

Introduction

The information citizens rely on to decide to support or oppose a policy is not always correct. Misconceptions, rather than complete lack of awareness, can lead to more dire consequences for the policy's target population, as an individual that believes they already hold correct knowledge will not know they must seek correct information.

Changes in policy are particularly consequential for undocumented students, as policy mandates both their legal and education opportunities. Unfortunately, the Trump administration's statements regarding immigration statistics and immigration policy often contain false or misleading information. The development of misconceptions about the opportunities undocumented immigrants actually receive can influence citizen's stance on policies that impact these opportunities. Additionally, these misconceptions could impact campus climate when held by undocumented students' college peers.

Refutation texts have been used to correct misconceptions in multiple domains, including education policy. As opposed to traditional expository texts which simply provide information, refutation texts explicitly state and refute a misconception. However, their efficiency in reducing misconceptions of education policies that specifically impact immigrant youth has not been examined before.

This study aimed to examine both the general public and college students' misconceptions of federal and state policies regarding higher education for undocumented students, and to pilot the effectiveness of refutation texts on correcting these misconceptions.

Research Questions

Study 1

RQ 1: Which misconceptions regarding college access for undocumented students are the most prevalent among the general public?

RQ 2: Does misconception prevalence differ based on individuals' race, gender, ethnicity, age, reported income, political affiliation, and educational background?

Study 2

RQ 1: Which misconceptions regarding college access for undocumented students are the most prevalent among college students?

RQ2: What is the effect of the refutation text on correct conceptions and misconceptions?

Methods

Study 1

Procedure. Participants answered a series of introductory questions about undocumented students' college access, including participants sources of information about this topic and their overall support for undocumented students receiving higher education opportunities. They were then presented with nine statements. Each statement corresponded with a potential misconception. Participants marked each statement as "true," "false," or "unsure." They then answered a series of demographics questions.

Analysis. Multiple regression analysis with race, gender, ethnicity, age, reported income, political affiliation, and educational background as predictors of misconceptions.

Study 2

Procedure. Participants answered the same introductory questions and were presented with the same nine statements as those in Study 1. Participants were then randomly assigned to receive a refutation text, a long control text, or a short control text. The refutation text differed from the control text in format, but all three text types contained the same information that addressed the conception statements they had previously marked as "true," "false," or "unsure." After reading the text, participants received the same conception questions and support questions as before, followed by a demographic questionnaire.

Analysis. Analysis of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to determine significant differences in post-text responses between text conditions. Tukey's tests were conducted to examine the texts' performance for each misconception.

College Access Statements

1. *Federal law prohibits undocumented students from enrolling in a public or private college in the United States. [False]*
2. *States can prohibit undocumented students from enrolling in a public or private college. [True]*
3. *Undocumented students must pay out-of-state college tuition in all states. [False]*
4. *Undocumented students are eligible for federal financial aid. [False]*
5. *Undocumented students are able to apply for state financial aid in all states. [False]*
6. *The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form requires students to provide a social security number. [True]*
7. *U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is accepting requests from individuals who have never before been granted deferred action under DACA. [False]*
8. *Current DACA students may renew their application for deferred action. [True]*
9. *School districts are able to disclose students' citizenship status with the students' or their parents' permission. [True]*

Results

Study 1.

Most prevalent misconceptions:

- Undocumented students must pay out-of-state college tuition in all states [False]. **25.4%**
- USCIS is accepting requests from individuals who have never before been granted deferred action under DACA [False]. **23.1%**
- School districts are able to disclose students' citizenship status with the students' or their parents' permission [True]. **25.9%**

Study 2.

