Lecture Note: Week 6

MATH 461: Probability Theory, Spring 2021
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Lecture 15. Other Discrete Random Variables (Sec 4.8)

Geometric random variables

A random variable X is called geometric if it takes values $1, 2, \cdots$ with probabilities

$$\mathbb{P}(X = n) = p(1-p)^{n-1}$$

for some $p \in (0, 1)$ and denoted by $X \sim \mathrm{Geom}(p)$. Note that $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} p(1-p)^{n-1} = 1$.

Example 1. An urn contains N white and M black balls. Balls are randomly selected, one at a time, until a black one is obtained. If we assume that each ball selected is replaced before the next one is drawn, what is the probability that (a) exactly n draws are needed? (b) at least k draws are needed?

Proposition 2. *Let $X \sim \mathrm{Geom}(p)$ for some $p \in (0, 1)$.*

(i) *For any two nonnegative integers $m, n \geq 0$,*

$$\mathbb{P}(X > m + n | X > m) = \mathbb{P}(X > n).$$

(ii) $\mathbb{E}[X] = \frac{1}{p}$ *and* $\mathrm{Var}(X) = \frac{1-p}{p^2}$.

Proof. (i) It follows from $\mathbb{P}(X > k) = (1-p)^{k+1}$.

(ii) We have

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbb{E}[X] &= \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} k\mathbb{P}(X = k) \\
&= \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} kp(1-p)^{k-1} \\
&= (1-p)\sum_{k=1}^{\infty}(k-1)p(1-p)^{k-2} + 1 \\
&= (1-p)\mathbb{E}[X] + 1
\end{aligned}$$

and

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbb{E}[X^2] &= \sum_{k=1}^{\infty} k^2\mathbb{P}(X = k) \\
&= (1-p)\sum_{k=1}^{\infty}(k-1)^2 p(1-p)^{k-2} + 2\mathbb{E}[X] - 1 \\
&= (1-p)\mathbb{E}[X^2] + \frac{2}{p} - 1.
\end{aligned}$$

Thus, $\mathrm{Var}(X) = \frac{1-p}{p^2}$.

□

Negative binomial random variables

Let $p \in (0,1)$ and $r \geq 1$ be an integer. A random variable X is called negative binomial if it takes values $r, r+1, \cdots$ with probabilities

$$\mathbb{P}(X = n) = \binom{n-1}{r-1} p^r (1-p)^{n-r}.$$

Example 3. Suppose that independent trials, each having probability p, $0 < p < 1$, of being a success are performed until a total of r successes is accumulated. Let X be the number of trials required. Find $\mathbb{P}(X = n)$ for $n = r, r+1, \cdots$.

Note that a geometric random variable is negative binomial with $r = 1$. One can show that $\mathbb{E}[X] = \frac{r}{p}$ and $\mathrm{Var}(X) = \frac{r(1-p)}{p^2}$.

Example 4 (The Banach match problem)**.** At all times, a pipe-smoking mathematician carries 2 matchboxes: 1 in his left-hand pocket and 1 in his right-hand pocket. Each time he needs a match, he is equally likely to take it from either pocket. Consider the moment when the mathematician first discovers that one of his matchboxes is empty. If it is assumed that both matchboxes initially contained N matches, what is the probability that there are exactly k matches, $k = 0, 1, \cdots, N$, in the other box?

Hypergeometric Random variables

Let N, m, n be positive integers with $N > n, m$. A random variable X is called hypergeometric if it takes values $0, 1, 2, \cdots, n$ with probabilities

$$\mathbb{P}(X = i) = \frac{\binom{m}{i}\binom{N-m}{n-i}}{\binom{N}{n}}$$

for $i = 0, 1, 2, \cdots, n$.

Example 5. Suppose that a sample of size n is to be chosen randomly (without replacement) from an urn containing N balls, of which m are white and $N - m$ are black. Let X denote the number of white balls selected, then X is hypergeometric.

