

2b. Approximation Algorithms
COMP6741: Parameterized and Exact Computation

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1 Approximation Algorithms

Optimisation problems

Definition 1. An *optimisation problem* is characterised by

- a set of input instances
- a set of *feasible solutions* for each input instance
- a *value* for each feasible solution

In a *maximisation* problem (resp., a *minimisation*) problem, the goal is to find a feasible solution with maximum (resp., minimum) value.

Example: In the VERTEX COVER minimisation problem, the input is a graph G , the feasible solutions are all the vertex covers of G , and the value of a vertex cover is its size.

Approximation algorithm

Definition 2. An *approximation algorithm* A for an optimisation problem Π is a polynomial time algorithm that returns a feasible solution. Denote by $A(I)$ the value of the feasible solution returned by the approximation algorithm A for an instance I and by $\text{OPT}(I)$ the value of the optimum solution. If Π is a minimisation problem, then the *approximation ratio* of A is r if

$$\frac{A(I)}{\text{OPT}(I)} \leq r \text{ for every instance } I.$$

If Π is a maximisation problem, then the *approximation ratio* of A is r if

$$\frac{\text{OPT}(I)}{A(I)} \leq r \text{ for every instance } I.$$

We say that A is an r -approximation algorithm if it has approximation ratio r .

2 Multiway Cut

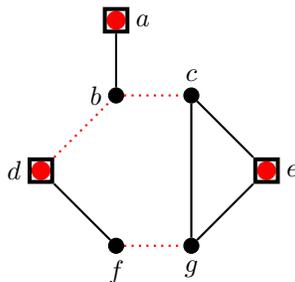
Problem Definition

MULTIWAY CUT

Input: A connected graph $G = (V, E)$ and a set of terminals $S = \{s_1, \dots, s_k\}$

Feasible Solution: A multiway cut, i.e., an edge subset $X \subseteq E$ such that the graph $(V, E \setminus X)$ has no path between any two distinct terminals

Objective: Minimize the size of the multiway cut.



Complexity

MULTIWAY CUT is NP-complete, even when $k = 3$ [Dah+94].

MULTIWAY CUT can be solved in polynomial time when $k = 2$ by a maximum flow algorithm.

Approximation algorithm

Algorithm Greedy-MC

- For each $i \in \{1, \dots, k\}$, compute a smallest edge set C_i , separating s_i from the other terminals. (This can be done by computing a smallest cut between s_i and s_{-i} in the graph obtained from G by merging all the vertices in $S \setminus \{s_i\}$ into a new vertex s_{-i} .)
- Return $\bigcup_{i \in \{1, \dots, k\}} C_i$.

Approximation ratio

Theorem 3 ([Dah+94]). *Greedy-MC is a 2-approximation algorithm for MULTIWAY CUT.*

Proof. First, note that the algorithm runs in polynomial time. To show that its approximation ratio is at most 2, let us compare the size of the solution it returns, $C = \bigcup_{i \in \{1, \dots, k\}} C_i$, to the size of an optimal solution, A . The graph $(V, E \setminus A)$ has k connected components G_1, \dots, G_k , one for each s_1, \dots, s_k . Let $A_i \subseteq A$ denote the edges with one endpoint in G_i . Observe that $A = \bigcup A_i$. Since each edge of A is incident to two of the connected components, we have that

$$2 \cdot |A| = \sum_{i=1}^k |A_i| \geq \sum_{i=1}^k |C_i| \geq |C|$$

Since $|C| \leq 2 \cdot |A|$, Greedy-MC is a 2-approximation algorithm. □

3 Vertex Cover

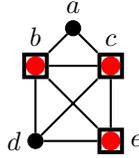
Recall: A *vertex cover* of a graph $G = (V, E)$ is a subset of vertices $S \subseteq V$ such that for each edge $\{u, v\} \in E$, we have $u \in S$ or $v \in S$.

VERTEX COVER

Input: A graph $G = (V, E)$ and an integer k

Parameter: k

Question: Does G have a vertex cover of size at most k ?



3.1 Preprocessing

VC-preprocess

Input: A graph G and an integer k .

Output: A graph G' and an integer k' such that G has a vertex cover of size at most k if and only if G' has a vertex cover of size at most k' .

$G' \leftarrow G$

$k' \leftarrow k$

repeat

| Execute simplification rules (Degree-0), (Degree-1), (Large Degree), and (Number of Edges) for (G', k')

until no simplification rule applies

return (G', k')

Claim: It is easy to add some book-keeping to this preprocessing algorithm so that any vertex cover S' for G' of size $O((k')^2)$ can be extended to a vertex cover for G of size $O(k^2)$ in polynomial time.

Approximation algorithm for Vertex Cover

Since VC-preprocess returns an equivalent instance (G', k') of size $O(k^2)$, we have that

Corollary 4. The VERTEX COVER optimisation problem has an approximation algorithm with approximation ratio $O(\text{OPT})$.

Proof sketch. We start from $k = 0$ and increment k until a solution is returned

- For a given value of k , kernelize.
- If (Number of Edges) does not return NO, then return a vertex cover containing all the vertices of the kernelized graph, along with the vertices determined by the bookkeeping of the kernelization procedure.

