WeGotYouCovered: The Winning Solver from the PACE 2019 Challenge, Vertex Cover Track*

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Abstract

We present the winning solver of the Parameterized Algorithms and Computational Experiments (PACE) 2019 Challenge, Vertex Cover Track. The minimum vertex cover problem is one of a handful of problems for which *kernelization*—the repeated reducing of the input size via *data reduction rules*—is known to be highly effective in practice. Our algorithm uses a portfolio of techniques, including an aggressive kernelization strategy, local search, branch-and-reduce, and a state-of-the-art branch-and-bound solver. Of particular interest is that several of our techniques were *not* from the literature on the vertex cover problem: they were originally published to solve the (complementary) maximum independent set and maximum clique problems.

Aside from illustrating our solver's performance in the PACE 2019 Challenge, our experiments provide several key insights not yet seen before in the literature. First, kernelization can boost the performance of branch-and-bound clique solvers enough to outperform branch-and-reduce solvers. Second, local search can significantly boost the performance of branch-and-reduce solvers. And finally, somewhat surprisingly, kernelization can sometimes make branch-and-bound algorithms perform *worse* than running branch-and-bound alone.

1 Introduction

A *vertex cover* of a graph $G = (V, E)$ is a set of vertices $S \subseteq V$ of G such that every edge of G has at least one of member of S as an endpoint (i.e., $\forall (u, v) \in E$ [$u \in S$ or $v \in S$]). The minimum vertex cover problem—that of computing a vertex cover of minimum cardinality—is a fundamental NP-hard problem, and has applications spanning many areas. These include computational biology [12], classification [20], mesh rendering [37], and many more through its complementary problems [19, 18, 21, 48].

Complementary to vertex covers are independent sets and cliques. An independent set is a set of vertices $I \subseteq V$, all pairs of which are not adjacent, and an clique is a set of vertices $K \subseteq V$ all pairs of which are adjacent. A maximum independent set (maximum clique) is an independent set (clique) of maximum cardinality. The goal of the maximum independent set problem (maximum clique problem) is to compute a maximum independent set (maximum clique).

Many techniques have been proposed for solving these problems, and papers in the literature usually focus on one of these problems in particular. However, all of these problems are equivalent (when solved exactly): a minimum vertex cover C in G is the complement of a maximum independent set $V \setminus C$ in G, which is a maximum clique $V \setminus C$ in $\overline{G}$. Thus, an algorithm that solves one of these problems can be used to solve the others. To win the Parameterized Algorithms and Computational Experiments (PACE) 2019 Challenge, we deployed a portfolio of solvers, using techniques from the literature on all three problems. These include data reduction rules and branch-and-reduce for the minimum vertex cover problem [2], iterated local search for the maximum independent set problem [3], and a state-of-the-art branch-and-bound maximum clique solver [29].

Our Results. In this paper, we describe our techniques and solver in detail and analyze the results of our experiments on the data sets provided by the challenge. Not only do our experiments illustrate the power of the techniques spanning the literature, they also provide several new insights not yet seen before. In particular, kernelization followed by branch-and-bound can outperform branch-and-reduce solvers; seeding branch-and-reduce by an initial solution from local search can significantly boost its performance; and, somewhat surprisingly, kernelization is sometimes counterproductive: branch-and-bound algorithms can perform significantly worse on the kernel than on the original input graph.

Organization. We first briefly describe related work in Section 3. Then in Section 4 we outline each of the techniques that we use, and in Section 5

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finally describe how we combine all of the techniques in our final solver that scored the most points in the PACE 2019 Challenge. Lastly, in Section 6 we perform an experimental evaluation to show the impact of the components used on the final number of instances solved during the challenge.

2 Preliminaries

We work with an undirected graph $G = (V, E)$ where V is a set of n vertices and $E \subset \{\{u, v\} \mid u, v \in V\}$ is a set of m edges. The open neighborhood of a vertex v, denoted $N(v)$, is the set of all vertices w such that $(v, w) \in E$. We further denote the closed neighborhood by $N[v] = N(v) \cup \{v\}$. We similarly define the open and closed neighborhoods of a set of vertices U to be $N(U) = \bigcup_{u \in U} N(u)$ and $N[U] = N(U) \cup U$, respectively. The set of vertices of distance d of a vertex u is denoted by $N^d(u)$, where $N^2(u)$ is called the *two-neighborhood* of u. Lastly, for vertices $S \subseteq V$, the induced subgraph $G[S] \subseteq G$ is the graph on the vertices in S with edges in E between vertices in S.

