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MEASURING THE SURFACE PROPERTIES OF POLISHING PADS USING ULTRASONIC REFLECTANCE

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a system and
5 method of measuring the surface properties of chemical
mechanical polishing pads used for creating a smooth,
ultra-flat surface on such items as glass,
semiconductors, dielectric/metal composites, magnetic
mass storage media and integrated circuits. More
10 specifically, the invention is directed to the use of
noncontact reflectance ultrasound to measure the surface
coating and wearing patterns of polishing pads.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Chemical-mechanical polishing (CMP) is used
15 extensively as a planarizing technique in the manufacture
of Very Large-Scale Integration (VLSI) integrated
circuits. It has potential for planarizing a variety of
materials in IC processing, but is used most widely for
planarizing metallized layers and interlevel dielectrics
20 on semiconductor wafers, and for planarizing substrates
for shallow trench isolation.

The growing use of copper for circuit interconnects,
but lack of etching techniques to remove copper, has led
to the adoption of damascene processes and the use of CMP
25 to remove excess copper and associated barrier metals.
In shallow trench isolation, for example, large areas of



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field oxide must be polished via to produce a planar starting wafer. Achieving acceptable planarization across the full diameter of a wafer using traditional etching processes has been largely unsuccessful.

- 5 However, using conventional CMP, where the wafer is polished using a mechanical polishing wheel and a slurry of chemical etchant, unwanted oxide material is removed with a high degree of planarity.

Similarly, multilevel metallization processes, each
10 level in the multilevel structure contributes to irregular topography. Planarizing interlevel dielectric layers, as the process proceeds, is often now favored in many state-of-the-art IC fabrication processes. High levels of planarity in the metal layers is a common
15 objective, and this is promoted by using plug interlevel connections. A preferred approach to plug formation is to blanket deposit a thick metal layer, comprising, for example W, Ti, TiN, on the interlevel dielectric and into interlevel windows, and then removing the excess metal
20 using CMP. CMP may also be used for polishing an oxide layers, such as SiO_2 , Ta_2O_5 or W_2O_5 or to polish nitride layers such as Si_3N_4 , TaN, TiN.

There are, however, deficiencies in our understanding the multiple factors that affect CMP
25 performance. These deficiencies derive in part from the lack to nondestructive methods to evaluate efficacy of steps in the production CMP pads, as well as evaluating the wearing characteristics of such pads. For example, the mechanical and chemical properties of CMP pads may be
30 evaluated by dynamic mechanical analysis (DMA) and Fourier Transform Infrared (FTIR) Spectroscopy, respectively. Such measurements, however are performed on strips or samples of material cut from pads. These

approaches, therefore, are not ideally suited to provide information about the dynamics of pad production and wear during use. Ultrasound provides a potential means to nondestructively evaluate these properties.

5 Noncontact optoacoustic metrology, for example, using laser light to generate and detect ultrasonic waves, has been used to characterize metal deposition and uniformity on semiconductor wafers before and after CMP. Techniques that bounce an acoustic signal off of the
10 wafer being polished, similar to sonar principles, have been used to detect polishing end points. Direct transmission scanning ultrasound, where an ultrasonic signal generated by a transducer attached to a pad is passed through the pad to a receiver on the opposite side
15 of the pad, has been used to detect inhomogeneities in ultrasonic transmission amplitudes, possibly related to the pad's density, elastic modulus or viscosity coefficient. This approach, however, requires intimate contact between the measuring device and the material
20 being tested, either by immersing the material in a coupling fluid or by vacuum suction of a sensor to the material's surface. Such contact disturbs the surface that is being measured. Such measurement approaches are also unacceptably slow, for example, requiring more than
25 one day to measure the surface of a polishing pad. Moreover, none of the above described approaches, address inspecting of pad surfaces during their production and monitoring the pad's wear characteristics.

