



Focusing  
Philanthropy

## Per Scholas Diligence Trip Report Boston April 1, 2024

### Program Visited

- Per Scholas Boston

### Focusing Philanthropy Staff

- Larry Gilson

### Per Scholas Staff

- H. Kay Howard - Managing Director, Per Scholas
- Molly Russell - Senior Manager, Development
- Tyrone Ramnath - Site Director

### Executive Summary

Larry Gilson visited the Per Scholas offices/training site, interacted with Boston leadership, observed a class in session, met with three students, and chaperoned two donors, one prospective donor and representatives of a wealth advisory firm for a portion of the visit.

### Background

Per Scholas is a national nonprofit offering intensive, tuition-free classes, job placement and career development services to prepare 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.

### Per Scholas - Boston

Per Scholas' Boston program operates from shared space in central Cambridge in a high-rise office building near the MIT campus and adjacent to a T (light rail) stop. Training rooms are dedicated to Per Scholas but common areas, conference rooms, and break rooms are shared.

Larry observed a portion of a class taught by Steve Thomas, Technical Instructor

The class observed was one of the final sessions of a 13-week training course in IT Support. Students were engaged in recapping what they had learned regarding establishing/expanding office IT networks and troubleshooting technical problems. All students were preparing for or in the midst of proctored credentialing exams for CompTIAA+ certifications.

Larry met with three of the students who stepped out of the class for a half hour discussion. Each of the three students acknowledged that the technical training and the pace of the work was challenging but each communicated a sense of accomplishment and confidence in their command of the subject matter. When asked what was most unexpected, each cited the value of the soft skill training,



indicating that the interview practices and feedback, the listening skills, and the strengthened ability (and confidence) in presenting themselves to potential employers were particularly helpful.

**Per Scholas Boston offers the following training tracks:**

- IT Support – 13 weeks – leading to jobs as end user support & help desk
- Cybersecurity – 15 weeks – leading to jobs as network or security analyst
- Software Engineer – 15 weeks – full stack web developer, front or back-end developer
- AWS re/Start – 15 weeks – cloud engineer or cloud architect

Launched in 2019, Per Scholas Boston had trained 925 students through 2023 of whom 80% are people of color, 32% are women. The percentage of women is increasing. For the latest year for which material data is available, 87% of students had graduated and 68% had thus far obtained IT jobs in the first year post-graduation with average starting wages of \$24.97/hour (\$51.9k/year). Per Scholas staff acknowledged that some graduates do not report on their post-graduation employment experience and hiring, and wage statistics are only for those reporting.

Boston has been selected as one of the Per Scholas test sites for a pilot where modest sized zero interest loans will be made available to students facing acute financial challenges that jeopardize their ability to persist in the program through graduation. This experiment is a response to the fact that 56% of students were unemployed at admission and, at least for students enrolled in recent IT Support training, the average annual pre-training income is \$18,100, well below a living wage in Boston.

As with visits to other Per Scholas sites, the Boston leadership team demonstrated detailed knowledge of the curriculum, student demographics, local employers, and public and nonprofit “feeder” entities through which referrals to the program frequently occur. H. Kay said that they have a close mutual-referral history with JVS Boston which is another of the Focusing Philanthropy programs, providing equivalent training for health care professions.

The students demonstrated a level of self-confidence and professional demeanor that reflected the refinement of these key attributes through their nearly completed course. Each expressed confidence in passing their credentialing exams and each had credible (and quite diverse) ambitions about how they hoped to apply their new skills and credentials. Acknowledging that they were inevitably selected to meet with Larry because of their positive attitude and communications skills, each seemed credible in indicating that the Per Scholas training and support had a profound and positive impact on their opportunities, life expectations, and families.