3 Related Work

Research results in the area can be found through work on the minimum vertex cover problem and its complementary maximum clique and independent set problems, and can often be categorized depending on the angle of attack. For exact exponential (theoretical) algorithms, the maximum independent set problem is canonically studied, for parameterized algorithms, the minimum vertex cover problem is studied, and the maximum clique problem is normally solved exactly in practice (though there are recent exceptions). However, these problems are only *trivially* different — techniques for solving one problem require only subtle modifications to solve the other two.

Exponential-time Algorithms. The maximum independent set problem is most often considered when designing exact (exponential-time) algorithms, and much research has been devoted to reducing the base of the exponential running time. A primary technique is to develop rules to modify the graph, removing or contracting subgraphs that can be solved simply, which reduces the graph to a smaller instance. These rules are referred to as *data reduction rules* (often simplified to *reduction rules* or *reductions*). Reduction rules have been used to reduce the running time of the brute force $O(n^2 2^n)$ algorithm to the $O(2^{n/3})$ time algorithm of Tarjan and Trojanowski [40], and to the current best polynomial space algorithm with running time of $O^*(1.1996^n)$[1] by Xiao and Nagamochi [47].

The reduction rules used for these algorithms are often staggeringly simple, including *pendant vertex removal*, *vertex folding* [10] and *twin* reductions [46], which eliminate nearly all vertices of degree three or less from the graph. These algorithms apply reductions during recursion, only branching when the graph can no longer be reduced [17], and are referred to as *branch-and-reduce* algorithms. Further techniques used to accelerate these algorithms include *branching rules* [26, 16] which eliminate unnecessary branches from the search tree, as well as faster exponential-time algorithms for graphs of small maximum degree [47].

Parameterized Algorithms. For parameterized algorithms, we turn to the minimum vertex cover problem. The most efficient algorithms for computing a minimum vertex cover in both theory and practice repeatedly apply data reduction rules to obtain a (hopefully) much smaller problem instance. If this smaller instance has size bounded by a function of some parameter, it's called a *kernel*, and producing a polynomially-sized kernel gives a fixed-parameter tractable algorithm in the chosen parameter. Reductions are surprisingly effective for the minimum vertex cover problem. In particular, letting k be the size of a minimum vertex cover, the well-known crown reduction rule produces a kernel of size $3k$ [13] and the LP-relaxation reduction due to Nemhauser and Trotter [31], produces a kernel of size $2k$ [10]. Chen et al. [11] developed the current best parameterized algorithm for minimum vertex cover, giving a branch-and-reduce algorithm with running time $O(1.2738^k + kn)$ and polynomial space. For more information on the history of vertex cover kernelization, see the recent survey by Fellows et al. [15].

Exact Algorithms in Practice. The most efficient maximum clique solvers use a branch-and-bound search with advanced vertex reordering strategies and pruning (typically using approximation algorithms for graph coloring, MaxSAT [28] or constraint satisfaction). The long-standing canonical algorithms for finding the maximum clique are the MCS algorithm by Tomita et al. [41] and the bit-parallel algorithms of San Segundo et al. [34, 35]. However, recently Li et al. [29] introduced the MoMC algorithm, which uses incremental MaxSAT logic to achieve speed ups of up to 1 000 over MCS. Experiments by Batsyn et al. [4] show that MCS can be sped up significantly by giving an initial solution found through local search. However, even with these state-of-the-art algorithms, graphs on thousands of vertices remain intractable. For example, a difficult graph on 4 000 vertices required 39 wall-clock hours in a highly-parallel MapReduce cluster, and is estimated to require over a year of sequential computation [45].

[1] $O(1.1996^n p(n))$ where $p(n)$ is some polynomial in n.

