Modeling growth kinetics and metabolism of *Clostridium acetobutylicum/Clostridium ljungdahlii* co-culture with cell fusion
Charles J. Foster1* (cjf33@psu.edu), Kamil Charubin,2,3 Eleftherios Terry Papoutsakis,2,3 and Costas D. Maranas1
1Department of Chemical Engineering, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, USA
2Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, University of Delaware, 15 Innovation Way, Newark, DE 19711, USA
3Delaware Biotechnology Institute, University of Delaware, 15 Innovation Way, Newark, DE 19711, USA
http://www.maranasgroup.com/
http://www.papoutsakis.org/
Project Goals: The goal of this project is to develop syntrophic *Clostridium* co-culture systems, involving three *Clostridium* organisms, for producing C4-C8-chain length metabolites that can be used as chemicals or serve as biofuels and biofuel precursors. Part of the effort includes modeling the behavior of these triple co-cultures. To build this capability, we first model the binary co-culture of *Clostridium acetobutylicum* (*C. ac*) with *C. ljungdahlii* (*C. lj*). This first modeling sub-goal then is to develop a method for modeling the co-culture growth kinetics that accounts for novel cell fusion events observed in this binary co-culture. Using the resulting kinetic model in conjunction with a community genome-scale metabolic model and the SteadyCom community modeling framework, we aim to explain the observed co-culture metabolism/redox state, and identify genetic intervention strategies maximizing production of isopropanol and 2,3-butanediol.

*Clostridia* organisms have been of interest for decades due to their ability to ferment a wide range of carbon sources to useful bioproducts. The metabolic repertoire of these anaerobes has been further expanded in co-cultures due to the diversity of substrates they can consume and unexpected syntrophic behaviors that are still being discovered. One such example lies in the syntrophic co-culture of *Clostridium acetobutylicum* (*C. ac*) and *C. ljungdahlii* (*C. lj*). In addition to the discovery of an upregulation of *C. lj sadh* and *23bdh* gene expression in the presence of *C. ac* (allowing *C. lj* to convert acetone and acetoin produced by *C. ac* to isopropanol and 2,3-butanediol, respectively) [1], *C. ac* and *C. lj* cells were recently shown to fuse membranes and exchange proteomes. This work aims to characterize the resultant change in growth kinetics due to the observed fusion/protein exchange event using a kinetic model which characterizes both the pure and mixed-proteome *C. ac* and *C. lj* growth rates and the cell fusion/proteome exchange rate. The parameterized kinetic model is used to inform the construction of a community genome-scale metabolic model of pure and mixed-proteome *C. ac* and *C. lj* cells using the SteadyCom framework, and characterize the dynamic shift in co-culture metabolism and redox state related to the observed fusion event required to support the experimentally measured isopropanol and 2,3-butanediol production. Single organism strain design tools (i.e. optKnock, optForce) are being adapted to support the inclusion of multi-organism models in order to understand how the *C. ac* and *C. lj* genomes can be manipulated to maximize the production of fermentation products of interest (i.e isopropanol, 2,3-butanediol) under the newly discovered *C. ac/C.lj* co-culture conditions.

References
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