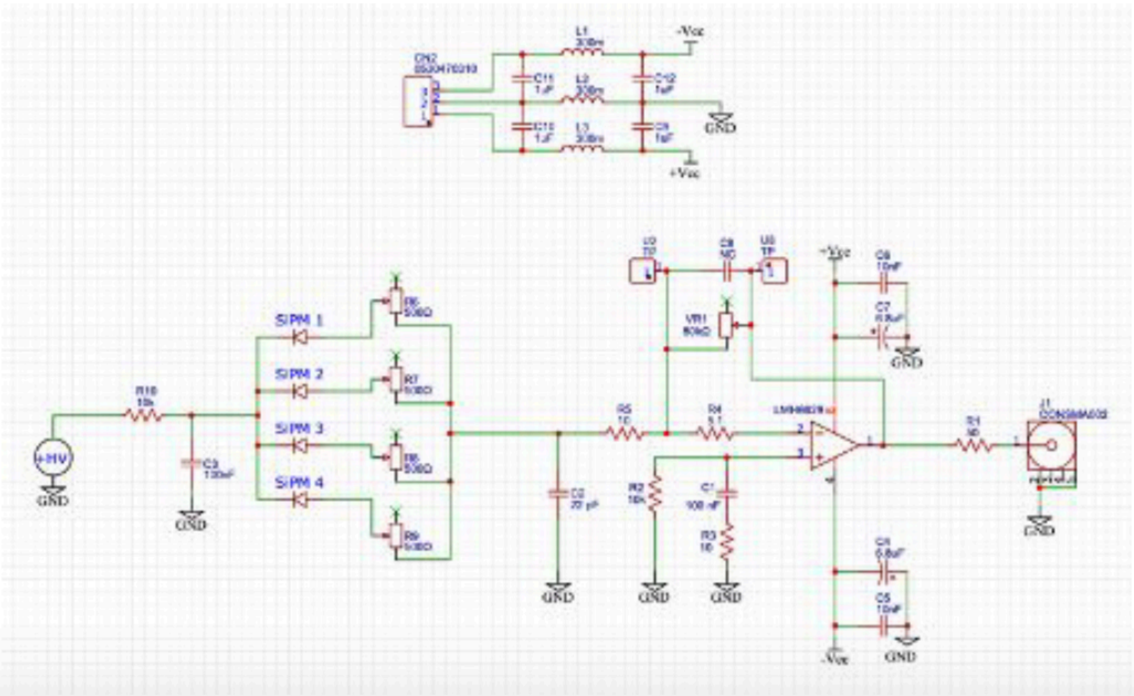
Swagelock 3/8”
CF-2.75
LAr filter #1
HV supply
CF-1.33 w/ SHV
Signals out & housekeeping
CF-6.75 w/DB50
CF-2.75
CF-1.33
LAr filter #2
LAr in
GAr out
LAr out
CF-1.33
to KF
+/-V
SiPM HV
Sig.
G10 supports
Charge
preamp
SHV
Charge
collection tile
MicroGRAMS TPC
RTD LAr level
sensors
Drift E-field
SiPM preamp
Secondary vessel
Main chamber
Dirty LAr Dewar
CF-6.75
Turbo pump #1
GAr filter
Bellows/Scroll
pump
Flow Meter
Cryocooler control
He Supply
To He compressor
Cryo
Cooler
He Return
CF-8.00
Condenser coil
CF-1.33
RTD
CF-2.75
Turbo pump #2
Heater

