The 2008 recession proved to be difficult for the manufacturing industry. As a result, strategies for succession and talent attraction are now important for the resurgence of the industry. The purpose of this study was to describe and interpret how community college students, preparing for technician entry positions in manufacturing, experienced a “learn and earn” industry and education partnership.

Past studies have focused on (a) preparing young adults for specific disciplines other than manufacturing, (b) evaluations of partnership programs, and (c) the analysis of the learning characteristics of young adults preparing for a career in manufacturing. This study added to that body of research in that the young adults’ characteristics were thoroughly explored to understand the type of person that is a good fit for a specialized “learn and earn” program in manufacturing.

By using qualitative research methods, this study explored the students’ experiences in five phases: (a) analysis of institution’s semester surveys, (b) phone interviews, (c) classroom observations, (d) work setting observations and (e) face to face interviews. Two sets of research questions were asked and these resulted in findings of value to companies and educational institutions engaged in a “learn and earn” partnership when attempting to attract young talent to such a program. The first set was developed from academic literature to understand what can be learned from the
experiences of students who enrolled in such a program, in an effort to better understand the characteristics of these students. There were seven major themes of characteristics that emerged. Participants: valued mentorship, were academically strong and preferred challenging work, were active, desired a professional career, valued training and education, preferred applied learning, and were not overwhelmed by the balance of school and work. The second set of research questions was developed to help form a profile of students that may be interested in such a specialized program. This analysis exposed the following themes. Participants: disliked repetitive work, were accurate, understood the monetary value of an education, possessed strong math skills, liked problem solving, and engaged in physical hobbies.