Accordingly, what is needed is an improved method of
30 using ultrasound to nondestructively monitor the production and wearing patterns of the surface of CMP pads, while not experiencing the above-mentioned problems.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

To address the above-discussed deficiencies, the present invention provides, in one embodiment, a system for measuring surface properties of a polishing pad. The
5 system comprises a polishing pad having a polishing surface associated therewith, an ultrasonic probe located over the polishing surface and a subsystem coupled to the ultrasonic probe. The probe is configured to both transmit an ultrasonic signal to the polishing surface
10 and receive a modified ultrasonic signal from the polishing surface without contacting the polishing surface. The subsystem is configured to determine a surface property of the polishing pad from the reflection.

15 In yet another embodiment, the present invention provides a method for measuring the surface properties of a polishing pad. The method includes situating an ultrasonic probe above a polishing surface of a polishing pad, without contacting the polishing surface. The
20 method further comprises transmitting an ultrasonic signal from the probe to the polishing surface, the ultrasonic signal being modified by the polishing surface. The method also includes receiving the modified signal by the ultrasonic probe.

25 The foregoing has outlined preferred and alternative features of the present invention so that those skilled in the art may better understand the detailed description of the invention that follows. Additional features of the invention will be described hereinafter that form the
30 subject of the claims of the invention. Those skilled in the art should appreciate that they can readily use the disclosed conception and specific embodiments as a basis for designing or modifying other structures for carrying out the same purposes of the present invention. Those

skilled in the art should also realize that such equivalent constructions do not depart from the scope of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete understanding of the invention, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawing, in which:

5 FIGURE 1 illustrates a system for measuring surface properties of a polishing pad;

 FIGURE 2 illustrates, by flow diagram, a method for measuring surface properties of a polishing pad;

 FIGURE 3 presents representative near infrared
10 spectra of samples of different thermoplastic foam polishing pads after variable periods of coating with a polishing agent comprising Tetraethoxy Silane (TEOS);

 FIGURE 4 shows the change in near infrared signal for representative thermoplastic foam polishing pads
15 exposed to different coating periods with TEOS;

 FIGURE 5 shows the time course in change in the acoustic reflectance from the surface of exemplary polishing pads as a function of silicon dioxide coating time and illustrates the relationship between acoustic
20 reflectance, transducer transmission frequency and the air gap between the transducer and the polishing pad surface being coated with a polishing agent comprising silicon dioxide;

 FIGURE 6 illustrates the use of noncontact
25 ultrasound to monitor within batch reflectance uniformity of representative polishing pads after coating with tetraisopropyl-titanate;

 FIGURE 7 illustrates the mean reflectance and absolute value of the range of reflectance values of
30 representative polishing pads after coating with tetraisopropyl-titanate;

 FIGURE 8 defines wear sections for a used polishing pad;

 FIGURE 9 presents representative near infrared
35 spectra obtained for different sections of a polishing

pad after a period of use;

FIGURE 10 presents representative scanning electron microscopy images of a surface of different sections of a polishing pad after a period of use;

5 FIGURE 11 illustrates the Dynamic Mechanical Analysis showing the relationship between Loss Modulus and Temperature for different sections of a used polishing pad;

10 FIGURE 12 illustrates the relationship between Storage Modulus and Temperature for different sections of a used polishing pad;

FIGURE 13 illustrates the relationship between Tan Delta and Temperature for different sections of a used polishing pad;

15 FIGURE 14 illustrates the relationship between noncontact ultrasonic transmittance and polishing surface location, as defined by distance from the outer edge to the center of a used polishing; and

20 FIGURE 15 presents a representative reflectance image of a section of a used polishing pad.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Recently, ultrasonic transducers have been developed to facilitate the transmitting and receiving of ultrasonic signals through air to perform noncontact
5 testing of paper, wood, ceramics, metals, plastics and composites. The present invention exploits the previously unrecognized advantages of using a system incorporating such transducers and associated instrumentation, and using a method to measure the
10 surface properties of polishing pads. This approach is superior to previous approaches that required making intimate contact between sensors and the sample surface being measured. In particular, the system and method of the present invention may be advantageously used to
15 monitor the production of pads, in particular the coating or impregnation of such pads with ceramic materials. The system and method may also be beneficially used to observe the wear patterns of the polishing surfaces of such pads after periods of use.

