

Capacitance-Voltage (C-V) characteristics of a solar cell

Aim: The C-V measurement experiment of a solar cell is to study how the junction capacitance varies with applied reverse bias and to estimate the doping density as well as the built-in potential.

Theory: When a p-n junction is reverse biased, uncompensated acceptor ions in the p- side of the junction and an equal number of ionized donors on the n- side of junction form the space charge region. Since there are no mobile carriers in this region, only the free carriers at the edge of the depletion region can respond to the externally applied ac field. The junction thus resembles a parallel plate capacitor, whose capacitance is specified as

$C = \left(\frac{dQ}{dV_{DC}} \right) = \frac{\epsilon_0 \epsilon_s A}{x_d}$ where Q is the charge, V_{DC} is the applied reverse bias voltage, ' ϵ_0 ' is the permittivity of free space and ' ϵ_s ' is the dielectric constant of the semiconductor, A is the area of the 'pn' junction. The depletion region width ' x_d ' of a reverse biased junction with a constant doping density ' N_d ' is given by

$$x_d = \left[\frac{2\epsilon_0 \epsilon_s (V_{bi} + V_{DC})}{qN_d} \right]^{1/2} \quad \text{--- --- 1}$$

V_{bi} is the built in voltage, q is charge or electron, From above two equations, one can write

$$\frac{1}{C^2} = \left[\frac{x_d}{\epsilon_0 \epsilon_s A} \right]^2 = \left[\frac{2(V_{bi} + V_{DC})}{qN_d \epsilon_0 \epsilon_s A^2} \right] \quad \text{--- --- 2}$$

In the above equation (2), V_{DC} is the reverse voltage. By plotting $1/C^2$ versus V_{DC} , doping density and built in potential can be determined.

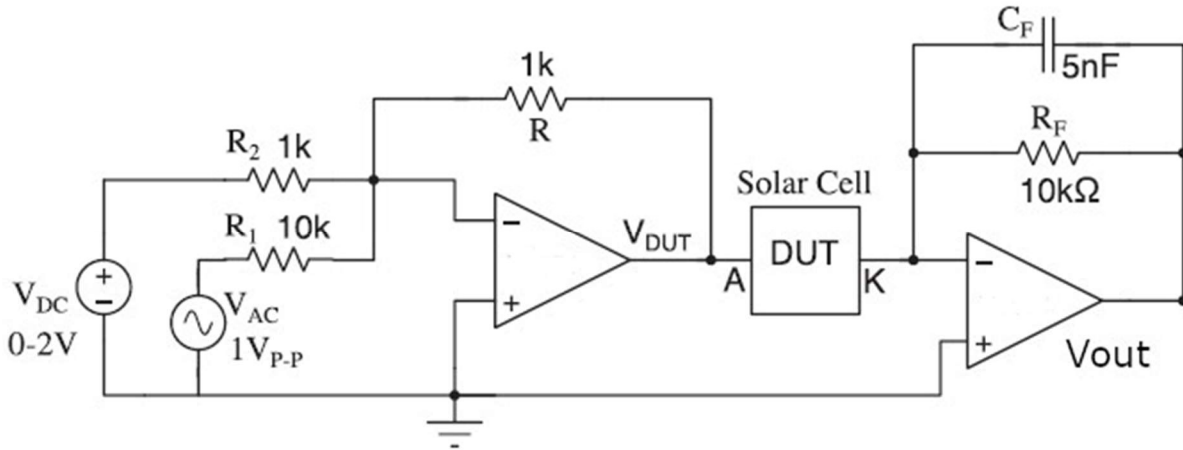


Fig.1 Circuit for CV measurement, where ‘A’ is anode and ‘K’ is cathode of solar cell(DUT), operational amplifier supply voltage connections are not shown in the picture

The capacitance of the solar cell (Device under test, DUT) depends strongly on the applied DC voltage. Since the experiment involves measurement of the C-V profile of the capacitor, the circuit must also be designed to apply an additional DC voltage across the capacitor (solar cell) that can be varied, while measuring the AC current to extract the capacitance. In our setup, we apply a variable DC bias and a small AC signal (small enough not to perturb DC bias and not affect the charge polarization due to the DC bias) to the DUT. This is accomplished by using a basic inverting summing amplifier that adds the variable DC voltage (with unity gain R/R_2) and the small signal AC voltage (with attenuation factor $1/10 = R/R_1$), the output voltage of which is then connected to the DUT. The voltage V_{DUT} in Fig. 1 is thus given by the following equation:

$$V_{DUT} = -R \left(\frac{V_{DC}}{R_2} + \frac{V_{AC}}{R_1} \right) \dots \dots \dots 3$$

The AC voltage amplitude across the DUT (solar cell) is thus one tenth of the applied input DC voltage (smaller AC voltage can also be applied but we are limited by the sensitivity of our measuring instrument). One end (Anode, A) of the solar cell is connected to the output of the summing circuit while the other end (cathode, K) is virtually grounded due to negative feedback in the op-amp circuit. Current through a capacitor is proportional to the applied AC sinusoidal voltage. We use a trans-

impedance amplifier (I to V converter) so that the current flowing through the capacitor is converted into voltage. The transimpedance amplifier generates a voltage output that is proportional to the DUT capacitance (C_{DUT}) and V_{DUT} . The magnitude of the **AC component of output voltage** is given by following equation:

$$V_{out} = V_{DUT} \frac{C_{DUT}}{C_F} \frac{1}{\sqrt{1 + \frac{1}{(\omega R_F C_F)^2}}} \dots \dots \dots 4$$

Procedure:

1. 741 opamps are used to realize the circuit in Fig.1.
2. Check for the datasheet of 741 opamp on internet or advanced electronics lab manual, connect the power supply, make either non inverting configuration or inverting configuration as done in LABI(A) of advanced electronics lab and check both the given 741 opamps are working.
3. After confirming that 741 opamps are functioning, make the complete circuit as shown in Fig.1. on breadboard.
4. At very low frequencies (0.1 to 10 Hz) operational amplifiers exhibit 1/f noise but for fast operational amplifiers it can be up to 2 kHz (what is the meaning of fast operational amplifier?), therefore, high frequencies are appropriate. Choose 5 kHz sine wave in the function generator.
5. Applying AC voltage using function generator, Vary the DC voltage using DC power supply from 0 to 1.5 V in steps (positive supply from DC voltage will reverse bias solar cell in this case, why?) and record the $V_{out}(AC)$ and V_{DUT} using separate multimeters. Derive equation 4. Using Equation 4, calculate C_{DUT} .
6. Plot $C_{DUT}-V_{DC}$. Estimate $1/C_{DUT}^2$ for reverse bias voltages and plot $1/C^2$ to extract V_{bi} and doping density. Choose the linear region in the plot of $1/C^2$ versus V_{DC} .
7. Perform the experiment in dark condition (by covering the solar cell with a black sheet or keeping inside the table draw) and you may try the same experiment with ambient light.

Note: Dielectric constant of Silicon (material of the solar cell) is 11.7, Area is the complete area of the given solar cell.

Table 1. Measurement of output voltage with reverse bias voltage for solar cell in different conditions

V_{DC}	V_{out} (dark)	V_{out} (with light)

References:

1. American Journal of Physics 86, 787 (2018); doi: 10.1119/1.5052360
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