Lecture 16. Intro to Continuous Random Variables (Sec 5.1)

A discrete random variable is a random variable whose possible values are countable. However, one can think a random variable with uncountable possible values, for instance, the lifetime of a light bulb. For a discrete random variable, we assign the probabilities for each possible values, which is not possible for the case with uncountable possible values. Then, how can we define the probabilities for this case?

Definition
A random variable X is a continuous random variable if there is a nonnegative function f on $\mathbb{R}$ such that

$$\mathbb{P}(X \in B) = \int_B f(x)\, dx$$

for any set $B \subseteq \mathbb{R}$. The function f is called the probability density function of X.

In particular, we have

$$\begin{aligned}
\mathbb{P}(X \in \mathbb{R}) &= \int_{\mathbb{R}} f(x)\,dx = 1,\\
\mathbb{P}(a \le X \le b) &= \int_a^b f(x)\,dx,\\
\mathbb{P}(X = a) &= \int_a^a f(x)\,dx = 0.
\end{aligned}$$

Example 6. Suppose that X is a continuous random variable whose probability density function is given by

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} C(3x - x^2), & 0 < x < 3,\\ 0, & \text{otherwise.}\end{cases}$$

Find C and $\mathbb{P}(X > 1)$.

The cumulative distribution function (in short, cdf) of a random variable X is defined by

$$F(a) = \mathbb{P}(X \le a) = \mathbb{P}(X < a) = \int_{-\infty}^{a} f(x)\,dx.$$

That is, the cdf is the integral of the probability density of X. Note that the cdf is continuous (regardless of the continuity of f). On the other hands, if we differentiate $F(a)$ with respect to a, then

$$\frac{d}{da}F(a) = \frac{d}{da}\int_{-\infty}^{a} f(x)\,dx = f(a).$$

That is, the probability density is the derivative of the cdf. Note that, for small $\varepsilon > 0$, we have

$$\mathbb{P}\left(a - \frac{\varepsilon}{2} \le X \le a + \frac{\varepsilon}{2}\right) = \int_{a-\frac{\varepsilon}{2}}^{a+\frac{\varepsilon}{2}} f(x)\,dx \approx \varepsilon f(a).$$

Example 7. Let X be a continuous random variable with the density f_X and the cdf F_X. Let $Y = X^2$. What is the density of Y?

Lecture 17. Expectation and Variance of Continuous RVs (Sec 5.2)

Let X be a continuous random variable with the density f. The expectation (or mean, or the expected value) of X is defined by

$$\mathbb{E}[X] = \int_{\mathbb{R}} x f(x)\,dx.$$

Example 8. Find $E[X]$ when the density function of X is given by

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} 2x, & 0 \le x \le 1,\\ 0, & \text{otherwise.}\end{cases}$$

Proposition 9. *Let X be a continuous random variable with the density f.*

(i) *If g a real-valued function, then $\mathbb{E}[g(X)] = \int_{\mathbb{R}} g(x)f(x)\,dx$. In particular $\mathbb{E}[aX+b] = a\mathbb{E}[X] + b$ for $a, b \in \mathbb{R}$.*

(ii) *If $X \geq 0$, then*

$$\mathbb{E}[X] = \int_0^\infty \mathbb{P}(X > x)\, dx.$$

Then,

The variance is defined by

$$\mathrm{Var}(X) = \mathbb{E}[(X - \mathbb{E}[X])^2] = \mathbb{E}[X^2] - (\mathbb{E}[X])^2 = \int_{\mathbb{R}} (x - \mathbb{E}[X])^2 f(x)\, dx.$$

Example 10. Find $E[e^X]$ when the density function of X is given by

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} 2x, & 0 \leq x \leq 1, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Example 11. A stick of length 1 is split at a point U having density function

$$f(x) = \begin{cases} 1, & 0 \leq x \leq 1, \\ 0, & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

Determine the expected length of the piece that contains the point p, $0 \leq p \leq 1$.

References

[SR] Sheldon Ross, *A First Course in Probability*, 9th Edition, Pearson

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