We briefly note that these algorithms are designed for the most difficult-to-solve instances. Many solvers have been recently introduced that solve very sparse instances [33, 42, 36, 8], however, these instances are very *easy* to solve in general [43]. However, worth noting is that these recent clique solvers for sparse graphs apply simple data reduction rules, using an initial clique given by some inexact method [42, 36, 8]. However, these techniques rarely work on dense graphs, such as the complement graphs that we consider here. A thorough discussion of many results in clique finding can be found in the survey of Wu and Hao [44].

Data reductions have been successfully applied in practice to solve many problems that are intractable with general algorithms. Butenko et al. [5, 7] were the first to show that simple reductions could be used to compute exact maximum independent sets on graphs with hundreds of vertices for graphs derived from error-correcting codes. Their algorithm works by first applying *isolated clique removal* reductions, then solving the remaining graph with a branch-and-bound algorithm. Later, Butenko and Trukhanov [6] introduced the *critical independent set* reduction, which was able to solve graphs produced by the Sanchis graph generator. Larson [27] later proposed an algorithm to find a *maximum* critical independent set, but in experiments it proved to be slow in practice [38]. Iwata et al. [25] then showed how to remove a large collection of vertices from a maximum matching all at once; however, it is not known if these reductions are equivalent.

For the minimum vertex cover problem, it has long been known that two such simple reductions, called *pendant vertex removal* and *vertex folding*, are particularly effective in practice. However, two seminal experimental works explored the efficacy of further reductions. Abu-Khzam et al. [1] showed that *crown reductions* are as effective (and sometimes faster) in practice than performing the LP relaxation reduction (which, as they show in the paper, removes crowns) on graphs. We briefly note that critical independent sets, together with their neighborhoods, are in fact crowns, and thus in some ways the work of Butenko and Trukhanov [6] replicates that by Abu-Khzam et al. [1], though their experiments are run on different graphs.

Later, Akiba and Iwata [2] showed that an extensive collection of advanced data reduction rules (together with branching rules and lower bounds for pruning search) are also highly effective in practice. Their algorithm finds exact minimum vertex covers on a corpus of large social networks with hundreds of thousands of vertices or more in mere seconds. More details on the reduction rules follow in Section 4.

We briefly note that we considered other reduction techniques that emphasize fast computation at the cost of a larger (irreducible) graph [9, 38, 22]; however, we did not find them as effective as Akiba and Iwata [2] for exactly solving difficult instances. This is somewhat expected, however, since these techniques are optimized to produce fast high-quality solutions when combined with inexact methods such as local search.

4 Techniques

We now describe techniques that we use in our solver.

4.1 Kernelization. The most efficient algorithms for computing a minimum vertex cover in both theory and practice use *data reduction rules* to obtain a much smaller problem instance. If this smaller instance has size bounded by a function of some parameter, it's called a *kernel*.

We use an extensive (though not exhaustive) collection of data reduction rules whose efficacy was studied by Akiba and Iwata [2]. To compute a kernel, Akiba and Iwata [2] apply their reductions $r_1, \ldots, r_j$ by iterating over all reductions and trying to apply the current reduction r_i to all vertices. If r_i reduces at least one vertex, they restart with reduction r_1. When reduction r_j is executed, but does not reduce any vertex, all reductions have been applied exhaustively, and a kernel is found. Following their study we order the reductions as follows: degree-one vertex (i.e., pendant) removal, unconfined vertex removal [46], a well-known linear-programming relaxation [25, 31] (which, consequently, removes crowns [1]), vertex folding [10], and twin, funnel, and desk reductions [46].

To be self-contained, we now give a brief description of those reductions, in order of increasing complexity. Each reduction allows us to choose vertices that are either in some minimum vertex cover, or for which we can locally choose a vertex in a minimum vertex cover after solving the remaining graph, by following simple rules. If a minimum vertex cover is found in the kernel, then each reduction may be undone, producing a minimum vertex cover in the original graph. Refer to Akiba and Iwata [2] for a more thorough discussion, including implementation details. Our implementation of the reductions is an adaptation of Akiba and Iwata's original code.

Pendant vertices: A vertex v of degree one is called a *pendant*. Its neighbor is in some minimum vertex cover, therefore v and its neighbor u can be removed from G.

