

# vConTACT: an iVirus tool to classify viruses that infect *Archaea* and *Bacteria*

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Taxonomic classification of archaeal and bacterial viruses is challenging, yet also fundamental for developing a predictive understanding of microbial ecosystems. Recent identification of hundreds of thousands of new viral genomes and genome fragments, whose hosts remain unknown, require a paradigm shift away from traditional classification approaches and towards the use of genomes for taxonomy. Here we revisited the use of genomes and their protein content as a means for developing a viral taxonomy for bacterial and archaeal viruses. A network-based analytic was optimized and benchmarked against authority-accepted taxonomic assignments and found to be largely concordant. Exceptions were manually examined and found to represent areas of viral genome ‘sequence space’ that are under-sampled or prone to excessive gene flow. While both cases are poorly resolved by genome-based taxonomic approaches, the former will improve as viral sequence space is better sampled and the latter are uncommon. Finally, given the largely robust taxonomic capabilities of this approach, we sought to enable researchers to easily and systematically classify new viruses. Thus, we established a tool, vConTACT, as an app at iVirus, where it operates as a fast, highly scalable, user-friendly app within the free and powerful CyVerse cyberinfrastructure.

**vConTACT: an iVirus tool to classify viruses that infect *Archaea* and *Bacteria***

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**Abstract.**

Taxonomic classification of archaeal and bacterial viruses is challenging, yet also fundamental for developing a predictive understanding of microbial ecosystems. Recent identification of hundreds of thousands of new viral genomes and genome fragments, whose hosts remain unknown, require a paradigm shift away from traditional classification approaches and towards the use of genomes for taxonomy. Here we revisited the use of genomes and their protein content as a means for developing a viral taxonomy for bacterial and archaeal viruses. A network-based analytic was optimized and benchmarked against authority-accepted taxonomic assignments and found to be largely concordant. Exceptions were manually examined and found to represent areas of viral genome ‘sequence space’ that are under-sampled or prone to excessive gene flow. While both cases are poorly resolved by genome-based taxonomic approaches, the former will improve as viral sequence space is better sampled and the latter are uncommon. Finally, given the largely robust taxonomic capabilities of this approach, we sought to enable researchers to easily and systematically classify new viruses. Thus, we established a tool, vConTACT, as an app at iVirus, where it operates as a fast, highly scalable, user-friendly app within the free and powerful CyVerse cyberinfrastructure.

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**Introduction.**

Classification of viruses that infect Archaea and Bacteria remains challenging in virology. Official viral taxonomy is handled by the International Committee for the Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) and organizes viruses into order, family, subfamily, genus and species. Historically, this organization derives from numerous viral features, such as morphology,

genome composition, segmentation, replication strategies and amino- and nucleic-acid similarities – all of which is thought to roughly organize viruses according to their evolutionary histories (Simmonds, 2015). As of 2015, the latest report issued, the ICTV has classified 7 orders, 111 families, 27 subfamilies, 609 genera and 3704 species (<http://ictvonline.org/virusTaxInfo.asp>).

Problematically, however, current ICTV classification procedures cannot keep pace with viral discovery and may need revision where viruses are not brought into culture. For example, of the 4400 viral isolate genomes deposited into National Center for Biotechnology information (NCBI) viral RefSeq, only 43% had been ICTV-classified by 2015. This is because the lengthy ‘proposal’ processes lags deposition of new viral genomes, in some cases for years (Fauquet & Fargette, 2005). Concurrently, new computational approaches are providing access to viral genomes and large genome fragments at unprecedented rates. One approach mines microbial genomic datasets to provide virus sequences where the host is known – already adding 12,498 new prophages from publicly available bacterial and archaeal microbial genomes (Roux et al., 2015a) and 89 (69 and 20, respectively) new virus sequences from single cell amplified genome sequencing projects (Roux et al., 2014; Labonté et al., 2015). A second approach assembles viral genomes and large genome fragments from metagenomics datasets. These studies have added 15,222 and 125,842 new virus sequences from oceanic viral metagenomes (Tara Oceans Virome, or TOV (Brum et al., 2015b) and Global Oceans Virome, or GOV (Roux et al., 2016)), and from microbial and viral metagenomes from a diversity of ecosystems (Paez-Espino et al., 2016), respectively. A third approach leverages large-insert cloning and sequencing approaches to identify new viral sequences – with 208 from a single seawater sample (Mizuno et al., 2013). Such new virus genomes and large genome fragments will keep coming for the foreseeable

future and represent an incredible resource for viral ecology, but they also represent a daunting challenge for taxonomy.

Currently such rapidly expanding genomic databases of the virosphere remain unclassified and challenging to integrate into a systematic framework for three reasons. First, viruses lack a universal marker gene, which prevents the taxonomic starting place that is so valuable for microbes (Woese, Kandler & Wheelis, 1990). Second, though genomes and large genome fragments are now much more readily available, researchers are reticent to use genomes as a basis for taxonomy as a paradigm has emerged whereby viruses are rampantly mosaic and therefore must exist as part of a genomic continuum such that any clustering in ‘sequence space’ is an artifact of sampling. This is most well studied in the many genomes of mycobacteriophages (Pope et al., 2015), but is contrasted by observations in cyanophages where efforts have been made to more deeply sample variability in a single site with findings suggesting clear population structure for naturally-occurring cyanophages (Deng et al., 2014) and that cyanophage populations appear to fit a population genetics-based species definition (Marston & Amrich, 2009; Gregory et al., 2016). It is possible that gene flow in fast evolving RNA and ssDNA viruses is rampant, but that slower evolving dsDNA viruses, particularly if obligately lytic rather than temperate, could evolve into relatively stable populations that could be the basis of taxonomy. Thus, it remains unclear whether viral genomes can serve as the sole basis for taxonomy, or whether exploration of available data could help identify areas of viral genome sequence space that are amenable to taxonomic ‘rules’ and others that are not.

Despite these challenges, numerous reference-independent, automated, genome-based classification schemes have been proposed. An early effort recognized that more genes are shared within related virus groups than between them (Lawrence, Hatfull & Hendrix, 2002),

which led to virologists grappling with natural diversity to use translated genomes as the basis of whole genome phylogenomic tree classifications – e.g., the Phage Proteomic Tree (Edwards & Rohwer 2002). Simulations showed this method to be very accurate for assigning fragmented reads to the correct genomes (Edwards & Rohwer, 2005) but it suffers from the availability of phage genomes. A second approach that has emerged for relatively well-studied virus groups, is to use pairwise distances between aligned sequences to identify discontinuities that can indicate classification thresholds. Two tools – Pairwise Sequence Comparison (PASC; Bao 2014) and DEmARC (Lauber & Gorbalenya, 2012a) – are available to align the sequences either in context of previous knowledge of the taxonomic affiliations (PASC) or naively using pairwise distributions (DEmARC). These tools have worked well for several virus families, such as the *Picornaviridae* (Lauber & Gorbalenya, 2012a) and *Filoviridae* (Lauber & Gorbalenya, 2012b) for DEmARC, and *Bornaviridae* and arenavirus for PASC (Kuhn et al., 2014; Radoshitzky et al., 2015). However, DEmARC and PASC suffer from several issues: (i) they are not generalizable to the coming deluge of environmental viral genome sequences as they require *a priori* expert knowledge to impose similarity thresholds at each level, (ii) ICTV subcommittees have established varied sequence similarity thresholds across viral groups (Simmonds, 2015), which would require a sliding threshold, and (iii) the methods can only classify sequences that are similar to database references (Zanotto et al., 1996), which for the oceans at least represents <1% of the viral genomes recovered (Brum et al., 2015a).