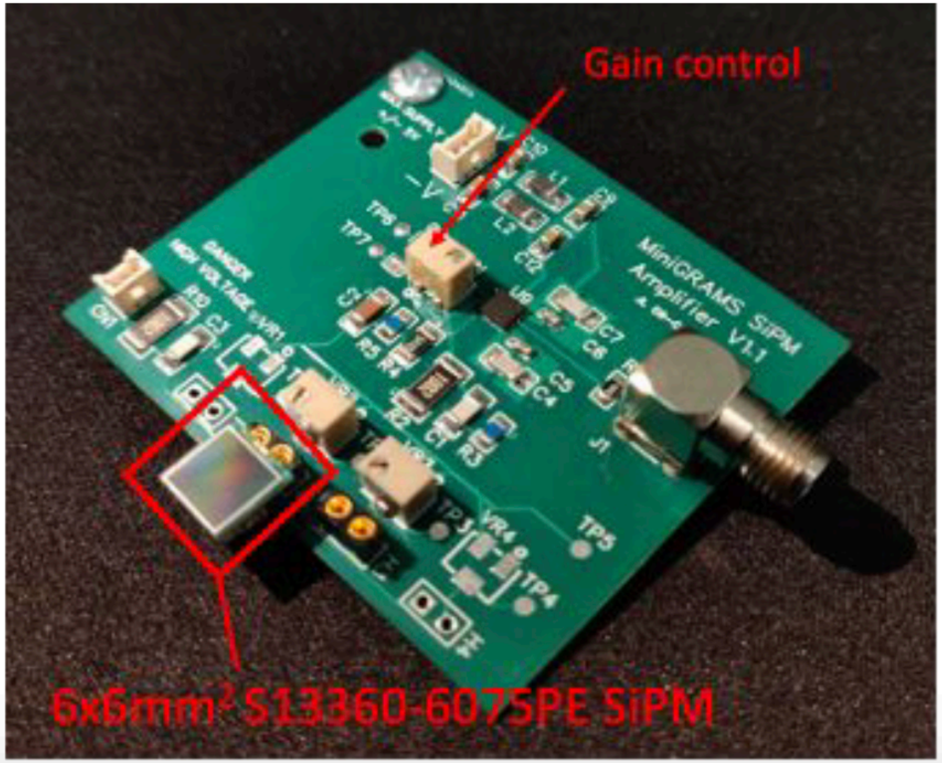

ARGON
ARG
XDS
5
BOC EDWARDS



SiPM board

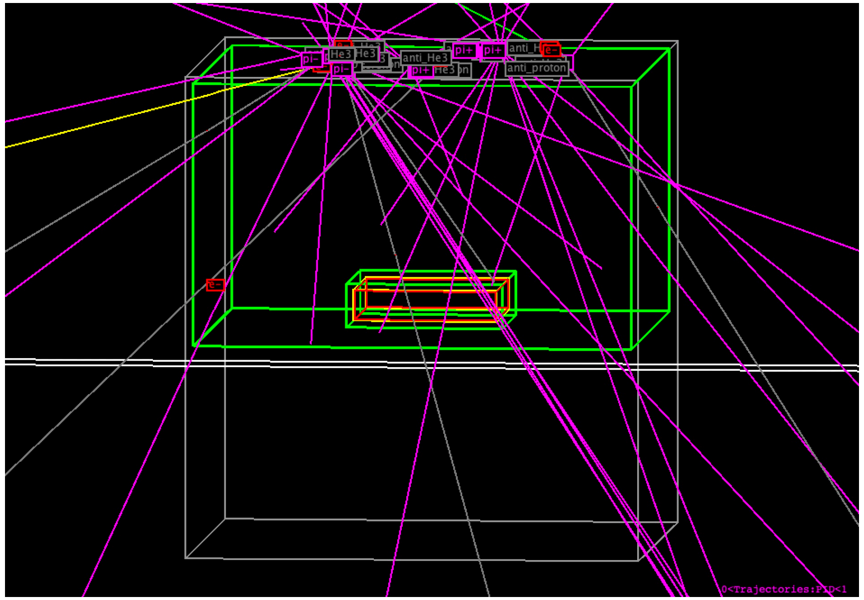
- Texas Instruments LMH6629
    - Input noise: 0.69 nV/√Hz and 2.6 pA/√Hz
    - 900 MHz bandwidth (includes controllable compensation feature that sacrifices bandwidth for improved stability at gains as low as 4V/V)
    - 1600 V/μs slew rate
    - Hetero-junction BJT, good for low temp stability
    - Typical power consumption with 3.4V (+/- 1.7V) of dynamic range → ~30 mW @ T=87K

