



AASU Presidents Portrait Gallery

In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the founding of the African-American Student Union (AASU), Harvard Business School is honoring the impact that AASU has had on Black/African American students and the larger HBS community. In recognition of AASU's rich history, HBS is proud to exhibit the AASU Presidents Portrait Gallery featuring the students that have led AASU since its founding.

Year after year, the AASU presidents have built upon the legacy of AASU—a student club that is universally revered as a welcoming, nurturing, and supportive student organization. AASU has helped and continues to help Black/African American students not only find a “home away from home,” but also to thrive academically, professionally, and socially. Equally important, the students of AASU have been activists, advocating for Black/African American issues while being supportive of the broader HBS community in times of need.

We hope you enjoy these powerful portraits!

AASU Presidents Portrait Gallery exhibition schedule*

April 12 – 19

- Spangler Center Lounge Area /Atrium
- Aldrich (various locations)
- Hawes Hall (first floor)
- Chao Center (first floor)

April 20 – 21

- Spangler Center Lounge Area /Atrium
- Shad Hall

**Note: The AASU Presidents Portrait Gallery will also be hosted on the AASU50 website.*



Clif Darden [MBA 1969, DBA 1982]

Founding Chairman

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

A few thoughts based largely on my own experiences over the years:

1. Develop and project certain critical competencies/skills
2. Be of service – be willing to step up and lend whatever assistance is needed
3. Embrace the concept of leadership as a shared role
4. Be prepared to take prudent risk in the pursuit of AASU's mission and objectives
5. Strive to cultivate organizational allies within and without the HBS community
6. Beware the pitfalls of Sympatico as the basis for leadership succession
7. Finally, with apologies to any non-believers among us: *"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths"* [Proverbs 3: 5-6].

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The April 4, 1968 assassination of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was—without a doubt—the seminal event that accompanied the emergence of the AASU. Only several weeks earlier during a recruitment visit to universities in the San Francisco Bay Area, Roy Willis and I had committed to return to campus and importune our fellow African-American classmates to join us in launching a formal organization to serve as our collective voice to the HBS administration and faculty. We were nearing the end of that process when the sniper extinguished Dr. King's life. That changed everything for some of us.

Up to that point, my commitment to helping launch the Afro-American Student Union ("AFRO," as we eventually dubbed it) had, for sure, been real, but not necessarily fully integrated into my being. It was merely a role that I had agreed to play, but not a driving force. But, when the forces of reaction snuffed out Dr. King's life, the commitment to be of service to the larger African-American community took on a whole new meaning.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

1. Conceptualization and implementation of a "linking pin" organizational structure for the AASU, with the chairs of the several mission-related committees (e.g., recruitment, academics, etc.), along with the AASU chairperson, constituting the organization's principal decision-making body.
2. Strategy for reducing faculty resistance to AASU's core objective of increasing African-American MBA enrollment to the target (not quota) of the approximately 10% that African-Americans comprised in the overall U.S. population.
3. Helping HBS make the case for foundation support for greater numbers of fellowships to support substantially increased minority matriculates at HBS and other top MBA programs – an effort that culminated in the Sloan Foundation's funding of the Council for Opportunity in Graduate Management Education (COGME) that for more than a decade funded fellowships at HBS and several other top-tier graduate business schools.



Lillian Lincoln Lambert [MBA 1969]

Founder

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

The next generation of leaders must consider the impact of their decisions on economic, political and social issues. Instead of focusing primarily on accumulating wealth for oneself and one's immediate family, be compassionate of others. The "Golden Rule" should be a guide.

The possession of power often brings temptations. A good moral compass serves as a guide to make the right decisions. I implore future leaders to assume responsibility for making the world a better place for future generations. That's what the founders of AASU had in mind when we founded the organization.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Many significant events occurred while forming AASU during the tumultuous '60s. Racial tension was high and riots were occurring all over the country. The civil rights movement was in full swing, but fragmented between the pacifists and the militant blacks. The Black Power movement had momentum and was in direct opposition to Dr. Martin Luther King's nonviolent approach. Support of the Vietnam War was divided. President Lyndon Johnson declined to seek reelection. Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy were assassinated.

In spite of the difficult period, at HBS it was business as usual. While sit-ins were taking place in Cambridge, HBS students continued analyzing cases and making decisions for corporations, while coming to class in business attire. The attitude at HBS seemed to be that only business related matters had an effect on the school.

What stands out most was the response (or lack thereof) to the assassination of Dr. King. After listening to news reports, I began thinking about ways to contribute in class when the assassination was discussed. To my surprise, the subject never came up, at least not in Section D. Later, I regretted not having brought up Dr. King's death, but the intimidation I felt in class was overwhelming. This could have been a valuable teaching moment for all. The School did cancel classes the day of Dr. King's funeral.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

I am proud that HBS recognizes the significance of AASU and has made the commitment to sponsor the 50th year celebration. This gives me encouragement that AASU will continue its mission of providing support to incoming students, which makes my two years of agony at HBS and my role in founding the organization worthwhile.



Ted Lewis [MBA 1969]

Founder

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

I would advise the next generation to be vigilant and not assume that any gains made in the last 50 years will be sustained. Recent federal government initiatives have shown to have adverse impact on African-Americans; local governments have ignored basic services, including water quality, and used zoning to perpetuate discriminatory housing policies; and corporations, in their quest to maximize profits, may, without oversight, take short cuts that have negative consequences.

However, 50 years ago at HBS, our leadership, when confronted with the problem of a woefully low African-American student population and a solution provided by the “Founding Five,” were motivated to respond.

So, my advice is to be vigilant in identifying problems, and be willing to propose and assist in implementing solutions.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The Harvard College student strike in 1969 had a profound impact and highlighted a gap between the business world and the rest of the world.

In my second year at HBS, I was walking in Harvard Yard one morning during the strike with my wife, since both of us were House Residents at a Radcliffe dorm and “on duty” to squash rumors about the strike. While there, I saw a line of men dressed in business suits walking purposefully across the Yard. As they approached, I realized that they were my classmates, and were walking towards the location of the second year computer games, but oblivious to the fact that the University was completely shut down (including computer games). While the strike was University-wide, somehow the word never got across the river... And, even after the strike, several of my classmates complained about having been inconvenienced by it.

The “across the river” isolation of HBS was never more evident. It highlighted the need for me to be sure that my future corporate focus was not as myopic.



Roy Willis [MBA 1969]

Founder

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice to the next generation of leaders at HBS who want to make positive changes is:

1. Gather likeminded students and challenge them to assist you in identifying the toughest and most pressing problems that are still outstanding at HBS.
2. List possible solutions to those problems and determine which decision-makers need to be recruited to help fine tune and implement the solutions.
3. Organize your team to take actions to solve the identified problems. Ask them to keep an open mind and change their approach as needed.

When I attended my very first Section G class, I was profoundly disappointed that I was the only African American in a class of roughly 100 students. As soon as the class ended, I sought out the HBS Dean of Admissions to ask about the tiny number of African Americans and other minorities in Section G. He said that he and his team had tried and that this was the best that they could do. It was obvious then that he needed a new approach. He was dissatisfied with my line of questions, so I ended the conversation and sought out George Baker who was Dean of HBS at that time. I told him about my unsatisfactory meeting with the Dean of Admissions and asked if he would assist highly motivated students at HBS in recruiting more African Americans to HBS. He said that if I felt very strongly about recruiting more African Americans to HBS, that he would support this effort.

Together with Clifford Darden, I met with Dean Baker to begin the outreach effort which started with a trip to Northern California. At UCB, we were fortunate enough to meet Charles Brown who was the student leader of the UCB Black Student Union. We asked him how his organization was founded and what advice he would have for the two of us who wanted to replicate what he had done at UCB. As Clifford and I listened to him, we both decided that we would return to HBS and emulate what Mr. Brown had done at UCB.

We did just that after returning to HBS. Thus the AASU was born at HBS. We invited Lillian Lambert, Ted Lewis and George Price.

The rest is history.

Matthew Augustine [MBA 1971]

Co-Chair

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Get involved; you can make a difference. Listen well and learn from your experiences and the experiences of others. I have learned that praise is a much more powerful motivator/influencer than reprimand.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

When the National Guardsmen killed unarmed college students at Kent State during a mass protest, HBS suspended normal classes and reacted to the atrocity. Similarly, eleven days later, State Police killed and injured unarmed African-American students at Jackson State College, and HBS planned to conduct business as usual. We disrupted their plans and put our MBAs at risk by identifying psychological atrocities being perpetrated against African-American students at HBS, and implementing a strike that ultimately resulted in a transformation of the Harvard Business School into a more sensitive and inclusive institution.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the fact that in the midst of all the issues and chaos we were dealing with, a number of important efforts emerged/advanced such as:

- AASU Education Committee primarily admitting entire African-American Class of 1972
- Formation of AASU Alumni Association
- Formation of National Black MBA Association in cooperation with The University of Chicago Booth School of Business African-American MBA students
- Advancement of development of the Council for Opportunity in Graduate Management Education (COGME) in cooperation with Dean Fouraker and Columbia Business School
- Formation of highly successful ABC (All Black Company) simulation team once no African-American students were chosen for leadership roles in those formed by the School
- Consultation with Earl Graves on establishing Black Enterprise Magazine
- Formation of AASU Coordinating Committee (HBS paid 1970 summer internships for MBA students Eugene Jones, Leon Singleton, and Choice Phillips under the direction of AASU)
- A respectful/fruitful working relationship with Dean Fouraker



Walter Ross [MBA 1973]

Co-Chair

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

If you see something that needs to be done, do it.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Collaborating with Kelly Jacobs (MBA 1972), Chuck Bush, (MBA 1972) and Vern Stansbury (MBA 1973) to create the first Career Day/H. Naylor Fitzhugh Conference in 1972 was the most significant event that occurred during my time at HBS. The first Career Day event began the process of permanently interweaving African American Alumni into the HBS community. And, the first event was the catalyst that enabled Deborah Gilbert (MBA 1973) and Eric Boswell (MBA 1973) to produce the first HBS African American Alumni Directory. The creation of that first directory allowed us to rediscover forgotten HBS African American graduates, including Monroe Dowling, H. Naylor Fitzhugh, Luther Foster, and Fred Wilkinson, in order to complete our community.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

The game-changing meeting of the HBSAAA Board and Officers with Dean John McArthur to address the termination of a discretionary scholarship fund for African American students at HBS, and the potential for no future financial assistance for black students there. During the meeting, the HBSAAA declared its commitment to the business education provided by HBS and proposed the establishment of an African American Alumni-funded scholarship fund, the George P. Baker Fellowship Fund, to ensure a black presence at the School for decades to come.



