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1Washington & Jefferson College, Washington, Pennsylvania 15301, USA
2Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213, USA
3Siena College, Loudonville, New York 12220, USA
4Argonne National Laboratory, Argonne, Illinois 60439, USA
5California State University, Dominguez Hills, Carson, California 90747, USA
6Canisius College, Buffalo, New York 14208, USA
7Cathlic University of America, Washington, D.C., 20064, USA
8Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia 23606, USA
9CEA, Centre de Saclay, Irfu/Service de Physique Nucléaire, 91919 Gif-sur-Yvette, France
10University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut 06269, USA
11University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611, USA
12Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida 32306, USA
13The George Washington University, Washington, D.C., 20052, USA
14Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho 83209, USA
15INFN, Sezione di Ferrara, 44100 Ferrara, Italy
16INFN, Laboratori Nazionali di Frascati, 00044 Frascati, Italy
17INFN, Sezione di Genova, 16146 Genova, Italy
18INFN, Sezione di Roma Tor Vergata, 00133 Rome, Italy
19INFN, Sezione di Torino, 10125 Torino, Italy
20INFN, Sezione di Trieste, 34127 Trieste, Italy
21Institut de Physique Nucléaire, CNRS/IN2P3 and Université Paris Sud, Orsay, France
22Institute of Theoretical and Experimental Physics, Moscow, 117259, Russia
23James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807, USA
24Kyungpook National University, Daegu 702-701, Republic of Korea
25University of New Hampshire, Durham, New Hampshire 03824, USA
26Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia 23504, USA
27Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA
28Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia 23529, USA
29Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York 12180-3590, USA
30University of Richmond, Richmond, Virginia 23173, USA
31Universita’ di Roma Tor Vergata, 00133 Rome, Italy
32Skobeltsyn Institute of Nuclear Physics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, 119234 Moscow, Russia
33University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina 29208, USA
34Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19122, USA
35Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility, Newport News, Virginia 23606, USA
36Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario K9L 8J4, Canada
37Universidade Federal de Ouro Preto, Ouro Preto, MG, Brazil
38Universita degli Studi di Roma ‘La Sapienza’, 00185 Rome, Italy
39University of Salzburg, 5020 Salzburg, Austria
40Upsaala University, Upsala, Sweden
41University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia 22903, USA
42Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia 23284, USA
43Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia 24061, USA
44Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina 27109, USA
45Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri 63130, USA
46Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan 48202, USA
47Western University, London, Ontario N6A 5B7, Canada
48Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, Massachusetts 01609, USA
49Xiamen University, Xiamen 361005, China
50University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin 53706, USA
51Xi’an Jiaotong University, Xi’an 710049, China
52Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06520, USA
53Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio 44555, USA
54Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut 06520, USA

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We present a search for ten baryon number violating decay modes of Λ hyperons using the CLAS detector at Jefferson Laboratory. Nine of these decay modes result in a single meson and single lepton in the final state (Λ → meℓ) and conserve either the sum or the difference of baryon and lepton number (B ± L). The tenth decay mode (Λ → pπ+) represents a difference in baryon number of two units and no difference in lepton number. We observe no significant signal and set upper limits on the branching fractions of these reactions in the range (4–200) × 10⁻⁷ at the 90% confidence level.


I. INTRODUCTION

The Standard Model (SM) of particle physics [1–3] has had great success in interpreting and predicting experimental results since its conception in the late 1960s. There are, however, features of our Universe that are inconsistent with the SM framework. Astronomical observations suggest that our Universe is dominated by matter over antimatter [4,5]. Sakharov proposed in 1967 that this asymmetry suggests fundamental interactions that violate CP symmetry and baryon number conservation [6]. The observed quark-sector CP violation, combined with baryon number violating (BNV) processes that are allowed by the Standard Model, are insufficient [7] to account for the observed matter-antimatter asymmetry in our Universe. A possible explanation for this discrepancy is that there are yet-unobserved interactions that violate baryon number conservation.

Baryon number violating reactions are features of several theoretical extensions to the Standard Model, perhaps most notably the SU(5) Grand Unified Theory (GUT) of Georgi and Glashow [8]. SU(5) being the larger gauge group in which the Standard Model’s SU(3) × SU(2) are embedded [9]. The SU(5) theory proposes the existence of two new gauge bosons, the X and Y leptoquarks, so called because they allow vertices such as q → Xℓ, where q is a quark and ℓ a lepton. Other experiments have been performed to search for BNV processes in decays of the nucleon [10–12], τ leptons [13–15], top quarks [16], hadrons with bottom and charm quarks [17,18], and the Z boson [19], but no signal has yet been observed. The most stringent limits on such processes come from nucleon decays, and these have been used to constrain BNV decays in higher-generation (i.e., c, b, and t) quarks [20]. However, multiple amplitudes can contribute to a given decay process, and these amplitudes can interfere either constructively or destructively, depending on their relative phases. The theoretical calculations that constrain these BNV processes do not take into account interference between the amplitudes due to the large parameter space. This allows for nonobservation in one mode (e.g., decays involving the u or d quark) while still being consistent with observable BNV processes in some other mode (e.g., coupling to another quark flavor).

