

# On Generalizations of Network Design Problems with Degree Bounds\*

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## Abstract

Iterative rounding and relaxation have arguably become the method of choice in dealing with unconstrained and constrained network design problems. In this paper we extend the scope of the iterative relaxation method in two directions: (1) by handling more complex degree constraints in the minimum spanning tree problem (namely *laminar* crossing spanning tree), and (2) by incorporating ‘degree bounds’ in other combinatorial optimization problems such as *matroid intersection* and *lattice polyhedra*. We give new or improved approximation algorithms, hardness results, and integrality gaps for these problems.

- Our main result is a  $(1, b + O(\log n))$ -approximation algorithm for the *minimum crossing spanning tree* (MCST) problem with *laminar* degree constraints. The laminar MCST problem is a natural generalization of the well-studied bounded-degree MST, and is a special case of general crossing spanning tree. We give an additive  $\Omega(\log^c m)$  hardness of approximation for *general* MCST, even in the absence of costs ( $c > 0$  is a fixed constant, and  $m$  is the number of degree constraints). This also leads to a multiplicative  $\Omega(\log^c m)$  hardness of approximation for the *robust  $k$ -median* problem [1], improving over the previously known factor 2 hardness.
- We then consider the *crossing contra-polymatroid intersection* problem and obtain a  $(2, 2b + \Delta - 1)$ -approximation algorithm, where  $\Delta$  is the maximum element frequency. This models for example the degree-bounded spanning-set intersection in two matroids. Finally, we introduce the *crossing lattice polyhedron* problem, and obtain a  $(1, b + 2\Delta - 1)$  approximation algorithm under certain condition. This result provides a unified framework and common generalization of various problems studied previously, such as degree bounded matroids.

## 1 Introduction

Iterative rounding and relaxation have arguably become the method of choice in dealing with unconstrained and constrained network design problems. Starting with Jain’s elegant *iterative rounding* scheme for the generalized Steiner network problem in [18], an extension of this technique (*iterative relaxation*) has more recently lead to breakthrough results in the area of constrained network design, where a number of linear constraints are added to a classical network design problem. Such constraints arise naturally in

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a wide variety of practical applications, and model limitations in processing power, bandwidth or budget. The design of powerful techniques to deal with these problems is therefore an important goal.

The most widely studied constrained network design problem is the *minimum-cost degree-bounded spanning tree* problem. In an instance of this problem, we are given an undirected graph, non-negative costs for the edges, and positive, integral degree-bounds for each of the nodes. The problem is easily seen to be NP-hard, even in the absence of edge-costs, since finding a spanning tree with maximum degree two is equivalent to finding a Hamiltonian Path. A variety of techniques have been applied to this problem [9, 10, 15, 21, 22, 29, 30], culminating in Singh and Lau’s breakthrough result in [34]. They presented an algorithm that computes a spanning tree of at most optimum cost whose degree at each vertex  $v$  exceeds its bound by at most 1, using the *iterative relaxation* framework developed in [24, 34].

The iterative relaxation technique has been applied to several constrained network design problems: spanning tree [34], survivable network design [24, 25], directed graphs with intersecting and crossing super-modular connectivity [24, 4]. It has also been applied to degree bounded versions of matroids and submodular flow [19].

In this paper we further extend the applicability of iterative relaxation, and obtain new or improved bi-criteria approximation results for minimum crossing spanning tree (MCST), crossing contra-polymatroid intersection, and crossing lattice polyhedra. We also provide some hardness results and integrality gaps for these problems.

**Notation.** As is usual, when dealing with an undirected graph  $G = (V, E)$ , for any  $S \subseteq V$  we let  $\delta_G(S) := \{(u, v) \in E \mid u \in S, v \notin S\}$ . When the graph is clear from the context, the subscript is dropped. A collection  $\{U_1, \dots, U_i\}$  of vertex-sets is called *laminar* if for every pair  $U_i, U_j$  in this collection, we have  $U_i \subseteq U_j, U_j \subseteq U_i$ , or  $U_i \cap U_j = \emptyset$ . A  $(\rho, f(b))$  approximation for a minimum cost degree bounded problem refers to a solution that (1) has cost at most  $\rho$  times the optimum that satisfies the degree bounds, and (2) satisfies the relaxed degree constraints in which a bound  $b$  is replaced with a bound  $f(b)$ .

## 1.1 Our Results, Techniques and Paper Outline

**Laminar MCST.** Our main result is for a natural generalization of bounded-degree MST (called Laminar Minimum Crossing Spanning Tree or *laminar MCST*), where we are given an edge-weighted undirected graph with a laminar family  $\mathcal{L} = \{S_i\}_{i=1}^m$  of vertex-sets having bounds  $\{b_i\}_{i=1}^m$ ; and the goal is to compute a spanning tree of minimum cost that contains at most  $b_i$  edges from  $\delta(S_i)$  for each  $i \in [m]$ .

The motivation behind this problem is in designing a network where there is a hierarchy (i.e. laminar family) of service providers that control nodes (i.e. vertices). The number of edges crossing the boundary of any service provider (i.e. its vertex-cut) represents some cost to this provider, and is therefore limited. The laminar MCST problem precisely models the question of connecting all nodes in the network while satisfying bounds imposed by all the service providers.

From a theoretical viewpoint, cut systems induced by laminar families are well studied, and are known to display rich structure. For example, *one-way cut-incidence matrices* are matrices whose rows are incidence vectors of directed cuts induced by the vertex-sets of a laminar family; It is well known (e.g., see [23]) that such matrices are totally unimodular. Using the laminar structure of degree-constraints and the iterative relaxation framework, we obtain the following main result, and present its proof in Section 2.

**Theorem 1** *There is a polynomial time  $(1, b + O(\log n))$  bicriteria approximation algorithm for laminar MCST. That is, the cost is no more than the optimum cost and the degree violation is at most an additive  $O(\log n)$ . This guarantee is relative to the natural LP relaxation.*

This guarantee is substantially stronger than what follows from known results for the general *minimum crossing spanning tree* (MCST) problem: where the degree bounds could be on arbitrary edge-subsets  $E_1, \dots, E_m$ . In particular, for general MCST a  $(1, b + \Delta - 1)$  [4, 19] is known where  $\Delta$  is the maximum number of degree-bounds an edge appears in. However, this guarantee is not useful for laminar MCST as  $\Delta$  can be as large as  $\Omega(n)$  in this case. If a multiplicative factor in the degree violation is allowed, Chekuri et al. [12] recently gave a very elegant  $(1, (1 + \epsilon)b + O(\frac{1}{\epsilon} \log m))$  guarantee, which subsumes the previous best  $(O(\log n), O(\log m) b)$  result [6]. However, these results also cannot be used to obtain a small additive violation, especially if  $b$  is large<sup>1</sup>. In particular, both the results [6, 12] for general MCST are based on the natural LP relaxation, for which there is an integrality gap of  $b + \Omega(\sqrt{n})$  even without regard to costs and when  $m = O(n)$  [33] (see also Section 3.2). Furthermore, combined with the recent hardness result of Charikar et al. [8] on discrepancy minimization, it follows that it is NP-hard to achieve an additive  $o(\sqrt{n})$  guarantee on degree for MCST (we give more details later). On the other hand, Theorem 1 shows that a purely additive  $O(\log n)$  guarantee on degree (relative to the LP relaxation and even in presence of costs) is indeed achievable for MCST, when the degree-bounds arise from a laminar cut-family.

The algorithm in Theorem 1 is based on iterative relaxation and uses two main new ideas. Firstly, we drop a carefully chosen *constant fraction of degree-constraints* in each iteration. This is crucial as it can be shown that dropping one constraint at a time as in the usual applications of iterative relaxation can indeed lead to a degree violation of  $\Omega(\Delta)$ . Secondly, the algorithm does not just drop degree constraints, but in some iterations it also *generates new degree constraints*, by merging existing degree constraints.

All previous applications of iterative relaxation to constrained network design treat connectivity and degree constraints rather asymmetrically. While the structure of the connectivity constraints of the underlying LP is used crucially (e.g., in the ubiquitous uncrossing argument), the handling of degree constraints is remarkably simple. Constraints are dropped one by one, and the final performance of the algorithm is good only if the number of side constraints is small (e.g., in recent work by Grandoni et al. [16]), or if their structure is simple (e.g., if the ‘frequency’ of each element is small). In contrast, our algorithm for laminar MCST exploits the structure of degree constraints much more carefully.

**Hardness Results.** We obtain the following hardness of approximation for the *general MCST* problem (and its matroid counterpart). In particular this rules out any algorithm for MCST that has additive constant degree violation, even without regard to costs.

**Theorem 2** *Unless  $\mathcal{NP}$  has quasi-polynomial time algorithms, the MCST problem admits no polynomial time  $O(\log^c m)$  additive approximation for the degree bounds for some constant  $c > 0$ ; this holds even when there are no costs.*

The proof for this theorem is given in Section 3, and uses a two-step reduction from the well-known *Label Cover* problem. First, we show hardness for a *uniform* matroid instance. In a second step, we then demonstrate how this implies the result for MCST claimed in Theorem 2.

As mentioned above, in very recent work Charikar et al. [8] showed that it is NP-hard to obtain better than  $O(\sqrt{n})$  additive approximation for discrepancy minimization. This implies a  $b + \Omega(\sqrt{n})$  hardness of approximation for MCST, which is much stronger than Theorem 2. Still our hardness result has some advantages. Theorem 2 has the additional property that all degree bounds in its hard instances are *unit*; whereas the degree bounds in the hard instances implied by [8] are  $\Omega(n)$ . This turns out to be useful

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<sup>1</sup>An approximation algorithm for MCST is said to have additive degree guarantee of  $\beta$  if, given any instance with bounds  $b$ , its solution has degree  $\leq b + \beta$ . In particular, the  $(1 + \epsilon) \cdot b + O(\frac{1}{\epsilon} \log m)$  degree guarantee from [12] does not imply any non-trivial additive guarantee since it has a multiplicative factor ahead of  $b$ .

in the (seemingly unrelated) context of *robust (or min-max)  $k$ -median* [1]. In this problem, there are  $m$  different client-sets in a metric and the goal is to open  $k$  facilities that are simultaneously good (in terms of the  $k$ -median objective) for all the client-sets. Anthony et al. [1] obtained a logarithmic approximation algorithm for this problem, and showed that it is hard to approximate better than factor 2. The following result shows that the robust  $k$ -median problem is indeed harder to approximate than usual  $k$ -median, for which  $O(1)$ -approximation algorithms are known [7, 3]. We present its proof in Section 3.1.

**Corollary 3** *Robust  $k$ -median is  $\Omega(\log^c m)$ -hard to approximate even on uniform metrics (for some fixed constant  $c > 0$ ), assuming  $\mathcal{NP}$  does not have quasi-polynomial time algorithms.*

**Degree Bounds in More General Settings.** We consider crossing versions of other classic combinatorial optimization problems, namely *contra-polymatroid intersection* and *lattice polyhedra* [17].

A set function  $g : 2^E \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$  (on groundset  $E$ ) is called supermodular (w.r.t. the Boolean lattice  $(2^E, \subseteq, \cap, \cup)$ ) if, for each  $A, B \subseteq E$  we have  $g(A) + g(B) \leq g(A \cup B) + g(A \cap B)$ . The contra-polymatroid associated with such an integral supermodular function  $g$  is the polyhedron  $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^E : x(U) \geq g(U), \forall U \subseteq E, x \geq \mathbf{0}\}$ . It is well-known (see Equation (44.38) [32]) that this linear system is box totally dual integral; in particular the polytope  $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^E : x(U) \geq g(U), \forall U \subseteq E, \mathbf{0} \leq x \leq \mathbf{1}\}$  is integral. Moreover, it is also known (Corollary 46.1d in [32]) that the intersection of two contra-polymatroids (given by integral supermodular functions  $r_1, r_2 : 2^E \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$ ) is box totally dual integral. Hence  $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^E : x(U) \geq \max\{r_1(U), r_2(U)\} \forall U \subseteq E, \mathbf{0} \leq x \leq \mathbf{1}\}$  is an integral polytope. Contra-polymatroid intersection contains, for example, the spanning-set intersection in two matroids. We study the natural degree bounded version of this problem, i.e.

