

# Math 525: Lecture 4

January 16, 2018

## 1 Uniform distribution

**Definition 1.1.** We say  $X$  is *uniformly distributed* on  $[a, b]$  (written  $X \sim U[a, b]$ ) if it is a random variable with distribution function

$$F(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } x < a \\ \frac{x-a}{b-a} & \text{if } a \leq x < b \\ 1 & \text{if } x \geq b. \end{cases}$$

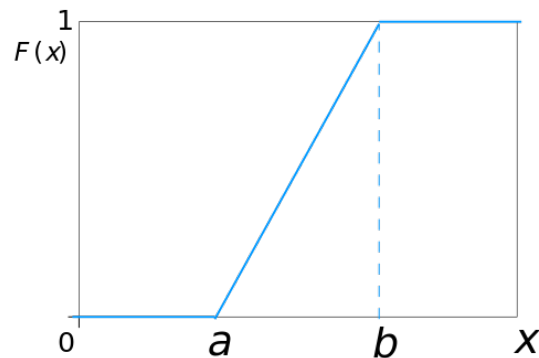


Figure 1: Uniform distribution

Intuitively, a uniform distribution tells us that any outcome in  $[a, b]$  is “equally likely”.

*Remark 1.2.* Actually, since  $F$  is continuous, no single outcome occurs with positive probability (recall that  $\mathbb{P}(\{X = x\}) = F(x) - F(x-)$ ). What we really mean is that given two disjoint subsets  $A$  and  $B$  of  $[a, b]$  which have the same “size”,  $X$  is equally likely to be in either of them.

**Example 1.3.** The position of the pointer on a gameshow wheel can be modelled as a random variable uniformly distributed on  $[0, 2\pi)$ .



Figure 2: Game show wheel

How do we actually construct a random variable with a uniform distribution? There are a few ways to do this:

**Example 1.4.** Let  $\Omega = \mathbb{R}$  and  $A_x = \{\omega \in \Omega: \omega \leq x\}$ . Define the probability measure  $\mathbb{P}: \mathcal{B}(\mathbb{R}) \rightarrow [0, 1]$  by

$$\mathbb{P}(A_x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } x < a \\ \frac{x - a}{b - a} & \text{if } a \leq x < b \\ 1 & \text{if } x \geq b. \end{cases}$$

$(\Omega, \mathcal{B}(\mathbb{R}), \mathbb{P})$  is a probability space. Moreover, the random variable  $X$  defined by  $X(\omega) = \omega$  is uniformly distributed on  $[a, b]$ .

*Remark 1.5.* You may ask, at this point, why have we not defined  $\mathbb{P}$  for sets not of the form  $A_x$ ? Remember that  $\mathcal{G} = \{A_x\}_{x \in \mathbb{R}}$  generates  $\mathcal{B}(\mathbb{R})$ . It turns out that to define a probability measure uniquely, it is sufficient to define it on generating sets (see, e.g., Corollary 1.8 of Walsh, John B. *Knowing the odds: an introduction to probability*. Vol. 139. American Mathematical Soc., 2012). The proof of this fact uses something called the *monotone class theorem*, which is outside of the scope of this course.

We could have also taken a slightly different approach in defining a uniformly distributed random variable:

**Example 1.6.** Let  $\Omega = [a, b]$  and  $\mathcal{B}([a, b]) = \sigma(\{[a, x]: x \in \mathbb{R}\})$  (compare this with the definition of  $\mathcal{B}(\mathbb{R})$ ). Define  $A_x$  as before and the probability measure  $\mathbb{P}: \mathcal{B}([a, b]) \rightarrow [0, 1]$  by

$$\mathbb{P}(A_x) = \frac{x - a}{b - a}.$$

$(\Omega, \mathcal{B}([a, b]), \mathbb{P})$  is a probability space. Moreover, the random variable  $Y$  defined by  $Y(\omega) = \omega$  is uniformly distributed on  $[a, b]$ .

The probability spaces in the last two examples are, for all intents and purposes, identical... even though  $X$  and  $Y$  are technically not the same mathematical objects. The first probability space allows for points outside of  $[a, b]$  to be outcomes, but they occur with zero probability. The second precludes them altogether.

## 2 Existence of random variables

In the last lecture, we showed that the distribution function  $F$  of any random variable is nondecreasing and right-continuous with

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow -\infty} F(x) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} F(x) = 1.$$

Today, we'll prove a "converse" of this fact.

**Proposition 2.1.** *Let  $F: \mathbb{R} \rightarrow [0, 1]$  be nondecreasing and right-continuous with*

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow -\infty} F(x) = 0 \quad \text{and} \quad \lim_{x \rightarrow \infty} F(x) = 1.$$

*Then, there exists a random variable whose distribution function is  $F$ .*

Note the subtlety here: in the previous lecture, we started out with a random variable and obtained a distribution function. The above proposition tells us we can go backwards: start with a distribution function and obtain a random variable.

