The background features abstract, overlapping green geometric shapes in various shades, including light lime green, medium green, and dark forest green, creating a modern, layered effect.

PREPARING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FOR THE 21st CENTURY: A THEORY-BASED PROGRAM EVALUATION OF THE WISE PROGRAM

Janine Polla Werner, Ed.D.
St. John's University

Purpose of Study

- ▶ To examine the impact of the WISE Individualized Senior Experience (WISE) Program for both **interim and final objectives** and to connect its goals and activities to its outcomes. The aim of the evaluation was to describe the program activities, document the results of the activities in terms of the program's stated goals, and evaluate the activities that brought about these results.

Data on the Job-Market and CCR

Although the workforce increased nearly 70% by 2007 with the total number of jobs increasing by 63 million, only two million jobs were held by those with no post-secondary education (Symonds, Schwartz & Ferguson, 2011)

While there will be 47 million job openings by 2018, individuals with a high school diploma as their only credential will fill just 36% of these jobs (Carnevale, Smith & Strohl, 2010).

Are They Ready for College and the Workplace?

- ▶ A two-year study in which over 400 faculty and staff members of various disciplines from 20 research universities participated. Sixty-five percent of college professors reported that what is taught in high school does not prepare students for college (Conley, 2003).
- ▶ Of 400 employers who were surveyed, less than 25% reported that new employees who completed college have “excellent” basic knowledge and applied skills. Among those who hired individuals directly out of high school, almost 50% reported their performance as “deficient” (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

Why Study WISE?

- ▶ Many school systems have partnered with agencies that can provide students with learning experiences that will prepare them for college and careers. Such initiatives have been funded by federal and state agencies, based on beliefs of their merits in helping students transition from high school to adult life (Neumark, 2006).
- ▶ However, few systematic evaluations of such transition programs have been conducted, particularly from the perspective of the extent to which they provide learning experiences consistent with current standards and views on academic, social, and emotional wellbeing in adult life.

Which Schools to Study?

The sample consisted of eight schools varying in size, location and demographics:

5 New York State Public Schools

2 New York City Public Schools

1 Private School in New York State

Study consisted of students who graduated from high school between 2007 and 2010 and who successfully completed the WISE Program.

Theory-Based Evaluation

This study used theory-based program evaluation to create a logical model of change drawn from Lipsey (1993) and included

- (1) articulation of the needs presented by the stakeholders the program;
- (2) a description of the components and activities that address the needs;
- (3) the changes in participant knowledge, attitude, skills or abilities in response to the components and activities, and
- (4) the long-term objectives of the program.

Which Aspects of the Program to Study?

Major Program Activities:

Journals (N=73) (Deep Exploration of a Topic)

Student Interviews (N=12)

Mentors (N=5)

Final Presentations

What did Conversations with Stakeholders Reveal?

WISE outcomes fell into three categories:

- A. Skills having to do with SELF (13)
- B. Skills having to do with OTHERS (5)
- C. APPLIED Skills (4)

Research Question 1

- ▶ At present, there is no common framework for college and career readiness that is universally defined and implemented across high schools in the U.S. Our secondary institutions as a whole have, at best, fragmented information concerning what students need to be able to do in order to succeed in college and the workplace (Conley, 2008).
- ▶ Are the outcomes of the WISE Program aligned to the college and career readiness objectives stated in the following theoretical frameworks: Conley's 4 Dimensions of College and Career Readiness, Wagner's 7 Survival Skills for the 21st Century, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, and the New York State College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards?