Here we present a search for baryon number (B) and lepton number (L) nonconserving decays of the Λ hyperon as a direct probe of couplings of BNV interactions to the strange quark. By summing the branching fractions and experimental uncertainties (in quadrature) of the six observed Λ decay modes [12], we find the total branching fraction to be 1.001 ± 0.007, implying that there is room for yet-unobserved decay modes.

We investigated eight decay modes in which the Λ decays to a charged meson and a charged lepton, conserving charge in all decays. The meson is either a π± or K±, and the lepton is either an e± or an μ±. We produced the Λ by means of a photon beam incident on a liquid hydrogen target through the exclusive reaction γp → K±Λ. For these eight modes, we could completely reconstruct the three final-state particles. We also searched for the decay of a Λ to a K0, and a neutrino, which must be inferred from the missing momentum. Selection of these nine channels is motivated by searching for the decay of the Λ to a lighter pseudoscalar meson. In each case, the final-state lepton is included to preserve charge and angular momentum conservation. Thus, violation of L in these reactions is a consequence of B violation rather than a primary motivation.

In addition, we searched for the BNV decay of the Λ to an antiproton and a π+, for which we can completely

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*mmccracken@washjeff.edu

†Present address: Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility, Newport News, VA 23606, USA.

‡Present address: Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287, USA.

§Present address: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, USA.

∥Present address: Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility, Newport News, VA 23606, USA.

¶Present address: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, USA.

#mmccracken@washjeff.edu

††Present address: Edinburgh University, Edinburgh EH9 3JZ, United Kingdom

‡‡Present address: Edinburgh University, Edinburgh EH9 3JZ, United Kingdom

§§Present address: Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287, USA.

∥∥Present address: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, USA.

‡‡‡Present address: Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility, Newport News, VA 23606, USA.

§§§Present address: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, USA.

∥∥∥Present address: Edinburgh University, Edinburgh EH9 3JZ, United Kingdom

‡‡‡‡Present address: Edinburgh University, Edinburgh EH9 3JZ, United Kingdom

§§§§Present address: Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287, USA.

∥∥∥∥Present address: Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA 23529, USA.
A. Analysis overview

This analysis was performed in three stages. Here, we present a brief outline; details of each stage will be given in the following sections.

Λ identification. To assess the sensitivity of our study, we first determined the number of Λ hyperons produced during the run period. We did so by considering the charged decay mode, Λ → pπ−. We applied a set of simple cuts on kinematic observables and timing for the recoil K+ to effectively identify potential Λ events. We used this sample to determine the total number of γp → K+Λ → K+π− events detected and then acceptance corrected to find the total number of γp → K+Λ → K+π− events produced during the run period.

TABLE I. Properties of conserved quantities for each Λ BNV channel. Here ℓ represents a lepton, either e or μ. The rightmost column shows the detected final-state particles for each channel. Subscripts denote recoil (r) or decay (d) kaons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decay</th>
<th>ΔB</th>
<th>ΔL</th>
<th>(ΔB−ΔL)</th>
<th>Detected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Λ → K+ℓ−</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>K+0, K+1, ℓ−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λ → K−ℓ+</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>K−0, K−1, ℓ+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λ → π+ℓ−</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>K+0, π+, ℓ−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λ → π−ℓ+</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>K−0, π−, ℓ+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λ → K0SL, K0Sd</td>
<td>−1</td>
<td>±1</td>
<td>0, −2</td>
<td>K+0, π+, π−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Λ → ¯pπ+</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>−2</td>
<td>K+0, ¯p, π+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Channel-specific tuning. When searching for evidence of the BNV decays listed in Table I, we performed a blind search. We developed a set of background separation cuts for each BNV channel, based on timing information for all charged final-state particles and kinematic observables for the event. In developing these cuts, we balanced the optimization of kinematic cuts for both discovery and upper-limit sensitivity by maximizing a figure of merit (approximately the BNV signal efficiency divided by the square root of the number of background events). We assessed the signal efficiency using a Monte Carlo technique and the background size using sidebands of the blinded signal region. This step provided a set of cuts for each BNV channel that reduced background and provides optimal analysis power.

