Click, Rate, and Enroll: The Impact of Evaluation Platforms on Course Selection

UC San Diego
Herbert Wertheim
School of Public Health and
Human Longevity Science

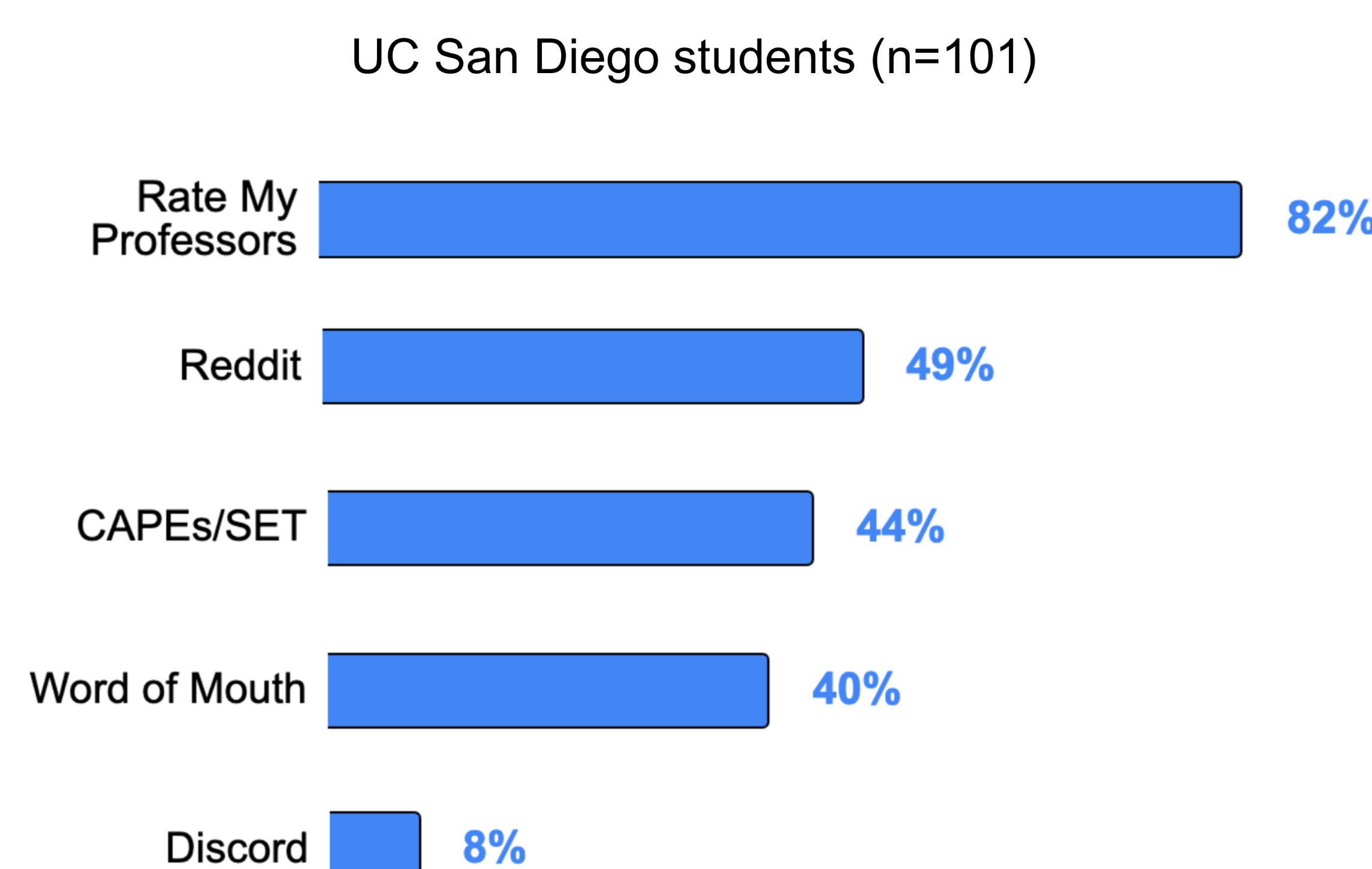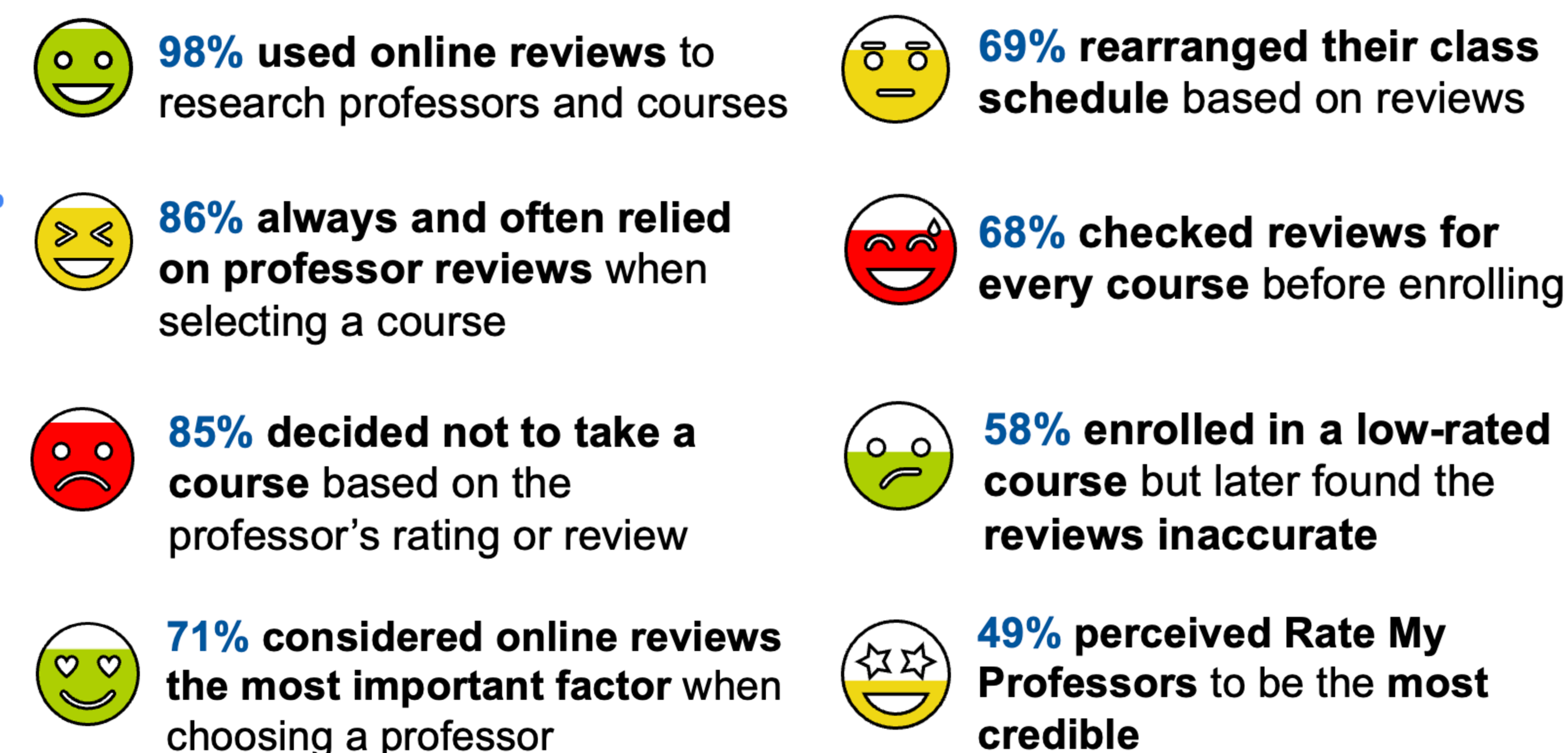Canbin Cai, Karen Huang, Aime Nguyen, and Sharon Nguyen