Vernon Stansbury [MBA 1973]

Co-Chair

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice is that the leadership role is not given to anyone. The position of leader is earned by careful evaluation of all sides of an issue and articulation of a plan of action that is consistent with core beliefs. It is a quality of human existence that flows from an unswerving desire to accomplish a principled goal. Leaders persuade followers to share the leader's articulated view of the benefits of a shared goal. Leadership requires a strength of character to withstand divisive complaints and negative rationale that must be overcome with a clearly thought out plan. Followers will follow a leader who has confidence in his/her convictions.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

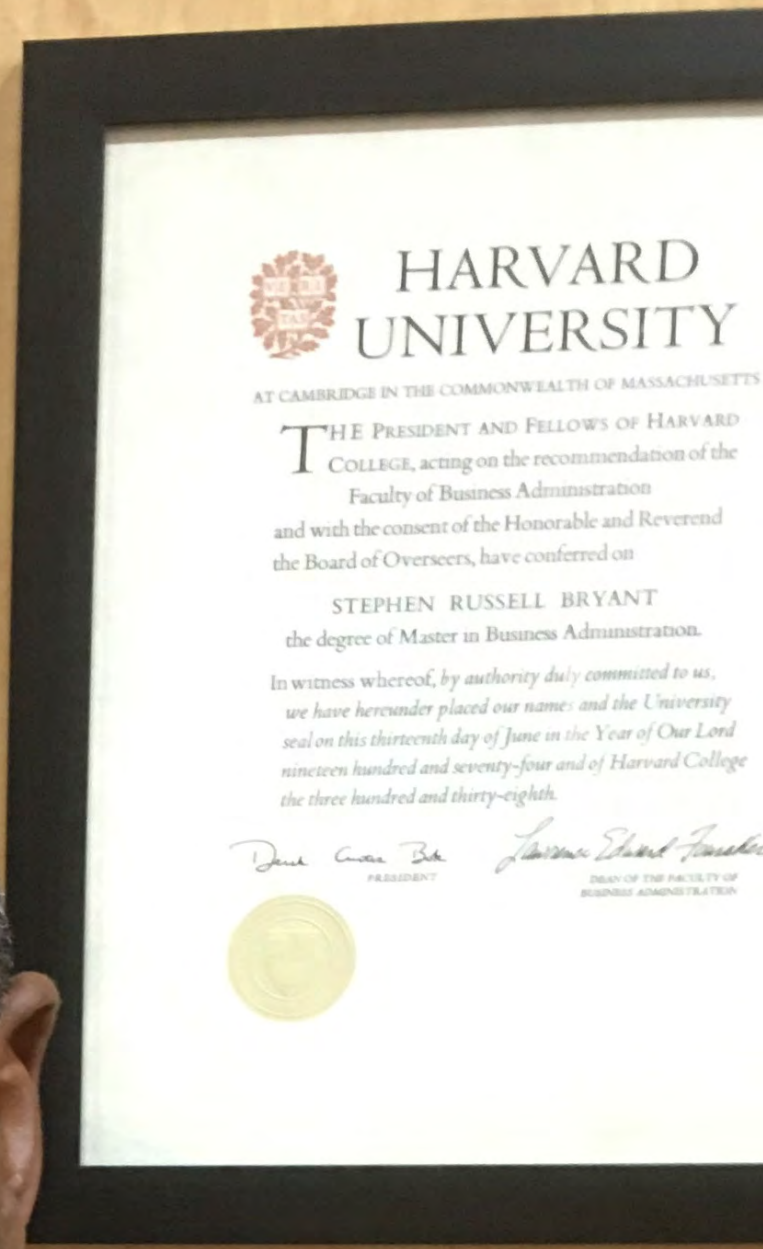
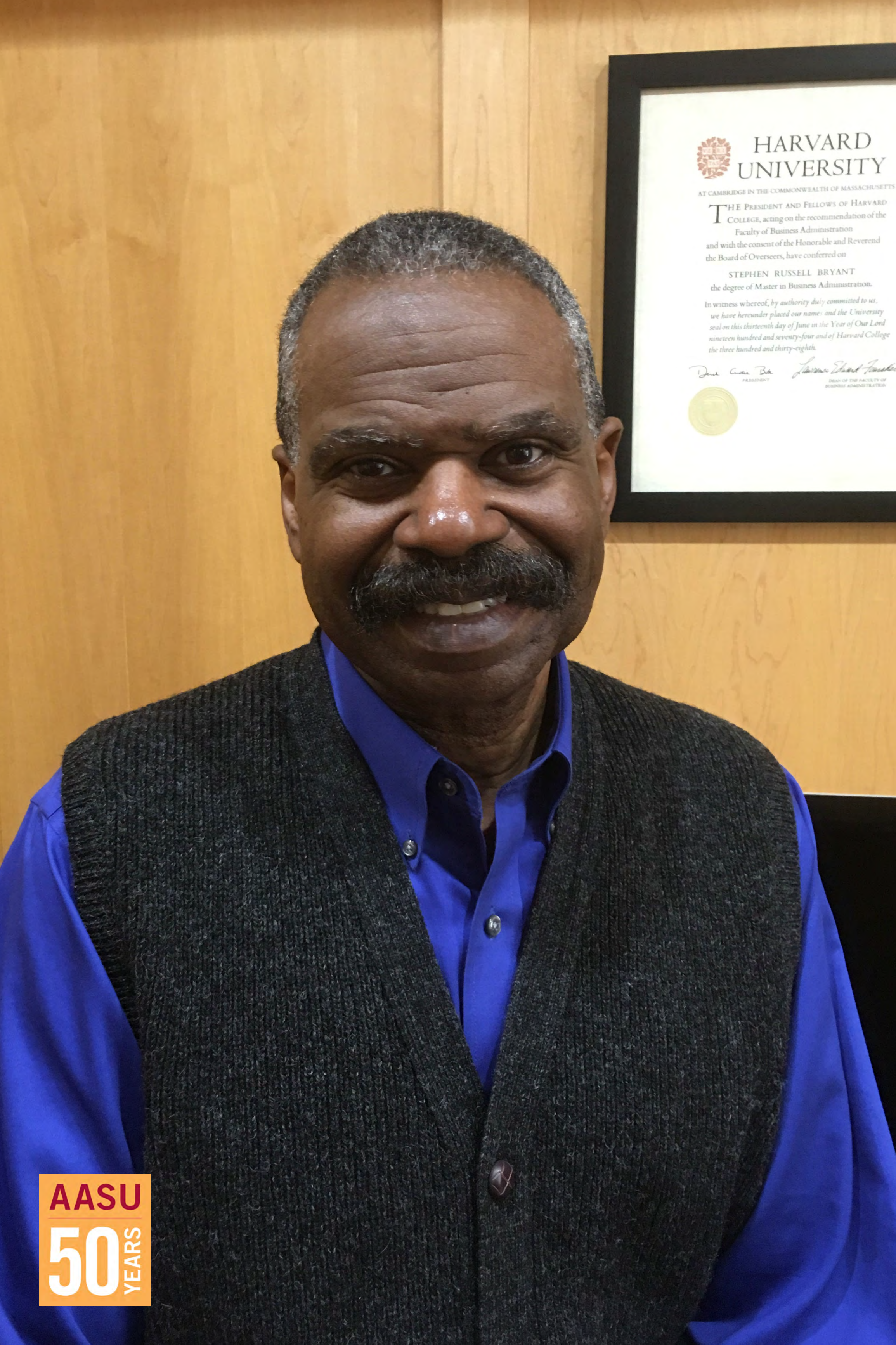
When I arrived at HBS, the world was rocked with protests of the Vietnam War and against the apartheid system in South Africa. Harvard Yard was filled with demands that Harvard portfolio managers divest itself of stock with investments in South Africa. Ultimately, this resulted in undergraduate students occupying the Harvard University president's office. During the sit-down protests, Harvard Law School students carried food to the protestors to help sustain the sit-in.

As the Co-Chair of AASU, I was under enormous pressure to lead the AASU in showing support. With ten years of corporate experience at IBM and Exxon, I was reluctant to support a policy where special interests could dictate corporate investment policy. Especially since those investments supported the scholarships of many AASU members.

We called a meeting to determine what role the HBS students should play. I listened as ideas were considered and ultimately, I became convinced that the AASU could not stand by while the struggle raged outside. We devised a plan to confront Dean Fouraker with a demand that HBS divest its investments in South Africa.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

Sitting across the table from the HBS Dean, demanding divestment in South Africa while our members protested in the courtyard. Although Harvard never did fully divest from South Africa, I can look back proudly on the small part the AASU played in the downfall of the South African apartheid regime.



Stephen R. Bryant [MBA 1974]

Co-Chair

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

To focus your efforts on becoming your own boss and not depending on someone else to control your economic destiny. This path provides you with the opportunity to build something that can provide you with a feeling of pride and accomplishment. Also, you will be rewarded from the results of your effort, and have the opportunity to pass on your success (and philosophy of taking control of your own economic destiny) to your family from generation to generation.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

In my opinion, during my presidency, the most significant event happening in the broader geo-political or social-cultural environment was The Civil Rights Movement in the United States to force this country to break down barriers that prohibited and/or made it extremely difficult for African Americans to be able to participate fully in all the opportunities this country has to offer. As a result, the climate we faced as African American students at HBS was challenging. We were dealing with the notion on the part of some HBS administrators, teachers, and students that the primary reason we were admitted to HBS was because of Affirmative Action, and not because we earned the opportunity of admission based on our intellect and success in business and other environments.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

Being able to participate, along with other African American students, in building a community at HBS that welcomed, supported and helped African American students be successful at HBS, and helping qualified African Americans gain admission to HBS.



