Professor Jennifer Balakrishnan, *jbala@bu.edu*

What is on today

1 Introduction to Determinants

Lay–Lay–McDonald §3.1 pp. 166 – 169

Recall that we saw that a 2×2 matrix is invertible if and only if its determinant is nonzero. To extend this useful fact to larger matrices, we need a definition for the determinant of an $n \times n$ matrix. Let $A = [a_{ij}]$ be an $n \times n$ matrix.

When $n = 1$, we define $\det A = a_{11}$.

Recall that when $n = 2$, that is, $A = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} \end{bmatrix}$, we have

$$\det A = a_{11}a_{22} - a_{12}a_{21}.$$

When $n = 3$, the determinant $\det A$ is defined recursively using determinants of 2×2 submatrices. That is, suppose $A = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & a_{13} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & a_{23} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} & a_{33} \end{bmatrix}$. Then

$$\det A = a_{11} \det \begin{bmatrix} a_{22} & a_{23} \\ a_{32} & a_{33} \end{bmatrix} - a_{12} \det \begin{bmatrix} a_{21} & a_{23} \\ a_{31} & a_{33} \end{bmatrix} + a_{13} \det \begin{bmatrix} a_{21} & a_{22} \\ a_{31} & a_{32} \end{bmatrix}.$$

For brevity, we write this as

$$\det A = a_{11} \det A_{11} - a_{12} \det A_{12} + a_{13} \det A_{13},$$

where A_{11}, A_{12}, and A_{13} are obtained from A by deleting the first row and one of the three columns. For any square matrix A, let A_{ij} denote the submatrix formed by deleting the ith row and jth column of A. Now we can give a recursive definition of determinants. When $n = 4$, $\det A$ uses determinants of 3×3 submatrices, and in general, the determinant of an $n \times n$ matrix is computed using determinants of $(n-1) \times (n-1)$ submatrices.

Definition 1. *For $n \geq 2$, the determinant of an $n \times n$ matrix $A = [a_{ij}]$ is the following:*

$$\det A = \sum_{j=1}^{n} (-1)^{1+j} a_{1j} \det A_{1j}.$$

Example 2. *Compute the determinant of* $A = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 5 & 0 \\ 2 & 4 & -1 \\ 0 & -2 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$.

To state the next theorem, it is convenient to write the definition of $\det A$ in a slightly different form. Given $A = [a_{ij}]$, the *(i,j)-cofactor* of A is the number C_{ij} given by

$$C_{ij} = (-1)^{i+j} \det A_{ij}.$$

Then the formula we just wrote is

$$\det A = a_{11}C_{11} + a_{12}C_{12} + \cdots + a_{1n}C_{1n}.$$

This formula is called a *cofactor expansion across the first row of A.*

Theorem 3. *The determinant of an $n \times n$ matrix A can be computed by a cofactor expansion across* any *row or column. The expansion across the ith row is*

$$\det A = a_{i1}C_{i1} + a_{i2}C_{i2} + \cdots + a_{in}C_{in}.$$

The expansion down the jth column is

$$\det A = a_{1j}C_{1j} + a_{2j}C_{2j} + \cdots + a_{nj}C_{nj}.$$

The theorem tells us that we have some flexibility in computing the determinant: by picking a favorable row or column (e.g., one with many zeros), we can cut down on the number of computations we have to do.

Example 4. *Compute* $\det A$*, where* $A = \begin{bmatrix} 3 & -7 & 8 & 9 & -6 \\ 0 & 2 & -5 & 7 & 3 \\ 0 & 0 & 1 & 5 & 0 \\ 0 & 0 & 2 & 4 & -1 \\ 0 & 0 & 0 & -2 & 0 \end{bmatrix}$.

The previous example motivates the following useful result:

Theorem 5. *If A is a triangular matrix, then* $\det A$ *is the product of the entries on the main diagonal of A.*

2 Properties of Determinants

Lay–Lay–McDonald §3.2 pp. 171 – 177

The properties of determinants are governed by row operations. Here are some useful results:

Theorem 6. *Let A be a square matrix.*

1. *If a multiple of one row of A is added to another row to produce a matrix B, then* $\det B = \det A$.
2. *If two rows of A are swapped to produce B, then* $\det B = -\det A$.
3. *If one row of A is multiplied by k to produce B, then* $\det B = k \cdot \det A$.

Suppose a square matrix A has been reduced to an echelon form U by row replacements and row swaps. (This is always possible by the row reduction algorithm.) If there are r swaps, the previous theorem tells us that

$$\det A = (-1)^r \det U.$$

Moreover, since U is in echelon form, it is triangular, and so $\det U$ is the product of the diagonal entries u_{ii}. If A is invertible, the entries u_{ii} are all pivots (because $A \sim I_n$ and the u_{ii} have not been scaled to 1s). Otherwise, at least u_{nn} will be zero, and the product of diagonal entries will be 0. This gives us

$$\det A = \begin{cases} (-1)^r \cdot (\text{product of pivots in } U) & \text{when } A \text{ is invertible} \\ 0 & \text{when } A \text{ is not invertible.} \end{cases}$$

The formula above proves the following theorem:

Theorem 7. *A square matrix A is invertible if and only if* $\det A \neq 0$.

Example 8. *Compute* $\det A$, *where* $A = \begin{bmatrix} 3 & -1 & 2 & -5 \\ 0 & 5 & -3 & -6 \\ -6 & 7 & -7 & 4 \\ -5 & -8 & 0 & 9 \end{bmatrix}$.

Here are some further useful properties of determinants:

Theorem 9. *If A is an $n \times n$ matrix, then* $\det A^T = \det A$.

Theorem 10. *If A and B are $n \times n$ matrices, then* $\det AB = (\det A)(\det B)$.