SKITTLES: Looking Deeper than the Color Coating

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Abstract: The Skittles Lab, where students guess the number of Skittles in a large jar using various statistical strategies, has been an activity in my Math 106 class for about fifteen years. To make more room in the Math 106 curriculum, the Skittles Lab will likely go into semi-retirement after this semester. So I thought this would be a good opportunity to look at the Skittles Lab one last time, but from a more theoretical point of view. There are many interesting theoretical explorations into how to estimate the number of Skittles. In this talk we'll look at two of the most common methods of estimation, the Method of Moments and the Method of Maximum Likelihood, plus we'll look closely at a few estimation strategies that have arisen from lively discussions in Math 106 over the years. These estimation strategies will be compared (how should we comapare them?), and we'll search for an answer to what's the best strategy for guessing the number of Skittles. This talk is particularly geared toward students, and calculus is the only prerequisite (a desire to eat Skittles is a plus!).