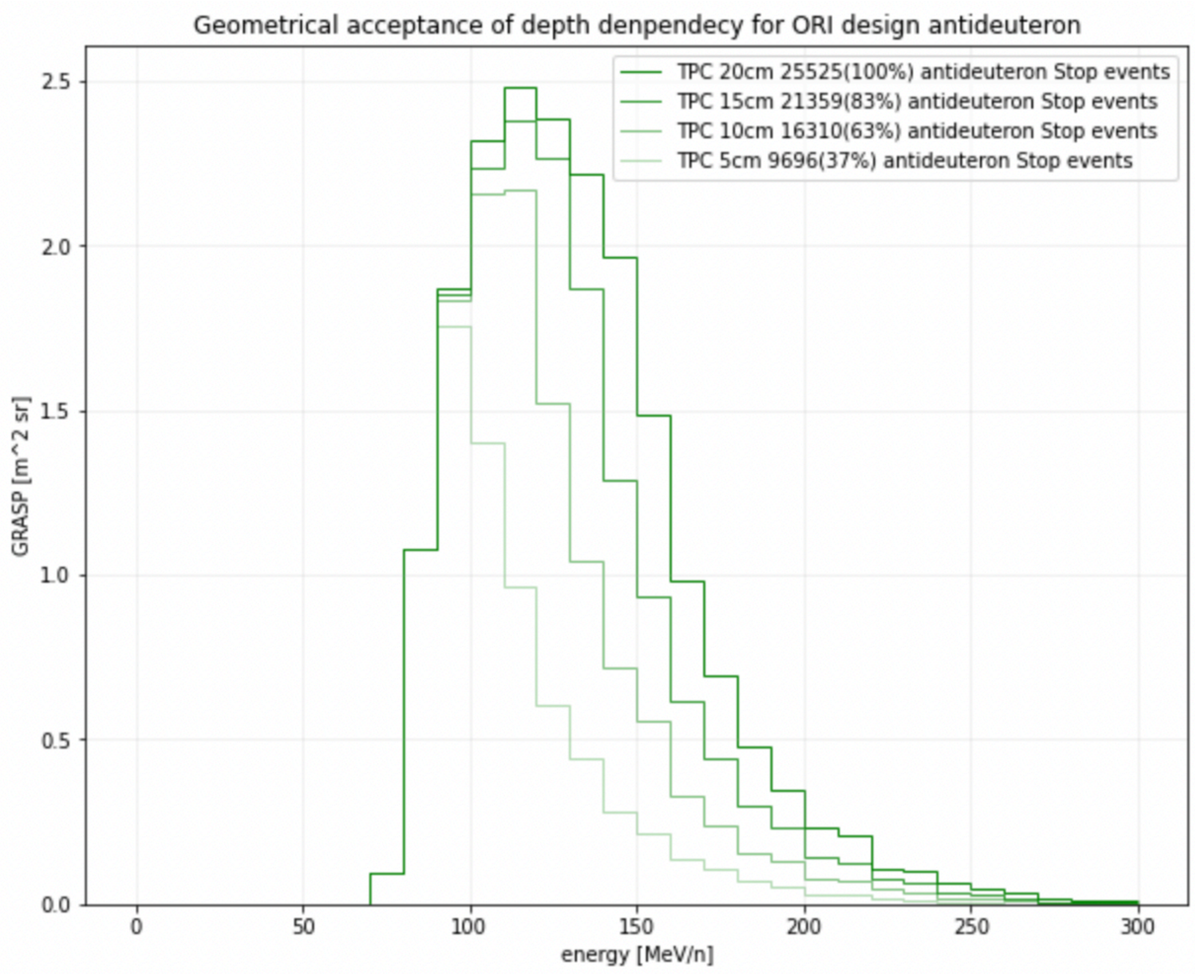




Impact of LArTPC thickness

- Randomly generate antideuteron from the sky and collect events that stop and annihilate inside LArTPC.