Terry Jones [MBA 1974]

Co-Chair

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

At every point in time, there exists “historical imperatives.” That is, there are some things or actions that must be done to move humanity, and especially Black people, forward. Finding a historical imperative for your life’s work and accepting the obligation to pursue it with passion, is the most important and rewarding use of your time and your skills. For me, coming out of the 1960’s and 70’s, I believed that engaging in and working to catalyze Black wealth creation was the historical imperative and economic movement that necessarily had to follow the successes of the civil and social rights movements. Today, 46 years later, I still believe that creating and sustaining Black wealth is the most important imperative for the next generation of HBS leaders.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

In 1972, America was reeling from the trauma and upheaval of racial riots, student power protests, and the impeachment of President Nixon. As a result, America’s businesses, political and educational institutions had to change their heretofore normal patterns of behavior. For HBS, a major adjustment was to dramatically increase the number African Americans admitted to the MBA program. Black student admissions went from 15-20 admits to 60-70. This increase had a profound impact on the way the MBA program was being taught, and certainly on the African American students themselves. The AASU became a much more vocal and effective voice with regard to HBS policies, cases, and admission criteria. To this day, AASU continues to provide a base of support and community that is integral to the success of many of HBS’s past and present Black graduates.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

My proudest and fondest memories are of my fellow students who early on decided that we would live, act and take on the challenges of HBS as a collective, forceful, body rather than as individuals. We adopted the Frelimo (the Mozambican freedom fighters) battle cry “A Luta Continua,” which means the struggle continues. To this day, I am proud of the way my classmates struggled with dignity, freely helped each other, and provided guidance to those who came after us, because we are still conscious of the hard truth that the struggle continues.



Harry Gordon Walker III [MBA 1975]

Co-Chair

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Formulate a plan for your future, which will probably start with your first job. That job should be seen as a stepping stone to your longer range objectives and should not be motivated by starting salary. If your HBS experience is mainly about creating wealth for yourself, make sure you also leave room for community service, physical fitness and spiritual growth. You literally cannot take it with you. As an HBS grad, people will constantly be looking to you for guidance in their own (collective/individual) enterprises. Be generous and help out. Mentor and encourage young talent to reach HBS or other avenues of higher education. Stay in touch with your HBS compadres and be open to collective enterprise. Nothing is worth compromising your integrity.

For a more global strategy, investigate new technology applications in emerging markets. There are many leapfrog possibilities for energy and communications in the Southern Hemisphere.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Along with Jonathan Weaver, Anton Neisler, Melodie Toby, Matt Augustine and others, I had the honor of helping to initiate the HBS African-American Alumni Association—including the first directory of graduates. Check out the website today to see what the effort has wrought. The HBSAAA not only enabled alumni to stay in touch with one another, it also encouraged graduates to recruit talented minorities to pursue business education at HBS. We became a virtual community before the Internet.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

When I enrolled at HBS in 1973, the nation was fraught with convulsions related to race issues in America. The HBS administration was in a reactionary mode while many of our fellow students had revolutionary leanings. Co-Chairmen Terry Jones, Steve Bryant, (1974) and Jonathan Weaver and myself (1975) had to keep pressure on the administration to not step back from the gains we had made in a framework that fit the HBS environment. We were HBS in the mid '70s; not Howard University in the '60s. As all four of us had rather radical leanings, we placed the greater good before us. I think the record shows we succeeded.



Kim Kispert [MBA 1981]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

As you start out in your chosen career, remember how important mentoring can be. The perspective that you gain from others is invaluable as you reach inflection points in your life and your career. Finally, remember to pay it forward. Each one, teach one!

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

As a testament to the resilience of the class of 1981, we departed HBS in the midst of a period of high inflation followed by a recession. At that time, it was the worst economic downturn the U.S. had experienced since the Great Depression. My classmates and I not only weathered the storm, but persevered to thrive in our chosen careers. While today's global economy and political landscape are equally challenging, I have faith in the ability of AASU members and alumni to navigate a successful path for themselves and for those they lead.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

At Harvard, where traditions are celebrated and treasured, AASU represents an important addition to the HBS experience. In what has become a rich legacy, I am privileged to have played a small role in leading and nurturing the organization. While evolution and re-invention are always required to remain relevant, the original values and spirit of AASU remain unchanged. I salute the students, alumni, faculty and administrators who have planned the fiftieth anniversary celebration. I look forward to celebrating with everyone!



George Van Amson [MBA 1982]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

To the new generation of MBA student leaders at HBS, I encourage you to perform at the highest academic level, to engage and connect with both first and second year black students, and to expand your network. Post-graduation, stay connected and make your voice heard at HBS.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The start of the Ronald Reagan regime and a new conservative agenda in Washington permeated many parts of HBS. The modest numbers of AASU members, in addition to handling the academic work load, now found themselves with the added burden of often defending their rightfully earned places at HBS to classmates and professors. While annoying at the time, it pales in comparison to the current existential threat from the current administration in Washington D.C.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

From 1980-1982, AASU achieved 100% membership and participation.



Kym Lew Nelson [MBA 1983]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Although all of the knowledge you gain from HBS/school and work experiences is important, I find WHO you know to be the most invaluable. Developing a sound network of people with various experiences/advice has been so important. It has been my contacts over the years that have helped get and keep my business going these last 15 years.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

During my tenure, Bert King, then president of COGME (Council for Opportunity in Graduate Management), was asked to step down due to conflicting issues with the various schools. Bert was an alumnus of HBS and an important role model to us at HBS. I, as leader of AASU, as well as my team, spent many hours defending Bert with the schools. Local news agencies got involved and many articles were written (I was interviewed by a few of them). In the end, Bert stayed on for one more year and stepped down in 1984.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

The people I met are the most meaningful memory of my time at HBS. However, I wish I had spent more time getting to know classmates. I now realize how important building your network is after leaving HBS.



George Ellis [MBA 1984]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Life is short. Live your dreams. Focus on what's really important to you. Don't be afraid to fail. Build a "gang" of brilliant people around you who support your personal agenda. Stay connected to friends. Make lots of new ones. Give love generously, and you'll get even more love in return. Life isn't all about making a bunch of money. But, do remember that the stronger you are financially, the more people you can lift up. Be fearless, but seek God's direction and wisdom.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The PC era was just starting in the 1982 to 1984 time frame. Looking back, it's hard to believe that very few HBS students in that time frame owned a laptop or desktop PC. In my section, there was only one student who owned a laptop, and he used it for a resume writing service. He was quite helpful, given the alternative of using a much in demand PC in Baker Library.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

My most meaningful memory is meeting my wife Angela Reid Ellis, falling in love and getting married two days after graduation. Angela was a student at University of Massachusetts, Boston and her mother, Marilyn Reid, worked in the HBS Faculty Administration office. Mrs. Reid invited Angela to our February 1983 AASU conference where I met Angela for the first time. We've been together 34 years, and have 3 adult children and five grandsons.

Gail Simons Morales [MBA 1985]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My best advice is to find your own voice. Know what you are interested in, and know that it can change over time. There is no one path that is best for you. Odds are that if you are attending HBS, you have strengths in many areas. The question becomes how will you use them? Only you can decide what is best for your career and family. Take the time and make the effort to do the internal work. Leverage personality, strengths, and work style testing—I have found the information to be stunningly accurate with respect to what I value, and what my strengths and weaknesses are. The knowledge you garner will make you stronger and happier.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

A well-known national reporter requested an audience with HBS African American student leaders to discuss our experiences on campus. I, along with several other students, agreed to the interview. What I remember most about the interview was not the actual interview, but the pre-meeting we held to discuss our points of view. It was during this experience that I learned that HBS had truly assembled a group of intelligent, thoughtful and courageous leaders who were willing and capable of leveraging the HBS platform. The AASU platform is and continues to be one of excellence, compassion, and willingness to lead with dignity.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

We have the opportunity to reflect and celebrate our experiences and journeys as African Americans in the Harvard Business School experiment. There is a shared bond between all of us and often we do not take the time to truly understand the trail we have blazed. It was not, and is not, an easy one, but it is one that is worth learning from and celebrating.



Rob Davenport [MBA 1986]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

In the last 45 years corporations have become the most powerful institutions in our society. The confounding effects of persistent deregulation, privatization of politics and socialization of corporate risk and loss, undermining worker collective bargaining and growing industry concentration increased profits and granted business leaders enormous influence in civil society. To what end?

The logic of brutally pressing for increased dominance in pursuit of more short-term profit is self-defeating. Markets need optimistic consumers with purchasing power to prosper over time. These facts force us to reconsider what is in the shareholders interest, changing notions of economic, social and environmental sustainability from deemed externalities into the core definition of fiduciary duty.

I encourage leaders to urgently work through how best to incorporate sustainability into core business process to maximize long term benefit to shareholders, and by extension, society. This is not philanthropy or worse yet muddle-headed. Instead it is an economically sound, desperately required adaptation that only business leaders can implement.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

A first year student loudly and officially objected to being “automatically” included in AASU because he happened to be black. While surprising (and less interesting) given the absence of coercion and the organization’s broadly recognized value to members and the larger community, it nevertheless prompted us to reconsider our presumptions about identity and defining eligibility based on ascribed characteristics. It also gave us practical experience in dealing with someone who opportunistically makes an organization a foil to promote a personal agenda.

This incident was part of a larger (age old and continuing) American conversation about the legacy of systematic racial discrimination, mechanisms like affirmative inclusion designed to help offset it and then ascendant neo-conservative critiques of those mechanisms. This episode only served to reinforce AASU’s ethic and mission.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU was a uniquely vital aspect of the HBS experience for me and many classmates, which has remained relevant to this day. I’m proud to be part of AASU’s 50 year legacy.





Stuart Taylor [MBA 1987]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice is to continue to be bold... and disruptive! I believe that the HBS experience occurs at a critical time in the lives of young men and women, and it provides a wonderful opportunity to set their careers on a new trajectory. However, don't lose sight of what has served you well so far: being independent, outspoken, courageous, and risk-seeking. Don't put those things on the shelf in order to "fit" into a corporate environment.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

My time at HBS (1985-1987) was defined by the explosion of investment banking on campus! Mike Milken spoke to the student body and attracted well over 50% of the student body. The vast majority of students worked on Wall Street before, during and after their HBS years. Interestingly, a precious few students took jobs at companies that the rest of us had never heard of including Microsoft, Intel, and Gateway. For African Americans, Silicon Valley might as well have been in Antarctica.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 means a lot to me. It means that we have a connection to one of the most powerful brands in the world. We are a part of HBS's legacy. It also means that we have a network of HBS graduates that we need to do a lot more to leverage. Hopefully this celebration can lead to a renewed commitment to mentor, support and invest in each other. The creation and development of successful black-owned businesses is the biggest contribution we can offer to society.