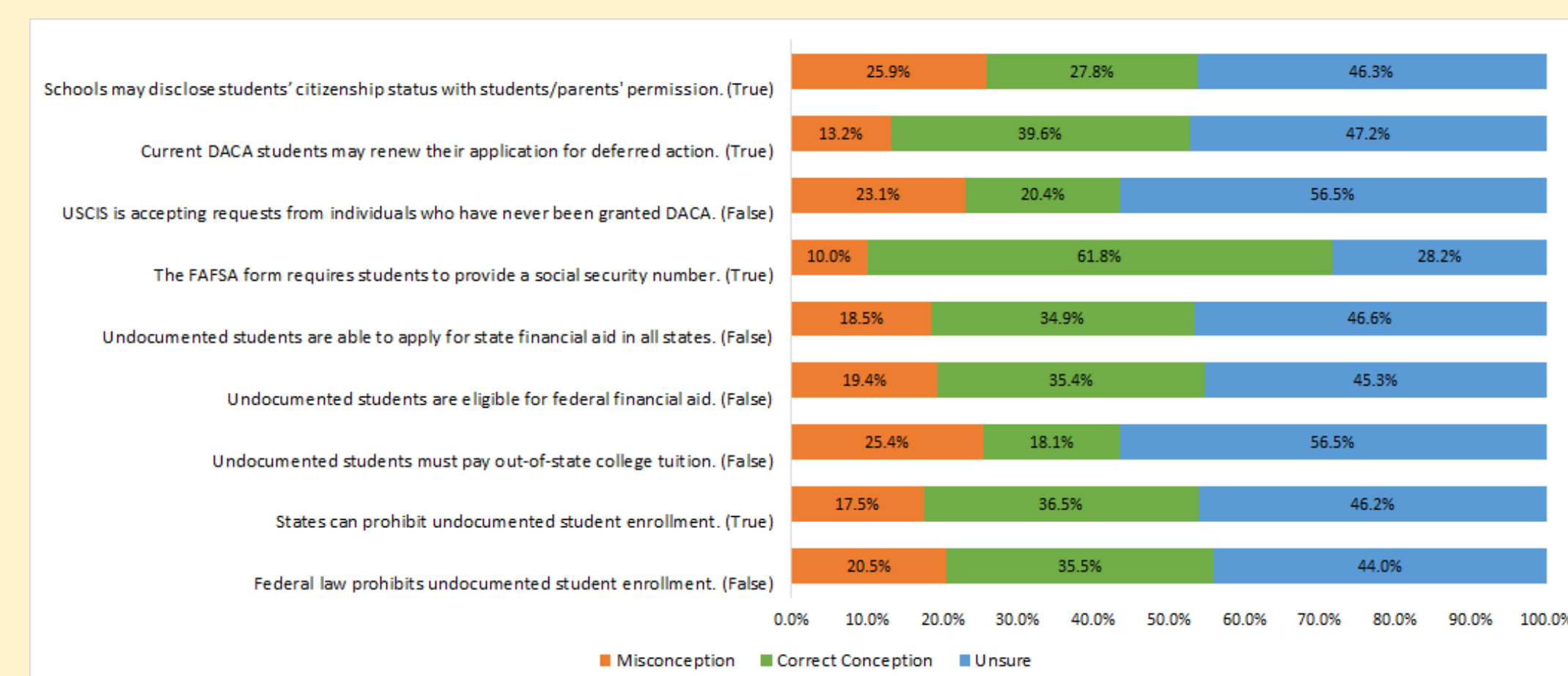
Most prevalent misconceptions

- Undocumented students must pay out-of-state college tuition in all states [False]. **30.4%**
- USCIS is accepting requests from individuals who have never before been granted deferred action under DACA [False]. **27.8%**