Vertex folding: For a vertex v with degree 2 whose neighbors u and w are not adjacent, either v is in some minimum vertex cover, or both u and w are in some minimum vertex cover. Therefore, we can contract u, v, and w to a single vertex v' and decide which vertices are in the vertex cover after computing a minimum vertex cover on the reduced graph.

Linear Programming Relaxation: First introduced by Nemhauser and Trotter [31] for the vertex packing problem, they present a linear programming relaxation with a half-integral solution (i.e., using only values 0, 1/2, and 1) which can be solved using bipartite matching. Their relaxation may be formulated for the minimum vertex cover problem as follows: minimize $\sum_{v \in V} x_v$, such at for each edge $(u, v) \in E$, $x_u + x_v \geq 1$ and for each vertex $v \in V$, $x_v \geq 0$. There is a minimum vertex cover containing all vertices with value 1 and no vertices with value 0. We use the further improvement from Iwata et al. [25], which computes a solution whose half-integral part is minimal.

Unconfined [46]: Though there are several definitions of an *unconfined* vertex in the literature, we use the simple one from Akiba and Iwata [2]. A vertex v is *unconfined* when determined by the following simple algorithm. First, initialize $S = \{v\}$. Then find a $u \in N(S)$ such that $|N(u) \cap S| = 1$ and $|N(u) \setminus N[S]|$ is minimized. If there is no such vertex, then v is confined. If $N(u) \setminus N[S] = \emptyset$, then v is unconfined. If $N(u) \setminus N[S]$ is a single vertex w, then add w to S and repeat the algorithm. Otherwise, v is confined. Unconfined vertices can be removed from the graph, since there always exists a minimum vertex cover that contains unconfined vertices.

Twin [46]: Let u and v be vertices of degree 3 with $N(u) = N(v)$. If $G[N(u)]$ has edges, then add $N(u)$ to the minimum vertex cover and remove u, v, $N(u)$, $N(v)$ from G. Otherwise, u and v may belong to some minimum vertex cover. We still remove u, v, $N(u)$ and $N(v)$ from G, and add a new gadget vertex w to G with edges to u's two-neighborhood (vertices at a distance 2 from u). If w is in the computed minimum vertex cover, then u's (and v's) neighbors are in some minimum vertex cover, otherwise u and v are in a minimum vertex cover.

Alternative: Two sets of vertices A and B are set to be *alternatives* if $|A| = |B| \geq 1$ and there exists a minimum vertex cover C such that $C \cap (A \cup B)$ is either A or B. Then we remove A and B and $C = N(A) \cap N(B)$ from G and add edges from each $a \in N(A) \setminus C$ to each $b \in N(B) \setminus C$. Then we add either A or B to C, depending on which neighborhood has vertices in C. Two structures are detected as alternatives. First, if $N(v) \setminus \{u\}$ induces a complete graph, then $\{u\}$ and $\{v\}$ are alternatives (a *funnel*). Next, if there is a cordless 4-cycle $a_1 b_1 a_2 b_2$ where each vertex has at least degree 3. Then sets $A = \{a_1, a_2\}$ and $B = \{b_1, b_2\}$ are alternatives (called a *desk*) when $|N(A) \setminus B| \leq 2$, $|N(B) \setminus A| \leq 2$, and $N(A) \cap N(B) = \emptyset$.

4.2 Branch-and-Reduce.

Branch-and-reduce is a paradigm that intermixes data reduction rules and branching. We use the algorithm of Akiba and Iwata, which exhaustively applies their full suite of reduction rules before branching, and includes a number of advanced branching rules as well as lower bounds to prune search.

Branching. When branching, a vertex of maximum degree is chosen for inclusion into the vertex cover. Mirrors and satellites are detected when branching, in order to eliminate branching on certain vertices. A *mirror* of a vertex v is a vertex $u \in N^2(v)$ such that $N(v) \setminus N(u)$ is a clique or empty. Fomin et al. [16] show that either the mirrors of v or $N(v)$ is in a minimum vertex cover, and we can therefore branch on all mirrors at once. This branching prevents branching on mirrors individually and decreases the size of the remaining graph (and thus the depth of the search tree). A *satellite* of a vertex v is a vertex $u \in N^2(v)$ such that there exists a vertex $w \in N(v)$ such that $N(w) \setminus N[v] = \{u\}$. If a vertex has no mirrors, then either v is in a minimum vertex cover or the neighbors of v's satellites in a minimum vertex cover. Akiba and Iwata [2] further introduce *packing* branching, maintaining linear inequalities for each vertex included or excluded from the current vertex cover (called *packing constraints*) throughout recursion; when a constraint is violated, further branching can be eliminated.