Complementarily, two network-based approaches have been utilized to organize virus genome sequence space in a manner that enables classification without *a priori* knowledge. The first, a gene sharing network (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008), predicts viral genes in all the genomes, translates them into proteins, organizes these proteins into MCL-based protein families (protein

clusters, “PCs”), evaluates the number of shared protein clusters pairwise throughout the dataset to establish a protein profile, and then represents this information as a weighted graph, with nodes representing viral genomes and edges the similarity score of their shared protein content. Given the 306 bacterial viruses (phages) known at the time, this method was precise as it correctly placed 92% and 95% of these phages into their correct ICTV genus or family, respectively (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008). The second, a bipartite network (Iranzo, Krupovic & Koonin, 2016), incorporates both gene sharing as above and genomic similarity. In this work, all dsDNA viruses along with mobile genetic elements were analyzed, which revealed a module-based structure to the dsDNA virosphere. These two studies imply that even very distantly related viruses can be organized into discrete populations by genomes alone and that there may be hope for automated, genome-based viral taxonomy, at least for dsDNA viruses.

Here we optimize gene sharing networks and re-evaluate their efficacy for recapitulating ICTV-based classifications using an expanded dataset of 2,010 bacterial and archaeal virus genomes (available as of RefSeq v75), while also deeply exploring where network-based methods have lower resolution and/or yield discontinuities with currently established taxonomies. Further, we make these approaches accessible to researchers by developing a tool, vConTACT (Viral CONTigs Automatic Clustering and Taxonomy), and deploy it as part of the iVirus ecosystem of apps that leverages the CyVerse cyberinfrastructure (Bolduc et al., 2016).

## Materials and Methods.

**Terminology.** Network topological parameters, their definitions and abbreviations are available in Table 1.

**Reference datasets.** To test this methodology, we downloaded the entire NCBI viral reference dataset (“ViralRefSeq”, version 75, containing 5539 viruses) and removed eukaryotic viruses by filtering against tables downloaded on NCBI’s ViralRefSeq viral genome page (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/genomes/GenomesGroup.cgi?taxid=10239>). The resulting file (“Bacterial and Archaeal viruses”; BAV) contained 2010 total viruses; 1905 dsDNA, 88 ssDNA, 5 dsRNA and 12 ssRNA. All viruses contained taxonomic affiliation information, though not all viruses had affiliations associated with each level of the taxonomy (i.e. not all viruses have a “sub-family” designation). To improve taxonomic assignments, the ICTV taxonomy was also retrieved (<https://talk.ictvonline.org/files/master-species-lists/>) and the ICTV affiliations were used to supplement the NCBI version.

**Building protein cluster profiles.** To generate sequence profiles – with information about the presence or absence of a sequence within one or more protein clusters (described previously as protein *families* (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008)), proteins from each sequence were first extracted from the ViralRefSeq proteins file. BLASTP (Altschul et al., 1997) was used to compare all proteins (198,102) from the sequences in an all-verses-all pairwise comparison. Protein clusters were subsequently identified using the Markov clustering algorithm (MCL) with an inflation value of 2, resulting in 23,022 protein clusters (“PCs”). Finally, we generated protein cluster profiles for each genome such that the presence of a gene within a protein cluster of a viral genome was given a value of “1” and the absence “0”. This resulted in a large 2,010 x 23,022 matrix.

**Generating the similarity network.** The similarity network is a graph where the nodes (i.e. reference sequences) are linked by edges when the similarity between their pc-profiles is considered significant. In other words, the network represents the overall similarity between



sequences based on the number of shared protein clusters. To calculate the similarity between the profiles of two sequences (sequence A and sequence B), the hypergeometric formula was used to estimate the probability that at least  $c$  protein clusters would be in common:

$$P(X \geq c) = \sum_{i=c}^{\min(a,b)} \frac{C_a^i C_{n-a}^{b-i}}{C_n^b} \quad (1)$$

Simply stated, the hypergeometric formula is the probability that genomes A and B would have  $c$  protein clusters in common by chance. The probability can be converted to an expectation value (E; for false positives) by multiplying the probability (P) by the total number of comparisons (T). The expectation value can then be converted into a significance score:

$$S(A,B) = -\log(E) = -\log(P \times T) \quad (2)$$

Genome pairs with significance scores greater than 1 (i.e. E-value < 0.1) are considered sufficiently similar (see permutation test, below) and were joined by an edge in the similarity network with a weight equal to their significance score. We refer to sequences within the network as *nodes*, the relationships connecting them, *edges* and the strength of that relationship, *edge weight*.

After generating the similarity network, groups of similar sequences (referred to as viral clusters, “VCs”) were clustered by applying MCL with an inflation of 2.

**Measuring the proportion of shared genes between genomes.** Given that genome sizes between pairs can differ greatly, this can lead to large differences in the proportion of the shared genes (Ågren et al., 2012). To counter this, we characterized the proportion of shared PCs between two genomes using the geometric index (G) as a symmetric index:

$$G_{AB} = \frac{|N(A) \cap N(B)|}{|N(A)| \times |N(B)|} \quad (3)$$

175 where  $N(A)$  and  $N(B)$  indicate the numbers of protein clusters (PCs) in the genomes of A and B,  
176 respectively.

177 **Permutation test.** The stringency of the significant score was evaluated through  
178 randomization of the original matrix where rows present viral genomes and columns PCs or  
179 singletons that are not shared with any other protein sequences (Leplae et al., 2004). Briefly,  
180 with an in-house R script, 1,000 matrices were generated by randomly rearranging PCs and/or  
181 singletons within pairs of genomes having the significant score  $\leq 1$  (a negative control) and  
182 calculated a new significant score each time. None of the genome pairs in this negative control  
183 produced significant scores  $>1$ , indicating values above this significance threshold did not occur  
184 by chance (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008).

