

The College Transition Collaborative (CTC)

**Identifying and Remediating Points of Psychological Friction in
College to Promote Equity and Success**

Greg Walton
Stanford University

Chris Smith
CTC

Kurt Boniecki
University of Central
Arkansas

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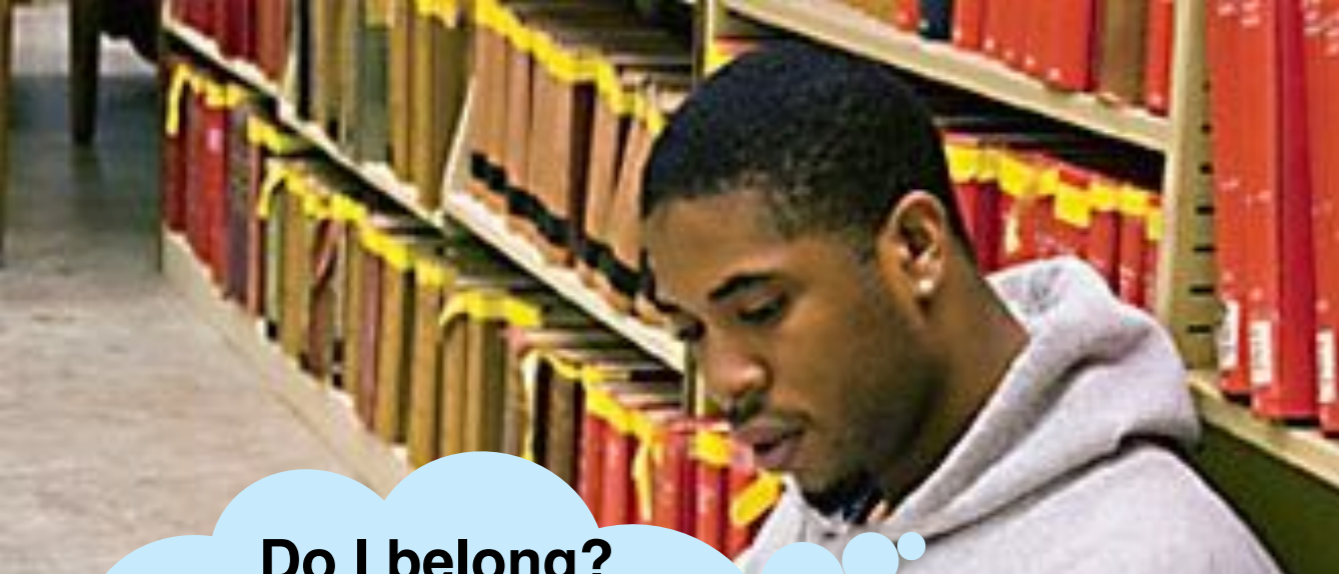
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Game Plan

- Psychologically “wise” interventions to improve postsecondary achievement (Greg Walton)
- The College Transition Collaborative (Chris Smith)
- CTC at the University of Central Arkansas (Kurt Boniecki)

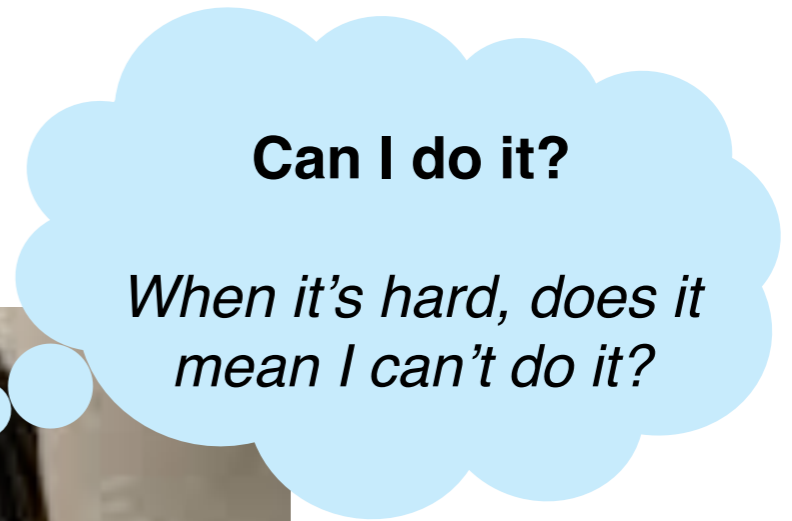
Some worries students have in school





Do I belong?

When I feel lonely (or disrespected, etc.), does it mean I don't belong?



Can I do it?

When it's hard, does it mean I can't do it?



Does it matter?

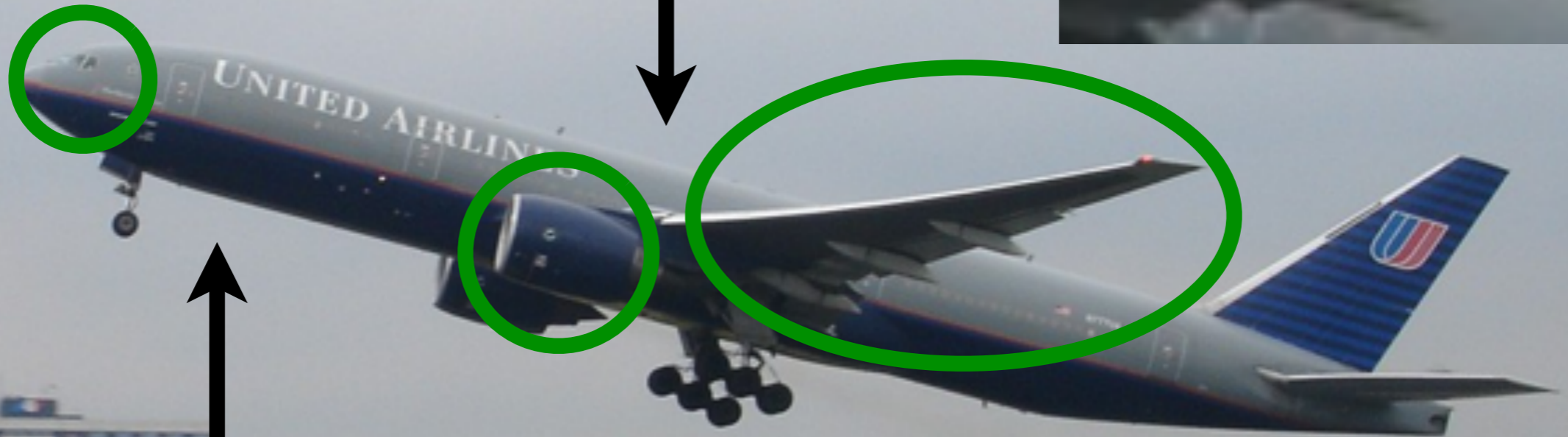
When it's boring, does it mean there's no reason to try?

They're Magic*

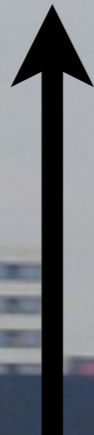
- #1 – They're magic ... tricks.
 - *These effects can't be real*
- #2 – They're magic ... bullets.
 - *Scale everywhere immediately without delay*

* They're not magic (Yeager & Walton, 2011)

Students' worries about belonging,
about fixed intelligence, about
stereotypes



Opportunities for learning;
Teachers' parents', and students'
motivation for students to do well
in school



Psychologically Wise Interventions

(Walton & Wilson, in press)

- Not programs or skill-building
- Address subjective-meanings
 - Most proximate driver of behavior
 - Readily become recursive—behaviors can reconfirm meanings to drive lasting change



**Meanings are malleable, but they
can become fixed, like *clay***

Especially when they become “baked into” the
structure of people’s lives

How to help a child struggling in school?

A young girl with dark hair and a blue patterned headband is resting her head on a stack of books. She has a thoughtful or slightly sad expression, looking off to the side. The background is a blurred classroom setting with colorful posters on the wall.

