Random Variables (rv)

Discrete Random Variables [Ross S4.2]

Definition 9.1: A random variable that can take at most a countable number of possible outcomes is called a discrete random variable.

Definition 9.2: For a discrete random variable X, we define its **Probability Mass Function** (PMF) $p_X(a)$ by

$$p_X(a) = P[X = a].$$

Let $\mathcal{X} = \{x_1, x_2, ...\}$ be the possible outcomes that X takes.

Then $\quad p_X(x) \geq 0 \qquad$ for $x \in \mathcal{X}$
$\qquad\quad p_X(x) = 0 \qquad$ for all other x

and, since X must take one of its possible values:

$$\sum_{x \in \mathcal{X}} p_X(x) = 1$$

Example 9.1: Say the PMF of the random variable X is

$$p_X(k) = C\frac{\lambda^k}{k!}, \qquad \text{for } k = 0, 1, 2, \ldots$$

and $\lambda > 0$ is given.

a) Find C in terms of λ

b) Find $P[X = 0]$

c) Find $P[X > 1]$.

Solution:

Say $\mathcal{X} \subset \mathbb{R}$. Instead of specifying $p_X(x)$ for every $x \in \mathcal{X}$, we can specify:

$$F_X(x) = P[X \leq x] \qquad x \in \mathbb{R}$$

instead.

$F_X(x)$ is called the **Cumulative Distribution Function** (CDF) of X.

Example 9.2: Let X be such that

$$p_X(1) = \frac{1}{4} \qquad p_X(2) = \frac{1}{2} \qquad p_X(3) = \frac{1}{8} \qquad p_X(4) = \frac{1}{8}$$

Plot the CDF $F_X(x)$.

Solution:

Expected (Mean) Value [Ross S4.3]

Definition 9.3: The **expected** (or **mean**) value of a random variable X is

$$E[X] = \sum_{x \in \mathcal{X}} x p_X(x) \tag{9.1}$$

This is an "average" where each outcome is weighted by the probability that X assumes that outcome.

Example 9.3: Say $p_X(0) = 1/2, \quad p_X(1) = 1/2$.

Then $\quad \begin{aligned} E[X] &= 0 \times 1/2 + 1 \times 1/2 \\ &= 1/2 \end{aligned}$

Example 9.4: Say $p_X(0) = 1/3, \quad p_X(1) = 2/3$.

Then $\quad \begin{aligned} E[X] &= 0 \times 1/3 + 1 \times 2/3 \\ &= 2/3 \end{aligned}$

Example 9.5: : Let $A \subset S$ be an event. Let the random variable I be such that

$$I = \begin{cases} 1 & A \text{ occurs} \\ 0 & A \text{ does not occur.} \end{cases}$$

Then

$$\begin{aligned} E[I] &= 0 \times P[I = 0] + 1 \times P[I = 1] \\ &= 0 \times P[A^c] + 1 \times P[A] \\ &= P[A] \end{aligned}$$

I is called an **indicator for event** A. We often write I_A or 1_A for this kind of random variable.

Example 9.6: 120 students are driven in 3 buses with 36, 40 and 44 students each. One of the 120 students is chosen randomly.

Let X = # students on bus of randomly chosen student.

What is $E[X]$?

Solution: