A bird's eye view of optimization

Javier Peña
MSCF program, CMU

Spring, 2025

A bird's eye view of optimization

Plan

- Introduction
- Math background: matrices & vectors, calculus, convexity
- Popular classes of optimization models:
  - linear programming
  - quadratic programming
  - integer programming
- Hands-on experience with CVXPY Python library

Slides and python notebook available at

`https://github.com/javi-pena/birdseyeview`

Introduction

Optimization

The process of finding the best possible solution to a problem.

Examples

- Optimal transport
- Optimal control
- Scheduling and logistics
- Regression, clustering, deep learning,...
- Portfolio construction, trade execution, risk management,...

A mathematically precise definition

Optimization model

Problem of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \end{aligned}$$

where $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ and $f : \mathcal{X} \to \mathbb{R}$.

Terminology

- Decision variables: $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$
- Objective function: $f(\mathbf{x})$
- Constraint set (feasible region) $\mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$.

Common format: *mathematical programming*

Problem of the form

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{x}) \leq \mathbf{0} \\ & \mathbf{h}(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{0} \end{array}$$

for $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$, $\mathbf{g} : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}^m$, and $\mathbf{h} : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}^p$.
This means that the constraint set is

$$\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \mathbf{g}(\mathbf{x}) \leq \mathbf{0},\ \mathbf{h}(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{0}\}.$$

The above format is too general. It has enormous modeling power but the optimization models are very difficult to solve.

Taxonomy of optimization problems

Convex optimization

Objective function $f(\mathbf{x})$ and constraint set $\mathcal{X}$ are convex.
This will be the focus of our discussion today.

Mixed integer optimization

Models with integrality constraints.
We will discuss them towards the end.

Stochastic & dynamic optimization

Models involving random and sequential features.
We will not discuss them today.

Some math background

Matrices and vectors

Suppose m, n are positive integers.

Notation

$\mathbb{R}^n$ = space of n-dimensional vectors. Convention: $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is a *column* vector with entries:

$$\mathbf{x} = \begin{bmatrix} x_1 \\ \vdots \\ x_n \end{bmatrix}.$$

$\mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ = space of m by n matrices. Convention: $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ is a matrix with entries:

$$\mathbf{A} = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{m1} & \cdots & a_{mn} \end{bmatrix}.$$

Operations with matrices and vectors

Matrix-vector multiplication

For $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ and $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$. Then $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^m$ is

$$\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11}x_1 + \cdots + a_{1n}x_n \\ \vdots \\ a_{m1}x_1 + \cdots + a_{mn}x_n \end{bmatrix} \in \mathbb{R}^m.$$

Matrix-matrix multiplication

Suppose $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$, $\mathbf{B} \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times p}$. Then their product $\mathbf{A}\mathbf{B} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times p}$ is the m by p matrix with ij entry equal to

$$\sum_{k=1}^{n} a_{ik} b_{kj}$$

for $i = 1, \ldots, m$ and $j = 1, \ldots, p$.

Operations with matrices and vectors

Transpose

Suppose $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ is as follows

$$\mathbf{A} = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & \cdots & a_{1n} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{m1} & \cdots & a_{mn} \end{bmatrix}.$$

The transpose $\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T} \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times m}$ is

$$\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T} = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & \cdots & a_{m1} \\ \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{1n} & \cdots & a_{mn} \end{bmatrix}.$$

Suppose $\mathbf{Q} \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ is symmetric, i.e., $\mathbf{Q}^\mathsf{T} = \mathbf{Q}$.

- $\mathbf{Q}$ is *positive semidefinite* (psd) if $\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{x} \geq 0$ for all $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$.
- $\mathbf{Q}$ is *positive definite* (pd) if $\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{x} > 0$ for all $\mathbf{0} \neq \mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$.