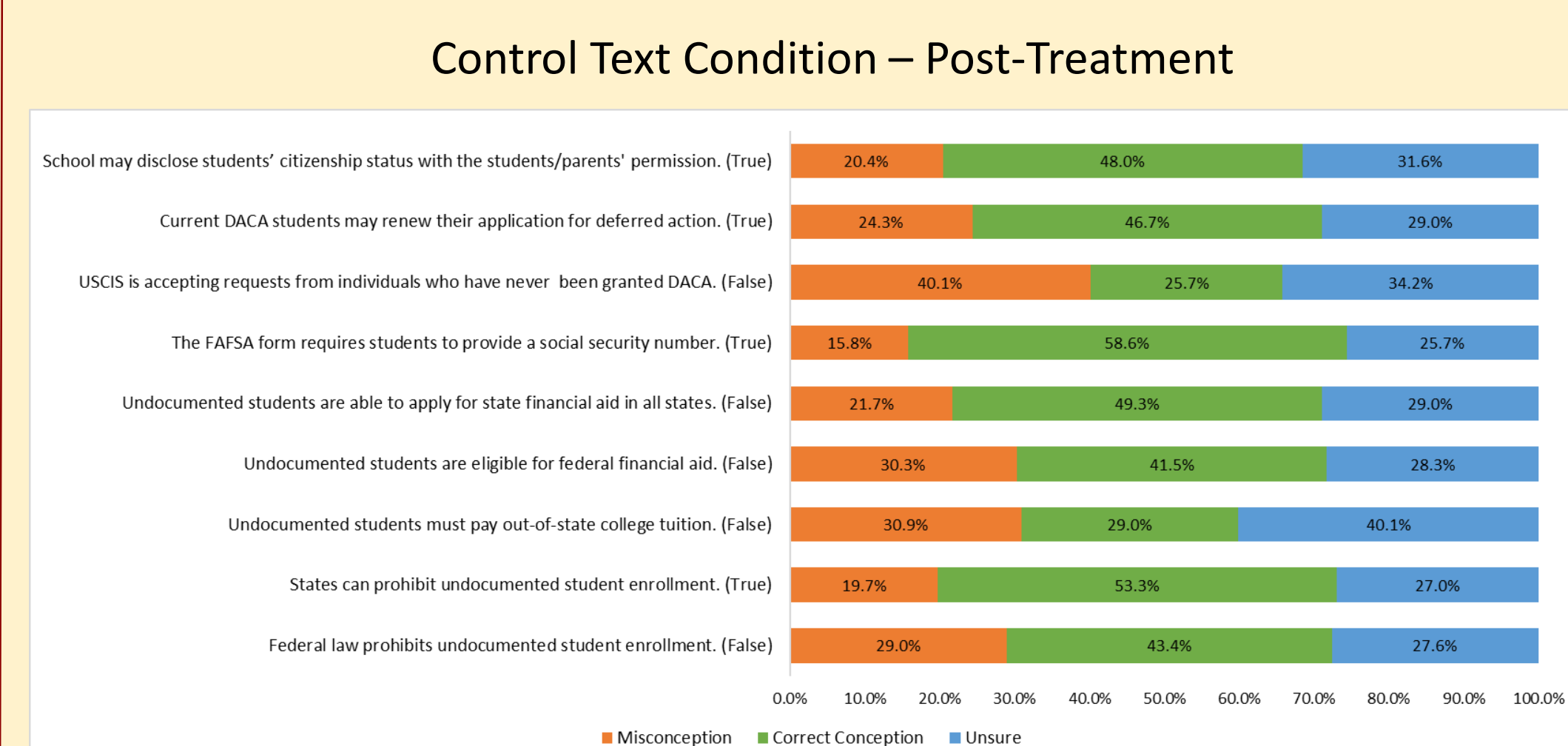
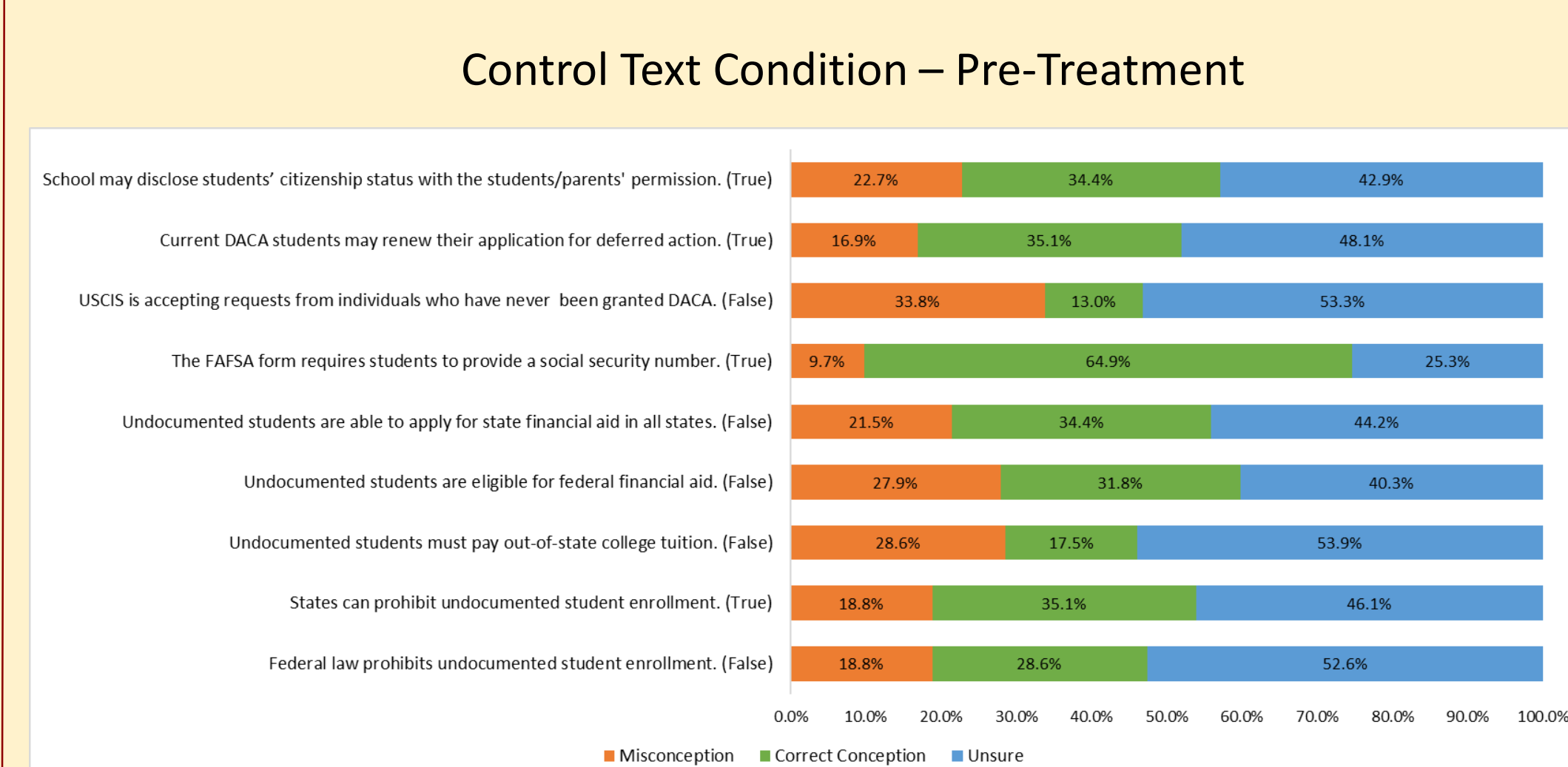
