

List of student internships offered by newcleo

-academic year-

2024–2025

June 20, 2025

Preface

This document contains the internship offers supported by *newcleo*. Each offer contains the specifications and modalities for the application and execution of the internship work.

Please submit your CV and motivation letter to the contact person indicated in the internship offer.

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About *newcleo*

Privately funded and headquartered in London, *newcleo* was launched in 2021 – and since raised a total of EUR 400m – to be an innovator in the field of nuclear energy. Its mission is to generate safe, clean, economic and practically inexhaustible energy for the world, through a radically innovative combination of existing, accessible technologies.

With visionary co-founders, *newcleo* capitalises on thirty years of R&D activity in metal-cooled fast reactors and liquid-lead cooling systems, and its senior management and advisory team can boast hundreds of years in cumulative hands-on experience.

Counting on around 800 highly skilled employees across Europe, *newcleo* has business, scientific, operations and industrial manufacturing capabilities in a vertically integrated model designed to deliver its ambitious timeline for its plan-to-market.

newcleo's technology, mostly comprising a novel approach to already qualified solutions, addresses equally well the three challenges affecting the nuclear industry to date:

- **Waste:** fast reactors are capable of efficient “burning” (i.e., fission) of depleted uranium, plutonium and minor actinides. When operated with mixed-oxide (MOX) fuel generated from reprocessed nuclear waste, *newcleo*'s reactors not only ensure sustainability by closing the fuel cycle, but can also boost energy independence;
- **Safety:** lead-cooled reactors operate at atmospheric pressure. The properties of lead (thermal capacity and conductivity, boiling point, chemically inert, low neutron activation, shielding properties) together with *newcleo*'s passive safety systems ensure very high levels of safety;
- **Cost:** *newcleo*'s reactor design has been optimised over the last 20 years leading to the concept of an ultra-compact and transportable 200MWe module with improvements in energy density compared to other technologies. Costs are kept low by means of simplicity, compactness, modularity, atmospheric pressure operation and elevated output temperature.

newcleo is also working to significantly invest in MOX fuel manufacturing in developed countries, extracting energy from the current nuclear industry by-products.

newcleo is ready to develop a new, sustainable, and completely safe way of generating nuclear energy that will help humanity reach zero emissions and mitigate global warming.

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Development of the thermal model of a once-through steam generator with spiral geometry and cross-flow

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June 17, 2025

– *Internship proposal –*
(ID No. 1000303)

Keywords — LFR, cross-flow heat exchanger, spiral tube, flow boiling, TH system code

Topics — Physical modelling, two-phase thermal-hydraulics

Location newcleo S.p.A., Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 5–6 months

Context

newcleo is currently in the process of developing advanced Lead-cooled Fast Reactor (LFR) units tailored for small and modular reactors. These units incorporate innovative features aimed at addressing the unique challenges associated with LFR technology. Simultaneously, the company is committed to meeting sustainability, economic and safety objectives, aligning with the criteria set for the fourth generation of nuclear reactors. One of the innovative design features of newcleo's LFR is represented by the Spiral Tube Steam Generator (STSG). The STSG is a cross-flow heat exchanger designed to efficiently transfer heat from the primary coolant (molten lead) to the secondary coolant (water), specifically designed to maximise compactness and efficiency. It is made of many layers, each containing a single spiral-shaped tube, arranged in a staggered lattice along the axial direction. The tubes are all immersed in molten lead, which flows radially outwards from the center to the periphery of the heat exchanger. Subcooled water enters the spirals at the periphery of the heat exchanger, flowing inwards inside the tubes, and exits as superheated steam.

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Description

This thesis focuses on the development of a thermal-hydraulic model of the STSG using a thermal-hydraulic system code. The main objectives are:

- to develop a thermal-hydraulic model of the STSG, taking into account the specific features of the spiral geometry and cross-flow configuration;
- to assess the impact of different heat transfer correlations on the performance of the STSG;
- to investigate the effects of azimuthal maldistribution on the heat transfer performance of the STSG;
- to study both the impact of different heat transfer correlations and the azimuthal maldistribution at different reactor power levels.

To this aim, the RELAP5/Mod3.3 code, modified by the DIAEE of "Sapienza" University of Rome" to include correlations for helical tube heat exchangers, will be used. The main design parameters and operating conditions of the STSG (steam outlet pressure, feedwater inlet temperature, lead outlet temperature, spiral tube length, lead mass flow rate per spiral, nominal thermal power per spiral, feedwater mass flowrate per tube) will be provided by *newcleo* based on the design of the LFR unit.

The thesis shall encompass the following stages:

1. Literature review on the thermal-hydraulic modelling of steam generators, with a focus on spiral geometries and flow configurations;
2. Development of a thermal-hydraulic model of the STSG using RELAP5/Mod3.3, neglecting azimuthal discretisation, to assess the impact of different heat transfer correlations on the performance of the STSG at various reactor power levels;
3. Extension of the model to include azimuthal discretisation, to investigate the effects of azimuthal maldistribution on the heat transfer performance of the STSG at different reactor power levels. Also in this case, the impact of different heat transfer correlations will be assessed;
4. (if time allows) an attempt to implement specific two-phase multipliers for the spiral geometry in RELAP5/Mod3.3 can be made, to improve the accuracy of the model.

Work plan

1. Literature review and retrieval of the existing work
2. Problem discussion and definition
3. Development models in TH system code
4. Analysis of behaviour of the heat exchanger in different conditions
5. Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

Master student in Nuclear, Mechanical or Aeronautical Engineering.

Background: fundamentals in thermal-hydraulics and heat transfer, multiphase flow.

Required computer skills: knowledge of TH system code, Python programming, L^AT_EX scientific editing (optional).

References

- [1] N. E. Todreas and M. S. Kazimi. *Nuclear systems Volume I: Thermal hydraulic fundamentals*. CRC press, 2021.
- [2] N. E. Todreas, M. S. Kazimi, and M. Massoud. *Nuclear systems Volume II: Elements of thermal hydraulic design*. CRC press, 2021.
- [3] Andrew Michael Fsadni and Justin P.M. Whitty. A review on the two-phase heat transfer characteristics in helically coiled tube heat exchangers. *International Journal of Heat and Mass Transfer*, 95:551–565, 2016.
- [4] Paisarn Naphon and Somchai Wongwises. A review of flow and heat transfer characteristics in curved tubes. *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, 10(5):463–490, 2006.

Upgrade of the Python package lbh15 with properties of irradiated heavy liquid metals used in nuclear fast reactors

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May 27, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1001776)

Keywords — LMFR, irradiated liquid-metal properties, Python

Topics — Radioactive nuclides volatility, confinement and interaction with liquid metals

Location newcleo SrL, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date First or second quarter of 2024

Duration 4–5 months

Context

Chemical control of the primary coolant in liquid-metal nuclear reactors is of crucial importance during plant operation, preventing alteration or degradation of materials such as steel and other structural alloys by corrosion. In addition, the control system considers the purification of the coolant from hazardous radioactive nuclides, originated by nuclear reactions, to prevent excessive dose release in case of leaks. Therefore, newcleo's activities on lead chemical control are the objects of intensive studies, both in terms of experiments and theoretical modeling. In order to support both types of activities, the Python package lbh15 is under active development within the Codes and Methods team to offer an unique and standardized entry point for the use of empirical correlations of physical properties.

