

# FROM COLLEGE INTENDING TO COLLEGE ATTENDING: Strategies to mitigate summer melt

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This is joint work with Benjamin L. Castleman (University of Virginia)

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# Revisiting the concept of summer melt

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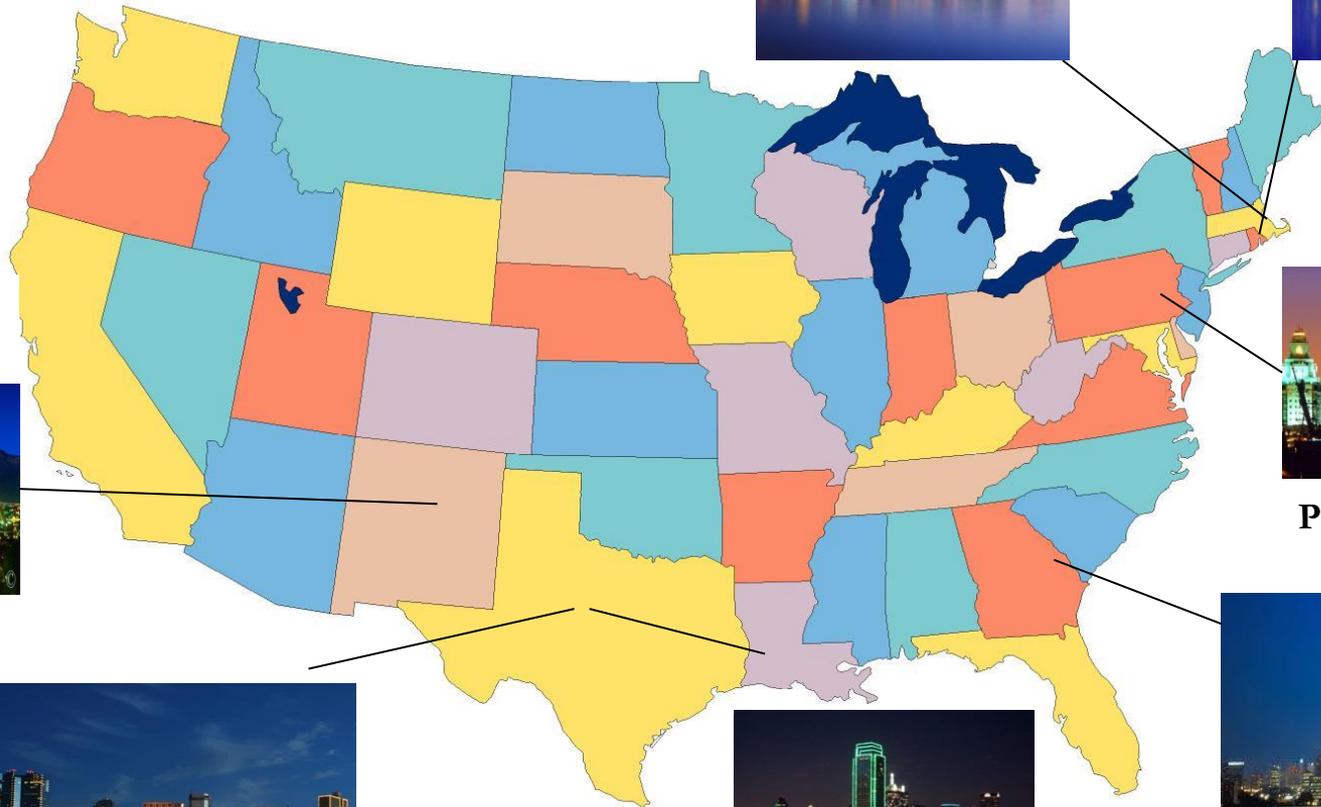
*Summer melt* is a term traditionally used by college admissions officers to describe the phenomenon that students pay a deposit to attend a particular college but do not matriculate *at that college* the following fall.

Here, we use *summer melt* to describe the phenomenon that college-intending students fail to enroll in college *at all* in the fall following high school graduation.

# Magnitude of the summer melt problem

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*Percentages indicate the share of college-intending students that do not enroll anywhere in the fall following high school graduation*



**Boston, MA**  
21%



**Providence, RI**  
33%



**Philadelphia, PA**  
32%



**Fulton County**  
22%

**Dallas, TX**  
28%



**Albuquerque, NM**  
29%



**Fort Worth, TX**  
44%



# The summer melt problem

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Even after being accepted to college and choosing where to attend, low-income students face many hurdles to college enrollment...

FAFSA verification

Award letter review

Supplementary loan applications

Tuition payment plan set-up

Unanticipated fees (orientation, housing, etc.)