Lower Bounds. We briefly remark that Akiba and Iwata [2] implement lower bounds to prune the search space. Their lower bounds are based on clique cover, the LP relaxation, and cycle covers (see their paper for further details). The final lower bound used for pruning is the maximum of these three.

4.3 Branch-and-Bound.

Experiments by Strash [38] show that the full power of branch-and-reduce is only needed *very rarely* in real-world instances; kernelization followed by a standard branch-and-bound solver is sufficient for many real-world instances. Furthermore, branch-and-reduce does not work well on many synthetic benchmark instances, where data reduction rules are ineffective [2], and

instead add significant overhead to branch-and-bound. We use a state-of-the-art branch-and-bound maximum clique solver (MoMC) by Li et al. [29], which uses incremental MaxSAT reasoning to prune search, and a combination of static and dynamic vertex ordering to select the vertex for branching. We run the clique solver on the complement graph, giving a maximum independent set from which we derive a minimum vertex cover. In preliminary experiments, we found that a kernel can sometimes be harder for the solver than the original input; therefore, we run the algorithm on both the kernel and on the original graph.

4.4 Iterated Local Search. Batsyn et al. [4] showed that if branch-and-bound search is primed with a high-quality solution from local search, then instances can be solved up to thousands of times faster. We use the iterated local search algorithm by Andrade et al. [3] to prime the *branch-and-reduce* solver with a high-quality initial solution. To the best of our knowledge, this has not been tried before. Iterated local search was originally implemented for the maximum independent set problem, and is based on the notion of (j, k)-swaps. A (j, k)-swap removes j nodes from the current solution and inserts k nodes. The authors present a fast linear-time implementation that, given a maximal independent set, can find a $(1, 2)$-swap or prove that none exists. Their algorithm applies $(1, 2)$-swaps until reaching a local maximum, then perturbs the solution and repeats. We implemented the algorithm to find a high-quality solution on *the kernel*. Calling local search on the kernel has been shown to produce a high-quality solution much faster than without kernelization [9, 14].

5 Putting it all Together

Our algorithm first runs a preprocessing phase, followed by 4 phases of solvers.

Phase 1. (Preprocessing) Our algorithm starts by computing a kernel of the graph using the reductions by Akiba and Iwata [2]. From there we use iterated local search to produce a high-quality solution S_{init} on the (hopefully smaller) kernel.

Phase 2. (Branch-and-Reduce, short) We prime a branch-and-reduce solver with the initial solution S_{init} and run it with a short time limit.

Phase 3. (Branch-and-Bound, short) If Phase 2 is unsuccessful, we run the MoMC [29] clique solver on the complement of the kernel, also using a short time limit[2]. Sometimes kernelization can make the problem harder for MoMC. Therefore, if the first call was unsuccessful we also run MoMC on the complement of the original (unkernelized) input with the same short time limit.

Phase 4. (Branch-and-Reduce, long) If we have still not found a solution, we run branch-and-reduce on the kernel using initial solution S_{init} and a longer time limit. We opt for this second phase because, while most graphs amenable to reductions are solved very quickly with branch-and-reduce (less than a second), experiments by Akiba and Iwata [2] showed that other slower instances either finish in at most a few minutes, or take significantly longer—more than the time limit allotted for the challenge. This second phase of branch-and-reduce is meant to catch any instances that still benefit from reductions.

Phase 5. (Branch-and-Bound, remaining time) If all previous phases were unsuccessful, we run MoMC on the original (unkernelized) input graph until the end of the time given to the program by the challenge. This is meant to capture only the hardest-to-compute instances.

The algorithm time limits (discussed in the next section) and ordering were carefully chosen so that the overall algorithm outputs solutions of the "easy" instances *quickly*, while still being able to solve hard instances.