*Proof.* We only consider the case in which  $F$  is a bijection. The general case is more challenging (see, e.g., Theorem 2.14 of Walsh, John B. *Knowing the odds: an introduction to probability*. Vol. 139. American Mathematical Soc., 2012).

Let  $X \sim U[0, 1]$ . In the case that  $F$  is a bijection, the inverse map  $F^{-1}$  maps singletons to singletons, and hence can be considered as a map from  $\mathbb{R}$  to  $\Omega$ . Therefore, we can define  $Y$  by  $Y(\omega) = F^{-1}(X(\omega))$ , or more succinctly,  $Y = F^{-1} \circ X$ . Since  $F$  is monotone, so too is  $F^{-1}$ . As a technical note, this implies that  $F^{-1}$  is Borel measurable and hence  $Y$  is indeed a random variable. Now, note that

$$\mathbb{P}(\{Y \leq y\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{F^{-1}(X) \leq y\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq F(y)\}) = \frac{F(y) - 0}{1 - 0} = F(y). \quad \square$$

The proof above has a very important consequence for sampling from non-uniform distributions, as demonstrated below:

**Example 2.2.** You use a random number generator to generate  $n$  samples  $U_1, \dots, U_n \sim U[0, 1]$ . You are given the distribution function  $F$ . Letting  $X_i = F^{-1}(U_i)$ , you obtain the samples  $X_1, \dots, X_n$ , which all have the distribution function  $F$ .

This shows us that we can always turn the problem of sampling from a non-uniform distribution into one of sampling from a uniform distribution!

**Example 2.3.** Let  $U$  be a uniform random variable on  $[0, 1]$ . Let  $X = U^2$ . Let  $F$  denote the distribution function of  $X$ . Then, if  $0 \leq x < 1$ ,

$$F(x) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq x\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{U^2 \leq x\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{U \leq \sqrt{x}\}) = \sqrt{x}.$$

### 3 Independence of random variables

In a previous lecture, we defined what it means for two events in a probability space  $(\Omega, \mathcal{F}, \mathbb{P})$  to be independent (if  $A, B \in \mathcal{F}$  and  $\mathbb{P}(A \cap B) = \mathbb{P}(A)\mathbb{P}(B)$ , we say  $A$  and  $B$  are independent). We extend this definition now to random variables.

**Definition 3.1.** Two random variables  $X$  and  $Y$  are *independent* if for all  $x, y \in \mathbb{R}$ ,

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X \leq x, Y \leq y\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq x\})\mathbb{P}(\{Y \leq y\})$$

(i.e., the events  $\{X \leq x\}$  and  $\{Y \leq y\}$  are independent).

**Example 3.2.** Let  $X$  be a random variable. Let  $Y = X^2$ . Suppose  $0 < \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq a\}) < 1$  for some  $a$ . Then,

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X \leq a, Y \leq a^2\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq a, X^2 \leq a^2\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq a, X \leq a\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \leq a\}).$$

That is,  $X$  and  $Y$  are not independent.

The above definition concerns only sets of the form  $\{X \leq x\}$  and  $\{Y \leq y\}$ . Can we extend it to other sets?

**Proposition 3.3.** *Let  $X$  and  $Y$  be independent random variables. Then,*

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X \in A\} \cap \{Y \in B\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X \in A\})\mathbb{P}(\{Y \in B\})$$

*whenever  $A = (p, q]$  and  $B = (r, s]$ .*

*Proof.* Note that

$$\begin{aligned} \mathbb{P}\{X \in (-\infty, q], Y \in (r, s]\} &= \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q, r < Y \leq s\} \\ &= \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q, Y \leq s\} - \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q, Y \leq r\} \\ &= \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q\}\mathbb{P}\{Y \leq s\} - \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q\}\mathbb{P}\{Y \leq r\} \\ &= \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q\}(\mathbb{P}\{Y \leq s\} - \mathbb{P}\{Y \leq r\}) \\ &= \mathbb{P}\{X \leq q\}\mathbb{P}\{r < Y \leq s\}. \end{aligned}$$

Now, use the same reasoning to get

$$\mathbb{P}\{p < X \leq q, r < Y \leq s\} = \mathbb{P}\{p < X \leq q\}\mathbb{P}\{r < Y \leq s\}. \quad \square$$

*Remark 3.4.* The previous proposition can be extended more generally to the case of  $A$  and  $B$  in  $\mathcal{B}(\mathbb{R})$  (see, e.g., Theorem 2.20 of Walsh, John B. *Knowing the odds: an introduction to probability*. Vol. 139. American Mathematical Soc., 2012). The proof uses, once again, the monotone class theorem.

## 4 Independence of multiple events

Let's generalize the concept of independence to families of random variables.