Table 4

Alignment between Framework Indicators and WISE Outcomes

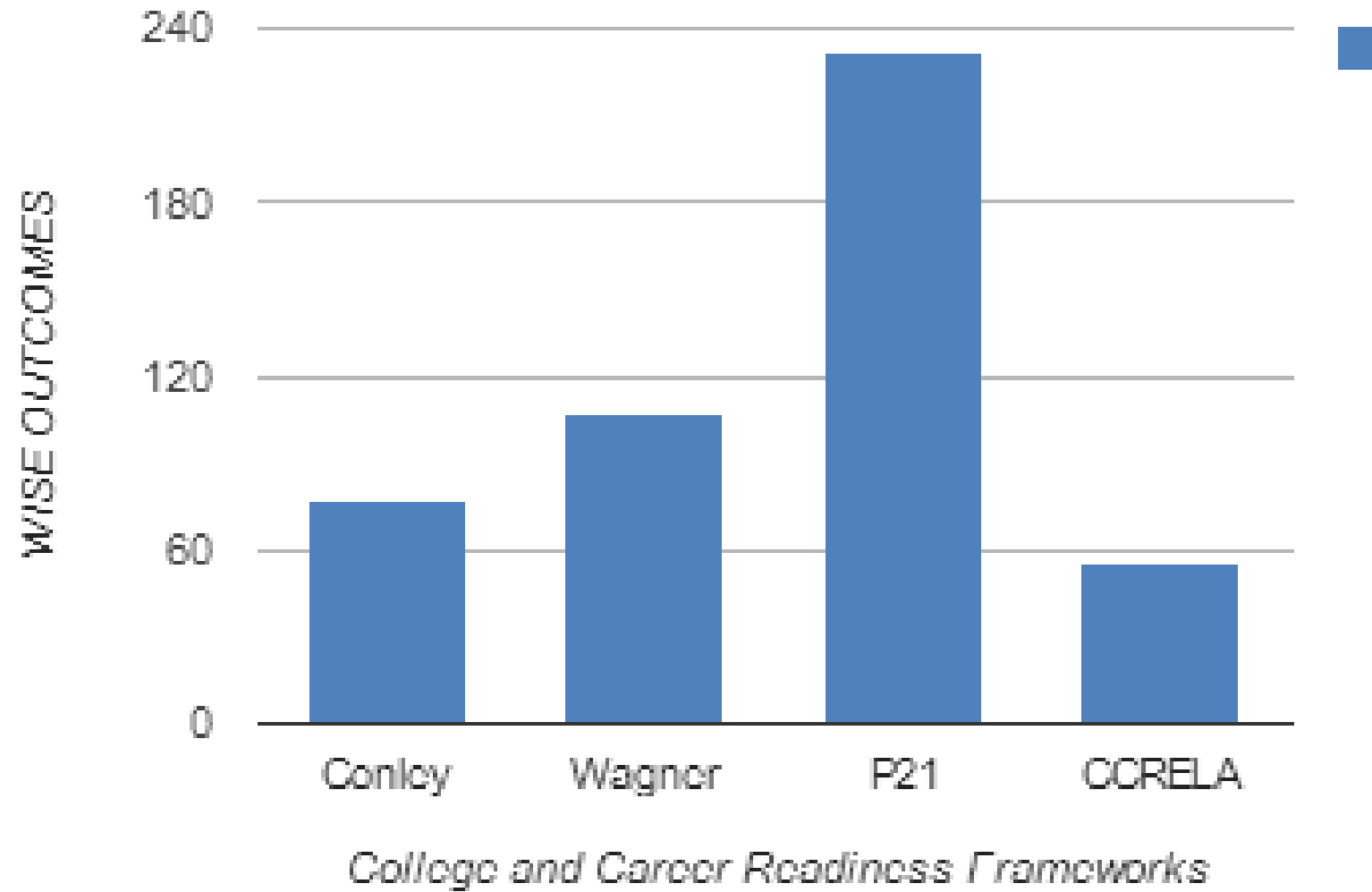
Framework	Indicators	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12	A13	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	C1	C2	C3	C4	TOTAL	f_i
Conley	30	1	2	7	0	1	3	1	1	3	7	4	8	0	4	3	4	1	4	7	6	6	4	77	26%
Wagner	19	4	6	9	1	1	4	9	4	4	2	11	10	2	8	7	6	3	4	4	1	4	3	107	56.30%
P21	51	1	10	13	7	7	5	8	8	15	27	21	23	3	18	19	13	13	8	2	1	3	7	232	45.40%
CCR ELA	31	0	4	0	2	2	2	0	0	1	7	5	0	0	1	3	0	1	0	6	6	11	4	55	18%
TOTAL	131	6	22	29	10	11	14	18	13	23	43	41	41	5	31	32	23	18	16	19	14	24	18	471	45.70%

Results Concerning Research Question 1

Based on the aggregate data, the WISE outcomes aligned to the composite framework in every area. However, there was variance in the degree of alignment in each framework.

Implication: The goals WISE strives for are very much in line with what educational researchers, industry and government say that young adults must possess in order to be successful!

Figure 1



Research Question 2

How does the WISE Program support the college and career readiness objectives for general education students and students with disabilities as stated in the following theoretical frameworks: Conley's 4 Dimensions of College and Career Readiness, Wagner's 7 Survival Skills for the 21st Century, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, the New York State College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards? This was measured through:

- ▶ content analysis of student journals
- ▶ a combination of evaluation data from mentors, evaluation committees, and site supervisors

Results Concerning Research Question 2

Content analysis of the **student journals** demonstrated the greatest representation of WISE outcomes in

- ▶ A11 (explore and adapt)
- ▶ B2 (interact with new/different people in adult environments)
- ▶ A12 (stretch personal boundaries/mature)

Content Analysis of **evaluations** revealed the greatest representation of WISE outcomes in

- ▶ C2 (develop research skills and acquisition of knowledge)
- ▶ A12 (stretch personal boundaries/mature)
- ▶ C4 (develop presentation skills)

The concurrence in the journals and the evaluations in A12 suggests that, from both a student and teacher/mentor point of view, WISE supports students in their development into adults.

