

Aviation Origin Stories: A Qualitative Inquiry into the Factors that Influenced of Aviation Students to Choose their Field of Study

The demand for skilled labor in the aviation industry is strong, and by many accounts, the industry is in the middle of a labor shortage (GAO, 2014a; GAO, 2014b). A decrease in unemployment and rise in wages for commercial airline pilots indicate that portion of the aviation industry is already experiencing a labor shortage (GAO, 2014a). Although the unemployment and wage data for aviation maintenance technicians do not currently indicate a labor shortage, there is evidence that the shortage in this part of aviation employment is masked by the use of overtime to bridge labor gaps (Prentice, 2017). There are strong indications that the demand for pilots exceeds the current supply (GAO, 2104a).

Developing the human resources for our future aviation system to use is a major concern for those involved in aviation education. The looming labor shortage will force us to find future aviators to supply the future workforce with the labor necessary to keep our economy growing at a healthy rate. Because traditional recruitment channels are no longer sufficient to provide adequate labor, the industry will need to find alternative strategies for recruitment. This study is a step in that direction.

I ask all of my students to describe to me how they were introduced to aviation as a viable career path, and their responses are so varied that I wanted to systematically discover, categorize, and count the different ways our students have been introduced to the field of aviation. We will use a semi-structured open-ended interview protocol to ask each participant the following question: “How were you introduced to aviation as a possible career?”. The study aims to explore the various ways students were introduced to aviation to see if a difference exists in the ways students from different genders, race, and/or socioeconomic status were introduced to aviation as a career field. This research will provide information that will be used to help to recruit the future, diverse aviation workforce.