**Definition 4 (Minimum crossing contra-polymatroid intersection)** *Let  $r_1, r_2 : 2^E \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}$  be two supermodular functions, cost function  $c : E \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+$  and  $\{E_i\}_{i \in I}$  be a collection of subsets of  $E$  with corresponding bounds  $\{b_i\}_{i \in I}$ . Then the goal is to minimize:*

$$\begin{aligned} \{c^T x \mid & x(S) \geq \max\{r_1(S), r_2(S)\}, \forall S \subseteq E; \\ & x(E_i) \leq b_i, \forall i \in I; \quad x \in \{0, 1\}^E\}. \end{aligned}$$

In particular, this definition captures the degree-bounded version of spanning-set intersection in two matroids (e.g., the *bipartite edge-cover* problem). We note that this definition does not capture alternate notions of matroid intersection, such as intersection of bases in two matroids; hence it does not apply to the degree-bounded arborescence problem.<sup>2</sup>

Let  $\Delta = \max_{e \in E} |\{i \in [m] \mid e \in E_i\}|$  be the largest number of sets  $E_i$  that any element of  $E$  belongs to, and refer to it as *frequency*. The proof of this theorem can be found in Section 4.

**Theorem 5** *Any optimal basic solution  $x^*$  of the linear relaxation of the minimum crossing contra-polymatroid intersection problem can be rounded into an integral solution  $\hat{x}$  such that:*

$$\hat{x}(S) \geq \max\{r_1(S), r_2(S)\}, \forall S \subseteq E; \quad \hat{x}(E_i) \leq 2b_i + \Delta - 1, \forall i \in I; \quad \text{and} \quad c^T \hat{x} \leq 2c^T x^*.$$

The algorithm for this theorem again uses iterative relaxation, and its proof is based on a ‘fractional token’ counting argument similar to the one used in [4]. We also observe that the natural iterative relaxation steps are insufficient to obtain a better approximation guarantee.

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<sup>2</sup>In an earlier version of the paper [5], we had incorrectly claimed that our result extends to degree-bounded arborescence.

It can be observed that uncrossing techniques play an essential role when analyzing iterative relaxation algorithms on combinatorial optimization problems where, additionally, some sort of “degree bound constraints” have been added to the linear inequality system. Thus, when looking for some general framework of systems, let’s say totally dual integral” (TDI) system, for which iterative relaxation techniques lead to “good” approximation guarantees for the corresponding crossing problem, the *lattice polyhedron* model, as introduced by Hoffman and Schwartz [17] seems to be a promising candidate.

**Crossing Lattice Polyhedra.** Lattice polyhedra form a unified framework for various discrete optimization problems (like, e.g., contra-polymatroid intersection, or planar min cut). They are polyhedra of type:

$$\{x \in \mathbb{R}^E \mid x(\rho(S)) \geq r(S), \quad \forall S \in \mathcal{F}\}$$

where  $E$  denotes some arbitrary non-empty finite set,  $\mathcal{F}$  relates to a collection of subsets of  $E$  via some mapping  $\rho : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow 2^E$ , and  $\mathcal{F}$  induces a lattice-type structure  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq, \wedge, \vee)$  with some partial order  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq)$  and binary meet and join operations  $\wedge$  and  $\vee$ . It is required that  $\mathcal{F}$  and  $\rho$  satisfy certain submodularity and consecutive properties (which are easily seen to be true for the Boolean lattice with the identity map), and  $r$  is supermodular w.r.t.  $\wedge$  and  $\vee$ . A precise definition is given in Section 5, where we also mention some examples of lattice polyhedra. The key property of lattice polyhedra is that the uncrossing technique can be applied. Using this uncrossing property it is not hard to see that the underlying system is box-TDI [17], and min-max theorems for several classical discrete optimization problems find their explanation this way. The integrality result of Hoffman and Schwartz was just a theoretical existence result without algorithmic foundation. Recently, the first combinatorial algorithm was found [27]. We refer the reader to [32] for a more comprehensive treatment of this subject.

Thus, as uncrossing techniques are crucial in almost all iterative relaxation approaches for optimization problems with degree bounds, we generalize our work even further and consider *crossing lattice polyhedra* which arise from lattice polyhedra by adding “degree-constraints” of the form  $a_i \leq x(E_i) \leq b_i$  for a given collection  $\{E_i \subseteq E \mid i \in I\}$  and lower and upper bounds  $a, b \in \mathbb{R}^I$ . We show that the standard LP relaxation for the general crossing lattice polyhedron problem is weak; in Section 5.1 we give instances of crossing planar min-cut where the LP-relaxation is feasible, but any integral solution violates some degree-bound by  $\Omega(\sqrt{n})$ . For this reason, we henceforth focus on a restricted class of crossing lattice polyhedra in which the underlying lattice  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq)$  satisfies the following monotonicity property:

$$(*) \quad S < T \implies |\rho(S)| < |\rho(T)| \quad \forall S, T \in \mathcal{F}.$$

We obtain the following theorem whose proof is given in Section 5.

**Theorem 6** *For any instance of the crossing lattice polyhedron problem in which  $\mathcal{F}$  satisfies property (\*), there exists an algorithm that computes an integral solution of cost at most the optimal, where all rank constraints are satisfied, and each degree bound is violated by at most an additive  $2\Delta - 1$ .*

We note that the above property (\*) is satisfied for matroids, and hence Theorem 6 matches the previously best-known bound [19] for degree bounded matroids (with both upper/lower bounds). Also note that property (\*) holds whenever  $\mathcal{F}$  is ordered by inclusion.

## 1.2 Related Work

As mentioned earlier, the basic bounded-degree MST problem has been extensively studied [9, 10, 15, 21, 22, 29, 30, 34]. The iterative relaxation technique for degree-constrained problems was developed



in [24, 34].

MCST was first introduced by Bilo et al. [6], who presented a randomized-rounding algorithm that computes a tree of cost  $O(\log n)$  times the optimum where each degree constraint is violated by a multiplicative  $O(\log n)$  factor and an additive  $O(\log m)$  term. Subsequently, Bansal et al. [4] gave an algorithm that attains an optimal cost guarantee and an additive  $\Delta - 1$  guarantee on degree; recall that  $\Delta$  is the maximum number of degree constraints that an edge lies in. This algorithm used iterative relaxation as its main tool. Recently, Chekuri et al. [12] obtained an improved  $(1, (1 + \epsilon)b + O(\frac{1}{\epsilon} \log m))$  approximation algorithm for MCST, for any  $\epsilon > 0$ ; this algorithm is based on pipage rounding.

The minimum crossing matroid basis problem was introduced in [19], where the authors used iterative relaxation to obtain (1)  $(1, b + \Delta - 1)$ -approximation algorithm when there are only upper bounds on degree, and (2)  $(1, b + 2\Delta - 1)$ -approximation algorithm in the presence of both upper and lower degree-bounds. The [12] result also holds in this matroid setting. [19] also considered a degree-bounded version of the *submodular flow* problem and gave a  $(1, b + 1)$  approximation guarantee.

The bounded-degree arborescence problem was considered in Lau et al. [24], where a  $(2, 2b + 2)$  approximation guarantee was obtained. Subsequently Bansal et al. [4] designed an algorithm that for any  $0 < \epsilon \leq 1/2$ , achieves a  $(1/\epsilon, b_v/(1 - \epsilon) + 4)$  approximation guarantee. They also showed that this guarantee is the best one can hope for via the natural LP relaxation (for every  $0 < \epsilon \leq 1/2$ ). In the absence of edge-costs, [4] gave an algorithm that violates degree bounds by at most an additive two. Recently Nutov [28] studied the arborescence problem under *weighted* degree constraints, and gave a  $(2, 5b)$  approximation algorithm for it.

Lattice polyhedra were first investigated by Hoffman and Schwartz [17] and the natural LP relaxation was shown to be totally dual integral. As stated above, the integrality result of Hoffman and Schwartz was not accompanied by an algorithm. In the last decades, several algorithms, often of greedy-type, have been established for special subclasses of lattice polyhedra. The farthest reaching greedy-type algorithms for lattice polyhedra are, most probably, the algorithms in [14] and [13]. However, in all these algorithms, the rank function was required to be monotone increasing on the underlying lattice, a property which does not hold for, e.g., contra-polymatroid intersection. Recently, the first combinatorial algorithm was established for lattice polyhedra in general [27].

## 2 Crossing Spanning Tree with Laminar degree bounds

In this section we prove Theorem 1 by presenting an iterative relaxation-based algorithm with the stated performance guarantee. During its execution, the algorithm selects and deletes edges, and it modifies the given laminar family of degree bounds. A generic iteration starts with a subset  $F$  of edges already picked in the solution, a subset  $E$  of *undecided* edges, i.e., the edges not yet picked or dropped from the solution, a laminar family  $\mathcal{L}$  on  $V$ , and residual degree bounds  $b(S)$  for each  $S \in \mathcal{L}$ .

The laminar family  $\mathcal{L}$  has a natural forest-like structure with *nodes* corresponding to each element of  $\mathcal{L}$ . A node  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  is called the *parent* of node  $C \in \mathcal{L}$  if  $S$  is the inclusion-wise minimal set in  $\mathcal{L} \setminus \{C\}$  that contains  $C$ ; and  $C$  is called a *child* of  $S$ . Node  $D \in \mathcal{L}$  is called a *grandchild* of node  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  if  $S$  is the parent of  $D$ 's parent. A node that has no parent is called *root*. Nodes  $S, T \in \mathcal{L}$  are *siblings* if they have the same parent node; we also define the set of all root nodes to be siblings. The *level* of any node  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  is the length of the path in this forest from  $S$  to the root of its tree. We also maintain a *linear ordering* of the children of each  $\mathcal{L}$ -node. A subset  $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$  is called *consecutive* if all nodes in  $\mathcal{B}$  are siblings (with some parent  $S$ ) and they appear consecutively in the ordering of  $S$ 's children. In any iteration  $(F, E, \mathcal{L}, b)$ , the algorithm solves the following LP relaxation of the residual problem.

$$\begin{aligned}
\min \quad & \sum_{e \in E} c_e x_e & (1) \\
\text{s.t.} \quad & x(E(V)) = |V| - |F| - 1 \\
& x(E(U)) \leq |U| - |F(U)| - 1 & \forall U \subset V \\
& x(\delta_E(S)) \leq b(S) & \forall S \in \mathcal{L} \\
& x_e \geq 0 & \forall e \in E
\end{aligned}$$

For any vertex-subset  $W \subseteq V$  and edge-set  $H$ , we let  $H(W) := \{(u, v) \in H \mid u, v \in W\}$  denote the edges induced on  $W$ ; and  $\delta_H(W) := \{(u, v) \in H \mid u \in W, v \notin W\}$  the set of edges crossing  $W$ . The first two sets of constraints are spanning tree constraints while the third set corresponds to the degree bounds. Let  $x$  denote an optimal *extreme point solution* to this LP. By reducing degree bounds  $b(S)$ , if needed, we assume that  $x$  satisfies all degree bounds at equality (the degree bounds may therefore be fractional-valued). Let  $\alpha := 24$ .

**Definition 7** An edge  $e \in E$  is said to be local for  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  if  $e$  has at least one end-point in  $S$  but is neither in  $E(C)$  nor in  $\delta(C) \cap \delta(S)$  for any grandchild  $C$  of  $S$ . Let  $\text{local}(S)$  denote the set of local edges for  $S$ . A node  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  is said to be good if  $|\text{local}(S)| \leq \alpha$ .

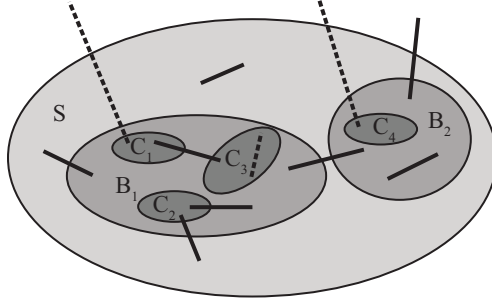


Figure 1: Example of local edges.

