

Meet Damien: Thriving in Health IT



When it comes to jobs, the healthcare industry is in healthy shape.

Since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law in 2010, the health care industry has gained nearly 1 million jobs, with the technology sector driving much of its growth. Spurred by federal incentives, Massachusetts has been leading the way to digitize hospitals, health centers, and doctor's offices to improve care and reduce costly medical errors. The result? A huge demand for technicians who can store, share, and protect data between hospitals, doctors and patients. In 2014, systems and data communications analyst positions grew by 43 percent, topping the state's list of fastest growing jobs.

At Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology (BFIT), students enrolled in its computer technology degree programs, are riding this wave of job opportunity. "Health IT is such a booming field," says 24-year old Damien Leach of Roxbury, a senior at BFIT. "There's a huge shift happening towards digital, and I'm excited that I'm getting a taste of it."

Damien earned an Associate of Science in Biomedical Engineering Technology at BFIT, and will graduate in May with a Bachelor of Science in Health Information Technology (HIT). BFIT is the only college in New England to offer a bachelor degree in HIT.

Like many BFIT students, his college experience extends beyond the classroom and reaches into the workplace. He has worked for Brigham and Women's Hospital and Massachusetts General Hospital, repairing defibrillators, bedside monitors, dialysis machines, and improving workflows. Today, he works on-campus for PlumChoice, providing tech support to customers across the U.S.

"After class, I walk upstairs to the third floor to my job and apply what I'm learning in the classroom," he says. "There's no better way to equip students than to give them school work and real work in the same day. We apply what we learn." - Damien Leach

Damien enrolled in BFIT when he was a sophomore in high school through the college's **Early Access to College Program**. This program allows Boston public high school sophomores, juniors and seniors to take college courses and earn college credit, saving time and money. "I knew that if didn't go to college, I wouldn't be successful. This was an opportunity to make something of myself and become the first person in my family to get a degree."

While Damien handles complex IT issues with ease, his road to college success has been anything but easy. "I didn't grow up with a computer. A lot of technology that was around, we could never really afford it." he says. "My mom always taught me throughout all those challenges, that I was gonna be a leader. Even when I was unable to see it for myself, she would tell me that."

Armed with his mother's wisdom, Damien has excelled at BFIT. He says he chose BFIT because of its small class sizes, hands-on degrees, and high job placement rate. Another important factor, he says, is its inclusive culture. "There's real people here. When I went here I knew I'd fit in. There's a lot of young people from Boston here who want to be somebody. You are not isolated into groups here. It's so diverse."

Damien says he is grateful to have chosen BFIT and that the college has shown him that hard work does pay off. "I could have been thousands of dollars in debt and not have a job. Or worse, I could have been in debt, and not be well-equipped to get a job. Here, I have a job lined up even before I graduate."