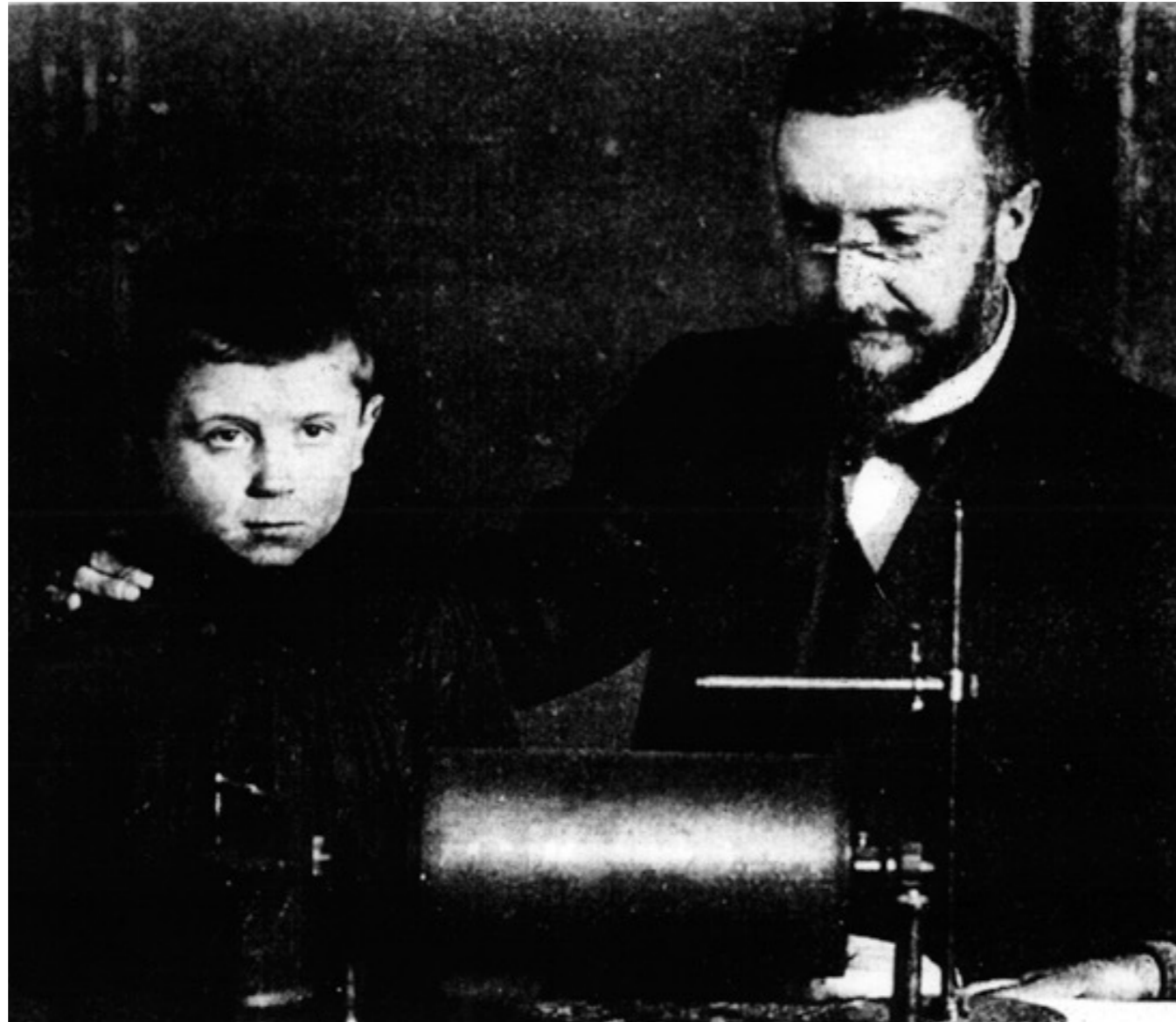
- 1. *Situation-centric approach:*** Provide new learning resources
- 2. *Person-centric approach:*** Make her more intelligent (e.g., special training program, e.g., working memory training)
- 3. *Psychologically wise interventions:*** Help her make sense of academic struggles in adaptive ways

Meanings Arise from Sociocultural Contexts

1. **The world:** Personal experiences, information, and ideas in the social and cultural context
2. **Perspectives and contingencies rooted in personal and social identity,** e.g., awareness of negative stereotypes and the risks they pose

A Question of Belonging

From Alfred Binet



“After the illness, the remedy”

-Alfred Binet (1857-1911)

From Alfred Binet to Lewis Terman



Lewis Terman
(1877-1956)

Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction which is concrete and practical. They cannot master, but they can often be made efficient workers, able to look out for themselves. There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should not be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding.

-Lewis M. Terman

The Measurement of Intelligence (pp. 91-92, 1916)

School Desegregation, and Resegregation



Contexts Raise Questions;

Am I the kind of person who can go to college and succeed in America?

Contexts Raise Questions;



Sonia Sotomayor

[At Princeton, I felt like] a visitor landing in an alien land ... I have spent my years since Princeton, while at law school, and in my various professional jobs, not feeling completely a part of the worlds I inhabit.

- Sonia Sotomayor (memoir)

Race matters, because of the slights, the snickers, the silent judgments that reinforce that most crippling of thoughts: 'I do not belong here.'

- Sonia Sotomayor (in dissent)

Contexts Raise Questions; People Construct Answers Through Experience, Even From Subtle Cues



Michelle Robinson

When I first arrived at school as a first-generation college student, I didn't know anyone on campus except my brother. I didn't know how to pick the right classes or find the right buildings. I didn't even bring the right size sheets for my dorm room bed. I didn't realize those beds were so long. So I was a little overwhelmed and a little isolated.

-Michelle Obama (2014)

Belonging Uncertainty

(Walton & Cohen, 2007)

Intervention Approach #1

**Address High-Level Beliefs People Use to Make
Sense of Many Aspects of the World**

Social-Belonging: From Fixed Quality to Process

Yes/No

- Do I belong or not?
- Does this event mean I don't belong?

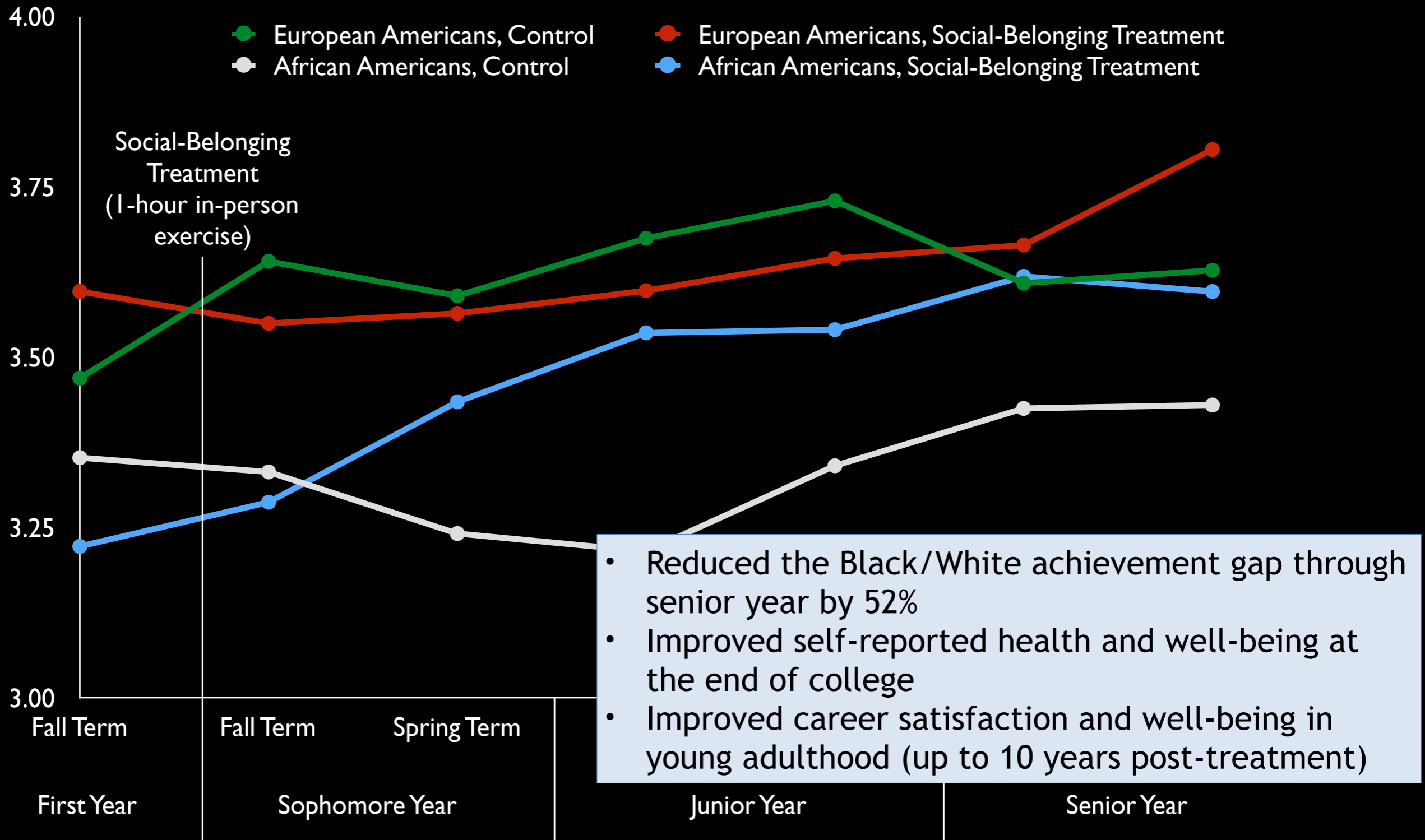
Process

- It takes time and effort
- How will I develop my belonging?