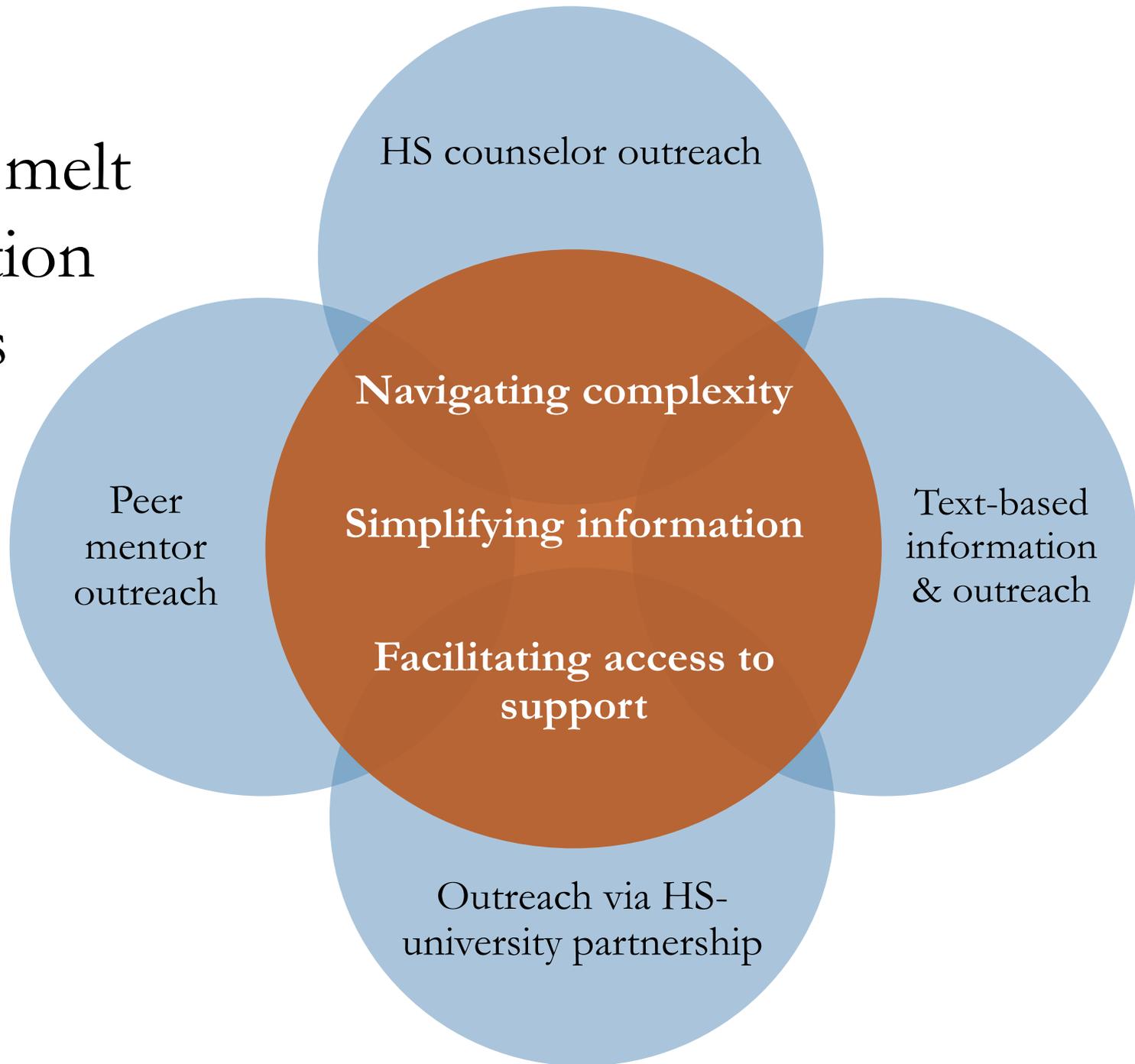
Orientation and placement test registration

Housing applications

Health insurance applications and waivers

...but typically have little access to professional help.

# Summer melt intervention strategies



# Sample text messages

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**Message purpose:** Remind students to register for orientation

Hi **Sylvia**! Have you signed up for the **TWU** orientation? Last one is **7/15**. Need to register? <http://1233443.org>. Need help? Reply MTG to talk w/ an advisor

**Message purpose:** Offer to help with financial aid application or award letter

Hi **Sylvia**! Need help w/ the FAFSA? Questions about your fin. aid award letter, or need more aid? Reply MTG to meet with a **DISD** counselor

# Research design to understand impact

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Advisors advertised the availability of summer support to students prior to high school graduation

## **Control group:**

Did not receive proactive outreach

## **Treatment group:**

Received proactive outreach via advisor, peer mentor or text throughout the summer