Unblinding. We then unblinded the signal regions of kinematic variable plots and determined whether a signal was present. For nine of the decays, the expected backgrounds were 0 or 1 event, and so we used the Feldman-Cousins method [27] to determine upper bounds on branching fractions; for the remaining channel, the backgrounds were higher, and so we scanned the relevant parameters in our fit to determine the 90% coverage for the number of signal events in the data set.

II. CLAS DETECTOR AND DATA SET

The CLAS detector is described in detail elsewhere [28]. The data set comes from the g11 run period, which collected data during May and June 2004. A bremsstrahlung photon beam was produced by a 4.023-GeV electron beam incident on a gold radiator. Electrons were provided by Continuous Electron Beam Accelerator Facility in 2-ns bunches. Photon energy and timing information were provided by a tagging spectrometer which directs the electrons after the radiator through a magnetic field and onto a set of scintillators, providing photon energy resolution of 4.0 MeV.

For this analysis, we made use of the CLAS drift chamber and toroidal magnet systems to measure the momenta of the charged final-state particles. Velocity measurements were made by a start counter (consisting of scintillators placed within 11.6 cm of the target) and a set of time-of-flight (TOF) scintillators located approximately 4 m from the target. Timing information from the photon tagger was combined with this system to calculate a velocity for each charged track, and this was compared with the particle hypothesis in the particle identification (PID) algorithm. More details of the g11 data set, calibration procedures, and systematic studies can be found in (e.g.) Ref. [29].

III. IDENTIFICATION OF γp → K+Λ → K+π− EVENTS

To compare the branching fraction for a BNV decay mode to that of the Standard Model Λ → pπ− decay, we first had to assess the number of Standard Model decays that occurred during the data-taking period. We did so by
Because a different set of background separation cuts was applied to the BNV channels, we corrected the number of reconstructed signal events \(N_{\text{rec}}\) to find \(N_{\text{prod}}\), the number of \(\gamma p \rightarrow K^+\Lambda \rightarrow K^+p\pi^-\) events that were produced in CLAS during the run period. To calculate the efficiency of the detector and analysis cuts, we generated \(3 \times 10^6\) Monte Carlo (MC) \(\gamma p \rightarrow K^+\Lambda\) events and weighted the distribution of these events in \(\cos \theta_{\text{CM}}^K\) (the \(K^+\) production angle in the center-of-mass frame) according to published \(d\sigma/d\cos \theta\) data [29]. Photon energies between 0.909 (threshold for \(K^+\Lambda\) production) and 3.860 GeV (the upper limit of the photon tagger during data taking) were generated from a bremsstrahlung spectrum given incident electrons of energy 4.023 GeV (matching the g11 run conditions). We then used the collaboration-standard GEANT-based [30] software suite (GSIM) to model the CLAS acceptance, allowing GEANT to produce the \(\Lambda \rightarrow p\pi^-\) decay according only to phase space constraints.

We began the data reduction by selecting from the data set all events in which three reconstructed final-state tracks, two of positive charge and one of negative charge, were coincident with a tagged photon. To each event, we assigned the mass hypothesis consistent with \(K^+, p, \) and \(\pi^-\) final-state particles, selecting the permutation of positive tracks as that with the value of the invariant mass of the \(p\) and \(\pi^-\) candidate tracks, \(INV(p, \pi^-)\), closest to the nominal \(\Lambda\) mass. We then applied a loose cut on the square of the total missing mass, \(MM^2\) of each event, keeping events for which \(MM^2 \in [-0.002, 0.0005]\) GeV\(^2/c^4\).

![FIG. 1](color online). \(\Delta t_{\text{of}}\) vs momentum \((p)\) for \(K^+\) candidate tracks for data (top) and MC (bottom) that pass the cut on \(MM^2\). The red curves show the upper and lower bounds of the \(K^+\) PID cuts. Several additional structures are apparent in data distribution. The band of events with \(\Delta t_{\text{of}} \gtrsim 1\) ns represents \(\mu^+\) from \(K^+\) decay, that with \(\Delta t_{\text{of}} \lesssim 1\) ns represents protons, and the less populated bands represent events matched with photons from a different 2-ns beam bunch. The majority of these are removed by further cuts.
To the hypothetical $K^+$ track, we applied a PID cut based on timing and momentum information from CLAS. CLAS measures the time of flight, $\text{tof}_m$, i.e., the time elapsed between the primary event vertex and the track’s triggering of the TOF scintillators. We also calculated a hypothetical time of flight, $\text{tof}_h$, based on our mass hypothesis and tracking information,

$$\text{tof}_h = \frac{d}{\beta c} = \frac{d}{c} \left[ 1 + \frac{m_h^2 c^2}{p^2} \right]^{\frac{1}{2}},$$