Figure 1 shows a set  $S$ , its children  $B_1$  and  $B_2$ , and grand-children  $C_1, \dots, C_4$ ; edges in  $\text{local}(S)$  are drawn solid, non-local ones are shown dashed.

Initially,  $E$  is the set of edges in the given graph,  $F \leftarrow \emptyset$ ,  $\mathcal{L}$  is the original laminar family of vertex sets for which there are degree bounds, and an arbitrary linear ordering is chosen on the children of each node in  $\mathcal{L}$ . In a generic iteration  $(F, E, \mathcal{L}, b)$ , the algorithm performs one of the following steps (see also Figure 2):

1. If  $x_e = 1$  for some edge  $e \in E$  then  $F \leftarrow F \cup \{e\}$ ,  $E \leftarrow E \setminus \{e\}$ , and set  $b(S) \leftarrow b(S) - 1$  for all  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  with  $e \in \delta(S)$ .
2. If  $x_e = 0$  for some edge  $e \in E$  then  $E \leftarrow E \setminus \{e\}$ .
3. **DropN:** Suppose there at least  $|\mathcal{L}|/4$  good non-leaf nodes in  $\mathcal{L}$ . Then either odd-levels or even-levels contain a set  $\mathcal{M} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$  of  $|\mathcal{L}|/8$  good non-leaf nodes. Drop the degree bounds of all *children* of  $\mathcal{M}$  and modify  $\mathcal{L}$  accordingly. The ordering of siblings also extends naturally.

4. **DropL:** Suppose there are more than  $|\mathcal{L}|/4$  good leaf nodes in  $\mathcal{L}$ , denoted by  $\mathcal{N}$ . Then partition  $\mathcal{N}$  into parts corresponding to siblings in  $\mathcal{L}$ . For any part  $\{N_1, \dots, N_k\} \subseteq \mathcal{N}$  consisting of ordered (not necessarily contiguous) children of some node  $S$ :
- Define  $M_i = N_{2i-1} \cup N_{2i}$  for all  $1 \leq i \leq \lfloor k/2 \rfloor$  (if  $k$  is odd  $N_k$  is not used).
  - Modify  $\mathcal{L}$  by removing leaves  $\{N_1, \dots, N_k\}$  and adding new leaf-nodes  $\{M_1, \dots, M_{\lfloor k/2 \rfloor}\}$  as children of  $S$  (if  $k$  is odd  $N_k$  is removed). The children of  $S$  in the new laminar family are ordered as follows: each node  $M_i$  takes the position of either  $N_{2i-1}$  or  $N_{2i}$  (arbitrarily), and other children of  $S$  are unaffected.
  - Set the degree bound of each  $M_i$  to  $b(M_i) = b(N_{2i-1}) + b(N_{2i})$ .

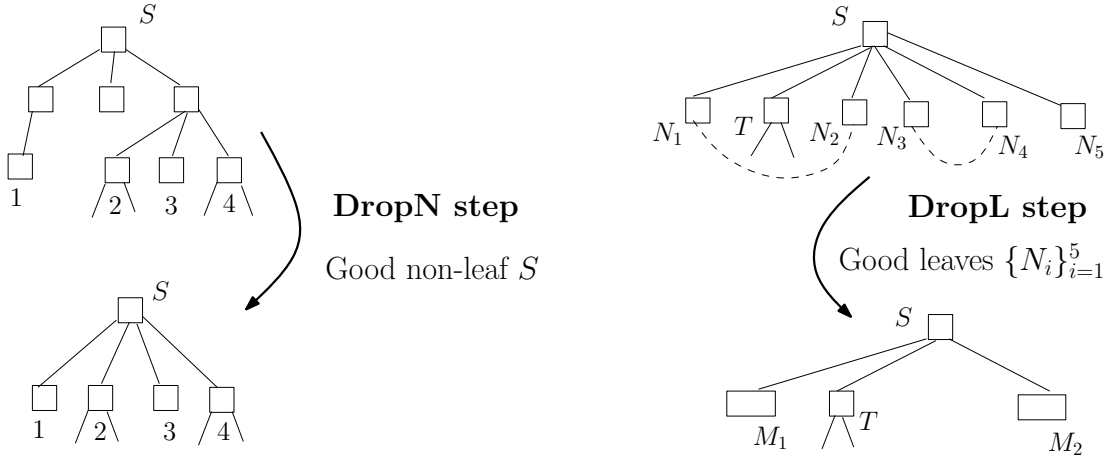


Figure 2: Examples of the degree constraint modifications DropN and DropL.

Assuming that one of the above steps applies at each iteration, the algorithm terminates when  $E = \emptyset$  and outputs the final set  $F$  as a solution. It is clear that the algorithm outputs a spanning tree of  $G$ . An inductive argument (see e.g. [24]) can be used to show that the LP (1) is feasible at each iteration and  $c(F) + z_{cur} \leq z_o$  where  $z_o$  is the original LP value,  $z_{cur}$  is the current LP value, and  $F$  is the chosen edge-set at the current iteration. Thus the cost of the final solution is at most the initial LP optimum  $z_o$ . Next we show that one of the four iterative steps always applies.

**Lemma 8** *In each iteration, one of the four steps above applies.*

**Proof:** Let  $x^*$  be the optimal basic solution of (1), and suppose that the first two steps do not apply. Hence, we have  $0 < x_e^* < 1$  for all  $e \in E$ . The fact that  $x^*$  is a basic solution together with a standard uncrossing argument (e.g., see [18]) implies that  $x^*$  is uniquely defined by

$$x(E(U)) = |U| - |F(U)| - 1 \quad \forall U \in \mathcal{S}, \quad \text{and} \quad x(\delta_E(S)) = b(S), \quad \forall S \in \mathcal{L}',$$

where  $\mathcal{S}$  is a laminar subset of the tight spanning tree constraints, and  $\mathcal{L}'$  is a subset of tight degree constraints; moreover this set of constraints are linearly independent and  $|E| = |\mathcal{S}| + |\mathcal{L}'|$ .

A simple counting argument using extreme-point properties of  $x^*$  yields  $2|\mathcal{S}| \leq |E|$  (see, e.g., [34]); we give a proof below for completeness.



**Claim 9** *The number  $|\mathcal{S}|$  of tight linearly independent spanning tree constraints of  $x^*$  is at most  $|E|/2$ .*

**Proof:** Recall that  $E$  denotes the support of the extreme point solution  $x^*$ . Consider any  $U \in \mathcal{S}$ . Let  $\{W_i\}$  denote the set of  $U$ 's children in  $\mathcal{S}$ ; i.e. the inclusion-wise maximal sets in  $\mathcal{S} \setminus \{U\}$  that are subsets of  $U$ . We will show that  $|E(U) \setminus \cup_i E(W_i)| \geq 2$ ; note that this suffices to prove the claim.

Observe that  $x^*(E(U) \setminus \cup_i E(W_i)) = x^*(E(U)) - \sum_i x^*(E(W_i))$  is an integer since  $U$  and  $\{W_i\}$  are tight spanning tree constraints (with integer values). Moreover  $E(U) \setminus \cup_i E(W_i) \neq \emptyset$  since the constraints  $U$  and  $\{W_i\}$  are linearly independent; hence  $x^*(E(U) \setminus \cup_i E(W_i)) > 0$  (recall  $x_e^* > 0$  for all  $e \in E$ ). Thus we have  $x^*(E(U) \setminus \cup_i E(W_i)) \geq 1$ . As  $x_e^* < 1$  for all  $e \in E$ , it follows that  $|E(U) \setminus \cup_i E(W_i)| \geq 2$  ■

Using this claim and  $|E| = |\mathcal{S}| + |\mathcal{L}'|$ , we obtain  $|\mathcal{S}| \leq |\mathcal{L}'|$  and  $|E| \leq 2|\mathcal{L}'| \leq 2|\mathcal{L}|$ .

From the definition of local edges, we get that any edge  $e = (u, v)$  is local to at most the following six sets: the smallest set  $S_1 \in \mathcal{L}$  containing  $u$ , the smallest set  $S_2 \in \mathcal{L}$  containing  $v$ , the parents  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  of  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  resp., the least-common-ancestor  $L$  of  $P_1$  and  $P_2$ , and the parent of  $L$ . Thus  $\sum_{S \in \mathcal{L}} |\text{local}(S)| \leq 6|E|$ . From the above, we conclude that  $\sum_{S \in \mathcal{L}} |\text{local}(S)| \leq 12|\mathcal{L}|$ . Thus at least  $|\mathcal{L}|/2$  sets  $S \in \mathcal{L}$  must have  $|\text{local}(S)| \leq \alpha = 24$ , i.e., must be good. Now either at least  $|\mathcal{L}|/4$  of them must be non-leaves or at least  $|\mathcal{L}|/4$  of them must be leaves. In the first case, step 3 holds and in the second case, step 4 holds. ■

It remains to bound the violation in the degree constraints, which turns out to be rather challenging. We note that this is unlike usual applications of iterative rounding/relaxation, where the harder part is in showing that one of the iterative steps applies.

It is clear that the algorithm reduces the size of  $\mathcal{L}$  by at least  $|\mathcal{L}|/8$  in each DropN or DropL iteration. Since the initial number of degree constraints is at most  $2n - 1$ , we get the following lemma.

**Lemma 10** *The number of drop iterations (DropN and DropL) is  $T := O(\log n)$ .*

**Performance guarantee for degree constraints.** We begin with some notation. The iterations of the algorithm are broken into periods between successive drop iterations: there are exactly  $T$  drop-iterations (Lemma 10). In what follows, the  $t$ -th drop iteration is called *round  $t$* . The *time  $t$*  refers to the instant just after round  $t$ ; time 0 refers to the start of the algorithm. At any time  $t$ , consider the following parameters.

- $\mathcal{L}_t$  denotes the laminar family of degree constraints.
- $E_t$  denotes the undecided edge set, i.e., support of the current LP optimal solution.
- For any set  $\mathcal{B}$  of *consecutive siblings* in  $\mathcal{L}_t$ ,  $\text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) = \sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} b(N)$  equals the sum of the residual degree bounds on nodes of  $\mathcal{B}$ .
- For any set  $\mathcal{B}$  of *consecutive siblings* in  $\mathcal{L}_t$ ,  $\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t)$  equals the number of edges from  $\delta_{E_t}(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N)$  included in the final solution.

Recall that  $b$  denotes the *residual* degree bounds at any point in the algorithm. The following lemma is the main ingredient in bounding the degree violation.

**Lemma 11** *For any set  $\mathcal{B}$  of consecutive siblings in  $\mathcal{L}_t$  (at any time  $t$ ),  $\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t) \leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t)$ .*

Observe that this implies the desired bound on each original degree constraint  $S$ : using  $t = 0$  and  $\mathcal{B} = \{S\}$ , the violation is bounded by an additive  $4\alpha \cdot T$  term.

**Proof:** The proof of this lemma is by induction on  $T - t$ . The base case  $t = T$  is trivial since the only iterations after this correspond to including 1-edges: hence there is no violation in *any* degree bound, i.e.  $\text{Inc}(\{N\}, T) \leq b(N)$  for all  $N \in \mathcal{L}_T$ . Hence for any  $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}$  (not necessarily consecutive),  $\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, T) \leq \sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} \text{Inc}(\{N\}, T) \leq \sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} b(N) = \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, T)$ .

Now suppose  $t < T$ , and assume the lemma for  $t + 1$ . Fix a consecutive  $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{L}_t$ . We consider different cases depending on what kind of drop occurs in round  $t + 1$ .

**DropN round.** Here either all nodes in  $\mathcal{B}$  get dropped or none gets dropped.

Case 1: *None of  $\mathcal{B}$  is dropped.* Then observe that  $\mathcal{B}$  is consecutive in  $\mathcal{L}_{t+1}$  as well; so the inductive hypothesis implies  $\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) \leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1)$ . Since the only iterations strictly between round  $t$  and round  $t + 1$  involve edge-fixing, we have  $\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t) \leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + \text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) \leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1) \leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t)$ .