185 **Affiliating sequence clusters with taxonomic groups.** To assign (in the case of  
186 unknown sequences) or compare nodes (genomes) within clusters to their reference counterparts,  
187 we first defined *membership* of a node  $c$  to a cluster  $k$   $B(c,k)$  according to two methods,  
188 conservative and permissive. The conservative method 4) directly takes the result from the MCL  
189 clustering to assign a node to a cluster:

$$190 \quad B(c,k) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if Contig } c \in \text{Cluster } k, \\ 0 & \text{otherwise} \end{cases} \quad (4)$$

191 while the permissive method takes the sum of all edge weights  $w$  linking the node to nodes of the  
192 cluster, with the node becoming a member of its maximal membership cluster (5):

$$193 \quad B'(c,k) = \frac{\sum_{i \in k} w_{c,i}}{\sum_{p \in \{\text{Clusters}\}} \sum_{j \in p} w_{g,j}} \quad (5)$$

194 The precision  $P(k,t)$  of the taxonomic class  $t$  with respect to a cluster  $k$  as its membership of  
195 nodes of the class  $t$  in the memberships of reference nodes in the cluster  $k$ .

$$P(k,t) = \frac{\sum_{\forall i \in \{\text{sequence of class } t\}} B(i,k)}{\sum_{\forall j \in \{\text{reference sequence}\}} B(j,k)} \quad (6)$$

A cluster and all its node members are then affiliated with its maximal precision class. For the conservative method, the cluster is affiliated with the taxonomic class associated with the majority of its members (i.e.  $\geq 50\%$ ). In cases where clusters do not contain at least half reference sequences, the entire cluster will be unaffiliated.

**Measuring the connectivity of genomes to clusters.** The connection strength of a node  $g$  to cluster  $c$  was calculated as the average edge weight linking it to nodes of cluster  $c$ :

$$W_{g,c} = \frac{1}{k} \sum_{i=1}^k w_{g,i} \quad (7)$$

where  $k$  and  $w$  are the number and total weight of edges of the node  $g$  in the cluster  $c$ , respectively. We refer to the average edge weight for node  $g$  to the cluster it belongs to as its in-VC average weight, and to other clusters within the network as out-VC average weight.

**Identifying sub-clusters.** To further subdivide heterogeneous clusters (those comprising  $\geq 2$  taxa), cluster-wise module profiles (i.e. a module profile only including viruses previously identified as belonging to the same viral cluster) were hierarchically clustered using UPGMA with pairwise distances calculated using Euclidean distance implemented in Scipy.

**Statistical calculations.** All calculations, statistics, network statistical analyses were performed using in-house python scripts, with the Numpy, Scipy, Biopython and Pandas python-packages. vConTACT is implemented in python with the same dependencies. The tool is available at <https://bitbucket.org/MAVERICLab/vcontact>. Scripts used in the generational and calculations of data are available at <https://bitbucket.org/MAVERICLab/vcontact-SI>.

**Network visualization and analysis.** The network was visualized with Cytoscape (version 3.1.1; <http://cytoscape.org/>), using an edge-weighted spring embedded model, which places the genomes or fragments sharing more PCs closer to each other. Topological properties were estimated using a combination of python and the Network Analyzer 2.7 Cytoscape plug-in (Assenov et al., 2008).

## Results and Discussion.

***vConTACT analytical workflow and terminology:*** The vConTACT analyses are based on previously established gene sharing network methods (Lima-Mendez 2008). Briefly, PCs are established across all genomes in the dataset; with vConTACT doing this by default using MCL clustering from all-verses-all BLASTP comparisons (though user-specified clusters can also be used). PC *profiles* of genomes or genome fragments (herein ‘genome’) are then calculated, where the presence and absence of PCs (from the entire PC dataset) along a genome are established and then compared pairwise between genomes (Fig. 1). The pairwise genome comparisons are then mathematically adjusted (using the hypergeometric similarity formula) to establish a probability that any genome pair would share  $n$  PCs, given the total number of all PCs. This probability is log-transformed (in similar fashion to BLAST E-values) into a significance score and applied as a *weight* to an edge between the two paired genomes in a similarity network. High significance scores represent a low probability that two genomes would share  $n$  PCs by chance, which can be interpreted as evidence of gene-sharing and presumably evolutionary relatedness between the paired genomes. After evaluating all pairings in the dataset, significance scores  $\geq 1$  are retained, and a network of the remaining genome pairs is constructed. MCL is subsequently applied to identify structure in the gene sharing network, but now the

clusters represent groups or related genomes and are termed *viral* clusters (“VCs”). MCL is also applied against the network of PCs, whose members can be similar to members of other PCs. This effectively organizes the PCs into a higher-order structure known as a protein module. The relationship information identified from the genomes (organized into VCs) and PCs (organized into protein modules) are used to create a *module profile*, which can then be mined for taxonomic identification, functional profiling, etc.

**Benchmarking network-based taxonomy:** To benchmark the ability of network-based taxonomy to capture ‘known’ viral relationships, we evaluated how vConTACT “re-classified” viral sequences at various taxonomic levels using 2,010 bacterial and archaeal viral genomes from VirRefSeq (v75). Of these reference genomes, ICTV-classifications were only available for a subset; 654 viruses from 2 orders, 738 viruses from 19 families, 152 viruses from 11 subfamilies, and 562 viruses from 158 genera. The network was then decomposed into VCs (described above) and a permutation test was used to establish significance score thresholds to prevent random relationships from entering the network. This analysis used the initial network’s edge information to construct a matrix between genome pairs, and then permuted the edges 1,000 times. No edges were found to be significant during these tests, suggesting that relationships seen within the network did not arise by chance and could be confidently used to establish taxonomic groupings (see Materials and Methods, Table S1).

The resulting network, consisting of 1,964 viruses (nodes) and 65,393 relationships (edges) between them (Fig. 2A), was then used as a basis for comparison to the ICTV-based classifications. A total of 211 VCs were identified, spread among 46 components (unconnected subnetworks), which more than doubles the 17 connected components identified previously (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008). Of the 46 components, 38 included 1,891 phages representing 194

VCs (left, Fig. 2A), and 8 components included 73 archaeal viruses representing 17 VCs (right, Fig. 2A). Most (87%) of the 1,891 phages belonged to the order *Caudovirales*, and comprised the largest connected component (LCC) in the analysis (top left, Fig. 2A). At the VC level, the network clustering performed well with average (across each taxonomic level) recall / precision percentages of 100% / 100%, 90% / 86%, and 80% / 80% at the order, family and genus levels, respectively (Fig. 2B). Of the 211 VCs resolved by the network, 76.4% contained a single ICTV-accepted genus, suggesting concordance between the network VCs and accepted taxonomy, whereas 15.1% and 8.5% of the VCs contained two and 3 or more genera, respectively (Fig. 2A and C). Thus, roughly 4 out of 5 of the VCs correspond to ICTV genera.

Mechanistically, these discrepancies between network clustering and the ICTV classification could derive from: (i) undersampling such that VCs with fewer members may not represent the naturally-occurring diversity of that viral group, or (ii) gene flow between viral genomes that ameliorates taxonomic boundaries by providing excessive access to genes outside the VC's gene pool. While much of abundant viral genome sequence space is recently being mapped (Paez-Espino et al., 2016; Roux et al., 2016), there remains contrasting paradigms about the role of gene flow in structuring mycobacteriophage ("mycophages") vs cyanophage populations (Gregory et al., 2016).

