



PathTech LISTEN

Mixed Methods Longitudinal Investigations of Students in Technician Education

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Perspectives from the Field: Wave 2 Interview Vignettes

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One participant was surprisingly upbeat despite the fact that “bad timing” had severely impacted her career and earnings. She had recently left a job and gotten a job as a life guard at a theme park. However, before she could start this job, the theme park closed down. She has been unable to reach anyone in HR to find out information about if or when she would be able to work for them but hopes she can work there when it reopens. In the meantime, she was able to secure a job at a pet store as an aquatics specialist.

She is also currently taking classes through an online program on animal behavior. She began these classes in January and is due to complete them in September. These were already online so there was little change as for as her schedule goes with these classes.



This worker lost not 1, but 2 jobs due to the pandemic. She was a paid intern as an environmental health and safety worker at a steel company. Originally a year-long commitment, she was laid off in April due to Covid-19. In addition to this stress, she experienced self-doubt and regret, as she had left a previously secure job outside of her field to take this internship in her field, leaving her wondering if she would be employed had she remained at her former job. She was also a self-employed massage therapist but currently has no clients due to covid-19, often working with people who are elderly or injured. She currently takes care of her niece though it is unclear whether or not she is paid for this labor. She has also experienced difficulties obtaining unemployment benefits. She received benefits for 1 week before they were shut off again.

She is currently enrolled in school. She is taking classes at a 2-year institution since it is cheaper and will transfer them to the 4-year institution where she intends to get her degree. This trajectory has not been impacted to the same extent as her career. While she thinks the colleges may have overreacted in response to the pandemic, she was glad they responded in the way that they did, as there are many older non-traditional students and this showed that the school cared about student safety. Many of her classes were already online though she misses using the library.

Despite the setbacks that she is currently experiencing, she believes covid-19 will have little impact long-term on the availability of jobs and may actually increase jobs or responsibilities as more safety precautions are required (she wants to work in health and safety).

“It affected me job wise. I was doing an internship and the company laid me off in the beginning of April. And I also worked for myself as a massage therapist. So my business was closed. So, it affected me pretty dramatically, but I'm starting to get back into working now and even though it was an impact, it helped me because I was able to help my sister with childcare and stuff. So, trying to see the positive of it.”



One technician is still building computers with the company that he has been with for 2 years. His job cannot be done remotely and he states “We haven’t closed down for even one day.” When asked how Covid-19 may have impacted his life outside of work, he stated that the only thing was that his fiancée works from home now. His only concern has been for the health of his diabetic mother.

He plans to go back to university in the future for a degree in computer science. However, his reason for not returning to school now is that he is in the process of moving to Florida. He does have some ambivalence about moving to a state that had a high number of infections, but this concern has not disrupted their timeline for moving.



One participant refers to the day of the interview as a “normal Monday,” which is the day of the week that his job holds meetings to plan out the scheduled jobs for the rest of the week. Despite the pandemic, things at his job with an energy company have been extremely busy and 3 new substation construction projects are currently in progress.

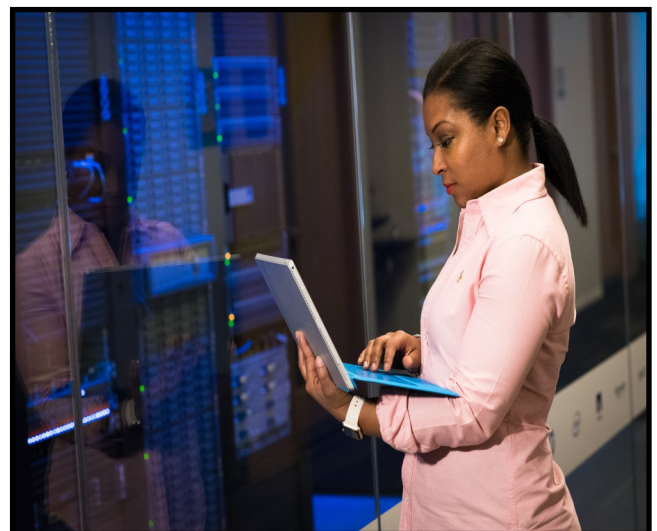
Briefly at the very beginning of the shutdown, he was unable to work but reported that he spent some time with his family though big gatherings had to be avoided. He is not particularly concerned about the virus because the 2 people he knows who did test positive had mild symptoms, saying that they’d had “worse hangovers.” In regards to current precautions, he states that “The only time I’ll put a mask on is if I’m working in a county that’s got a mandate kind of thing.”

