



FACULTY OF ARTS

Adelaide Summer Research Scholarship 2020-2021

Closure at Holden: Comparing and analysing the company's and workers' perception and experience of employee separation

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In 2017 General Motors Holden ceased manufacturing vehicles in Australia, thus ending more than a century of automotive production in this country. As South Australia's largest private employer for much of its life-span, and the linchpin of the state's manufacturing sector, the closure of Holden's operations evoked grave concern for its workers and the hundreds of smaller component manufacturers and local businesses that figuratively and literally fed its factory and workforce. This project seeks to examine Holden's closure and the experience of employee separation, from both the perspective of the company and the employees themselves. It addresses the inattention paid to workers in standard histories of Holden, which instead focus on the cars and senior management, and seeks to give voice to those who bent the metal that made the vehicles, cut and sewed the trim, and typed the orders; that is, the very people to which the company owed its long-standing success.

Under the direction and with the assistance of the project supervisor, Assoc. Professor Paul Sendziuk, the student will conduct a review of literature that examines what is considered 'best practice' when it comes to closing major manufacturing operations and managing the 'separation' of workers (i.e. the termination of their employment and assistance given to help them secure new jobs). Holden's approach will then be compared to what was, at the time, considered 'best practice', and the innovative features of Holden's approach identified. Drawing upon documents and evaluations produced by the company itself, and oral history interviews undertaken with Holden workers who were 'separated' from the company, the student will then compare and analyse the way in which the two parties understood what was happening and the effectiveness of programs aimed at helping Holden workers transition to new employment. This research will assist the production of at least one scholarly article, which the student will potentially co-author.

The student who works on the project will be engaged in sourcing research materials and contributing to a review of the relevant literature, thus developing their skills in finding and critiquing research literature. They will listen to oral histories and read oral history transcripts and select pertinent passages for analysis. They will be introduced to theories concerning the composition and narration of memory, and learn about the practicalities of conducting oral histories. They will also acquire or enhance their knowledge of Australian history (prior knowledge of which is not essential) as well as labour and industrial relations. The student will likely help draft a scholarly article, and thus receive feedback on their writing, as well as mentoring concerning the process of having work published in an academic journal.