Case 2: *All of  $\mathcal{B}$  is dropped.* Let  $\mathcal{C}$  (possibly empty) denote the set of all children (in  $\mathcal{L}_t$ ) of nodes in  $\mathcal{B}$ . Note that  $\mathcal{C}$  consists of consecutive siblings in  $\mathcal{L}_{t+1}$ , and inductively  $\text{Inc}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1) \leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1)$ . Let  $S \in \mathcal{L}_t$  denote the parent of the  $\mathcal{B}$ -nodes; so  $\mathcal{C}$  are grand-children of  $S$  in  $\mathcal{L}_t$ . Let  $x'$  denote the optimal LP solution *just before* round  $t + 1$  (when the degree bounds are still given by  $\mathcal{L}_t$ ), and  $H = E_{t+1}$  the support edges of  $x'$ . At that point, we have  $b(N) = x'(\delta(N))$  for all  $N \in \mathcal{B} \cup \mathcal{C}$ . Also let  $\text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) := \sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} b(N)$  be the sum of bounds on  $\mathcal{B}$ -nodes just before round  $t + 1$ . Since  $S$  is a good node in round  $t + 1$ ,  $|\text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) - \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1)| = |\sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} b(N) - \sum_{M \in \mathcal{C}} b(M)| = |\sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} x'(\delta(N)) - \sum_{M \in \mathcal{C}} x'(\delta(M))| \leq 2\alpha$ . The last inequality follows since  $S$  is good and all edges contributing to that difference lie in  $\text{local}(S)$ ; the factor of 2 appears since some edges, e.g., the edges between two children or two grandchildren of  $S$ , may get counted twice. Note also that the symmetric difference of  $\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N)$  and  $\delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)$  is contained in  $\text{local}(S)$ . Thus  $\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N)$  and  $\delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)$  differ in at most  $\alpha$  edges.

Again since all iterations between time  $t$  and  $t + 1$  are edge-fixing:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t) &\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + |\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N) \setminus \delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)| \\
&\quad + \text{Inc}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + \alpha + \text{Inc}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + \alpha + \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + \alpha + \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + 2\alpha + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t)
\end{aligned}$$

The first inequality above follows from simple counting; the second follows since  $\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N)$  and  $\delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)$  differ in at most  $\alpha$  edges; the third is the induction hypothesis, and the fourth is  $\text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t + 1) \leq \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t + 1) + 2\alpha$  (as shown above).

**DropL round.** In this case, let  $S$  be the parent of  $\mathcal{B}$ -nodes in  $\mathcal{L}_t$ , and  $\mathcal{N} = \{N_1, \dots, N_p\}$  be all the ordered children of  $S$ , of which  $\mathcal{B}$  is a subsequence (since it is consecutive). Suppose indices  $1 \leq \pi(1) < \pi(2) < \dots < \pi(k) \leq p$  correspond to good leaf-nodes in  $\mathcal{N}$ . Then for each  $1 \leq i \leq \lfloor k/2 \rfloor$ , nodes  $N_{\pi(2i-1)}$  and  $N_{\pi(2i)}$  are merged in this round. Let  $\{\pi(i) \mid e \leq i \leq f\}$  (possibly empty) denote the indices of good leaf-nodes in  $\mathcal{B}$ . Then it is clear that the only nodes of  $\mathcal{B}$  that may be merged with nodes outside  $\mathcal{B}$  are  $N_{\pi(e)}$  and  $N_{\pi(f)}$ ; all other  $\mathcal{B}$ -nodes are either not merged or merged with another  $\mathcal{B}$ -node. Let  $\mathcal{C}$  be the inclusion-wise *minimal* set of children of  $S$  in  $\mathcal{L}_{t+1}$  that is consecutive and contains:

Children of node  $S$  in  $\mathcal{L}_t$  and  $\mathcal{L}_{t+1}$

Squares are good leaf nodes in  $\mathcal{L}_t$ ; circle nodes are unaffected by DropL round

Arcs denote the merging of good leaves, and position of the new nodes

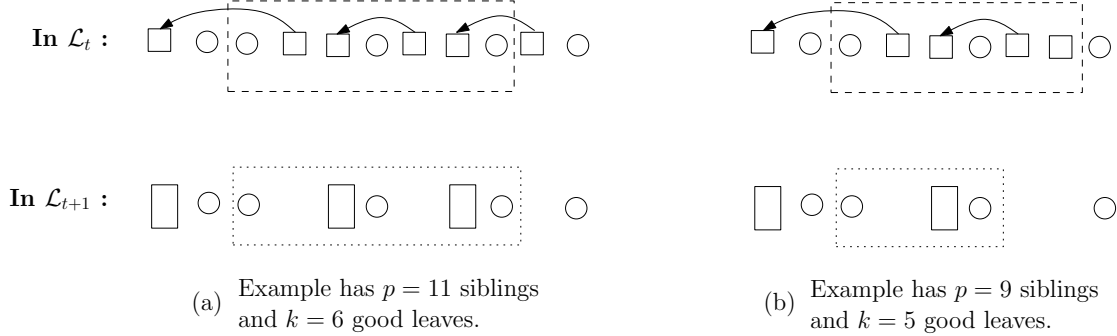


Figure 3: Deriving set  $\mathcal{C}$  (shown dotted) from  $\mathcal{B}$  (shown dashed) in DropL round.

- all nodes of  $\mathcal{B} \setminus \{N_{\pi(i)}\}_{i=1}^k$ , and
- every new leaf node resulting from merging *two good leaf nodes* of  $\mathcal{B}$ .

We remark that  $\mathcal{C}$  may contain more nodes than these two types, but it is chosen to be the minimal consecutive set containing all the above nodes. See also Figure 3 for some examples. Note that  $\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M$  consists of some subset of  $\mathcal{B}$  and at most two good leaf-nodes from  $\mathcal{N} \setminus \mathcal{B}$ . These two extra nodes (if any) are  $N_{\pi(e-1)}$  and  $N_{\pi(f+1)}$ , which might be merged with  $N_{\pi(e)}$  and  $N_{\pi(f)}$  respectively. Again let  $\text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) := \sum_{N \in \mathcal{B}} b(N)$  denote the sum of bounds on  $\mathcal{B}$  just before drop round  $t+1$ , when degree constraints are  $\mathcal{L}_t$ . Let  $H = E_{t+1}$  be the undecided edges in round  $t+1$ . By the definition of bounds on merged leaves, we have  $\text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t+1) \leq \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + 2\alpha$ . The term  $2\alpha$  is present due to the (possibly) two extra good leaf-nodes described above.

**Claim 12** We have  $|\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N) \setminus \delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)| \leq 2\alpha$ .

**Proof:** We say that  $N \in \mathcal{N}$  is represented in  $\mathcal{C}$  if either  $N \in \mathcal{C}$  or  $N$  is contained in some node of  $\mathcal{C}$ . Let  $\mathcal{D}$  consist of (i) nodes of  $\mathcal{B}$  that are *not* represented in  $\mathcal{C}$ , and (ii) nodes of  $\mathcal{N} \setminus \mathcal{B}$  that *are* represented in  $\mathcal{C}$ . Observe that by definition of  $\mathcal{C}$ , the set  $\mathcal{D} \subseteq \{N_{\pi(e-1)}, N_{\pi(e)}, N_{\pi(f)}, N_{\pi(f+1)}\}$ ; in fact it can be easily seen that  $|\mathcal{D}| \leq 2$ . Moreover  $\mathcal{D}$  consists of only good leaf nodes. (See Figure 3 for an example). Thus, we have  $|\cup_{L \in \mathcal{D}} \delta_H(L)| \leq 2\alpha$ . Now note that the edges in  $\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N) \setminus \delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)$  must be in  $\cup_{L \in \mathcal{D}} \delta_H(L)$ . This completes the proof. ■

As in the previous case, we have:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Inc}(\mathcal{B}, t) &\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + |\delta_H(\cup_{N \in \mathcal{B}} N) \setminus \delta_H(\cup_{M \in \mathcal{C}} M)| \\
&\quad + \text{Inc}(\mathcal{C}, t+1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + 2\alpha + \text{Inc}(\mathcal{C}, t+1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + 2\alpha + \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t+1) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1) \\
&\leq \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) - \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + 2\alpha + \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + 2\alpha + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t - 1) \\
&= \text{Bnd}(\mathcal{B}, t) + 4\alpha \cdot (T - t)
\end{aligned}$$

The first inequality follows from simple counting; the second uses Claim 12, the third is the induction hypothesis (since  $\mathcal{C}$  is consecutive), and the fourth is  $\text{Bnd}(\mathcal{C}, t+1) \leq \text{Bnd}'(\mathcal{B}, t+1) + 2\alpha$  (from above). This completes the proof of the inductive step and hence Lemma 11.  $\blacksquare$

### 3 Hardness Results

In this section we prove Theorem 2; i.e. unless  $\mathcal{NP}$  has quasi-polynomial time algorithms, there is no polynomial time  $O(\log^c m)$  additive approximation algorithm for degree bounds for the minimum crossing spanning tree problem, where  $c > 0$  is some universal constant. This result also holds in the absence of edge-costs. We note that this hardness result only holds for the general MCST problem, and not the laminar MCST addressed earlier. The first step to proving this result is a hardness for the more general minimum crossing matroid basis problem: given a matroid  $\mathcal{M}$  on a ground set  $V$  of elements, a cost function  $c : V \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+$ , and degree bounds specified by pairs  $\{(E_i, b_i)\}_{i=1}^m$  (where each  $E_i \subseteq V$  and  $b_i \in \mathbb{N}$ ), find a minimum cost basis  $I$  in  $\mathcal{M}$  such that  $|I \cap E_i| \leq b_i$  for all  $i \in [m]$ .

**Theorem 13** *Unless  $\mathcal{NP}$  has quasi-polynomial time algorithms, the unweighted minimum crossing matroid basis problem admits no polynomial time  $O(\log^c m)$  additive approximation algorithm for the degree bounds for some fixed constant  $c > 0$ .*

**Proof:** We reduce from the label cover problem [2]. The input is a bipartite graph  $H = (V_1, V_2, F)$  with label set  $\Sigma$  and constraints  $C_{u,v} \subseteq \Sigma \times \Sigma$  (consisting of ordered pairs of labels) for all  $(u, v) \in F$ . The goal is to compute an assignment  $f : V_1 \cup V_2 \rightarrow \Sigma$  such that the maximum number of constraints are satisfied, where constraint  $C_{u,v}$  is said to be satisfied if and only if  $\langle f(u), f(v) \rangle \in C_{u,v}$ . The following result is well known.

**Theorem 14 ([31])** *There exists a universal constant  $\gamma > 1$  such that for every  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ , there is a reduction from any SAT instance (having size  $N$ ) to a label cover instance  $\langle H = (V_1, V_2, F), \Sigma, \{C_{u,v}\}_{(u,v) \in F} \rangle$  with  $|H|, |F| = N^{\Theta(k)}$  and  $|\Sigma| = 2^{\Theta(k)}$  such that:*

- *If the SAT instance is satisfiable, the label cover instance has optimal value  $|F|$ .*
- *If the SAT instance is not satisfiable, the label cover instance has optimal value  $< |F|/\gamma^k$ .*

For our reduction, it is convenient to reduce to the following (equivalent) version of the label cover problem. We construct a graph  $G = (U, E)$  where  $U = (V_1 \cup V_2) \times \Sigma$  and

$$E = \{((v_1, a), (v_2, b)) : (v_1, v_2) \in F \text{ and } \langle a, b \rangle \in C_{v_1, v_2}\}.$$

Observe that the vertex set  $U$  is clearly partitioned into  $n = |V_1| + |V_2|$  parts  $U_1, \dots, U_n$  each having size  $|\Sigma|$ , and all edges in  $E$  are between distinct parts. We denote this instance by  $\langle G = (U, E), |\Sigma|, |F| \rangle$ . The goal here is to pick one vertex from each part  $\{U_i\}_{i=1}^n$  so as to maximize the number of induced edges. Clearly this is equivalent to the above definition of the label cover problem. Note also that  $|E| \leq |\Sigma|^2 \cdot |F|$ .