6 Experimental Results

We now look at the impact of the algorithmic components on the number of instances solved. Here, we focus on the public instances of the PACE 2019 Challenge, Vertex Cover Track A, obtained from `https://pacechallenge.org/files/pace2019-vc-exact-public-v2.tar.bz2`. This set contains 100 instances overall. We also summarize the results comparing against the second and third best competing algorithms on the private instances during the challenge (which can be found at `https://pacechallenge.org/2019/` and `https://www.optil.io/optilion/problem/3155`). Note that the public instances used during the challenge are all odd numbered and the private instances are all even numbered. The instances stem from various applications such as road networks, satisfiability, transit networks or social networks.

[2]Note that repeatedly checking the time can slow down a highly optimized branch-and-bound solver considerably; we therefore simulate time checking by using a limit on the number of branches.

6.1 Methodology and Setup. All of our experiments were run on a machine with four sixteen-core Intel Xeon Haswell-EX E7-8867 processors running at 2.5 GHz, 1 TB of main memory, and 32 768 KB of L2-Cache. The machine runs Debian GNU/Linux 9 and Linux kernel version 4.9.0-9. All algorithms were implemented in C++11 and compiled with gcc version 6.3.0 with optimization flag `-O3`. Our source code is publicly available under the MIT license at [23]. Each algorithm was run sequentially with a time limit of 30 minutes—the time allotted to solve a single data set in the PACE 2019 Challenge. Our primary focus is on the total number of instances solved.

6.2 Evaluation. We now explain the main configuration that we use in our experimental setup. In the following, MoMC runs the MoMC clique solver by Li et al. [29] on the complement of the input graph; RMoMC applies reductions to the input graph exhaustively, and then runs MoMC on the complement of the resulting kernel; LSBnR applies reductions exhaustively, then runs local search to obtain a high-quality solution on the kernel which is used as a initial bound in the branch-and-reduce algorithm that is run on the kernel; BnR applies reductions and then runs the branch-and-reduce algorithm on the kernel (no local search is used to improve an initial bound); FullA is the full algorithm as described in the previous section, using a short time limit of one second and a long time limit of thirty seconds.

Tables 1 and 2 give an overview of the instances that each of the solver solved, including the kernel size, and the minimum vertex cover size for those instances solved by any of the four algorithms. Overall, MoMC can solve 30 out of the 100 instances. Applying reductions first enables RMoMC to solve 68 instances. However, curiously, there are two instances (instances 131 and 157) that MoMC solves, but that RMoMC can not solve. In these cases, kernelization reduced the number of nodes, but *increased* the number of edges. This is due to the *alternative* reduction, which in some cases can create more edges than initially present. This is why we choose to also run MoMC on the unkernelized input graph in FullA (in order to solve those instances as well).

LSBnR solves 55 of the 100 instances. Priming the branch-and-reduce algorithm with an initial solution computed by local search has a significant impact: LSBnR solves 13 more instances than BnR, which solve 42 instances. In particular, using local search to find an initial bound helps to solve large instances in which the initial kernelization step does not reduce the graph fully. Surprisingly, RMoMC solves 26 instances that BnR does not (and even LSBnR is only able to solve one of these instances). To the best of our knowledge, this

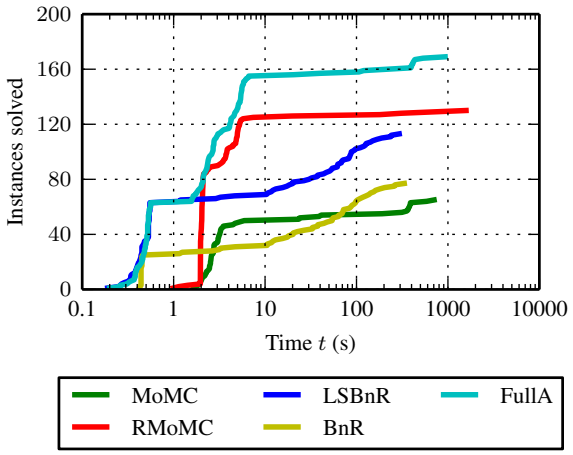

Figure 1: Number of instances solved over time by each algorithm over *all* instances. At each time step t, we count each instance solved by the algorithm in at most t seconds.

is the first time that kernelization followed by branch-and-bound is shown to significantly outperform branch-and-reduce. Our full algorithm FullA solves 82 of the 100 instances and, as expected, dominates each of the other configurations. This can be further seen from the plot in Figure 1, which shows how many instances each algorithm solves over time (this includes all 100 public and 100 private instances of the challenge). Note that LSBnR and RMoMC solve more instances in narrow time gaps, due to FullA's set up cost and running multiple algorithms. However, FullA quickly makes up for this and overtakes all algorithms at approximately eight seconds.