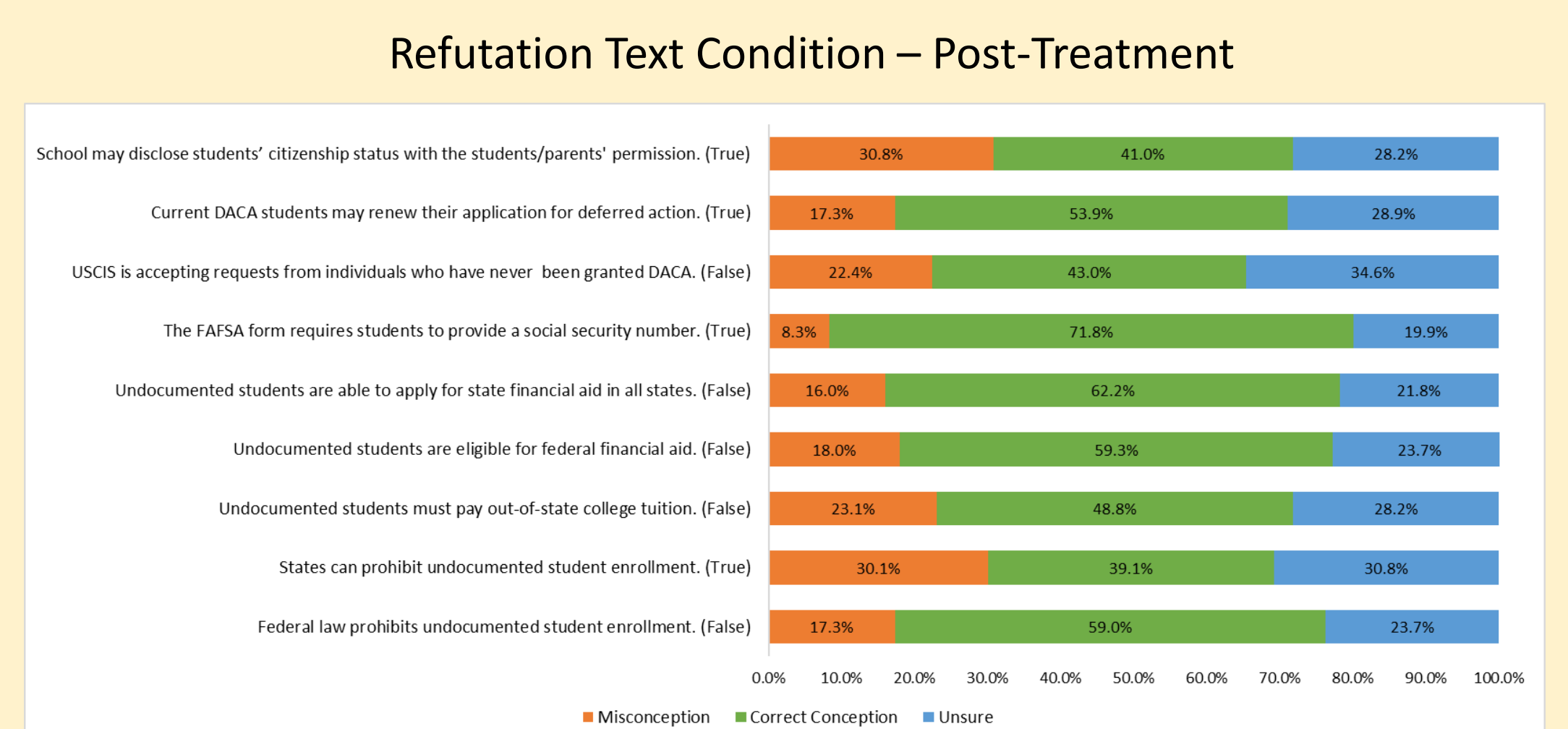