Restating Theorem 14 yields: there is a constant  $\gamma > 1$  such that for every  $k \in \mathbb{N}$ , there is a reduction from SAT instances (of size  $N$ ) to “label cover” instances  $\langle G = (U, E), q, t \rangle$  such that:

- If the SAT instance is satisfiable, the label cover instance has optimal value  $t$ .
- If the SAT instance is not satisfiable, the label cover instance has optimal value  $< t/\gamma^k$ .

- $|G| = N^{\Theta(k)}$ , number of labels  $q = 2^{\Theta(k)}$ ,  $|E| \leq t^2$ , and the reduction runs in time  $N^{O(k)}$ .

We consider a uniform matroid  $\mathcal{M}$  with rank  $t$  on ground set  $E$  (recall that any subset of  $t$  edges is a basis in a uniform matroid). We now construct a crossing matroid basis instance  $\mathcal{I}$  on  $\mathcal{M}$ . There is a set of degree bounds corresponding to each part  $i \in [n]$ : for every collection  $C$  of edges incident to vertices in  $U_i$  such that no two edges in  $C$  are incident to the same vertex in  $U_i$ , there is a degree bound in  $\mathcal{I}$  requiring *at most one* element to be chosen from  $C$ . Note that the number of degree bounds  $m$  is at most  $|E|^q \leq N^{O(k2^k)}$ . The following claim links the SAT and crossing matroid instances.

**Claim 15** [Yes instance] *If the SAT instance is satisfiable, there is a basis (i.e. subset  $B \subseteq E$  with  $|B| = t$ ) satisfying all degree bounds.*

[No instance] *If the SAT instance is unsatisfiable, every subset  $B' \subseteq E$  with  $|B'| \geq t/2$  violates some degree bound by an additive  $\rho = \gamma^{k/2}/\sqrt{2}$ .*

**Proof:** Observe that if the original SAT instance is satisfiable, then the matroid  $\mathcal{M}$  contains a basis obeying all the degree bounds: namely the  $t$  edges  $T^* \subseteq E$  induced in the optimal solution to the label cover instance. This is because if we consider any  $U_i$ , then all the  $T^*$ -edges having a vertex in  $U_i$  as their endpoint, have the same endpoint. Thus, for any degree bound corresponding to collection  $C$  (as defined above), at most one  $T^*$ -edge can lie in  $C$ .

Now consider the case that the SAT instance is unsatisfiable. Let  $B' \subseteq E$  be any subset with  $|B'| \geq t/2$ . We claim that  $B'$  contains at least  $\rho = \gamma^{k/2}/\sqrt{2}$  edges from some degree-constrained set of edges. Suppose (for a contradiction) that  $|B' \cap C| < \rho$  for each degree constraint  $C$ . This means in particular that each part  $\{U_i\}_{i=1}^n$  contains fewer than  $\rho$  vertices that are incident to edges of  $B'$ . For each part  $i \in [n]$ , let  $W_i \subseteq U_i$  denote the vertices incident to edges of  $B'$ ; note that  $|W_i| < \rho$ . Consider the label cover solution obtained as follows. For each  $i \in [n]$ , choose one vertex from  $W_i$  independently and uniformly at random. Clearly, the expected number of edges in the resulting induced subgraph is at least  $|B'|/\rho^2 \geq \frac{t}{2\rho^2} = t/\gamma^k$ . This contradicts the fact that the value of label cover instance is strictly less than  $t/\gamma^k$ . ■

The steps described in the above reduction can be done in time polynomial in  $m$  and  $|G|$ . Also, instead of randomly choosing vertices from the sets  $W_i$ , we can use conditional expectations to derive a deterministic algorithm that recovers at least  $t/\rho^2$  edges. Setting  $k = \Theta(\log \log N)$  (recall that  $N$  is the size of the original SAT instance), we obtain an instance of bounded-degree matroid basis of size  $\approx m \leq N^{O(k2^k)} \leq N^{\log^a N}$  for some constant  $a$ . Also  $\rho \geq \gamma^{k/2}/2 \geq 2^{\Omega(k)} \geq \log^b N$ , where  $b > 0$  is a constant. Note that  $\log m \leq \log^{a+1} N$ , which implies  $\rho \geq \log^c m$  for  $c = \frac{b}{a+1} > 0$ , a constant. Thus it follows that for this constant  $c > 0$  the bounded-degree matroid basis problem has no polynomial time  $O(\log^c m)$  additive approximation algorithm for the degree bounds, unless  $\mathcal{NP}$  has quasi-polynomial time algorithms. ■

We now prove Theorem 2.

**Proof:** [Theorem 2] We show how the bases of a uniform matroid can be represented in a suitable instance of the crossing spanning tree problem. Let the uniform matroid from Theorem 13 consist of  $e$  elements and have rank  $t \leq e$ ; recall that  $t \geq \sqrt{e}$  and clearly  $m \leq 2^e$ . We construct a graph as in Figure 4, with vertices  $v_1, \dots, v_e$  corresponding to elements in the uniform matroid. Each vertex  $v_i$  is connected to the root  $r$  by two vertex-disjoint paths:  $\langle v_i, u_i, r \rangle$  and  $\langle v_i, w_i, r \rangle$ . There are no costs in this instance. Corresponding to each degree bound (in the uniform matroid) of  $b(C)$  on a subset  $C \subseteq [e]$ , there is a constraint to pick at most  $|C| + b(C)$  edges from  $\delta(\{u_i \mid i \in C\})$ . Additionally, there is a *special degree bound* of  $2e - t$  on the edge-set  $E' = \bigcup_{i=1}^e \delta(w_i)$ ; this corresponds to picking a basis in the uniform matroid.

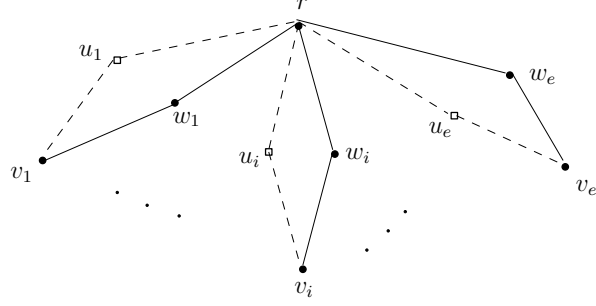


Figure 4: The crossing spanning tree instance used in the reduction.

Observe that for each  $i \in [e]$ , any spanning tree must choose exactly three edges amongst  $\{(r, u_i), (u_i, v_i), (r, w_i), (w_i, v_i)\}$ , in fact any three edges suffice. Hence every spanning tree  $T$  in this graph corresponds to a subset  $X \subseteq [e]$  such that: (I)  $T$  contains both edges in  $\delta(u_i)$  and one edge from  $\delta(w_i)$ , for each  $i \in X$ , and (II)  $T$  contains both edges in  $\delta(w_i)$  and one edge from  $\delta(u_i)$  for each  $i \in [e] \setminus X$ .

From Theorem 13, for the crossing matroid problem, we obtain the two cases:

Yes instance. There is a basis  $B^*$  (i.e.  $B^* \subseteq [e]$ ,  $|B^*| = t$ ) satisfying all degree bounds. Consider the spanning tree

$$T^* = \{(r, u_i), (u_i, v_i), (r, w_i) \mid i \in B^*\} \cup \{(r, w_i), (v_i, w_i), (r, u_i) \mid i \in [e] \setminus B^*\}.$$

Since  $B^*$  satisfies its degree-bounds,  $T^*$  satisfies all degree bounds derived from the crossing matroid instance. For the special degree bound on  $E'$ , note that  $|T^* \cap E'| = 2e - |B^*| = 2e - t$ ; so this is also satisfied. Thus there is a spanning tree satisfying all the degree bounds.

No instance. Every subset  $B' \subseteq [e]$  with  $|B'| \geq t/2$  (i.e. near basis) violates some degree bound by an additive  $\rho = \Omega(\log^c m)$  term, where  $c > 0$  is a fixed constant. Consider any spanning tree  $T$  that corresponds to subset  $X \subseteq [e]$  as described above.

1. Suppose that  $|X| \leq t/2$ ; then we have  $|T \cap E'| = 2e - |X| \geq 2e - t + \frac{t}{2}$ , i.e. the special degree bound is violated by  $t/2 \geq \Omega(\sqrt{e}) = \Omega(\log^{1/2} m)$ .
2. Now suppose that  $|X| \geq t/2$ . Then by the guarantee on the no-instance,  $T$  violates some degree-bound derived from the crossing matroid instance by additive  $\rho$ .

Thus in either case, every spanning tree violates some degree bound by additive  $\rho = \Omega(\log^c m)$ .

By Theorem 13, it is hard to distinguish the above cases and we obtain the corresponding hardness result for crossing spanning tree, as claimed in Theorem 2. ■

### 3.1 Hardness for Robust $k$ -median

Another interesting consequence of Theorem 13 is for the robust  $k$ -median problem [1]. Here we are given a metric  $(V, d)$ ,  $m$  client-sets  $\{S_i \subseteq V\}_{i=1}^m$ , and bound  $k$ ; the goal is to find a set  $F \subseteq V$  of  $k$  facilities such that the worst-case connection cost (over all client-sets) is minimized, i.e.

$$\min_{F \subseteq V, |F|=k} \max_{i=1}^m \sum_{v \in S_i} d(v, F).$$



Above  $d(v, F)$  denotes the shortest distance from  $v$  to any vertex in  $F$ . Anthony et al. [1] gave an  $O(\log m + \log k)$ -approximation algorithm for robust  $k$ -median, and showed that it is hard to approximate better than factor two. At first sight this problem may seem unrelated to crossing matroid basis. However using Theorem 13, we obtain the poly-logarithmic hardness result stated in Corollary 3.

**Proof:** Recall that in a uniform metric, the distance between every pair of vertices is one. In this case the robust  $k$ -median problem can be rephrased as:

$$\min_{F \subseteq V, |F|=k} \max_{i=1}^m |S_i \setminus F|, \quad \text{where } \{S_i \subseteq V\}_{i=1}^m \text{ are the client-sets.}$$

The hard instances of crossing matroid basis in Theorem 13 are in fact for uniform matroids where every degree upper-bound equals *one*. i.e. there is a ground-set  $V$ , degree bounds given by  $\{E_i \subseteq V\}_{i=1}^m$ , and rank  $t$ ; the goal is to find (if possible) a subset  $I \subseteq V$  with  $|I| = t$  such that  $|I \cap E_i| \leq 1$  for all  $i \in [m]$ . Theorem 13 showed that it is hard to distinguish the following cases: (Yes-case) there is some  $I \subseteq V$  with  $|I| = t$  and  $\max_{i \in [m]} |I \cap E_i| \leq 1$ ; and (No-case) for every  $I \subseteq V$  with  $|I| = t$ ,  $\max_{i \in [m]} |I \cap E_i| \geq \rho := \Omega(\log^c m)$ .

These hard instances naturally correspond to the robust  $k$ -median problem on uniform metric  $V$ , client-sets  $\{E_i \subseteq V\}_{i=1}^m$ , and bound  $k = |V| - t$ . It is clear that the robust  $k$ -median objective is at most one in the Yes-case, and at least  $\rho$  in the No-case. Thus we obtain a multiplicative  $\rho$  hardness of approximation for robust  $k$ -median on uniform metrics. This proves Corollary 3.  $\blacksquare$

### 3.2 Integrality Gap for general MCST

We now present the  $b + \Omega(\sqrt{n})$  integrality gap instance for minimum crossing spanning tree. While such gaps instances are easy to obtain if one allows  $m$  to be super-polynomially large (for example, by setting a degree bound for each subset of edges), the nice property of the example here is that  $m$  is quite small, in fact  $m = O(n)$ . This result is due to Mohit Singh [33], we thank him for letting us present the example here.

The graph is the same as the one used for the hardness result. The vertex-set is  $\{r\} \cup \{v_i, u_i, w_i\}_{i=1}^e$  so  $n = 3e + 1$ . The edges are  $\{(r, u_i) \mid i \in [e]\} \cup \{(v_i, u_i) \mid i \in [e]\}$  and  $\{(r, w_i) \mid i \in [e]\} \cup \{(v_i, w_i) \mid i \in [e]\}$ . See also Figure 4. There are no costs in this instance.

