

PERCEPTIONS OF DISPLACED MANUFACTURING WORKERS ABOUT THEIR
TRANSITION TO SUCCESSFUL RE-EMPLOYMENT THROUGH A COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE: SIX STORIES OF SUCCESS

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

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TRANSITION TO SUCCESSFUL RE-EMPLOYMENT THROUGH A COMMUNITY
COLLEGE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE: SIX STORIES OF SUCCESS (August 2011)

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The significant economic shift of the past ten years within the United States has forced thousands of long-time manufacturing workers to change careers. Within this life transition process, dislocated workers have chosen to attend community colleges using the education benefit within the federal Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program. Using narrative methodology, this qualitative study explored how North Carolina workers, dislocated from traditional manufacturing jobs, successfully navigated transition from work to college into a new career field through the use of TAA benefits. Six individuals who earned an associate's degree from a North Carolina community college and began work in a new field were interviewed using a semi-structured format. Because all six participants successfully navigated the transition, determining how and why they were successful was a focus in data analysis.

Three major themes emerged from data analysis: predisposition for learning, opportunity, and competing identities. Findings indicate that dislocated workers who discover and use their natural abilities for learning and view TAA support for college as an opportunity are likely to successfully complete a degree program regardless of prior levels of education. Findings also indicate that workers, upon graduating from college

and beginning a new field of work, may, for a period of time, be situated between former and newly developing identities associated with formal education and becoming a professional. These findings, in combination with prior research findings, may have implications for federal worker assistance programs, the agencies that administer them, and community colleges, particularly in the manner in which the complexities of life transition are addressed.