Description

lbh15 (**L**e**a**d **B**ismuth **H**andbook **2015**) is a Python package developed by newcleo based on the reference handbook edited by OECD-NEA [1], as contribution to the expert group on heavy liquid metal technologies. The metal properties are implemented as analytical functions from

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empirical correlations. The package is also equipped with services for function characterization that use the standard Python packages for scientific computation, namely NumPy and SciPy. The release of the second version of lbh15 is scheduled by the end of 2023: it will implement both thermophysical and thermochemical properties of molten lead (Pb), of bismuth (Bi) and of their eutectic alloy (LBE). The package repository and the related documentation can be found at

<https://newcleo-dev-team.github.io/lbh15/index.html> and
<https://github.com/newcleo-dev-team/lbh15>, respectively.

During the internship, the student will develop new features in lbh15 by implementing the topics covered in chapter 5 of the above-mentioned handbook. Specifically, the student will work on the integration of the following subjects:

- a) volatilisation of hazardous nuclides (Polonium, Caesium, Iodine, etc.) from liquid metals;
- b) estimation of equilibrium vapour pressure;
- c) gas phase purification.

For check and illustration purposes, the student will be involved in the development of one or more simple Python applications/tests focused on the exploitation of the properties just implemented.

lbh15 adopts high quality standards for code development. Hence, the student will develop/consolidate skills about the following aspects of the Python-based software engineering ([2], [3]):

- Object-Oriented programming based on SOLID principles;
- Python Dynamic programming;
- Design patterns (template and factory patterns in particular);
- CI/CD pipelines (including regression tests);
- Well-documented code writing for scientific applications.

The student will be followed by the Codes and Methods group members of *newcleo* that are developing lbh15.

Work plan

- 1) Handbook [1] review and identification of the main correlations to implement
- 2) Code architecture design
- 3) Code implementation
- 4) Test application definition and implementation
- 5) Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

Master student in Industrial Engineering, Chemistry, Applied Physics or Computer Science.
Skills and background:

- Fundamentals in thermodynamics and chemistry
- Basic knowledge of software programming (previous experience in Python appreciated, but not fundamental)
- Basic knowledge of Linux operative system

Nice to have: experience using git, basic knowledge on liquid metal-cooled fast reactors.

References

- [1] C. Fazio et Al. Handbook on Lead-bismuth Eutectic Alloy and Lead Properties, Materials Compatibility, Thermal-hydraulics and Technologies. Technical Report No. 7268, OECD/Nuclear Energy Agency (NEA), Paris, France, 2015.
- [2] Giridhar Chetan. *Learning Python Design Patterns*. Packt Publishing, Birmingham - Mumbai, 2 edition, 2016.
- [3] Lutz Mark. *Learning Python: Powerful Object-Oriented Programming*. O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, USA, 5 edition, 2013.

Comparison of numerical acceleration methods for nonlinear iterations used in the computer code TRANSURANUS

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May 27, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1003986)

Keywords — TRANSURANUS, numerical acceleration, non-linear iterations

Topics — fuel performance, numerical mathematics, computational modelling

Location newcleo SrL, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 4–6 months

Context

newcleo is currently in the process of developing advanced Lead-cooled Fast Reactor (LFR) units tailored for small and modular reactors. These units incorporate innovative features aimed at addressing the unique challenges associated with LFR technology. Simultaneously, the company is committed to meeting sustainability, economic, and safety objectives, aligning with the criteria set for the fourth generation of nuclear reactors.

In the context of fuel performance analysis, newcleo relies on the TRANSURANUS (TU) thermo-mechanical computer code, which is distributed by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission in Karlsruhe, Germany, under a collaboration research agreement [1, 2]. Newcleo has initiated a meticulous examination of the code to ensure its suitability and adaptability for applications involving LFR technology. The goal is to employ precise physical models that guarantee reliable results in numerical simulations. This ongoing effort also includes improving the code to broaden its scope and enhancing its performances.

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Description

The thermal analysis of an integral fuel rod can be treated by superposing one-dimensional radial and axial solutions. Given the multitude of non-linearities inherent in these processes, only numerical solution techniques prove feasible. These techniques are of critical importance as they determine numerical stability and, to a considerable extent, the overall computational cost.

TU solves heat transfer by the Fourier equation in the radial coordinate of the fuel rod, whose discretized form brings to a tridiagonal system. The nonlinearity of the coefficients in the second order differential equation is handled by successive substitutions. The resulting non-linear iterations are accelerated by minimizing the residuals through a numerical scheme based on Regula Falsi, initially implemented by Lassmann [3].

This procedure was adopted because calculating the temperature of a fuel rod, which is schematically shown in Fig. 1, is a computationally intensive task. Therefore, it is important to focus on obtaining convergence and minimizing the total numerical effort required.

In the current internship the student will perform a complete literature review of the existing models to solve heat conduction equation and technique to accelerate the convergence of such numerical method. Some of this technique will be implemented and their performance will be compared.

The student will be introduced to the use of TU and will join the team of TU developers at newcleo, learning the best practices for collaborative work and quality-assured code development. The production of a technical report is expected at the end of the internship to describe the work done by the student and to compile the analysis of the results.

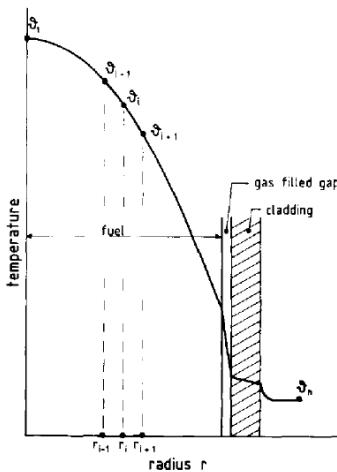


Figure 1: Schematic representation of the stationary radial temperature profile in a slice of the fuel rod

Work plan

- Litterature review and retrieval of the existing work
- Discussion of the problem
- Implementation and verification of the numerical solution

- d) Analysis of the numerical results
- e) Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

Master or PhD student in Nuclear, industrial or Software Engineering; Applied Physics; Mathematics.

Required computer skills: Basic knowledge of Linux operative system and software programming (previous experience in FORTRAN is appreciated, but not fundamental).

Knowledge of L^AT_EX editing is appreciated, but not required.

References

- [1] K Lassmann. Transuranus: a fuel rod analysis code ready for use. *Journal of Nuclear Materials*, 188:295–302, 1992.
- [2] K Lassmann and H Blank. Modelling of fuel rod behaviour and recent advances of the transuranus code. *Nuclear Engineering and design*, 106(3):291–313, 1988.
- [3] K. Lassmann. A fast and simple iteration scheme for the temperature calculation in a fuel rod. *Nuclear Engineering and Design*, 103(2):211–214, 1987.