This procedure returns a vertex cover of size $O(\text{OPT}^2)$. □

Can we obtain a constant approximation ratio?

4 Another kernel / approximation algorithm for Vertex Cover

Integer Linear Program for Vertex Cover

The VERTEX COVER problem can be written as an Integer Linear Program (ILP). For an instance $(G = (V, E), k)$ for VERTEX COVER with $V = \{v_1, \dots, v_n\}$, create a variable x_i for each vertex v_i , $1 \leq i \leq n$. Let $X = \{x_1, \dots, x_n\}$.

$$\text{ILP}_{\text{VC}}(G) = \begin{array}{ll} \text{Minimize } \sum_{i=1}^n x_i & \\ x_i + x_j \geq 1 & \text{for each } \{v_i, v_j\} \in E \\ x_i \in \{0, 1\} & \text{for each } i \in \{1, \dots, n\} \end{array}$$

Then, (G, k) is a YES-instance iff the objective value of $\text{ILP}_{\text{VC}}(G)$ is at most k .

Note: Since we just reduced the NP-complete VERTEX COVER problem to ILP, we conclude that ILP is NP-hard.

LP relaxation for Vertex Cover

$\text{LP}_{\text{VC}}(G) =$

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Minimize } \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \\ & x_i + x_j \geq 1 && \text{for each } \{v_i, v_j\} \in E \\ & x_i \geq 0 && \text{for each } i \in \{1, \dots, n\} \end{aligned}$$

Note: the value of an optimal solution for the Linear Program $\text{LP}_{\text{VC}}(G)$ is at most the value of an optimal solution for $\text{ILP}_{\text{VC}}(G)$

Note 2: Linear Programs (LP) can be solved in polynomial time [CLS19].

Properties of LP optimal solution

- Let $\alpha : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$ be an optimal solution for $\text{LP}_{\text{VC}}(G)$. Let

$$\begin{aligned} V_- &= \{v_i : \alpha(x_i) < 1/2\} \\ V_{1/2} &= \{v_i : \alpha(x_i) = 1/2\} \\ V_+ &= \{v_i : \alpha(x_i) > 1/2\} \end{aligned}$$

Lemma 5. For each $i, 1 \leq i \leq n$, we have that $\alpha(x_i) \leq 1$.

Lemma 6. V_- is an independent set.

Lemma 7. $N_G(V_-) = V_+$.

Lemma 8. For each $S \subseteq V_+$ we have that $|S| \leq |N_G(S) \cap V_-|$.

Proof. For the sake of contradiction, suppose there is a set $S \subseteq V_+$ such that $|S| > |N_G(S) \cap V_-|$. Let $\epsilon = \min_{v_i \in S} \{\alpha(x_i) - 1/2\}$ and $\alpha' : X \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_{\geq 0}$ s.t.

$$\alpha'(x_i) = \begin{cases} \alpha(x_i) & \text{if } v_i \notin S \cup (N_G(S) \cap V_-) \\ \alpha(x_i) - \epsilon & \text{if } v_i \in S \\ \alpha(x_i) + \epsilon & \text{if } v_i \in N_G(S) \cap V_- \end{cases}$$

Note that α' is an improved solution for $\text{LP}_{\text{VC}}(G)$, contradicting that α is optimal. \square

Theorem 9 (Hall's marriage theorem). A bipartite graph $G = (V \uplus U, E)$ has a matching saturating $S \subseteq V$ if and only if for every subset $W \subseteq S$ we have $|W| \leq |N_G(W)|$.¹

Consider the bipartite graph $B = (V_- \uplus V_+, \{\{u, v\} \in E : u \in V_-, v \in V_+\})$.

Lemma 10. There exists a matching M in B of size $|V_+|$.

Proof. The lemma follows from the previous lemma and Hall's marriage theorem. \square

Crown Decomposition: Definition

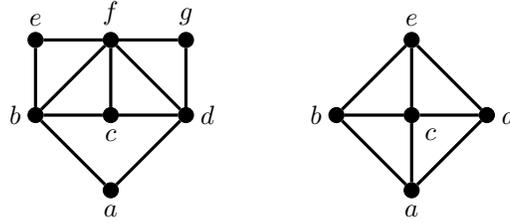
Definition 11 (Crown Decomposition). A crown decomposition (C, H, B) of a graph $G = (V, E)$ is a partition of V into sets C, H , and B such that

- the crown C is a non-empty independent set,
- the head $H = N_G(C)$,
- the body $B = V \setminus (C \cup H)$, and
- there is a matching of size $|H|$ in $G[H \cup C]$.

By the previous lemmas, we obtain a crown decomposition $(V_-, V_+, V_{1/2})$ of G if $V_- \neq \emptyset$.

¹A *matching* M in a graph G is a set of edges such that no two edges in M have a common endpoint. A matching *saturates* a set of vertices S if each vertex in S is an end point of an edge in M .