The Social Belonging Intervention

Stories + “Saying-Is-Believing”

Highly Selective College College Grade Point Average by Year



A Deleterious Interpretation of Social Adversity

Everyone is going out without me, and they didn't consider me when making their plans. At times like this I feel like I don't belong here and that I'm alienated.

-Black female, control condition

A Deleterious Interpretation of Social Adversity

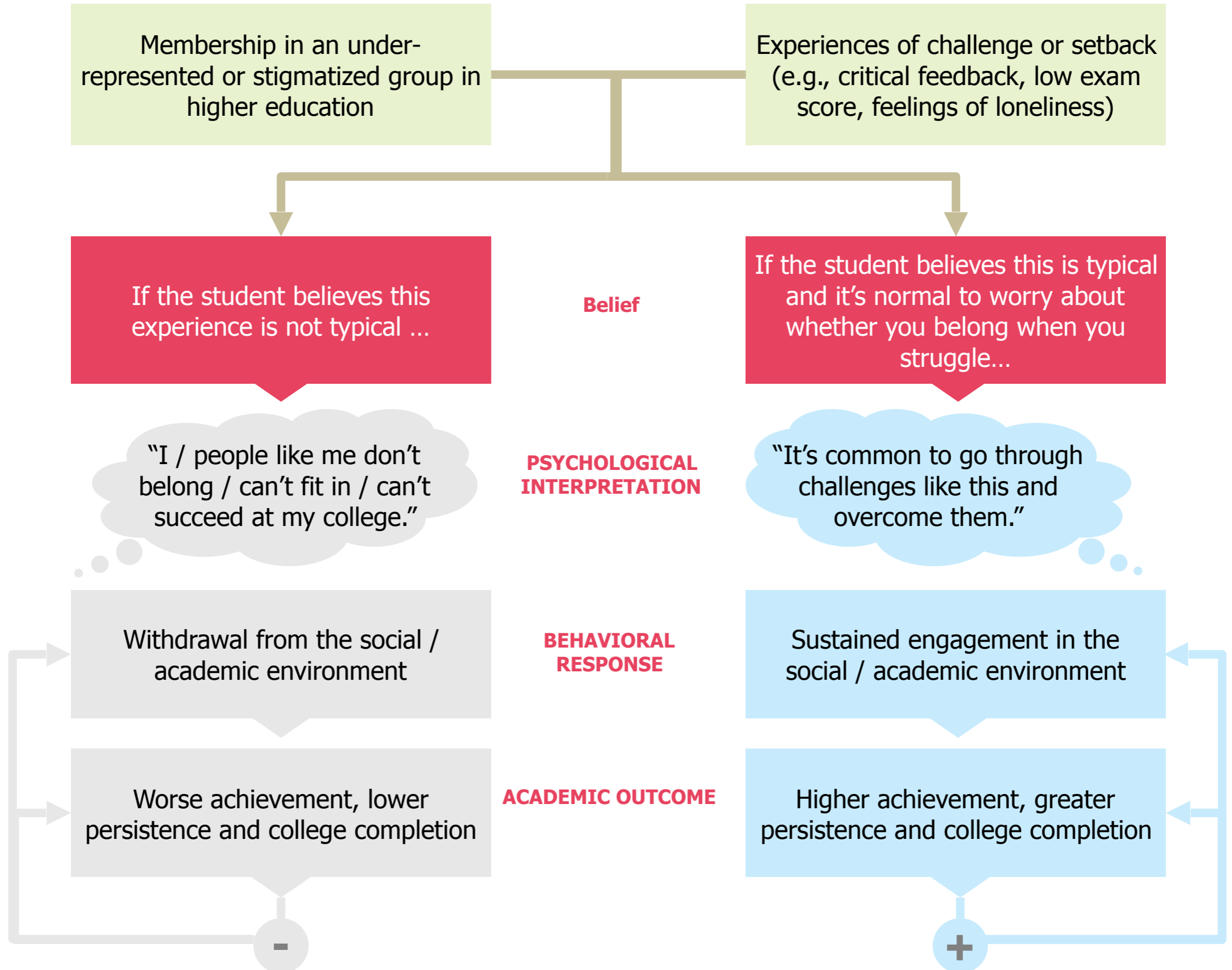
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-Black female, control condition

Statistical mediation:

This *change in social construal* statistically mediated the 3-year gain in academic performance.

How does it work? A model from multiple studies



Preparatory Intervention

(Yeager, Walton, Brady et al., 2016)

- Can we give students helpful theories about challenges in the college transition in advance?
- Potential for large-scale dissemination
 - Possible to reach entire cohorts of students through online pre-enrollment materials



**You're finishing high school.
You're going to college.
You're excited.**

And you probably still have lots of questions about what to expect.

This survey will give you an opportunity to learn more about current students' experiences of going to college.

And because we value your point of view, we'll ask you to share your personal thoughts and feelings about going to college too. The findings of this survey will then be shared anonymously with future high school graduates like you so they'll know what to expect.

Survey Powered By [Qualtrics](#)

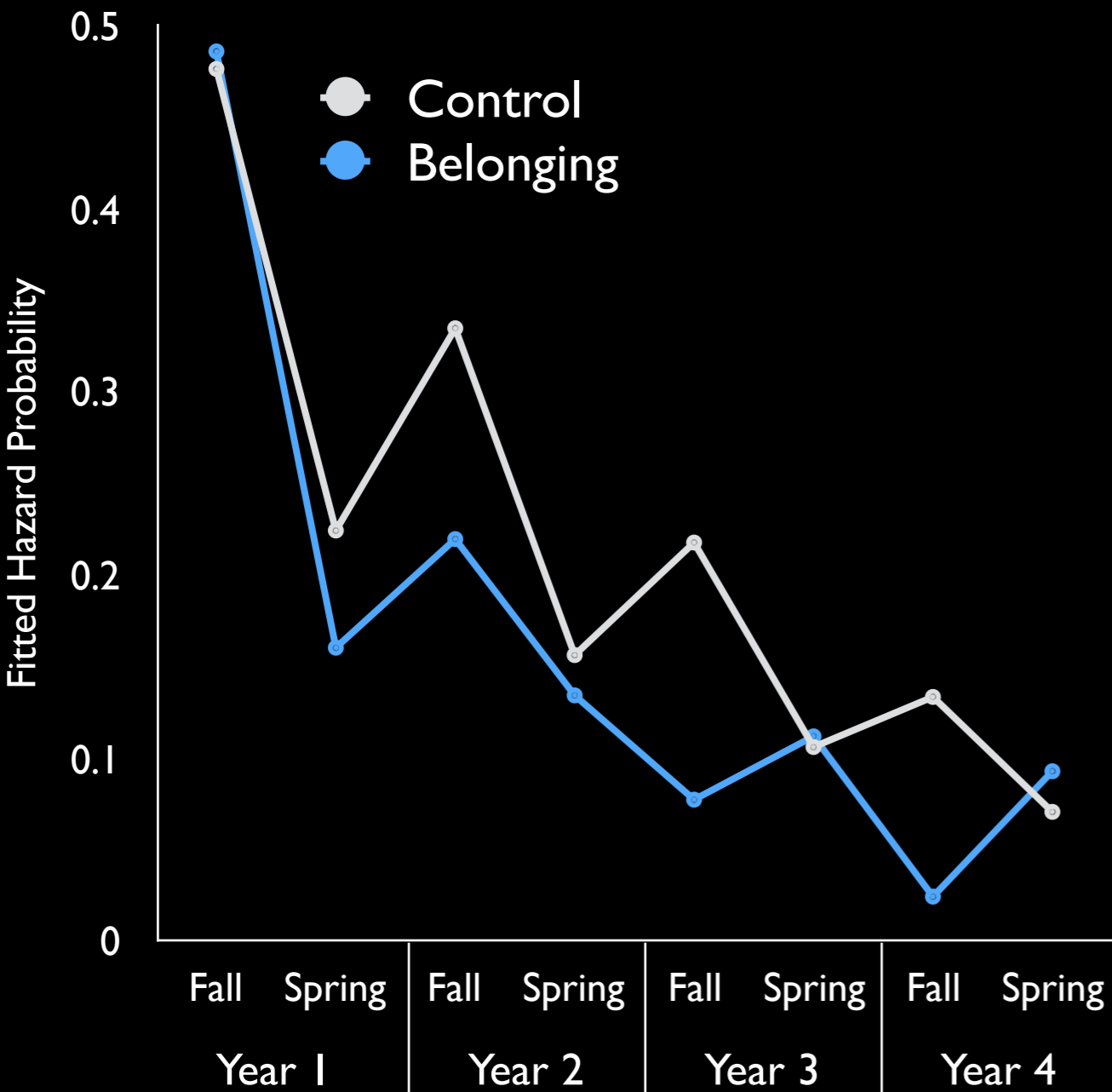
“Saying is Believing”

