

High Spirited

Faith and a commitment to others keep

LSA President Bobby Harrison on the fast track

Robert Harrison '01 is a man whose cup runneth over. The list of his activities is exhaustive: president of the Law Students Association (LSA), director of his church choir, the youngest-ever board member of the national Jesuit honor society, to name a few. But the list pales in comparison to the person himself. High-energy, compassionate, and driven, he is, as one dean said in admiring understatement, "an inspiring young man," the kind of guy who sings his acceptance speech when elected to student office.

Harrison will begin his legal career this fall at Brown & Wood LLP, a mid-sized Wall Street securities law firm. He has chosen to do so despite talents that might have taken him instead to mid-town and the Great White Way. The son of working-class parents who immersed him from infancy in church and musical culture, Harrison decided that he could be a more effective role model as a lawyer than as a performer. Eventually, he hopes to marry those two interests by practicing entertainment law.

"In college, people asked me, 'Why law? You should be on Broadway, singing and acting,'" Harrison recalls. "I guess I didn't want it that badly. I wanted a more academic path." He also wanted to dispel the perception that African Americans are only known for their prowess in entertainment or sports. "It is important as an African American to pursue a profession that is under-represented," he says. "There are not many lawyers of color."

Harrison's instincts as a role model are rooted in the Church of God and Saints of Christ, which emphasizes leadership and service to others. His grandfather is pastor. Harrison began singing in the choir as a child and has been its director since the end of high school. (While at BCLS, he drove the several hours home to Hamden, Connecticut, every weekend to conduct the a cappella singers.) "My church influenced me because from an early age I developed an unusual sense of self confidence," Harrison says. "Since the age of

three I've been in front of large crowds, which contributed to being able to develop my thoughts in front of people."

When Harrison was in junior high school, his social studies teacher taught a course in criminal and civil law. He remembers it as a great class that included trips to the courthouse. "I hadn't considered law before that," he says, "but I thought, gee, this is really cool. I really like this." Law sustained its appeal for him throughout his undergraduate years as an honors student at Fairfield University, where he majored in psychology, won the St. Ignatius Loyola Medal for academic and community-service achievement, and volunteered as a child advocate in the Bridgeport, Connecticut, juvenile court system. He acted as a guardian ad litem, helping victims of severe abuse and neglect. "It was hard, but I was able to act as a role model for a lot of kids," Harrison says. "I also realized how blessed I was."

The first in his immediate family to earn a college degree, Harrison set out for Boston and what was to be another three years of accomplishment. As a 1L, he was elected as a section representative in the LSA (which was when he sang his acceptance speech). He became vice president in his second year and president in his third. Among his goals for the organiza-

tion was beefing up involvement in the administrative and academic affairs of the Law School and strengthening ties among staff, faculty, alumni, and students. To those ends, he worked with Richard Gelb '73 to establish the Faculty Alumni Student Association, an immediately popular networking organization, and helped implement a dean's state-of-the-Law-School address. The LSA was also a presence on the faculty appointments committee and in efforts to computerize essay exams so they didn't have to be handwritten any more.

Harrison now has his sights on the future. No matter how great the demands of his new work life may be, he's looking forward to the day when he can teach an introductory law course at an inner-city school. "I've already been thinking about how to make it interesting with mock trials" and classroom techniques borrowed from favorite BCLS professors, he says. "My focus is always going to be giving back."

—Vicki Sanders



Faith, family, and law are a winning combination for Robert Harrison, outgoing president of the Law Student Association.

DANA SMITH