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# Inferring community characteristics in labelled networks

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## Abstract

1 Labelled networks form a very common and important class of data, naturally  
2 appearing in numerous applications in science and engineering. A typical inference  
3 goal is to determine how the vertex labels (called features) affect the network’s  
4 graph structure. A standard approach has been to partition the network into blocks  
5 grouped by distinct values of the feature of interest. A block-based random graph  
6 model – typically a variant of the stochastic block model (SBM) – is then used to  
7 test for evidence of asymmetric behaviour within these feature-based communities.  
8 Nevertheless, the resulting communities often do not produce a natural partition of  
9 the graph. In this work we introduce a new generative model, the feature-first block  
10 model (FFBM), which is more effective at describing vertex-labelled undirected  
11 graphs and also facilitates the use of richer queries on labelled networks. We  
12 develop a Bayesian framework for inference with this model, and we present a  
13 method to efficiently sample from the posterior distribution of the FFBM parame-  
14 ters. The FFBM’s structure is kept deliberately simple to retain easy interpretability  
15 of the parameter values. We apply the proposed methods to a variety of network  
16 data to extract the most important features along which the vertices are partitioned.  
17 The main advantages of the proposed approach are that the whole feature-space  
18 is used automatically, and features can be rank-ordered implicitly according to  
19 impact. Any features that do not significantly impact the high-level structure can  
20 be discarded to reduce the problem dimension. In cases where the vertex features  
21 available do not readily explain the community structure in the resulting network,  
22 the approach detects this and is protected against over-fitting. Results on several  
23 real-world datasets illustrate the performance of the proposed methods.

24 **1 Introduction**

25 A somewhat surprising property of many real-world networks is that they exhibit strong community  
26 structure; most nodes often belong to a densely connected cluster. There is high interest in recovering  
27 the latent communities from the observed graphs. The inferred communities can be exploited for  
28 compression algorithms [1] or used for link prediction in incomplete networks [4] to name a few  
29 applications.

30 We restrict our analysis to vertex-labelled networks. We shall refer to the vertex-labels as features. A  
31 common goal is to determine whether a given feature impacts graphical structure. To answer this  
32 from a Bayesian perspective we must use a random graph model; the standard is the stochastic block  
33 model (SBM) [10]. This is a latent variable model where each vertex belongs to a single block and  
34 the probability two nodes are connected depends only on the block memberships of each. There have

35 been many variants to this model – the most popular being the mixed-membership stochastic block  
 36 model (MMSBM) [2] and the overlapping stochastic block model (OSBM) [20]. Effectively, these  
 37 just extend the model to allow each vertex to belong to multiple blocks simultaneously. However,  
 38 a major drawback of these graphical models as applied to labelled networks is that they do not  
 39 automatically include vertex features in the random graph generation process. Approaches based on  
 40 graph neural networks [9] that utilise vertex features have been developed but these lack the easy  
 41 interpretability of the simpler models.

42 To analyse a labelled network using one of the simple SBM variants, a typical inference procedure  
 43 would be to partition the graph into blocks grouped by distinct values of the feature of interest. The  
 44 associated model can then be used to test for evidence of heterogeneous connectivity between the  
 45 feature-grouped blocks. Nevertheless, this approach is limited in that it can only consider one feature  
 46 at a time. This makes it difficult to rank order the features by magnitude of impact. Lastly, the  
 47 feature-grouped blocks are often an unnatural partition of the graph, leading to a poor model fit. We  
 48 would instead prefer to partition the graph into its most natural blocks and then find which of the  
 49 available features – if any – best predict the resulting partition.

50 With these desiderata in mind, we present a novel framework for modelling labelled networks, which  
 51 we call the feature-first block model (FFBM). This is an extension of the SBM to labelled networks.  
 52 We go on to present an efficient algorithm for sampling from the parameters of the feature-to-block  
 53 generator. We can interpret the sampled FFBM parameters to determine which features have the  
 54 largest impact on overall graphical structure.

## 55 2 Preliminaries

56 We first need a model for community-like structure in a network. For this we adopt the stochastic  
 57 block model (SBM) - widely used across academia. Each node in the graph belongs to a unique  
 58 community called a block. The probability that two nodes are connected depends only on the block  
 59 memberships of each. Specifically, we will use the microcanonical variant of the SBM, proposed by  
 60 Peixoto [15]. To allow for degree-variability between members of the same block, we must choose  
 61 the degree-corrected formulation (DC-SBM).

62 **Definition 2.1 (Microcanonical DC-SBM)** Let  $N \in \mathbb{Z}^+$  denote the number of vertices in an undi-  
 63 rected graph. The block memberships are encoded by a vector  $b \in [B]^N$ <sup>1</sup>, where  $B \in \mathbb{Z}^+$  is the  
 64 number of non-empty blocks. Let  $e \in (\mathbb{Z}_0^+)^{N \times N}$  be the matrix of edge counts between blocks.  $e_{rs}$  is  
 65 then the number of edges from block  $r$  onto block  $s$  – or twice that number if  $r = s$ . For undirected  
 66 graphs,  $e$  is symmetric. Let  $k \in (\mathbb{Z}_0^+)^N$  be a vector denoting the degree sequence of the graph.  $k_i$  is  
 67 then the degree of vertex  $i$ . The graph's adjacency matrix  $A \in \{0, 1\}^{N \times N}$  is generated as follows:

$$A \sim DC-SBM_{MC}(b, e, k) \quad (1)$$

68 Where edges are placed uniformly at random but respecting the constraints imposed by  $e$ ,  $b$  and  $k$  –  
 69 hence the microcanonical moniker. Specifically,  $A$  must satisfy the following:

$$e_{rs} = \sum_{i,j \in [N]} A_{ij} \mathbb{1}\{b_i = r\} \mathbb{1}\{b_j = s\} \quad \forall r, s \in [B] \quad \text{and} \quad k_i = \sum_{j \in [N]} A_{ij} \quad \forall i \in [N] \quad (2)$$

## 70 3 Feature-first block model

71 In this section we propose a novel generative model for labelled networks. We call this the feature-first  
 72 block model (FFBM) and outline its structure in 1 As before, we let  $N$  denote the number of nodes  
 73 and  $B$  the number of blocks in our graph. We define the vector  $x_i \in \mathcal{X}^D$  as the feature vector for the  
 74  $i$ 'th vertex.  $D$  is the number of features. For the datasets we analyse, we deal with binary feature

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<sup>1</sup>We introduce the notation  $[K] := \{1, 2 \dots K\}$  to compactly define a set of  $K$  indices. Clearly,  $[K]$  is only defined for  $K \in \mathbb{Z}^+$ .

75 flags so  $\mathcal{X} = \{0, 1\}$ . The feature vectors  $\{x_i\}_{i=1}^N$  may be compactly subsumed into the feature matrix  
 76  $X \in \mathcal{X}^{N \times D}$ .

77 For the FFBM, we start with the feature matrix  $X$  and probabilistically generate a vector of block  
 78 memberships  $b \in [B]^N$ . The parameters of this step are encapsulated by  $\theta$ . Each feature vector  $x_i$  is  
 79 treated independently and used to generate the corresponding block membership  $b_i \in [B]$ . We choose  
 80 a single softmax layer to model  $p(b_i|x_i, \theta)$ . More complex models are possible but then deriving  
 81 meaning from the inferred parameter distributions is more difficult. Summarising, we write  $p(b|X, \theta)$   
 82 as follows:

$$p(b|X, \theta) = \prod_{i=1}^N p(b_i|x_i, \theta) = \prod_{i=1}^N \phi_{b_i}(x_i; \theta) = \prod_{i=1}^N \frac{\exp(w_{b_i}^T x_i)}{\sum_{k=1}^B \exp(w_k^T x_i)} \quad (3)$$

83 We deliberately exclude a bias term to ensure that the relationships we model are based on features  
 84 and not information about the size of each detected block; a more complete discussion on this topic  
 85 is given in A.5. The parameter vector  $\theta$  for this stage contains all the weight vectors  $\theta = \{w_k\}_{k=1}^B$ .  
 86 Each  $w_k$  has dimension  $D$ . We could instead write the parameters  $\theta$  as a  $B \times D$  matrix of weights  $W$ ;  
 87 this form has computational benefits as then  $z_i := Wx_i$ , which is the input to the softmax activation  
 88 function.