To discriminate between these possibilities, we identified these "ICTV-discordant" areas of the network containing 2 or more ICTV genera (which we define as *heterogeneous VCs*), focusing on three of the more well-populated (many member genomes) heterogeneous VCs, and the archaeal virus heterogeneous VCs, which are among the least well-sampled taxa. Of the well-sampled VCs, VCs containing the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> most members (i.e. genomes), included the following: (i) VC1 contains the 8 genera belonging to the *Tevenvirinae* subfamily (*T4virus*,

*Cc31virus*, *Js98virus*, *Rb49virus*, *Rb69virus*, *Sl6virus*, *Sp18virus*, and *Schizot4virus*) and a genus of the *Eucamylvirinae* (*Cp8virus*), as well as the *Tg1virus* and *Secunda5virus* that are not assigned to a particular subfamily, (ii) VC2 contains three genera (*Biseptimavirus*, *Phietavirus*, and *Triavirus*), and (iii) VC3 contains four genera (*Kayvirus*, *Silviavirus*, *Twortvirus*, and *P100virus*) belonging to the *Spounavirinae* and the six *Bacillus* virus genera (*Agatevirus*, *B4virus*, *Bc431virus*, *Bastillevirus*, *Nit1virus*, and *Wphvirus*). Finally, among the 73 archaeal viruses, only the *Fuselloviridae* were accurately classified at the genus level, while most (63%) archaeal viruses were incorrectly classified at the genus level.

**Gene content analyses suggest ICTV classifications, not VC-based classifications should be revised:** A total of 23.6% of the VCs contained genomes from more than one ICTV-recognized genus, which suggests ‘lumping’ by the network analyses (via MCL) or ‘splitting’ during ICTV classification. To assess this, we computed the fraction of PCs that were shared both within an ICTV genus and between the multiple ICTV genera found in each heterogeneous VC and represented them as the percentage of intragenus similarity and intergenera similarity, respectively. Of the 25 VCs, intragenus similarities of all but one (VC9) suggested they shared more than 40% of their PCs (Fig. 3A, Table S2), which is consistent with the threshold commonly used to define a new dsDNA viral genus (Lavigne et al., 2009). In contrast, the intergenera similarities varied widely – some VCs (VCs 1-3, 9-11, 17, 20, 25, 33, 58, 91, 95) shared 20-40% of their PCs (subfamily level), whereas others shared more than ~40% (VCs 12, 14, 24, 26, 37, 44, and 51) or less than ~20% (VCs 39, 55, 63, 74, and 77) of their PCs. Where intergenera similarities are high (>40% of the PCs are shared), there may be a case to be made for merging the currently recognized ICTV genera. Consistent with this, all 6 of these highly (>40%) similar VCs (12, 14, 24, 26, 37 and 51) are suggested to be in need of revision, as these

include *G7Cvirus*, *N4virus*, *T1virus*, *HP34virus*, and *PhiKMVvirus* (Wittmann et al., 2015; Eriksson et al., 2015; Niu et al., 2014; Krupovic et al., 2016). Additionally, we found that in VC44, the phage CAjan, belonging to the *Seuratvirus*, shared 41.6-42.7% of its genes with three phages (JenP1 and 2 and JenK1 of the *Nongavirus* (Table S2)). Where intergenera similarities are lower (<20%, or 20-40% of the PCs are shared), the appropriate taxonomic assignment may require deeper sampling of viral genome sequence space and/or further network analytic development.

To further assess these cases, we next examined four VCs (1-3, 14) that contained more than 4 ICTV-recognized genera using hierarchical clustering of PC presence-absence data for each genome (Fig. 3B). In parallel, we computed the actual connectivity of the genomes within these heterogeneous VCs according to the average weight of edges that (i) are between genomes of the same VC (in-VC avg. weight) and (ii) between the genomes of other VCs (out-VC avg. weight) (Table S3; Materials and Methods). For example, within VC1, 8 genera of the *Tevenvirinae* (*SI6virus*, *Cc31virus*, *T4virus*, *Rb69virus*, *Sp18virus*, *Js98virus*, *Rb49virus* and *Schizotvirus*) and their relatives (*Tg1virus* and *Secunda5virus*) share, on average, 61% and 38% of their total PCs, respectively, and 39% between all 10 genera (Table S2). Outside VC1, they share ~11.2% of genes with other viral groups (Table S2). We found that the 10 genera within VC1 are more tightly interconnected than those of the 210 VCs overall, with average in-cluster values of 223.7 and 131.9 and average out-cluster values of 13.1 and 9.0, respectively (Table S3). These observations indicate that higher cross-similarities of 10 genera can be attributed to a large fraction of their shared genes, whereas only a small fraction of gene shared by other groups can hold them together.



Upon closer inspection, some of this ‘lumping’ appeared to be due to poorly sampled regions of sequence space. For example, VC1 also contained the *Cp8virus* of the subfamily *Eucampyvirinae*, which is odd to be placed alongside the *Tevevirinae*, given that other ICTV-recognized genus (*Cp220virus*) of the *Eucampyvirinae* is grouped into the separate cluster (VC 87). Since both genera (*Cp8virus* and *Cp220virus*) are distantly related to the *Tevenvirinae* (Javed et al., 2014), containing only ~11% the shared genes to (an average weight of 18.5) and ~6% (11.8) , respectively (Tables S2 and S3), these groupings might be driven by the lack of diversity among the *Cp220virus* where only 2 reference genomes (i.e., *Campylobacter* phages CPX and NCTC12673) available in our ViralRefSeq dataset. To test this, we computationally doubled the number of the genomes for this group while holding the number and weight of their connections constant, finding that the *Cp220virus* genomes clearly separated from VC1 and instead were correctly placed alongside VC 87 (Table S4). Consistently, among the heterogeneous VCs 39, 55, 63, 74, and 77 showing < ~20% intergenera similarities (Figs. 3A and S1), increasing the genome numbers of poorly-sampled ICTV genera led to clustering of members of those genera into their correct VCs (Table S4). Together these findings suggest that additional sampling in poorly sampled areas of viral sequence space will be required to most accurately establish genome-based taxonomy – issues that parallel those presented by long branch attraction for phylogenies (Bergsten, 2005).