(1)

where $p$ is the track’s momentum (determined by its curvature through the magnetic field of CLAS), $\beta$ is related to the track’s velocity (determined from tracking and timing information), $\beta = v/c$, $m_h$ is the hypothetical mass for the track ($493.7 \text{ MeV}/c^2$ for the $K^+$), $d$ is the path length of the track from the vertex to the TOF system, and $c$ is the speed of light. This PID cut (and later cuts) is based on the difference of these two quantities,

$$\Delta \text{tof} = \text{tof}_h - \text{tof}_m.$$

(2)

In the case where the mass hypothesis is correct, we expect the measured and hypothetical $\text{tof}$ to be roughly identical (modulo timing resolution), and thus $\Delta \text{tof} \approx 0$. If the hypothetical mass is greater (less) than the particle’s actual mass, then we expect the $\Delta \text{tof}$ to be greater (less) than zero. We found that a suitable separation of $K^+$ candidate tracks from non-$K^+$ tracks was achieved by a two-dimensional cut, keeping events for which

$$|\Delta \text{tof}| \leq (1.8 \text{ ns}) \exp \left( -\frac{p}{1 \text{ GeV}/c} \right) + 0.15 \text{ ns}.$$  

(3)

The $\Delta \text{tof}$ vs $|\vec{p}|$ plane for signal Monte Carlo events is shown in Fig. 1.

We then made a further cut on the missing mass off of the $K^+$,

$$MM(K^+) \equiv (p_\gamma + p_t - p_K)^2,$$

(4)

where $p_\gamma$, $p_t$, and $p_K$ are the 4-momenta of the incident photon, target proton, and recoil $K^+$, respectively. We kept events for which $MM(K^+)$ was in the range $[1.05 \text{ GeV}, 1.165 \text{ GeV}]$. In addition to nonstrange backgrounds, this cut removed contamination from photoproduction of higher-mass hyperons that include $\Lambda$ in their decay chain (predominantly $\gamma p \to K^+\Sigma^0 \to K^+\gamma\Lambda$). We also applied geometrical fiducial cuts, omitting events from regions of the detector for which our simulation is inaccurate. After all cuts, we found that data and MC distributions were quite similar, as shown in Fig. 2.

After these cuts, we identified the signal events by inspecting a histogram of $\text{INV}(p, \pi^-)$. Figure 3 shows that this distribution is exceptionally clean. We modeled these data with a third-order polynomial for background processes and a double Gaussian for signal processes. We then extracted the number of signal events by taking the excess of the data histogram above the background function in all of the histogram bins within 0.015 GeV$/c^2$ of the nominal $\Lambda$ mass, yielding $N_{\text{rec}} = 1.861 \times 10^6$ reconstructed $\Lambda \to p\pi^-$ signal events. Because the shape and magnitude of the background and the magnitude of the signal are dependent on kinematics, we vetted the above estimate by separating the data into ten bins in $\cos \theta_{\text{cm}}$ and performing the fit in each bin. This method again yielded an estimate of $N_{\text{rec}} = 1.861 \times 10^6$.
A. Acceptance correction

With the number of reconstructed $\gamma p \rightarrow K^+\Lambda \rightarrow K^+ p \pi^-$ events in hand, we could then correct for the effects of the detector’s acceptance and the efficiency of our analysis cuts to estimate $N_{\text{prod}}$. We began by applying the cuts described above to the Standard Model MC. Because the generation of MC events matched the data in photon energy distribution and kinematics, we separated the data and MC coarsely into ten bins in $\cos \theta_{cm}^K$. In each bin, we calculated the acceptance $e_{\text{prod}}(\cos \theta_{cm}^K)$ by simply dividing the number of MC events that passed CLAS simulation and acceptance cuts by the total number of MC events generated. We used this factor to determine the number of $K^+\Lambda \rightarrow K^+ p \pi^-$ events produced during the run in each $\cos \theta_{cm}^K$ bin and completed the calculation by summing over the angular bins:

$$N_{\text{prod}} = \sum_{\cos \theta_{cm}^K} N_{\text{sec}}(\cos \theta_{cm}^K) e_{\text{prod}}(\cos \theta_{cm}^K)$$  
$$= 3.71 \times 10^7.$$  

IV. BNV CANDIDATE SELECTION AND OPTIMIZATION

Because of the sensitive nature of the probability of BNV discovery, we pursued a blind analysis. For each of the BNV $\Lambda \rightarrow AB$ decay modes under investigation (see Table I), we tuned a set of cuts, $C$, using the kinematic quantities $MM(K^+)$, $INV(A, B)$, and $MM^2$, as well as the timing information for $A$ and $B$. As before with the Standard Model $\Lambda$ decay, we identified the BNV signal using the $INV(A, B)$ spectrum (except for the $\Lambda \rightarrow K^0\nu$ channel described below). In tuning each set of cuts, we tried to strike a balance between reducing the large number of nonsignal events and maintaining acceptance for a potentially small BNV signal.