Objective

✦ To assess how peer evaluations on platforms like RateMyProfessors influence students' perceptions of course difficulty, course selection decisions, and levels of uncertainty during the decision-making process.

Background

✦ RateMyProfessors is an anonymous online platform that students use to rate professors on their teaching style, personality, and course difficulty.[1,2]

✦ Ratings may be influenced by grade leniency rather than actual teaching effectiveness.[3]

✦ Superficial or negative reviews may shape students' perceptions without impacting learning outcomes.[4]

Results

Figure 1: Top Platforms Chosen by Students for Professor Ratings and Reviews

UC San Diego students (n=101)

- Rate My Professors — 82%
- Reddit — 49%
- CAPEs/SET — 44%
- Word of Mouth — 40%
- Discord — 8%

Figure 2: Key Insights into Student Perceptions of Evaluation Platforms and Their Influence on Enrollment Decisions

- 😀 **98% used online reviews** to research professors and courses
- 😆 **86% always and often relied on professor reviews** when selecting a course
- 😡 **85% decided not to take a course** based on the professor's rating or review
- 😍 **71% considered online reviews the most important factor** when choosing a professor
- 😐 **69% rearranged their class schedule** based on reviews
- 😠 **68% checked reviews for every course** before enrolling
- 😕 **58% enrolled in a low-rated course** but later found the **reviews inaccurate**
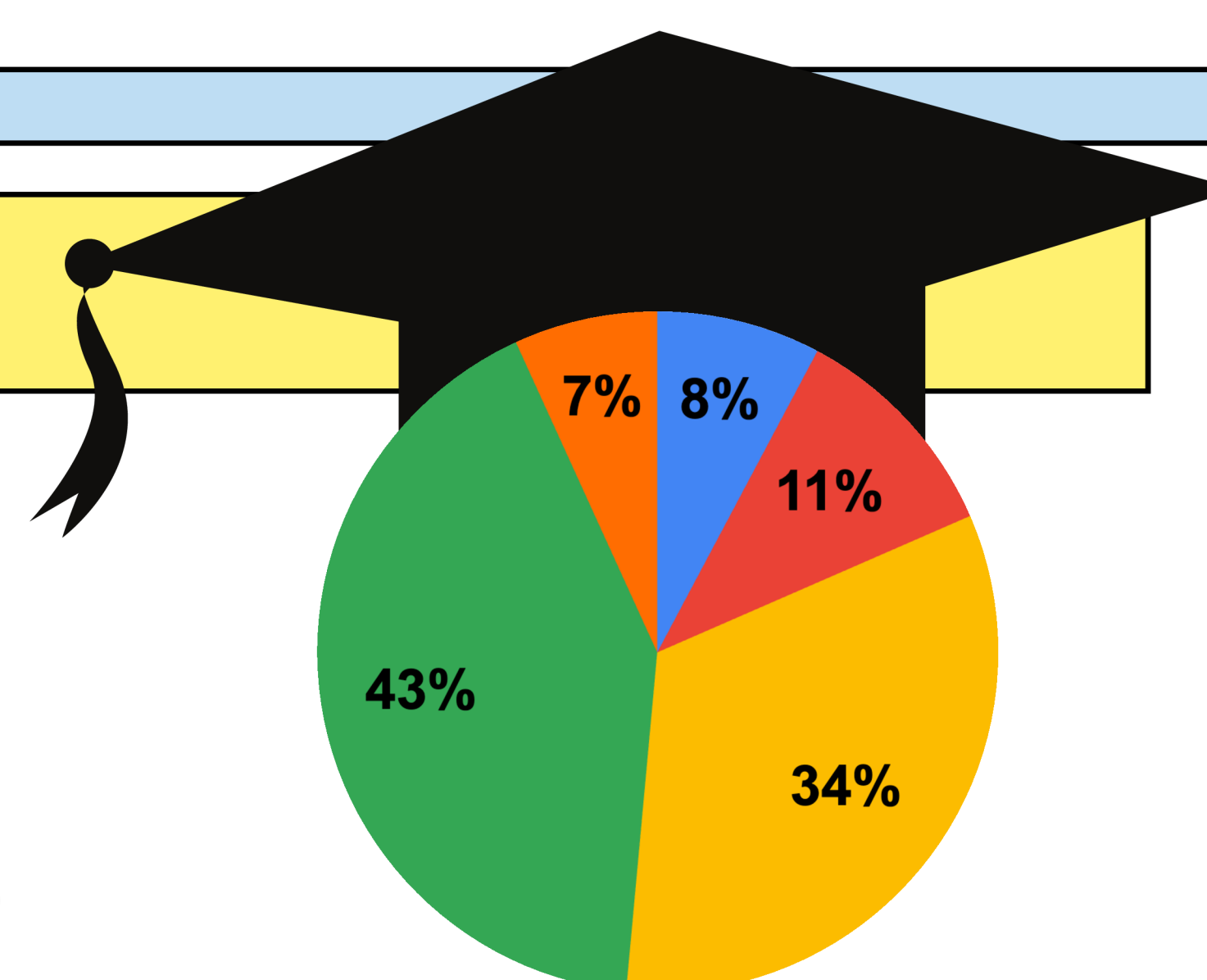- 🤩 **49% perceived Rate My Professors** to be the **most credible**

Methods

✦ This cross-sectional study utilized a Qualtrics survey distributed to UC San Diego students via mass email and QR code (n = 103).

✦ <u>Exposure</u>: Frequency and patterns of using academic evaluation platforms (e.g., RMP, CAPEs/SET, Reddit, etc.)

✦ <u>Outcome</u>: Perceptions of the reliability and influence of online platforms in professor evaluations, along with self-reported digital habits related to academic decision-making.

✦ <u>Statistical test</u>: Chi-square test with three independent samples.

Demographics

Academic Year Distribution
UC San Diego students (n=103)

- Freshman — 8%
- Sophomore — 11%
- Junior — 34%
- Senior — 43%
- Grad Students — 7%

Conclusion

✦ **60% of students weigh positive and negative reviews equally**, indicating a meaningful trend between feedback type (positive, negative, both) and schedule rearrangement that warrants further study with a larger, more diverse sample.

<u>**Policy Implications**</u>:

✦ UC San Diego should enhance student access to CAPEs/SET reviews during course registration to support informed decision-making.

✦ Faculty should consider online feedback thoughtfully to ensure accurate and fair representation of their teaching.

✦ Improve platform reliability and equity by advocating for standardized, bias-reducing features.

<u>**Future Research**</u>:

✦ To examine how demographics (e.g., year, gender, major) and academic factors (e.g., subject, difficulty, grading leniency) shape the influence of online evaluations on course selection.

Professors, it's your turn!

Scan here to **RateMyStudents**