Journal Outcomes

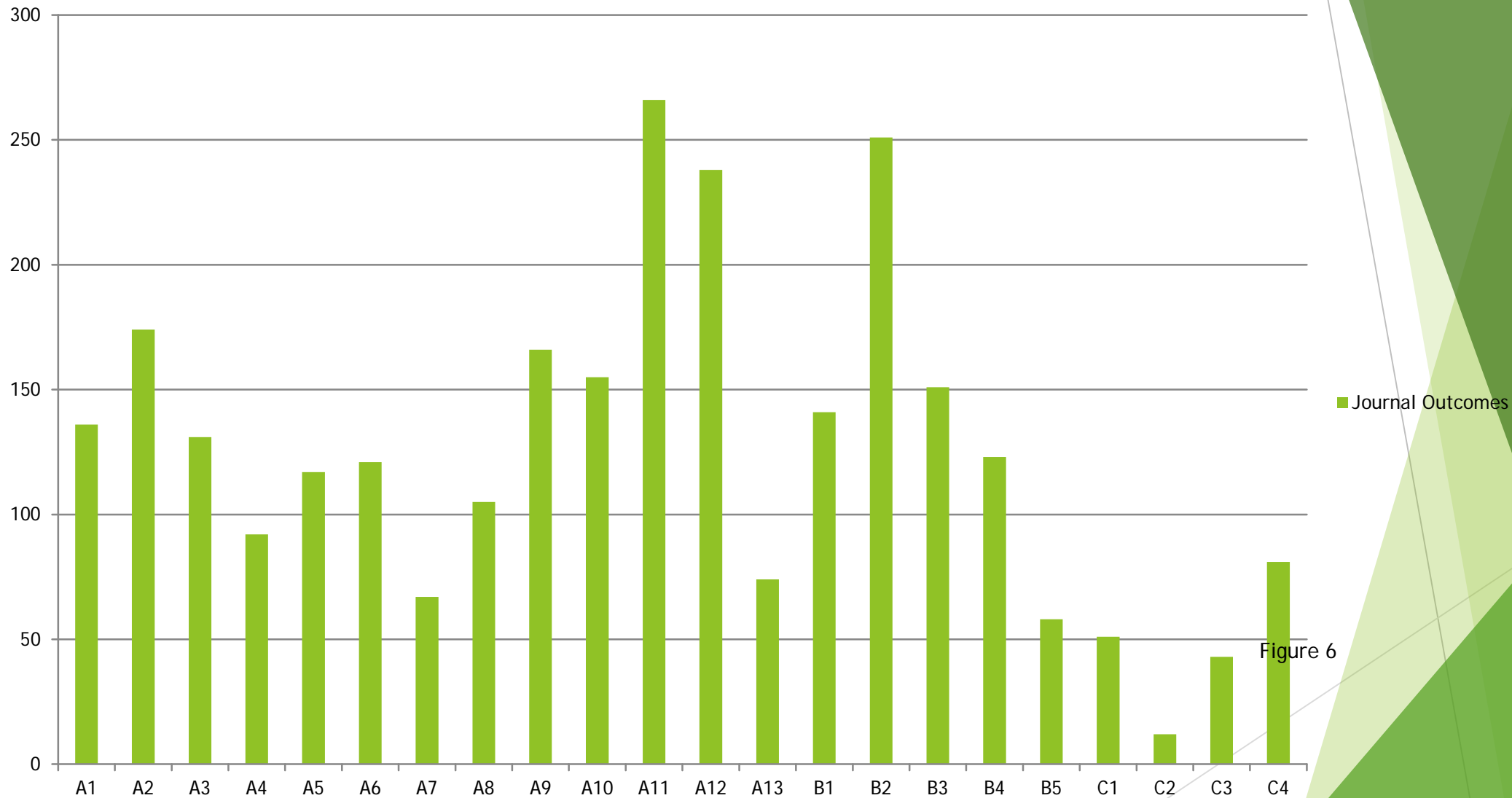


Figure 6

Evaluation Outcomes

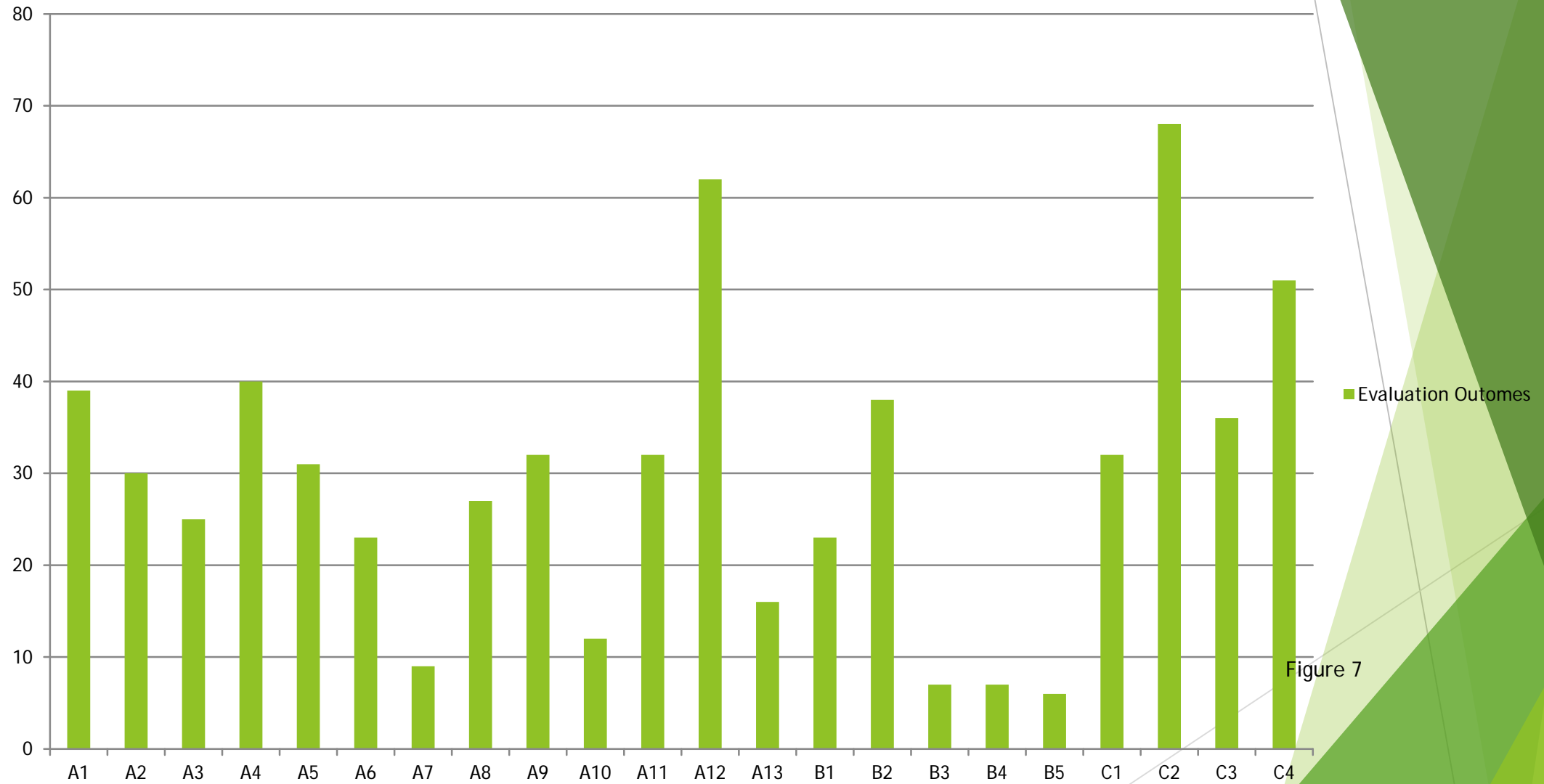


Figure 7

Research Question 3

How do the processes of a) the out-of-school experience b) journaling, and c) mentoring support long-term program outcomes? This was measured through:

- ▶ interviews with WISE participants
- ▶ interviews with WISE mentors

Results Concerning Research Question 3

All of the former WISE students interviewed reported that their out-of-school experience helped them in their transition and that the effects of it carried over into their present circumstances.

The most common WISE outcomes students referenced that have carried over were A3 (become creative problem-solvers and theorize toward solutions), B2 (interact with new/different people in adult environments), and B3 (adapt and navigate new and different professional environments). In addition, when students spoke about their experiences with keeping journals, they referenced how journaling helped them develop writing skills, outcome C3. Finally, students and mentors stated that the mentoring process was essential to skill acquisition.

Does WISE...

Align to established College and Career
Readiness Standards?

YES

Produce the outcomes it sets out to achieve?

YES

Do the effects of WISE endure after the WISE
experience?

YES