Arnold Lewis [MBA 1988]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

First and foremost, be a leader within your community and among your family and friends. At HBS we are conditioned to want to conquer the world. However, conquering the world requires significant trade-offs and I've come to believe that leaders should try to accomplish the most within their abilities up until the point it starts to require compromises of one's relationship with one's family. We all have a wide variety of skills and abilities and some can accomplish more than others without making trade-offs. If you can conquer the world without making trade-offs that are uncomfortable to you, great. But at the end of the day, once you move on, or retire, it will be family and friends who bring you the most satisfaction.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

I remember hoping things would get better as Ronald Reagan's presidency was winding down. And then, things got worse. A few weeks into our second year, Black Monday hit, and all of the grand plans many of us made for our future jobs and careers were thrown into doubt by the market crash of Monday, October 19, 1987. Many of us had to re-think our career aspirations, while others had more immediate and pressing issues like summer job offers being rescinded. However, by the end of our second year, the market had mostly bounced back and almost everyone had good job options. Nevertheless, it was a great reminder that not everything is under our control, and as such, it's always a good idea to have a backup plan!

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 means I've been around a long time! We were just celebrating AASU at 20 years when I was at HBS, so being a part of the growth and longevity of AASU means a lot to me. Without a doubt, I know AASU was critical to being able to survive and thrive at HBS—the mentoring, tutoring and reassurance was a real competitive advantage. I knew that because of AASU, I was at least as prepared, if not better prepared for my classes and exams than some of my peers. So, AASU50 means 50 years of African Americans helping each other succeed and thrive. Here's to 50 more!



Belinda Stubblefield [MBA 1989]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

While at HBS, join a diverse study group early in your tenure. Learning from others with very different experiences and perspectives than your own will greatly enhance your learning and enable you to build life-long relationships with amazing colleagues—one of the most valuable aspects of being a part of the HBS community. If this requires stepping out of your comfort zone, so be it! Do not miss out on one of the greatest opportunities afforded to you at HBS.

In addition, I would encourage you to be bold in considering what you want to pursue when you graduate from HBS. Identify, research and evaluate numerous opportunities before narrowing your focus. Understand your strengths, as well as what excites you, what motivates you and what drives you. Only then will you be able to make decisions that are right for you, versus simply following traditional paths of HBS alums.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

During our first year at HBS, “Black Monday” dramatically impacted the economy and Wall Street, in particular. This clearly led many students to pursue a broader variety of full-time opportunities during our 2nd year.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

Celebrating AASU’s 50th Anniversary is a unique opportunity to learn more about and connect with all African American HBS alumni, which is truly a once in a lifetime opportunity! If ever there is a reason to clear the calendar and be on the HBS campus, this historic event is it.



Charles M. Henderson, Jr. [MBA 1991]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Know yourself, listen carefully with your mind and your heart, and try to see through your personal biases to an objective view of reality. Study the works of the great thinkers, current and ancient. Be flexible, always prepared to adjust your views to changes in the body of research and the evidence in front of you. Don't be afraid to fail and see failure as an opportunity to learn and develop as a person and as a leader.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Upon arrival (September 1989) the incoming class of African American students was promptly notified that attrition for our group was unacceptably high.

There was a sense of doom and gloom but there was also a sense that if we supported each other, and stood up to what seemed like a racially biased system, we could bring about change. The class of 1990 provided us with academic support and coached us on the dos and don'ts of classroom participation, and how to approach meetings with professors.

Derrick Ferguson and Keith Clinkscales approached me about running for president, and after the election they helped prepare me to liaise with the Dean and others in the administration to address the critical issue of attrition. Deborah Renny was my "wingman," who accompanied me to regular meetings with the Dean to discuss AASU concerns and make suggestions on how to overcome them. At the graduation, the Dean recognized Deborah for her contributions to these meetings. Bill Taggart, as VP, ran all of the AASU meetings and provided strategic support on all AASU initiatives. Darryl West, Lewis Long, Candy Walls, Nina Henderson Moore, Robert Jones, Dina Holder Runcie, Jeff Perry, Deborah Evans, Pam Jackson Simpkins and many others in our class made significant contributions to this effort. The end result was the attrition rate of African Americans for our class was close to zero. The class of 1992's attrition rate was also very strong.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of how our class came together to stand up to what we considered to be a racially biased grading system and made changes that not only benefitted our class but also classes that came after us.

A portrait of Kenneth Fearn, a Black man with short dark hair and a goatee, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue pinstripe suit jacket over a white shirt and a red patterned tie. He is seated, with his hands clasped in his lap. The background is a blurred interior with warm lighting and wooden paneling.

Kenneth Fearn [MBA 1992]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice to the next generation of leaders is to embrace potential failure. Make thoughtful, well-reasoned decisions by trusting in their preparation and training. The biggest threat to innovation and greatness is acceptance of the status quo. However, embracing failure does not mean accepting the status quo or becoming comfortable with failure. This is increasingly difficult in a world that says you are a winner simply for participating. On the contrary, success is only possible by embracing failure which requires us to maintain a burning desire for success, demands that we learn from each setback and commit to work harder and smarter with this new knowledge so that we are positioned to take calculated risks and succeed in the future.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

I was elected AASU President a few months following the Rodney King jury decision and the subsequent riots in Los Angeles. The LA Riots had a profound impact on me, as the center of the riots in South Central LA was a few blocks from my childhood, and many of my fellow AASU classmates' homes. It created an environment of concern and racial discontent. The discontent was well earned as a short while later a male AASU student was slammed to the ground and handcuffed by police while walking on the HBS campus late one evening. The crux of their action was that he did not look like an HBS student. Not long after this incident, an Organizational Behavior teaching note appeared in the campus mail box of every first year student that essentially said women and minorities fail in business because they are abstract thinkers and lack analytical skills. Although the initial impact was challenging, the end result was very positive. Many sections had discussions around race relations in America and how HBS grads could be agents for change. Also, the HBS Initiative for a Competitive Inner City was created by Professor Michael Porter based on a field study initiated by four AASU members.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

Visionary leadership in the image of H. Naylor Fitzhugh, an early African American graduate of HBS in 1933, who is credited with being the creator of targeted marketing. The Dean of Black Business was the epitome of determination, hard work, resilience, a willingness to fail!



Valerie S. Grant [MBA 1994]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice for the next generation of leaders is: Don't reduce your dreams and aspirations to fit your circumstances. Rather, adjust your circumstances to accomplish your dreams.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The most significant event during my tenure as AASU president was the controversy surrounding the University's decision to invite Colin Powell, the then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to be the Commencement Speaker in 1993. General Powell was the first military officer invited to give the commencement address since 1946, and most members of AASU, which included several veterans and graduates of the military academies, were excited and proud.

However, members of the University's LGBT community were deeply offended by his views at the time on gays in the military, and the controversial "don't ask, don't tell" policy of the Clinton Administration. They wanted—and asked for—our support. In crafting our response, I first had to acknowledge that there were members of the LGBT community in AASU, and that their views deserved consideration as well. This was my first experience in understanding what it means to lead in a community that is truly diverse and inclusive.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 is a time to celebrate, reflect, reconnect, and engage with faculty, alumni and students on what it means to be a leader with urgency and vision in the times in which we live.



Kimberly Corbin [MBA 1995]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

We should not be fooled—great leadership is about SERVING with true joy and humility. While you are “climbing” the ladder, earning good money, building your network, racking up the accomplishments there is still more. The more is facilitating a change in the trajectory of someone’s life. True leadership is inextricably tied to having an impact not just producing activities and products. The smallest act of servant leadership can cause the healing or advancement of another person. That’s immeasurable value.

Becoming a great leader is a journey. Wisdom is gained overtime. Our job is to not just plan and perform, but to persevere. The quote that brings this home for me is, “A river cuts through rock, not because of its power, but because of its persistence.”

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

When a white student gave his perspective in an economics class, he said, “I don’t see what the problem was with slave labor...” That was the beginning of a passionate debate all over campus among students, professors and even with the Dean. The Administration became so concerned about the impact on students, especially AASU members, that the next economics class was devoted to allowing AASU students a chance to respond. In addition, Faculty Advisors were brought in to provide student counselling. No one will ever forget that moment.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

We conceived and created the AASU Alumni Relations Committee and AASU Advisory Board to ensure the passing of history, continuity of leadership and sustainability of the student organization. Dick America, Ken Powell, Dennis Hightower, Lillian Lincoln and Cliff Darden all became AASU advisors. They coached and mentored the AASU leadership team.

Thanks to the urging of Jim Cash, and as an offshoot of an African American Archive project started by the AASU Class of 1994, we created a Historian position and launched the AASU History Archive project in partnership with Baker Library. We dove into the records left behind in the AASU Office on campus. We sent letters to all previous leaders seeking information and photos. So happy to see this project is still alive.



Jill Pemberton [MBA 1996]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice for the next generation of leaders is to be risk takers. Get out of your comfort zone and learn something new. Almost all business is global, so seek out opportunities to work in another country. It will broaden your perspective and enable you to appreciate other cultures. Be a champion of diversity and inclusion so everyone feels comfortable to be their authentic self and share their ideas. Mentor and sponsor those who follow in your footsteps. It is your responsibility to continue to develop future African-American leaders.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

One of the most significant events during 1995-1996 was the OJ Simpson criminal trial verdict. OJ Simpson was acquitted on Oct 3, 1995. The verdict stunned the nation. The reaction was different depending on one's race. Many white people were upset with the verdict while the majority of the black population was relieved. The environment on campus around the time of the verdict was tense. There were many sides to the issue. I don't recall any significant incidences on campus as a result of the verdict.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the fact that during my tenure, AASU began developing a plan to establish an endowed chair program to encourage professors to research topics related to African-American issues. In 1996, a fund-raising campaign was led by Jim Cash, Dennis Hightower and Nancy Lane to launch the endowed professorship in Naylor Fitzhugh's name. Professor David Thomas was the first professor to receive the award. We also collaborated with HBS' Historical Department to archive the activities of AASU and held a very successful 24th Annual Career/Alumni Conference.



Beverly Anderson [MBA 1997]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice to the next gen leaders is to take responsible, calculated risks much earlier in your careers. When I think about career trajectories of those I've watched, admired and tried to emulate, one consistency is their ability to differentiate themselves by taking on a high beta role or assignment, by choosing a career that seemed "off the beaten path" or by removing previously deemed important criteria (e.g., location, compensation) to pursue a dream or passion. The earlier in your careers that you push yourselves to try new things, to lean in to uncertainty or to take a chance on your own resilience, the greater the chance of having an extraordinary career.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

One moment in time that stands out is Tiger Woods winning his first major championship on April 13, 1997 by 12 strokes over the runner up. He was the first African-American and the youngest to win the Masters. I can recall being in Kresge watching the TV screens. A few of us AASU members were hanging out with our colleagues, and we had no issues demonstrating our excitement! The parallels of this young man ascending to the pinnacle of his journey at the same time as we were completing our passage through HBS were special. We were all holding our heads a little higher that day.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

During my tenure as president, we celebrated the 25th Annual H. Naylor Fitzhugh Conference. Our AASU leadership team decided to actively engage the HBS African American Alumni to join us in the celebration. During the process of re-establishing relationships, we developed a case study that pondered the AASU/alumni relationship and how to create a more cohesive community. Our collective efforts resulted in a bridge between the two organizations that would help fortify our community and deliver an extremely successful 25th year AASU conference.