Calculus

Let $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$. The *gradient* $\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) \in \mathbb{R}^n$ is

$$\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial f}{\partial x_1}(\mathbf{x}) \\ \vdots \\ \frac{\partial f}{\partial x_n}(\mathbf{x}) \end{bmatrix},$$

and the *Hessian* $\nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ is

$$\nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) = \begin{bmatrix} \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x_1^2}(\mathbf{x}) & \cdots & \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x_1 \partial x_n}(\mathbf{x}) \\ \vdots & & \\ \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x_n \partial x_1}(\mathbf{x}) & \cdots & \frac{\partial^2 f}{\partial x_n^2}(\mathbf{x}) \end{bmatrix}.$$

Example

Suppose $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2}\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{c}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x}$ where $\mathbf{c} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ and $\mathbf{Q} \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ is symmetric. Then

$$\nabla f(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{Q}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{c}, \ \nabla^2 f(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{Q}.$$

Calculus

First-order Taylor's approximation

If ∇f is continuous at $\bar{\mathbf{x}} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ then for small $\mathbf{p} \in \mathbb{R}^n$

$$f(\bar{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{p}) \approx f(\bar{\mathbf{x}}) + \nabla f(\bar{\mathbf{x}})^\mathsf{T} \mathbf{p}.$$

Second-order Taylor's approximation

If both ∇f and $\nabla^2 f$ are continuous at $\bar{\mathbf{x}} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ then for small $\mathbf{p} \in \mathbb{R}^n$

$$f(\bar{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{p}) \approx f(\bar{\mathbf{x}}) + \nabla f(\bar{\mathbf{x}})^\mathsf{T} \mathbf{p} + \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{p}^\mathsf{T} \nabla^2 f(\bar{\mathbf{x}}) \mathbf{p}.$$

Euclidean norm

Suppose $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$, the Euclidean norm $\|\mathbf{x}\|_2$ is defined as

$$\|\mathbf{x}\|_2 = \sqrt{\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T} \mathbf{x}} = \sqrt{x_1^2 + \cdots + x_n^2}.$$

Convexity

A set $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is convex if for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in C$

$$[\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y}] := \{\lambda \mathbf{x} + (1 - \lambda)\mathbf{y} : \lambda \in [0, 1]\} \subseteq C.$$

Examples of convex sets

- Half space: $\{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \mathbf{a}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \leq b\}$ where $\mathbf{a} \in \mathbb{R}^n,\ b \in \mathbb{R}$.
- Balls: $\{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \|\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{c}\|_2 \leq r\}$ where $\mathbf{c} \in \mathbb{R}^n,\ r > 0$.
- Intersections: $C_i \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n,\ i \in I$ convex then $\bigcap_{i \in I} C_i$ convex.

Suppose $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ convex. A function $f : C \to \mathbb{R}$ is *convex on* C if for all $\mathbf{x}, \mathbf{y} \in S$ and $\lambda \in [0, 1]$

$$f(\lambda \mathbf{x} + (1 - \lambda)\mathbf{y}) \leq \lambda f(\mathbf{x}) + (1 - \lambda) f(\mathbf{y}).$$

Examples of convex functions

- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \mathbf{c}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x}$ where $\mathbf{c} \in \mathbb{R}^n$.
- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2}\|\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{b}\|_2^2$ where $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m\times n}$ and $\mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^m$.
- $f(\mathbf{x}) = \frac{1}{2}\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{c}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x}$ where $\mathbf{c} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ and $\mathbf{Q} \in \mathbb{R}^{n\times n}$ is symmetric and positive semidefinite.

Convex sets & convex functions

Suppose $C \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$ is a convex set and $f : C \to \mathbb{R}$.

- f is a convex function if and only if epi$(f) := \{(\mathbf{x}, t) : \mathbf{x} \in C, t \geq f(\mathbf{x})\} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^{n+1}$ is a convex set.
- If f is a convex function on a convex set C then for all $\ell \in \mathbb{R}$ the *sublevel* set $\{\mathbf{x} \in C : f(\mathbf{x}) \leq \ell\}$ is convex.

