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## ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

## Variable neighborhood search for reverse engineering of gene regulatory networks

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#### Abstract

A new search heuristic, Divided Neighborhood Exploration Search, designed to be used with inference algorithms such as Bayesian networks to improve on the reverse engineering of gene regulatory networks is presented. The approach systematically moves through the search space to find topologies representative of gene regulatory networks that are more likely to explain microarray data. In empirical testing it is demonstrated that the novel method is superior to the widely employed greedy search techniques in both the quality of the inferred networks and computational time. *Keywords:* Gene regulatory networks, reverse engineering, variable neighborhood search

#### 1. Background

A gene regulatory network (GRN) is a collection of genes, regulators, and regulatory connections that govern expression levels [1]. Analysis of GRNs has become essential for better understanding cellular systems because it provides insight into which genes control the activation of others [2, 3]. The network topology has various interpretations in literature: the nodes in the GRN may represent genes or their protein products, the undirected edges between nodes may indicate genes are co-regulated, share common functionality, location or process, or directly bind one another; and directed edges may imply a step in a metabolic pathway, signal transduction cascade, stage of development, or a causal relationship [4]. These networks create the blackprint of the cellular system structure and provide design details of the cell.

Research in computational systems biology revolves around inferring or reverse engineering GRNs based on gene expression levels [5]. A basic assumption within the field is that the observed data, which are the changes in mRNA expression profiles, can explain transcriptional regulation. By

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