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BU alums descend on New Hampshire in race for White House

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by Angela Yang

Life after college graduation is not always predictable.

Five Boston University alumni had no idea after leaving BU they'd be joining the presidential campaigns of three current and former 2020 Democratic primary candidates in the most crowded and diverse primary in U.S. history.

Each of the five have played a role in the New Hampshire teams of candidates Joe Biden and Cory Booker as well as former contender Beto O'Rourke, who dropped from the race last month. All graduated from BU within the past decade.

Ian Moskowitz is the New Hampshire State Director for Joe Biden, former vice president to Barack Obama and current Democratic frontrunner. Moskowitz graduated from the College of Arts and Sciences in 2012 with a B.A. in political science.



Presidential candidate Cory Booker speaks at a grassroots event in Fenway on Oct. 21. ANGELA YANG/ DFP FILE

In the fall of his freshman year in 2008, Moskowitz was sitting in the Warren Towers dining hall with a crowd of students when he watched



*Boston University alumnus Ian Moskowitz (CAS '12) is the New Hampshire State Director for Joe Biden.
COURTESY OF IAN MOSKOWITZ*

Obama win the presidency. He said it became one of his formative political memories.

“I remember seeing all the students there and going out in the streets and cheering after [Obama and Biden] won and seeing that it was the start of a new era in this country,” Moskowitz said. “That moment in particular was a major part of me wanting to be involved in campaigns.”

Since receiving his diploma, Moskowitz has worked continuously on various political campaigns and had previously served as political director of the New Hampshire Democratic Party three years before joining Biden’s team in April.

Nowadays, he starts every morning with a call to members of Biden’s senior staff to check in on any ongoing projects. He then enters conversations about upcoming trips from Biden, Jill Biden or a surrogate, and attends to outstanding press requests.

Much of Moskowitz’s position entails meeting with the organizing team to confer about how to expand Biden’s campaign footprint in the state via grassroots organizing. Sprinkled in throughout his day are also conversations with supporters seeking updates and opportunities to help.

Seeing Biden interact one-on-one with voters, Moskowitz said, is when he notices how the candidate “shines.” He described having witnessed individuals with terminal cancer or disabled family members approach Biden after campaign events to thank him for the care they received under the Affordable Care Act.

“I think all the moments where you see that the things that we do actually matter and affect real people,” Moskowitz said, “are the moments that will always stick out to me and stay with me, probably for the rest of my life.”

Moskowitz said one of the most exhilarating aspects of his job is actively contributing to the outcome of what he believes is the most important election of his lifetime.

“Getting to work with a great team in New Hampshire, getting to meet people in New Hampshire who are supporting the vice president for all kinds of reasons and meeting people who really care and have a stake in the fight,” Moskowitz said, “has been one of the most inspiring and coolest pieces of the job.”

Danny O’Halloran, New Hampshire political

director for Booker, was part of the first class to graduate from BU's Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies. O'Halloran received degrees in political science and international relations in 2015.

"I always thought that I would graduate and, within a couple years of graduating, take the Foreign Service exam, go the State Department route," O'Halloran said. "I had really focused more on that."

Although O'Halloran had interned in the U.K. Parliament during a BU Study Abroad program in London, most of his six political internships throughout college were domestic.

He interned twice with his local congressman, then in former Sen. John Kerry's office as well as on Boston Mayor Martin Walsh's first campaign. O'Halloran spent his final summer before graduation interning in the White House.

Afterward, O'Halloran continued taking on campaign work for various races, expecting to turn a new page after 2016.

"I thought that that would be it: Hillary Clinton would become president and I would take the Foreign Service exam and do the original plan I've had," O'Halloran said. "And then I kind of just thought to myself that I don't want to start a career in foreign service in Donald Trump's State Department."

O'Halloran said that while he stepped onto Booker's team in May, he had been following the senator before he declared his presidential run.

"I've known about him for years," O'Halloran said, "and always really thought, 'This guy is going to be president one day, I'm really excited to see what happens when this guy runs.'"

As a state political director for Booker, O'Halloran serves as one of the key points of contact for the candidate's endorsers in New Hampshire. The political department maintains little regularity on a day-to-day basis, O'Halloran said, but his job often constitutes having conversations with state representatives, senators and mayors to glean their opinions.

"But some of the moments that really stand out is not even when we have Cory here, but just the team that we have,"



Boston University alumnus Danny O'Halloran (Pardee '15) is the New Hampshire Political Director for Cory Booker. COURTESY OF DANNY O'HALLORAN

O’Halloran said. “Something that comes with being on a campaign is that you spend countless hours together. You become really, really tightly knit.”



*BU alumnus Chris Moyer (COM '09) is the communications director for Cory Booker's New Hampshire campaign.
COURTESY OF CHRIS MOYER*

Also on Booker’s team is Chris Moyer, communications director for his New Hampshire campaign. Moyer is a 2009 graduate of the College of Communication with a degree in communication studies.

Moyer said he originally expected to pursue a career in sports broadcasting before a political internship in former Sen. Ted Kennedy’s office changed his mind junior year.