Punzi [31] has proposed a figure of merit for performing such optimizations, which has been used in several other searches for rare reactions. For a set of cuts $C$, the Punzi figure of merit, $P(C)$, is defined as

$$P(C) = \frac{\epsilon(C)}{b^2 + 2a\sqrt{B(C)} + b\sqrt{b^2 + 4a\sqrt{B(C)}} + 4B(C)},$$  

where $\epsilon(C)$ is the efficiency of the cuts when applied to signal, $B(C)$ is the number of background events passing cuts $C$, and $a$ and $b$ are the number of standard deviations corresponding to the analysis-defined significance and statistical power. In this analysis, we chose $b = a = 4$, indicating a $4\sigma$ confidence level. With these choices, the figure of merit simplifies to

$$P(C) = \frac{\epsilon(C)}{16(2 + \sqrt{B(C)})}.\quad (8)$$

We tuned our cuts by simultaneously assessing $\epsilon(C)$ using MC BNV events and $B(C)$ from sidebands of the blinded signal region. In all plots that would identify any BNV signal [e.g., $INV(A, B)$], we blinded the signal region. We postponed the unblinding of the signal regions of all of our data plots until after the optimization of the analysis cuts, once we were confident that all cuts and systematic effects were understood.

For each BNV $\Lambda \rightarrow AB$ decay under investigation, we generated $10^6 \gamma p \rightarrow K^+\Lambda \rightarrow K^+AB$ Monte Carlo events, matching photon energies to the run conditions and $K^+\Lambda$ kinematics to the measured $d\sigma/d\cos \theta$ (as for the Standard Model MC). We generate kinematics for the $\Lambda \rightarrow AB$ decays according only to phase-space constraints. In the case of the $\Lambda \rightarrow K^0\nu$ reaction, the subsequent $K^0 \rightarrow \pi\pi$ decay was modeled by GEANT at the time of detector simulation.

For each channel, we chose the positive track mass hypothesis that yields a value of $INV(A, B)$ nearest to the nominal $\Lambda$ mass (as was done for the Standard Model analysis above). The analysis cuts for each channel began with a PID cut on $\Delta tof$ [see Eq. (2)] for each final-state particle. For each particle type, we applied a loose two-sided cut in the $\Delta tof$ vs $p$ plane, similar to that applied to the $K^+$ track for the SM decay. CLAS resolution allowed us to make these cuts loose; however, the characteristic decay length of $K^\pm$ is on the same order as the dimensions of CLAS, and the nontrivial fraction of $K^\pm$ that decay in the detector resulted in these cuts reducing the data sample by approximately half (depending on the number of charged kaons detected for each channel).

A. Example: $\Lambda \rightarrow \pi^+\mu^-$

Here, we demonstrate this process with the $\Lambda \rightarrow \pi^+\mu^-$ channel; other channels, with the exception of the $K^0\nu$ decay, were analyzed using the same observables.

For the three charged tracks in each event, we first decided which positive tracks correspond to the recoil $K^+$ and $\pi^+$. We made this assignment by calculating the invariant mass of each positive-negative track pair and choosing the assignment that gave a value nearest the nominal $\Lambda$ mass. We then applied PID cuts based on the $\Delta tof$ method to each of the three particles, the boundaries of which are shown in Fig. 4. These cuts are loose, and we have found that their efficiencies for each particle type are similar when applied to broader MC and data samples.

After the PID cuts were made, we turned to analysis cuts based on kinematic observables. For the $\Lambda \rightarrow \pi^+\mu^-$ channel, we made a symmetric cut on $MM^2$ (centered about 0 with width $w_1$) and $MM(K^+)$ (centered about 1.1186 GeV/$c^2$, with width $w_2$). To find the widths, $w_1$ and
these values to calculate ground events in the blinded signal region. We then used lists the properties of the optimal cuts for each channel. They are similar for all of the charged decay channels. Table II

The effects of detector acceptance and analysis cuts to determine the signal efficiency, \( w_2 \), which optimize the Punzi metric, we uniformly sampled 40 values for each width, resulting in 1600 distinct pairs with

\[
w_1 \in [0, 0.001] \text{ GeV}^2/c^4
\]

\[
w_2 \in [0, 0.03] \text{ GeV}/c^2.
\]

We applied these cuts to both signal MC and data and inspected the resulting \( \text{INV}(\pi^+, \mu^-) \) histograms with the signal region of the data histogram blinded. We defined the signal region to be values of \( \text{INV}(\pi^+, \mu^-) \) within 0.03 GeV/c\(^2\) of the nominal \( \Lambda \) mass (i.e., [1.086, 1.146] GeV/c\(^2\)) and the sideband regions to be within 0.15 GeV/c\(^2\) of the peak (excluding the signal region).