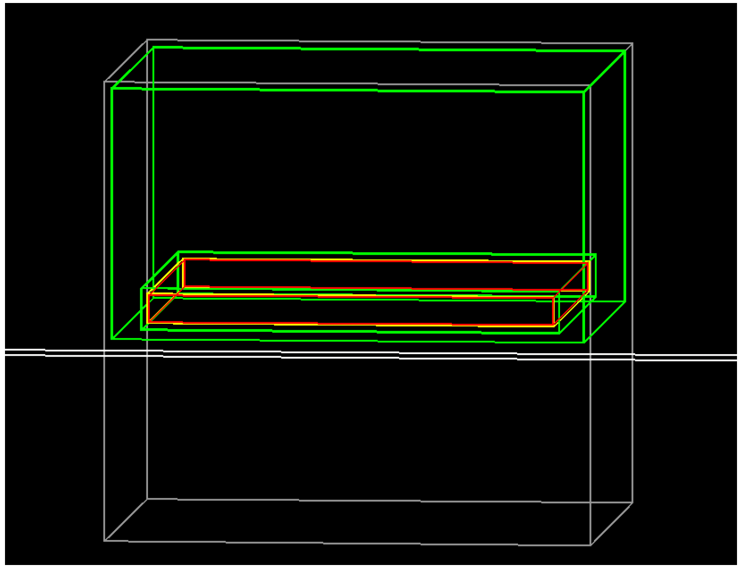
Detector horizontally expand