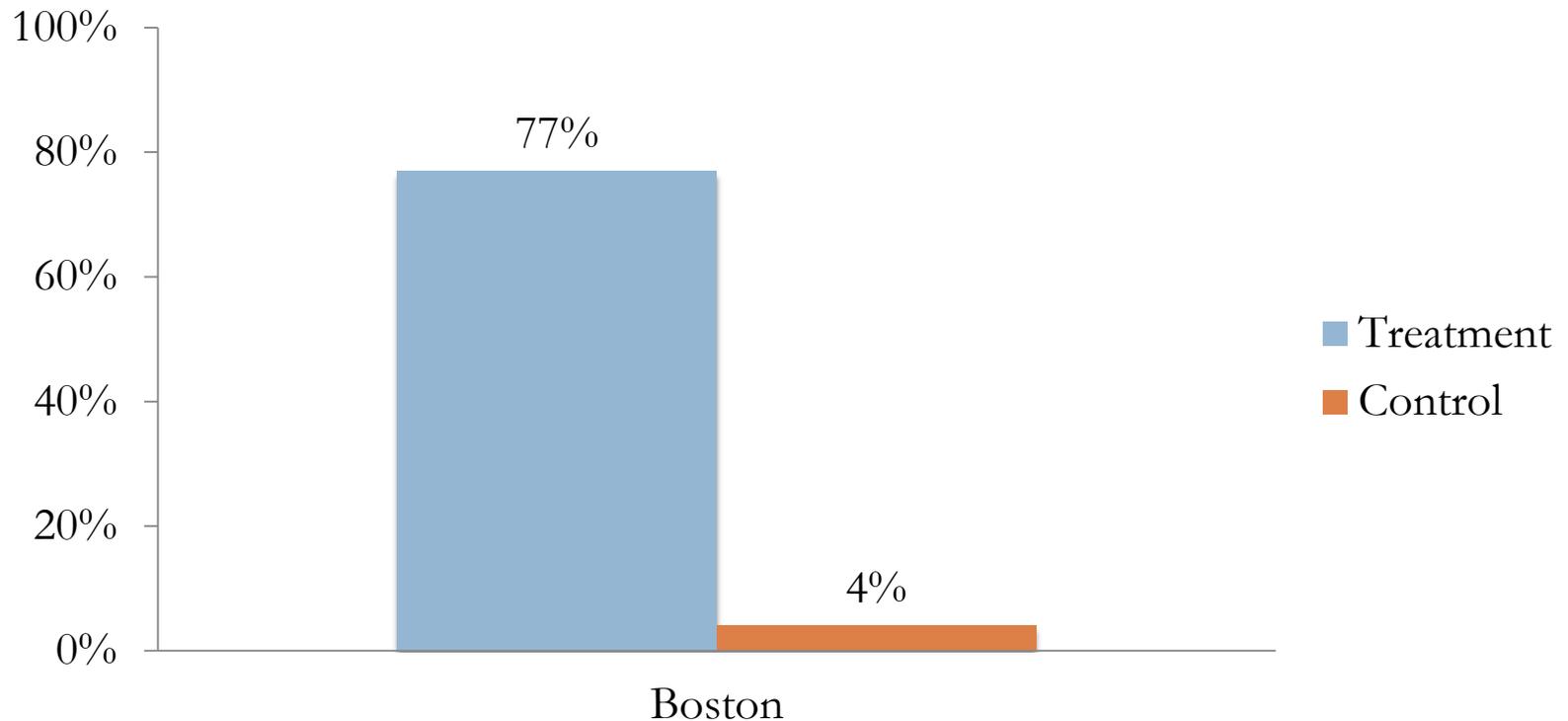
## **Details:**

- Students assigned to treatment or control group via lottery
- Although students in control group did not receive proactive outreach, they did receive the full level of support equivalent to that received by students in the treatment group if they sought support

# Students are responsive to summer outreach

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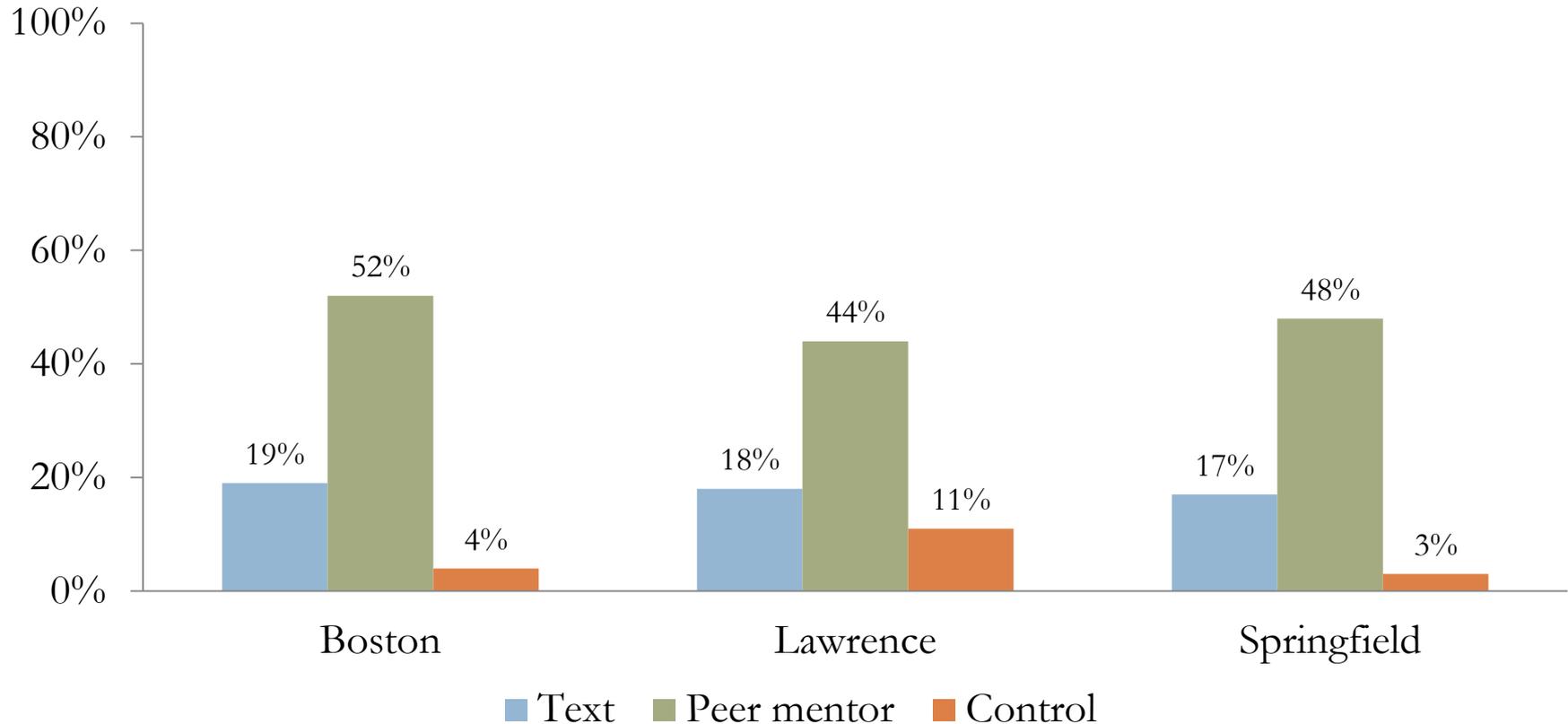
**Counselor outreach: Share of students interacting with a counselor over the summer**