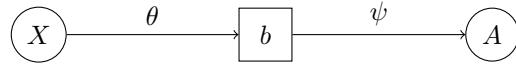


Figure 1: The feature-first block model (FFBM)

89 Once the block memberships  $b$  have been generated, we then draw the graph  $A$  from the microcanonical  
 90 DC-SBM (equation 4) with additional parameters encapsulated by  $\psi = \{\psi_e, \psi_k\}$ .

$$A \sim \text{DC-SBM}_{\text{MC}}(b, \psi_e, \psi_k) \quad (4)$$

### 91 3.1 Prior selection

92 Before performing any inference, we must specify priors on  $\theta$  and  $\psi$ . For  $\theta$  it seems sensible to  
 93 choose a Gaussian prior, with zero mean and variance matrix  $\sigma_\theta^2 I$  such that each element of  $\theta$  is  
 94 independent and distributed like  $\mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_\theta^2)$ . In vector form, the prior for  $\theta$  is therefore:

$$p(\theta) = \mathcal{N}(\theta; 0, \sigma_\theta^2 I) \quad (5)$$

95 In our model, the block memberships vector  $b$  is an intermediate latent variable and so we are not  
 96 free to choose a prior for it. Nevertheless, as far as inference on the right-hand-side of figure 1, we  
 97 regard  $p(b|X)$  as a pseudo-prior on  $b$ . We can show (appendix B.1) that our choice of prior for  $p(\theta)$   
 98 in equation 5 leads to a uniform  $p(b|X)$  in equation 6.

$$p(b|X) = \int p(b|X, \theta)p(\theta)d\theta = B^{-N} \quad (6)$$

99 This is an enormously important simplification as evaluating  $p(b|X)$  does not require an expensive  
 100 Monte-Carlo integration over the  $\theta$ -domain nor does it require the exact value of  $X$ . Peixoto  
 101 [15] proposes careful choices for the additional microcanonical SBM parameters  $\psi$  which we  
 102 adopt. Peixoto's idea is to write the joint prior on  $(b, e, k)$  as a product of conditionals  $p(b, e, k) =$   
 103  $p(b)p(e|b)p(k|e, b) = p(b)p(\psi|b)$ . For our purposes we must insert a conditioning on  $X$ , to form our  
 104 pseudo-prior for  $b$  and  $\psi$ , to give equation 7.

$$p(b, \psi|X) = p(b|X)p(\psi|b, X) = p(b|X)p(\psi|b) \quad (7)$$

105 Where we leverage the fact  $(\psi \perp\!\!\!\perp X)|b$ . We then borrow the priors proposed by Peixoto [15] for  
 106  $p(\psi|b)$  to complete our model. Please refer to appendix A.1 for the exact form of  $p(\psi|b)$ . All that  
 107 concerns the main argument is we have a computable form.

108 **4 Inference**

109 Now that we have defined the FFBM, we wish to leverage it to perform inference. Suppose we are  
110 presented with a vertex-labelled graph  $(A, X)$ ; the goal is to draw samples for  $\theta$  according to the  
111 posterior given the observed data:

$$\theta^{(t)} \sim p(\theta|A, X) \quad (8)$$

112 However, generating these samples is not easily done in practice. We therefore propose an iterative  
113 approach. We first draw samples  $b^{(t)}$  from the block membership posterior (equation 9) and then use  
114 each  $b^{(t)}$  to draw samples for  $\theta$  as in equation 10.

$$b^{(t)} \sim p(b|A, X) \quad (9)$$

$$\theta^{(t)} \sim p(\theta|X, b^{(t)}) \quad (10)$$

115 Both of these sampling steps can be implemented with a Markov Chain through the Metropolis-  
116 Hastings algorithm [5]. We just need to define a proposal distribution  $q(x, x')$  for proposing a move  
117  $x \rightarrow x'$  and be able to evaluate an un-normalised form of the target distribution, denoted  $\pi(\cdot)$ ,  
118 point-wise. The proposed move is then accepted with probability  $\alpha$  (equation 11) else it is rejected  
119 and we stay at  $x$ .

$$\alpha(x, x') = \min \left( \frac{\pi(x')q(x', x)}{\pi(x)q(x, x')}, 1 \right) \quad (11)$$

120 This accept-reject step ensures the resulting Markov Chain is in detailed balance with the target  
121 distribution  $\pi(\cdot)$ . What we propose in equations 9 and 10 is therefore implemented through a 2-level  
122 Markov chain. The resulting samples for  $\theta^{(t)}$  are unbiased in the sense that the expectation of their  
123 distribution is the posterior we are targeting:

$$\mathbb{E}_{b^{(t)}} \left[ p(\theta|X, b^{(t)}) \right] = \sum_{b \in [B]^N} p(\theta|X, b)p(b|A, X) = \sum_{b \in [B]^N} p(\theta, b|A, X) = p(\theta|A, X) \quad (12)$$

124 This is an example of a pseudo-marginal approach. Indeed, Andrieu and Roberts [3] show that the un-  
125 biased result in equation 12 is sufficient to prove that for large enough  $t$ ,  $\theta^{(t)} \sim \mathbb{E}_{b^{(t)}} [p(\theta|X, b^{(t)})] = p(\theta|A, X)$  which is exactly the distribution we are targeting (equation 8).

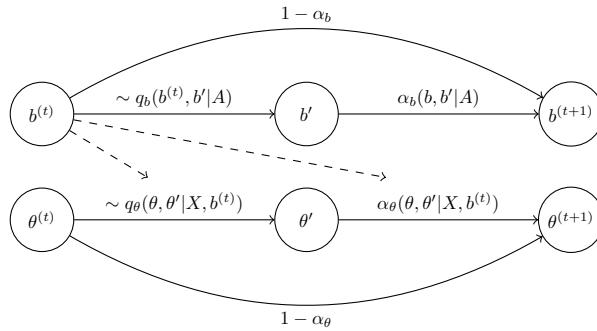


Figure 2: Sampling sequence

126  
127 The reason we split the Markov chain into two stages is because the summation over all latent states  
128  $b \in [B]^N$  required to directly compute the likelihood  $p(A|X, \theta) = \sum_{b \in [B]^N} p(A|b)P(b|X, \theta)$  is  
129 intractable –  $O(B^N)$ . Figure 2 shows an overview of the proposed method. We have introduced  
130 subscripts and conditionings to make explicit what variables each step utilises. We note the power of  
131 the simplification given by equation 6. As  $p(b|X)$  does not depend on the exact value of  $X$ , we do  
132 not need to know the value of  $X$  to perform the sampling on  $b$ . Conversely, for the  $\theta^{(t)}$  samples, we  
133 use only  $b^{(t)}$  but not  $A$  as  $(\theta \perp\!\!\!\perp A)|b$ .

134 **4.1 Sampling block memberships**

135 Peixoto [13] proposes a Monte Carlo method which we will base our approach on. It relies on writing  
 136 the posterior in the following form:

$$p(b|A, X) \propto p(A|b, X) \cdot p(b|X) = \pi_b(b) \quad (13)$$

137 Now  $\pi_b(\cdot)$  is the un-normalised density we wish to sample from for the  $b$ -chain. In other words, we  
 138 wish to construct a Markov chain that has  $\pi_b(\cdot)$  as its invariant distribution. We can break  $\pi_b$  down as  
 139 follows:

$$\pi_b(b) = p(b|X) \sum_{\psi} p(A, \psi|b, X) = p(b|X)p(A, \psi^*|b, X) = p(A|b, \psi^*) \cdot p(\psi^*|b) \cdot p(b|X) \quad (14)$$

140 Since we are using the microcanonical SBM formulation, there is only one value of  $\psi$  that is  
 141 compatible with the given  $(A, b)$  pair (given in equation 2). We denote this value  $\psi^* = \{\psi_k^*, \psi_e^*\}$ .  
 142 Therefore, the summation over all  $\psi$  reduces to just the single  $\psi^*$  term; this is the power of the  
 143 microcanonical formulation. We also define the microcanonical entropy of the configuration as.

$$S(b) = -\log \pi_b(b) = -\left( \log p(A|b, \psi^*) + \log p(\psi^*, b|X) \right) \quad (15)$$

144 This entropy can equally be thought of as the description length of the graph. The exact form of  
 145 the proposal  $q_b$  is explored thoroughly by Peixoto [13] and not repeated here. There is a widely  
 146 used library for Python made available under LGPL called `graph-tool` [14], which implements this  
 147 algorithm. The only modification we make is in the block membership prior  $p(b)$  which we replace  
 148 with  $p(b|X) = B^{-N}$ , which cancels out in the MH accept-reject step as it is independent of  $b$ .