The ‘degree bounds’ for the MCST instance are derived from the lower bound for the *discrepancy problem* [11]. From discrepancy theory there exists a collection  $\{S_j \subseteq [e]\}_{j=1}^e$  of subsets such that,

$$\max_{j=1}^e \left| |X \cap S_j| - |\overline{X} \cap S_j| \right| \geq \rho, \quad \text{for every } X \subseteq [e].$$

Above  $\overline{X} = [e] \setminus X$  as usual, and  $\rho = \Omega(\sqrt{e}) = \Omega(\sqrt{n})$ . In other words, for every way of partitioning  $[e]$  into two sets, there is some set  $S_j$  such that the partition induced on  $S_j$  has a large imbalance. There are  $m = 2e$  degree bounds, defined as follows. For each  $j \in [e]$  there is a bound of  $|S_j| + \lceil |S_j|/2 \rceil$  on each of the edge-sets  $U_j = \cup_{i \in S_j} \delta(u_i) = \{(r, u_i), (u_i, v_i)\}_{i \in S_j}$ , and  $W_j = \cup_{i \in S_j} \delta(w_i) = \{(r, w_i), (w_i, v_i)\}_{i \in S_j}$ .

Consider the fractional solution to the natural LP relaxation that sets each edge to value  $3/4$ . It is easily seen that it is indeed a fractional spanning tree and satisfies all the degree bounds.

On the other hand, we claim that any integer solution must violate some degree bound by additive  $\frac{\rho}{2} - 1$ . Note that every spanning tree  $T$  in this graph corresponds to a subset  $X \subseteq [e]$  such that: (I)  $T$  contains both edges in  $\delta(u_i)$  and one edge from  $\delta(w_i)$ , for each  $i \in X$ , and (II)  $T$  contains both edges in  $\delta(w_i)$  and one edge from  $\delta(u_i)$  for each  $i \in \overline{X}$ . The number of edges used by tree  $T$  in the degree-bounds (for each  $j \in [e]$ ) are:

- $|T \cap U_j| = 2|X \cap S_j| + |\bar{X} \cap S_j| = |S_j| + |X \cap S_j|$ , and
- $|T \cap W_j| = |X \cap S_j| + 2|\bar{X} \cap S_j| = |S_j| + |\bar{X} \cap S_j|$ .

From the discrepancy instance, it follows that  $\max_{j=1}^e ||X \cap S_j| - |\bar{X} \cap S_j|| \geq \rho$ ; let  $k$  be the index achieving this maximum. Then we have:

$$\max\{|T \cap U_k|, |T \cap W_k|\} = |S_k| + \max\{|X \cap S_k|, |\bar{X} \cap S_k|\} \geq |S_k| + \frac{|S_k|}{2} + \frac{\rho}{2}.$$

Thus the degree-bound for either  $U_k$  or  $W_k$  is violated by additive  $\frac{\rho}{2} - 1$ .

**Remark:** The above construction is essentially a reduction from discrepancy minimization to MCST. Combined with the hardness result in [8] this implies that, unless  $P = NP$ , MCST admits no  $o(\sqrt{n})$  additive approximation in degree when the number of degree bounds  $m = O(n)$ . We note that degree bounds in this instance have large values, i.e.  $\Omega(n)$ . On the other hand, all degree bounds in Theorem 13 have unit values— this was crucial in proving the hardness for robust  $k$ -median.

## 4 Minimum Crossing Contra-Polyamatroid Intersection

In this section we consider the *crossing contra-polyamatroid intersection problem* (see Definition 4) and prove Theorem 5. The algorithm (given as Algorithm 1) for this problem is based on iteratively relaxing the following natural LP relaxation.

$$\begin{aligned} \min \quad & \sum_{e \in E'} c_e \cdot x_e \\ & x(S \cap E') \geq r_1(S) - |F \cap S| && \forall S \subseteq E \\ & x(S \cap E') \geq r_2(S) - |F \cap S| && \forall S \subseteq E \\ & x(E_i \cap E') \leq b'_i && \forall i \in W \\ & 0 \leq x_e \leq 1 && \forall e \in E'. \end{aligned}$$

At a generic iteration,  $E' \subseteq E$  denotes the set of unfixed elements,  $F \subseteq E$  the set of chosen elements (recall that  $E$  denotes the groundset of the instance),  $W \subseteq I$  the set of remaining degree bounds, and  $b'_i$  (for each  $i \in W$ ) the residual degree-bound in the  $i^{\text{th}}$  constraint. Observe that this LP can indeed be solved in polynomial time by the Ellipsoid algorithm: the separation oracle for the first two sets of constraints involve submodular function minimization for the two functions  $g_i(S) = x(S \cap E') + |S \cap F| - r_i(S)$  (with  $i = 1, 2$ ). The resulting fractional solution can then be converted to an extreme point solution of no larger cost, as described in Jain [18].

Note that this algorithm rounds variables of value  $x^*(e) \geq \frac{1}{2}$  to 1, and hence we loose a factor of two in the cost and in the degree bounds. Theorem 5 follows as a consequence if we can show that in each iteration, either some variable can be rounded, or some constraint can be dropped.

**Lemma 16** *If  $x^* \in \mathbb{R}^{E'}$  is an optimal extreme point solution to the above LP for crossing contra-polyamatroid intersection, with  $0 < x^*(e) < \frac{1}{2}$  for all  $e \in E'$ , then there exists  $i \in W$  such that*

$$|E_i \cap E'| \leq \lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \Delta - 1$$

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**Algorithm 1** Algorithm for minimum crossing contra-polymatroid intersection.