# Students are responsive to summer outreach

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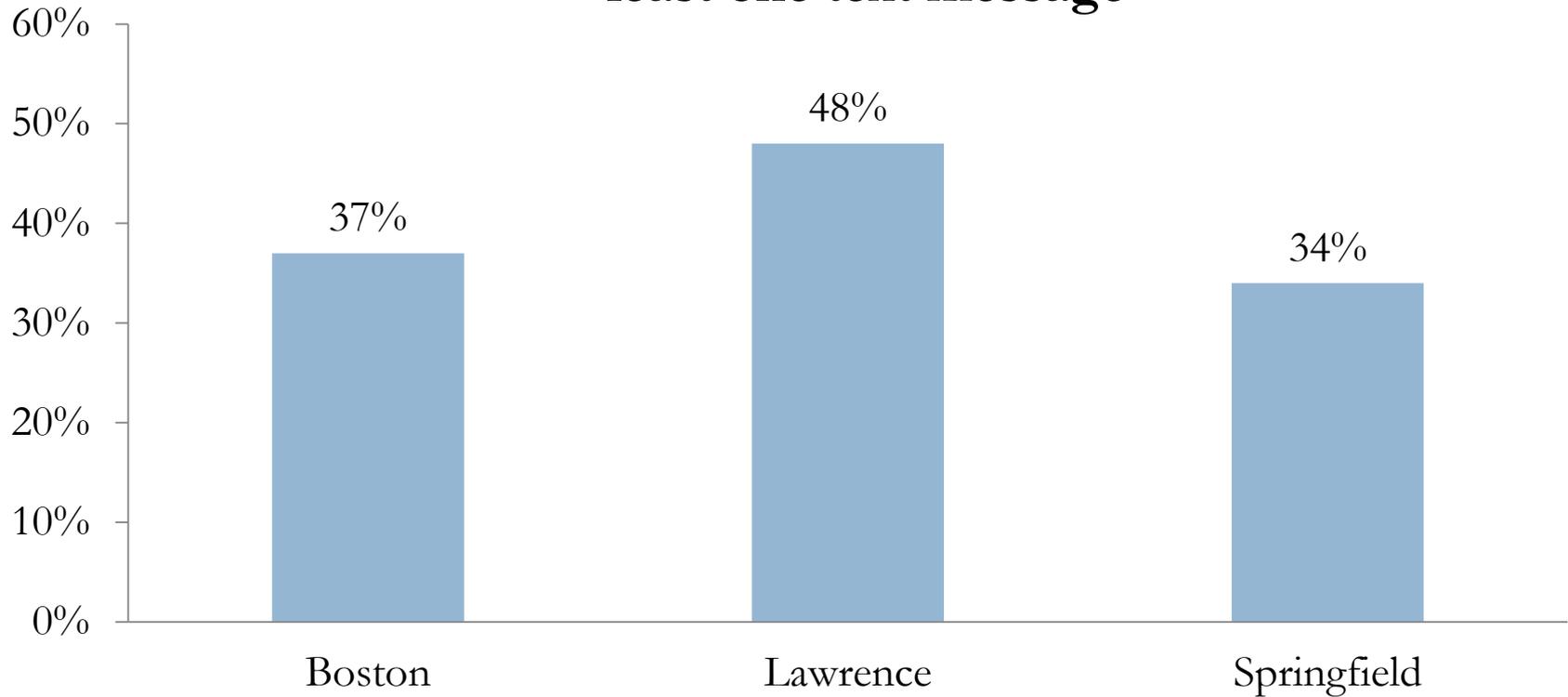
## Peer and text outreach: Share of students interacting with an counselor (text outreach) or peer mentor