Similar structure emerged from hierarchical clustering of PC presence / absence data from the 3 other well-represented heterogeneous VCs. In VC2, the three known subgroups of the *Phietavirus* (Gutiérrez et al., 2014) were resolved, sharing 44.9% of their PCs, and separate from two other subgroups – the *Biseptimavirus* and *Triavirus*, which shared 22.3% of their PCs (Fig. 3B, Table S2). In VC3, containing the *Spounavirinae* (Krupovic et al., 2016), each sub-cluster

has a corresponding ICTV genus with largely overlapping sets of genes while also showing a clearly distinct set(s) of genes. Of these, the six *Bacillus* virus genera (*Wphvirus*, *Bastillevirus*, *B4virus*, *Bc431virus*, *Agatevirus*, and *Nit1virus*) appear to be closely related to the *Spounavirinae*, with ~20% of total PCs in common (Fig. 3B, Table S2). Finally, VC14 produced a clear division of the *Tunavirinae* (Krupovic et al., 2016), in which the *Escherichia* virus Jk06 is placed in a separate branch due to its less shared common genes (~56%) to the other *Rogue1virus* members (~82%); their highly-overlapped genes between genera above the genus boundary (40%) are associated with “taxonomic lumping” as described above (Niu et al., 2014; Krupovic et al., 2016).

We next evaluated three phage groups which were poorly represented in the S277 network (Lima-Mendez et al 2008) and also represent some of the most abundant, widespread, and/or extensively studied phage groups (Grose & Casjens, 2014; Pope et al., 2015; Roux et al., 2015b)) – the mycobacteriophages, *Tevenivirinae*, *Autographivirinae* and the archaeal viruses.

***Mycobacterium* phages.** The largest viral group covering 16.1% of the total population of the LCC (mostly *Caudovirales*, top left Fig. 1A) includes phages infecting *Mycobacteria*. The 318 mycophage genomes were assigned to 14 VCs (Fig. 4A), 13 of which were composed of reference genomes belonging to a single ICTV-recognized genus for each VC. The 14<sup>th</sup> mycophage VC, VC25, contained three ICTV-recognized genera – the *Bignuzvirus*, *Charlievirus*, and *Che9cvirus*. Although the module-based approach discerned the structure in this VC, which would group them into the known genera (Fig. S1), this “lumping” into a single VC reflects (i) their undersampling (i.e., each genus has 1 to at most 3 viruses) and/or (ii) highly-overlapped genes between genera. Indeed, of the 3 phages belonging to the *Che9cvirus*, phages Babsiella and Che9c shared 45% of their genes, but also shared 35% and 36% of their genes with

the *Bignuzvirus* and 28% and 32% with the *Charlievirus*, respectively (Table S2), which results in higher connectivity between three genera than other viral groups to which they linked (Table S3). These findings contrast those in the rest of the network, and suggest that some phage groups (e.g., mycophages) may more frequently exchange genes than others.

To quantify this, we next examined features of the network. For example, many VC59 mycophages were broadly linked to nine VCs that contain other mycophages and phages from diverse hosts (Fig. 4A). To characterize this further, we analyzed the topological properties using the betweenness centrality (BC), as it can identify the node residing in the shortest path between other nodes (Halary et al., 2009). Specifically, in the shared-gene network, high-betweenness nodes (phages) can act as bridges between phages that would remain disconnected, due to their mosaic content of genes (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008). Indeed, these eight VC 59 phages had 42-fold higher average BC than those of other mycophages and their relatives (0.04 vs. 9.45E-04) (Fig. S2), strongly indicating they may be prone to increased gene flow and thus exceptionally ‘mosaic’ genomes (Halary et al., 2009; Pope et al., 2015a).

***The Tevenvirinae*** As the second-largest group, containing 94 viruses in the heterogeneous VC1, which were further connected to 74 distant relatives and taxonomically unclassified myo-/siphoviruse(s), appeared to be restricted to a densely interconnected region (Fig. 4). A subsequent hierarchical clustering within VC1 grouped these 168 viral genomes into 5 subgroups (Fig. S3). Interestingly, three phages infecting cyanobacteria (P-SSM2, P-SSM4, and S-PM2) and T4-like phages that were initially found in a single cluster (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008) are separated into two clusters of the Exo T-evens (VC\_8) and T-evens/Pseudo/Schizo T-evens (VC\_1), respectively (Filee, 2006) (upper in Fig. 4B; Fig. S3). This network grouping can identify the Exo T-evens including cyano- and pelagiphages, which the literature suggests to be

only distantly related to other T4 superfamily viruses (Comeau & Krisch, 2008; Roux et al., 2015b).

***The Autographivirinae*** We further identified 8 VCs associated with the *Autographivirinae*. Of four genera defined by the NCBI and/or ICTV, the *T7virus*, *SP6virus*, *Kp34virus* were found in VCs 4, 28, and 37, respectively, whereas the *PhiKMVvirus* were spread across VCs 13 and 37 (Fig. 4B; also Fig. S4). Notably, a previous phylogenetic study based on three conserved proteins (i.e., RNA polymerase, head-tail connector and the DNA maturase B) showed considerable diversity of the *phiKMVvirus* (Eriksson et al., 2015). We also observed distinct patterns of PC sharing between the PhiKMV-related genome(s) and other viruses in each cluster (Fig. S4), suggesting that the *PhiKMVvirus* should likely be divided into two new subgroups.

In addition, as the recently emerged groups, nine *Acinetobacter* phages (Huang et al., 2013), as well as phage vB\_CsaP\_GAP227 (Abbasifar et al., 2013) and its close relatives were found in VCs 54 and 93, respectively (Fig. S4); all of them encode T7-specific RNA polymerase (Lavigne et al., 2009), which suggest that they fall within the *Autographivirinae* subfamily.

Finally, many viruses are now thought to co-opt host genes to improve viral fitness; these stolen ‘auxiliary metabolic genes’ are known from cyanophage genomes (photosynthesis genes; (Sullivan et al., 2006; Millard et al., 2009; Labrie et al., 2013), but also from ocean viral metagenomes where viruses are now shown to contain genes involved in central carbon metabolism (Hurwitz, Hallam & Sullivan, 2013) and nitrogen and sulfur cycling (Roux et al., 2016) in ways that likely drive niche differentiation (Hurwitz, Brum & Sullivan, 2014). Thus it is striking that VC22 in our network, which contains 19 cyanopodoviruses, had many linkages to taxonomically disparate *Tevenvirinae*, which turned out to be driven by photosynthesis genes

shared across these viral taxa (Fig. 4B). Such “host” genes in viruses can bring taxonomically disparate viral groups closer together, and the network can thus help identify such niche defining viral genes for viruses infecting well studied hosts.