20 FIGURE 1 illustrates one embodiment of the present invention, a system 100 for measuring surface properties of a polishing pad. The system 100 comprises a polishing pad 105 having a polishing surface 110 associated therewith. The system also has an ultrasonic probe 115
25 located over the polishing surface 110. The probe 115 transmits an ultrasonic signal 120 to the polishing surface, and receives a modified ultrasonic signal 125 from the polishing surface 110 without contacting the polishing surface 110. The system 100 also includes a
30 subsystem 130 coupled to the ultrasonic probe 115 and configured to determine a surface property of the polishing pad 105 from the modified signal 125.

The subsystem 130 may be coupled to the probe 115 via a conventional data communication line 135 or via a

conventional wireless communication means. The ultrasonic probe 115 preferably comprises a single ultrasonic transducer. In alternative embodiments, however, the probe 115 may comprise a separate ultrasonic transducers
5 configured for transmitting and receiving. Exemplary designs for the probe 115, subsystem 130 and communication line 135 are presented in U.S. Patent No. 6,311,573 to Bhardwai, and U.S. Patent No. 6,343,510 to Neeson et al., both incorporated herein by reference.

10 In certain embodiments, for example, the probe 115 comprises separate first and ultrasonic transducers configured as a transmitter and receiver 116, 117. The transmitter and receiver 116, 117 are located above the surface 110 such that the transmitted 120 and received
15 125 signals are not perpendicular to the surface 110. In still other embodiments, the probe 115 comprises a first ultrasonic transducers configured transmitter 118, on the same side as the surface 110, which generates a transmitted signal 120 that goes through the entire pad
20 105, thereby providing a signal 125 to a second ultrasonic transducers configured as a receiver 119 located on the opposite side of the pad 105. Combinations of different probe 115 configurations may be advantageously used to provide multiple measurements of a
25 polishing pad.

As further illustrated in the Experimental section to follow, the probe's 115 ultrasonic signal 120 transmission frequency and the air gap 140 located between polishing surface 110 and the probe 115, are
30 important parameters affecting the utility of the reflected signal 125. In certain embodiments, for example, the transmitted ultrasonic signal 120 is between about 100 kHz and about 5 MHz, and more preferably between about 2 MHz and about 3 MHz. The air gap 140 is
35 between about 5 mm and about 50 mm and more preferably

between about 12 mm and about 25 mm. In certain preferred embodiments, the transmitted ultrasonic signal 120 is about 3 MHz and the air gap 140 is about 12.5 mm.

The polishing pad 105 and polishing surface 110 may
5 comprise any conventional material used for CMP. More preferably, the pad 105 and polishing surface 110 are any of the materials described in any of the above references patent applications by Obeng and Yokley; Yokley and Obeng; or Obeng and Thomas. For example, the polishing
10 pad may comprise a thermoplastic foam substrate and a polishing agent coating the polishing surface of the substrate. In certain preferred embodiments, the thermoplastic foam substrate comprises a crosslinked polyethylene closed-cell foam. In other preferred
15 embodiments the polishing agent is selected from a group of ceramics consisting of Silicon Dioxide, Titanium Dioxide, Tetraethoxy Silane Polymer and Titanium Alkoxide Polymer. In other advantageous embodiments, the polishing agent is selected from a group of polymers
20 consisting of Polyalcohols; and Polyamines.