Analysis and verification of the burnup model implemented in the computer code TRANSURANUS

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May 27, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1003987)

Keywords — TRANSURANUS, Burnup model, LFR

Topics — nuclear fuel design, fuel performance and thermomechanics, computational modeling

Location newcleo SrL, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 5–6 months

Context

Currently, newcleo is designing advanced Lead-cooled nuclear Fast Reactors (LFR). These units incorporate innovative features aimed to address the unique challenges associated with the decarbonization of the energy market and reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. Concurrently, the company is dedicated to fulfilling sustainability, economic, and safety goals, in line with the criteria established for the fourth generation of nuclear reactors.

In the domain of fuel performance analysis, newcleo relies on the TRANSURANUS (TU) thermo-mechanical computer code, which is provided by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission in Karlsruhe, Germany, under a collaboration agreement [1, 2]. newcleo is performing a thorough examination of the code to check that it can reliably reproduce the physical behavior of LFR fuel rods.

This ongoing endeavour also includes improving the code to broaden its range of applications, with a specific focus on providing trustworthy predictions for modeling LFR fuel rods. The final goal of this initiative is to develop an improved version of the code.

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Description

The performance of a fuel rod is greatly influenced by several physical phenomena. The exposure of the fuel rod to neutron irradiation determines the time evolution of the isotopic concentrations, and of the power density distribution within the fuel. The power density is the main driving force of the local temperature profile. The temperature heavily affects material properties and many physical phenomena, such as fuel restructuring, actinide redistribution, fission gas release, creep of fuel and cladding [1, 2]. A thorough description of the time evolution of the isotopic concentration of heavy metals in the fuel is thus crucial. Accordingly, one of the first stages in describing fuel rod behaviour is to compute at each radial position in the fuel: the local burnup, the build-up of heavy metal nuclides and the formation of fission products. The equations used to describe these phenomena constitute the so-called burnup models.

A model called TUBRNP, developed by Lassmann in 1994 [3], is implemented in TU. This model predicts the radial power density distribution based on burnup together with the radial profiles of actinide concentrations.

During the internship, the student will study and verify the implementation of the simplified burnup model. In particular, it will be requested to revise the implementation of the calculation of the radial neutron flux distribution in the fuel slices that is currently preventing the use of user-input distributions.

In addition, to assess the physical consistency of the isotopic composition evolution in case of anomalous behavior, a parallel inventory analysis of LFR fuel rods will be performed using the depletion module of the OpenMC Monte Carlo code.

The student will be introduced to the use of TU for the calculation of fuel rods used in nuclear reactors. He/she will join the team of TU developers at newcleo where he will learn effective collaborative practices and methods for developing code with ensured quality. At the conclusion of the internship, the student is expected to produce a technical report detailing his/her contributions and experiences during the internship period.

Work plan

- a) Literature review and retrieval of the existing work relating to TUBRNP
- b) Code implementation
- c) Analysis of the results
- d) Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

Master or PhD student in Nuclear, Industrial or Software Engineering; Applied Physics
Computer skills: FORTRAN, Linux.

Knowledge of L^AT_EX editing is appreciated, but not required.

References

- [1] K Lassmann. Transuranus: a fuel rod analysis code ready for use. *Journal of Nuclear Materials*, 188:295–302, 1992.

- [2] K Lassmann and H Blank. Modelling of fuel rod behaviour and recent advances of the transuranus code. *Nuclear Engineering and design*, 106(3):291–313, 1988.
- [3] K. Lassmann, C. O'Carroll, J. van de Laar, and C.T. Walker. The radial distribution of plutonium in high burnup uo₂ fuels. *Journal of Nuclear Materials*, 208(3):223–231, 1994.

Validation of lead-water heat exchangers modelling in ATHLET through benchmarking with simplified tools

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May 27, 2025

– Internship proposal –

(ID No. 1005558)

Keywords — LFR, Heat Transfer, separate effect test, system TH codes

Topics — multiphysics/multiscale modelling, safety assessment, scientific codes

Location newcleo SrL, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 5–6 months

Context

Lead technology is one of the most promising alternatives for the development of advanced nuclear reactors and sustainable energy scenarios. In this context, newcleo is involved in the design and construction of Advanced Modular Reactors (AMR) lead-cooled.

For Lead Fast Reactor (LFR), a major role for compactness is played by the efficiency of the in pool heat exchangers (Steam Generator, Decay Heat Removal) and the optimization of their working point is under discussion. Thermal-hydraulic system codes (hereinafter, STH) are used for the design and safety analyses of LFRs [1]. Suitable modelling strategies are yet to be chosen according to the available calculation environment, including the selection of the most appropriate models and closure laws.

The development of tools and models able to support the design phase is of major importance, as well as the justification of the assumptions of adopted tools.

The code validation against the available experimental measurements for the specific purpose of the LFR is done through the choice of the most suitable closure laws, having a direct influence on the results provided by the code itself.

It may also support the validation of the ATHLET code, thus improving the selection of the most suitable closure laws.

The validation effort will be part of a wider activity dedicated to the STH codes Validation and Verification (V&V) to attain a reasonable level of robustness for the adopted tools.

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Description

This internship will support the identification and modelling of heat exchange phenomena occurring between lead coolant, reactor internals and secondary water loop in different scenarios (steady state, transient and accidental).

The focus will be the assessment of the most appropriate closure laws for irradiation, conduction and convection justifying this choice and highlighting the differences. This task will be carried out by means of the analysis of heat exchanges regimes and flow pattern maps.

In the hypothesis of a geometry representative of a LFR pool, this internship will provide the criteria for selecting the most appropriate closure laws among the ones available in the ATHLET code and/or asking for the implementation of new ones and the justification behind this choice.

For these purposes, simplified Python tool will be associated to the STH code in order to facilitate the assessment of selected closure laws and heat transfer mechanisms providing a first comparison against ATHLET.

Parametric and sensitivity analysis will be performed in order to understand the differences among assessed closure laws, their validity domain and the possible extrapolation to reactor operating conditions. As optional work, dimensional analysis may be used to justify the semi-empirical form of the correlations and to propose possible improvements.

The target is to meet the *newcleo* Codes & Methods (C&M) department needs in term of codes V&V. Such methodology will be tested and deployed against open literature mock-ups with available measurements and lay the groundwork for new experimental campaigns ongoing or foreseen by *newcleo*.

Work plan

The work plan is structured according to the following items:

1. Review of the state-of-the-art literature with focus on available experimental measurements and mock-ups but also on heat exchange phenomena and modelling between liquid metal flows and water.
2. Adaptation of available simplified python tools to the selected mock-ups test section geometries.
3. Automation of pre- and post-processing to analyse experimental measurements and closure laws.
4. Proposition of a benchmark against ATHLET and the simplified tool in a geometry representative of an heat exchanger for LFR applications.
5. Presentation of the work done in terms of adopted theory, modelling approaches, tools and physical results.
6. Drafting of a final report.