**The Archaeal Viruses.** Of the 72 archaeal viruses, 66 were associated with 18 VCs, while 6 viruses (Haloviruses HHTV-1 and VNH-1, Hyperthermophilic Archaeal Virus 1 & 2, Pyrococcus abyssi virus 1, and His 1 virus) were not included in the network, due to lack of statistically significant similarity to any other virus. Of the 25 heterogeneous VCs, archaeal viruses comprise 3 of them (VCs 51, 74 and 77), likely owing to their gene products showing little similarity to published viruses outside of other archaeal viruses (Prangishvili, Garrett & Koonin, 2006). All 3 VCs show considerable sharing of PCs within each VC (61.3 %, 50.2 % and 67.6 %, respectively). VCs 74 and 77, each consisting of 2 genera (*Gammalipothrixvirus/Rudivirus* and *Betalipothrixvirus/Deltalipothrixvirus*) unify the entire *Ligamenvirales* order (2 families). Though the genera are distinguished mainly by their virion morphology (Prangishvili & Krupovič, 2012), it can be argued that some lipothrixviruses share as much similarity within the *Lipothrixviridae* family as to the rudiviruses, exemplified by the 10 genes shared between AFV-1 (a lipothrixvirus) and SIRV1 (a rudivirus) (Prangishvili & Krupovič, 2012) and that they likely derive from a common ancestor (Goulet et al., 2009). In addition to the number of PCs shared between AFV-1 and the rudivirus in VC74 (Fig. S1), the more “distal” position between AFV-2 (*Deltalipothrixvirus*) and the other VC77 members (*Betalipothrixvirus*) (Fig. S1), the order-level separation is easily seen in the overall network (Fig. 2). VC55 (*Alphafusellovirus/Betafusellovirus*) consists of all known *Fuselloviridae* members. Like VCs 74 and 77, their genera are separated mainly through virion morphology, with Alphafusellovirus lemon-shaped and Betafusellovirus pleomorphic, and also through their

attachment structures (Redder et al., 2009). The large number of “core” genes (13) shared among all family members argues for frequent recombination events, with even distant fuselloviruses potentially capable of recombination during integration. Furthermore, some fuselloviruses exhibit regions >70% pairwise identity on the nucleotide level, including ASV-1 (*Betafusellovirus*) and SSV-K1 (*Alphafusellovirus*) (Redder et al., 2009). Despite shared non-core regions between the *fuselloviridae*, the high similarity between the two genera is also revealed in the network through unification into a single VC. The most recently identified member of the *Fuselloviridae*, *Sulfolobales* Mexican fusellovirus 1 (SMF1) has no official ICTV classification between family, though clustering within the VC shows clear association with the *Betafusellovirus*. It is remarkable that nearly all known archaeal viruses not only fall within the network, but that most of their VCs follow a genus-level affiliation.

**vConTACT, an iVirus tool for network-based viral taxonomy:** Given the strong and robust performance of these network classification methods (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008) to largely capture known viral taxonomy from genomes alone, we sought to democratize the analytical capability. To this end, we developed a tool named “vContact” (overview of its logic in Fig. 1) and integrated it into iVirus, a virus ecology-focused set of tools also known as “apps” and databases (Bolduc et al., 2016). Such implementation at iVirus enables any user to run the application simply by inputting viral sequences with all compute, storage and data repository happening via the CyVerse cyberinfrastructure (formerly the iPlant Collaborative (Goff et al., 2011)).

## Conclusions

Network-based approaches have been widely used to explore mathematical, statistical, biological, and structural properties of a set of entities (nodes) and the connections between them (edges) in a variety of biological and social systems (Dagan, 2011; Barberán et al., 2012). Such approaches are invaluable for developing a quantitative framework to evaluate if and where taxonomically meaningful classifications can be made in viral sequence space (Simmonds et al., 2016). By expanding upon prior large-scale analyses (Lima-Mendez et al., 2008; Koonin, Krupovic & Yutin, 2015; Roux et al., 2015a) we sought here to quantitatively evaluate when and where such network-based classifications will perform poorly. These findings suggest that under sampled viral sequence space and some phage groups with exceptionally high gene flow (e.g., mosaic genomes of the mycophages) are currently challenging and represent about 1 in 4 publicly-available, dsDNA viral genomes. While these problematic viral genomes await improved representation of viral sequence space and/or improvements in network analytics to best resolve their taxonomy, the remaining  $\frac{3}{4}$  of viral genomes appear ready for gene sharing network-based viral taxonomy. To this end, we present vConTACT as a publicly-available tool for researchers to effectively enable large-scale, automated virus classification. Given the scale of thousands of new virus genomes and genome fragments discovered through increasingly used metagenomics approaches (Roux 2016 and Paez et al 2016), such step-wise progress towards an automated taxonomic classifier will be foundational to most rapidly integrate viruses into models that seek to make predictions in ecosystems ranging from the oceans and soils to bioreactors and humans.

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**Table 1** (on next page)

Terminology used.

1

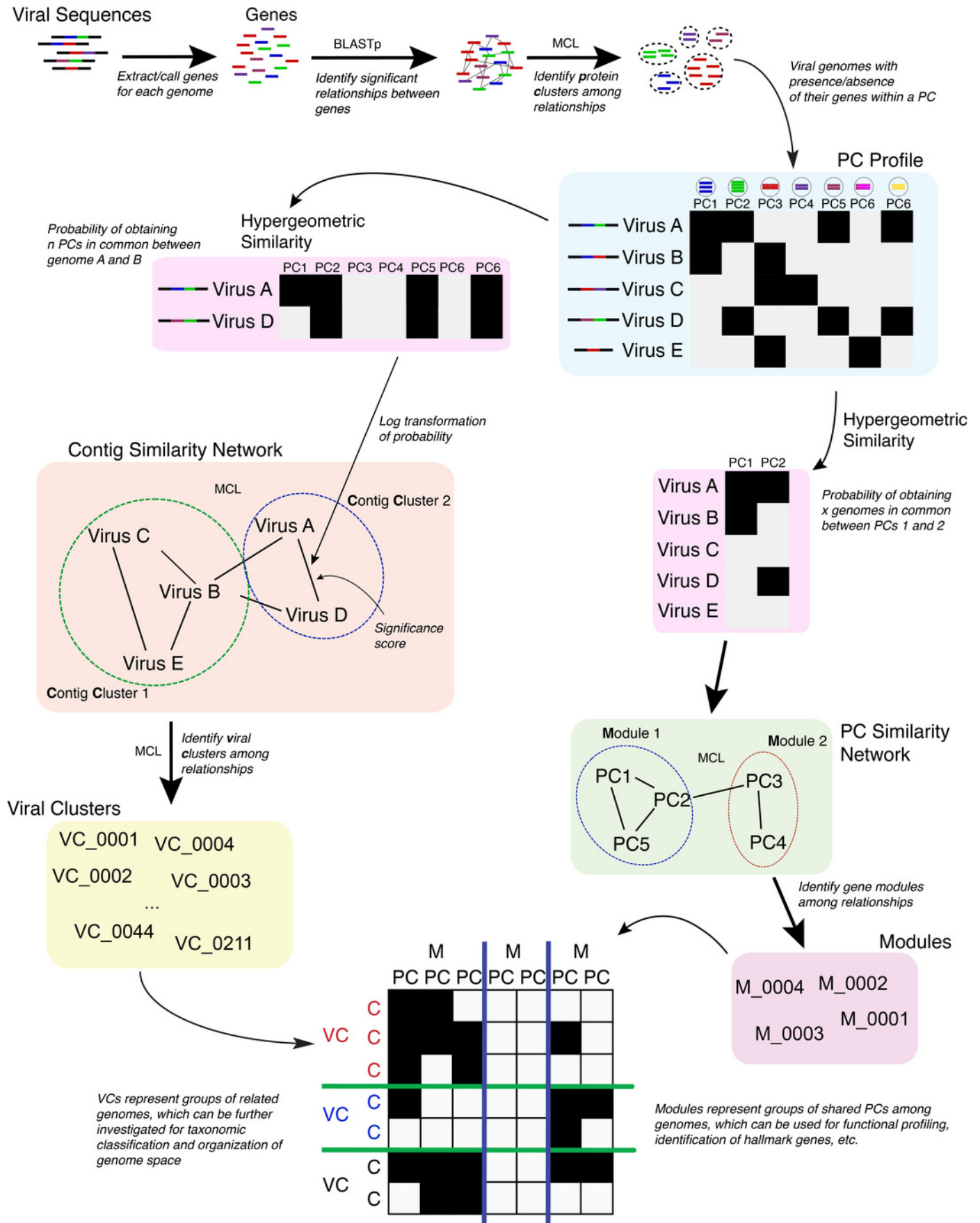
Terminology	Definition
<b>Nodes</b>	Also known as <i>vertices</i> , these are points within a network. In this work, they are viral genomes.
<b>Edges</b>	Also known as <i>arcs</i> , these lines connect nodes in the network. In this work, edges have a property called <i>weight</i> , which represents the strength (as measured by significance score) between two genomes.
<b>Betweenness centrality (BC)</b>	Measure of how influential a node is within a network, measured by the number of shortest paths that pass through the node from all other nodes.
<b>Connected component</b>	A subgraph in which any two nodes are connected to each other directly (to each other) or indirectly (through other nodes).
<b>Largest connected component (LCC)</b>	The connected component with the greatest number of nodes.
<b>Viral cluster (VC)</b>	A group of viral sequences sharing a significant number of genes.
<b>Protein cluster (PC)</b>	A group of highly similar and related proteins, defined in this work using MCL on BLAST E-values between proteins.
<b>Module Profile</b>	A table-like representation of the presence/absence data between groups of protein clusters (modules) and groups of genomes (viral clusters).
<b>Precision (P)</b>	Also known as the <i>positive predictive value</i> , is a measure of how many true positives are identified.
<b>Recall (R)</b>	Also known as <i>sensitivity</i> , is a measure of how many of the total positives are identified.