The system 100 may be used to characterize any number of surface properties of the polishing surface 110 may be determined from the reflected signal 125 using methods well known to one of ordinary skill in the art.
25 Non-limiting examples include Density, Surface Texture and Visco-Elasticity. However, any of the properties discussed in Mahesh C. Bhardwaj, *Non-Contact Ultrasound: The Last Frontier in Non-Destructive Testing and Evaluation*, in *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF SMART MATERIALS* (Mel Swartz ed.,
30 2002), incorporated herein by reference, may be determined.

Yet another embodiment of the present invention is a method for measuring the surface properties of a polishing pad. Turning to the flow diagram depicted in
35 FIGURE 2, the method 200 includes situating an ultrasonic

probe above a polishing surface of a polishing pad 210,
without contacting the polishing surface. The method 200
further includes transmitting an ultrasonic signal 220
from the probe to the polishing surface, the ultrasonic
5 signal being modified by the polishing surface. The
method 200 also includes receiving the modified signal
230 reflected from the polishing surface by the same or
different ultrasonic probe. In certain alternative
embodiments, where separate ultrasonic probes configured
10 as transmitter and receiver are configured in different
locations at a non-perpendicular angles above the surface
above or on either side of the pad, receiving the signal
230 further includes receiving a transmittance signal 235
transmitted by the transmitter through the pad or
15 reflected from the transmitter to a receiver.

In certain embodiments, the method 200 may be
advantageously used to monitor the fabrication 240 of any
conventional polishing pad. The method 200 may be
incorporated into any of the procedures described in the
20 above cited patent applications for the production of
polishing pads. In particular, the method 200 may be
advantageously used for monitoring the coating of a
polishing agent 245 onto the polishing surface of a
thermoplastic foam substrate. Monitoring 245 may be
25 done, for example, by transmitting and receiving 220, 230
ultrasonic signals after a period of coating the
polishing pad.

In certain preferred embodiments, however, the
monitoring is performed during the coating process 250,
30 with the probe and the polishing pad located in a
reaction chamber used for coating. In certain
embodiments, for example, the coating process may
comprise exposing a surface of the thermoplastic foam
substrate to an initial plasma reactant to produce a
35 modified surface thereon. The modified surface is then

exposed to a secondary plasma reactant to create the polishing surface on the modified surface, the polishing surface comprised of the polishing agent. Alternatively, the coating process may include exposing a plastic
5 substrate to a polishing agent dissolved in a supercritical fluid to thereby produce a modified plastic.

In other preferred embodiments, the method 200 may be advantageously used to evaluate the wear pattern 260
10 of any conventional polishing pad after a period of use to polishing a wafer, such as a semiconductor wafer. In certain preferred embodiments, however, the method 200 is used to evaluate the wearing of a polishing pad during polishing 265. In such embodiments, the polishing pad
15 and the probe are coupled to a polishing apparatus comprised of a mechanically driven carrier head and a polishing platen. For example, the polishing pad is attached to the polishing platen and the transmitting and receiving 220, 230 are carried out while the carrier
20 head holds a wafer and imparts a polishing force against the polishing pad to polish a wafer.

The method 200 may include any conventional signal processing steps to convert the reflected signal 230 into information about the surface properties of the polishing
25 pad. For example, the reflected signal 230 may be used to calculate an acoustic reflectance spectrum 270 of the polishing surface. The reflected signal 230 may be rasterized to produce an acoustic reflectance image 280 of the polishing surface. Similarly, the reflected
30 signal 230 may be used to determine a surface texture of the polishing surface 290. Alternatively, in certain embodiments, the transmittance signal 235 may be used to determine a relative density 295 of the polishing surface.

35 Having described the present invention, it is

believed that the same will become even more apparent by reference to the following experiments. It will be appreciated that the experiments are presented solely for the purpose of illustration and should not be construed
5 as limiting the invention. For example, although the experiments described below may be carried out in a laboratory setting, one skilled in the art could adjust specific numbers, dimensions and quantities up to appropriate values for a full-scale plant setting.