Unconstrained convex optimization

Unconstrained optimization

Suppose $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ and consider the problem

$$\min_{\mathbf{x}} f(\mathbf{x}).$$

Fermat's rule

Suppose $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R}$ is convex and differentiable. Then $\bar{\mathbf{x}} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ solves the above problem if and only if $\nabla f(\bar{\mathbf{x}}) = \mathbf{0}$.

Unconstrained optimization

Suppose $\mathbf{Q} \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$ is symmetric and positive semidefinite and $\mathbf{c} \in \mathbb{R}^n$. Then $\bar{\mathbf{x}} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ solves

$$\min_{\mathbf{x}} \left\{ \frac{1}{2} \mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T} \mathbf{Q} \mathbf{x} + \mathbf{c}^\mathsf{T} \mathbf{x} \right\}$$

if and only if $\mathbf{Q}\bar{\mathbf{x}} + \mathbf{c} = \mathbf{0}$. In particular, if $\mathbf{Q}$ is non-singular, then the unique minimizer is $\bar{\mathbf{x}} = -\mathbf{Q}^{-1}\mathbf{c}$.

Example

Suppose $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ is full column rank and $\mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^m$.

- The minimizer of $\frac{1}{2}\|\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{b}\|_2^2$ is

$$\bar{\mathbf{x}} = (\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{A})^{-1}\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{b}$$

- For $\lambda > 0$ the minimizer of $\frac{1}{2}\|\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{b}\|_2^2 + \lambda\|\mathbf{x}\|_2^2$ is

$$\bar{\mathbf{x}} = (\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{A} + 2\lambda\mathbf{I})^{-1}\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{b}$$

Linear programming

Linear program

Problem of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & \mathbf{c}^{\mathsf{T}}\mathbf{x} \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b} \\ & \mathbf{D}\mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{d}. \end{aligned}$$

This is always convex.

A simple portfolio construction problem

Example

You would like to allocate \$80,000 among four mutual funds.

Capitalization	Fund 1	Fund 2	Fund 3	Fund 4
large	50%	30%	25%	60%
medium	30%	10%	40%	20%
small	20%	60%	35%	20%
exp. return	10%	15%	16%	8%

- The allocation must contain at least 35% large-cap, 30% mid-cap, and 15% small-cap.
- Find an acceptable long-only allocation with the highest expected return.

Linear programming formulation

Variables:

x_i: amount (in \$1000s) invested in fund i for $i = 1, \ldots, 4$.

Objective:

$$\max \quad 0.10x_1 + 0.15x_2 + 0.16x_3 + 0.08x_4$$

Constraints:

$$\begin{array}{rcll}
x_1 + x_2 + x_3 + x_4 & = & 80 & \text{(budget)} \\
0.50x_1 + 0.30x_2 + 0.25x_3 + 0.60x_4 & \geq & 0.35 \cdot 80 & \text{(large-cap)} \\
0.30x_1 + 0.10x_2 + 0.40x_3 + 0.20x_4 & \geq & 0.30 \cdot 80 & \text{(mid-cap)} \\
0.20x_1 + 0.60x_2 + 0.35x_3 + 0.20x_4 & \geq & 0.15 \cdot 80 & \text{(small-cap)} \\
x_1, \ldots, x_4 & \geq & 0 & \text{(long-only)}.
\end{array}$$

Linear programming formulation (matrix form)