# Students are responsive to summer outreach

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**Text outreach: Share of respondents who replied to at least one text message**



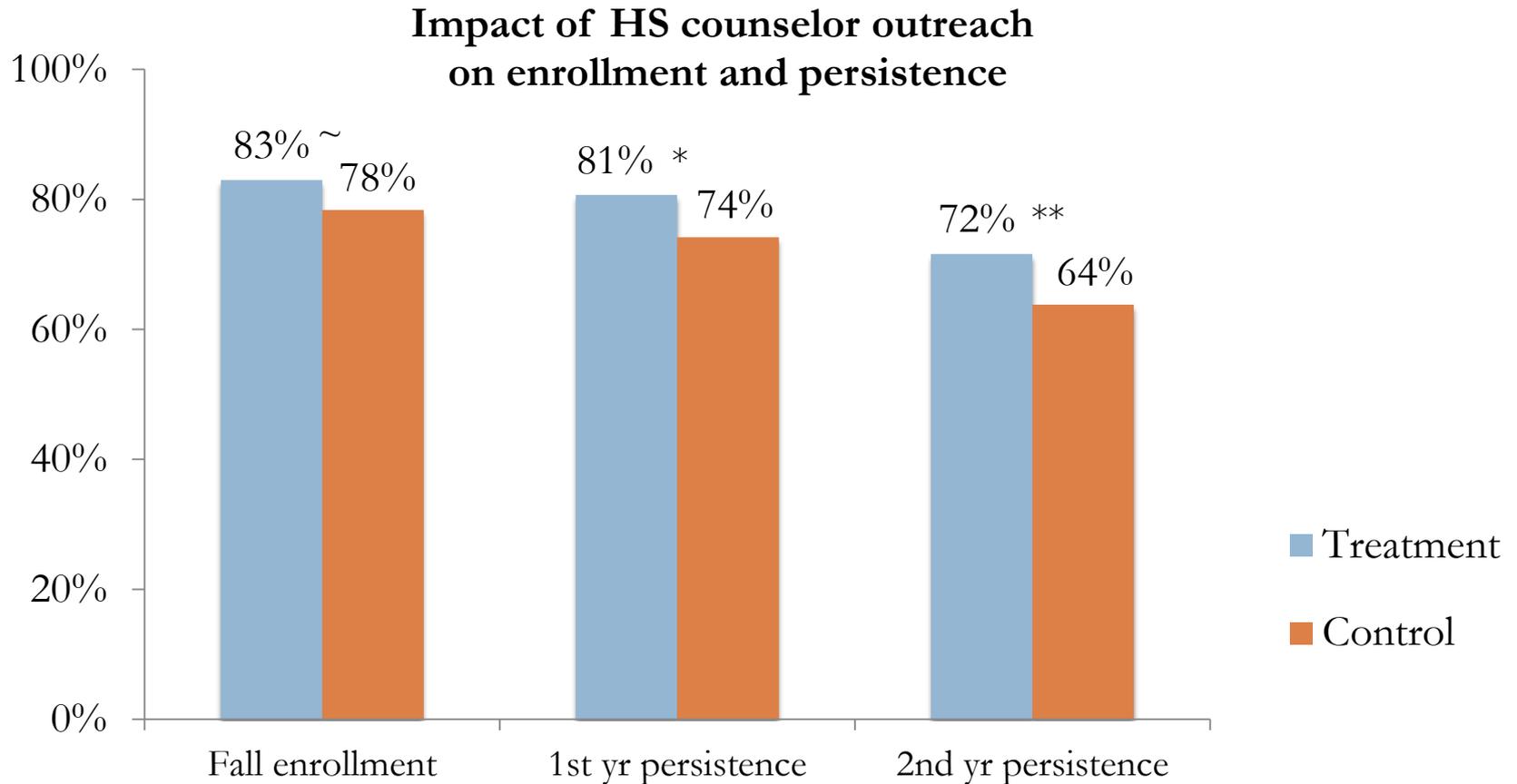
# Example text responses

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- **July 4:** “Awwww! Thank you so much!”
- **July 4:** “Oh hey! You couldn’t text me at a better time! I was wondering if I can make an appointment with you...I need to update my financial aid with the 2011 tax forms and I don’t know how to do it. I need your help!”
- **August 2:** “Honestly i really need help with college cost. I still dont know if im really gonna go to college..but im doing my best and all i can to get into College.”
- **August 15:** “She needs to sign waiver for health insurance which she has health new england and masshealth”
- **July 29:** “Thanks but i'm all set for the fall. I don't need anymore messages”

