



Annabelle Lilly

Sociology

Program Assistant at
Boston Cares
from July to Dec. 2020

What was your position and the organization you worked for on co-op?

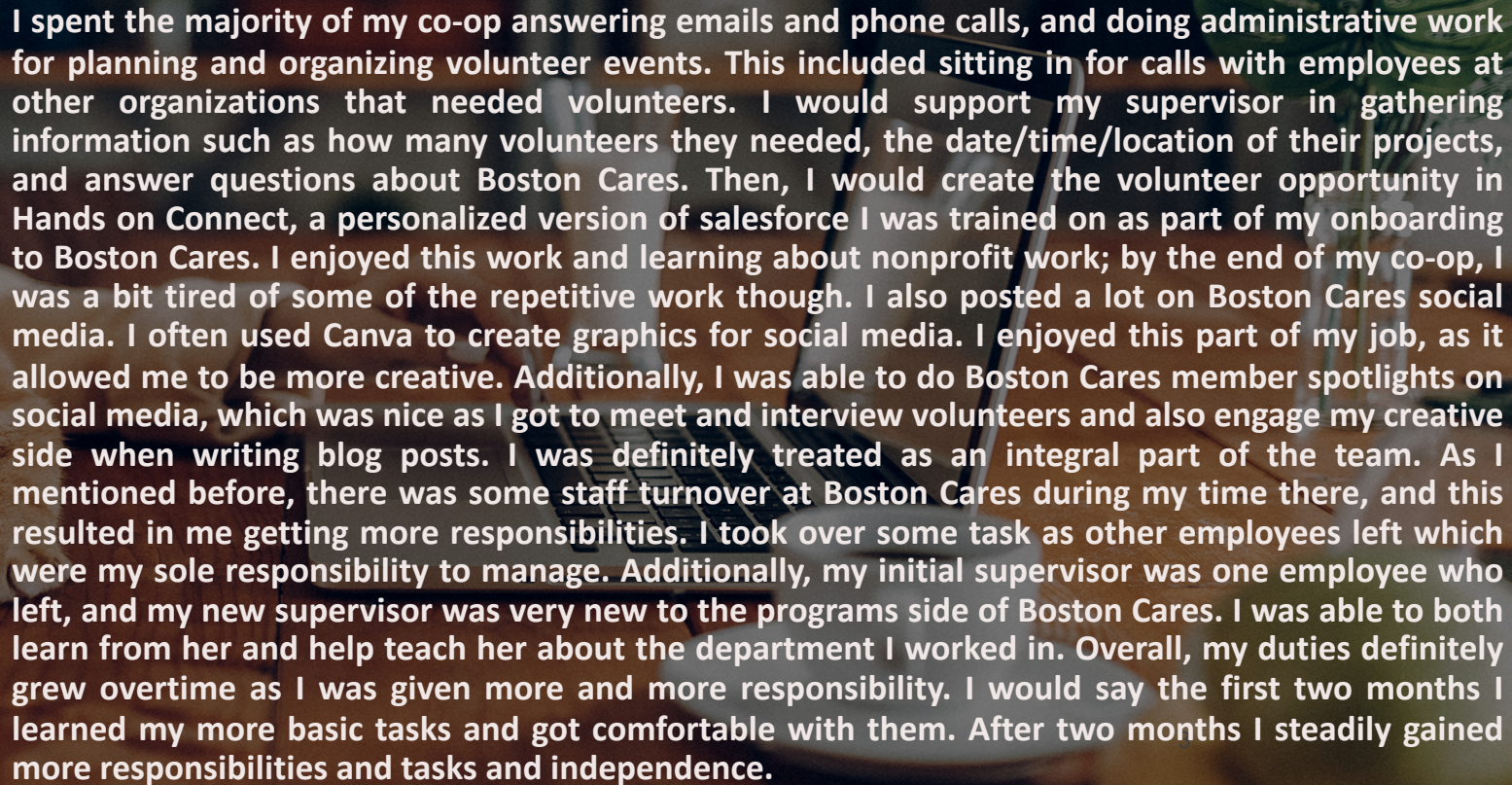


For my first co-op, I worked at Boston Cares, which is a nonprofit. Boston Cares is a volunteer mobilizer, meaning that they connect individual volunteers with various organizations throughout Boston in need of volunteers, such as other nonprofits and schools. Boston Cares also has a corporate department, which plans days of weeks of service for companies. At my co-op, I was the Program Assistant, meaning that I worked in the programs department, which dealt with individual volunteers. I was the main contact for volunteers via phone and email, and would answer questions about the organization, how to use the website, etc. I did administrative tasks as well, including the posting and planning of volunteer opportunities.


My co-op was in Boston, although it ended up being remote due to the pandemic, so I could have done it anywhere (although I chose to complete it from my apartment in Boston). This is an established co-op, not self-developed, which is nice because Boston Cares knows exactly how to train and co-op and keep them busy. The NUCareers description of my job was mostly accurate in terms of the computer work that I did, but ended up being somewhat different due to Covid-19. Since I worked from home, the going out to volunteer projects was not part of my job as it usually is for the co-op at Boston Cares. Additionally, there was some staff turnover at Boston Cares during my time there, which led to some new responsibilities for me, including managing the virtual volunteering opportunities which Boston Cares had added as a result of the pandemic.