149 **4.2 Sampling feature-to-block generator parameters**

150 The invariant distribution we wish to target for the  $\theta$  samples is the posterior of  $\theta$  given the values of  
 151 the pair  $(X, b)$ . We write this as follows:

$$\pi_\theta(\theta) \propto p(\theta|X, b) \propto p(b|X, \theta)p(\theta) \propto \pi_\theta(\theta) \propto \exp(-U(\theta)) \quad (16)$$

152 Where we have introduced  $U(\theta)$  equal to the negative log posterior. We define  $y_{ij} := \mathbb{1}\{b_i = j\}$  and  
 153  $a_{ij} := \phi_j(x_i; \theta)$ . Discarding constant terms, we can write  $U(\theta)$  as in equation 17 (refer to appendix  
 154 B.2 for the derivation).

$$U(\theta) = \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^B y_{ij} \log \frac{1}{a_{ij}} \right) + \frac{1}{2\sigma_\theta^2} \|\theta\|^2 = N \cdot \mathcal{L}(\theta) + \frac{1}{2\sigma_\theta^2} \|\theta\|^2 \quad (17)$$

155  $U(\theta)$  in equation 17 appears a typical objective function for neural network training. The first term  
 156 is introduced by the likelihood. We collect it into  $N \cdot \mathcal{L}(\theta)$ , which is the cross-entropy between the  
 157 graph-predicted and feature-predicted block memberships summed over all vertices. The second  
 158 term of equation 17 – introduced by the prior – brings a form of regularisation, guarding against  
 159 over-fitting. Different to traditional applications, our goal is not to find the minimiser of  $U(\theta)$  but to  
 160 draw samples from the posterior  $\pi_\theta(\cdot) \propto \exp(-U(\cdot))$ . We can use  $\nabla U$  as a useful heuristic to bias  
 161 our proposal towards regions of higher target density. We therefore adopt the Metropolis-adjusted  
 162 Langevin algorithm (MALA) – first proposed by Roberts and Tweedie [16]. Given the current sample  
 163  $\theta$ , we generate a new sample  $\theta'$  according to equation 18.

$$\theta' = \theta - h \nabla U(\theta) + \sqrt{2h} \cdot \xi \quad (18)$$

$$\therefore q_\theta(\theta, \theta') = \mathcal{N}(\theta'; \theta - h \nabla U(\theta), 2hI) \quad (19)$$

164 Where  $\xi \sim \mathcal{N}(0, I)$  and  $h$  is a step-size parameter – which may vary with the sample index (appendix  
 165 A.2 explores this more fully). Without the injected noise term, MALA is equivalent to gradient  
 166 descent. We require the noise term  $\xi$  to fully explore the parameter space. We can write the proposal  
 167 distribution  $q_\theta$  as in equation 19. The term  $\nabla U$  has an easy to compute analytic form (derived in  
 168 Appendix B.3). By noting that  $\theta = \{w_k\}_{k=1}^B$ , we write the derivative with respect to each  $w_k$  as:

$$\frac{\partial U}{\partial w_k} = - \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ \tilde{x}_i (y_{ik} - a_{ik}) \right\} - \frac{w_k}{\sigma_\theta^2} \right) \quad (20)$$

169 After a proposed move is generated, in typical Metropolis-Hastings fashion we accept the move with  
 170 probability  $\alpha_\theta$ , as in equation 11.

171 **4.3 Sampling sequence**

172 Up to this point, each  $\theta^{(t)}$  update uses its corresponding  $b^{(t)}$  sample. This means that the evaluation  
 173 of  $U(\theta)$  and  $\nabla U(\theta)$  has high variance. This may lead to longer burn-in for the resulting Markov  
 174 chain. The only link between  $b^{(t)}$  and  $\theta^{(t)}$  is in the evaluation of  $U(\theta)$  and  $\nabla U(\theta)$  which depends  
 175 only on the matrix  $y^{(t)}$  with entries  $y_{ij}^{(t)} := \mathbb{1}\{b_i^{(t)} = j\}$ . We would rather deal with the expectation  
 176 of each  $y_{ij}^{(t)}$ :

$$\mathbb{E} [y_{ij}^{(t)}] = \mathbb{E}_{b^{(t)}} [\mathbb{1}(b_i^{(t)} = j)] = p(b_i = j | A, X) \quad (21)$$

177 We can obtain an unbiased estimate for this quantity using the set of  $b$ -samples. However, as with  
 178 all MCMC methods, we must only use samples after burn-in and thinning have been applied. We  
 179 introduce  $\mathcal{T}_b$  to denote the retained set of indices for the  $b$ -samples and  $\mathcal{T}_\theta$  similarly for the  $\theta$ -chain.  
 180 An in-depth discussion of how these sets are chosen is given in appendix A.3. The unbiased estimate  
 181 for  $y_{ij}^{(t)}$  using the restricted sample set  $\mathcal{T}_b$  is denoted  $\hat{y}_{ij}$  and has form:

$$\hat{y}_{ij} := \frac{1}{|\mathcal{T}_b|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_b} y_{ij}^{(t)} = \frac{1}{|\mathcal{T}_b|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_b} \mathbb{1}\{b_i^{(t)} = j\} \quad (22)$$

182 We choose to feed each  $\theta^{(t)}$  update step the same matrix  $\hat{y}$  for all  $t$  rather than the corresponding  $y^{(t)}$ .  
 183 This means we no longer need to run the  $b$  and  $\theta$  Markov chains concurrently. Instead, we run the  
 184  $b$ -chain to completion and use it to generate  $\hat{y}$ . This affords us the flexibility to vary the lengths of the  
 185  $b$  and  $\theta$ -chains. Furthermore, the changeover from  $y^{(t)}$  to  $\hat{y}$  reduces the burn-in time for the  $\theta$ -chain  
 186 by reducing the variance in our evaluation of  $U$  and  $\nabla U$ . A description of the overall algorithms is  
 187 given in appendix C.1.

188 **4.4 Dimensionality reduction**

189 Once we have the samples  $\{\theta^{(t)}\} \sim p(\theta | A, X)$ , we can compute the empirical mean and standard  
 190 deviation of each component of  $\theta$ . Switching back to matrix notation we define  $\theta = W$ , such that  
 191  $W_{ij}$  is the weight component for block  $i$  and feature  $j$ , we can define:

$$\hat{\mu}_{ij} := \frac{1}{|\mathcal{T}_\theta|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_\theta} W_{ij}^{(t)} \quad \text{and} \quad \hat{\sigma}_{ij} := \frac{1}{|\mathcal{T}_\theta|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_\theta} (W_{ij}^{(t)} - \hat{\mu}_{ij})^2 \quad (23)$$

192 A simple heuristic to discard the least important features requires specifying a cutoff  $c > 0$  and a  
 193 multiplier  $k > 0$ . We define the function  $\mathcal{F}_i(j)$  as in 24 then only keep features with indices  $d \in \mathcal{D}'$ ,  
 194 where  $\mathcal{D}'$  is constructed as in equation 25.

$$\mathcal{F}_i(j) := (\hat{\mu}_{ij} - k\hat{\sigma}_{ij}, \hat{\mu}_{ij} + k\hat{\sigma}_{ij}) \cap (-c, +c) \quad (24)$$

$$\mathcal{D}' := \{j \in [D] : \exists i \in [B] \text{ s.t. } \mathcal{F}_i(j) \neq \emptyset\} \quad (25)$$