We then used the signal MC distributions before and after cuts to determine the signal efficiency, \( e(C) \). We applied a simple sideband technique to the data \( \text{INV}(\pi^+, \mu^-) \) histogram to extrapolate \( B(C) \), the expected number of background events in the blinded signal region. We then used these values to calculate \( \hat{P} \) for each width pair (see Fig. 5) and selected the width pair that maximizes \( \hat{P} \) as optimal. For the \( \Lambda \rightarrow \pi^+\mu^- \) channel, we found the optimal widths to be \( w_1 = 3.25 \times 10^{-4} \text{ GeV}^2/c^4 \) and \( w_2 = 9.00 \times 10^{-3} \text{ GeV}/c^2 \). The plots in Fig. 5 illustrate the resulting cuts and the blinded signal plot for this channel.

Figure 5 demonstrates that the optimal cut scheme for this channel is quite restrictive; only five data events populate the (blinded) \( \text{INV}(\pi^+, \mu^-) \) histogram, and none of these falls within the sideband regions. We thus estimated the expected number of background events in the signal region to be zero. By studying the signal MC for this channel, we estimated that the efficiency of these cuts, \( e(C) \), is 7.91% (including the effects of detector acceptance). The effects of detector acceptance and analysis cuts are similar for all of the charged decay channels. Table II lists the properties of the optimal cuts for each channel.

B. \( \Lambda \rightarrow \bar{p}\pi^+ \)

Our analysis of the \( \Lambda \rightarrow \bar{p}\pi^+ \) channel proceeded nearly identically to that of the charged \( \Lambda \rightarrow m^+c \) channels. We first assigned the positively charged track mass hypothesis by comparing \( \text{INV}(\bar{p}, \pi^+) \) for the two possible track permutations. We then applied a PID cut in the \( \Delta tof \) vs momentum plane for each particle. Threshold \( \bar{p} \) photoproduction via the process \( pp \rightarrow pp\bar{p} \) occurs at a photon energy of 3.751 GeV; the maximum tagged photon energy in our data set is 3.86 GeV. Unlike in the other charged decay channels where there are significant numbers of each particle type present in the data, the null hypothesis suggests that there should be relatively few antiprotons in the data set. As a result, we used a less restrictive PID cut for the antiproton, keeping events with \( \Delta tof \) between \(-1.8\) and 1.0 ns. Because of the absence of background reactions that produce \( \bar{p} \), this PID cut was the most stringent requirement in this channel. We optimized cuts on the \( MM^2 \) and \( MM(\Lambda^+) \) observables using the same method as for the \( \Lambda \rightarrow m^+c \) channels, yielding optimal cut widths of \( w_1 = 5.00 \times 10^{-4} \text{ GeV}^2/c^4 \) and \( w_2 = 4.25 \times 10^{-2} \text{ GeV}/c^2 \), respectively, and a signal efficiency of \( e = 4.98\% \).

C. \( \Lambda \rightarrow K^0\nu \)

In addition to the charged decay modes, we searched for the decay of \( \Lambda \rightarrow K^0\nu \), using the dominant charged decay mode \( K_S^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^- \). (Observation of the \( K^0 \rightarrow 2\pi \) selects \( K_S^0 \) rather than \( K_L^0 \).) Because of this reaction’s final-state neutrino, we do not have access to \( \text{INV}(K^0, \nu) \); thus, the analysis described for the charged decay modes is not appropriate for this channel. In addition, the unmeasured momentum of the \( \nu \) limited our analysis constraints, and we expected more background to pass the optimized cuts.

We began the background separation process by applying two-dimensional PID cuts based on \( \Delta tof \) and momentum to the charged final-state particles (recoil \( K^+ \) and the
π± from \( K^0 \) decay) similar to those for the \( \Lambda \rightarrow \pi^+ \mu^- \) channel (see Fig. 4). We then optimized a two-dimensional cut motivated by the particulars of this decay. The first is a symmetric cut on \( MM^2 \), centered at 0 (the mass of the \( \nu \) is negligible) with width \( w_1 \).