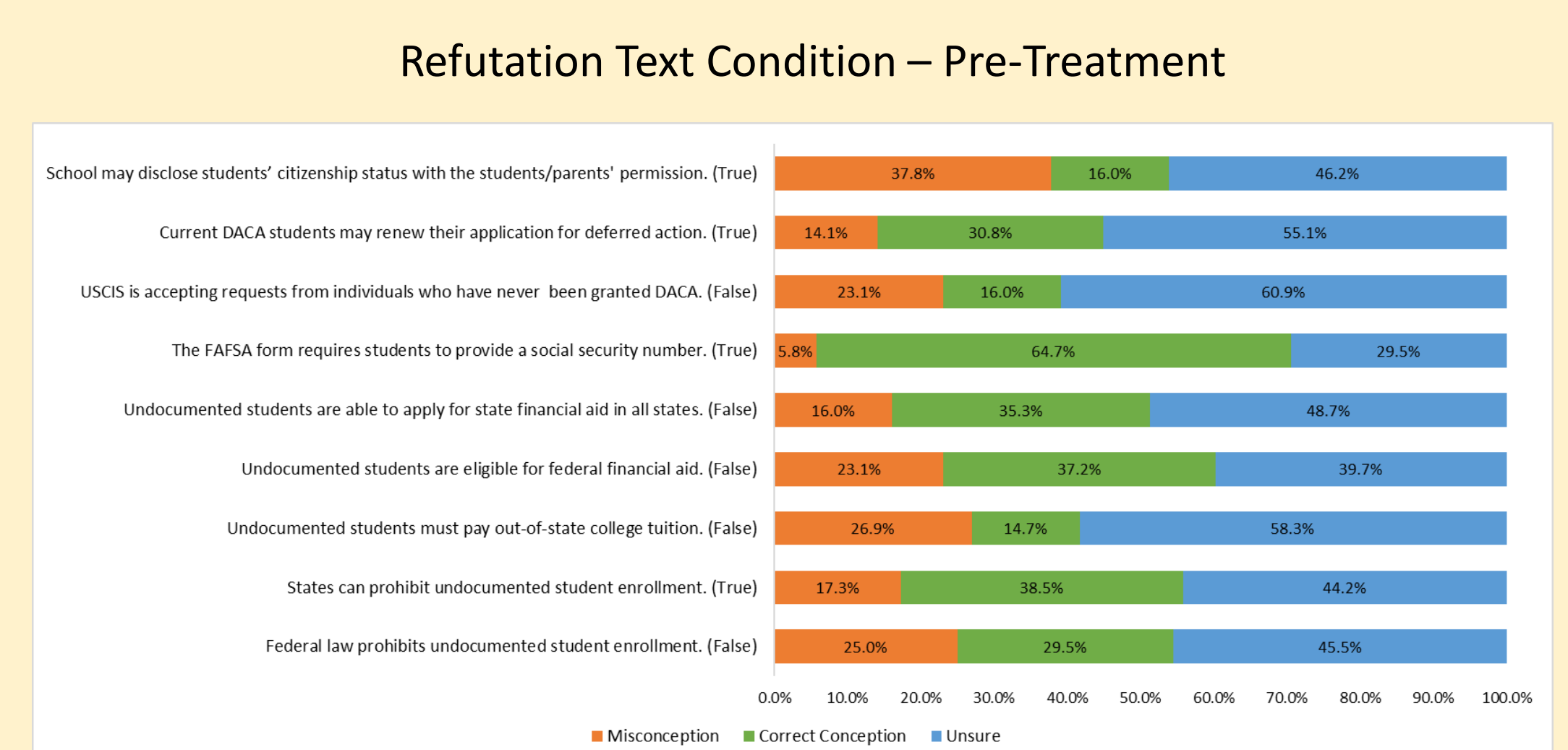
Effect of refutation text