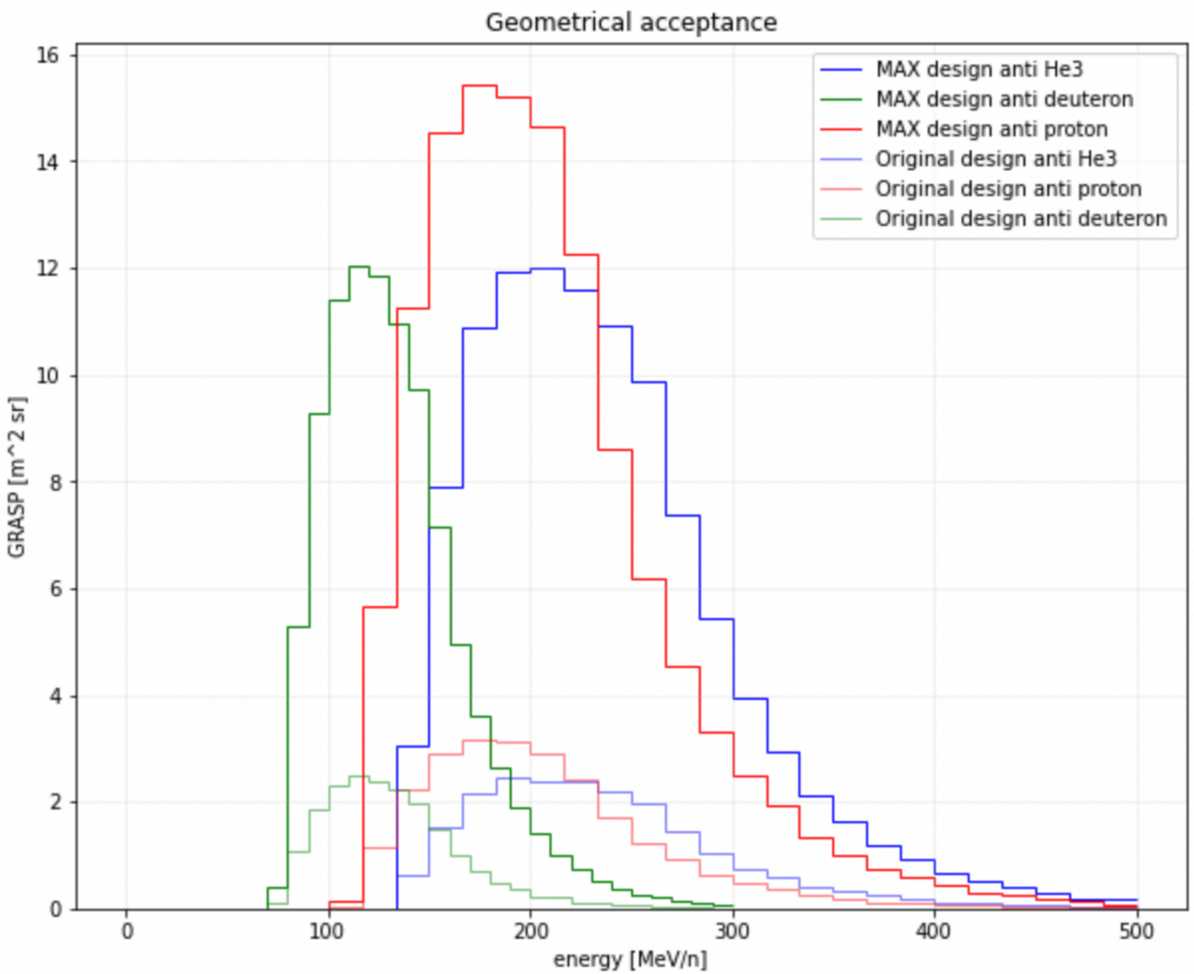
- Original design:

$140cm \times 140cm \times 20cm$

- MAX design:

$320cm \times 320cm \times 20cm$





TPC shape

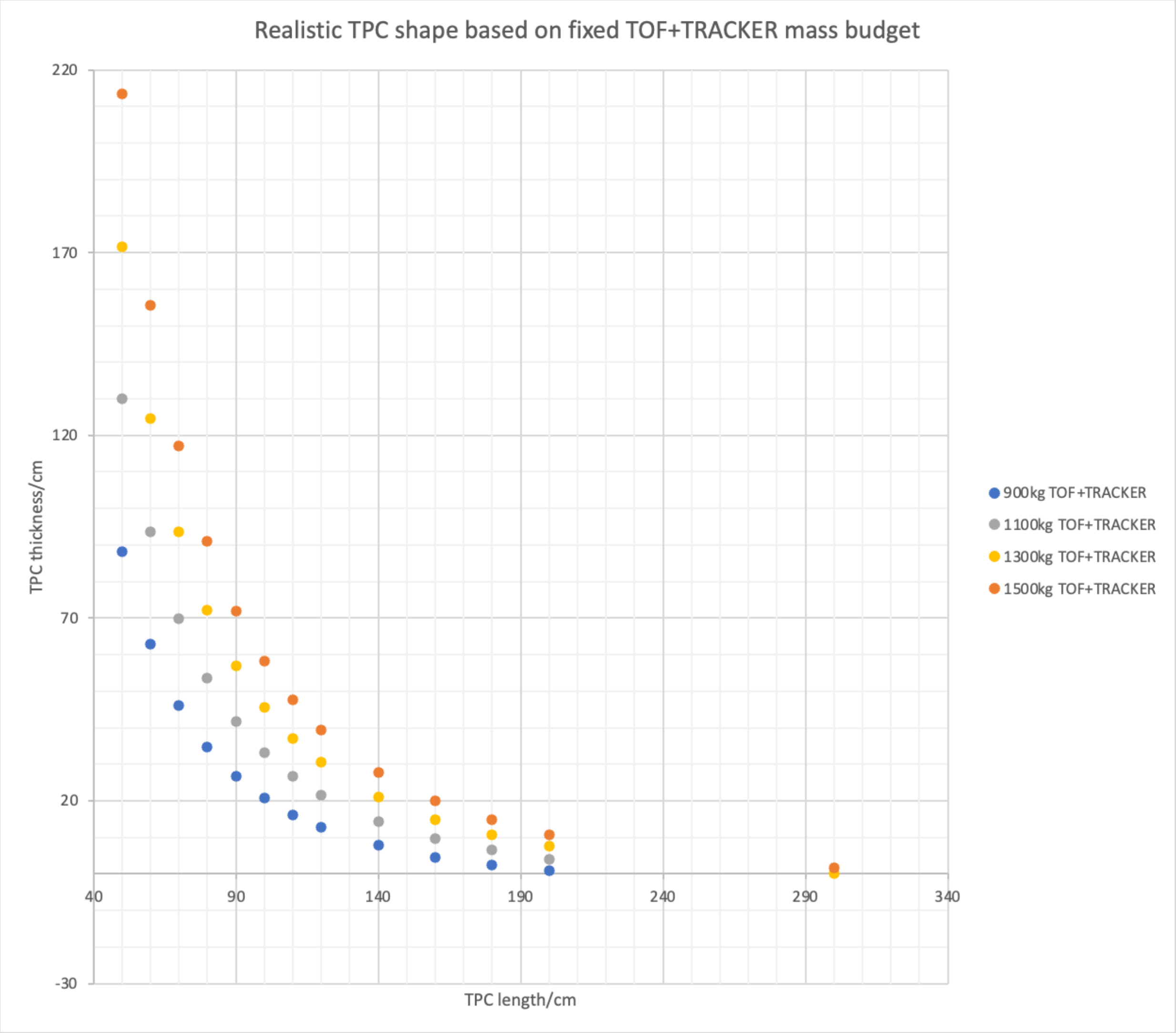
Tracker + TOF 900kg	TOF CONF 1424
TPC length [cm]	TPC thickness [cm]
50	88.2
60	62.8
70	46.2
80	34.8
90	26.6
100	20.7
110	16.2
120	12.7
140	7.8
160	4.6
180	2.3
200	0.8
300	-2.9
600	-4.8

Tracker + TOF 1100kg	TOF CONF 1424
TPC length [cm]	TPC thickness [cm]
50	130
60	93.7
70	69.9
80	53.5
90	41.8
100	33.1
110	26.6
120	21.6
140	14.4
160	9.7
180	6.5
200	4.1
300	-1.4
600	-4.4