Applicant profile

Master's student in Nuclear Engineering. Students of theoretical Physics and applied Mathematics will also be considered for the position.

Background: *fundamentals of reactor physics and multiphysics approaches, but also computational Thermal-hydraulics*.

References

- [1] Ferry Roelofs. *Thermal hydraulics aspects of liquid metal cooled nuclear reactors*. Woodhead Publishing, 2018.
- [2] N. E. Todreas and M. S. Kazimi. *Nuclear systems Volume I: Thermal hydraulic fundamentals*. CRC press, 2021.
- [3] N. E. Todreas, M. S. Kazimi, and M. Massoud. *Nuclear systems Volume II: Elements of thermal hydraulic design*. CRC press, 2021.
- [4] Barbara Calgaro and Barbara Vezzoni. Advanced Couplings and Multiphysics Sensitivity Analysis Supporting the Operation and the Design of Existing and Innovative Reactors. *Energies*, 15:3341, 2022.

Validation of liquid lead flow patterns modelling in ATHLET through benchmarking activities

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May 27, 2025

– Internship proposal –
(ID No. 1005559)

Keywords — LFR, Heat Transfer, separate effect test, system TH codes

Topics — multiphysics/multiscale modelling, safety assessment, scientific codes

Location newcleo SrL, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 5–6 months

Context

Lead technology is one of the most promising alternatives for the development of advanced nuclear reactors and sustainable energy scenarios. In this context, newcleo is involved in the design and construction of Advanced Modular Reactors (AMR) lead-cooled.

Thermal-hydraulic system codes (hereinafter, STH) are used for the design and safety analyses of Lead Fast Reactors (LFR) [1]. Suitable modelling strategies are yet to be chosen according to the available calculation environment.

The development of tools and models able to support the design phase is of major importance, as well as the justification of the assumptions of adopted tools.

Closure laws directly influence the results provided by a STH code.

Their assessment done by means of experimental measurements or by comparison with other codes is crucial to have reliable results from the STH code. The focus of this activity is the assessment of the flow pattern regimes and head losses correlation with the support of specialized tools, as OpenModelica, frequently used to optimize the hydraulic network and to perform balance of plan analyses.

The activity will support the validation of the ATHLET code, improving the selection of the most suitable closure laws.

The validation effort will be part of a wider activity dedicated to the STH codes Validation and Verification (V&V) to attain a reasonable level of robustness for the adopted tools.

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Description

The proposed internship will deal with the simulation representative of the primary circuit of a simplified model of an LFR in different operating conditions. ATHLET will be the STH code that will profit the work realized by this study but, initially, to easily compare experienced flow pattern regimes and head losses correlation (concentrated and distributed) other simplified tools will be associated.

After a review of the available literature focusing on the characterization of the typical flow pattern in lead cooled primary system by means of similar approaches, a feasibility analysis will be carried out with the aim of investigating the OpenModelica support to STH V&V practices.

The proposed internship will contribute to identify experimental measurement campaigns or test cases available in literature for Liquid Metal Fast Reactors (LMFR), or to valorize those already identified, and to prepare the appropriate pre- and post-processing data for calculations and associated results for OpenModelica.

Those comparisons will be used firstly to assess closure laws and flow pattern regimes. Parametric and sensitivity analysis is performed in order to understand the differences among assessed closure laws, their validity domain and the possible extrapolation to reactor operating conditions. As optional work, dimentional analisys may be used to justify the correlation semi-empirical forms and to propose possible improvements.

The target is to meet the *newcleo* Codes & Methods (C&M) department needs in term of codes V&V. Such methodology will be tested and deployed against open literature mock-ups with available measurements and lay the groundwork for new experimental campaigns ongoing or foreseen by *newcleo*.

Work plan

The work plan is structured according to the following items:

1. Review of the state-of-the-art in the usage of system thermal-hydraulic codes for LFRs modelling or process tools.
2. Getting started with the simulation of the simplified loop representative of LFR's primary system model with ATHLET.
3. Reproduction of the same simplified model with OpenModelica.
4. Comprehension, assessment and comparison of the behavior of above-mentioned codes on such simplified configuration.
5. Improvement of the full scale primary system input deck with correlations and models assessed in the previous activities trying to retrieve from the OpenModelica model as much information as possible for improving the corresponding ATHLET model.
6. Identification of the layout of some possible tool chains to exploit at best the thermal-hydraulic software used in this work.
7. Drafting of a final report.

Applicant profile

Master's student in Nuclear Engineering. Students of theoretical Physics and applied Mathematics will also be considered for the position.

Background: *fundamentals of reactor physics and multiphysics approaches, but also computational thermal-hydraulic.*

References

- [1] Ferry Roelofs. *Thermal hydraulics aspects of liquid metal cooled nuclear reactors*. Woodhead Publishing, 2018.
- [2] N. E. Todreas and M. S. Kazimi. *Nuclear systems Volume I: Thermal hydraulic fundamentals*. CRC press, 2021.
- [3] N. E. Todreas, M. S. Kazimi, and M. Massoud. *Nuclear systems Volume II: Elements of thermal hydraulic design*. CRC press, 2021.
- [4] Barbara Calgaro and Barbara Vezzoni. Advanced Couplings and Multiphysics Sensitivity Analysis Supporting the Operation and the Design of Existing and Innovative Reactors. *Energies*, 15:3341, 2022.

Burnup calculation of LFR fuel assemblies by DRAGON5

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June 4, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –

(ID No. 1008548)

Keywords — LFR, lattice calculation, burnable absorbers, breeding, DRAGON

Topics — Nuclear fuel management, neutron transport, reactor physics

Location newcleo SA, EDF Lab Paris-Saclay, Bd Gaspard Monge, 91120 Palaiseau, or newcleo S.p.A., Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date Fall 2025

Duration 6 months

Context

newcleo is designing new Lead-cooled Fast Reactor (LFR) units for small modular reactors. These reactors sustain a fast neutron spectrum allowing for fission of heavier actinides, such as plutonium that is a by-product of light water reactors. Cooling is done by molten lead which shields photon radiation and has low neutron absorption.

Nuclear fuel management studies can rely on burnup calculations performed through lattice transport computer codes [1, 2]. newcleo is currently adapting DRAGON5 [3, 4], a deterministic neutron transport code developed at Polytechnique de Montréal, Canada, to the calculation of LFR. After achieving good results in single fuel pin cells, DRAGON5 is now being upgraded to perform accurate burnup calculations of fuel elements and heterogeneous assembly patterns, comprising burnable absorbers and spectrum softeners. This internship contributes to the verification and validation of the calculation scheme, including the data used to reproduce radioactive decay and isotope transmutation.