The initial worries about belonging to a college are likely to go away over time because once the student becomes more involve with social groups on campus that interest them they later found friends with the same interest as them. Also when student understand that they can go to office hours to meet with their professor to discuss a situation, they later feel that the professors are there for them and want them to succeed...

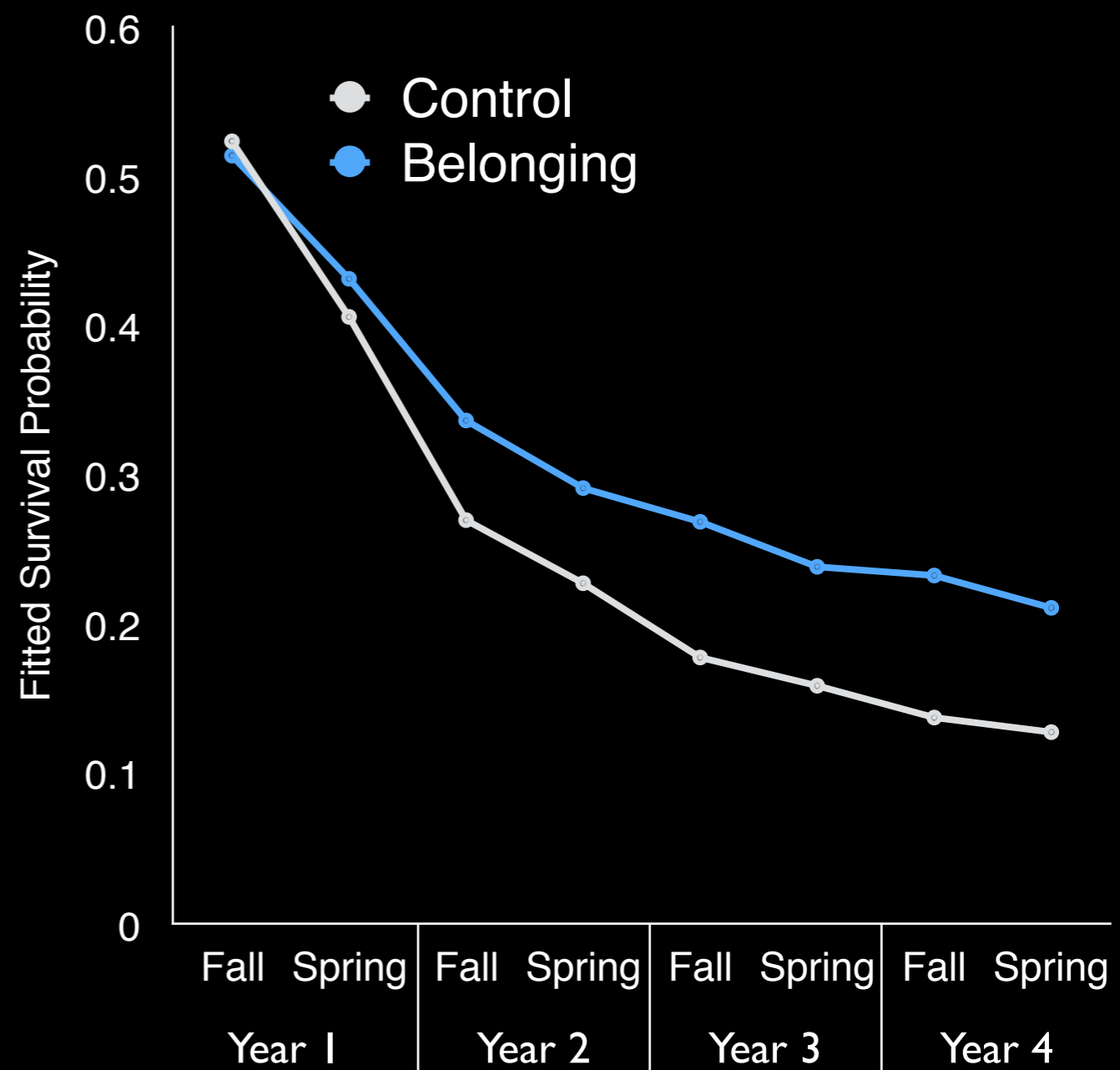
-- Treated African American Female

Retention in a 4-Year College

Probability of Going Below Full-Time Enrollment in a Given Semester



Probability of Remaining Full-Time Enrolled in a Given Semester



With Shannon Brady, Parker Goyer, David Yeager, and others;
For first year outcomes, see Yeager, Walton, Brady et al., 2016



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Leadership



CTC Partners



The **Joyce** Foundation



30+

schools



Ohio Wesleyan University



40K+

students



University of Pittsburgh



40+

liaisons



~300+

Additional schools have expressed interest



Learn more, get tools:

collegetransitioncollaborative.org/

Intervention Approach #2

**Anticipate and Remedy Pejorative Meanings
Likely to Arise in Specific Situations**

Academic Probation



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Geoff Cohen



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The Problem

- Director of Undergraduate Advising:
 - Most students placed on academic probation don't return to good academic standing
- Purpose of probation
 - Due notice
 - Also: Intended to be helpful for students

Probation Notification Letter

Dear Kurt,

After reviewing your academic record, I write to advise you that you have not met the minimum requirements for satisfactory academic progress set forth by the Faculty Senate. As a result, you will be placed on academic Probation effective Spring 2012-13. Let me make very clear that Probation at Stanford is a warning, nothing more, and will not appear on your official transcript. Its purpose is to alert you to academic difficulties in time to identify those areas where you may be experiencing problems and determine how best to address them.

We also recognize that success is not always achieved along a predictable path. Placement on academic Probation is a part of the University's commitment to offer students support for—and guidance through—whatever difficulties they may have experienced. To this end, you must meet as soon as possible, but not later than [date] with an Academic Advisor to discuss your situation and develop a plan that will ensure your continued academic success. A hold has been placed on your registration effective immediately which may be released only after you have met with the UAR Advisor.

...

Please take full advantage of the advising resources in UAR. Our professional staff is available for immediate assistance during times of difficulty as well as ongoing advice and counsel throughout your undergraduate career. Experience shows that early and frequent consultation with advisors contributes greatly to future academic success and satisfaction, and our advisors look forward to working with you.

Key Purposes: Lost in Communication?

*6 point scales from
1 = "not a purpose" to 6 = "a very important purpose"*

Admin Mean Student Mean Diff

Warn students that they are not meeting academic expectations 5.43 5.49 -0.06

Serve as a "wake-up call" 5.21 5.18 0.03

Comply with federal and state regulations 4.17 4.23 -.06

Key Purposes: Lost in Communication?

<i>6 point scales from 1 = "not a purpose" to 6 = "a very important purpose"</i>	<i>Admin Mean</i>	<i>Student Mean</i>	<i>Diff</i>
Connect students with helpful resources	5.57	3.87	1.70
Warn students that they are not meeting academic expectations	5.43	5.49	-0.06
Let students know that staff/faculty are concerned and care about them	5.34	3.23	2.11
Serve as a "wake-up call"	5.21	5.18	0.03
Motivate students	4.96	3.81	1.15
Comply with federal and state regulations	4.17	4.23	-.06

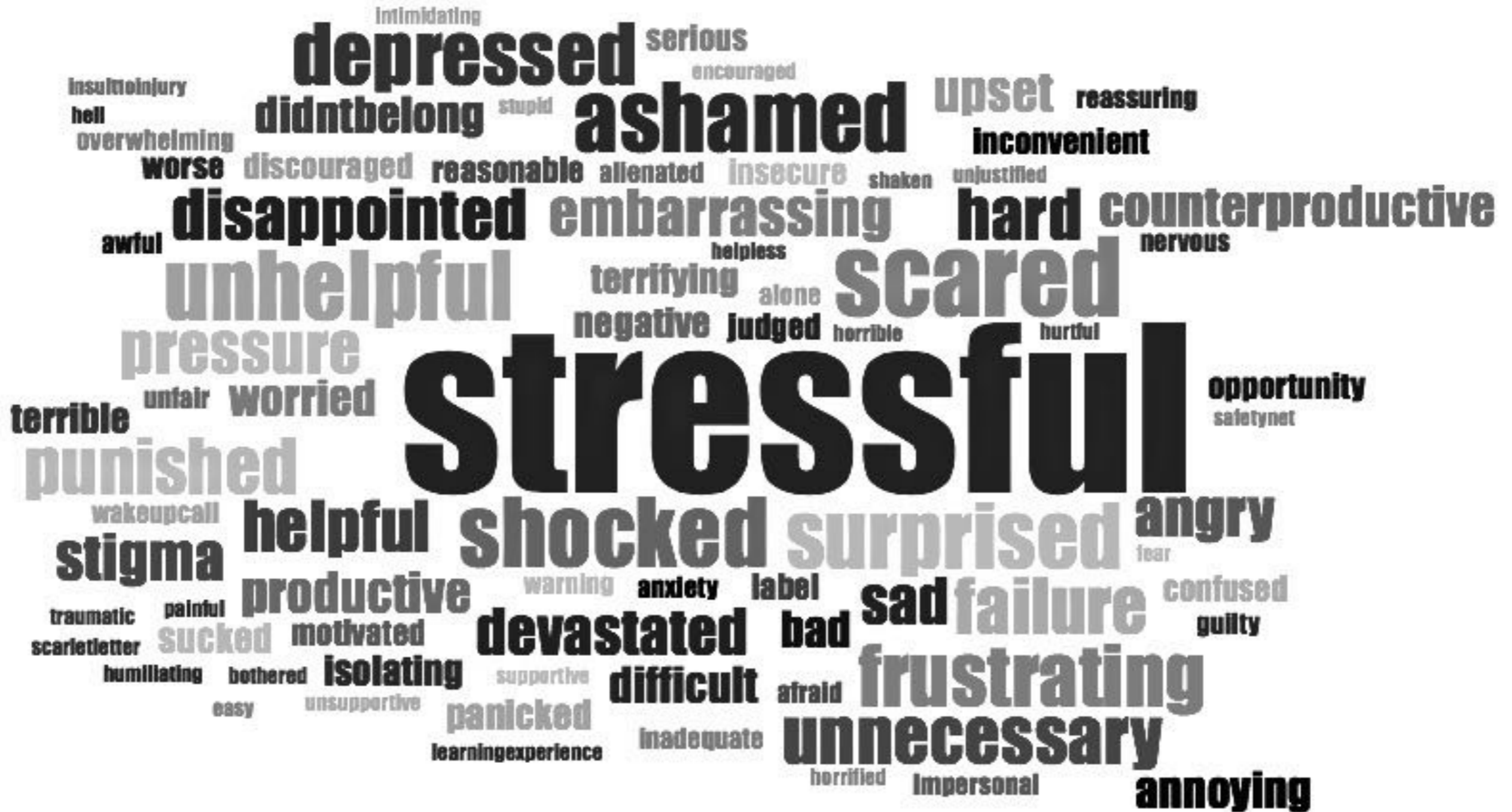
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Identify students who can't be successful	2.72	3.48	-0.76
Punish students	1.64	3.50	-1.86

What is Probation Like for Students?

- 155 students previously or currently on probation
 - 67% current students, 33% graduated or left university
 - 50% men, 50% women
 - 23% Asian, 19% Black, 17% Latino, 6% Native, 43% White
 - 28% first-generation students
- Responded to online survey: “Tell your story...”

Survey: Students said...



Survey: Students said...

- I felt like a **failure** when I got my probation.
- I felt incredibly **alone. No one seems to struggle**, or at least not to that degree....**I felt like I couldn't tell anyone...**
- Being on probation **sucked. I lied so many times**....For some time after getting the letter, I felt that I **didn't belong**. I had already felt that way coming in, but that letter seemed to confirm that. For a minute I wanted to dropout...
- Being put on probation was **hell**.
- **I met some great people** during the process of being placed on academic probation...I am **thankful** [School] has a **strong safety net** to catch students who are struggling, whatever the reason. I really **appreciate** all the advisors at [School] who **really care** about student well-being. **I could not have finished my degree without all of you.**

Revise the Letter

- Frame probation as process not a label
 - Placement on academic Probation... -> The process for academic probation...
- Communicate “you’re not the only one”
 - [nothing] -> You should also know that you are not alone in experiencing these difficulties.
- Acknowledge specific reasons
 - Whatever difficulties -> There are many reasons students enter the academic probation process. These reasons can include personal, financial, health, family, or other issues.
- Offer hope for returning to good standing
 - [nothing] -> By working with their advisors, many [students on probation] leave the process and continue a successful career at [School].

Standard **Revised**

Include Student Perspectives

When I failed an important math class, I was devastated. If anything, getting the probation notice made me feel worse. I thought I was the only one having a hard time. Eventually, I got up the courage to talk to my RA....He told me, 'You'd be surprised how many times I've had this conversation. Every time a person walks in thinking they are the only one, but really, lots of students struggle.' ... I learned something important in the process, about how to face up to challenges, to reach out to others for help, and find a way forward.

-“Michael,” Junior

How Did Students Respond?

Effect Sizes (Cohen's <i>d</i>)	Elite Univ. Between S	Elite Univ. Within S	State Univ. Between S
Less ashamed	0.44*	0.34*	0.43*
Less stigmatized	0.77**	0.73**	0.22†
Less likely to consider dropping out	0.41*	0.44**	0.30**

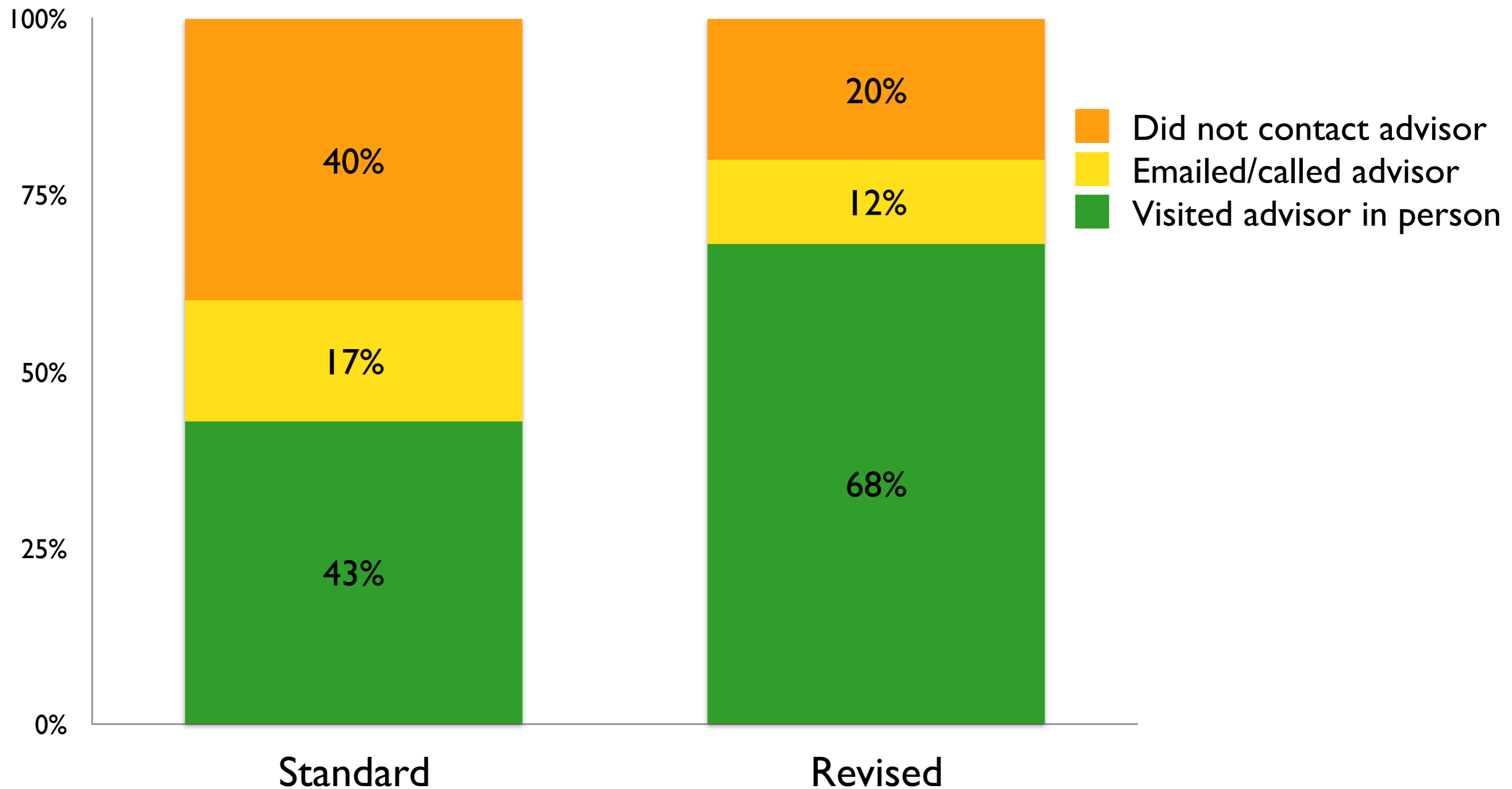
† $p = .06$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