My co-op was paid, which was really nice, as I didn't realize how many nonprofits you can co-op at and still get paid.

How did you spend the majority of your time in co-op?

A person's hands are shown typing on a laptop keyboard. A ginger cat is sitting on the person's lap, looking towards the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a desk or workspace.

I spent the majority of my co-op answering emails and phone calls, and doing administrative work for planning and organizing volunteer events. This included sitting in for calls with employees at other organizations that needed volunteers. I would support my supervisor in gathering information such as how many volunteers they needed, the date/time/location of their projects, and answer questions about Boston Cares. Then, I would create the volunteer opportunity in Hands on Connect, a personalized version of salesforce I was trained on as part of my onboarding to Boston Cares. I enjoyed this work and learning about nonprofit work; by the end of my co-op, I was a bit tired of some of the repetitive work though. I also posted a lot on Boston Cares social media. I often used Canva to create graphics for social media. I enjoyed this part of my job, as it allowed me to be more creative. Additionally, I was able to do Boston Cares member spotlights on social media, which was nice as I got to meet and interview volunteers and also engage my creative side when writing blog posts. I was definitely treated as an integral part of the team. As I mentioned before, there was some staff turnover at Boston Cares during my time there, and this resulted in me getting more responsibilities. I took over some task as other employees left which were my sole responsibility to manage. Additionally, my initial supervisor was one employee who left, and my new supervisor was very new to the programs side of Boston Cares. I was able to both learn from her and help teach her about the department I worked in. Overall, my duties definitely grew overtime as I was given more and more responsibility. I would say the first two months I learned my more basic tasks and got comfortable with them. After two months I steadily gained more responsibilities and tasks and independence.

A top-down view of a wooden desk with various office supplies. In the center is a silver laptop. To its left is a white coffee cup filled with black coffee. Above the coffee cup is a small potted plant. To the right of the coffee cup is a clipboard with a pen and a document labeled 'INVOICE'. Below the laptop is a calculator and a document labeled 'BUSINESS Economy of the European Union'. Above the laptop is a document labeled 'Refund Form'. In the bottom left corner, a smartphone displays the time '08:15'.

**What did you
hope to learn
on this co-op?**

On my co-op, I hoped to learn what it was like to work in a small nonprofit. I wanted to learn office skills within non-profit work. I also hoped to learn some communications skills like social media posting. I am happy to say that I was able to gain all these skills during my co-op.

Discuss *the most difficult or challenging activity that you engaged in during co-op.*

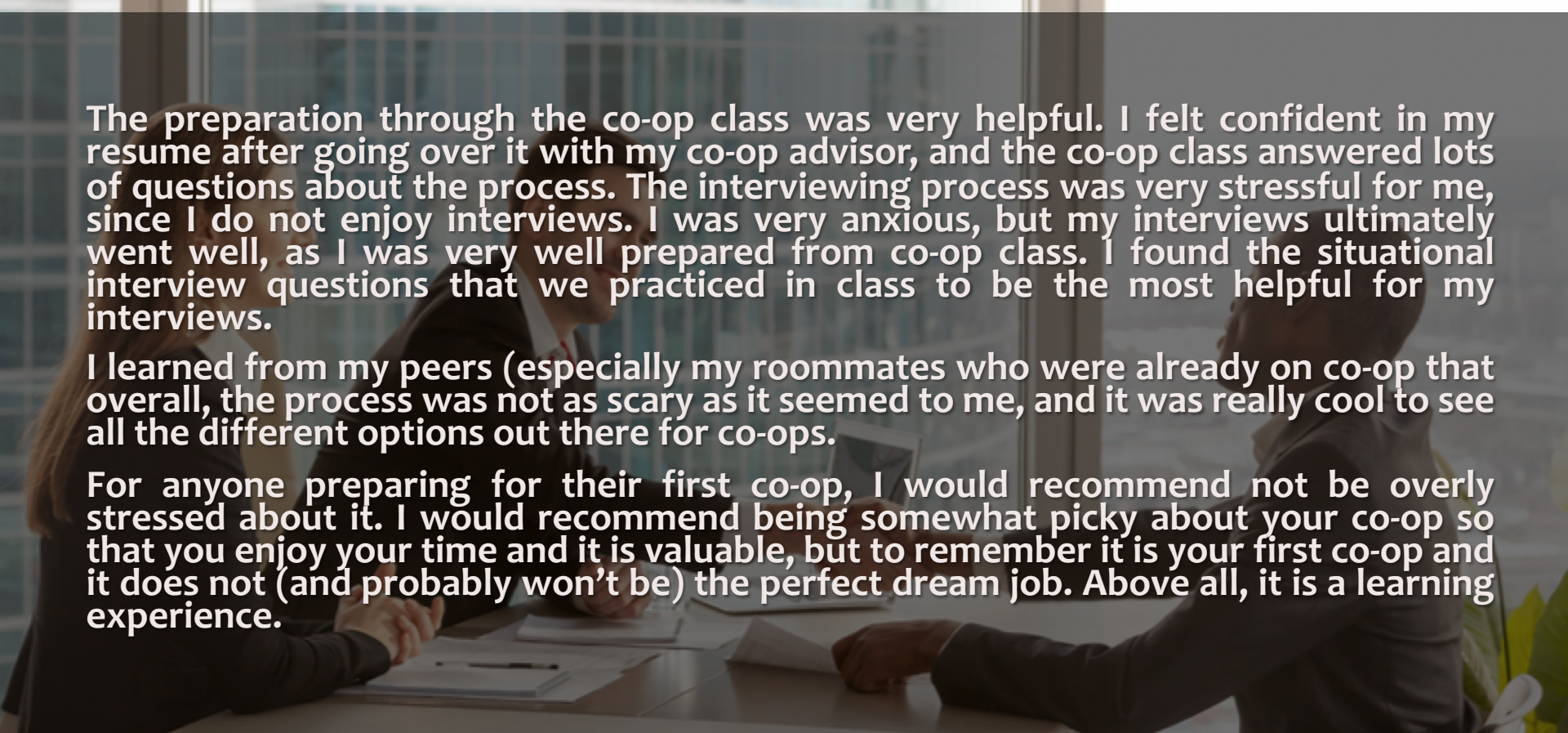
The most challenging part of my co-op was interacting with coworkers, volunteers and community partners over zoom. It was difficult to get to know my coworkers completely over zoom, and to learn how to have effective conversations completely remote. As someone who can be more reserved, getting over the zoom awkwardness was tough. However, I got better with time. Additionally, I had my supervisors with me on lots of calls to help support me. My team also had fun, non-work zoom calls which helped me get to know my coworkers better. I learned that zoom can be awkward for everyone, and to do my best.



