

PAOS: a fast, modern, and reliable Python package for Physical Optics studies

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DOI: N/A

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Submitted: 01 January 1970

Published: 01 January 1970

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Summary

PAOS is an open-source code implementing physical optics propagation (POP) in Fresnel approximation and paraxial ray-tracing to analyze complex waveform propagation through both generic and off-axes optical systems, enabling the generation of realistic Point Spread Functions across various wavelengths and focal planes. It improves upon other POP codes offering extensive customization options and the liberty to access, utilize, and adapt the software library to the user's application. With a generic input system and a built-in Graphical User Interface, PAOS ensures seamless user interaction and facilitates simulations. The versatility of PAOS enables its application to a wide array of optical systems, extending beyond its initial use case. PAOS presents a fast, modern, and reliable POP simulation tool, enhancing the assessment of optical performance for a wide range of scientific and engineering applications and making advanced simulations more accessible and user-friendly.

Developed using a Python 3 stack, PAOS is released under the BSD 3-Clause license and is available on [GitHub](#). The plugin can be installed from the source code or from [PyPI](#), so it can be installed as `pip install paos`. The documentation is available on [readthedocs](#), including a quick-start guide, documented examples, a comprehensive description of the software functionalities, and guidelines for developers. The documentation is continuously updated and is versioned to match the software releases.

Benchmark

Statement of need

Accurate assessment of the optical performance of advanced telescopes and imaging systems is essential to achieve an optimal balance between optical quality, system complexity, costs, and risks. Optical system design has witnessed significant advancements in recent years, necessitating efficient and reliable tools to simulate and optimize complex systems ([Smith, 2000](#)). Ray-tracing and Physical Optics Propagation (POP) are the two primary methods for modelling the propagation of electromagnetic fields through optical systems. Ray-tracing is often employed during the design phase due to its speed, flexibility, and efficiency in determining basic properties such as optical magnification, aberrations, and vignetting. POP provides a comprehensive understanding of beam propagation by directly calculating changes in the electromagnetic wavefront ([Goodman, 2005](#)). POP is particularly useful for predicting diffraction effects and modelling the propagation of coherently interfering optical wavefronts. Yet, it may require supplementary input from direct measurements or a ray-tracing model for comprehensive analysis including aberration variations, especially in the Fresnel approximation. Commercial tools like Zemax and Code V enable POP calculations, offering advanced capabilities

in aberration reduction and optical system optimization. However, these programs often come with substantial costs and steep learning curves, which may not be justifiable for every application. Furthermore, accessibility to their source code is often limited or not available.

To address these limitations, we developed PAOS, a reliable, user-friendly, and open-source POP code that integrates an implementation of Fourier optics. PAOS employs the Fresnel approximation for efficient and accurate optical system simulations. By including a flexible configuration file and paraxial ray-tracing, PAOS seamlessly facilitates the study of various optical systems, including non-axial symmetric ones, as long as the Fresnel approximation remains valid. Initially developed to evaluate the optical performance of the Ariel Space Mission (Tinetti et al., 2021, 2018), PAOS has proven its value in assessing the impact of diffraction, aberrations, and related systematics on Ariel's optical performance. By offering a general-purpose tool capable of simulating the optical performance of diverse optical systems, PAOS fills a crucial gap in the field and makes advanced physical optics research more accessible.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Italian Space Agency (ASI) with Ariel grant n. 2021.5.HH.0.

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