**In the within-subjects study,
78.8% of students recommend the revised letter**

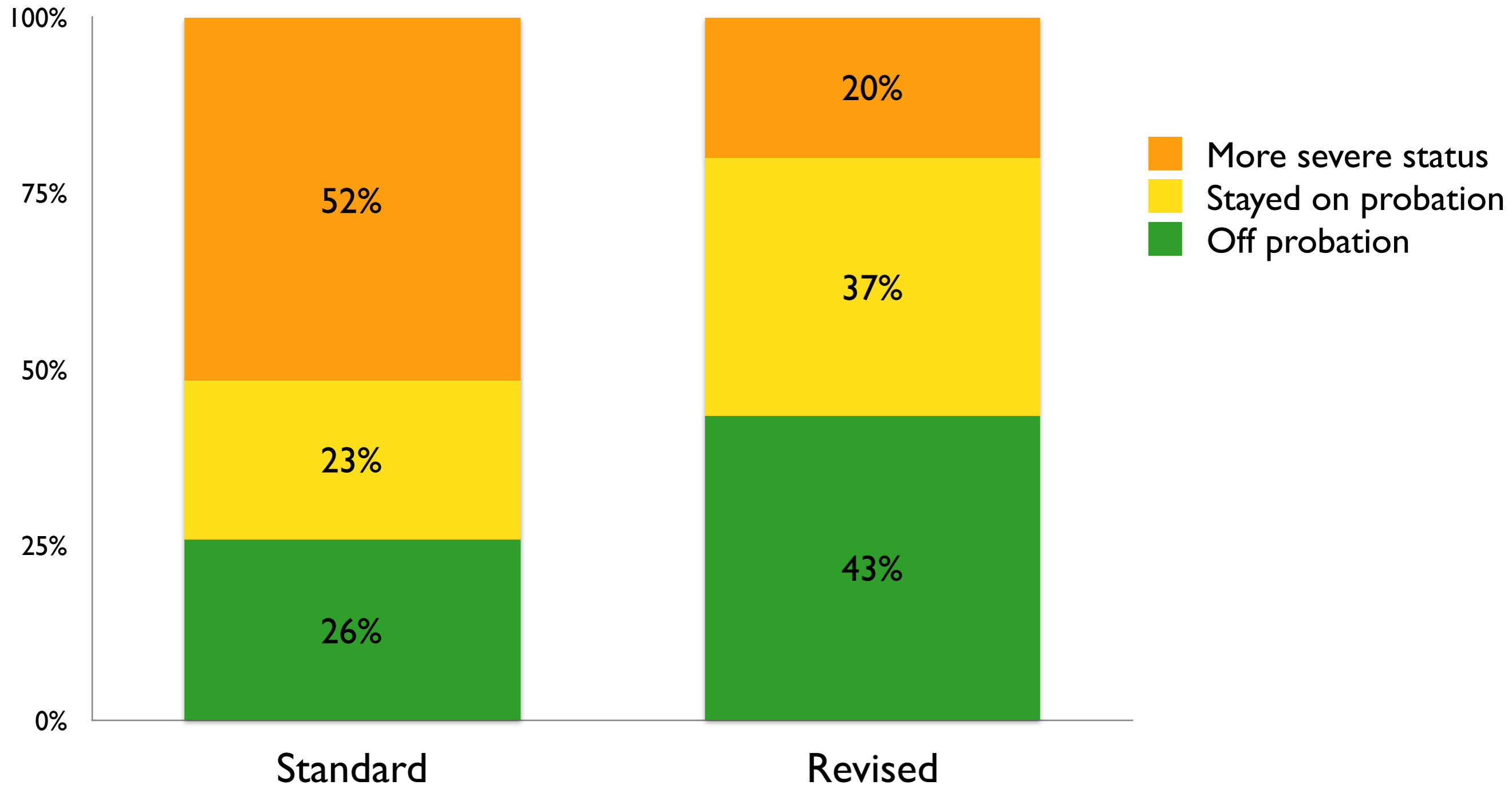
Academic Recovery

- 61 students being placed on probation by the university
 - 21% freshmen, 33% sophomores, 18% juniors, 28% seniors
 - 70% men, 30% women
 - 18% Asian, 12% Black, 20% Latino, 7% Native, 38% White
 - Criterion: 5% low GPA, 95% insufficient units
- Receive the standard letter or the revised letter (randomized)

Did students contact an advisor soon (within 3 weeks) after receiving the letter?



A year later: Were students off probation?



A win for psychological science, and for Stanford

Shannon—

We have rolled out the revised probation letter to all students.

So no need to randomize again. The new letter is THE letter.

CTC-Student Academic Standing Success (SASS) Team

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Scaling

- **Version 1.0: Iterative design and revision process at 6 new partner schools**
 - Tell your probation story
 - Scenario experiments comparing old versus revised letter (we've now conducted 28)
 - Ask students about the letter
 - Randomized controlled field trials at 6 new schools
- **Version 2.0: Administrator toolkit (n=120 administrators)**
 - ~2 hr online self-paced module + resources
 - Draft-a-Letter Tool scaffolds letter development with core psychological principles (e.g., process not label...)
 - Assessing administrators' beliefs, the quality of the letter they create for their school, whether it is sent to students, and their feedback on the Toolkit