10 **Experiments**

Two sets of experiments were conducted to examine the use of noncontact ultrasound to: 1) monitor the coating of thermoplastic substrates with polishing agents; and 2) evaluate the wearing pattern of polishing surfaces of
15 polishing pads after various periods of use.

Experiment 1

A thermoplastic foam substrate was formed into circular polishing pads of approximately 120 cm diameter of
20 about 0.3 cm thickness. The commercially obtained thermoplastic foam substrate (J-foam from JMS Plastics, Neptune NJ), designated as "J-60," comprised a blend of about 18% EVA, about 16 to about 20% talc, and balance polyethylene and other additives, such as silicates,
25 present in the commercially provided substrate. The J-60 sheets were skived with a commercial cutting blade (Model number D5100 K1, from Fecken-Kirfel, Aachen, Germany). The sheets were then manually cleaned with an aqueous/isopropyl alcohol solution.

30 The J-60 substrate was then coated with a polishing agent comprising Tetraethoxy Silane (TEOS), by placing the skived substrate into a reaction chamber of a conventional commercial Radio Frequency Glow Discharge (RFGD) plasma reactor having a temperature controlled electrode

configuration (Model PE-2; Advanced Energy Systems, Medford, NY). The plasma treatment of the substrate was commenced by introducing the primary plasma reactant, Argon, for 30 seconds within the reaction chamber
5 maintained at 350 mTorr. The electrode temperature was maintained at 30°C, and a RF operating power of 300 Watts was used. Subsequently, the secondary reactant was introduced for periods ranging from about 0 to about 45 minutes at 0.10 SLM and consisted of TEOS mixed with He or
10 Ar gas. The amount of secondary reactant in the gas stream was governed by the vapor back pressure (BP) of the secondary reactant monomer at the monomer reservoir temperature (MRT; $50 \pm 10^\circ\text{C}$).

FIGURES 3 and 4 illustrate the use of a conventional
15 process, FTIR spectroscopy, to monitor the coating of the substrate's polishing surface with the TEOS polishing agent. Spectra were obtained on a FTIR spectrometer (FTIR 1727, Perkin-Elmer). Samples of the substrate after different periods of coating were removed from the reaction
20 chamber and prepared for FTIR spectroscopy. This illustrates at least two limitations in using FTIR spectroscopy to monitor the coating process: multiple pads must be sacrificed and multiple samples must be obtained during the coating process, thus requiring the process to
25 be stopped at different intervals to obtain the sample.

FIGURE 3 illustrates that as coating time increases, the FTIR spectroscopy signals at about 1010 (assigned to Si-O-Si stretch) and about 850 cm^{-1} (assigned to Si-OH) decreased, due to net accumulation of silicates on the pad
30 surface. As illustrated in FIGURE 4, the transmittance at either wavenumber increases linearly from 0 to 30 min and then starts to decrease thereafter. The decrease in transmittance is thought to be due to competitive signals being received from native versus deposited silicates. As
35 noted above, the foams pads also contain silicates as

filler material. These native silicates have essentially the same FTIR signature as the deposited silicates from TEOS. The deposition process involves both sputtering off the surface native silicates and deposition of silicates via plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (CVD). After about 30mins deposition, the native silicate is substantially replaced or covered by the deposited silicates. This will result in FTIR signals primarily from the deposited silicates, which is thought to have slightly different optical characteristics from the native silicate. This illustrates yet another limitation in using FTIR spectroscopy to monitor the coating process: distinguishing between silicate native to the pad material versus deposited silicates.

FIGURE 5 illustrates the use of noncontact reflectance ultrasound to monitor the coating or polishing pads, according to the present invention. The transducer and associated subsystem components are commercially available (SecondWave Systems, Boalsburg, PA). For the results shown in FIGURE 5, the polishing surface of J60 substrates were coated using a process similar to that described above, using a polishing agent comprising silicon dioxide. The reflectivity of the polishing surface was measured on different polishing pads removed from the reaction chamber after different periods of coating. It is important to note, however, that once the optimal measurement conditions had been established, the reflectivity of a single polishing pad could have been monitored continuously during the coating process. One skilled in the art would understand that these measurements are sensitive to the distance of the transducer from the surface of the pad, and that the distance must be routinely optimized for maximum sensitivity and reproducibility.

