Galaxies by the Millions

NASA's Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope will have the power to collect an unprecedented volume of high-resolution near-infrared imaging and spectroscopic observations of galaxies across vast fields of view and spans of time, providing the large data sets needed to understand how different types of galaxies form, grow, interact with their environments, and evolve over time.

Galaxy Formation and Evolution

Roman will enable observations of hundreds of millions of galaxies at numerous stages of development, providing imaging and spectroscopy required to build a clear and detailed picture of how different types of galaxies form and evolve. Roman will provide:

- Large data sets with homogenous observing conditions needed to identify statistically significant correlations between various galaxy properties as a function of mass, environment, and redshift
- Potential Extragalactic Wide Area Survey (High-Latitude Survey) covering ~2,000 deg² with NIR imaging and spectroscopy over the same fields of view
  - Imaging depth (5σ) of 26.9, 26.95, 26.9, and 26.25 in Y, J, H, and F184 filters
  - Grism (1.00–1.93 µm) spectroscopy depth of 1.0 × 10⁻¹⁶ ergs/s/cm² at 1.80 µm (5σ)
  - Estimated detection rate of 27 million galaxies per month, with a total of more than one billion galaxies over the full survey
- Immediate open access to all mission data via the Mikulski Archives for Space Telescopes (MAST), and funding opportunities for new observations and archival research programs

With its 0.11” resolution, two sitall spectroscopy modes covering 0.75–1.93 µm, and survey speeds 100–1000× Hubble, Roman will provide the large datasets needed for unprecedented statistical analysis of galaxy populations and evolutionary relationships across multi-dimensional parameter space. Roman will enable:

- Extragalactic surveys for measurements of redshift, luminosity, color, size, shape, clumpiness, and clustering from 10⁴–10⁶ galaxies over the mission lifetime
- Grism observations to provide robust spectroscopic redshifts for >100 million galaxies, and to create spatially resolved maps of Hα surface brightness, dust extinction, mass-to-light ratio, and metallicity at ~1 kpc resolution
- Detection of ~14 million Hα galaxies at 1 < z < 1.9, and 1.5–2.0 million [OIII] galaxies at z = 1.8–2.8 (up to z = 4.2 with SFR >200 M☉/yr)
- Modeling of spectral energy distributions, including spectral lines from grism spectra, to measure SFR, stellar mass, dust extinction, mass-to-light ratio, and metallicity
- Detection of 10⁴ galaxy-galaxy strong lenses (~10/deg²) for mass density profile models of luminous and dark matter in foreground galaxies of z = 1–2 and M* = 10⁹–10¹² M☉

Galaxy Properties

Overlay of a simulated Roman grism image (green) of sources <25 AB mag on a section of a two-color CANDELS GOODS-S field image taken with the HST in F160W (red) and F606W (blue). (Swaro Ravindranath, STScI)

Roman will facilitate a more complete census of black holes, quasars, and AGN, and a more comprehensive understanding of the coevolution of supermassive black holes and their host galaxies. Roman will enable:

- Surveys with the potential to reveal the mass of accreting black holes at peak growth of z = 2–7, as well as the clustering and properties of their host galaxies
- Studies of the effects of black hole accretion on the growth of galaxies via feedback mechanisms at 1 < z < 7
- Investigations of the AGN/star-formation relationship in the most massive galaxies
- Characterization of differences in clustering amplitude of obscured and unobscured AGN to probe AGN unification scenarios and possible correlations with galaxy evolution
- Discovery of ~2600 quasars at z > 7 to track the assembly of 10⁸–M☉ black holes during the Epoch of Reionization
- Characterization of the faint end of the quasar luminosity function at z > 3–4
- Detection of strongly lensed quasars to map mass distribution of lensing systems, as well as properties of their host galaxies

Galaxies, Black Holes, and AGN

Galaxies and their Environments

Roman’s ability to capture vast swaths of the sky will provide insights into the relationships between galaxies and their environments over a wide range of scales, building a better understanding of how a galaxy’s environment affects its properties, growth, and evolution. Roman will make it possible to:

- Test models of galaxy evolution by measuring clustering as a function of galaxy properties
- Survey galaxies at \( z = 1–2 \) and combine grism redshift data with weak-lensing imaging data to create the densest map of structure on linear scales of 11–12 Mpc
- Investigate links between galaxies, AGN and supernova feedback mechanisms, and dark matter halos at \( z > 1 \) as a function of galaxy mass
- Detect dwarf galaxies in large enough numbers to provide constraints on dark matter models and compare to cosmological simulations
- Map substructure in galaxies’ stellar halos to track past accretion history
- Survey galaxy groups and clusters to identify environmental influences on galaxy properties
- Use strong and weak gravitational lensing to map dark matter on spatial scales of 10–50 kpc within galaxy clusters to compare to simulated dark matter profiles from cosmological models and better understand interactions between mass components in merging/colliding clusters

Roman’s unique combination of near-infrared sensitivity, high resolution, and extreme survey speed will dramatically increase our sample of galaxies and quasars in the early universe, providing the data needed to revolutionize our understanding of early star formation, the Epoch of Reionization, and the early structure of the universe. Roman will enable:

- Potential Extragalactic Wide-Area Survey with estimated detection of \( 2.8 \times 10^5 \) galaxies of ≤26.5 mag at \( z = 8 \); \( 7.5 \times 10^4 \) galaxies at \( z = 9 \); and \( 1.9 \times 10^4 \) galaxies at \( z = 10 \)
- Discovery of high-\( z \) Ly-\( \alpha \) emitting galaxies (8 < \( z < 15 \)), Lyman-break galaxies, AGN, and quasars to determine their luminosity functions and investigate their impact on cosmological reionization
- Detection of Ly-\( \alpha \) and H\( \alpha \) emission features to constrain SFR, amount of ionizing radiation, and escape fraction from the neutral intergalactic medium, and to understand their impact on structure formation
- Treasury-scale observation programs with survey speeds \( 10^7–10^9 \times \) Hubble, including potential Roman Ultra Deep Field and Wide Deep Grism programs for probing galaxies in the early universe

High Redshift Galaxies

Footprint of an example Roman Ultra Deep Field (orange) compared to the Hubble Ultra Deep Field (blue), and wider, shallower Hubble observations (white) (NASA, ESA, DSS, and Anton M. Koekemoer, STScI)

Synergies

Wavelength range of select space and ground-based observatories to complement Roman in the 2020s (A. James, P. Jeffries, STScI)

Learn more about the Roman Space Telescope
STScI website: www.stsci.edu/roman
Mission/partner websites: www.stsci.edu/roman/about.html#Partners
For more about how Roman will explore the universe, see www.stsci.edu/roman/documentation

Previously known as the Wide Field Infrared Survey Telescope (WFIRST), the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope was named in May 2020 in honor of NASA’s first Chief of Astronomy.

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