Game Plan

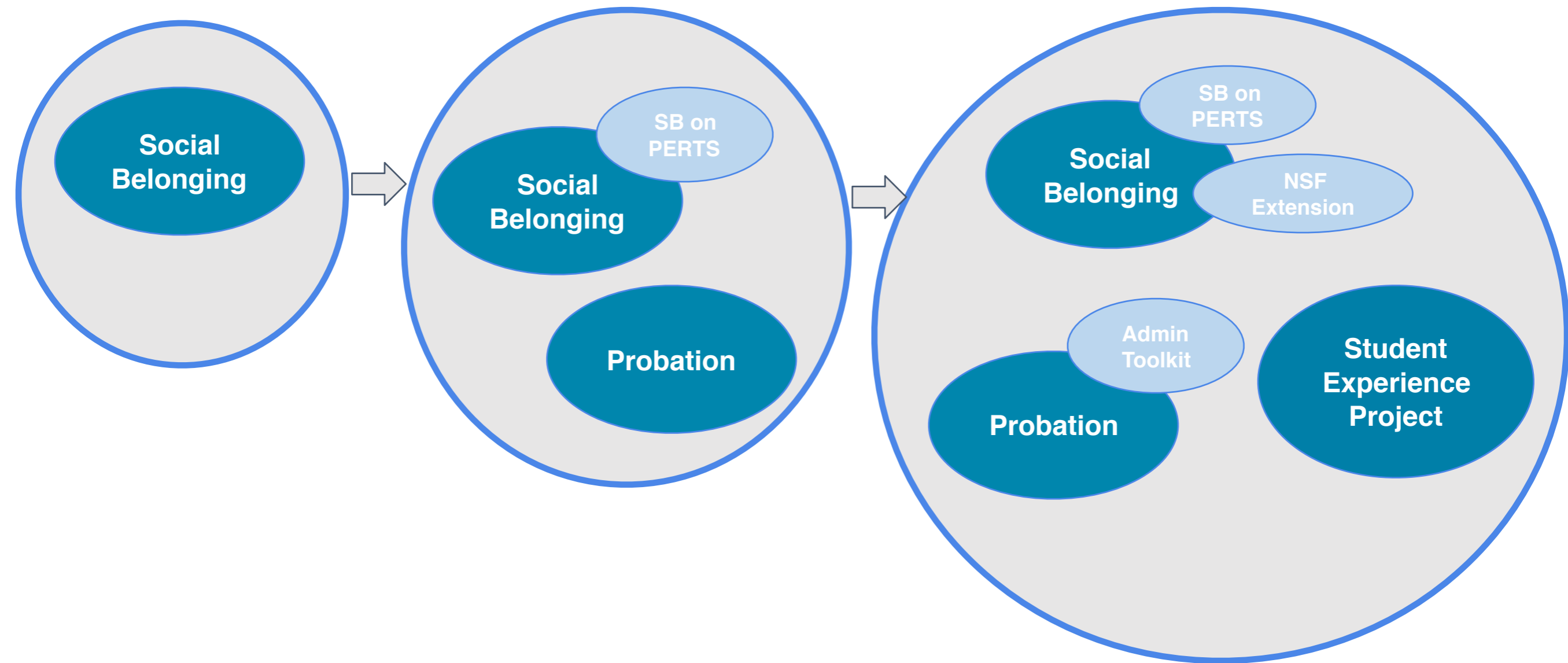
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The College Transition Collaborative: Our Growth as an Organization

2014-2015

2016-2017

2018



We can intervene at a variety of points to address the psychological friction students experience and support their resilience and success.

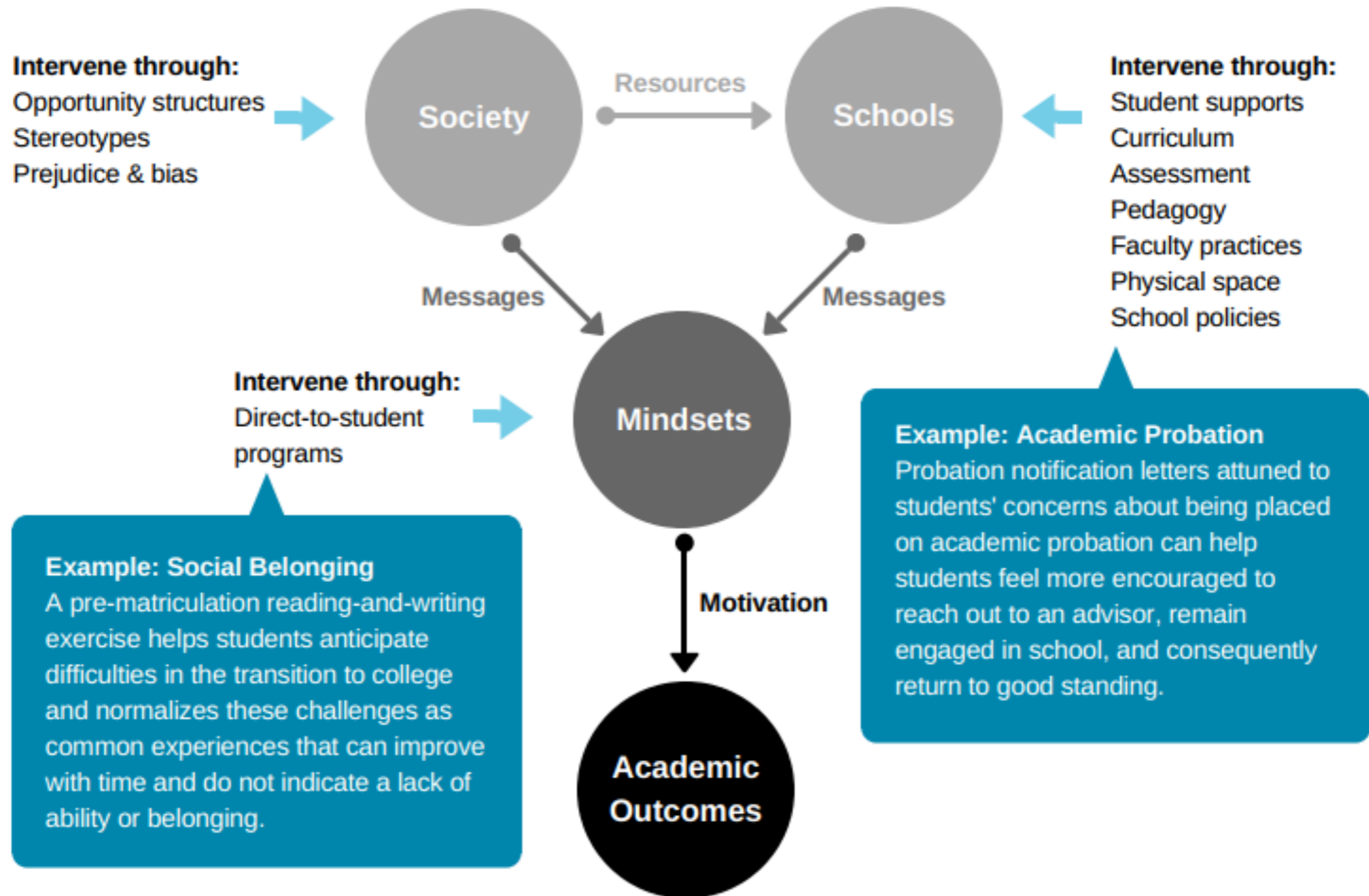


Image adapted from diagram designed by the Mindset Scholars Network

Through collaborative partnerships between practitioners and researchers, we can identify points of intervention with the greatest potential for student impact.

Psychological Theory + Administrator Perspectives + Student Perspectives + Institutional Data

Evidence-Based, Psychologically-Attuned Programs and Practices

Game Plan

- Psychologically “wise” interventions to improve postsecondary achievement (Greg Walton)
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- **CTC at the University of Central Arkansas (Kurt Boniecki)**