Crown Decomposition: Examples



crown decomposition
 $(\{a, e, g\}, \{b, d, f\}, \{c\})$

has no crown decomposition

Using the crown decomposition

Lemma 12. *Suppose that $G = (V, E)$ has a crown decomposition (C, H, B) . Then,*

$$vc(G) \leq k \iff vc(G[B]) \leq k - |H|,$$

where $vc(G)$ denotes the size of the smallest vertex cover of G .

Proof. (\Rightarrow): Let S be a vertex cover of G with $|S| \leq k$. Since S contains at least one vertex for each edge of a matching, $|S \cap (C \cup H)| \geq |H|$. Therefore, $S \cap B$ is a vertex cover for $G[B]$ of size at most $k - |H|$.

(\Leftarrow): Let S be a vertex cover of $G[B]$ with $|S| \leq k - |H|$. Then, $S \cup H$ is a vertex cover of G of size at most k , since each edge that is in G but not in G' is incident to a vertex in H . \square

Nemhauser-Trotter

Corollary 13 ([Nemhauser, Trotter, 1974]). *There exists a smallest vertex cover S of G such that $S \cap V_- = \emptyset$ and $V_+ \subseteq S$.*

Corollary 14 ([Nemhauser, Trotter, 1974]). *VERTEX COVER has a 2-approximation algorithm.*

Crown reduction

(Crown Reduction)

If solving $LP_{VC}(G)$ gives an optimal solution with $V_- \neq \emptyset$, then return $(G - (V_- \cup V_+), k - |V_+|)$.

(Number of Vertices)

If solving $LP_{VC}(G)$ gives an optimal solution with $V_- = \emptyset$ and $|V| > 2k$, then return NO.

Lemma 15. *(Crown Reduction) and (Number of Vertices) are sound.*

Proof. (Crown Reduction) is sound by previous Lemmas. Let α be an optimal solution for $LP_{VC}(G)$ and suppose $V_- = \emptyset$. The value of this solution is at least $|V|/2$. Thus, the value of an optimal solution for $ILP_{VC}(G)$ is at least $|V|/2$. Since G has no vertex cover of size less than $|V|/2$, we have a NO-instance if $k < |V|/2$. \square

Linear vertex-kernel for Vertex Cover

Theorem 16. *VERTEX COVER has a kernel with $2k$ vertices and $O(k^2)$ edges.*

This is the smallest known kernel for VERTEX COVER. See <http://fpt.wikidot.com/fpt-races> for the current smallest kernels for various problems.

5 More on Crown Decompositions

Crown Lemma

Lemma 17 (Crown Lemma). *Let $G = (V, E)$ be a graph without isolated vertices and with $|V| \geq 3k + 1$. There is a polynomial time algorithm that either*

- *finds a matching of size $k + 1$ in G , or*
- *finds a crown decomposition of G .*

To prove the lemma, we need König's Theorem

Theorem 18 ([König, 1916]). *In every bipartite graph the size of a maximum matching is equal to the size of a minimum vertex cover.*

Proof of the Crown Lemma. Compute a maximum matching M of G . If $|M| \geq k + 1$, we are done. Note that $I := V \setminus V(M)$ is an independent set with $|V| - |V(M)| \geq k + 1$ vertices. Consider the bipartite graph B formed by edges with one endpoint in $V(M)$ and the other in I . Compute a minimum vertex cover X and a maximum matching M' of B . We know: $|X| = |M'| \leq |M| \leq k$. Hence, $X \cap V(M) \neq \emptyset$. Let $M^* = \{e \in M' : e \cap (X \cap V(M)) \neq \emptyset\}$. We obtain a crown decomposition with

- crown $C = V(M^*) \cap I$
- head $H = X \cap V(M) = X \cap V(M^*)$, and
- body $B = V \setminus (C \cup H)$.

As an exercise, verify that (C, H, B) is indeed a crown decomposition. □

After computing a kernel ...

- ... we can use any algorithm to compute an actual solution.
- Brute-force, faster exponential-time algorithms, parameterized algorithms, often also approximation algorithms

Kernels

- A parameterized problem may not have a kernelization algorithm
 - Example, COLORING² parameterized by k has no kernelization algorithm unless $P = NP$.
 - A kernelization would lead to a polynomial time algorithm for the NP-complete 3-COLORING problem
- Only exponential kernels may be known for a parameterized problem
- There is a theory of kernel lower bounds, establishing exponential lower bounds on the kernel size of certain parameterized problems.

Approximation algorithms

Besides constant factor approximation algorithms, positive results include:

- additive approximation (rare)
- polynomial time approximation schemes (PTAS): able to achieve an approximation ratio $1 + \epsilon$ for any constant ϵ in polynomial time, but the running time depends on $1/\epsilon$. Restrictions include EPTAS (Efficient PTAS) and FPTAS (Fully PTAS), restricting how the running time may depend on the parameter $1/\epsilon$.

Negative results include

- no factor- c approximation algorithm unless $P = NP$ / unless the Unique Games conjecture fails, etc.
- APX-hardness, ruling out PTASs

²Can one color the vertices of an input graph G with k colors such that no two adjacent vertices receive the same color?

6 Further Reading

- Vazirani’s textbook [Vaz03]
- Fellows et al.’s survey on VERTEX COVER kernelization [Fel+18]

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