# Summer counselor outreach: Improved enrollment & persistence

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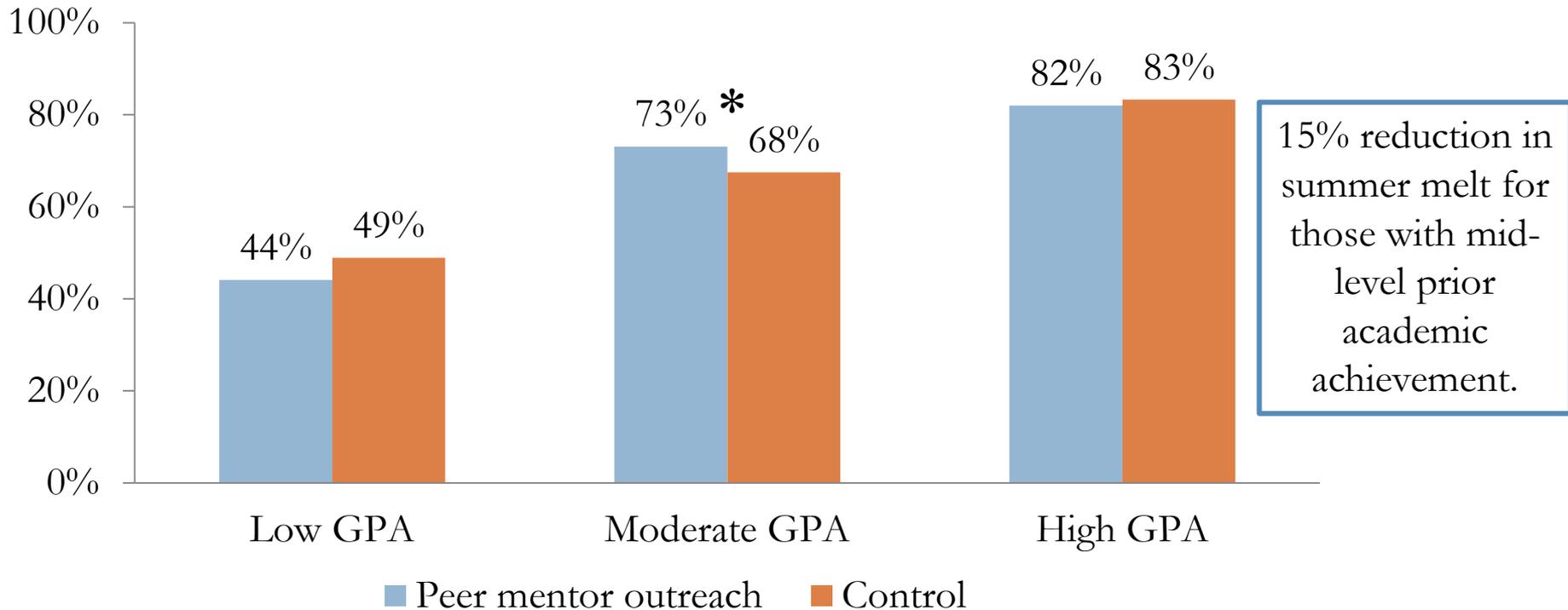


- Levels of statistical significance: ~  $p < 0.10$  \*  $p < 0.05$  \*\*  $p < 0.01$

# Summer outreach improves enrollment & persistence

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## Impact of peer mentor outreach on fall enrollment by GPA