2



# Figure 1

Overview of the vContact processing pipeline.

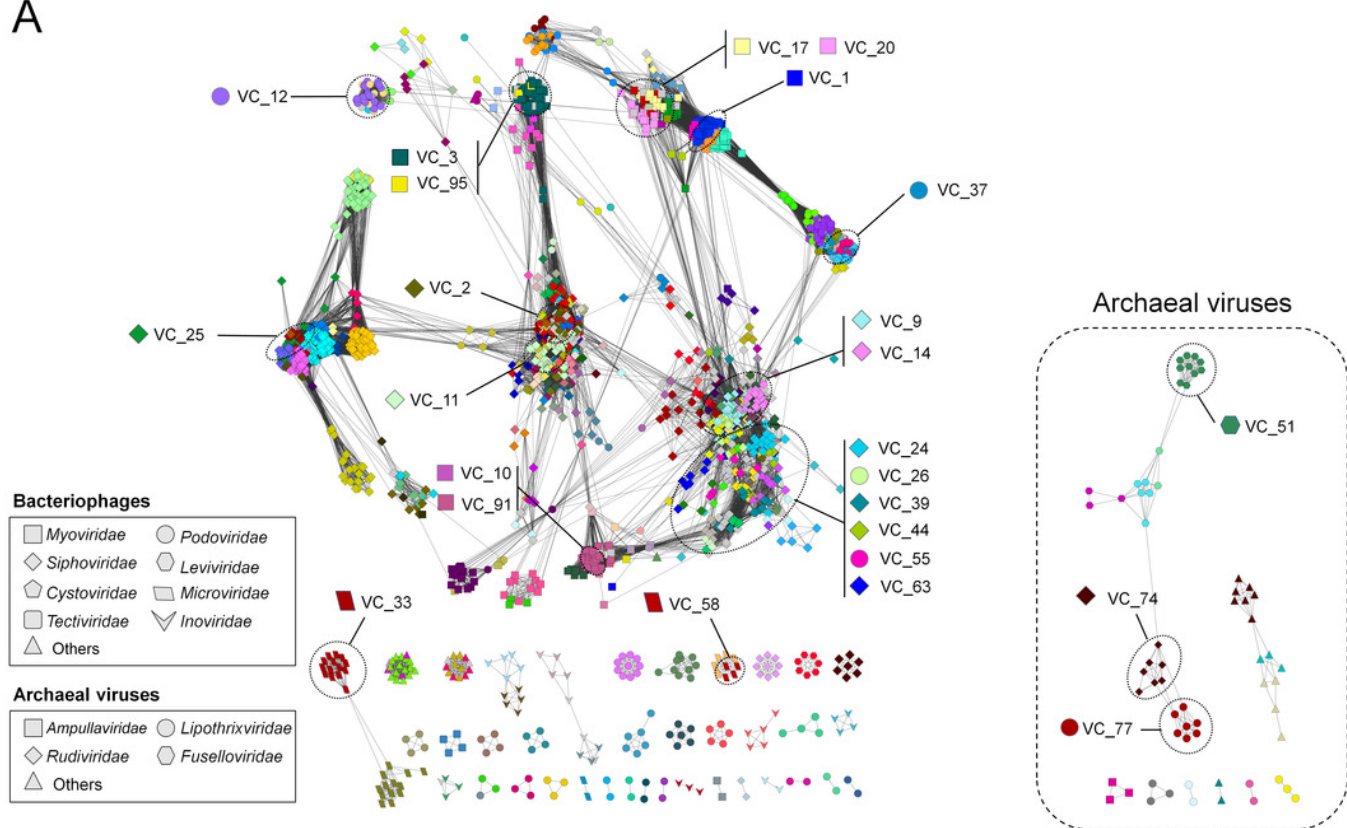


# Figure 2

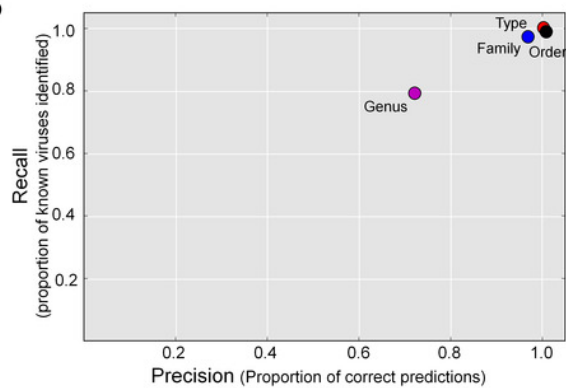
Protein-sharing network.

