

Dear IRE:

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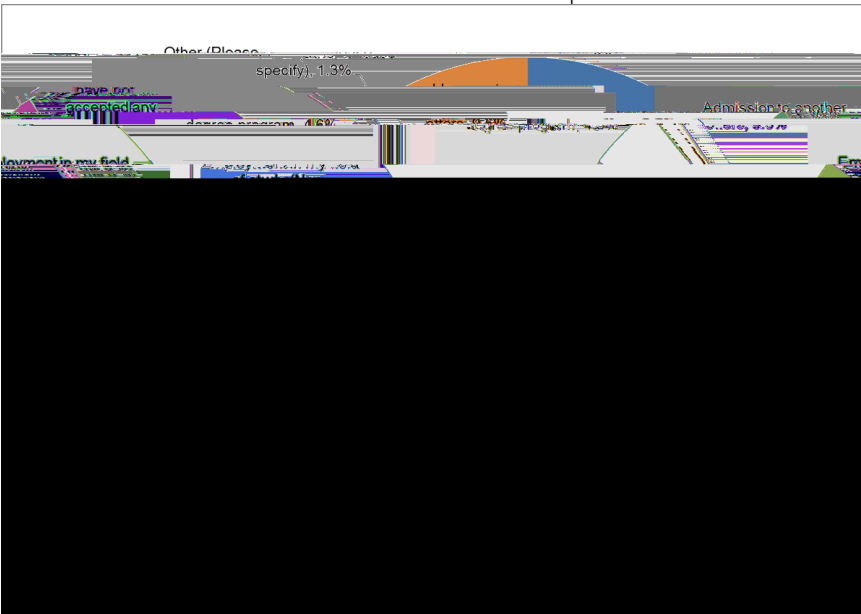
Sincerely, Indecisive about pies or bars

Dear Indecisive:

The answer depends on your data but generally speaking you can use either one. However, bar charts offer a variety of options (i.e., horizontal, stacked, etc.) and allow for a clearer depiction of relationships between data points. Look at the charts below. Both charts display the same data in different ways. Chart 1 shows the reported percentages of accepted offers and the slices in the pie allow you to see the 2 largest groups. Chart 2 being a bar chart allows us to create 2 sets of bars; one representing offers and the other representing accepted offers. The bar chart also allows you to organize the data from largest to smallest. Both charts present the same data in different ways. Conclusion? If you are looking to display a few data points that are substantially different in scale use a pie chart, but if you want some flexibility with presentation and the ability to demonstrate trends with data you are better off with a bar chart.

Sincerely, Team IRE

Chart 1. 2015 WesternU Graduates' Accepted Offers*



Pie charts are...

Best when used with ordinal (ranked) and nominal (demographic) data.

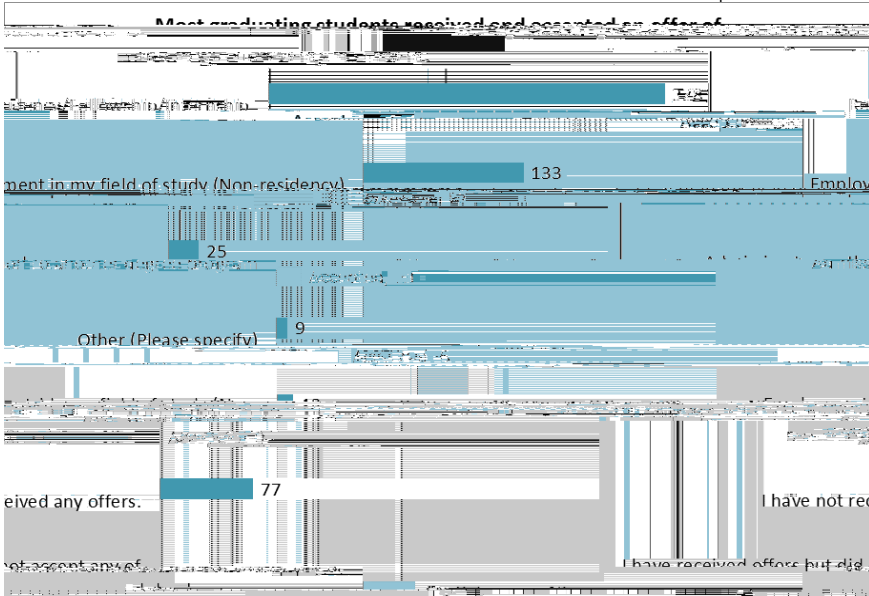
Ideal when you only have a few data points to display (6 or less categories).

Best when a few key data points represent the vast majority of the whole.

Disadvantage

If data differences are subtle it will be difficult to view the distribution.

Chart 2. 2015 WesternU Graduates' Offers and Accepted Offers*



Bar charts are

Best when used with ordinal (ranked) and nominal (demographic) data

Allow you to demonstrate different types of trends or relationships with data that are not easily shown with pie charts.

Can arrange data from large to small

*Actual data from the 2015 Graduating Student Survey was used.

Got a stats/research question? Email us at pkallemeyn@westernu.edu