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Description

Nuclear reactors are usually operated with multi-batch reloading plans, which allows reducing the reactivity margin to control at the beginning of cycle, increasing at the same time the overall fuel utilization. The general performance of a core loading plan can be predicted rapidly by means of the linear reactivity model, which makes use of lattice calculations by deterministic transport codes for different fuel assembly types [2]. These first predictions must be confirmed later by coupled full-core calculations, which are more expensive computationally. This work focuses on fuel element design and their burnup calculation.

The lifetime of the fuel cycle can be increased with burnable absorbers. Such burnable absorbers are nuclides with high neutron absorption that transmute into nuclides with lower neutron absorption during the reactor's operation. The associated negative reactivity worth decreases with time reducing the decrease in positive reactivity of the fuel as it becomes more spent. Besides, less reliance on control rods is needed and the fuel cycle can become longer. Good examples of a burnable absorbers used in fast reactor design are erbium and hafnium.

The reactor core can also show assemblies with elements that soften the neutron spectra, designed to favor plutonium breeding along exposure. A breeder reactor produces more fissile or fissionable material at operation than what it consumes. This demands adjusting locally the spectrum of neutrons to maximize the number of fissions that will occur later in time. This can be achieved with yttrium-stabilized zirconium at the periphery of the core to shift the spectrum from the fast region to the epithermal region where most of fission takes place.

After first practice with the different capabilities of DRAGON5, the candidate will select the self-shielding options giving the most accurate calculations for fuel elements with burnable absorbers. This will require comparing DRAGON5 results with the ones obtained by the Monte Carlo code OpenMC [5]. After performing steady-state calculation with fresh fuel, the candidate will perform burnup calculations assuring proper convergence in time. The verification of the calculation scheme will require careful check of the used decay chains and nuclear data libraries, while the validation will be performed against Monte Carlo simulation. Finally, the candidate will produce a technical report at the end of the internship compiling the results.

Work plan

- a) Literature review and study of the main physical phenomena.
- b) Training and practice with DRAGON.
- c) Study of cross-section self-shielding of doping elements.
- d) Ensure fitness of nuclear data libraries used for the simulations.
- e) Perform, verify and validate burnup calculations.
- f) Analyze the results and preparation of the final report.

Applicant profile

Master student in Nuclear Engineering or student in Applied Mathematics and Physics.

Background: fundamentals in applied mathematics and the physics of nuclear reactors.

Required computer skills: Linux, Python (intermediate), L^AT_EX scientific editing (optional).

References

- [1] MR Egan. Elements of nuclear reactor fueling theory. *Progress in Nuclear Energy*, 14(3):313–360, 1984.
- [2] Michael J Driscoll, Thomas Joseph Downar, and Edward E Pilat. *The linear reactivity model for nuclear fuel management*. American Nuclear Society, 1990.
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- [5] Paul K. Romano, Nicholas E. Horelik, Bryan R. Herman, Adam G. Nelson, Benoit Forget, and Kord Smith. Openmc: A state-of-the-art monte carlo code for research and development. *Ann. Nucl. Energy*, 2015.

Cross section preparation for LFR by Monte Carlo computer codes

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June 4, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1008549)

Keywords — LFR, OpenMC, cross section preparation

Topics — Physical modelling, neutron transport, reactor physics

Location newcleo S.p.A., Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 5 months

Context

newcleo is designing small lead fast reactors (LFR) operating in a pool that contains all the primary system components. Cooling is done by molten lead which shields photon radiation and has low neutron absorption.

The core can show high heterogeneity to meet the criteria of compactness, target neutron leakage and power shape, breeding or burning features. The core is made of a main active zone, possibly surrounded by a shielding or breeding blanket.

Although computer simulation by Monte Carlo codes like OpenMC [1] allows today to carefully represent many details of the reactor, simplified calculation schemes relying on homogenization theory and equivalence theory must still be adopted to perform faster core calculations [2, 3], thus easing the whole design process. During this internship, the student will prepare homogenized cross sections by OpenMC and use them after to perform calculations with the deterministic full-core codes VARIANT [4] and DONJON [5].

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Description

Deterministic computer codes allows fast neutron calculations and are largely employed in reactor physics and analysis. They rely on assumptions and approximations that must be carefully verified and validated. For instance, using lattice calculations of fuel elements in fundamental mode neglects the environment effects and the local core conditions, introducing sometimes an inconvenient limitation in the calculation scheme. Provided that the material inventory of all fuel elements is known, the Monte Carlo simulation can be used to overcome this limitation, yet paying a higher computational cost.

A new feature in the code OpenMC to prepare homogenized cross sections on hexagonal grids is currently under development and it will be tested during this internship, together with a reduced nuclide chain suitable to lead fast reactors. After, a suitable interface will be developed to load the set of homogenized data into VARIANT and DONJON, which use different solution methods to obtain the neutron flux distribution over the full core. These codes use low-order transport methods, with a lower computational effort. Besides, the core configurations calculated by OpenMC and used for detailed cross section preparation will allow to assess the performance of low-order transport solutions. The setup of the calculation input files and the interfaces will be performed on git version control. Finally, the candidate will produce a technical report at the end of the internship to compile the results, by quantifying the gain in runtime obtained while using the deterministic codes and by assessing the performance in physical accuracy and numerical precision.

Work plan

- a) Literature review and study of homogenization and equivalence theory.
- b) Training and practice with the computer codes.
- c) Setup of the core model by OpenMC.
- d) Preparation of the cross section model.
- e) Setup of the core calculations.
- f) Analysis of results and preparation of the final report.

Applicant profile

Master student in Nuclear Engineering or student in Applied Mathematics and Physics.

Background: fundamentals in applied mathematics and the physics of nuclear reactors.

Required computer skills: Linux, Python (intermediate), L^AT_EX scientific editing (optional).

References

- [1] P. K. Romano, N. E. Horelik, B. R. Herman, A. G. Nelson, B. Forget, and K. Smith. Openmc: A state-of-the-art monte carlo code for research and development. *Annals of Nuclear Energy*, 82:90–97, 2015.
- [2] George I Bell and Samuel Glasstone. *Nuclear reactor theory*. US Atomic Energy Commission, Washington, DC (United States), 1970.
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- [5] A Hébert. DRAGON and DONJON: a legacy open-source reactor physics project at Polytechnique Montréal. In *Proceedings of the IAEA Technical Meeting on the Development and Application of Open-Source Modelling and Simulation Tools for Nuclear Reactors, Milano, Italy, June*, 2022.

Calculation of long-term sealed LFR

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May 27, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1008571)

Keywords — LFR, Monte Carlo, high-fidelity neutron calculations.

Topics — Reactor physics and analysis, radiation transport, core design.

Location newcleo SrL, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date As soon as possible

Duration 5 months

Context

newcleo is developing innovative small modular reactors based on lead-cooled fast reactor (LFR) technology. A sealed unit intended for long-term extended operation is currently under study for ship propulsion and remote power generation. The internship focuses on building a complete LFR model and on performing neutron calculations by the Monte Carlo computer code OpenMC [1], providing the engineering team with essential data to improve reactor design.