195 Intuitively, this means discarding any feature for which  $\hat{\mu}_{ij} \pm k\hat{\sigma}_{ij}$  lies within or spans the null  
 196 region  $(-c, c)$  for all block indices. If we were to use the Laplace approximation for the posterior  
 197  $p(W_{ij} | A, X) \approx \mathcal{N}(W_{ij}; \mu_{ij}, \sigma_{ij})$ , then this is effectively a hypothesis test on the value of  $W_{ij}$   
 198 (equation 26).  $\mathcal{D}'$  then comprises all features  $i$  for which  $H_1$  is accepted at least once for some  
 199  $j \in [B]$ .

$$H_0 : |\mu_{ij}| \leq c \quad H_1 : |\mu_{ij}| > c \quad (26)$$

200 The multiplier  $k$  determines the degree of significance of the result. However, as the Laplace  
 201 approximation is not exact we will only treat this dimensionality reduction method as a useful  
 202 heuristic and not an exact method. Conversely, we could fix  $k = k_0$  and the dimension of our reduced  
 203 feature set  $|\mathcal{D}'| = D'$ . We would then like to find the largest value of  $c$  such that  $|\mathcal{D}'| = D'$  given  
 204  $k = k_0$ . This is summarised in equation 27. This approach is often preferred as it fixes the number of  
 205 reduced dimensions.

$$c^* = \arg \max_{c>0} (c : |\mathcal{D}'| = D', k = k_0) \quad (27)$$

207 **5 Experiments**

208 We apply the developed methods to a variety of datasets. These are chosen to span a range of node  
 209 counts  $N$ , edge counts  $E$  and feature space dimension  $D$ . We consider the following:

- 210 • **Political books** [11] ( $N = 105, E = 441, D = 3$ ) – network of Amazon book sales about U.S.  
 211 politics, published close to the presidential election in 2004. Two books are connected if they were  
 212 frequently co-purchased by customers. Vertex features encode the political affiliation of the author  
 213 (liberal, conservative or neutral).
- 214 • **Primary school dynamic contacts** [18] ( $N = 238, E = 5539, D = 14$ ) – network of face-to-face  
 215 contacts amongst students and teachers at a primary school in Lyon, France. Two nodes are  
 216 connected if the two parties shared a face-to-face interaction over the school-day. Vertex features  
 217 include class membership (one of 10 values: 1A-5B), gender (male, female) and status (teacher,  
 218 student). No further identifiable information is retained. We choose to analyse just the second day  
 219 of results.
- 220 • **Facebook egonet** [7] ( $N = 747, E = 30025, D = 480$ ) – an assortment of Facebook users'  
 221 friends lists. Vertex features are extracted from each user's profile and are fully anonymised. They  
 222 include information about education history, languages spoken, gender, home-town, birthday etc.  
 223 We focus on the egonet with id 1912.

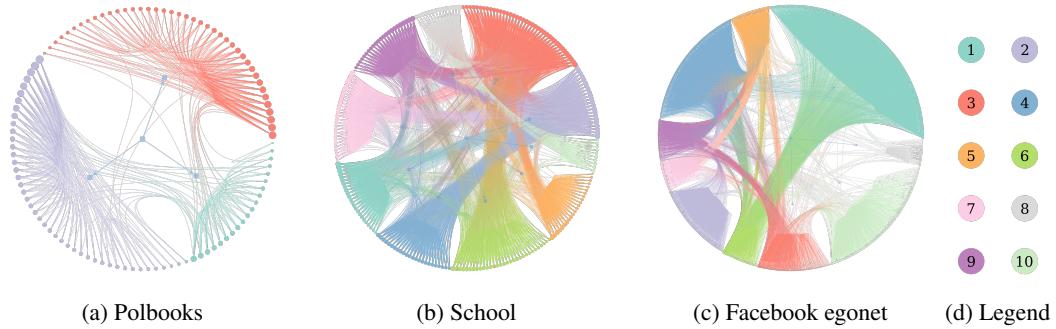


Figure 3: Networks laid out and coloured according to inferred block memberships  $\hat{y}$  for a given experiment iteration. Visualisation performed using *graph-tool* [14]

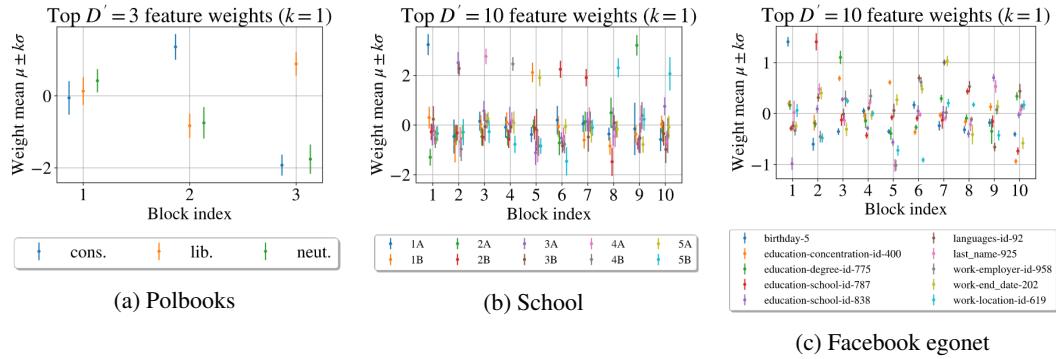


Figure 4: Reduced dimension feature-to-block generator weight samples

Table 1: Experimental results averaged over  $n = 10$  iterations (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation)

Dataset	$B$	$D$	$D'$	$\bar{S}_e$	$\bar{\mathcal{L}}_0$	$\bar{\mathcal{L}}_1$	$c^*$	$\bar{\mathcal{L}}'_0$	$\bar{\mathcal{L}}'_1$
Polbooks	3	3	–	$2.250 \pm 0.000$	$0.563 \pm 0.042$	$0.595 \pm 0.089$	–	–	–
School	10	14	10	$1.894 \pm 0.004$	$0.787 \pm 0.127$	$0.885 \pm 0.129$	$1.198 \pm 0.249$	$0.793 \pm 0.132$	$0.853 \pm 0.132$
FB egonet	10	480	10	$1.626 \pm 0.003$	$1.326 \pm 0.043$	$1.538 \pm 0.069$	$0.94 \pm 0.019$	$1.580 \pm 0.150$	$1.605 \pm 0.106$

224 We require metrics to assess performance. This can be split into two separate components: the  
 225 microcanonical SBM fit (concerned with the  $b$ -samples) and the fit of the feature-to-block generator  
 226 (concerned with the  $\theta$ -samples). Starting with the SBM,  $S(b)$  (equation 15) can be interpreted as  
 227 the description length of the partition imposed by  $b$ . It is only natural to divide this quantity by the  
 228 number of entities (nodes and edges) in our graph  $N + E$  to allow for rough comparison between  
 229 graphs. This defines a simple metric to gauge the fit of the SBM: the description length per entity  
 230 averaged over the  $b$ -samples (equation 28):

$$\bar{S}_e := \frac{1}{(N+E)|\mathcal{T}_b|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_b} S(b^{(t)}) \quad (28)$$

231 However, to assess the performance of the feature-to-block predictor, we must partition the vertex  
 232 set  $[N]$  into training and test sets. We choose to randomly partition the vertices on each experiment  
 233 run such that a constant fraction  $f$  of the available vertices go to form our training set  $\mathcal{G}_0$  and the  
 234 remainder are held out to form our test set  $\mathcal{G}_1$ . The  $b$ -chain is run using the whole network but we only  
 235 use vertices  $v \in \mathcal{G}_0$  to train the  $\theta$ -chain. As  $|\mathcal{G}_0| \neq |\mathcal{G}_1|$  in general, we cannot use the un-normalised  
 236 log target  $U$  (equation 17) for comparison as the total cross-entropy loss is scaled by the size of each  
 237 set but the prior term stays constant. We therefore must use the average cross-entropy loss over each  
 238 set (equation 29):

$$\bar{\mathcal{L}}_\star := \frac{1}{|\mathcal{T}_\theta|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_\theta} \mathcal{L}_\star(\theta^{(t)}) \quad \text{where} \quad \mathcal{L}_\star(\theta^{(t)}) := \frac{1}{|\mathcal{G}_\star|} \sum_{i \in \mathcal{G}_\star} \sum_{j \in [B]} \hat{y}_{ij} \log \frac{1}{\phi_j(x_i; \theta^{(t)})} \quad (29)$$

239 Where  $\star \in \{0, 1\}$  has been introduced to toggle between training and test sets. Table 1 summarises  
 240 the results for each experiment.<sup>2</sup> We also apply the dimensionality reduction method on the two higher  
 241 dimensional datasets (the school and FB egonet). For this we leverage equation 27, to reduce the  
 242 dimension from  $D$  to  $D'$  with  $k = 1$  to yield the maximal cutoff  $c^*$ . We then retrain the feature-block  
 243 predictor using just the retained feature set  $\mathcal{D}'$  and report the loss over the training and test sets for  
 244 the reduced classifier – denoted  $\bar{\mathcal{L}}'_0$  and  $\bar{\mathcal{L}}'_1$  respectively. These values are also included in table 1.