Lisa Skeete Tatum [MBA 1998]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice to the next generation of leaders is to invest in the cultivation and strength of your personal board of advisors. Make sure you have several sponsors (not just mentors) that are willing to spend their social currency to help you achieve your goals and dreams. In order to do this, you must have a strong personal brand, and your accomplishments, capabilities, potential and reputation must be known.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

In 1998, we were entering the height of the dot-com era. We also had the founding of companies such as Google and Paypal. On campus, there was increased interest in technology and startup opportunities as the preferred path to traditional careers. Initially, a smaller percentage of African American students were pursuing these options compared to the general student body. Over time, our alums have become leaders in all segments of technology.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 is a key milestone in the history of HBS, and an authentic acknowledgement by the University of the impact, leadership and importance of our diversity to the fabric, success and legacy of the business school.



Brickson Diamond [MBA 1999]

President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Storm the gates of enterprise, government and society. Do not ever accept the demand that you wait your turn. However, in doing so, be prepared to be accountable, responsible and generous, especially to those you displace. Displace them none-the-less.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

We were a class on the cusp. We unknowingly rode the last wave to the dot-com bust.

The possibilities for self-determination and wealth creation seemed limitless. The traditional paths of consulting and investment banking were no longer foregone conclusions.

Thinking about careers as a black HBS student was challenging. Were all these opportunities really open to us? The answers were not immediately clear and our career searches and choices reflected this.

As AASU members, we were challenged with managing relationships with the consulting firms and investment banks that funded us (through the conference), while our members no longer necessarily wanted to take their jobs.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 signifies an opportunity for black alumni to reconvene, reconnect and unite in order to take full advantage of the access and opportunities belonging to the ranks of HBS alumni. I'm excited to remain better connected, to share deals, to propel each other's careers and hold one another accountable for our impact on society and the world. No group of black people is better equipped, prepared or positioned.



John Majors [MBA 2000]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Learn to hold two ideas in mind at the same time, which I learned from my seminary studies. Just one example of that concept is the quote by 20th century theologian Reinold Niebur that “[Humankind’s] capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but [humankind’s] inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary.” As leaders, we have to be able to recognize that both of those statements may be true at the same time. We must never lose sight of our individual and collective capacity for justice. Nor can we afford to be surprised by our individual and collective inclination to injustice. We must be able to hold both of those statements in mind and to be comfortable with the tension created by doing so.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

One of the most significant trends was the shift in the power dynamic between students and recruiters created by the endless dot-com opportunities. As students eschewed the traditional consulting or investment banking tracks, I recall recruiting teams being creative in making the case for students interviewing with their firms.

Besides that short-term shift in power dynamic, the lasting impact has been an increased emphasis on entrepreneurship in course offerings at b-schools, as well as in the general milieu of young people thinking about their futures.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the supportive relationships that Shari Hubert and I built and sustained among AASU members as well as the broader HBS community. I am continually in awe of the great work that our classmates, other alum, and current students are engaged in. The flip-side to that is that being constantly surrounded by some of the most brilliant thinkers in the world who are working on pursuits that would seem ludicrous anywhere outside of HBS can be daunting at times. The legacy of AASU has been that the organization serves as a booster, facilitator, intercessor, and giver of voice to make sure that our members never forget that we each contribute an important thread. And, that if we play small or keep our contributions to ourselves, we not only rob ourselves and AASU, but we rob the entire HBS community of a great gift.



Shari Hubert [MBA 2000]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice would be to keep in mind that success is about the journey, not the destination. Take advantage of your blessings, but don't take for granted your lessons learned – both are equally valuable and can help you continue to refine (and define) your own path in life.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Our class graduated at the height of the dot-com boom in 2000. It was great to see so many of my peers go out on their own, team up with each other to start new ventures, and raise capital or start a new investment fund on their own. In hindsight, we were fortunate to have graduated during that period because we all had multiple job offers or were able to take advantage of the dot-com boom. The atmosphere was full of possibility.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

John Majors and I were Co-Presidents. We were reminiscing on our time leading the club, and although some of the memories are a bit foggy after 18 years, we definitely recall the fun times we had planning the AASU conference (late nights stuffing packets and eating pizza with our planning committee members). Cornell West was one of our keynote speakers and he spoke about the “Blue Note in Jazz” and the fact that despite our good fortune, many in society were still marginalized and struggling. He encouraged us, as emerging leaders, to pay it forward in a way that left society better off as a whole, and not just in our small circles. I've attempted to do my part in helping others connect to opportunity. AASU50 is a time when we can all come together, regardless of our life circumstance or how long it has been since we have connected with the school or with each other, to recognize and celebrate the legacy, history and impact of African Americans at Harvard Business School. I know being part of this community was a lifeline for me to survive here, especially during my first year. I can't imagine how my HBS experience would have been without having the support from the AASU family.



Demond Martin [MBA 2001]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Build community... not a network. Great things happen where there is real familiarity and a clear understanding of each other.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The bursting of the internet bubble made us all focus on what was important in a way we did not have to until that point. Immediately after HBS, a number of folks chose to work in environments where they would learn from individuals that had already been highly successful. I believe that pivotal and scary time period gave many of us a foundation and essential skills that we would not have acquired otherwise.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of the community we created. The bonds we built back then have remained strong and have led to significant impacts on many nonprofit organizations, collaboration on starting successful businesses, fantastic investments and a whole lot of fun.



Craig Robinson [MBA 2002]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

There is an acronym my wife and I use to guide our lives: GEL. There are three elements captured in this acronym. “G” is for what you’re Good at. What is your God-given talent that allows you to do 10 times better than anyone else? “E” is for what you Enjoy. What gets your heart rate up with excitement so you go the extra mile and inspire others to follow you? And finally, “L” is for the Lifestyle you desire. What life do you envision for yourself?

I firmly believe that to be an authentic and effective leader, you need to consider each of the questions. I’ve found that those who nail it in life achieve the optimal balance in their GEL. Each of these elements helps them to be their best and most authentic self in the leadership opportunities that arise.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

September 11, 2001 was a day that forever changed our world. Not long after hosting our annual AASU retreat—a tradition that reinforced that we belonged to a special community—we witnessed two planes fly into the World Trade Center. This act of terror evoked different emotions as we watched the horrific scenes on the TV screens in Aldrich. Following the attack, there was an unfortunate rise in hate, fear and xenophobia (particularly towards Muslims) that seemed to quickly divide America. While there were strong feelings of nationalism on campus, there was also a sense of oneness that pulled us closer together as citizens of the world. HBS felt like a safe space to make sense of it all.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

50 years is not a long time, especially in the life of an institution like HBS. AASU50 reminds me that those of us who came to HBS within the past 20 years are still very much a part of AASU’s evolving history. While the first African American graduate of HBS was Wendell Thomas Cunningham in 1915, only in the last 50 years have we had a voice and sense of place on campus. AASU50 is as much a celebration as it is a reminder to current students and alumni to ensure that the next 50 years foster an even more welcoming environment that allows AASU students to flourish at HBS.



Keith Gordon [MBA 2002]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

I believe the best advice I can give to the next generation of leaders is the understanding that your career is more a marathon than a sprint. A leader is someone who is not afraid to stand out and take chances with a long term goal in mind despite short term challenges or changes. Every reunion, I saw different industry sectors thriving. For example, during my ten year reunion it was widely believed that hedge fund managers were doing well but by my fifteenth reunion it was private equity managers. What I took from these reunions was the belief that staying the course in your chosen field of work was the ultimate way of achieving long term desired career goals not by being side tracked by short term market trends.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The most significant event that happened during my presidency was 9/11. It totally limited the amount of opportunities that were available to students compared to previous years. Students were forced to navigate a tumultuous job market often taking opportunities that were different than what they sought when they entered HBS, particularly African Americans students. Most students adjusted and found great opportunities that they did not originally consider when they entered the program and many foreign students found opportunities in their home countries.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU to me is one of the most exclusive and diverse groups of African American business leaders in the world. I am forever grateful and honored to have served as AASU Co-President and sincerely hope that this group continues to support this extensive network of great minds for another 50 years.

A portrait of Rayford Davis, a Black man with a shaved head, smiling slightly. He is wearing a blue sweater over a pink and white checkered shirt. The background is blurred.

Rayford Davis [MBA 2003]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

1. Bet on yourself, early and often.
2. Find the delicate balance between being patient and aggressive, and know that it changes with timing and situation.
3. Meet with triumph and disaster, and treat those two imposters just the same.

(From the poem "IF" by Rudyard Kipling)

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Dr. Jim Cash's retirement was the most significant event I remember during our AASU presidency. We knew how impactful he had been to the entire Harvard community based on the stories we'd heard and the powerful, yet personal, way he'd guided each one of us. When we learned of the wave of AASU alumni that were coming back for the AASU conference to celebrate him, it was very daunting, yet fitting. While everyone across both classes ('03 and '04) pitched in to do their part, I most remember Dr. Cash's speech. He never used notes for his speeches, but for this one, he did, as he didn't want to forget each planned "thank you." To see Dr. Cash's appreciation for the AASU community and to see decades of AASU alumni come back for his retirement is a moment that has always impressed upon me the importance of the African-American Student Union.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

To have the African-American tradition lifted as a unique and valued aspect of the HBS experience speaks volumes about the role that honesty and transparency plays in leadership development at the highest levels. In some organizations, efforts to lift the African-American voice have been diluted into the broader banners of diversity, multi-culturalism, etc. While these are important movements on their own, the fact that AASU has sustained for five decades speaks to Harvard's student, faculty, and administration understanding and acknowledgement of the consistent and unique relevance that African-Americans play in our broader society.

A portrait of Rocki Hunter, a woman with voluminous, wavy brown hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a red, ruffled top and a dark, chunky beaded necklace. The background is a soft, out-of-focus warm tone.

