FOR 112: Chart Guidelines

Chart Basics

1. Keep it simple
2. What are you trying to communicate or accomplish?
3. Include a chart title and appropriate labels
4. For any chart, you can always add a text box or shape with text (icons on the Insert Tab) if it helps tell your chart story better than just the standard chart title and labels.
5. Aim to show trends, not detail.
6. Pay attention to the details (e.g. does your chart title accurately reflect what is on the page)
7. Use a consistent format for multiple charts
8. In this class, avoid 3-D charts (they can easily distort the data)

Chart Types We Will Study

Pie Charts
a. Easy to make, easy to understand
b. Use them to show the relative proportion of numbers that add up to a total
c. They’re good for a single data series
d. They work best when there are a reasonable number of data points in the series (you could also say a reasonable number of slices in the pie)

Column Charts (or Bar Charts)
a. Usually used to compare items side by side
b. They’re good multiple data series (each item compared is a series)
c. Too many columns (bars) may result in an effective chart
d. To help with a chart’s legibility, you can increase/decrease the gap width and the overlap of the bars.

Line Charts
a. Good for showing trends where data has been sampled at continuous intervals
b. Time is the most common category x-axis on a line chart
c. Comparisons can be made by using more than one line on the chart. In other words, adding a data series. CAUTION: More than 3-5 lines will reduce effectiveness.

Scatter Chart (also known as an X-Y Chart)
• Simple X-Y charts take two columns of data and plot a single data series consisting of data points that are derived from each pair of values
• Change the order of the columns, if you like, because the first column will be assumed to be your x-axis values.