Protein-sharing network for 1,964 archaeal and bacterial virus genomes benchmarked against ICTV-accepted viral taxonomy. (A) Each node represents a viral genome from RefSeq, with its shape representing the viral family (as indicated in the legend) and each distinct color the node's viral cluster (VC). Edges between nodes indicate a statistically significant relationship between the protein profiles of their viral genomes, with edge colors (darker = more significant) corresponding to their weighted similarity scores (threshold of  $\geq 1$ ). VCs within the network are discriminated using the MCL algorithm (Materials and Methods) and denoted as separate colors. The position of 26 heterogeneous VCs that contain 2 or more genera is indicated. (B) Precision and recall of network-based assignments as compared to ICTV assignments for each taxonomic level (genus, family, order, and type). (C) Percentage (Y-axis) of VCs that contain the number (X-axis) of each ICTV taxonomic level (genus, family, and order).

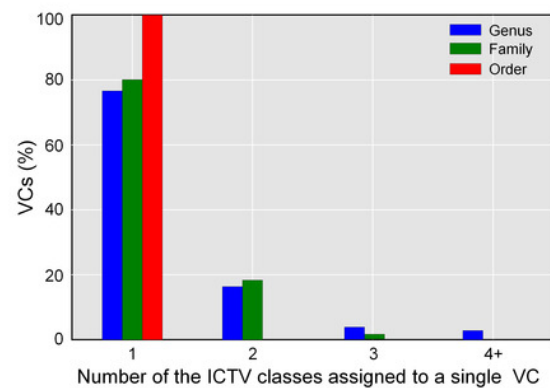
A



B



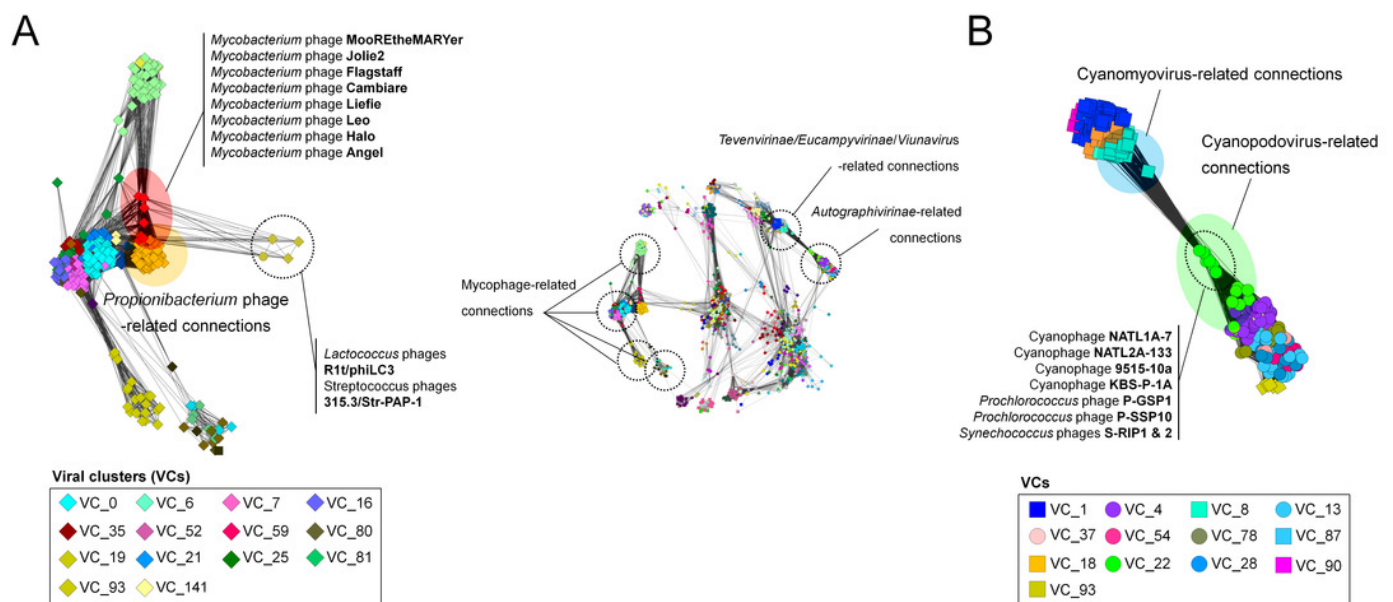
C



# Figure 3

Detailed view of three major viral groups with relatives.

A detailed view of network regions containing three major viral groups and their relatives. Viruses (nodes) are grouped by the MCL clustering. The different shapes and colors of the nodes represent different viral families (Figure 2) and viral clusters (VCs, legends), respectively. The location of viral groups is indicated for illustrative purpose.



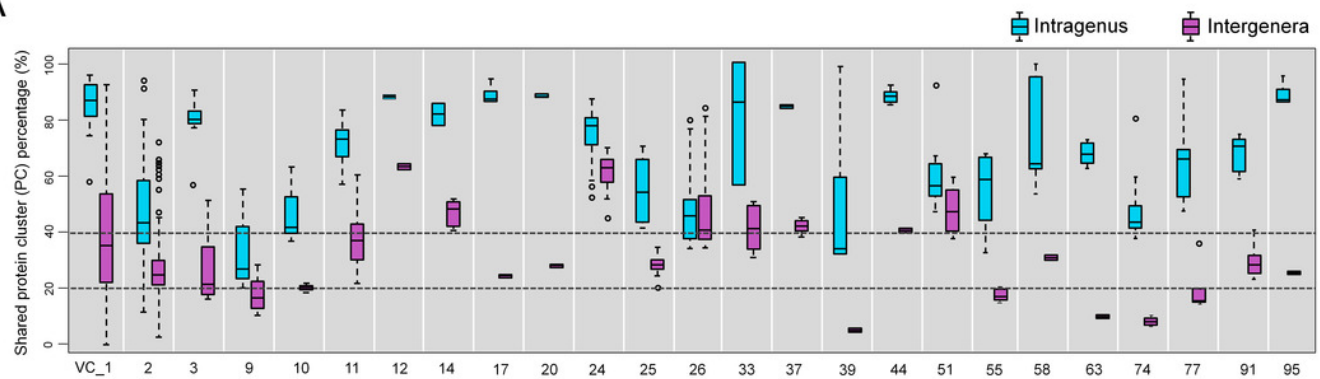
# Figure 4

## Heterogeneous VCs

Evaluation of VCs which contained taxon representatives from more than one ICTV genus. (A) Box plots show the percent inter- and intra-genus proteome similarities in the heterogeneous VCs. Dotted lines indicate the cut-off values of 20% and 40% proteome similarities to define the subfamily and genus, respectively, which have been ratified by the ICTV Bacterial and Archaeal Viruses Subcommittee. (B) Module profiles showing the presence and absence of PCs across genomes. Presence (dark box) denotes a gene that is present within a protein cluster. Genes from related genomes often cluster into the same PC, with alignments of highly related genomes showing large groups of PCs. Genomes are further partitioned using hierarchical clustering (see materials and methods).



A



B