Discuss what you learned about yourself and your work/learning style on your co-op.



At Boston Cares, the management style is very democratic. My supervisor, and the executive director, almost always wanted input from others for decision making. I enjoyed this style of management, as I felt that I was trusted to complete my tasks and was not micro-managed, but I always had support when I had questions of needed help. While there was a hierarchical structure at Boston Cares, I never felt as if my superiors looked down on me or bossed me around. My superiors always asked if I had time to do a task, rather than demanding I do it. I enjoyed this as I felt respected. From my co-op, I learned how to manage multiple projects. I learned how to keep organized rather than letting my brain get overwhelmed from various tasks. Additionally, working from home made me learn how to stay focused, as there are far more distractions at home than at an office.



The preparation through the co-op class was very helpful. I felt confident in my resume after going over it with my co-op advisor, and the co-op class answered lots of questions about the process. The interviewing process was very stressful for me, since I do not enjoy interviews. I was very anxious, but my interviews ultimately went well, as I was very well prepared from co-op class. I found the situational interview questions that we practiced in class to be the most helpful for my interviews.

I learned from my peers (especially my roommates who were already on co-op that overall, the process was not as scary as it seemed to me, and it was really cool to see all the different options out there for co-ops.

For anyone preparing for their first co-op, I would recommend not be overly stressed about it. I would recommend being somewhat picky about your co-op so that you enjoy your time and it is valuable, but to remember it is your first co-op and it does not (and probably won't be) the perfect dream job. Above all, it is a learning experience.

How was the preparation and interviewing process for you?

How did your co-op experience affect you?



As a result of my co-op, I realized how much organizations depend on volunteers to get work done, how under resourced nonprofits can be. I also learned how the pandemic has impacted my community. The need for volunteers is massive throughout Boston due to the pandemic, as nonprofits (especially food banks and pantries) are seeing high demand for their services. Food insecurity has risen in Boston because of Covid-19. I learned how difficult the pandemic has been for my community and how important it is to continue to support those in need right now.


Did this co-op help you decide what you want to do next? (in terms of career)

My co-op helped me realize that I really enjoy working with a small team. Additionally, I also learned how I enjoy nonprofit work. I would definitely consider working for a nonprofit again.

Overall I realized that I probably wouldn't work at a volunteer mobilizer again. I like my co-op, but it was not my dream job, so my biggest takeaway is that I am going to keep exploring my options.

My co-op also showed me that working to support my community is something I really enjoy and would like to incorporate into my career.



A photograph of a city skyline at dusk, with numerous skyscrapers and buildings illuminated by warm lights. The buildings are reflected in the water in the foreground. The sky is a deep blue, and the overall scene is a classic cityscape view.

In what ways did your co-op experience help you to better understand the nature, organization or manifestation of social inequality in society or in social organizations?

This co-op has helped me realize that nonprofit work is complicated. A lot of what nonprofits do is really important for helping those in need, but at the same time, nonprofits can reinforce class structures. For example, the entire staff at Boston Cares is white, while many of the organizations that Boston Cares supports with volunteers serve clients of color. My co-op made me realize how nonprofits must constantly be working to improve in terms of equality.

This impacted my attitude towards nonprofit work in making me more cautious of working at a nonprofit. While it is still something I am interested in, I also want to make sure my work is also actively working towards dismantling systems of inequality.