The second cut identifies \( \pi^\pm \) pairs that are produced from \( K^0 \) decay by inspecting the \( \pi^\pm \) opening angle, \( \theta^{\pi^\pm}_{\ell} \), in the c.m. frame,

\[
\theta^{\pi^\pm}_{\ell} = \cos^{-1} \left( \frac{\vec{p}_+ \cdot \vec{p}_-}{|\vec{p}_+||\vec{p}_-|} \right),
\]  

where \( \vec{p}_\pm \) are the momenta of the decay pions indexed by charge. Due to the breakup energy associated with the \( K^0 \rightarrow \pi^+ \pi^- \) decay, \( \theta^{\pi^\pm}_{\ell} \) is constrained to a narrow range for a given value of \( K^0 \) momentum. However, for \( \pi^+ \pi^- \) pairs that do not come from \( K^0 \) decay, we expected only the constraints associated with momentum conservation for the entire event, i.e., much less correlation between the pion momenta. Distributions of \( \theta^{\pi^\pm}_{\ell} \) vs magnitude of \( K^0 \) momentum, \( p_K \), for data and signal MC are shown in Fig. 6. We separated \( K^0 \rightarrow \pi^+ \pi^- \) events by making a two-dimensional cut on \( \theta^{\pi^\pm}_{\ell} \) vs \( p_K \). To obtain a description of the correlation between \( \theta^{\pi^\pm}_{\ell} \) and \( p_K \), we fit the two-dimensional histogram.
The function of the two observables and found adequate description with

$$f(p_K) = 0.319 - \frac{0.459}{p_K + 0.5} + \frac{2.23}{(p_K + 0.5)^2} - \frac{0.641}{(p_K + 0.5)^3}. \tag{12}$$

The cut width, \(w_2\), is implemented by keeping events for which

$$(1 - w_2) f(p_K) \leq \theta^* \leq (1 + w_2) f(p_K). \tag{13}$$

The optimization process tested 1600 pairings of cut widths with \(w_1 \in [0, 0.15] \text{ GeV}^2/c^4\) and \(w_2 \in [0, 0.2]\).

Because \(INV(K^0, \nu)\) was not accessible, we used the \(MM(K^+)\) distributions to estimate \(\epsilon(C)\) and \(B(C)\), and ultimately to identify the signal. We chose the blinded signal region to be within 0.03 GeV/c^2 of the \(\Lambda\) mass peak in the \(MM(K^+)\) spectrum determined from Standard Model data and MC, 1.186 GeV/c^2, and the sideband regions to be within 0.15 GeV/c^2 of the peak (excluding the signal region). We found the optimal widths to be \(w_1 = 1.875 \times 10^{-2} \text{ GeV}^2/c^4\) and \(w_2 = 0.0600\), yielding an efficiency of 2.23% and 239.25 estimated background events in the signal region. The \(MM(K^+)\) distribution for data events after unblinding is shown in Fig. 7.

![FIG. 6 (color online). \(K^0 \rightarrow \pi^+\pi^-\) opening angle vs \(p\) for \(\Lambda \rightarrow K^0\) Monte Carlo (left) and data (right) after PID cuts. The red curves demonstrate the boundaries of the optimized cut.](image-url)
to the unblinded data. For the nine decay modes where the final state could be completely reconstructed, we found that the number of observed events in the signal region, $N_{\text{obs}}$, to be between 0 and 2, consistent with background estimates from the cut optimization studies. For these decay modes, we used the Feldman–Cousins approach [27] to determine upper limits on the reconstructed signal yields, $N_{\text{UL}}$.

The Feldman–Cousins approach provides a way to estimate upper confidence limits for null results. The inputs are the expected number of background events ($N_{\text{bb}}$) and the observed number of events ($N_{\text{obs}}$). We estimated the expected number of background events from the sidebands in the data (see the previous section). $N_{\text{obs}}$ and $N_{\text{bb}}$ values for each decay mode are shown in Table II. Fractional numbers are given when only one event was observed in a sideband region that spans a greater range than the signal region.

These provided the input to the Feldman–Cousins method, and we quote the upper limit on the reconstructed signal yield at 90% confidence level ($N_{\text{UL}}$), shown in Table II. To calculate the upper limit on the branching fraction ($B_{\text{UL}}$), we used the efficiency ($\epsilon$) for each decay mode as determined from Monte Carlo studies and the total number of $\gamma p \rightarrow K^+\Lambda \rightarrow K^+ p\pi^-$ events produced during the data-taking period, $N_{\text{prod}}$ [see Eq. (6)],

$$B_{\text{UL}} = B_{\rho\pi} \frac{N_{\text{UL}}}{eN_{\text{prod}}},$$

where $B_{\rho\pi} = 0.639 \pm 0.005$ is the $\Lambda \rightarrow p\pi^-$ branching fraction [12]. The $B_{\text{UL}}$ values for all charged decay modes are shown in Table II.

