



Focusing
Philanthropy

Per Scholas Boston Diligence Trip Report Boston, MA November 18, 2022

Program Visited

- Per Scholas Boston

Focusing Philanthropy Staff

- Teresa Burton

Per Scholas Staff

- Kay Howard, Managing Director
- Tyrone Ramnath, Site Director
- Bernadette DeLeon-Rees, Business Solutions Director
- Jena Hernandez, Business Solutions Senior Manager
- Gloria Revanche, Recruitment and Admissions Manager
- Steve Thomas, Technical Instructor

Executive Summary

Teresa Burton visited Per Scholas Boston. The Boston site opened in 2019 and offers a full slate of courses serving local employers. It was the first time FP staff visited Boston. The goal of the visit was to see the location, meet the local staff, and talk to students.

Background

Per Scholas is a national nonprofit offering intensive, tuition-free classes, job placement and career development services to prepare young people and adults for long-term careers in technology. Working closely with employers in each location, Per Scholas designs class curricula to teach students the technical and career skills they need for local, in demand entry-level tech jobs.

Programs Offered in Boston

- Market Driven courses
 1. IT Support (15 weeks) in-person and remote
 2. Cyber Security (15 weeks) in-person and remote
 3. Software Engineering (15 weeks) remote
 4. AWS re/Start (15 weeks) remote
- Customized courses
 1. Full Stack Java Developer (14 weeks)
 2. Data Engineering (14 weeks)



Boston's Largest Funders and Employers

Per Scholas Boston is located in a professional office building in Cambridge, across the street from the MIT Sloan School of Management, and close to several modes of public transportation. The building, named The Link is part of a public-private collaboration with 1) the Cambridge Redevelopment Authority, 2) developer Boston Properties, 3) CIC, a coworking space provider, and 4) TSNE, a nonprofit fiscal sponsor and consultant. The Link has offices, classrooms, coworking, and event spaces built to catalyze workforce development in the region. The stated goal of the project is to house nonprofits focused on workforce development and career advancement by weaving together nearby Kendall Square employers, local nonprofits in the workforce development sector, and students in search of career opportunities.

Boston Enrollment & Demographic

To date, Per Scholas Boston has graduated more than 650 learners with the following statistics:

- 83% graduation rate
- 80% job placement rate
- 30% women (national Per Scholas learners are 40% women)
- Median age of 30 years old
- 2021 wages were more than \$25/hour (national goal is \$21/hour)
- 2022 average pre-training wage of \$22,000/year
- 2022 post-training wage of \$53,500/year (or 2.4x)

Per Scholas' largest employers in Boston are TekSystems (their founding employer in Boston), Trillium, CapGemini, and Granite Telecommunications. The Boston Business Solutions team is focused on 1) building on these strong relationships, and 2) diversifying their network by adding new employers that can hire 5 to 10 learners each year so that Per Scholas creates larger pipelines to local employers. Other featured employers include BNY Mellon, Comcast, TB Bank, and Akamai.

Classroom Observation

TB observed an IT Support class in session with 20 students, all in masks. It is only the 2nd in-person cohort held in Boston since the pandemic began. The class straddles the upcoming holidays so that learners will have one week vacation in the middle of the course. Graduation is set for the first week of February 2023.

To start the class, each learner received a tech kit, including a laptop. The course is designed for people who are interested in IT but have no previous experience. The instructor, Steve Thomas, has been teaching for 20 years, 2 years with Per Scholas. Every Friday, the Per Scholas curriculum shifts from the technical skills curriculum to soft skills: resume writing, interview skills, career mapping, customer services principles, etc.

TB met three students who took a quick break from class to talk.

- Rana is a Lebanese immigrant living in Arlington, MA. She was working on a short-term contract basis doing bookkeeping and learned about Per Scholas through a local career center. She has a business degree from a local college, but related that after September 11,



she has had difficulty getting work, possibly due to her ethnicity. Rana's experience as a part-time bookkeeper, keeping paper records for local small business was a good experience and led to her interest in technology as a more efficient way to work and a means to a more stable form of employment.

- Kevin from Lyon, MA was also interested in the tech sector and was recommended by a Per Scholas alum. He took one course in community college and dropped out after a negative experience. Since then, he's been working for a local utility as a field technician. He took a Coursera class in IT support and was disappointed that he didn't learn what he needed to pass the Google IT Support certification exam. He considered other remote, self-paced training programs, but wasn't optimistic about them because of his low skill level and lack of college level courses. His plan after graduation is to get short-term contracts in tech, continue learning and completing more certifications in order to build his tech credentials and portfolio of work experience.
- Hai has worked as a security guard for 20 years and was interested in moving into a professional role in technology. In the past, he took a couple of college programming classes and remembered enjoying them. He is looking forward to working at a help desk as his first job after graduation. Later, plans to continue his training to become a software engineer, possibly in the field of cyber security or data analytics.

Challenges

The Boston location struggles with student enrollment. The tight job market in Boston is a mixed blessing, providing Per Scholas graduates an edge finding tech jobs after graduation, but also making it difficult to find enough local jobseekers. Per Scholas Boston is performing slightly below the estimated number of prospective students that must express interest, complete the application and interview process, and ultimately put their lives on hold for 3 months without pay. Currently, the admissions rate is 20% of applicants. The national average rate is closer to 10%. Many students self-select or opt-out based on the challenges of the program: classes are full-time and intensive; tuition-free but unpaid. To increase applications, Per Scholas Boston reset the income criteria to 2x the HUD poverty level for individuals and is receiving more interest.

Key Observations

As a well-known, effective national program in the workforce development sector, Per Scholas Boston is remarkable in a few ways.

- They are able to hire local talented staff with experience in the field.
- They are offered valuable opportunities such as access to free or discounted classroom/office space in prime locations.
- They have positive recommendations and introductions to local employers and funders.
- Taking the experience of other locations, staff can use metrics to make quick adjustments and improvements, e.g., to attract more students.
- The program continued and grew every year despite opening just before the pandemic.
- The program is exceeding annual wage goals for graduates.



The visit to Per Scholas in Boston was productive and inspiring. It is always confidence-inspiring to see the program doing well in another city, becoming a part of the nonprofit landscape there, and addressing its challenges with the same proficiency and speed as older sites.