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & \mathbf{r}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b} \\ & \mathbf{D}\mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{d} \\ & \mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{0} \end{aligned}$$

where

$$\mathbf{r} = \begin{bmatrix} 0.10 \\ 0.15 \\ 0.16 \\ 0.08 \end{bmatrix}, \ \mathbf{A} = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 & 1 & 1 \end{bmatrix}, \ \mathbf{b} = 80,$$

and

$$\mathbf{D} = \begin{bmatrix} 0.50 & 0.30 & 0.25 & 0.60 \\ 0.30 & 0.10 & 0.40 & 0.20 \\ 0.20 & 0.60 & 0.35 & 0.20 \end{bmatrix}, \ \mathbf{d} = \begin{bmatrix} 0.35 \cdot 80 \\ 0.30 \cdot 80 \\ 0.15 \cdot 80 \end{bmatrix}.$$

Solution to optimization problems

- Optimality conditions (Fermat's rule and more general KKT)
- Numerical methods

Optimization software

- Excel Solver
- CVXPY Python library for convex optimization
- Other solvers
  commercial: GUROBI, MOSEK, CPLEX
  open-source: CVXOPT, ECOS, OSQP, SCS

Unsolvable linear programs

A linear program always has a solution unless one of two pathologies occur: *infeasibility* or *unboundedness.*

Other linear programs: ℓ_1 minimization

Suppose $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}$ with $n \gg m$ and want the sparsest solution to

$$\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b}.$$

ℓ_1 norm

For $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ define $\|\mathbf{x}\|_1 := \sum_{j=1}^{n} |x_j|$.

ℓ_1 minimization

Used in compressed sensing and related to lasso regression:

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & \|\mathbf{x}\|_1 \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b} \end{array} \quad \Leftrightarrow \quad \begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x},\mathbf{u}} & \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{u} \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b} \\ & \mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{u} \\ & -\mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{u} \end{array}$$

Quadratic programming

Quadratic program

Problem of the form

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & \tfrac{1}{2}\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{Q}\mathbf{x} + \mathbf{c}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} = \mathbf{b} \\ & \mathbf{D}\mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{d}. \end{aligned}$$

This is convex if $\mathbf{Q}$ is positive semidefinite.

Lasso regression

Suppose $\mathbf{A} \in \mathbb{R}^{m \times n}, \mathbf{b} \in \mathbb{R}^m$ and $\lambda > 0$. The *lasso regression* problem

$$\min_{\mathbf{x}} \left\{ \frac{1}{2} \|\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{b}\|_2^2 + \lambda \|\mathbf{x}\|_1 \right\}$$

can be reformulated as

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\mathbf{x},\mathbf{u}} \quad & \tfrac{1}{2}\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{A}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{b}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} + \lambda \cdot \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{u} \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{x} \le \mathbf{u} \\ & -\mathbf{x} \le \mathbf{u}. \end{aligned}$$

Unlike ridge regression, the above problem does not have a closed-form solution.

Markowitz mean-variance model

Consider an investment universe with n risky assets and a single-period investment horizon.

Let

- $\mathbf{r}$ = vector of asset returns
- $\boldsymbol{\mu} = \mathbb{E}(\mathbf{r}) \in \mathbb{R}^n$: vector of expected returns
- $\mathbf{V} = \operatorname{cov}(\mathbf{r}) \in \mathbb{R}^{n \times n}$: covariance matrix (symmetric and positive definite)

For a given portfolio $\mathbf{x} = \begin{bmatrix} x_1 & \cdots & x_n \end{bmatrix}^\mathsf{T} \in \mathbb{R}^n$

- x_i: portfolio holding in asset i
- Expected portfolio return: $\boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} = \mathbb{E}(\mathbf{r}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x})$
- Variance of portfolio return: $\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x} = \operatorname{var}(\mathbf{r}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x})$

Mean-variance models

Efficient portfolios

Optimal tradeoff between expected return $\boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x}$ and risk $\mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x}$.

Mean-variance model

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min_{\mathbf{x}} & \mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x} \\ & \boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \geq \bar{\mu} \\ & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}. \end{array}$$

Here $\mathcal{X}$: portfolio constraints.