245 Table 1 already highlights some general trends in the results. Firstly, the variance of the test loss  
 246  $\bar{\mathcal{L}}_1$  tends to be higher than the training loss  $\bar{\mathcal{L}}_0$ . This is expected as our test set is smaller than the  
 247 training set and so more susceptible to variability in its construction. Indeed, most of the variance  
 248 in the evaluation of  $\bar{\mathcal{L}}_0$  and  $\bar{\mathcal{L}}_1$  comes from the random partitioning of the graph into training and  
 249 test sets. Secondly, it can be seen that the dimensionality reduction procedure brings the training  
 250 and test losses closer together. This implies that the features we keep are indeed correlated with the  
 251 underlying graphical partition and that the approach generalises correctly.

252 The average description length per entity of the graph  $\bar{S}_e$  has very low variance implying the detected  
 253 communities can be found reliably (to within an arbitrary relabelling of blocks). For reference we  
 254 plot an inferred partition for each of the graphs on figure 3. The polbooks graph yields the cleanest  
 255 separation between blocks but nonetheless the inferred partitions for the other datasets do succeed at  
 256 partitioning the graph into densely connected clusters.

## 257 5.1 Political books

258 We wish to determine whether the author’s political affiliation is a good predictor of the overall  
 259 network structure. We choose to partition the network into  $B = 3$  communities as we only have this  
 260 many distinct values for political affiliation (conservative, liberal or neutral). From, figure 4a, we see  
 261 that all 3 blocks have a distinct political affiliation as their largest positive component. This is strong  
 262 evidence that political affiliation is indeed the axis which best predicts the 3-way natural partition  
 263 of the graph into blocks. Furthermore, from table 1 we see that the training and test losses are very  
 264 similar and both are low in magnitude. This provides further evidence to the claim that political  
 265 affiliation is the best explanatory variable for the overall network structure.

---

<sup>2</sup>For a comprehensive list of the hyper-parameters used for each experiment please see appendix C.2

266 **5.2 Primary school dynamic contacts**

267 We choose  $B = 10$  in line with the total number of school-classes. As before, we sample the  
268 block-generator parameters  $\theta$  and employ the dimensionality reduction technique with standard  
269 deviation multiplier  $k = 1$  to pick out the top  $D' = 10$  features. We then plot the weights for the  
270 surviving features  $d \in D'$  on figure 4b. Immediately, we see that only the pupils' class memberships  
271 have survived (1A-5B); gender and teacher/student status have been discarded meaning that these are  
272 not good predictors of overall macro-structure.

273 The vast majority of blocks are composed of a single class. However, some blocks have 2 comparably  
274 good classes as their predictor. For example, block 2 contains classes 3A and 3B as its 2 best  
275 predictors. This suggests that the social divide between classes is less pronounced for pupils in year  
276 3. Conversely, some classes are found to extend over two detected blocks (class 2B spans blocks 6  
277 and 7) but we nonetheless do not have a feature which explains the division. The most surprising  
278 block is number 5 - which has comparable weightings for classes 5A and 1B. Perhaps there was a  
279 joint event between those two classes on the day the data were collected.

280 **5.3 Facebook egonet**

281 We choose  $B = 10$  and  $D' = 10$  for this experiment. The remaining features (figure 4c) are those  
282 that best explain the high-level community structure. The majority of the surviving features are  
283 education related. Nevertheless, for  $D' = 10$  we only have good explanations for the makeup of  
284 some of the detected blocks; several blocks in figure 4c do not have high-magnitude components for  
285  $D' = 10$ .

286 When the feature dimension is very large, it becomes increasingly likely that a particular feature may  
287 uniquely identify a small set of nodes. If these nodes are all part of the same community then the  
288 classifier will overfit for that particular parameter. The regularisation term imposed by the prior goes  
289 some way to alleviating this problem. Nevertheless, we see in figure 4c that the feature `birthday-5`  
290 has a very high weight as it relates to block 1 – but it would be preposterous to conclude that birthdays  
291 determine graphical structure. The analyst must remain vigilant of such problems.

292 **6 Conclusion**

293 The FFBM was developed to address the shortcomings of other graphical models when testing how  
294 vertex features affect community structure. The idea is to divide the graph into its most natural  
295 partition and test whether the vertex features can accurately explain this partition. It is very easy to  
296 find vertex features that are in some way correlated with the graphical structure. Nonetheless, only  
297 when we find the feature that best describes the most pronounced partition do we have a stronger  
298 case for causation.

299 With the newly-defined FFBM, we go on to present an efficient inference algorithm to sample the  
300 parameters  $\theta$  of the feature-to-block generator. This is introduced as two concurrent Markov chains  
301 to sample the block memberships  $b$  and block generator parameters  $\theta$ . Nevertheless, we can serialise  
302 the chains and use the empirical mean of the  $b$ -samples as the input to our  $\theta$ -chain. This reduces the  
303 variance in our evaluation of the target distribution and thus shortens burn-in.

304 The overall method is shown to be effective at extracting and describing the most natural communities  
305 in a labelled network. Nevertheless, the approach can only currently explain the structure at the  
306 macro-scale. We cannot explain structure within each block. Future work will benefit from extending  
307 the FFBM to be hierarchical in nature. That way, the structure of the network can be explained at all  
308 length-scales of interest. So long as data collection techniques remain ethical and care is taken to  
309 respect personal privacy, such empowered decision-making can only help humankind.

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375    **Checklist**

- 376    1. For all authors...
  - 377    (a) Do the main claims made in the abstract and introduction accurately reflect the paper's  
378    contributions and scope? [Yes] See experiments section 5
  - 379    (b) Did you describe the limitations of your work? [Yes] See conclusion 6 and experiments  
380    5 sections
  - 381    (c) Did you discuss any potential negative societal impacts of your work? [Yes] See  
382    conclusion 6
  - 383    (d) Have you read the ethics review guidelines and ensured that your paper conforms to  
384    them? [Yes]
- 385    2. If you are including theoretical results...
  - 386    (a) Did you state the full set of assumptions of all theoretical results? [Yes] See inference  
387    section 4
  - 388    (b) Did you include complete proofs of all theoretical results? [Yes] See inference section  
389    4
- 390    3. If you ran experiments...
  - 391    (a) Did you include the code, data, and instructions needed to reproduce the main experi-  
392    mental results (either in the supplemental material or as a URL)? [Yes] See supplemen-  
393    tary code
  - 394    (b) Did you specify all the training details (e.g., data splits, hyperparameters, how they  
395    were chosen)? [Yes] See appendix C.2
  - 396    (c) Did you report error bars (e.g., with respect to the random seed after running experi-  
397    ments multiple times)? [Yes] See table 1
  - 398    (d) Did you include the total amount of compute and the type of resources used (e.g., type  
399    of GPUs, internal cluster, or cloud provider)? [Yes] See appendix C.3
- 400    4. If you are using existing assets (e.g., code, data, models) or curating/releasing new assets...
  - 401    (a) If your work uses existing assets, did you cite the creators? [Yes] See section experi-  
402    ments 5
  - 403    (b) Did you mention the license of the assets? [Yes] See section inference 4
  - 404    (c) Did you include any new assets either in the supplemental material or as a URL? [Yes]  
405    Supplementary material
  - 406    (d) Did you discuss whether and how consent was obtained from people whose data you're  
407    using/curating? [Yes] Referred to original papers
  - 408    (e) Did you discuss whether the data you are using/curating contains personally identifiable  
409    information or offensive content? [Yes] Referred to original papers
- 410    5. If you used crowdsourcing or conducted research with human subjects...
  - 411    (a) Did you include the full text of instructions given to participants and screenshots, if  
412    applicable? [N/A]
  - 413    (b) Did you describe any potential participant risks, with links to Institutional Review  
414    Board (IRB) approvals, if applicable? [N/A]
  - 415    (c) Did you include the estimated hourly wage paid to participants and the total amount  
416    spent on participant compensation? [N/A]