Rocki Hunter [MBA 2003]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

1. Happiness trumps wealth.
2. Integrity never goes out of style.
3. Family first. Always.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

On September 11th, 2001, the Twin Towers and Pentagon were struck by airplanes. As this was within a few weeks of my first-year at HBS, these attacks on American soil continued to shape the geo-political landscape throughout my tenure with AASU. The job market had stalled and for the first time, even the top HBS students were graduating without jobs. Ultimately, this solidified for me the strength of the AASU Alumni network. Through this turbulent time, we were able to rely on alumni connections made through AASU in order to gain access to job opportunities and career development. This was true for me, as AASU formed my connection with Dawn Williams-Thompson (HBS '90), who became my mentor and guide to helping me land my job at P&G and start a career in brand management.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

The year that I was Co-President of AASU, was also the year that Dr. Jim Cash retired from HBS. Hence, we had the distinct honor of recognizing him at the annual H. Naylor Fitzhugh Conference. That experience was hands-down the most rewarding of my presidency. To be allowed to honor a man that has touched so many lives and impacted HBS and the community-at-large in such a significant way was an experience I will never forget. We had record attendance, as hordes of alumni and friends flocked at the opportunity to recognize Dr. Cash one last time. To witness the outpouring of love and admiration showed me first-hand how one person can truly make a difference in the lives of so many. It continues to inspire me to always give back, mentor, and lend a hand.



Tarik Brooks [MBA 2004]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Leaders must be unafraid to be bold, decisive and disruptive, while empowering those they lead. Striking the balance between listening and learning from employees, customers and stakeholders, while having the confidence to make decisions, is challenging, but critical.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

I recall the start of the Iraq War during my time at HBS. While it wasn't disruptive on campus, I recall very interesting debates and conversations while traveling internationally with my HBS classmates. People from other countries were particularly interested in the perspective of the African Americans in our traveling groups



Torarie Durden [MBA 2004]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Say Yes. Often leaders are bound by personal and professional constraints and our innate analytical mindset causes us to assess, consider and ponder. At this stage, it is fair to consider option value and risk tolerance in any decision, however the greatness of your generation is the innate strength of simply saying YES. Be open to the opportunities in front of you and those tucked in isolated places that require you to spend some time developing, yet can be so worth your time. Saying yes does not tie you to a project indefinitely and to your own peril. It simply keeps the possibility set open and provides the platform for you to be included early and often. This applies to corporate roles. Say yes to the new assignment even if you don't feel quite ready—this applies to entrepreneurial opportunities. Take the time to look into it and decide quickly if you should push forward or pass. Most importantly, say yes when your family, friends, and loved ones ask you to spend more time together.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

We entered HBS in 2002 as the first class post the cultural awakening and profound tragedy of 9/11. We left HBS in 2004, three months after the launch of Facebook and the social media movement. Our time at HBS was sandwiched between events that redefined our sense of cultural identity in this country and across the globe. The world became much smaller, more accessible and vastly easier to address with our words and actions.

And with all of this socio-cultural change, AASU was presented with unique opportunities, and a few challenges, to stand and tell a very compelling story: we as African-American students held a unique place as a unifying group.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

It means my classmates and I had a small section of a much larger quilt. The greatness of 50 years is how much the AASU mission has evolved through the decades to continue to accomplish its mission. This also shows the interconnectedness of our organization.



Seble Tareke-Williams [MBA 2005]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

The HBS experience—from inspiring case studies to memorable global experiences to social activities amongst an impressive school community—is designed to encourage and prepare graduates to be bold, effective leaders. My advice is to do just that—be bold so that you can be great. The sooner you step up to opportunities and challenges, the earlier you get exposure to practical learning. I wish I made certain mistakes earlier in my career so that I could have applied my growth experiences sooner.

As you progress in your career, use your success to be civically engaged. Your professional advancement will expand the ways in which you can be a positive influencer, whether through your voice, a board seat, a donation or mentorship. Remind yourself often that you are powerful.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

I recall my time at HBS as being within a supportive community. Classmates were quick to help each other, coming together around various domestic and global events. I remember an outpouring of support for Asia after the devastating 2004 Tsunami. We were on winter break yet everyone was checking on the safety of students and their families. A student-led fundraising campaign was quickly launched to support relief efforts. We were a community of galvanizers, and this was before the organizing power of social media (interestingly, Facebook was launched just across the river at the College during our year). AASU was the center of this culture of activism. We came together for volunteer projects, community-building events, and to plot about uplifting our communities (some members met regularly about developing “a business plan for Black America”).

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 gives me great pride and hope. I’m reminded that the founding of AASU was close to the height of the Civil Rights Movement, just a few years after the passage of the Civil and Voting Rights Acts, and the same year we lost President Kennedy and Martin Luther King. Since that time, our country, and African-Americans specifically, have progressed in many ways. Yet, significant injustice persists in our neighborhoods, workplaces and political offices. This important year in AASU’s timeline is an opportunity to reflect on and reaffirm the greatness of the AASU legacy and the capacity of its members as bearers of positive change.



Natalie Eckford [MBA 2006]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Bring all of who you are to the table. Share your experiences, your knowledge, and your perspective with others, rather than trying to emulate what you think a leader should do or say. That unique voice is why you are there. It is the voice that no one else can bring, and it is the voice that someone else needs to hear.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that impact the climate at HBS and African-American students?

Just a few weeks before the semester started, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast, directly and indirectly affecting many in AASU and at HBS. The AASU and broader HBS community responded by coming together in a beautiful way, organizing numerous efforts aiming to assist the victims of Katrina and rebuild the Gulf Coast region, including an AASU-sponsored fundraiser event. It was a testament to the impact this community of particularly talented people could create when working together.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

It is common to use a tree to illustrate the power of legacy. A young tree grows better when it is planted in an area with older trees, because the roots of the young tree are able to follow the pathways created by former trees and implant themselves more deeply. Over time, many roots join together to create a strong interdependent foundation so that the whole forest becomes healthier. This interconnection describes perfectly my view of AASU50, the power of our collective roots getting stronger over time and the possibility it creates.

Francis Idehen [MBA 2006]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

1. Connect/engage: as leaders, it can be easy to over-rotate on the strategic priorities of an organization. But invariably, those objectives can only be achieved through others. Taking the time to connect and engage with your people will not only allow you to better drive performance, but will also create the trust that's required to weather the inevitable storm.
2. Confront issues head on: notwithstanding being put in leadership positions, many leaders avoid confrontation like the plague. Be they behavioral or performance related, issues in the workplace can't solve themselves. Confrontation doesn't equate to being combative. One should strike a balance between confronting and understanding but don't let issues fester.
3. Be vulnerable: as leaders, we often feel that we need to project an almost robotic image, devoid of emotion and fallibility. In reality, mistakes will be made, and people will know when they're made. Be willing to acknowledge mistakes, lack of knowledge, or any other apparent shortcoming that ultimately makes you human—people will respect, identify with, and ultimately trust you more. That said, be sure to instill confidence in your team that you will work to address those issues going forward.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that impact the climate at HBS and African-American students?

Hurricane Katrina in 2005 was a significant event during my time at HBS. It sat front of mind for students when we returned to campus. The response by the administration was lackluster initially, making the issue even more polarizing given the number of African Americans that were affected by the disaster. The impact on campus was palpable on a few levels; for one, in light of the disappointing response, the AASU community felt a distinct call to support, with some even volunteering to go down to New Orleans to participate in relief efforts. Many of us experienced a sense of both humility and greater perspective as the HBS bubble had been pierced by the reality of a catastrophic national crisis.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

HBS can be a bubble. And even within the AASU community, while on average we had a decidedly different path to and experience at HBS than our majority counterparts, we were still relatively oblivious to what the post-HBS journey would really entail, particularly for people of color. What I realize now is that the path to professional leadership is riddled with potholes and pitfalls that are unique to the black community. And, if not for the many that came before us who not only paved the way, but also made it such that the world could accept, respect, and, dare I say, embrace the black leader, that plight would have been infinitely more difficult. I am thankful for AASU having been the breeding ground, support network, and family for those leaders who came before me. I am also thrilled to see that the organization has thrived through 50 years and look forward to gathering with the aforementioned leaders of the past, along with future leaders, to continue the legacy.



Rissa Lawrence [MBA 2007]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

1. Take time to follow. As leaders, we often find ourselves largely focusing on how to be a trailblazer or a groundbreaker. I've realized that many successes come from following others. Don't be afraid to do that.
2. Take time to develop the next generation of leaders. Use your platform to empower others and help them find their unique path to success. By advising others, you're ensuring future generations uphold the same standards as yourself. Mentoring also gives you the opportunity to reflect on your own practice – something that I find critical to do on a regular basis.
3. Demonstrate the value of diversity. As members of the multicultural community, I believe we should continually educate our colleagues about the importance of having a diverse workforce. The multi-faceted set of opinions that is created by different minds from distinct backgrounds is limitless—that value is immeasurable.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

On February 10th, 2007 then Senator Barack Obama announced his campaign to become the nation's first black president. Several members of the AASU, CBC, and ABC communities began brainstorming about how they would participate in helping to elect a qualified candidate that shared our ancestry/heritage. In the days and weeks that followed, members of the Harvard community, of all political affiliations and racial backgrounds, conversed about what his candidacy meant for our great country. I would have loved to be on campus a year and half later when Barack Obama was elected president.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

The Sankofa production was one of my fondest memories during my time at Harvard Business School. Originating from the Akan-Twi language spoken in Ghana, Sankofa means “we must look back into the past so that we can move forward into the future”. In 2006, AASU, The Caribbean Business Club and the African Business Club joined forces to create this magnificent production celebrating our African ancestry. Poetry, dances, musical renditions and various other performances were showcased in Burden Auditorium to a crowd of over 600. It was a brilliant way to educate students and the greater Boston population about the rich African culture that is such an integral/vital part of the Harvard community.



Alice Vilma [MBA 2007]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice for the next generation of leaders is to lead intentionally and unapologetically, yet with humility and empathy. It is important, particularly given the social climate at this time in our history as a country, world, and as a people, that leadership brings about a call to action. It is not okay to view the world from afar, because there is no such concept as leadership from the sidelines. Be intentional around your goals and objectives in order to make positive, enduring change and have the confidence to remain true to your guiding principles. Lastly, humility and empathy enable awareness and understanding of different perspectives, which allow for open and honest discourse, even in the face of adversity, and can hopefully be an agent of cohesion instead of division.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that impact the climate at HBS and African-American students?