“That was a really eye-opening experience to see this whole new world to me that was related to communications but very much had a great purpose and mission to it,” Moyer said. “That really resonated with me and it really set me on a path to wanting to move to Washington, D.C. and pursue a job in government and policy.”

Since then, he has worked for a number of different campaigns — including on the Ohio team for Hillary Clinton’s 2016 presidential bid — before joining Booker’s.

As communications director, Moyer’s responsibilities mainly revolve around the press: responding to inquiries and securing media coverage for Booker’s policies. When Booker is in the state, Moyer also helps advise the candidate on regionally relevant issues.

“I am constantly reading the latest news and trying to stay on top of everything that’s happening in New Hampshire and the national political scene,” Moyer said. “I think the most challenging thing is getting the press corps, really, to focus on more than just polling. Polling is one indicator of where the race stands, but there are so many other metrics to look at.”

Moyer first met Booker in 2018 when the candidate was campaigning for Democrats in New Hampshire. He said when primary season rolled around, he remembered how much Booker’s speech had resonated with the audience that day.

“I just thought he would be a good person to work for, a good boss,” Moyer said. “Presidential campaigns are difficult work and it really helps when you have someone who treats their staff really well and respects their staff. And Cory is just an incredible, incredible boss.”

Shwetika Baijal, a 2009 graduate, is on Booker’s team

as his New Hampshire operations and special projects director. She was a participant in the University Professors Program, an honors program that allowed students to create their own interdisciplinary majors before its discontinuation in 2011.

Baijal said she kicked off her early career interning in finance with a front-row seat to the beginnings of the 2008 global recession. She said she continued to work in the field after graduation, but had always harbored a passion for policy.

“Somehow in 2013, I hit a point in my career where I realized, you know what, I have to make the change now, otherwise I’m not going to do it,” Baijal said. “And I ended up working on a campaign in the fall of 2013, and then have just worked in politics ever since.”

Her primary tasks now, according to Baijal, include keeping track of Booker’s campaign materials and helping to manage his trips around the state. With two months left before the primary, she said the day-to-day schedule is volatile.

“I’ve worked with a lot of candidates back home in California, but [Booker’s] the first person that is just really energizing in person,” Baijal said. “He walks in, he has a loud voice, he always has some horrible dad joke, he always says hi to staff.”

One major appeal of the job for Baijal, she said, is the challenge that comes with its logistical nature.

“There’s always a problem that has to be solved from five different angles, and I like that,” Baijal said. “The thing that I find most challenging is not always having the time to do things the way that I want to do them. I’m kind of a perfectionist, and when you work on a campaign, there’s always a ticking clock.”



Boston University alumnus Shwetika Baijal (UNI '19) is the New Hampshire Operations and Special Projects Director for Cory Booker. COURTESY OF SHWETIKA BAIJAL

Emma Sands, the most recent alumnus of the group, worked on O’Rourke’s campaign as his New Hampshire deputy press secretary. She graduated in 2017 with a degree in public relations and a minor in political science.

“I did BU for Hillary when I was in school at BU,” Sands said, “and I’d always been involved in politics and really cared about it.”



BU alumna Emma Sands (COM '17) worked on Beto O'Rourke's campaign as the New Hampshire deputy press secretary. COURTESY OF EMMA SANDS

Sands said that after starting her career working for Massachusetts Treasurer Deborah Goldberg for more than two years, she felt ready for new horizons. When she learned of the opening on O'Rourke's team, she said she knew it would be a right fit.

Her most memorable moment on the campaign occurred soon after she joined the team, Sands said, when she and a few colleagues hiked with O'Rourke to the Flume Gorge in White Mountain National Forest.

"He's just a wonderful, compassionate, kind person so it was kind of a life-changing experience for me," Sands said. "And it was my first week on the job so I don't think a lot of people get to say something like that. It's something I'll never forget — it was really, really cool."

Sands's mornings usually started with her scouring for mentions of O'Rourke in the news before heading into the office. Her tasks ranged from planning weekly press releases on the candidate's policy to grabbing coffee with reporters.

Something that stood out about O'Rourke, Sands said, was that he didn't need to be prepared by his staff before press appearances.

"He just is so, so smart that he understands these issues in such a deep way and understands the history of our country in a way that a lot of people aren't willing to talk about," Sands said. "I didn't jump in only because I wanted to work on a campaign. I jumped in because I wanted to work for Beto and I thought he would have made an incredible president."

COM sophomore Jeffrey Bloom said he thinks it's cool to know where graduates from the university have gone on to work.

"It's very impressive what you can do with a poli sci degree from BU," Bloom said.

Liam Dwyer, a junior in Sargent College of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences, said it's hard to predict where classmates will head after graduation.

"It depends, really, on everybody and what they're doing," Dwyer said. "Some people go to graduate school, some people go right into the workforce."

Katarina Soto, a sophomore in COM, said she thinks BU alum’s presence in politics makes sense because students tend to be heavily involved in advocacy on campus.

“Politics are very important in BU, as can be seen by Ben Shapiro and Divest BU and all of the current political topics that we’re currently facing on BU’s campus,” Soto said. “I think that it’s great to see that it continues outside of the campus and that people can use what they’ve learned here to go out and actually help with presidential campaigns. That seems really awesome.”



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