Equivalent formulation when $\mathcal{X}$ is closed and convex:

$$\begin{array}{ll} \max_{\mathbf{x}} & \boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} - \frac{\gamma}{2} \cdot \mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x} \\ & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}. \end{array} \Leftrightarrow \begin{array}{ll} \min_{\mathbf{x}} & \frac{\gamma}{2} \cdot \mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \\ & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X}. \end{array}$$

"Equivalent" means: set of efficient portfolios can be obtained by varying $\bar{\mu}$ or γ in each of the two formulations.

Popular simple case: fully-invested (long-only) portfolios

Consider the case when the portfolio constraint set is

$$\mathcal{X} = \{\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n : \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} = 1, \mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{0}\}.$$

The previous mean-variance model reads

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & \frac{\gamma}{2} \cdot \mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \\ & \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} = 1 \\ & \mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{0}. \end{array}$$

Without the long-only constraint, get the simpler model

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & \frac{\gamma}{2} \cdot \mathbf{x}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}\mathbf{x} - \boldsymbol{\mu}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} \\ & \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} = 1. \end{array}$$

Example: efficient frontier for a one-factor model

Suppose asset returns satisfy

$$r_i = \beta_i \cdot f + u_i,\ i = 1, \ldots, n$$

where

- f = common factor that applies to all asset returns
- β_i = known exposure to common factor f
- u_i = asset-specific return

and

$$\mathrm{cov}(u_i, f) = 0,\ \mathrm{cov}(u_i, u_j) = 0 \text{ for } i \neq j.$$

Some matrix algebra shows that in this case

$$\mathbf{V} = \sigma^2 \cdot \boldsymbol{\beta}\boldsymbol{\beta}^\mathsf{T} + \mathbf{D},\ \boldsymbol{\mu} = \mathbb{E}(f) \cdot \boldsymbol{\beta} + \mathbb{E}(\mathbf{u})$$

where $\sigma^2 = \mathrm{var}(f)$ and $\mathbf{D} = \mathrm{diag}(\mathrm{var}(u_1), \cdots, \mathrm{var}(u_n))$.

In this case efficient portfolios are a tradeoff of betas, systematic (i.e., σ^2), and idiosyncratic (i.e., $\mathrm{var}(u_i)$) risks.

Common constraints in mean-variance models

- Upper/lower bounds on individual positions

$$\mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{u} \text{ and/or } \mathbf{x} \geq \boldsymbol{\ell}$$

- Bounds on exposure to sectors: for $S \subseteq \{1, \ldots, n\}$

$$\sum_{i \in S} x_i \leq u \text{ and/or } \sum_{i \in S} x_i \geq \ell$$

- Turnover constraints: suppose $\mathbf{x}^0$ and $\mathbf{x}$ are respectively a current and new portfolio. A turnover constraint is of the form

$$\sum_{i=1}^{n} |x_i^0 - x_i| \leq t \Leftrightarrow \begin{cases} \mathbf{x}^0 - \mathbf{x} \leq \mathbf{u} \\ \mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}^0 \leq \mathbf{u} \\ \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{u} \leq t \end{cases}$$

Integer programming

Mixed integer programming

Optimization problems with integrality constraints. That is, where some variables are restricted to be integer.

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \\ & x_j \in \mathbb{Z},\ j \in J \end{array}$$

where $f : \mathbb{R}^n \to \mathbb{R},\ \mathcal{X} \subseteq \mathbb{R}^n$, and $J \subseteq \{1, \dots, n\}$.
We shall assume that f and $\mathcal{X}$ are convex.

Special case: mixed binary programming

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \\ & x_j \in \{0, 1\},\ j \in J \end{array}$$

What is interesting about integer programming?

Powerful modeling (much more than convex optimization)

- Sometimes quantities are naturally integer
- Binary variables enable us to model logical conditions
- Binary variables enable us to model cardinality constraints, that is, "n choose k" constraints.