The pandemic has led to some changes in policies at his work, such as limiting the number at in-person meetings and some office workers working remotely which he reports has made them more difficult to reach in a timely manner. However, his job, which cannot be done remotely, has been relatively stable. In fact, since last year’s interview, he has been promoted from assistant relay tech to a journeyman relay tech, which he says is the highest non-managerial position in his work field. His future goals include working his way up to a supervisor or manager in the same company. He had at one point considered going back to pursue a degree in electrical engineering after working in the field for a few years but has since decided that he likes this job and would not need that degree to advance to the positions he wants.

When asked about the long-term impact, he stated, “Honestly, I don’t think that it’s going to have hardly any impact on us. Like I said, we really never broke stride at work, even through the peak of this virus thing.”

One medical technician is an immigrant from a Northern African country. After finishing his 2-year degree, he took a gap year with the intent of returning to school for a 4 year degree in chemical engineering next semester. However, he has decided to postpone these plans due to Covid-19. Financial considerations, including the availability of scholarships, was also a factor. He is interested in returning in Spring 2021, but he will not return to school if classes are still all online, as he feels the quality and connection to the material would not be as strong. He prefers to meet in person though, he is open to a hybrid system.

He currently works as a technician in a medical lab. Some aspects of his job cannot be done remotely. He was still new to the job and in the process of being trained when the pandemic began so some of the classes about procedure and techniques had to be done online. He has had some difficulty with parts of his job that he can do online, as his laptop is old and has some technical difficulties, but the IT department was able to help on some of these issues. Despite some of these setbacks, he believes there will be a long-term career boom, as chemical engineering will be an integral part of studying the virus and designing vaccines or treatments.



One engineer was hired in January as a full-time manufacturing engineer at the company where she had interned. Because she was already an intern there, it was a relatively smooth transition. She enjoys working for the company, which she describes as laid back and really caring about their employees. In the beginning of the pandemic, the company made an effort to not lay off any employees and instead, put employees on a 50% furlough. They staggered employee hours for one week on/one week off, so that employees could collect unemployment benefits when they were not working.

The company is an essential business so they have not been closed completely. To adapt to reduced demand, the company created a way to disinfect N95 masks so that they can be worn again. A few employees did test positive for covid-19 but departments were immediately quarantined and disinfected which controlled any spread of the virus.

As the manufacturing engineer, she is required to be onsite and most of her work cannot be done remotely. However, for the parts of her work that can be done at home, she felt she was well-prepared since many of her labs for her schooling were done at home so she already had the space set up. Thus, while working from home was not her preference, she felt more prepared perhaps than some of her peers, since she already knew how to run some labs at home.

She feels secure in her job but expresses sympathy for those currently graduating in the spring or summer semesters given the slowed down job market, saying, “I feel like I got my foot in the door right before the door closed.” She did report feeling a heightened level of stress and anxiety. And expressed sadness that she could not travel to see her grandmother whom she had previously visited monthly. She also gets frustrated with some family members who she feels aren’t taking proper precautions but so far, none of these family members have gotten sick.



Gender Patterns:

Women were MUCH more likely to bring up family than men. Also, nearly all women spent some of the interview talking about stress and changes that came with Covid-19, even if their jobs were secure, yet, whether or not men reported feeling impacted by Covid-19 seemed to match up with the degree to which their job was impacted (or not impacted).

Even women whose jobs are secure and who were minimally impacted still went into more detail on what had changed, as well as elaborating on Covid concerns that were not directly related to work (such as family). I think this is why I had difficulty finding women saying that they weren’t significantly impacted, as even if their career trajectory was fine, they still reported Covid-19’s impact on other aspects of life (and even the woman I did put in the “Not Impacted” group reported some impact and anxiety).

Both men and women expressed some concern for family members. However, when it came to actual daily tasks, women were more likely to report being impacted, particularly in terms of taking on childcare roles. Even those not taking on childcare roles seemed to go into a bit more detail about their concerns for family members.