417 **A Appendix: Additional material**

418 **A.1 SBM likelihood and prior**

419 For reference, we provide the likelihoods and priors for the mircocanonical SBM proposed by Peixoto  
420 [15]. We have that the graph  $A$  is drawn from the SBM:

$$A \sim \text{DC-SBM}_{\text{MC}}(b, e, k) \quad (30)$$

421 With edges placed uniformly at random but respecting the constraints imposed by  $b, e$  and  $k$ . The  
422 likelihood calculation for  $p(A|k, e, b)$  then reduces to a case of counting configurations that yield  
423 the same adjacency matrix,  $\Xi(A)$ , and dividing by the total number of configurations possible,  $\Xi(e)$ .  
424 This is why this formulation is given the microcanonical moniker. If we consider the half-edges to be  
425 distinguishable for a moment, the total number of configurations that satisfy the  $e$  constraint is:

$$\Omega(e) = \frac{\prod_r e_r!}{\prod_{r,s:r < s} e_{rs}! \cdot \prod_r e_{rr}!!} \quad (31)$$

426 Where  $e_r := \sum_s e_{rs}$  and  $(2m)!! := 2^m m!$ . Nevertheless, a great number of these configurations  
427 yield the same graph  $A$ . We denote the number of configurations that yield the adjacency matrix  $A$   
428 with  $\Xi(A)$ , which can be computed as:

$$\Xi(A) := \frac{\prod_i k_i!}{\prod_{i,j : i < j} A_{ij}! \prod_i A_{ii}!!} \quad (32)$$

429 Note the similarity between the forms of  $\Omega(e)$  and  $\Xi(A)$  as  $e$  is effectively the adjacency matrix of  
430 the block-graph. With these defined we can write the overall likelihood:

$$p(A|k, e, b) = \frac{\Xi(A)}{\Omega(e)} \quad (33)$$

431 Obviously, this form is only defined if  $A$  respects the constraints imposed by  $(k, e, b)$  else the  
432 likelihood is 0. With the likelihood defined, we move on to the prior. As discussed in the main text,  
433 for the FFBM  $b$  is an intermediate variable and not a parameter so we are not free to choose a prior  
434 for it. Nevertheless, we can borrow the conditional prior proposed by Peixoto [15] for  $p(e, k|b)$ :

$$p(e, k|b) = p(e|b)p(k|e, b) = \left[ \begin{Bmatrix} \{ \frac{B}{2} \} \\ E \end{Bmatrix} \right]^{-1} \cdot \left[ \prod_r \frac{\prod_j \eta_j^r!}{n_r! q(e_r, n_r)} \right] \quad (34)$$

435 Where  $\{ \frac{n}{m} \}$  is shorthand for  $\binom{n+m-1}{m} = \frac{(n+m-1)!}{(n-1)!(m)!}$  which can be thought of as the total number  
436 of distinct histograms with  $n$  bins under the constraint they sum to  $m$ .  $E = \frac{1}{2} \sum_{r,s} e_{rs}$  is the total  
437 number of edges in the graph. Importantly,  $E$  is not allowed to vary and so  $p(e|b)$  is uniform with  
438 respect to  $e$ . The variable  $\eta_j^r$  is introduced to denote the number of vertices in block  $r$  that have degree  
439  $j$ . Formally,  $\eta_j^r := \sum_i \mathbb{1}\{b_i = r\} \mathbb{1}\{k_i = j\}$ . Furthermore,  $q(m, n)$  is the number of different  
440 histograms with at most  $n$  non-zero bins that sum to  $m$ .  $q(m, n)$  is related to but different from  $\{ \frac{n}{m} \}$ .  
441 Recall that  $e_r := \sum_s e_{rs}$  is the total number of half edges in block  $r$  and  $n_r := \sum_i \mathbb{1}\{b_i = r\}$  is the  
442 number of vertices assigned to block  $r$ .

443 The form of these priors were chosen carefully by Peixoto [15] to more closely match the structure of  
444 empirical networks than simple uniform priors. We do not repeat his arguments here.

445 **A.2 Choosing the MALA step-size**

446 For sampling from the  $\theta$ -chain of the block membership generator parameters, we employed the  
447 Metropolis Adjusted Langevin Algorithm (MALA). At iteration  $t$ , the proposed sample is generated  
448 by:

$$\theta' = \theta^{(t)} - h_t \nabla U(\theta^{(t)}) + \sqrt{2h_t} \cdot \xi \quad (35)$$

449 There are two competing objectives when choosing the step-size  $h_t$ . On the one hand, we want the  
450 step-size to be large so that we arrive at a high density region quickly. However, too large a step-size

451 will lead to a lower acceptance ratio and thus inefficient sampling. A solution to this problem would  
 452 be to slowly decrease the step-size with  $t$  - often called simulated annealing. Therefore, we still have  
 453 a short burn-in time but will not bounce around the mode for large  $t$ . As well as the trivial constraint  
 454 for  $h_t$  to be strictly positive, we introduce two further constraints as outlined by Welling and Teh  
 455 [19]:

$$\sum_{t=1}^{\infty} h_t = \infty \quad \text{and} \quad \sum_{t=1}^{\infty} h_t^2 < \infty \quad (36)$$

456 The first constraint ensures that we have cover sufficient distance to arrive at any arbitrary point in  
 457 our domain, no matter the starting point. The second constraint ensures that once we converge to the  
 458 mode rather than simply bouncing around it. Welling and Teh [19] propose the following form for a  
 459 polynomially decaying step-size which we adopt:

$$h_t = \alpha(\beta + t)^{-\gamma} \quad (37)$$

460 Where  $\alpha, \beta, \gamma$  are hyper-parameters to be chosen. We require  $\alpha, \beta > 0$  and  $\gamma \in (0.5, 1]$  to satisfy  
 461 equation 36. To reduce the number of hyperparameters we set these to have values given by the  
 462 equations 38.

$$\alpha = \frac{250 \cdot s}{N} \quad \beta = 1000 \quad \gamma = 0.8 \quad (38)$$

463 Where  $N$  is the number of data-points we are considering and now  $s$  is the only free variable which  
 464 we call the step-size scaling. For approximate methods, we can choose to bypass the MH accept-reject  
 465 entirely to speed up computation. If this is done, the algorithm is instead called stochastic gradient  
 466 Langevin diffusion (SGLD) [19]. This speeds up computation at the expense of exactness of the  
 467 method.

### 468 A.3 Burn-in and thinning

469 As with any MCMC method, we must deal with the issues presented by burn-in and thinning. We  
 470 have introduced the notation  $\mathcal{T}_b$  and  $\mathcal{T}_{\theta}$  to denote the set of samples we keep from the  $b$  and  $\theta$  chains  
 471 respectively. Note that we generate  $T_b$  and  $T_{\theta}$  samples total. The burn-in period refers to the time  
 472 taken for the Markov Chain to converge to the stationary distribution. Sample thinning is necessary  
 473 to ensure that neighbouring samples satisfy independence. However, as we do not leverage the  
 474 independence property this is less important in our analysis. We can write the general set  $\mathcal{T}_*$  as:

$$\mathcal{T}_* = \{T_* \kappa_* + i \lambda_* : 0 \leq i \leq \lfloor T_*(1 - \kappa_*) / \lambda_* \rfloor\} \quad (39)$$

475 Where the parameter  $\kappa_* \in (0, 1)$  controls our burn-in and  $\lambda_*$  controls our thinning.  $\kappa_*$  can be  
 476 determined by plotting the log-target (either  $S(b^{(t)})$  or  $U(\theta^{(t)})$ ) with respect to the epoch  $t$ .  $\kappa_*$  is then  
 477 chosen to encompass the region where the log-target has roughly equilibrated. As we do not leverage  
 478 sample independence  $\lambda_*$  can be chosen less rigorously. We often just use  $\lambda_b = 5$  and  $\lambda_{\theta} = 10$ .