Some canonical examples

- Knapsack and set covering problems
- Scheduling problems
- Benchmark tracking
- Sparse regression

Tradeoff

Integer programs are computationally harder than convex optimization. Integer programming is NP-hard.

Knapsack problem

Select the most valuable items to pack in a knapsack with limited weight capacity.

Suppose
$v_i :=$ value of item i, $i = 1, \ldots, n$
$w_i :=$ weight of item i, $i = 1, \ldots, n$
$W :=$ capacity of the knapsack

Formulation

Let x_i indicate whether item i is selected

$$x_i := \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if item } i \text{ is selected} \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \max_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & v_1 x_1 + \cdots + v_n x_n \\ & w_1 x_1 + \cdots + w_n x_n \leq W \\ & x_i \in \{0, 1\}, \ i = 1, \ldots, n. \end{aligned}$$

Set covering problem

Consider a finite "ground set" $\{1, \ldots, n\}$ and a collection of sets $S_j \subseteq \{1, \ldots, n\},\ j = 1, \ldots, m$ such that $\bigcup_{j=1}^m S_j = \{1, \ldots, n\}$.

Suppose there is a cost c_j associated to each set $S_j,\ j = 1, \ldots, m$.

Set covering problem

Find the cheapest collection of sets that covers the ground set:

$$
\begin{aligned}
\min_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & \sum_{j=1}^{m} c_j x_j \\
& \sum_{j : i \in S_j} x_j \geq 1 \text{ for } i = 1, \ldots, n \\
& x_j \in \{0, 1\} \text{ for } j = 1, \ldots, m.
\end{aligned}
$$

Common generic constraint: sparsity or "n choose k"

For $\mathbf{x} \in \mathbb{R}^n$ let

$$\|\mathbf{x}\|_0 := |\{i : x_i \neq 0\}| = \text{ number of non-zero entries in } \mathbf{x}$$

Example: sparse regression

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & \frac{1}{2}\|\mathbf{A}\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{b}\|_2^2 \\ & \|\mathbf{x}\|_0 \leq k \end{array}$$

Example: benchmark tracking

$$\begin{array}{ll} \min\limits_{\mathbf{x}} & (\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_B)^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{V}(\mathbf{x} - \mathbf{x}_B) \\ & \mathbf{1}^\mathsf{T}\mathbf{x} = 1 \\ & \mathbf{x} \geq \mathbf{0} \\ & \|\mathbf{x}\|_0 \leq k \end{array}$$

The above two problems can be recast as mixed integer programs but the resulting formulations are extremely difficult to solve.

Heuristics for "n choose k" constraints

Consider a problem with sparsity constraints:

$$\begin{aligned} \min_{\mathbf{x}} \quad & f(\mathbf{x}) \\ \text{s.t.} \quad & \mathbf{x} \in \mathcal{X} \\ & \|\mathbf{x}\|_0 \leq k. \end{aligned}$$

Natural heuristic approach: stepwise selection

- Do either "forward" or "backward" selection.
- Forward selection:
  - Choose the non-zero component i that gives the best solution among all single-component sparse $\mathbf{x}$.
  - Add a new non-zero component, each time selecting the one that gives the "most" improvement over the current selection.
- Backward selection:
  - Start by letting the entire set of components be non-zero.
  - Set a new component to zero, each time selecting the one that creates the "least" worsening of the current selection.

References for further reading

Books on optimization (available at CMU library)

- Boyd & Vandenberghe, “Convex Optimization”
- Nocedal & Wright, “Numerical Optimization”
- Conforti, Cornuéjols & Zambelli, “Integer Programming”

Optimization software

- `https://www.cvxpy.org`
- `http://cvxr.com/cvx/`
- `https://www.gurobi.com`
- `https://www.mosek.com`

Textbook for our MSCF course (available at CMU library)

Cornuéjols, Peña & Tütüncü, “Optimization Methods in Finance”

Bonus material for MSCF students in Fall 2025.