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Salary before tech ed: \$26K. After: \$73K

Details from the first graduating class of Queens nonprofit school Access Code show the (dollar) value of a computer-science education.

[Matthew Flamm](#)

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General Assembly and Flatiron School are not the only tech-education programs whose graduates find jobs. Access Code, [a tiny program run by the nonprofit Coalition for Queens](#), has just completed a survey of its inaugural class six months after graduation that shows the organization batting better than .700.

Of the 21 students who completed the 18-week course, 15 have full-time jobs, according to Coalition for Queens founder Jukay Hsu. Another five alumni are freelancing or working part-time while developing their own projects, or are still in school. Only one has left the tech field (another three dropped out early in the program).

Just as important, Access Code graduates have moved up the economic ladder: The average salary for the group now comes to \$73,000, with the range extending from about \$40,000 to \$100,000. Prior to the program, the average salary for the group was \$26,000, with half the students earning less than \$15,000.

Though the course—in programming iPhone applications—started in May and ran through the summer, Access Code worked with the students into October. In addition to teaching iOS coding, the program included visits from entrepreneurs, networking opportunities, job-interview coaching and mentoring.

"For us, this is about a long-term commitment to serving our graduates and to building this tech ecosystem, and as time goes on we'll see people's salaries increasing and increasing," Mr. Hsu said.

The overall aim was to teach tech skills and entrepreneurship to groups often left out of New York's thriving tech scene: women, minorities, immigrants and low-income residents. Tuition, for those who could afford it, was around \$1,000, or about a twelfth of what a similar course would cost at General Assembly or Flatiron.

The roughly \$200,000 cost of the program was paid for by grants from Google and the city.

More than half the students were women, and more than half were African-American and Hispanic. [Most had college degrees but no tech background](#); one, Michelle Fernandez, had a computer-science degree but no skills as a developer. She's now a website developer at Condé Nast.

Eli Bierman is another of Access Code's success stories: A geography major at CUNY's Macaulay Honors College, he graduated last spring knowing nothing about coding. He was hired out of the program as a mobile developer at Vantageous Inc., a Manhattan based creator of a video-production app.

Access Code offered many of the graduates their first glimpse of a different sort of career.

"It taught me the basics of programming and opened my eyes to the world of being able to design something and push it through to an app," said Sky Davis, a Harlem native who was finishing up a graduate degree in communications design at Pratt Institute when she arrived at Access Code. Unable to afford the tuition, she performed volunteer work at the

coalition's office.

In October, she landed a position as a Web designer at Scratch Music Group. Her ability to do iOS coding won points in the job interview, she said.

Mr. Hsu is now raising money for the next Access Code class, which he hopes will number 100—four cohorts of 25 students each. [Reddit co-founder Alexis Ohanian](#) is among those helping with fundraising.

Mr. Hsu acknowledges that for all the diversity of the first graduating class, he was drawing from a pool of highly motivated, mostly college-educated applicants. But he sees the program growing to include a broader range of New Yorkers.

"This is about finding pathways to economic mobility," he said. "We're hopeful that as we expand we'll expand the pipeline."

Correction: Coalition for Queens is the nonprofit that runs Access Code. The name of the nonprofit was misstated in an earlier version of this article published April 23, 2014.



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