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1: Initially, set  $E' = E, F = \emptyset, W = I, b'_i = b_i$ , for all  $i \in I$ 
2: while  $E' \neq \emptyset$  do
3:   Compute an optimal extreme point solution  $x^*$  of the  $\text{LP}(E', F, W)$ ;
4:   for all  $e \in E'$  with  $x^*(e) = 0$  do
5:      $E' \leftarrow E' \setminus \{e\}$ 
6:   end for
7:   for all  $e \in E'$  with  $x^*(e) \geq \frac{1}{2}$  do
8:      $F \leftarrow F \cup \{e\}; E' \leftarrow E' \setminus \{e\}$ 
9:      $b'_i \leftarrow b'_i - x^*(e)$ , for all  $i \in W$  with  $e \in E_i$ 
10:  end for
11:  for all  $i \in W$  with  $|E_i \cap E'| \leq \lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \Delta - 1$  do
12:     $W \leftarrow W \setminus \{i\}$ 
13:  end for
14: end while
15: Return the incidence vector of  $F$ ;

```

---

**Proof:** Let  $\mathcal{T}'_i = \{\chi(E' \cap S) | x^*(S \cap E') = r_1(S) - |S \cap F|, S \subseteq E\}$  for  $i = 1, 2$  denote the tight sets from the first two constraints of the LP respectively. Let  $\mathcal{B}' = \{\chi(E' \cap E_i) | x^*(E_i \cap E') = b'_i, i \in W\}$  denote the tight degree constraints. Since  $x^*$  is an extreme point solution (and  $0 < x^* < 1$ ), there exist linearly independent tight sets  $\mathcal{T}_1 \subseteq \mathcal{T}'_1, \mathcal{T}_2 \subseteq \mathcal{T}'_2$  and  $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{B}'$  such that  $|E'| = |\mathcal{T}_1| + |\mathcal{T}_2| + |\mathcal{B}|$ .

Since  $x^*$  is modular and  $r_i(S) - |S \cap F|$  (for  $i = 1, 2$ ) are supermodular on  $2^E$ , it can be assumed (using uncrossing arguments, see eg. Chapter 44 in [32]) that each of  $(\mathcal{T}_1, \subseteq)$  and  $(\mathcal{T}_2, \subseteq)$  forms a chain<sup>3</sup>. The following claim goes back to a similar result for spanning trees as stated in [4].

**Claim 17** For each  $i = 1, 2$ , we have  $|\mathcal{T}_i| \leq x^*(E')$ ; additionally if  $|\mathcal{T}_i| = x^*(E')$  then  $E' \in \mathcal{T}_i$ .

**Proof:** We prove the claim for  $i = 1$ . Let  $\mathcal{T}_1 = \{S_1 \subset \dots \subset S_k\}$  where  $S_k \subseteq E'$ . Let  $S_0 = \emptyset$  and consider an arbitrary pair of subsequent chain elements  $S_j \subset S_{j+1}$ , for any  $j \in \{0, 1, \dots, k-1\}$ . Since  $x^*_e > 0$  for all  $e \in E'$  it follows that  $x^*(S_{j+1} \setminus S_j) > 0$ . Hence, by the integrality of  $r_1(S) - |S \cap F|$  and tight constraints  $S_j$  and  $S_{j+1}$ ,

$$x^*(S_{j+1} \setminus S_j) = x^*(S_{j+1}) - x^*(S_j) = r_1(S_{j+1}) - |S_{j+1} \cap F| - r_1(S_j) + |S_j \cap F| \geq 1.$$

Summing over  $i = 0, \dots, k-1$  we therefore obtain the inequality:

$$x^*(E') \geq x^*(S_k) = \sum_{j=0}^{k-1} x^*(S_{j+1} \setminus S_j) \geq k = |\mathcal{T}_1|,$$

with equality only if  $E' = S_k$ . ■

We now proceed with the proof of Lemma 16. Suppose (for a contradiction) that for all  $i \in W$ ,  $|E_i \cap E'| \geq \lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \Delta$ . For each  $i \in W$ , define  $\text{Sp}_i := \sum_{e \in E' \cap E_i} (1 - 2x^*_e) = |E' \cap E_i| - 2x^*(E' \cap E_i)$ . Then we have  $\text{Sp}_i \geq |E' \cap E_i| - 2b'_i \geq |E' \cap E_i| - \lceil 2b'_i \rceil \geq \Delta$ . Hence  $\sum_{i \in W} \text{Sp}_i \geq \Delta \cdot |W|$ .

For each  $e \in E'$ , let  $r_e := |\{i \in W : e \in E_i\}| \leq \Delta$  the maximum element frequency. Note also that  $0 < 1 - 2x^*_e < 1$  for each  $e \in E'$ . Now,

$$\sum_{i \in W} \text{Sp}_i = \sum_{e \in E'} r_e \cdot (1 - 2x^*_e) \leq \Delta \cdot \sum_{e \in E'} (1 - 2x^*_e)$$

---

<sup>3</sup>A family  $(\mathcal{L}, \subseteq)$  is a chain if and only if for every  $X, Y \in \mathcal{L}$ , either  $X \subseteq Y$  or  $Y \subseteq X$ .

$$= \Delta \cdot (|E'| - 2 \cdot x^*(E')) \leq \Delta \cdot (|E'| - |\mathcal{T}_1| - |\mathcal{T}_2|)$$

The last inequality uses Claim 17. Note that equality holds above only if  $E' \in \mathcal{T}_1 \cap \mathcal{T}_2$  (by Claim 17), which would contradict the linear independence of  $\mathcal{T}_1$  and  $\mathcal{T}_2$ . Thus we have:

$$\sum_{i \in W} \text{Sp}_i < \Delta \cdot (|E'| - |\mathcal{T}_1| - |\mathcal{T}_2|) = \Delta \cdot |\mathcal{B}| \leq \Delta \cdot |W|.$$

However this contradicts the assumption  $|E' \cap E_i| \geq \lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \Delta$  for all  $i \in W$ .  $\blacksquare$

**Proof: [Theorem 5]** Lemma 16 implies that an improvement is possible in each iteration of Algorithm 1. Note also that restricting the current LP solution (to  $E'$ ) yields a feasible solution to the residual LP in the next iteration. Since we only round elements that the LP sets to value at least half, the cost guarantee is immediate. Consider any degree bound  $i \in I$ ; let  $b'_i$  denote its residual bound when it is dropped, and  $F'$  (resp.  $E'$ ) the set of chosen (resp. unfixed) elements at that iteration. Again, rounding elements of fractional value at least half implies  $|E_i \cap F'| \leq \lfloor 2b_i - 2b'_i \rfloor = 2b_i - \lceil 2b'_i \rceil$  since  $b_i$  is integer. Furthermore, the number of  $E_i$ -elements in the support of the basic solution at the iteration (i.e.,  $E'$ ) when constraint  $i$  is dropped is at most  $\lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \Delta - 1$ . Thus the number of  $E_i$ -elements chosen in the final solution is at most  $|E_i \cap F'| + |E_i \cap E'| \leq 2b_i - \lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \lceil 2b'_i \rceil + \Delta - 1 = 2 \cdot b_i + \Delta - 1$ .  $\blacksquare$

**Tight Example.** We note that the natural iterative relaxation steps (used above) are insufficient to obtain a better approximation guarantee. Consider the special case of the crossing bipartite edge cover problem. The instance consists of graph  $G$  which is a  $4n$ -length cycle, with its edges partitioned into two perfect matchings  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ . There is a degree-bound of  $n$  on each of  $E_1$  and  $E_2$ ; so  $\Delta = 1$ . Consider the fractional solution to the LP-relaxation that assigns value of  $\frac{1}{2}$  to all edges. It is indeed a fractional edge-cover since each vertex is covered to extent one. The degree-bounds are clearly satisfied. It is also an extreme point: note that this is the unique fractional solution minimizing the all-ones cost vector. For this extreme point solution, the largest edge-value is  $\frac{1}{2}$ , and the support-size (i.e.  $2n$ ) of its degree-constraints is twice their bound (i.e.  $n$ ). Thus the iterative relaxation must either pick a half-edge or drop a degree-constraint that is potentially violated by factor two.

## 5 Minimum Crossing Lattice Polyhedra

Before formally defining the lattice polyhedron problem, we need to introduce some terminology. We use notation similar to [14]. The groundset of the problem is denoted by  $E$ . Let  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq)$  be a partially ordered set with  $\mathcal{F} \neq \emptyset$ . We consider a lattice-type structure  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq, \wedge, \vee)$ , where the two commutative binary operations, *meet*  $\wedge$  and *join*  $\vee$ , are defined on *all* pairs  $A, B \in \mathcal{F}$ , such that  $A \wedge B \leq A, B \leq A \vee B$ . Note that our definition is more general than the usual definition of a lattice, since the join  $A \vee B$  is not required to be the least common upper bound of  $A$  and  $B$ . In the lattice polyhedron model, we are given a *supermodular* function  $r : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}_+$  on  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq, \wedge, \vee)$ , i.e.  $r$  satisfies

$$r(A) + r(B) \leq r(A \wedge B) + r(A \vee B), \quad \text{for all } A, B \in \mathcal{F}.$$

Throughout this paper, we call  $r$  the *rank function* of the lattice polyhedron. Finally, there is a set-valued function  $\rho : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow 2^E$  relating the lattice  $\mathcal{F}$  to the groundset  $E$ , so that  $\mathcal{F}$  and  $\rho$  satisfy the following two properties:

1. **Consecutive property:** If  $A \leq B \leq C$  then  $\rho(A) \cap \rho(C) \subseteq \rho(B)$ ,

2. **Submodularity:** For all  $A, B \in \mathcal{F}$ ,  $\rho(A \vee B) \cup \rho(A \wedge B) \subseteq \rho(A) \cup \rho(B)$ ,

Given a ground set  $E$ , a lattice  $\mathcal{F}$ , a mapping  $\rho : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow 2^E$ , so that the consecutive and submodularity property are satisfied, and a supermodular function  $r : \mathcal{F} \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}_+$ , the polyhedron  $\{x \in \mathbb{R}^E \mid \sum_{e \in \rho(S)} x_e \geq r(S), \forall S \in \mathcal{F}\}$  is a *lattice polyhedron*. Hoffman and Schwartz [17] showed that the underlying linear inequality system is box-TDI.

**Definition 18 (Minimum crossing lattice polyhedron)** Given a lattice polyhedron  $\langle E, (\mathcal{F}, \leq), r, \rho, c \rangle$ , a cost function  $c : E \rightarrow \mathbb{R}_+$ , and lower/upper bounds  $\{a_i\}_{i \in I}$  and  $\{b_i\}_{i \in I}$  on a collection  $\{E_i \subseteq E\}_{i \in I}$ , the goal is to minimize:

$$\left\{ c^T \cdot x \mid \sum_{e \in \rho(S)} x_e \geq r(S), \forall S \in \mathcal{F}; \quad a_i \leq x(E_i) \leq b_i, \forall i \in I; \quad x \in \{0, 1\}^E \right\}.$$

As mentioned earlier, several discrete optimization problems fit into the lattice polyhedron model (see e.g. [32]). We give some examples below.

*Example 1: Crossing (contra-)polymatroids.* Consider the case where  $\mathcal{F} = 2^E$ ,  $\rho$  is the identity map, and the partial order in  $\mathcal{F}$  is the canonical one that is induced by set inclusion. If  $r$  is supermodular on the Boolean lattice  $(2^E, \subseteq, \cap, \cup)$ , then  $P(r) = \{x \in \mathbb{R}^E \mid \sum_{e \in S} x_e \geq r(S), \forall S \subseteq E\}$  is a (*contra-*)*polymatroid* in the sense of Edmonds. For any integral cost function  $c \in \mathbb{Z}_+^E$ , the polymatroid greedy algorithm efficiently finds an integral vector in  $P(r)$  of minimal cost. The crossing contra-polymatroid problem now searches for the minimum cost vector in  $P(r)$  satisfying certain degree bounds.

*Example 2: Crossing contra-polymatroid intersection.* Consider the case of two polymatroids  $P(r_1)$  and  $P(r_2)$ , where the two supermodular functions  $r_1$  and  $r_2$  are defined on the same ground set  $E$ . The contra-polymatroid intersection problem, i.e., the problem to find a vector of minimal cost in the intersection of  $P(r_1)$  and  $P(r_2)$ , can be modeled as a lattice polyhedron problem via the following reduction: let  $\mathcal{F} := \{S' : S \subseteq E\} \cup \{S'' : S \subseteq E\}$  with  $\rho(S') = \rho(S'') = S$  for each subset  $S \subseteq E$ . The partial order is:

$$S' \leq T'', \forall S, T \subseteq E \quad \text{and} \quad S' \leq T' \text{ and } S'' \geq T'', ; \forall S \subseteq T \subseteq E.$$

The meet ( $\wedge$ ) and join ( $\vee$ ) operators are defined to be the greatest common lower bound and least common upper bound, respectively. This is easily seen to satisfy the consecutivity and submodularity properties. The rank function  $r$  for the lattice polyhedron has  $r(S') = r_1(S)$  and  $r(S'') = r_2(S)$ , for all  $S \subseteq E$ , which is supermodular on  $\mathcal{F}$ . The crossing contra-polymatroid intersection problem asks for the best vector in the intersection of  $P(r_1)$  and  $P(r_2)$  satisfying degree bounds.

*Example 3: Crossing  $s, t$ -planar min cut.* Let  $G = (V, E)$  be a (directed or undirected) graph with  $s, t \in V$ , and capacities  $c : E \rightarrow \mathbb{Z}_+$  on the edges. Furthermore, let the elements of  $\mathcal{F}$  correspond to  $s$ - $t$  paths in  $G$  (i.e.,  $\rho$  maps each element of  $\mathcal{F}$  to the edge-set of that  $s, t$ -path). The *crossing min-cut problem* now asks for an edge set  $C \subseteq E$  of minimal capacity so that  $C$  forms an  $s, t$ -cut in  $G$ , and  $C$  satisfies certain degree bounds. For the classical min-cut (or dual max-flow) problem, the rank function is the constant all-ones function, i.e., an edge set forms a  $s, t$ -cut if each of the  $s, t$ -paths in  $\mathcal{F}$  is hit at least once. We restrict to the special case where  $G$  is  $s, t$ -plane, i.e., where  $G$  is given in a planar embedding with  $s$  and  $t$  on the outer boundary. We consider the partial order which sets for any pair of  $s, t$ -paths  $P, Q$ ,

$$P \leq Q \iff P \text{ "below" } Q \text{ in the planar representation.}$$

