On the Optical-to-Silicate Extinction Ratio
as a Probe of the Dust Size in Active Galactic Nuclei

Zhenzhen Shao¹, Biwei Jiang¹, and Aigen Li²

¹. Beijing Normal University, 2. University of Missouri

Dust plays a central role in the unification theory of active galactic nuclei (AGNs). Whether the dust that forms the torus around an AGN is tenth micron-sized like interstellar grains or much larger has a profound impact on correcting for the obscuration of the dust torus to recover the intrinsic spectrum and luminosity of the AGN. Here we show that the ratio of the optical extinction in the visual band (A_V) to the optical depth of the 9.7μm silicate absorption feature (A_V/Δτ_{sil}) could potentially be an effective probe of the dust size. The anomalously lower ratio of A_V/Δτ_{sil}~5.5 of AGNs compared to that of the Galactic diffuse interstellar medium of A_V/Δτ_{sil}~18 (Roche & Aitken 1984) reveals that the dust in AGN torus is substantially larger than the interstellar grains of the Milky Way and of the Small Magellanic Cloud, and therefore, one expects a flat extinction curve for AGNs.