To establish optimal measurement condition, various transducers, each emitting ultrasonic signals at different

frequencies, were situated above the coated polishing surface of the pads, with the transducer located at various distances from the surface. As illustrated in FIGURES 5A through 5D, the frequency of the transmitted ultrasonic signal and the air gap between the polishing surface and the transducer are important parameters affecting the relative amounts of reflectivity observed. For example, the reflectance from transmitted signals of ~500 KHz and ~1 MHz were relatively insensitive to the period of coating, as compared to transmitted signals at ~2 MHz and ~3 MHz. As illustrated in FIGURES 5C and 5D, the air gap between the transducer and the polishing surface also affected the reflectance signal. As illustrated in FIGURE 5D, using a transmitted signal with a frequency of ~3 MHz and an air gap of ~12.5 mm, the coating of the polishing surface can be advantageously monitored.

FIGURES 6 and 7 illustrate the use of noncontact ultrasound to monitor within batch reflectance uniformity of representative polishing pads after coating with a polishing agent. Multiple batches of polishing pads, with several pads per batch, were fabricated similar to that described above using a substrate comprised of a crosslinked polyethylene foam (Product Number SV4M, Volara® from Voltek, Lawrence, MA) and a polishing agent comprised of tetraisopropyl-titanate (TYZOR® TPT). FIGURE 6 shows the variation in reflectivity obtained from individual polishing pads within each batch. FIGURE 7 shows the mean reflectance and absolute value of the range of reflectance values of representative polishing pads after coating with tetraisopropyl-titanate.

Experiment 2

To examine wearing patterns of polishing surfaces after various periods of use, polishing pads were prepared by exposing skived J60 thermoplastic foam substrates to the

above-described grafting process to produce SiO_2 coated polishing pads, designated as "J60SE." As illustrated in FIGURE 8, to facilitate comparisons between conventional measurements and the noncontact ultrasonic measurements of the present invention, different sections of the polishing pad were defined as: center (C); center to track (CT); track (T); Track to edge (TE) and Edge (E).

The J60SE polishing pads were subjected to a wearing period by polishing wafers having a deposited about 4000 Å tungsten surface and an underlying about 250 Å thick tantalum barrier layer. Tungsten polishing properties were assessed using a commercial polisher (Product No. EP0222 from Ebara Technologies, Sacramento, CA). Unless otherwise noted, the removal rate of tungsten polishing was assessed using a down force of about 13. N per inch² of substrate (about 3 to about 4 psi); table speed of about 100 to about 250 rpm and a conventional slurry (Product Number MSW2000, from Rodel, Newark DE). Plasma Enhanced Tetraethylorthosilicate (PE-TEOS) wafers, having a thickness of about 10,000 Å and a deposited tungsten surface having a thickness of about 8,000 Å and an underlying titanium barrier layer having a thickness of about 250 Å, were used for test polishing. A conventional slurry (Product Number MSW2000, from Rodel, Newark DE) adjusted to a pH of about 2 was used. After polishing, the pads were divided into the above-defined sections for conventional analysis, or the intact pads were analyzed using the non-contact ultrasound system and methods of the present invention.

FIGURE 9 illustrates conventionally FTIR spectroscopy, obtained using similar procedures to that described in Experiment 1, from different sections of the pad. Sections of the pad corresponding to the center (C) and edge (E) had the largest FTIR spectroscopy signal at about 1010 cm^{-1} , signifying the continued presence of SiO_2 . In contrast, the

FTIR spectra from pad material corresponding to the track (T) had a smaller signal at about 1010 cm^{-1} .