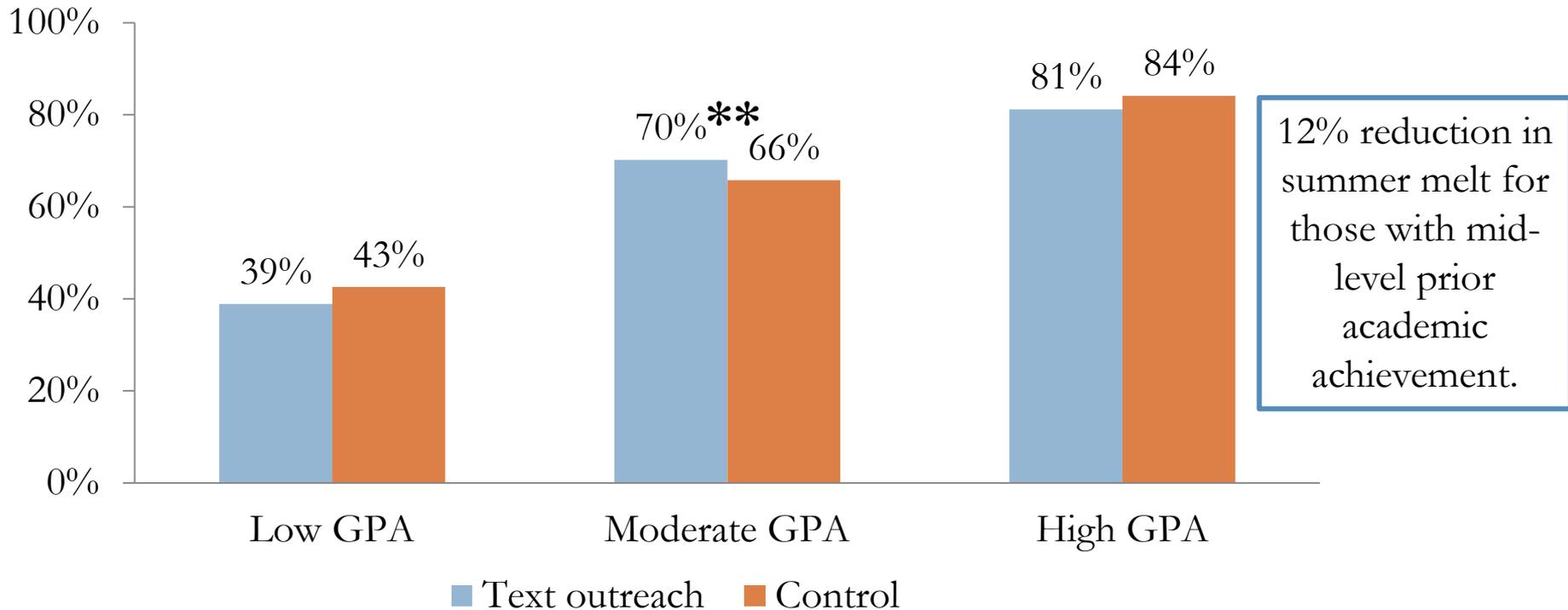


- Results from probit regressions including fixed effects for high school or advising team and baseline covariates.
- ~ p < 0.10 \* p < 0.05 \*\* p < 0.01

# Summer outreach improves enrollment & persistence

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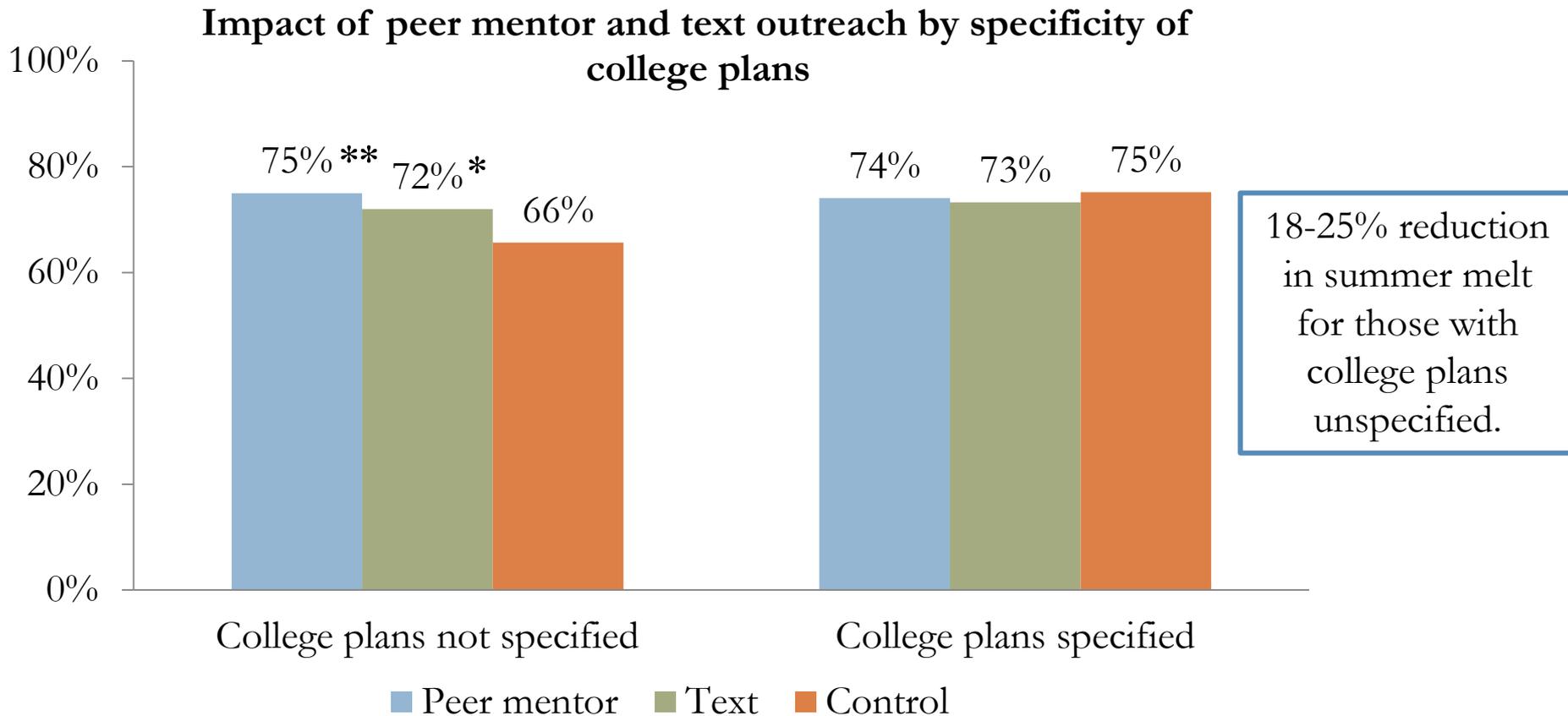
## Impact of text outreach on fall enrollment by GPA



- Results from probit regressions including fixed effects for high school or advising team and baseline covariates.
- ~ p < 0.10 \* p < 0.05 \*\* p < 0.01