### 479 A.4 Initializing the b-chain

480 For the purposes of our model (the FFBM), the number of blocks  $B$  is a constant which must be  
 481 specified by the data scientist. We could however, allow our choice of  $B$  to be influenced by the  
 482 observed data. This places us in the domain of empirical Bayes, which must be negotiated carefully.  
 483 Prior beliefs must be determined a priori else they are not prior. However, as the number of blocks  
 484 only specifies the coarseness of the analysis, it is fine to allow it to vary. Indeed, Peixoto [12] shows  
 485 that for a fixed average degree the maximum number of detectable blocks scales as  $O(\sqrt{N})$  where  $N$   
 486 is the number of vertices.

487 If we allow  $B$  to vary in the  $b$ -chain (i.e. new blocks can be created and we permit empty blocks) then  
 488 it can be run until a minimum description length (MDL) solution is reached. We take the number of  
 489 non-empty blocks at the MDL to be our fixed block number  $B$  for subsequent analysis. Indeed, it is  
 490 prudent to start our  $b$ -chain at this MDL solution as then we can burn-in time is greatly reduced.

491 **A.5 Dimensionality discussion**

492 There is a challenge when dealing with vertex-features. Many vertex feature often take only one  
 493 of several discrete values within a set. For example, with the primary school dataset [18], a pupil's  
 494 school-class can take one of 10 values from {"1A", "1B", "2A", "2B" ... "5A", "5B"}.

495 It is not immediately obvious how to encode this for the feature-to-block classifier. Although this is  
 496 technically only a single dimension, we choose to expand the data into a set of 10 binary feature flags  
 497  $\in \mathcal{X} = \{0, 1\}$ . Although only one flag will be set at a time it is the simplest method for representing  
 498 discrete-valued data. The reason we choose  $\mathcal{X} = \{0, 1\}$  and not  $\mathcal{X} = \{-1, 1\}$  is that the former  
 499 allows for simpler analysis of the resulting weight values. When a feature is switched off, it has  
 500 no impact on the softmax classifier. It is simpler to only model positive relationships. We prefer to  
 501 say that this block is comprised of the vertices with feature  $d$  on rather than this block contains the  
 502 vertices with feature  $d$  switched off. To make this explicit, say we have a feature encoding a pupil's  
 503 gender: {"male", "female"}, we represent this as 2 binary feature flags "male": {0, 1} and "female":  
 504 {0, 1}. This approach may seem inefficient but it is vital to ensure we can interpret the resulting  
 505 parameter distributions.

506 Nevertheless, this dimensionality expansion means that we cannot include a bias term in our classifier  
 507 as then the MAP solution is less peaked and our  $\theta$ -samples will have higher variance. To illustrate  
 508 this point we need only look at the form of the soft-max classifier with bias vector  $\beta$ , operating on a  
 509 vector  $x$  which only has feature  $d$  turned on such that  $x_i = \mathbb{1}\{i = d\}$ . Component  $j$  of the output is  
 510 given by:

$$\phi_j(x) = \frac{\exp(w_j^T x + \beta_j)}{\sum_{k=1}^B \exp(w_k^T x + \beta_k)} = \frac{\exp(w_{jd} + \beta_j)}{\sum_{k=1}^B \exp(w_{kd} + \beta_k)} \quad (40)$$

511 For the case that  $x$  can only has one entry  $x_d = 1$  and the rest are 0, the term  $w_{kd} + \beta_k$  is effectively  
 512 the new weight for component  $k$ . The bias term  $\beta_k$  becomes an unnecessary extra degree of freedom.  
 513 To illustrate this point, we set  $\beta_k = \beta_0 \forall j$ . If this is the case then equation 40 can be simplified to:

$$\phi_j(x) = \frac{\exp(\beta_0) \cdot \exp(w_{jd})}{\sum_{k=1}^B \exp(\beta_0) \cdot \exp(w_{kd})} = \frac{\exp(w_{jd})}{\sum_{k=1}^B \exp(w_{kd})} \quad (41)$$

514 This expression is independent of  $\beta_0$  and so it is free to vary. This is not the whole picture as we also  
 515 have the prior which introduces a regularisation term which favours weights closer to 0. Nevertheless,  
 516 for mutually exclusive binary feature flags, the bias term does not add to the expressiveness of the  
 517 model and only serves to complicate analysis. We therefore remove the bias term from the Softmax  
 518 classifier. Even for data comprised of several such features (e.g. school class and data) we prefer  
 519 to discard the bias term. The bias term only serves to decrease the loss function by leveraging  
 520 information about the size of each detected block and not feature information. We do not wish to be  
 521 overly confident in our model predictions when such prediction is influenced by block size and not  
 522 feature information. Indeed, the approach was initially developed with a bias term but we found its  
 523 removal yielded more reliable and reproducible results.

524 **B Appendix: Derivations**

525 **B.1 Derivation of conditional block distribution given feature matrix**

526 We wish to determine the form of  $p(b|X)$ . This can be done by integrating over the joint probability  
527 with respect to  $\theta$ .

$$\begin{aligned} p(b|X) &= \int p(b, \theta|X, \theta)d\theta = \int p(b|X, \theta)p(\theta|X)d\theta \\ &= \int p(b|X, \theta)p(\theta)d\theta = \int \prod_{i \in [N]} \phi_{b_i}(x_i; \theta)p(\theta)d\theta \\ &= \prod_{i \in [N]} \int \frac{\exp(w_{b_i}^T \tilde{x}_i) \prod_{j \in [B]} \mathcal{N}(w_j; 0, \sigma_\theta^2 I)}{\sum_{k \in [B]} \exp(w_k^T \tilde{x}_i)} dw_{1:B} \end{aligned}$$

528 We note that  $b_i \in [B]$  and so the integral's value is unchanged with respect to  $b_i$ . The integrand  
529 has the same form no matter which value  $b_i$  takes as the prior is the same for each  $w_j$ . As such the  
530 integral can only be a function of at most  $\tilde{x}_i$  and  $\sigma_\theta^2$  as it is symmetric with respect to  $b_i$  and all the  
531 various  $w_j$  are integrated out as they are dummy variables. Therefore, denoting the integral by the  
532 (unknown) function  $f(\tilde{x}_i, \sigma_\theta^2)$ , we write  $p(b|X)$  as follows:

$$p(b|X) = \prod_{i=1}^N f(\tilde{x}_i, \sigma_\theta^2) = \text{const w.r.t } b = c$$

533 As this is a constant with respect to  $b$  we conclude that  $p(b|X)$  must be a uniform distribution.  $1/c$   
534 is simply the size of the set of values that  $b$  can take. We know  $b_i \in [B]$ . Therefore,  $b \in [B]^N$  and  
535  $|[B]^N| = B^N = 1/c$ . Putting this all together we conclude that:

$$p(b|X) = B^{-N} \quad (42)$$

536 **B.2 Derivation of U form**

537 The invariant distribution we wish to target for the  $\theta$  samples is the posterior of  $\theta$  given the values of  
538 the pair  $(X, b)$ . We write this as follows:

$$\pi_\theta(\theta) \propto p(\theta|X, b) \propto p(b|X, \theta)p(\theta) \propto \exp(-U(\theta)) \quad (43)$$

$$\therefore U(\theta) = -(\log p(b|X, \theta) + \log p(\theta)) + \text{const} \quad (44)$$

539 Where we have introduced  $U(\theta)$  equal to the negative log posterior. Each of the constituent terms of  
540  $U(\theta)$  are easily computed (equation 45) by defining  $y_{ij} := \mathbb{1}\{b_i = j\}$  and  $a_{ij} := \phi_j(x_i; \theta)$ .