The general peace and prosperity that was occurring worldwide that was made possible by a strong global economy that acted as the “tide lifting all ships.” This general sense of prosperity impacted the climate at HBS and African American students by allowing for openness and inclusivity within the student body. As African Americans, we were able to engage authentically with the general student body for the advancement of our overall community. However, what we didn’t realize was this era would come to an abrupt end almost immediately after graduation in 2007, and would ultimately usher in the greatest worldwide financial crisis since the 1930’s. It was literally the calm before the storm.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

My most meaningful memory of my time at HBS was graduation. That day represented the culmination of my initial dreams and aspirations coupled with hard work, motivation and dedication. It also marked the beginning of a new era as I looked to embark on the path that I set for myself upon arriving on campus. I also celebrated that day with the people who were closest to me, in addition to classmates who have become lifelong friends. It was such a great representation of everything I had hoped for and achieved while at HBS and holds so much meaning for me.



Lori Bowden Estiverne [MBA 2008]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Believe in yourself. Your own conviction and self-confidence will likely be your greatest limitation.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

I served as AASU Co-President for the 2007-2008 school year. In early 2008, Bear Sterns almost collapsed before being acquired. We now know that this was the beginning of an economic collapse that would send our economy into the most significant recession since the Great Depression. We rallied around each other at a time when our ability to secure jobs at the companies we came to HBS to pursue was challenging. For many, it was the first time in our lives that our career dreams seemed ever so distant to attain. In the midst of this turbulent time, we had each other. The community banded together. Each of us grew to understand that leadership means maintaining your drive and persevering in good times and bad.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

My most meaningful memory from my time at HBS is the lasting friendships that I formed. Those friendships support me professionally and personally. When I reflect on the times of hardship that I've had since graduating, it's those friends who are front and center. I know I've built relationships that will last a lifetime.



Earl Gordon [MBA 2008]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My advice for the next generation of leaders is to avoid having “What if?” moments. Be true to yourself and follow the path that is most meaningful to you, not necessarily the path that is the most lucrative, or the most high-profile, or the most sought after by “the crowd”. When you’re working late nights or juggling commitments to balance work and family, if you’re engaged in a career and volunteer activities that are truly fulfilling for you, it is much easier to be happy with the required tradeoffs. In addition, when (not if...) there are unfortunate events in your personal and/or professional life, being able to look back without regret on how you spent your personal and professional time will be invaluable.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

For me, the most significant event on campus was the return of the Sankofa cultural show in December 2006 (and December 2007). Since Sankofa had been on hiatus in 2005, it was a new event for everyone involved. We faced the challenge of creating, organizing, and marketing an event that was unfamiliar to both ECs and RCs, which was also a distinct and unabashed celebration of African American culture. There was a definite risk that the show wouldn’t appeal to the broader HBS student body, and that we could be performing in an empty Burden Auditorium.

The success of the initial event in December 2006—which sold out Burden—was a joint effort between the RCs and ECs of AASU (as well as contributions from members of the HBS Africa Business Club, HBS Caribbean Business Club, and HBS Latin American Students Organization). We all had busy schedules yet still made time to write, direct, rehearse, and perform in the show. In the weeks leading up to Sankofa, AASU members marketed the event by wearing “Ask me about Sankofa!” buttons to class on a daily basis. Producing Sankofa was a bonding moment for the two classes and set the stage for some strong friendships and relationships which have endured to this day. In addition, we were all very proud to have played a part in re-igniting a tradition at HBS that continued for several years afterwards that both entertained and educated the broader HBS student body about African American history and culture.



Damien Hooper-Campbell [MBA 2009]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Never forget. We are all standing on the shoulders of the giants who gave up so much for us to be here. When you're tempted to fade to the background instead of running towards the tough, uncomfortable and risky stuff... when you want to give up... think about Rosa, Malcolm, Martin, Shirley, Frederick and Bayard. When did we get to a place where we think we have a choice? Nope. It's not a choice... it's an *honor*.

Give thanks. No matter how busy you get, take the time to tell people thank you. Whether it's your parents, mentors, mentees or colleagues. Don't take for granted how much it means to someone else to know that you appreciate the role they've played in your journey. It's never too late to say thank you.

Keep a journal. It'll be inspiring, healing and incredible to look back and see how much you will have grown and accomplished. It'll also be pretty comical to see the kinds of things that you used to stress out about back then.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The election of President Barack Obama. Hands down. The AASU Family reserved Gallatin Hall and celebrated all night. Impact? It changed our lives, the tenor of the conversations we had inside and outside of the classroom, and the reality of what was possible.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

RC Year. Winter 2007. HBS Trek to volunteer in New Orleans. Cross-program team with peers from The Kennedy School. I went for a late night jog through the streets of NOLA with two HKS/HBS peers I'd just met. I got winded and stopped. They could have kept going. Instead, they waited for me and didn't make me feel bad about it. They didn't realize it had been a tough first semester for me. They also didn't realize that their small, yet powerful gesture of patience and encouragement helped to make me feel included in a way that set the tone for the rest of my HBS experience. Thank you, Paris and Aaron.

Erin Teague [MBA 2010]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

It is important to surround yourself with people who will tell you the truth. As you ascend into leadership roles with increasing influence and power, the number of people willing to provide honest feedback will decrease. It is important to proactively seek those who are willing to hold you accountable as this type of feedback is necessary to ensure continual growth and development.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

Under our newly elected President Barack Obama's leadership, we experienced the end of the 2008 recession and the passage of the Affordable Care Act during the 2009-10 academic year. The election of our first black president and witnessing the achievement of these two major accomplishments was empowering for our entire community.

A second event is the emergence of the current generation of computing. The first iPad and Android phones were launched and social networks became a more integral part of our lives. We leveraged this shift in terms of how we organized and communicated. We also recognized this evolution meant a change in the job market, so we made efforts to ensure African-American students had advanced exposure and were prepared.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

We achieved standing room only in Burden Auditorium with the sole purpose to celebrate and honor both African-American culture, and culture throughout the African diaspora. Sankofa was that celebration, and it was completely oversold.

I'm also proud that we created an inclusive community. We launched a series of efforts aimed at having impact beyond AASU members reaching both the broader HBS community and other business schools. We initiated the inaugural ski and Martha's Vineyard trips in coordination with the African-American student groups from graduate business schools across the East Coast and Midwest.

Finally, I'm proud of our work to restructure the AASU leadership board. At the mid-way point of the academic year, we realized our leadership team could benefit from enhanced operational efficiency. We met with professors for advice, developed a new structure, and pitched it to leadership and the general student body, which was approved by an almost unanimous vote and implemented by the new leaders.



Ray Chambers [MBA 2010]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

While at HBS, take risks, challenge yourself and be uncomfortable, that is when the most learning happens. There are so many rich, diverse experiences to be had from building relationships with others whose personal, social and professional experiences are different from your own. There is so much opportunity to take on leadership roles at HBS and learn the influencing skills you'll need to engage an intelligent, demanding group. It's a safe space to make mistakes, so take uncomfortable risks.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The first African-American, Barack Obama, was elected President of the United States just a couple of months after starting at HBS. Most of us did not think we would see something like this happen in our lifetimes. I remember the mix of unbelievable surprise and joy that we felt. This was juxtaposed with the financial crisis, and our concerns about our ability to land internships/full time jobs, and debates about whether it was the perfect time or the worst time to be in an MBA program.

What is the most meaningful memory of your time at HBS?

The most meaningful memory I have from HBS is the lifelong friendships I made with some of the most interesting and talented people I've ever met. I've shared many lifetime experiences with them, including attending unbelievably fun weddings, a five-week trip around the world, a weekend trip to Iceland during its banking crisis, and a trip to Zimbabwe during economic turmoil.



Aaron Mitchell [MBA 2011]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

As a recent grad, I'm still figuring it out myself and making mistakes along the way. If anything, I'd say "run your own race!" Only you can truly measure how far you've gone and how much of an impact you've made with respect to the goals you've set. I decided to follow a career path that wasn't popular and I have had an amazing experience these last six years. I encourage everyone I meet to follow their true north because the only person who ultimately has to live with your choices is you.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The most significant event that stands out was when a local club confused a group of black Harvard and Yale students for "gangbangers" and refused to admit them, even though they had rented the club for an event. I did not recognize this event as a precursor for the next 6 years under President Obama, where our nation would feel emboldened to mistreat its black citizens in ways reminiscent of the Jim Crow South. I did not act in a manner that was consistent with this urgency while the aftermath of the event laid a fog of confusion over the mindset of black students at HBS. Ultimately, many leaders did step up to create a platform to take action, and we encouraged the aggrieved to participate and be heard. However, I could have done much more to lead but didn't see it for what it was, but my eyes are open now.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I was fortunate enough to be surrounded by the best leadership team I've ever encountered. Every member of our board was an amazing leader. We created an amazing community and culture during our time as leaders. For me, this is what AASU was supposed to be—"the section outside of section" that felt like home in ways that HBS couldn't. Running AASU would have been impossible without the right leaders, and every single member played a key role in building and sustaining that community. I am proud to have been in the company of such amazing people, standing on the shoulders of so many others who did the same before us.

Stephanie Atiase [MBA 2011]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

1. Always remember that work is a way to positively impact others and a means to live the lifestyle that you want. Do it well. But until you find something that moves you to your core put work in perspective.
2. Find something that moves you to your core.
3. Most people do not share all that is going on in their lives so be kind and treat people like an egg—you will never regret treating people with care.
4. When someone tells you the sky is purple (when you know it is blue) do not spend too much time trying to convince them the sky is blue. Use the time to understand why they think the sky is purple. You will likely better understand the person or better understand how to share your point of view more effectively.
5. Listen intently. Not just to what each person is saying, but also how each person is presenting information. Ask questions. Clarify. Reflect before making any judgments. A thoughtful, slow response is usually better than a quick judgment.
6. Follow your Joy. Live passionately. Love yourself. Love others.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and the African American students?

I think we were impacted more by a significant political change prior to HBS. I entered business school in 2009, one year after Barack Obama was elected. In many ways, looking back, it was a simpler time. HBS African Americans had someone who represented them and Harvard in a way that reinforced that you could achieve whatever you wanted to achieve. Given our current political environment, I think fondly of that time. I also recognize that there was more we could have done to be politically active. I am reminded that we should never be complacent, and that we should use our collective power to not only advance in business but to have an impact through political and civic engagement.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 means we have come a long way and that it wasn't that long ago that society thought African Americans were not worthy of senior level business positions. It is a reminder that we should continue to "show up" to impact our community and the world. It's a time to reflect on what we want to say we have accomplished when we celebrate AASU100. I am thankful to be a part of this inspiring community of leaders, innovators and change agents. AASU50 means we are blessed and we have an obligation to continue to invest in the AASU community that we hold so dear.