**Definition 4.1.** We say the family  $\{A_\alpha\}_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}} \in \mathcal{F}$  is independent if for each positive integer  $k \leq n$  and  $\{A_{i_1}, \dots, A_{i_k}\} \subset \{A_\alpha\}_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}}$ ,

$$\mathbb{P}(A_{i_1} \cap \dots \cap A_{i_k}) = \mathbb{P}(A_{i_1}) \cdots \mathbb{P}(A_{i_k}).$$

The notion of independence above is stronger than requiring each pair of events to be independent:

**Example 4.2.** Toss two fair coins at the same time. Let  $A$  be the event that the first coin is heads,  $B$  be the event that the second coin is heads, and  $C$  be the event that the first and second coins disagree (i.e., one is heads and the other is tails). Note that  $\mathbb{P}(A) = \mathbb{P}(B) = \mathbb{P}(C) = 1/2$ .

Obviously,  $A$  and  $B$  are independent. To see that  $A$  and  $C$  are independent, note that

$$\mathbb{P}(A \cap C) = 1/4 = \mathbb{P}(A)\mathbb{P}(C).$$

Similarly,  $B$  and  $C$  are independent. This establishes that the three events are **pairwise** independent. However, note that  $\mathbb{P}(A \cap B \cap C) = \mathbb{P}(\emptyset) = 0$  and  $\mathbb{P}(A)\mathbb{P}(B)\mathbb{P}(C) \neq 0$ . Therefore, the events  $A, B, C$  are not independent, despite being pairwise independent.

**Definition 4.3.** We say the family of random variables  $\{X_\alpha\}_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}}$  are independent if for each positive integer  $k \leq n$ ,  $\{X_{i_1}, \dots, X_{i_k}\} \subset \{X_\alpha\}_{\alpha \in \mathcal{A}}$ , and  $x_1, \dots, x_k$ ,

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X_{i_1} \leq x_1, \dots, X_{i_k} \leq x_k\}) = \mathbb{P}(\{X_{i_1} \leq x_1\}) \cdots \mathbb{P}(\{X_{i_k} \leq x_k\}).$$

**Exercise 4.4.** Let  $X$  and  $Y$  be i.i.d. integer-valued random variables (i.e.,  $\mathbb{P}(\{X \text{ is an integer}\}) = 1$  and similarly for  $Y$ ). Let  $p_n = \mathbb{P}(\{X = n\})$ . Then,

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X = Y\}) = \sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} \mathbb{P}(\{X = n\})\mathbb{P}(\{Y = n\}) = \sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} p_n^2.$$

Similarly,

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X \leq Y\}) = \sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} \mathbb{P}(\{X = n\}) \sum_{m=n}^{\infty} \mathbb{P}(\{Y = m\}) = \sum_{n=-\infty}^{\infty} p_n \sum_{m=n}^{\infty} p_m.$$

For example, suppose

$$p_n = \frac{6}{\pi^2} \frac{1}{n^2} \text{ if } n > 0 \quad \text{and} \quad p_n = 0 \text{ otherwise}$$

(you can check that  $\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} p_n = 1$ ). Then,

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X = Y\}) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} p_n = \frac{36}{\pi^4} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^4} = \frac{36}{\pi^4} \frac{\pi^4}{90} = \frac{36}{90} = \frac{2}{5}.$$

and

$$\mathbb{P}(\{X \leq Y\}) = \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} p_n \sum_{m=n}^{\infty} p_m = \frac{36}{\pi^4} \sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \frac{1}{n^2} \sum_{m=n}^{\infty} \frac{1}{m^2} = \frac{36}{\pi^4} \frac{7\pi^4}{360} = \frac{7}{10}.$$

## 5 Types of distributions

**Definition 5.1.** Let  $X$  be a random variable.

1.  $X$  has a *discrete distribution* if we can find a countable subset  $\{x_n\}_n \subset \mathbb{R}$  for which

$$\sum_{n=1}^{\infty} \mathbb{P}\{X = x_n\} = 1.$$

2.  $X$  has a *continuous distribution* if its distribution function  $F$  is continuous.
3.  $X$  has an *absolutely continuous distribution* if its distribution function can be written

$$F(x) = \int_{-\infty}^x f(x)dx$$

for some integrable function  $f$ .

While many random variables fall into one of the above categories, there are still many which do not! For example...

**Example 5.2.** Consider flipping a coin. If the coin is heads, you receive one dollar. Otherwise, you receive  $Y$  dollars, where  $Y \sim U[0, 1]$ . This random variable is

$$X = I_{\{\text{tails}\}}Y + I_{\{\text{heads}\}}.$$

Its distribution function is

$$F(x) = \begin{cases} 0 & \text{if } x < 0 \\ \frac{x}{2} & \text{if } 0 \leq x < 1 \\ 1 & \text{if } x \geq 1. \end{cases}$$