# Summer outreach improves enrollment & persistence

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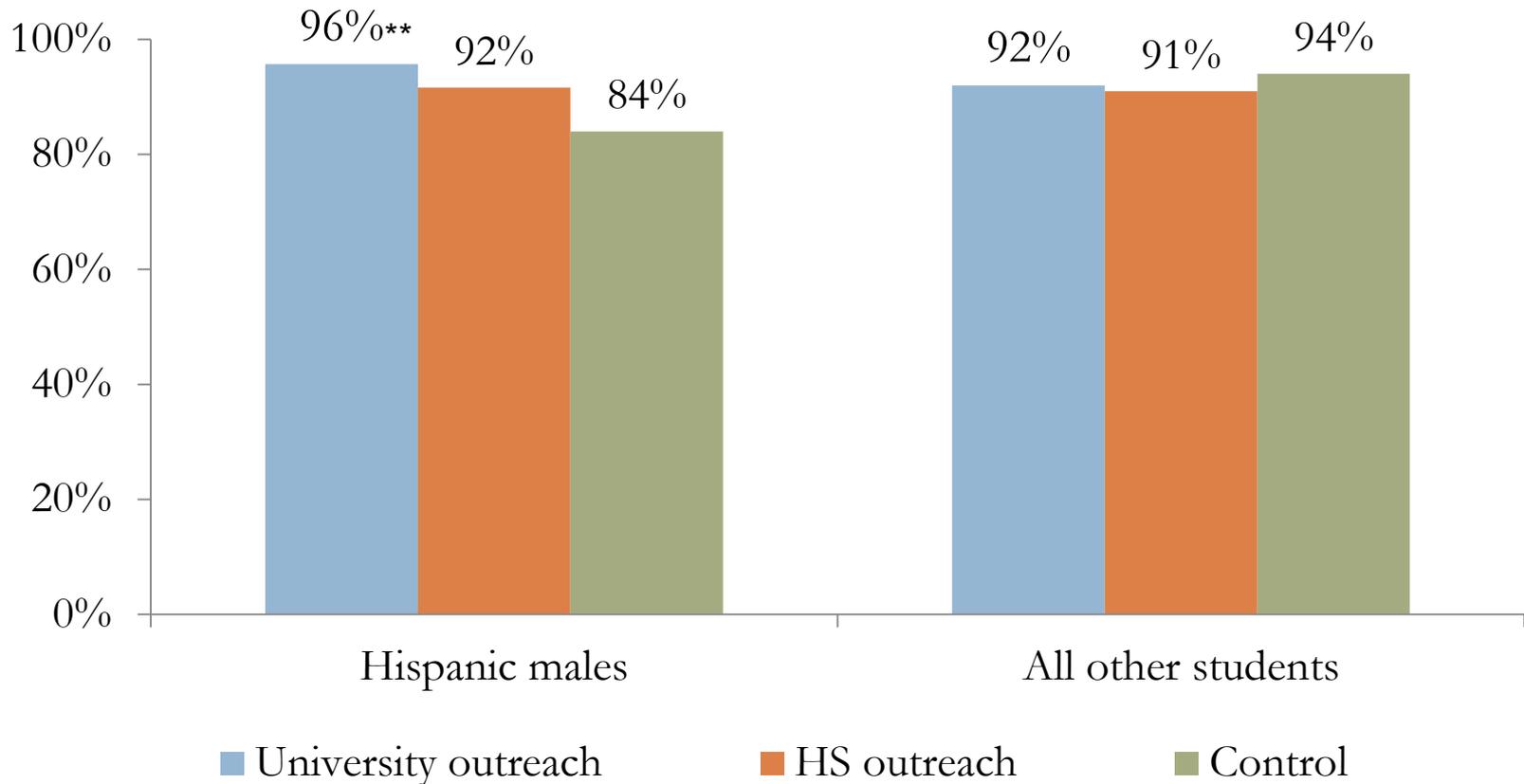


- Results from probit regressions including fixed effects for high school or advising team and baseline covariates.
- ~ p < 0.10 \* p < 0.05 \*\* p < 0.01

# Outreach from university-stationed counselor: Improved timely enrollment among Hispanic males

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**Impact of university and high school outreach on timely college enrollment on students planning to attend the state flagship university**



• Levels of statistical significance: ~ p < 0.10 \* p < 0.05 \*\* p < 0.01

# Conclusions from summer melt research

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- ❑ College-intending students encounter a host of barriers during the post-high school summer
- ❑ These challenges can arise particularly when students lack access to professional guidance and support
- ❑ Outreach from a counselor or peer mentor either directly or via text messaging is effective for keeping students on track with required summer tasks and providing 1:1 help when needed.

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# SUMMER MELT

Supporting Low-Income Students  
Through the Transition to College

Forthcoming this fall  
from the Harvard  
Education Press

# Extensions earlier and later in college process

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## Application & choice

- Proactive outreach & support for college choice and award letter review
- Personalized prompts to complete FAFSA and income verification



## Transition

- Experiment to assess comparative benefit of *personal* outreach from a counselor to *personalized* outreach via text messaging
- Collaboration with College Bound STL to evaluate an adaptive online platform to increase counselors' capacity to mitigate summer melt



## Persistence & success

- Encouragement to maintain satisfactory academic progress and renew FAFSA
- Personalized, text-based prompts to: make use of academic & social support services; meet with advisor during academic year; and get involved with campus-based organization

# Thank you!

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