**B. $\Lambda \rightarrow K^0\pi$**

For the $K^0_S\pi$ decay mode, a BNV signal would manifest itself as a peak in the $MM(K^+)$ distribution at the $\Lambda$ mass. When we unblinded the $MM(K^+)$ histogram, we observed no such peak and found a number of events in the signal region that is consistent with the background study above. The number of events in the signal region was much larger than is normally handled by the Feldman–Cousins approach; thus, we perform a likelihood scan to determine the upper limit on $N_{\text{UL}}$.

We performed an unbinned maximum likelihood fit to the data in this region using an exponential probability density function (PDF) to describe the background and a sum of two Gaussians to describe the signal. The shape of the background was allowed to vary in the fit, as are the numbers of signal and background events. The parameters describing the Gaussians (i.e., means and widths) were fixed to values determined from Monte Carlo studies.

The fit converged to a central value of $N_{\text{obs}} = -3.88 \pm 8.9$ signal events, consistent with zero signal events. To check whether or not this negative value is of concern, we sampled from a distribution described by the background...
parameters returned by the fit to generate 1000 mock 
“background-only” samples and fit them to a background-
plus-signal hypothesis. About 50% of these fits returned a 
negative value for the signal, and about 35% returned a 
value more negative than what was found in the data. We 
determined that the negative value is an artifact of fitting to 
a small number of points using a function with as much 
freedom as we use. We note that nowhere does the total 
PDF go negative.

To calculate an upper limit on the signal yield, we scanned 
the likelihood function by performing a series of fits where 
the signal yield (N) is varied around the best fit value N_{obs} 
and the other parameters were refit to map out the difference 
in the ln-likelihood: \( \Delta \ln L = \ln \mathcal{L}(N_{obs}) - \ln \mathcal{L}(N) \). We 
integrated the function \( y = e^{-\Delta \ln L} \) over N. We ignored 
the unphysical region with N < 0 and calculated the integral 
for N > 0. We noted the value of N which encloses 90% of 
the area above N = 0 and interpreted this as the upper limit 
on the signal yield returned by the fit at 90% confidence level. 
This procedure returned an upper limit (N_{UL}) of 14.1 signal 
events.

C. Experimental uncertainties

Uncertainty in B_{UL} comes from the world average of the 
\( \Lambda \to p \pi^+ \) branching fraction (0.8\%) [12] and statistical 
and systematic uncertainties from the extraction of N_{prod} and 
cut efficiencies for each BNV channel. We found a 6.1% 
relative uncertainty in N_{prod} by combining the 0.02% 
systematic uncertainty due to the \( \text{INV}(p, \pi^-) \) peak fitting 
procedure, the \( \approx 6\% \) systematic uncertainty in CLAS 
acceptance calculation (taken from previous hyperon pro-
duction analysis [29]), and the 0.64% statistical uncertainty 
in \( \epsilon_{\pi^-} \) (estimated with binomial statistics). We estimated 
the uncertainty in \( \epsilon \) for each BNV channel by comparing 
the effects of optimized \( MM'(K^+) \) and \( MM^2 \) cuts on MC 
and Standard Model data distributions and found it to be 
\( \approx 7.6\% \). We combined all uncertainties in quadrature to find 
a relative uncertainty in B_{UL} of \( \approx 9.8\% \). With this estimate 
of the combined uncertainty in hand, we quote the final B_{UL} 
results to one significant figure (see Table II).

VI. SUMMARY

The analysis described here represents the first search for 
baryon and lepton number violating decays of the \( \Lambda \) 
hyperon. Though similar studies have been performed with 
more higher sensitivities for decays of the nucleon, this 
study offers the first direct probe of BNV processes 
involving strange quarks in the initial state. Using a data 
set for photoproduction off of the proton collected with the 
CLAS detector at Jefferson Laboratory containing roughly 
1.8 \times 10^6 reconstructed \( \gamma p \to K^+ \Lambda \to K^+ p \pi^- \) events, we 
have searched via blinded analysis for BNV decays of the \( \Lambda \) to either meson-lepton pairs or to \( \bar{p} \pi^+ \). We found 
no BNV signal in any of the ten decay channels investigat-
ed and set upper limits on the branching fraction for 
each of the processes studied in the range \( 7 \times 10^{-7} \) to 
\( 2 \times 10^{-5} \).

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