Description

The reactor considered in this work is of the sealed type seeking inherent safety by means of passive cooling systems and employing robust materials to ensure long-term reliability, as in [2, 3], thus operating for at least 20 years without refuelling. The core layout is highly heterogeneous with zones keeping a fast neutron spectrum and others with an epithermal one.

The internship focuses on high-fidelity neutron calculations of liquid lead fast reactors (LFRs) using the Monte Carlo method. Calculations are in eigenvalue mode to reproduce operation in critical state by maneuvering control elements. The feasibility of using different types of control elements will be investigated. The calculations will be performed with assumed distributions

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of temperature and thermal expansion for geometry deformation. Machine learning techniques will be used to find clusters within the active core showing similar neutron spectrum.

Several calculations are necessary to find optimal configurations for reactor design, which limits the applicability of the Monte Carlo method indeed. Mixed deterministic-stochastic methods will be explored during the first phase of optimization.

During the internship, the student will be introduced to the physics and engineering of the LFR reactors, acquiring notions and developing skills in Monte Carlo methods and neutral particle transport [4, 5]. The student will become a proficient user of OpenMC, learning Python programming too. At the end of the internship, the student will write a technical report on the analysis of the results from the numerical simulations. The student will be followed by the Codes and Methods group members of newcleo.

Work plan

During the internship, the student will be introduced to the open source Monte Carlo transport code OpenMC for modeling the LFR reactor and calculating maps of the released thermal power.

The student will examine significant topics concerning Monte Carlo simulations. These include the theoretical aspects underlying particle transport simulation and adequate modeling of reactor components.

The expected working plan is detailed in the following:

- a) Literature review on off-grid and long-term reactors
- b) Literature review on materials softening the neutron spectrum
- c) Discussion of current core configurations
- d) OpenMC introduction and training
- e) Setup of the LFR full reactor model
- f) Analysis of the results
- g) Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

Master or PhD student in Nuclear Engineering, Applied Mathematics and Physics.

Background: fundamentals in reactor physics and Monte Carlo methods.

Required computer skills: A good knowledge of Python and Linux operating systems (or willingness to learn). Knowledge of \LaTeX editing is appreciated.

References

- [1] Paul K. Romano, Nicholas E. Horelik, Bryan R. Herman, Adam G. Nelson, Benoit Forget, and Kord Smith. Openmc: A state-of-the-art monte carlo code for research and development. *Annals of Nuclear Energy*, 82:90–97, 2015. Joint International Conference on Supercomputing in Nuclear Applications and Monte Carlo 2013, SNA + MC 2013. Pluri- and Trans-disciplinarity, Towards New Modeling and Numerical Simulation Paradigms.
- [2] J. Wallenius, S. Qvist, I. Mickus, S. Bortot, P. Szakalos, and J. Ejenstam. Design of sealer, a very small lead-cooled reactor for commercial power production in off-grid applications. *Nuclear Engineering and Design*, 338:23–33, 2018.
- [3] Keith E Holbert. A review of maritime nuclear reactor systems. *Journal of Nuclear Engineering*, 6(1):5, 2025.
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Implementation and Testing of New Numerical Solvers for the Intra-granular Fission Gas Diffusion Problem in the Computer Code TRANSURANUS

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June 4, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1008576)

Keywords — Intra-granular Diffusion, Numerical Solvers, TRANSURANUS

Topics — nuclear fuel design, fuel performance and thermomechanics, computational modelling

Location newcleo S.p.A., Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date October 2025

Duration 4 months

Context

newcleo is designing an advanced modular Lead-cooled nuclear Fast Reactors (LFR). Regarding the fuel performance analysis, newcleo relies on the TRANSURANUS (TU) thermo-mechanical computer code, which is provided by the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission in Karlsruhe, Germany, under a collaboration agreement [1, 2]. newcleo is performing a verification process including checking the convergence of the employed numerical algorithms and their suitability for the problem under consideration with the final goal of developing an improved version of the code.

Description

Among the many phenomena that occur in a fuel pin under irradiation, Fission Gas Release (FGR) and Fission Gas Swelling (FGS) are fundamental to be correctly modelled in a fuel performance code. They are the result of a continuous production of Fission Gas (FG) atoms, such as Xenon (Xe) and Krypton (Kr), that accumulate in the fuel matrix, causing volume increase

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(swelling) and, consequent enhanced pellet-cladding interaction [3]. When certain saturation conditions are met, they can be released into pin's free volume [4, 5] leading to degradation of the thermal conductivity of the fuel rod filling gas (usually He) and increase of the internal fuel rod pressure. At the core of FGR and FGS modelling, accurately simulating gas diffusion within fuel grains is of paramount importance. This process is described by a Partial Differential Equation (PDE) [6]:

$$\frac{\partial C(r,t)}{\partial t} = D \nabla^2 C(r,t) + \beta(r,t) \quad (1)$$

where $C(r,t)$ is the gas concentration, D is the diffusion coefficient and $\beta(r,t)$ is the gas production rate. Eq.(1) can be referred to as FG diffusion equation and it is solved using *ad-hoc* numerical algorithms [3]. However, these algorithms are often complex to implement and difficult to verify, therefore, exploring new numerical methods for solving the diffusion equation is essential to enhance code readability and maintainability.

During the internship, the student will be asked to perform a literature review of the existing solvers for the FG diffusion equation and of the most recent numerical techniques that can be employed. Then, he/she will implement and test the new numerical solvers, comparing them to the existing algorithms in terms of accuracy and computational efficiency. The student will be introduced to using TU for fuel performance analysis and will become part of the TU development team at *newcleo*. He/she will learn best practices for collaborative work and high-quality, reliable code development. At the end of the internship, the student is expected to produce a technical report.

Work plan

- a) Literature review on FG diffusion, current numerical schemes and new suitable numerical algorithms.
- b) Implementation and test of the new selected algorithms in TU.
- c) Analysis of the results
- d) Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

BSc or MSc student in Industrial Engineering; Applied Physics.

Computer skills: FORTRAN, Linux, Python.

Knowledge of LATEX editing is appreciated, but not required.

References

- [1] K. Lassmann. Transuranus: a fuel rod analysis code ready for use. *Journal of Nuclear Materials*, 188:295–302, 1992.
- [2] K. Lassmann and H. Benk. Modelling of fuel rod behaviour and recent advances of the transurauns code. *Nuclear Engineering and Design*, 106(3):291–313, 1998.

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- [4] R. White. The development of grain-face porosity in irradiated oxide fuel. *Journal of Nuclear Materials*, 325(1):61–77, 2004.
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- [6] P. Van Uffelen, G. Pastore, V. Di Marcello, and L. Luzzi. Multiscale modelling for the fission gas behaviour in the transuranus code. *Nuclear Engineering and Technology*, 43(6):477–488, 2011.

Review about the utilization of Beryllium in reactor design

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June 4, 2025

– Internship proposal –
(ID No. 1008987)

Keywords — FBR, nuclear fuel management, fuel design, core cycle, neutron activation

Topics — Reactor physics and analysis, radiation transport, core design.