CTC-UCA Partnership

2014

- Focus Groups
- Intervention Customization
- Historical Data Analysis

2015-2016

- Cohort 1 Implementation
- Cohort 1 Preliminary Results

2016-17

- Cohort 2 Implementation
- Cohort 2 Preliminary Results
- Cohort 1 Data

2018 and Beyond

- Long-Term Implementation
- Opportunity for continued data sharing & learning

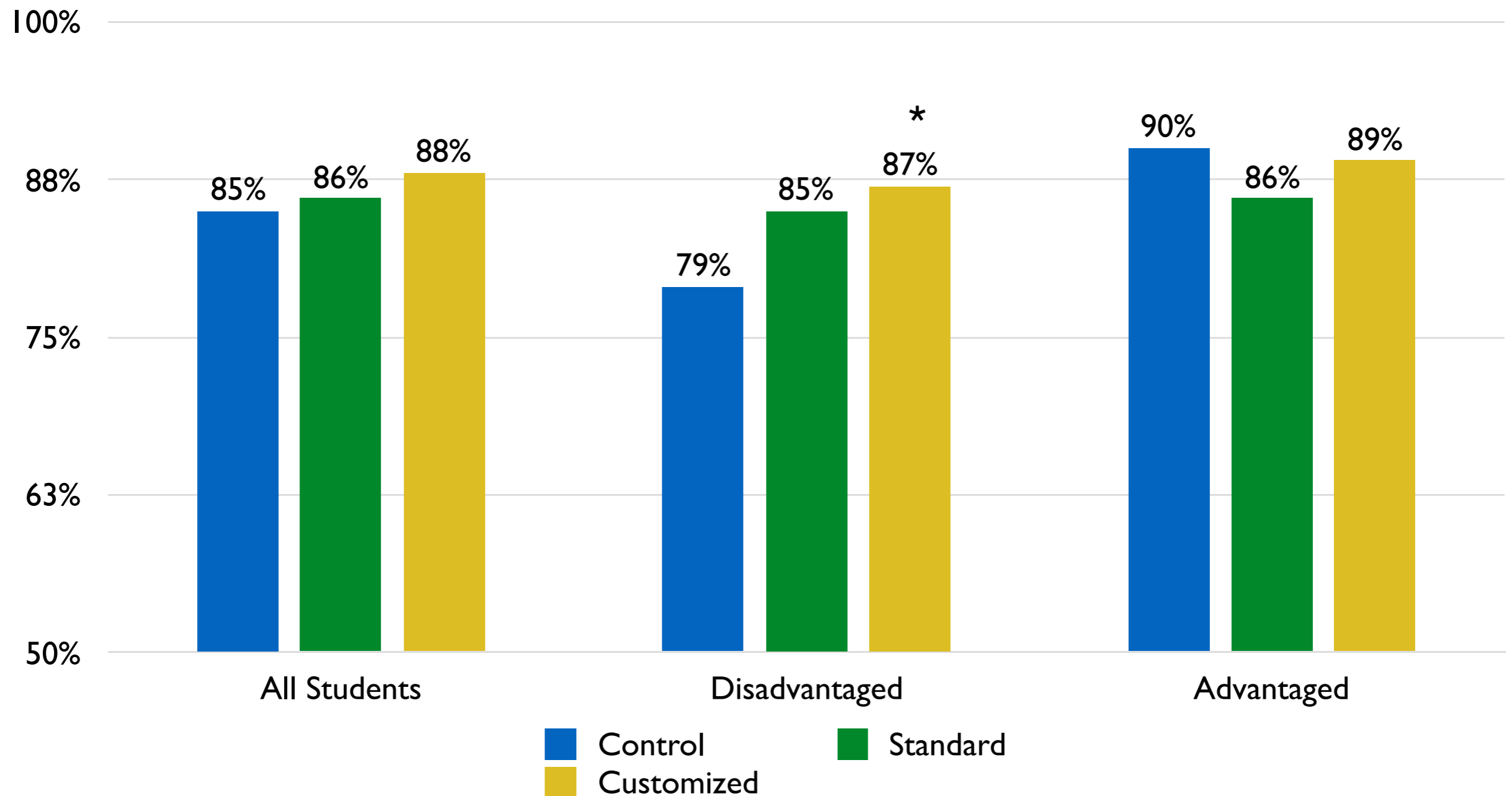
UCA's Results (So Far)

Participation in 2015 and 2016 Summer Interventions

Stage	2015		2016	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Incoming Freshmen Invited	2,092	100	1,825	100
Opened the Intervention	1,387	66.3	1,024	56.1
Started Treatment Materials	1,167	55.8	823	45.1
Finished Intervention	869	41.5	632	34.6
Finished Post-Intervention Questions	858	41	607	33.3

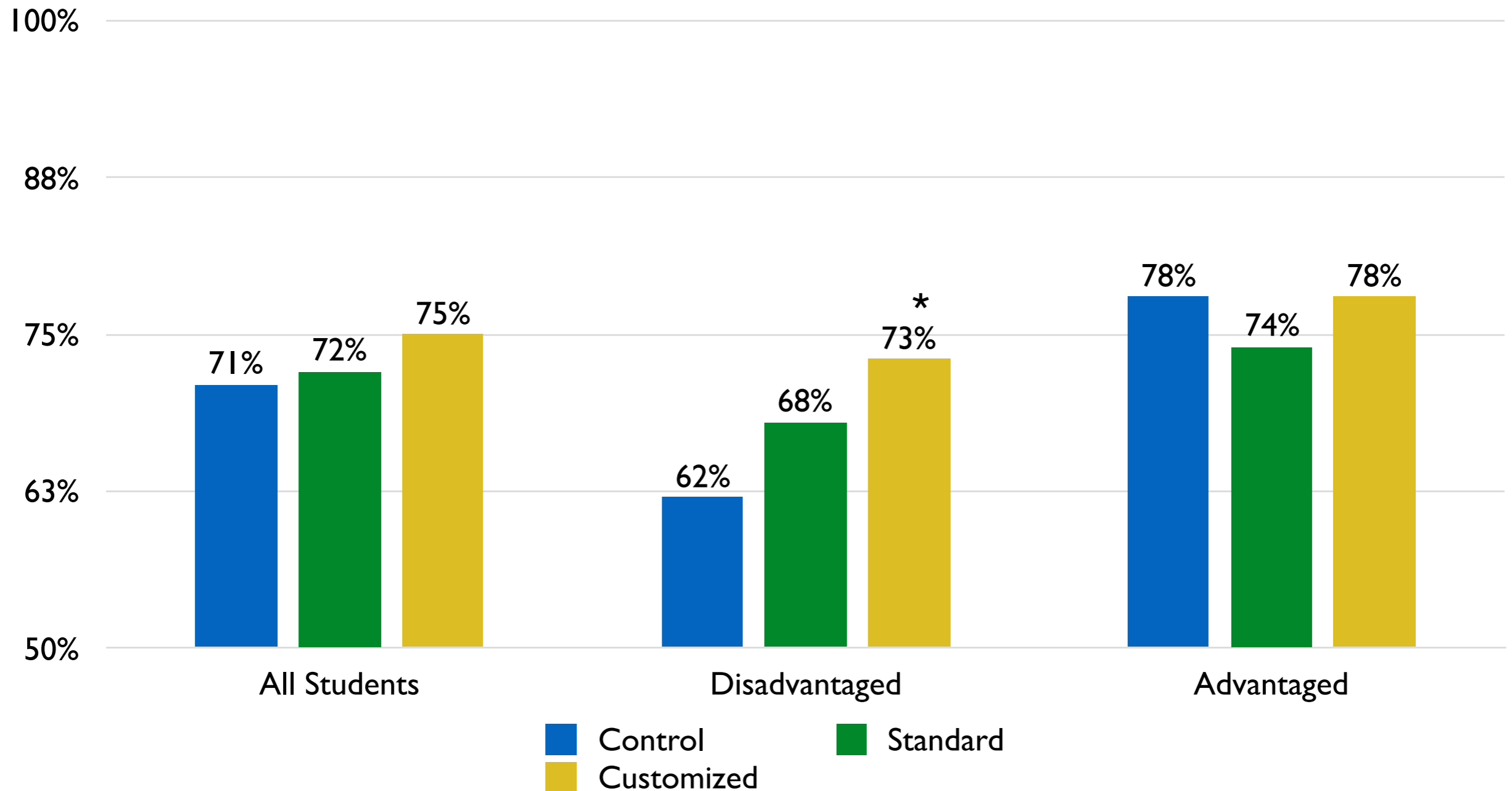
UCA's Results (So Far)

Fall First-Year Full-Time Completion



UCA's Results (So Far)

First-Year Full-Time Completion



UCA's Results (So Far)

- **Over 90% of students in the intervention conditions reported learning something from the interventions.**
- **What did they learn?**
 - *I learned that every one feels the same way going into College, feelings of confusion and doubt, but grow as they progress in College. I learned that I will grow in my studies and overall intellect here at UCA. Finally, I learned that UCA is home.*
 - *I learned that everyone is nervous about going to college but if we step out of our comfort zone than we can feel right at home at UCA.*
 - *I learned that there is a lot that is going to change, but it is okay because everyone else is going through the same change. I have no reason to worry because I will fit once I get used to it.*

UCA's Results (So Far)

- **Anticipated growth in belonging**
 - All students in either treatment reported greater anticipated growth in social belonging compared to students in the control condition.
- **Social Integration**
 - Students from disadvantaged backgrounds in the customized condition reported higher levels of social integration compared to students in the control condition.

UCA's Conclusions

- **Strengths**
 - Low cost and easy to implement
 - Significant effect on full-time completion rates of disadvantaged students
 - More campus attention to how we communicate to students and how it may affect their sense of social belonging (e.g., probation letters)

UCA's Conclusions

- **Challenges**
 - Response rates are lower than desired
 - Trending but nonsignificant effects on first and second year GPA (these effects may strengthen over time)
 - No effect on retention (yet)

UCA's Conclusions

- **Opportunities**

- Long-term implementation; shorter version to increase response rates
- More analyses to conduct; effects can emerge over time
- Continued partnership with the CTC (e.g., NSF support and beta-testing probation letter)
- Develop other methods for increasing social belonging (e.g., orientation videos, class assignments)