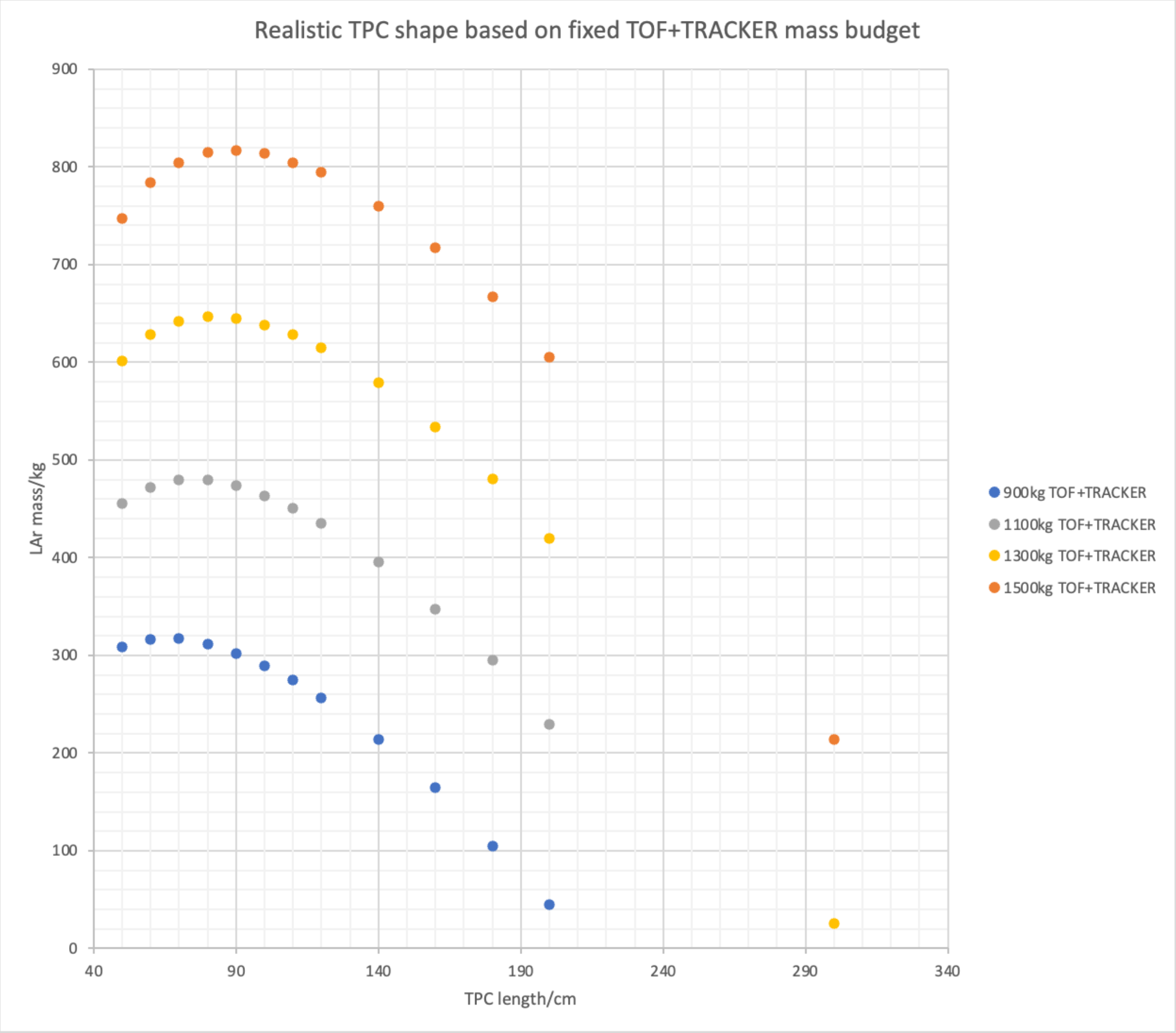
Tracker + TOF 1300kg	TOF CONF 1424
TPC length [cm]	TPC thickness [cm]
50	171.7
60	124.6
70	93.6
80	72.2
90	56.9
100	45.6
110	37.1
120	30.5
140	21.1
160	14.9
180	10.6
200	7.5
300	0.2
600	-4

Tracker + TOF 1500kg	TOF CONF 1424
TPC length [cm]	TPC thickness [cm]
50	213.5
60	155.5
70	117.2
80	90.9
90	72
100	58.1
110	47.5
120	39.4
140	27.7
160	20
180	14.7
200	10.8
300	1.7
600	-3.7

TPC Shape



Realistic TPC shape based on fixed TOF+TRACKER mass budget
TPC thickness/cm
TPC length/cm
220
170
120
70
20
-30
40
90
140
190
240
290
340
900kg TOF+TRACKER
1100kg TOF+TRACKER
1300kg TOF+TRACKER
1500kg TOF+TRACKER



Realistic TPC shape based on fixed TOF+TRACKER mass budget
LAr mass/kg
TPC length/cm
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
40
90
140
190
240
290
340
900kg TOF+TRACKER
1100kg TOF+TRACKER
1300kg TOF+TRACKER
1500kg TOF+TRACKER

Mass budget comparison