Location newcleo S.p.A. - C.so Stati Uniti 38, Torino (TO), Italy

Starting date To be defined

Duration 3 months

Context

newcleo is developing innovative small modular reactors based on lead-cooled fast reactor (LFR) technology. The use of alternative materials is considered to achieve target performance for long-term operation without refueling. This internship focuses on performing a complete literature review about the utilization of Beryllium in nuclear reactors, providing the engineering teams with essential data to improve the design of future reactor units.

Description

The results provided by this internship will support the design of a small modular LFR, where the employment of beryllium could be particularly beneficial in reducing the size of the systems.

The internship focuses on a bibliographic review about the possibility of employing beryllium as a reflector in LFRs, with specific interest on applications to small modular reactors in the fast neutron regime. In the literature, there are studies which show the impact in terms of reactivity of the (n,2n) reactions of beryllium, leading to systems with smaller critical dimensions [1]. The above mentioned feature is of particular interest for small modular reactors [2]. However, other studies show that beryllium is affected by severe issues in terms of neutron activation and gas production, making the disposal of systems employing beryllium an even more delicate task [3].

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Additionally, beryllium is characterized by quite high values of (γ ,n) cross sections at energies characteristic of fission product's γ radiation: it has been shown that the impact of photonuclear neutrons can be neglected for stationary states, but it has non-negligible effects on the kinetics of the reactor [4, 5]. The presence of lead, which has a strong shielding effect against photons, could possibly alleviate the magnitude of these phenomena.

The student will have to find several references in the literature in order to understand if the advantages of using beryllium in fast fission reactors are supported by physical and engineering considerations, taking into account all the pros and the cons of employing such a nuclide and analysing its behaviour in the presence of lead.

During the internship, the student will have to collect as many data as possible, with the aim of providing valuable information about the possible use of beryllium in the design of a small modular LFR, supporting the design of this nuclear system. At the end of the internship, the student will write a technical report summarizing all the main findings of the bibliographic review. The student will be followed by the Codes and Methods group members of newcleo.

Work plan

During the internship, the student will need to perform a detailed bibliographic review in order to conclude if the use of beryllium can be beneficial in small modular LFRs, considering both aspects related to change in reactivity due to (n,2n) and (γ ,n) reactions, and to safety and radiological issues related to the presence of beryllium.

The student will examine significant topics concerning reactor physics of fast reactors. These include mainly theoretical and engineering aspects underlying the behaviour of neutrons and photons in the presence of beryllium and lead.

The expected working plan is detailed in the following:

- a) Literature review on beryllium behaviour in fast systems
- b) Literature review on fission systems employing beryllium
- c) Discussion of current core configurations
- d) Analysis of bibliographic references
- e) Preparation of a technical report

Applicant profile

Bachelor student in Nuclear Engineering, Applied Mathematics and Physics.

Background: fundamentals in reactor physics.

Required computer skills: Knowledge of L^AT_EX editing is appreciated.

References

- [1] P.K. Job and M. Srinivasan. Evaluation of reactivity bonus due to (n, 2n) multiplication in Be/BeO-reflected 233u uranyl nitrate solution systems. *Annals of Nuclear Energy*, 9(4):209–213, 1982.
- [2] A. Tomberlin T. *Beryllium-a unique material in nuclear applications*. Citeseer, 2004.

- [3] G. R. Longhurst, K. Tsuchiya, C. H. Dorn, S. L. Folkman, T. H. Fronk, M. Ishihara, H. Kawamura, T. N. Tranter, R. Rohe, M. Uchida, and E. Vidal and. Managing beryllium in nuclear facility applications. *Nuclear Technology*, 176(3):430–441, 2011.
- [4] Tsuyoshi Misawa, Seiji Shiroya, and Keiji Kanda and. Study on reactivity worth of beryllium by ($n,2n$) and (γ,n) reactions. *Nuclear Technology*, 116(1):9–18, 1996.
- [5] G. Hordósy, Andras Keresztúri, Cs. Hegedűs, and P. Vértes. Influence of the photoneutrons on the kinetics of beryllium reflected core of the budapest research reactor. 1998.

Refactoring and optimization of DASSH subchannel code

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June 20, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1009187)

Keywords — LMFR, Subchannel code, Python

Topics — Code development, heat transfer, thermal-hydraulics, numerical simulation

Location newcleo SpA, Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy

Starting date As soon as possible

Duration 6 months

Context

The accurate and fast prediction of thermal-hydraulic behavior of nuclear reactor cores is essential to support and speed up the design activities of Lead-cooled Fast Reactors (LFR). Subchannel codes play a key role in modeling coolant flow, pressure drop, and heat transfer phenomena both in single assemblies and at the core level. Among the others, DASSH ([1], [2], [3]) is a Python-based code originally developed at the Argonne National Laboratory (IL, USA). Currently, newcleo is actively developing it to expand its range of application to include the conditions in which its reactors operate. As the models used in DASSH become more complex, improving its computational performance together with its reliability, maintainability and readability has become a priority. The refactoring of the code is then under evaluation, including the possible use of faster compiled languages like Fortran 2018 or C++ to rewrite some critical sections of the code.

Description

DASSH is a Python-based subchannel code originally used for the steady-state thermal-hydraulic analysis of reactor cores, particularly in liquid metal-cooled fast reactors. The original version

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of the code, developed at the Argonne National Laboratory, is open-source and can be downloaded from <https://github.com/dassh-dev/dassh.git>. *newcleo* has forked the original repository (https://github.com/newcleo-dev-team/dassh_nc) to introduce new advanced features, to improve the code accuracy and to extend its application domain. Although Python ([4], [5]) ensures rapid development and code readability, it could introduce performance limitations when applied to large, computationally demanding problems.

The aim of this internship is to refactor from scratch DASSH code with the aim of improving its readability, maintainability and computational performance. After gathering a deep insight of the current architecture, the candidate will identify the portions of the code that significantly impact the code runtime. Following this diagnostic phase, optimization strategies will be considered and implemented. These may include:

- integration with modules written in C++ or Fortran 2018, that will substitute the computationally most expensive portions of the code;
- adoption of parallelization techniques whenever useful;
- refactoring of some of the already existing Python classes.

During the implementation phase, it will be necessary to ensure that any optimization does not affect the accuracy of the original code, thus updating and/or integrating the test suite accordingly. The refactoring activity will include also the setup of the automatic documentation framework, with the aim of limiting as much as possible any inconsistency between the base code and its manual.

The activity will be carried out under the supervision of the Codes and Methods team at *newcleo*.

Work plan

- a) Analysis of the original code architecture and identification of the most critical sections.
- b) Definition of a more suitable code architecture.
- c) Code implementation.
- d) Update and integration of the test suite, possibly exploiting CI/CD pipelines.
- e) Setup of the automatic documentation framework.
- f) Preparation of a technical report.

Applicant profile

Master student in Industrial Engineering, Computer Engineering or Computer Science.