Again, the meet ( $\wedge$ ) and join ( $\vee$ ) are defined to be the greatest common lower bound and least common upper bound respectively. For  $s, t$ -plane graphs, this poset induces a lattice satisfying the consecutive and submodularity properties [26]. Moreover, the all-ones rank function is certainly supermodular. Thus, the crossing  $s, t$ -planar min-cut problem, which involves finding a minimum cost  $s, t$ -cut in  $G$  that obeys the degree bounds, fits into the model of crossing lattice polyhedra.

## 5.1 Integrality gap for general crossing lattice polyhedra

We first show that there is a bad integrality gap for crossing lattice polyhedra. Consider the  $s, t$ -planar min-cut instance on graph  $G = (V, E)$  in Figure 5 with vertices  $s, t \in V$  as shown. Define edge-sets  $E_i := \{(v_{i-1}, u_{i,j})\}_{j=1}^k \cup \{(v_i, u_{i,j})\}_{j=1}^k$  for each  $i \in [k]$ ; here we set  $v_0 = s$  and  $v_k = t$ . There are only degree upper-bounds in this instance, namely a bound of one on each  $\{E_i\}_{i=1}^k$ . Note also that  $\Delta = 1$  in this instance, and that the size of the ground-set is  $n = |E| = \Theta(k^2)$ .

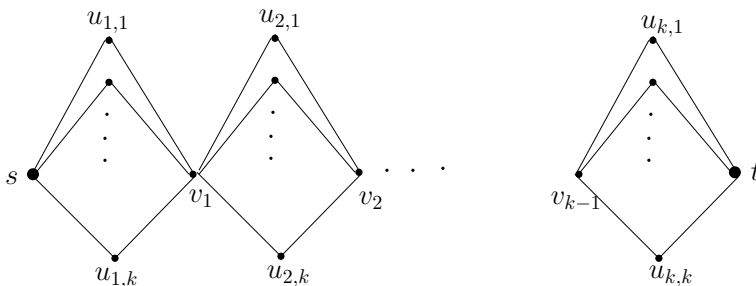


Figure 5: The integrality gap instance for crossing  $s, t$ -planar min-cut.

Consider the LP solution that sets  $x_e = \frac{1}{2k}$  for every edge  $e \in E$ . It is clearly feasible for the rank constraints (every  $s - t$  path has  $x$ -value one). Furthermore,  $x(E_i) = |E_i|/(2k) = 1$  for all  $i \in [k]$ ; i.e. the degree constraints are also satisfied. Hence the LP relaxation is feasible.

On the other hand, consider any integral solution  $I \subseteq E$  that has  $|I \cap E_i| \leq k - 1$  for all  $i \in [k]$ . It can be checked directly that there is an  $s - t$  path using only edges in  $E \setminus I$ . Thus any integral feasible solution  $J$  must have  $\max_{i \in [k]} |J \cap E_i| \geq k$ , i.e. it violates some degree-bound by at least an additive  $k - 1 = \Omega(\sqrt{n})$  term.

## 5.2 Algorithm for crossing lattice polyhedra satisfying monotonicity

Given this bad integrality gap for general crossing lattice polyhedra, we are interested in special cases that admit good additive approximations. In this section we consider lattice polyhedra that satisfy the following *monotonicity property*, and provide an additive approximation algorithm.

$$(*) \quad S < T \implies |\rho(S)| < |\rho(T)|, \quad \text{for all } S, T \in \mathcal{F}$$

As noted earlier, this property is satisfied by all matroids, and so our results generalize that of Kiraly et al. [19]. In the rest of this section we prove Theorem 6. The algorithm is again based on iterative relaxation. At each iteration, we maintain the following:

- $F \subseteq E$  of elements that have been chosen into the solution.
- $E' \subseteq E \setminus F$  of undecided elements.



- $W \subseteq [m]$  of degree bounds.

Initially, let  $E' = E$ ,  $F = \emptyset$  and  $W = [m]$ . In a generic iteration with  $E', F, W$ , we solve the following LP relaxation on variables  $\{x_e \mid e \in E'\}$ , called  $\mathcal{LP}_{\text{lat}}(E', F, W)$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \min \quad & c^T x \\ & x(\rho(S)) \geq r(S) - |F \cap \rho(S)|, & \forall S \in \mathcal{F} \\ & a_i - |F \cap E_i| \leq x(E_i) \leq b_i - |F \cap E_i|, & \forall i \in W \\ & 0 \leq x_e \leq 1, & \forall e \in E'. \end{aligned}$$

This LP can be solved in polynomial time using the Ellipsoid algorithm with the algorithm from [27] as the separation oracle for the rank constraints. Moreover, as shown in [18] we can also find (in polynomial time) an optimal extreme point solution, again using a separation oracle for the rank constraints. Consider an optimal basic feasible solution  $x$  to the above LP relaxation. The algorithm then does one of the following in iteration  $(E', F, W)$ , until  $E' = W = \emptyset$ .

1. If there is  $e \in E'$  with  $x_e = 0$ , then  $E' \leftarrow E' \setminus \{e\}$ .
2. If there is  $e \in E'$  with  $x_e = 1$ , then  $F \leftarrow F \cup \{e\}$  and  $E' \leftarrow E' \setminus \{e\}$ .
3. If there is  $i \in W$  with  $|E_i \cap E'| \leq 2\Delta$ , then  $W \leftarrow W \setminus \{i\}$ .

We note that this algorithm is a natural extension of the one for matroids [19] and the one for spanning trees [34]. However the correctness proof (next subsection) relies only on properties of lattice polyhedra and the monotonicity property (\*).

### 5.3 Proof of Theorem 6

Assuming that one of the steps (1)-(3) applies at each iteration, we will show that the final solution  $F^*$  has cost at most the optimal value, satisfies the rank constraints, and violates each degree constraint by at most an additive  $2\Delta - 1$ . First, we show that one of (1)-(3) applies at each iteration  $(E', F, W)$ .

**Lemma 19** *Suppose  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq)$  is a lattice satisfying the consecutive and submodular properties, and condition (\*), function  $r$  is supermodular, and  $x$  is a basic feasible solution to  $\mathcal{LP}_{\text{lat}}$  with  $0 < x_e < 1$  for all  $e \in E'$ . Then there exists some  $i \in W$  with  $|E_i \cap E'| \leq 2\Delta$ .*

We first establish some standard uncrossing claims (Claim 20 and Lemma 21), before proving this lemma. We also need some more definitions. Two elements  $A, B \in \mathcal{F}$  are said to be *comparable* if either  $A \leq B$  or  $B \leq A$ ; they are *non-comparable* otherwise. A subset  $\mathcal{L} \subseteq \mathcal{F}$  is called a *chain* if  $\mathcal{L}$  contains no pair of non-comparable elements. Note that a chain in  $\mathcal{F}$  does *not* necessarily correspond to a chain in  $2^E$  (with the usual subset relation) under mapping  $\rho$ .

Let  $r'(S) := r(S) - |F \cap \rho(S)|$  for all  $S \in \mathcal{F}$  denote the right hand side of the rank constraints in the LP solved in a generic iteration  $(E', F, W)$ .

**Claim 20**  *$r'$  is supermodular.*

**Proof:** This follows from the consecutive and submodular properties of lattice  $(\mathcal{F}, \leq)$ . Consider any  $A, B \in \mathcal{F}$ , and

$$\begin{aligned} |F \cap \rho_A| + |F \cap \rho_B| &= |F \cap (\rho_A \cup \rho_B)| + |F \cap (\rho_A \cap \rho_B)| \\ &\geq |F \cap (\rho_{A \wedge B} \cup \rho_{A \vee B})| + |F \cap (\rho_A \cap \rho_B)| \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
&\geq |F \cap (\rho_{A \wedge B} \cup \rho_{A \vee B})| + |F \cap (\rho_{A \wedge B} \cap \rho_{A \vee B})| \\
&= |F \cap \rho_{A \wedge B}| + |F \cap \rho_{A \vee B}|
\end{aligned}$$

The second inequality follows from submodularity (i.e.  $\rho_A \cup \rho_B \supseteq \rho_{A \wedge B} \cup \rho_{A \vee B}$ ), and the third inequality uses  $\rho_{A \wedge B} \cap \rho_{A \vee B} \subseteq \rho_A \cap \rho_B$  by the consecutive property (since  $A \wedge B \leq A, B \leq A \vee B$ ). This combined with supermodularity of  $r$  implies  $r'(A) + r'(B) \leq r'(A \wedge B) + r'(A \vee B)$  for all  $A, B \in \mathcal{F}$ . ■

For any element  $A \in \mathcal{F}$ , let  $\chi(A) \in \{0, 1\}^{E'}$  be the incidence vector of  $\rho(A) \subseteq E'$ . Let  $\mathcal{T} := \{A \in \mathcal{F} \mid x(\rho_A) = r'(A)\}$  denote the elements in  $\mathcal{F}$  that correspond to tight rank constraints in the LP solution  $x$  of this iteration. Using the fact that  $r'$  is supermodular (from above), and by standard uncrossing arguments, we obtain the following.

**Lemma 21** *If  $S, T \in \mathcal{F}$  satisfy  $x(\rho_S) = r'(S)$  and  $x(\rho_T) = r'(T)$ , then:*

$$x(\rho(S \wedge T)) = r'(S \wedge T) \quad \text{and} \quad x(\rho(S \vee T)) = r'(S \vee T)$$

Moreover,  $\chi(S) + \chi(T) = \chi(S \wedge T) + \chi(S \vee T)$ .

**Proof:** We have the following sequence of inequalities:

$$\begin{aligned}
r'(S \wedge T) + r'(S \vee T) &\leq x(\rho_{S \wedge T}) + x(\rho_{S \vee T}) \\
&= x(\rho_{S \wedge T} \cap \rho_{S \vee T}) + x(\rho_{S \wedge T} \cup \rho_{S \vee T}) \\
&\leq x(\rho_{S \wedge T} \cap \rho_{S \vee T}) + x(\rho_S \cup \rho_T) \\
&\leq x(\rho_S \cap \rho_T) + x(\rho_S \cup \rho_T) \\
&= x(\rho_S) + x(\rho_T) \\
&= r'(S) + r'(T) \\
&\leq r'(S \wedge T) + r'(S \vee T)
\end{aligned}$$

The first inequality is by feasibility of  $x$ , the third inequality is the submodularity property, the fourth inequality is by the consecutive property (and definition of  $\wedge$  and  $\vee$ ), and the last inequality is supermodularity of  $r'$ . Thus we have equality throughout, in particular  $x(\rho(S \vee T)) = r'(S \vee T)$  and  $x(\rho(S \wedge T)) = r'(S \wedge T)$ . Finally since  $x_e > 0$  for all  $e \in E'$ , we also have  $\chi(S) + \chi(T) = \chi(S \wedge T) + \chi(S \vee T)$ . ■

Given Claim 20 and Lemma 21, we immediately obtain the following (see eg. [32], Chapter 60).

**Lemma 22 ([32])** *There exists a chain  $\mathcal{L} \subseteq \mathcal{T}$  such that the vectors  $\{\chi(A) \mid A \in \mathcal{L}\}$  are linearly independent and span  $\{\chi(B) \mid B \in \mathcal{T}\}$ .*

We are now ready for the proof of Lemma 19.

**Proof:** [Lemma 19]  $|E'|$  is the number of non-zero variables in basic feasible  $x$ . Hence there exist tight linearly independent constraints:  $\mathcal{L} \subseteq \mathcal{F}$  corresponding to rank-constraints and  $\mathcal{B} \subseteq \mathcal{W}$  degree-constraints, such that  $|E'| = |\mathcal{L}| + |\mathcal{B}|$ . Furthermore, by Lemma 22, we may assume that  $\mathcal{L}$  is a chain in  $\mathcal{F}$ , say consisting of the elements  $S_1 < S_2 < \dots < S_k$ . We claim that,

$$|\rho(S_j) \setminus \left( \bigcup_{t=1}^{j-1} \rho(S_t) \right)| \geq 2, \quad \text{for each } 1 \leq j \leq k \quad (2)$$

The above condition is clearly true for  $j = 1$ : since  $x(\rho(S_1)) = r'(S_1) \geq 1$  (it is positive and integer-valued), and  $x_e < 1$  for all  $e \in E'$ . Consider any  $j \geq 2$ . By the consecutive property on  $S_t \leq S_{j-1} < S_j$

(for any  $1 \leq t \leq j-1$ ), we have  $\rho(S_j) \cap \rho(S_t) \subseteq \rho(S_{j-1})$ . So,  $\rho(S_j) \setminus \left(\bigcup_{t=1}^{j-1} \rho(S_t)\right) = \rho(S_j) \setminus \rho(S_{j-1})$ . We now claim that  $|\rho(S_j) \setminus \rho(S_{j-1})| \geq 2$ , which would prove (2). Since  $S_{j-1} < S_j$ , assumption (\*) implies that there is at least one element  $e \in \rho(S_j) \setminus \rho(S_{j-1})$ . Moreover, if this is the only element, i.e., if  $\rho(S_j) \setminus \rho(S_{j-1}) = \{e\}$ , then  $\rho(S_{j-1}) = \rho(S_j) \setminus \{e\}$  must be true (again by property (\*)). But this causes a contradiction to the non-integrality of  $x_e$ :

$$x_e = x(\rho(S_j)) - x(\rho(S_{j-1})) = r'(\rho(S_j)) - r'(\rho(S_{j-1})) \in \mathbb{Z}.$$

Now, equation (2) implies that  $k = |\mathcal{L}| \leq \frac{|E'|}{2}$ . Hence  $|E'| \leq 2|\mathcal{B}|$ .

Suppose (for contradiction) that  $|E_i \cap E'| \geq 2\Delta + 1$  for all  $i \in W$ . Then  $\sum_{i \in W} |E_i \cap E'| \geq (2\Delta + 1) \cdot |W|$ . Since each element in  $E'$  appears in at most  $\Delta$  sets  $\{E_i\}_{i \in W}$ , we have  $\Delta \cdot |E'| \geq \sum_{i \in W} |E_i \cap E'| \geq (2\Delta + 1) \cdot |W|$ . Thus  $|E'| > 2|W| \geq 2|\mathcal{B}|$ , which contradicts  $|E'| \leq 2|\mathcal{B}|$  from above. ■

We are now able to prove the main result of this section:

**Proof: [Theorem 6]** Since the algorithm only picks 1-elements into the solution  $F$ , the guarantee on cost can be easily seen. As argued in Lemma 19, at each iteration  $(E', F, W)$  one of the Steps (1)-(3) apply. This implies that the quantity  $|E'| + |W|$  decreases by 1 in each iteration; hence the algorithm terminates after at most  $|E| + |I|$  iterations. To see the guarantee on degree violation, consider any  $i \in I$  and let  $(E', F, W)$  denote the iteration in which it is dropped, i.e. Step (3) applies here with  $|E_i \cap E'| \leq 2\Delta$  (note that there must be such an iteration, since finally  $W = \emptyset$ ). Since a degree bound is dropped at this iteration, we have  $0 < x_e < 1$  for all  $e \in E'$  (otherwise one of the earlier steps (1) or (2) applies).

1. *Lower Bound:*  $a_i - |F \cap E_i| \leq x(E_i \cap E') < |E' \cap E_i| \leq 2\Delta$ , i.e.  $a_i \leq |F \cap E_i| + 2\Delta - 1$ . The final solution contains at least all elements in  $F$ , so the degree lower bound on  $E_i$  is violated by at most  $2\Delta - 1$ .
2. *Upper Bound:* The final solution contains at most  $|F \cap E_i| + |E' \cap E_i|$  elements from  $E_i$ . If  $E_i \cap E' = \emptyset$ , the upper bound on  $E_i$  is not violated. Else,  $0 < x(E_i \cap E') \leq b_i - |F \cap E_i|$ , i.e.  $b_i \geq 1 + |F \cap E_i|$ , and  $|F \cap E_i| + |E' \cap E_i| \leq b_i + 2\Delta - 1$ . So in either case, the final solution violates the upper bound on  $E_i$  by at most  $2\Delta - 1$ .

Observing that all the steps (1)-(3) preserve the feasibility of the  $\mathcal{LP}_{\text{lat}}$ , it follows that the final solution satisfies all rank constraints (since  $E' = \emptyset$  finally). ■

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