In addition to the 100 public instances, the PACE 2019 Challenge tests all submissions on 100 private instances. Detailed results for those instances can be found in [24]. The results are similar to the results on the private instances. On the private instances, MoMC can solve 35 out of the 100 instances, RMoMC solves 62, LSBnR solves 58 and BnR solves 35 instances. Our full algorithm FullA solved 87 of the 100 instances, which is 10 more instances than the second-place submission (peaty [32], solving 77), and 11 more than the third-place submission (bogdan [49]), solving 76). Our solver dominates these other solvers: with the exception of one graph, our algorithm solves all instances that peaty and bogdan can solve combined.

We briefly describe these two solvers. The peaty solver uses reductions to compute a problem kernel of the input followed by an unpublished maximum weight clique solver on the complement of each of the connected components of the kernel to assemble a

Table 1: Detailed per instance results for public instances. The columns n and m refer to the number of nodes and edges of the input graph, n' and m' refer to the number of nodes and edges of the kernel graph after reductions have been applied exhaustively, and $|VC|$ refers to the size of the minimum vertex cover of the input graph. We list a '✓' when a solver successfully solved the given instance in the time limit, and '-' otherwise.

inst#	n	m	n'	m'	MoMC	RMoMC	LSBnR	BnR	FullA	$\|VC\|$
001	6 160	40 207	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 586
003	60 541	74 220	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	12 190
005	200	819	192	800	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	129
007	8 794	10 130	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 397
009	38 452	174 645	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	21 348
011	9 877	25 973	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 981
013	45 307	55 440	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	8 610
015	53 610	65 952	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	10 670
017	23 541	51 747	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	12 082
019	200	884	194	862	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	130
021	24 765	30 242	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	5 110
023	27 717	133 665	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	16 013
025	23 194	28 221	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 899
027	65 866	81 245	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	13 431
029	13 431	21 999	0	0	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	6 622
031	200	813	198	818	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	136
033	4 410	6 885	138	471	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	2 725
035	200	884	189	859	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	133
037	198	824	194	810	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	131
039	6 795	10 620	219	753	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	4 200
041	200	1 040	200	1 023	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	139
043	200	841	198	844	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	139
045	200	1 044	200	1 020	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	137
047	200	1 120	198	1 080	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	140
049	200	957	198	930	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	136
051	200	1 135	200	1 098	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	140
053	200	1 062	200	1 026	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	139
055	200	958	194	938	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	134
057	200	1 200	197	1 139	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	142
059	200	988	193	954	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	137
061	200	952	198	914	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	135
063	200	1 040	200	1 011	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	138
065	200	1 037	200	1 011	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	138
067	200	1 201	200	1 174	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	143
069	200	1 120	196	1 077	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	140
071	200	984	200	952	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	136
073	200	1 107	200	1 078	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	139
075	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
077	200	988	193	954	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	137
079	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
081	199	1 124	197	1 087	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	141
083	200	1 215	198	1 182	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	144
085	11 470	17 408	3 539	25 955	-	-	-	-	-	
087	13 590	21 240	441	1 512	-	✓	-	-	✓	8 400
089	57 316	77 978	16 834	54 847	-	-	-	-	-	
091	200	1 196	200	1 163	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	145
093	200	1 207	200	1 162	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	143
095	15 783	24 663	510	1 746	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
097	18 096	28 281	579	1 995	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
099	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300

Table 2: Detailed per instance results for public instances. The columns n and m refer to the number of nodes and edges of the input graph, n' and m' refer to the number of nodes and edges of the kernel graph after reductions have been applied exhaustively, and $|VC|$ refers to the size of the minimum vertex cover of the input graph. We list a '✓' when a solver successfully solved the given instance in the time limit, and '-' otherwise.