Skills and background:

- Basic knowledge of object-oriented software programming (Python, Fortran 2018, C/C++);
- Basic knowledge of Linux OS;
- Fundamentals in thermo-fluid dynamics and numerical simulations (appreciated, but not fundamental).

Nice to have: experience using Git and L^AT_EX. Basic knowledge of liquid metal-cooled fast reactors.

References

- [1] Milos Atz, Micheal Smith, and Florent Heidet. Dassh software for ducted assembly thermal hydraulics calculations - overview and benchmark. 2020.
- [2] Milos Atz, Micheal A. Smith, and Florent Heidet. *Ducted Assembly Steady State Heat Transfer Software (DASSH) - Theory Manual*. ANL/NSE-21/33, Argonne National Laboratory, 2021.
- [3] Milos Atz, Micheal A. Smith, and Florent Heidet. *Ducted Assembly Steady State Heat Transfer Software (DASSH) - User Guide*. ANL/NSE-21/34, Argonne National Laboratory, 2021.
- [4] Lutz Mark. *Learning Python: Powerful Object-Oriented Programming*. O'Reilly Media, Sebastopol, USA, 5 edition, 2013.
- [5] Giridhar Chetan. *Learning Python Design Patterns*. Packt Publishing, Birmingham - Mumbai, 2 edition, 2016.

Development of a Serpent 2 Monte Carlo model of the TAPIRO reactor and assessment of the sensitivity analysis capabilities of the code in the framework of shielding design

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June 20, 2025

– *Internship proposal* –
(ID No. 1009324)

Keywords — Shielding, Monte Carlo, sensitivity analysis

Topics — Numerical modelling, neutronic systems.

Location newcleo S.p.A. – Via Galliano 27, 10129 Torino, Italy; University of La Sapienza
- Piazzale Aldo Moro 5, 00185 Rome, Italy.

Starting date July, 2025.

Duration 6 months. The period in each location will be defined.

Context

newcleo is designing new Lead-cooled Fast Reactor (LFR) units for small and modular reactors using MOx fuel. In this type of compact fast reactors, shielding components (e.g. the steam generator) from high neutron fluxes coming from the core is of primary importance in order to avoid phenomena related to neutron activation and material degradation. Shielding optimization and development is therefore one of the main challenges associated with this type of innovative systems.

The fast spectrum reactor TAPIRO, located in ENEA – Casaccia, is an irradiation facility that can be used to perform tests on possible shielding configurations. As the experimental activity is by its own nature limited, computational methods to assist in the development of optimized shielding configurations represent a powerful tool in the design phase.

Within this context, the goal of the internship is to develop a Monte Carlo model of the TAPIRO reactor using Serpent 2 with two main objectives:

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- Explore, assess and apply to the problem of optimized shield design the sensitivity analysis capabilities based on the General Perturbation Theory (GPT) recently implemented in Serpent 2;
- Perform comparisons in some specific cases with the OpenMC TAPIRO model internally developed in newcleo.

Description

Neutron activation is one of the main sources of concern in the development of a lead cooled reactor. This is mainly due to the behaviour of lead, which is a very effective material at diffusing neutrons rather than absorbing them. This aspect, combined with the small size of the reactor, creates difficult conditions for radiation shielding, as the limited space requires innovative solutions to decrease the neutron flux impacting on supporting structures. Lowering the neutron flux limits irradiation damage to the structures and limits activation, which is beneficial in terms of both maintenance activities and future decommissioning.

The TAPIRO reactor is a fast spectrum research facility located in ENEA – Casaccia. It is considered a valuable asset, as it is one of the few research reactors with a fast spectrum that could, under certain circumstances, mimic the irradiation conditions of the newcleo LFR. For this reason, it could be used to test shielding components and assess their effectiveness in attenuating the neutron flux. Figure 1 provides a view of the TAPIRO reactor in ENEA - Casaccia.

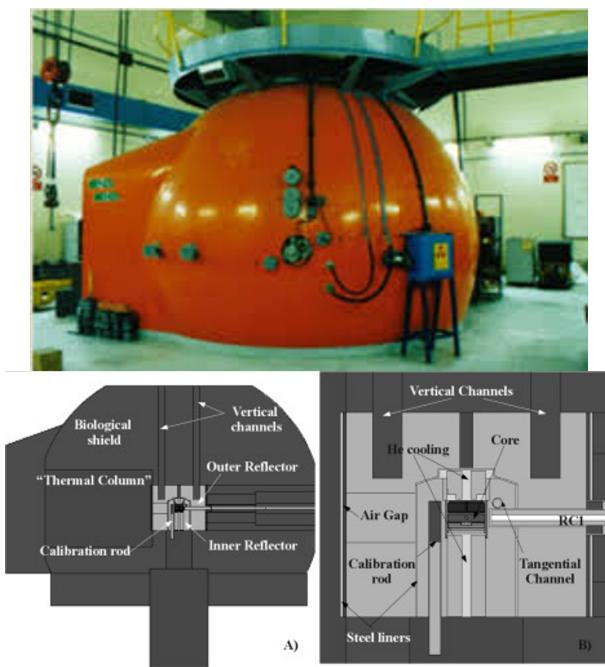


Figure 1: The TAPIRO reactor.

The first phase of this activity envisions the study of the Monte Carlo code Serpent 2 [1]. In the second phase, the student should familiarize with the General Perturbation Theory (GPT) [2] and its implementation in the code [3, 4].

The GPT is a general methodology that applied to a problem allows to assess the effect of small perturbations on input parameters. In the context of neutron shielding design it could be used as an optimization tool, assessing the effect of small modifications on inputs such as the material density or the shield thickness. For these reasons, special attention should be dedicated to the evaluation of sensitivity coefficients to assess the effect of these latter parameters and, more in general, reaction rates (e.g. capture, tritium production).

In the third phase of the internship, the student should develop a Serpent 2 model of the TAPIRO [5, 6] reactor. Some comparison with the OpenMC model developed internally in newcleo will be performed to ensure that the model works as expected.

Finally, the student should test the sensitivity analysis capabilities of Serpent 2 in the model developed, and perform some preliminary tests on proposed shielding configurations.

Work plan

The proposed workplan for the internship is the following:

- a) Familiarization with the Serpent 2 Monte Carlo code;
- b) Review of the GPT theory and its implementation inside Serpent 2;
- c) Assessment of the sensitivity analysis capabilities of Serpent 2 in the framework of shield design;
- d) Development of a Serpent 2 model of the TAPIRO reactor;
- e) Comparison of some results to the ones of the OpenMC model of TAPIRO internally developed in newcleo;
- f) Application of the sensitivity analysis capabilities of Serpent 2 in the developed model to some proposed shielding configurations;
- g) Analysis and interpretation of the results;
- h) Preparation of a technical report.

Applicant profile

Master or PhD student in Nuclear, Mechanical or Aeronautical Engineering; Applied Mathematics and Physics.

Background: Knowledge in nuclear reactor physics and scientific computing.

Required computer skills: Python programming, linux OS; L^AT_EX scientific editing (optional).

References

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