$$\log p(b|X, \theta) = \sum_{i \in [N]} \sum_{j \in [B]} y_{ij} \log a_{ij} \quad \text{and} \quad \log p(\theta) = -\frac{(D+1)(B)}{2} \log 2\pi - \frac{1}{2\sigma_\theta^2} \|\theta\|^2 \quad (45)$$

541 Discarding constant terms, we write  $U(\theta)$  as in equation 46. Note that  $\|\theta\|^2 = \sum_i \theta_i^2 = \sum_{j=1}^B \|w_j\|^2$   
542 is the Euclidean norm of the vector of parameters  $\theta$ .

$$U(\theta) = \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^B y_{ij} \log \frac{1}{a_{ij}} \right) + \frac{1}{2\sigma_\theta^2} \|\theta\|^2 = N \cdot \mathcal{L}(\theta) + \frac{1}{2\sigma_\theta^2} \|\theta\|^2 \quad (46)$$

543 **B.3 Derivation of U gradient with respect to feature parameters**

544 The goal is to determine  $\nabla U(\theta)$ , the gradient of the negative log posterior with respect to the  
545 parameters. We repeat the form of  $U(\theta)$  in equation 47.

$$U(\theta) = \left( \sum_{i \in [N]} \sum_{j \in [B]} y_{ij} \log \frac{1}{a_{ij}} \right) + \frac{1}{2\sigma_\theta^2} \|\theta\|^2 \quad (47)$$

546 Where  $y_{ij}$  is independent of  $\theta$  and  $a_{ij}$  is the output from the softmax layer, with form as given in  
 547 equation 48.

$$a_{ij} := \phi_j(x_i; \theta) = \frac{\exp(w_j^T \tilde{x}_i)}{\sum_{r \in [B]} \exp(w_r^T \tilde{x}_i)} \quad (48)$$

548 We note that  $\theta = \{w_k\}_{k=1}^B$ , and as such we can write this in vector form  $\theta = [w_1^T, w_2^T \dots w_B^T]^T$ .

549 Therefore,  $\nabla U(\theta) = [\partial U / \partial w_1^T, \partial U / \partial w_2^T \dots \partial U / \partial w_B^T]^T$ ; to compute  $\nabla U(\theta)$  it suffices to find the  
 550 form of  $\partial U / \partial w_k$  with respect to a general  $k$ .

551 To this end, we must first find partial derivatives of  $a_{ij}$  and  $\|\theta\|$  with respect to  $w_k$ . Starting with  $a_{ij}$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial a_{ij}}{\partial w_k} &= \frac{\tilde{x}_i \exp(w_j^T \tilde{x}_i) \delta_{jk} \cdot \sum_{r \in [B]} \exp(w_r^T \tilde{x}_i) - \exp(w_j^T \tilde{x}_i) \cdot \tilde{x}_i \exp(w_k^T \tilde{x}_i)}{\left( \sum_{r \in [B]} \exp(w_r^T \tilde{x}_i) \right)^2} \\ &= \tilde{x}_i (a_{ij} \delta_{jk} - a_{ij} a_{ik}) \end{aligned} \quad (49)$$

552 Where  $\delta_{jk} := \mathbb{1}\{j = k\}$ . Now moving onto the derivative of  $\|\theta\|^2$ :

$$\frac{\partial}{\partial w_k} \|\theta\|^2 = \frac{\partial}{\partial w_k} \left( \sum_{r \in [B]} \|w_r\|^2 \right) = 2w_k \quad (50)$$

553 We are ready to put this all together, to find the partial derivative of  $U(\theta)$  with respect to each  $w_k$ :

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial U}{\partial w_k} &= \sum_{i=1}^N \sum_{j=1}^B y_{ij} \left( \frac{-\tilde{x}_i}{a_{ij}} (a_{ij} \delta_{jk} - a_{ij} a_{ik}) \right) + \frac{w_k}{\sigma_\theta^2} \\ &= - \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \tilde{x}_i \left( y_{ik} - a_{ik} \sum_{j=1}^B y_{ij} \right) - \frac{w_k}{\sigma_\theta^2} \right) \\ &= - \left( \sum_{i=1}^N \left\{ \tilde{x}_i (y_{ik} - a_{ik}) \right\} - \frac{w_k}{\sigma_\theta^2} \right) \end{aligned} \quad (51)$$

554 This is the required result. This form can be computed efficiently through matrix operations. The only  
 555 property of  $y_{ij}$  we have used in the derivation is the sum-to-one constraint  $\sum_{j=1}^B y_{ij} = 1$  for all  $i$ .

556 **C Appendix: Implementation details**

557 **C.1 Algorithms**

---

**Algorithm 1** Block membership sample generation

---

```

 $b^{(0)} \leftarrow \arg \min_b S(b|A)$                                  $\triangleright$  Implemented as greedy heuristic in graph-tool library
for  $t \in \{0, 1 \dots T_b - 1\}$  do
     $b' \leftarrow \sim q_b(b^{(t)}, b'|A)$ 
     $\log \alpha_b \leftarrow \log \alpha_b(b^{(t)}, b'|A)$ 
     $\eta \leftarrow \sim \text{Unif}(0, 1)$ 
    if  $\log \eta < \log \alpha_b$  then
         $b^{(t+1)} \leftarrow b'$ 
    else
         $b^{(t+1)} \leftarrow b^{(t)}$ 
    end if
end for
return  $\{b^{(t)}\}_{t=1}^{T_b}$ 

```

---



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**Algorithm 2** FFBM parameter pseudo-marginal inference

---

```

 $\hat{Y}_{ij} \leftarrow \frac{1}{|\mathcal{T}_b|} \sum_{t \in \mathcal{T}_b} \mathbb{1}\{b_i^{(t)} = j\} \quad \forall i, j$ 
 $\theta^{(0)} \leftarrow \sim \mathcal{N}(0, \sigma_\theta I)$ 

for  $t \in \{0, 1 \dots T_\theta - 1\}$  do
     $\xi \leftarrow \sim \mathcal{N}(0, I)$ 
     $\theta' \leftarrow \theta^{(t)} - h_t \nabla U(\theta^{(t)} | X, \hat{Y}) + \sqrt{2h_t} \cdot \xi$ 
     $\log \alpha_\theta \leftarrow \log \alpha_\theta(\theta^{(t)}, \theta' | A, \hat{Y})$ 
     $\eta \leftarrow \sim \text{Unif}(0, 1)$ 
    if  $\log \eta < \log \alpha_\theta$  then
         $\theta^{(t+1)} \leftarrow \theta'$ 
    else
         $\theta^{(t+1)} \leftarrow \theta^{(t)}$ 
    end if
end for
return  $\{\theta^{(t)}\}_{t=1}^{T_\theta}$ 

```

---

558 **C.2 Hyperparameter values**

Table 2: Hyper-parameter values for each experiment

Dataset	$B$	$f$	$\sigma_\theta$	$T_b$	$\kappa_b$	$\lambda_b$	$T_\theta$	$\kappa_\theta$	$\lambda_\theta$	$s$	$k$	$D'$	$T'_\theta$	$\kappa'_\theta$	$\lambda'_\theta$	$s'$
Polbooks	3	0.7	1	1,000	0.2	5	10,000	0.4	10	0.05	—	—	—	—	—	—
School	10	0.7	1	1,000	0.2	5	10,000	0.4	10	0.2	1	10	10,000	0.4	10	0.2
FB Egonet	10	0.7	1	1,000	0.2	5	10,000	0.4	10	0.017	1	10	10,000	0.4	10	0.5

559 **C.3 Hardware specification**

560 All data analysis and visualisation was implemented in Python. Full source code is available in the  
 561 supplementary material. The scripts were run using a standard PC using the Windows Subsystem for  
 562 Linux (WSL) environment. Specs are:

- 563 • **CPU:** Intel(R) Core(TM) i7-1065G7
- 564 • **RAM:** 8GB
- 565 • **GPU:** Intel(R) Iris(R) Plus Graphics

566 On this hardware each experiment iteration took the following amount of time to execute:

Table 3: Compute-time for each experiment

Dataset	$b$ -chain	$\theta$ -chain	Reduced $\theta$ -chain	Overall compute time
Polbooks	~1s	~10s	–	~11s
School	~1s	~7s	~7s	~15s
FB Egonet	~2s	~50s	~8s	~60s