inst#	n	m	n'	m'	MoMC	RMoMC	LSBnR	BnR	FullA	$\|VC\|$
101	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
103	15 783	24 663	513	1 752	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
105	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
107	13 590	21 240	435	1 500	-	✓	-	-	✓	8 400
109	66 992	90 970	20 336	66 350	-	-	-	-	-	
111	450	17 831	450	17 831	✓	✓	-	-	✓	420
113	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
115	18 096	28 281	573	1 986	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
117	18 096	28 281	582	2 007	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
119	18 096	28 281	588	2 016	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
121	18 096	28 281	579	1 998	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
123	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
125	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
127	18 096	28 281	582	2 001	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
129	15 783	24 663	507	1 752	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
131	2 980	5 360	2 179	6 951	✓	-	-	-	✓	1 920
133	15 783	24 663	507	1 746	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
135	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
137	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
139	18 096	28 281	579	1 995	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
141	18 096	28 281	576	1 995	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
143	18 096	28 281	582	2 001	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
145	18 096	28 281	576	1 989	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
147	18 096	28 281	567	1 974	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
149	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
151	15 783	24 663	501	1 728	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
153	29 076	45 570	2 124	16 266	-	-	-	-	-	
155	26 300	41 500	500	3 000	-	-	✓	-	✓	16 300
157	2 980	5 360	2 169	6 898	✓	-	-	-	✓	1 920
159	18 096	28 281	582	2 004	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
161	138 141	227 241	41 926	202 869	-	-	-	-	-	
163	18 096	28 281	582	2 004	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
165	18 096	28 281	576	1 995	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
167	15 783	24 663	510	1 746	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
169	4 768	8 576	3 458	11 014	-	-	-	-	-	
171	18 096	28 281	576	1 989	-	✓	-	-	✓	11 185
173	56 860	77 264	17 090	55 568	-	-	-	-	-	
175	3 523	6 446	2 723	8 570	-	-	-	-	-	
177	5 066	9 112	3 704	11 797	-	-	-	-	-	
179	15 783	24 663	504	1 740	-	✓	-	-	✓	9 755
181	18 096	28 281	573	1 989	-	✓	✓	-	✓	11 185
183	72 420	118 362	30 340	133 872	-	-	-	-	-	
185	3 523	6 446	2 723	8 568	-	-	-	-	-	
187	4 227	7 734	3 264	10 286	-	-	-	-	-	
189	7 400	13 600	5 802	18 212	-	-	-	-	-	
191	4 579	8 378	3 539	11 137	-	-	-	-	-	
193	7 030	12 920	5 510	17 294	-	-	-	-	-	
195	1 150	81 068	1 150	81 068	-	-	-	-	-	
197	1 534	127 011	1 534	127 011	-	-	-	-	-	
199	1 534	126 163	1 534	126 163	-	-	-	-	-	

solution. The clique solver is similar to MaxCLQ by Li and Quan [30], but is more general. Local search is used to obtain an initial solution. On the other hand, bogdan implemented a small suite of simple reductions (including vertex folding, isolated clique removal, and degree-one removal) together with a recent maximum clique solver by Szabó and Zavalnij [39].

Lastly, we note that our choice of using MoMC as our chosen branch-and-bound solver is significant on the private instances. Eight instances solved exclusively by our solver are solved in Phase 5, where MoMC is run until the end of the challenge time limit.

7 Conclusion

We presented the winning solver of the PACE 2019 Challenge, Vertex Cover Track. Our algorithm uses a portfolio of techniques, including an aggressive kernelization strategy with all known reduction rules, local search, branch-and-reduce, and a state-of-the-art branch-and-bound solver. Of particular interest is that several of our techniques were not from the literature on the vertex over problem: they were originally published to solve the (complementary) maximum independent set and maximum clique problems. Moreover, the two closest competitors in the challenge also applied reductions and a clique solver. Lastly, our experiments show the impact of the different solver techniques on the number of instances solved during the challenge. In particular, the results emphasize that data reductions play an important tool to boost the performance of branch-and-bound, and local search is highly effective to boost the performance of branch-and-reduce.

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