FIGURE 10 show representative conventional Scanning Electron Microscopy Images (SEM) at 100X magnification of the surface of different sections of a polishing pad after a period of use. SEM images were obtained from a commercial instrument (JEOL, Peabody, MA). The images illustrate the evolution of changes in the cell structure of the foam. While the cells in the center and edge of the pad appear intact, those around the track defined between the locus of the wafer during polishing were deformed and sheared.

The mechanical properties of different sections of J60SE polishing pads after use were assessed using Dynamic Mechanical Analysis (DMA). The DMA measurements were obtained using a commercial instrument and analyzed using Universal V2.5H software (both from TA Instruments, New Castle, DE). Exemplary data of Storage Modulus, Loss Modulus and Tan Delta are presented in FIGURES 11, 12 and 13, respectively. For FIGURES 11 and 13, maxima are depicted by vertical lines, and temperature at the maximum is presented in the legend. These data illustrate that DMA is relatively insensitive to detecting small changes in the viscoelastic properties of different sections of used pads.

In comparison, noncontact ultrasound measurements shown marked differences between the different sections of used polishing pads. FIGURE 14 illustrates the relationship between noncontact ultrasonic transmittance and polishing surface location, as defined by distance from the outer edge to the center of a used polishing pad. The pad edge (E) and center (C) having the least amount of wear also had the highest transmittance, as compared to more central portions of pad having more extensive wear. FIGURE 15 illustrates that noncontact ultrasound measurements may be rasterized to produce a reflectance image of a section

of the polishing surface of a used polishing pad.

Although the present invention has been described in detail, those skilled in the art should understand that they can make various changes, substitutions and
5 alterations herein without departing from the scope of the invention.

REPLACEMENT SHEETS

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A system for measuring surface properties of a polishing pad comprising:

a polishing pad having a polishing surface

5 associated therewith;

an ultrasonic probe located over said polishing surface and configured to both transmit an ultrasonic signal to said polishing surface and receive a modified ultrasonic signal from said polishing surface without
10 contacting said polishing surface; and

a subsystem coupled to said ultrasonic probe and configured to determine a surface property of said polishing pad from said reflection.

2. The system as recited in Claim 1, wherein said
15 ultrasonic probe comprises a single ultrasonic transducer.

3. The system as recited in Claim 1, wherein said ultrasonic probe comprises a first ultrasonic transducer configured for said transmitting and a second ultrasonic
20 transducer configured for said receiving.

4. The system as recited in Claim 2, wherein said transmitted ultrasonic signal is between about 2 MHz and

about 3 MHz and an air gap located between said probe and said polishing surface is between about 12 mm and about 25 mm.

5 5. The system as recited in Claim 1, wherein said surface property is selected from the group consisting of:

Density;
Surface Texture; and
Visco-Elasticity.

10 6. A method for measuring the surface properties of a polishing pad, comprising:

situating an ultrasonic probe above a polishing surface of a polishing pad, without contacting said polishing surface;

15 transmitting an ultrasonic signal from said probe to said polishing surface, said ultrasonic signal being modified by said polishing surface; and

receiving said modified signal by said ultrasonic probe.

20 7. The method as recited in Claim 6, wherein said modified signal is a reflected signal received during coating of a polishing agent onto said polishing surface

of a thermoplastic foam substrate.

8. The method as recited in Claim 6, wherein said polishing pad and said probe are coupled to a polishing apparatus comprised of a mechanically driven carrier head
5 and a polishing platen.

9. The method as recited in Claim 8, wherein said polishing pad is attached to said polishing platen and said transmitting and said receiving are carried out while said carrier head holds a wafer and imparts a
10 polishing force against said polishing pad to polish a wafer.

10. The method as recited in Claim 6, wherein said modified signal is a reflected signal used to calculate an acoustic reflectance spectrum of said polishing
15 surface.