- There was a significant difference in misconceptions prevalence between experimental conditions for seven of the nine questionnaire items.
- For six of the seven statements in which there was a significant difference in responses between experimental conditions, our refutation text performed better than the control or short control texts. Participants who read the refutation text held less misconceptions at posttest than those who read the control or short control.
- A maximum of 30.76% misconception reduction was observed with our refutation text while only a maximum of 10.29% misconception reduction was observed in the control text condition.

Study 1. Prevalence of misconceptions among a sample of the general population.



Study 2. Prevalence of misconceptions among a sample of college students.



Discussion

- A comparison of Study 1 results and Study 2 pretest results show that the possibility of being in closer proximity to undocumented students does not impact college students' knowledge of undocumented students' higher education opportunities.
- In addition to improving institutional policies, universities can play a role in changing state and national policy. For example, the UC Board of Regents was among the first parties to file suit after the Trump administration announcement of DACA's rescindment. While pressure to enact change often comes from undocumented students, non-undocumented student involvement could increase support to hold institutions accountable to provide equitable education for all.
- Correcting misconceptions in undocumented college students' peers could help them become efficient and informed advocates. Given the positive effects of refutation texts in reducing misconceptions, refutation texts could be an effective means by which to do so.
- However, we also caution to state things clearly. An unusual surge in misconceptions after treatment in our "state enrollment" item led us to conclude that the wording in our refutation text regarding that particular policy was unclear.
- Because policies impacting undocumented students are constantly changing, future work could continue to investigate the effect of refutation texts on people's misconceptions of these policies or different means through which these misconceptions can be reduced.

The Importance of Reducing Misconceptions

- Study 2 was conducted a few days before the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 against the 2017 rescission of DACA on June 18, 2020. Thus, DACA was not a prominent topic in the news at the time. This could explain why "USCIS is accepting requests from individuals who have never before been granted deferred action under DACA" was a common misconception.
- However, in DACA had been a prominent topic in the news just a few months before in November 2019. At the time, Supreme Court held hearings on DACA's termination but postponed making a final decision.
- Therefore, although the opportunity to learn about the current state of a policy that affects thousands of undocumented students had presented itself, misconceptions were still widely present.
- Explicitly refuting misconceptions, rather than simply presenting information, is important to ensure people's knowledge of important and consequential policies is correct. This will aid them in making informed rational decisions when participating in the democratic process.

References

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