Lauren Booker Allen [MBA 2012]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

I'd encourage the next generation of leaders to take risks, be bold, embrace their roots, and leverage any platforms at their disposal throughout life to continue advancing black communities and those of underrepresented peoples more broadly. There is still so much work to do, and with great privilege, comes great responsibility.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The most significant event to occur during my presidency was the fatal shooting of Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old African American high school student from Sanford, Florida. As with most of Black America, this tragedy heavily impacted black students at HBS, serving as a sheer reminder of how incredibly vulnerable black lives are in the United States. This unfortunate fact holds true regardless of where you were raised, where you study, where you work, or where you live. As a small sign of empathy, solidarity, and protest, AASU arranged a "Hoodies Up" day and a series of conversations on campus.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

To me, AASU50 represents a powerful milestone. A symbol of the collective legacy that HBS Black MBAs have built, are building, and will continue to build. It reflects courage and strength, challenge and opportunity, intergenerational leadership, and progress. AASU was a critical component of my business school experience, and the ensuing bonds from that community have led to emerging lifelong friendships and partnerships. By multiplying the thousands of similar experiences of my fellow black HBS-ers across fifty years, I'm inspired by the magic of that intricate fabric, and the impact it will leave on our country and world.



Will Drewery [MBA 2012]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Do work with a purpose. Your career is your most valuable asset. As an HBS graduate, there is no shortage of companies willing to pay big bucks to extract value from consumers or financial markets. However, as an emerging leader, you have a responsibility (an obligation) to invest your life's work into efforts that will generate value, create opportunities, and advance society.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

In November of 2010, we organized a large party for the Black/African American community at a Boston nightclub in celebration of the Harvard/Yale football game. I remember the lines mounting in anticipation of the party, when we were surprisingly told that the nightclub was no longer able to host the party. This was a huge disappointment, because over 400 students and alumni were really looking forward to the party.

It later came to light that the owner of the nightclub didn't want to risk ruining the reputation of his new venue by hosting a party for "thugs and gangsters". For many in the Harvard community, it was shocking to learn that, despite our collective accomplishments, we were still denied admission by an owner that didn't see us as a group of doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs; but rather as "thugs and gangsters".

These events highlighted the importance of supporting black-owned venues and businesses whenever possible; a concept that we pursued as AASU leaders, continuing to this day.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I'm proud of many things from my time at HBS, but most proud of the lasting relationships that we built. As time passes, it's common to see people drift apart. Although we may not see each other frequently, I am consistently impressed with the level of support that we have for each other in business and personal endeavors. Over time, we may forget about the specific events we shared with each other, but we'll never forget how we felt together as an AASU family.



Christopher Hollins [MBA 2013]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

As you move beyond HBS and to your second and third careers post-MBA, your network will serve as your most important asset. Invest time in cultivating authentic relationships on campus (not just people you party with), and maintain these special connections after graduation (this will be a lot harder than you think).

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The most significant event during the 2012-2013 academic year was the re-election of President Barack Obama. Despite entering office with a clear mandate from the American people, Obama endured more partisan opposition and vitriol than any newly elected president in recent memory—in large part due to his race. However, after bringing the country out of a debilitating economic recession and providing healthcare to millions of uninsured Americans, Obama became just the fourth president to win the popular vote twice. While the current political environment sadly elucidates America's unresolved issues with race—in addition to sexism, homophobia, and Islamophobia—Obama's victorious 2012 campaign heightened our sense of optimism and strengthened the familial bond of AASU members.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 signifies a moment where we must renew our commitment to moral leadership. As a result of our shared history of oppression and systematic racism, our matriculation at prestigious institutions like HBS is a privilege that is accompanied with an obligation to drive meaningful change in the world. I'm proud to be a part of an AASU community that has boldly answered the call time after time.



Stacie Smith [MBA 2014]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Act on what you believe and protect your values at all costs. Go after your passions with confidence. You already possess the tools necessary for success; you need only to increase the level of confidence you have in your abilities. Learn from those who have had a different experience than yours. In this age of selfies, “doing you” and individualism, don’t lose sight of the collective power of community. Cherish your relationships and hold tight to the people that keep you centered.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

During my first year at HBS, President Obama was elected to his second term. Seemingly past the economic downturn, with a black man in the Oval Office, the country still lingered more in a state of hopefulness and less in the state of agitation that would present itself in just a couple years. This was before an onslaught of black male shootings that took prominence in national media, yet, amidst Hurricane Sandy, the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting and the Boston Bombing. Simultaneously, the campus celebrated W50—the 50th anniversary of women being admitted to the full-time MBA program. These events shifted the focus to important political and social topics that were often not race based. The climate, therefore, manifested itself in the form of questioning: Why should I participate in AASU? Is there still a need for such an organization? Where does the race conversation fit within business school and within business overall? Is it still valid?

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

I am most proud of my team’s ability to remain steadfast in the importance of AASU to African American students, the HBS campus and the future business community. We pushed ourselves to hold thought provoking, difficult conversations on ‘why AASU?’. We strategized on what was best for students and the campus. We worked tirelessly, often holding multiple leadership positions to redefine and create success for AASU. We answered the call no matter what – even if that meant being snowed in at the Conference’s host hotel while Boston was in a state of emergency (due to a nor’easter storm) – all so that we could fulfill our mission. We held firm to the legacy of those that came before us and remained committed for those who would come after. We proudly kept the torch lit and passed it on to the next generation of student leaders.



Erin Patten [MBA 2015]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Always think outside of the box and be unafraid to operate outside of your comfort zone. It is important to remember that being of African descent makes you unique, especially in the business world. Use that uniqueness to your advantage. Stand out. Be bold. Never give up. It is your destiny to succeed. Embrace that and you will have eternal success.

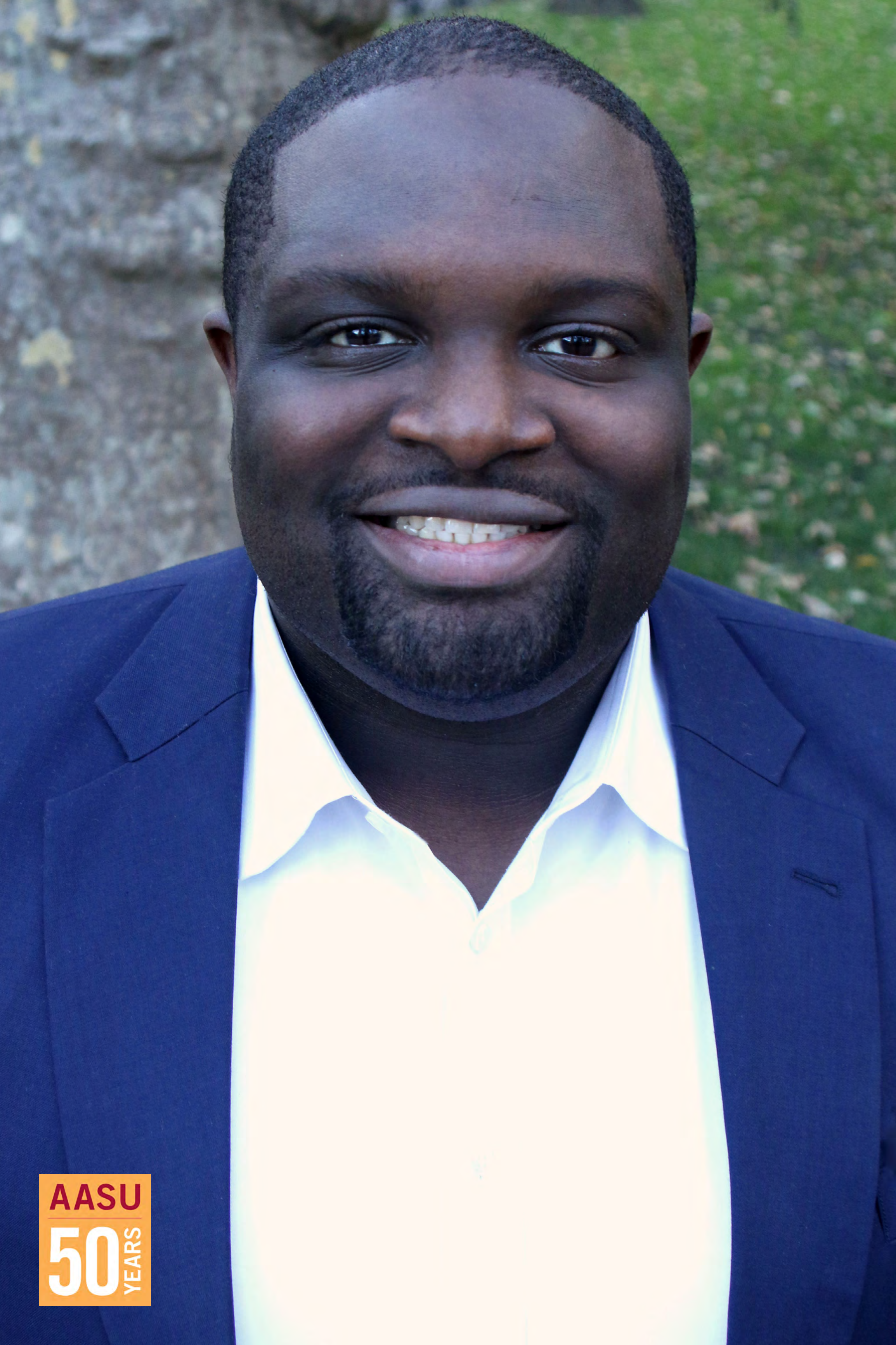
During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

At the time of my presidency, the Black Lives Matter movement was in its infancy and we saw protests, sit-ins and activism across the Harvard campus. However, it was eerily silent at HBS. That silence needed to be broken and I leveraged my platform as an AASU student leader to do just that.

I had a vision for a unified HBS campus that embraced the complexities of not just business, but also of the social, cultural, and economic issues. With the help of many AASU and LASO members, we hosted the first ever Memorial Vigil in HBS history in remembrance of the young black men and women who had senselessly died as a result of police brutality. Hundreds of people attended including HBS Dean Nohria. Students shared personal police brutality experiences, and all left with a sense of purpose and belonging. We broke a huge cultural barrier on campus, unlocking empathy and creating a connection never before seen on the HBS campus. Since the event, HBS has embraced Black Graduation, Black Lives Matter, and issues more broadly related to diversity and inclusion. The HBS campus will never be the same.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 is a long overdue celebration of culture shapers, shifters and activators. AASU was the first of its kind on the HBS campus. A community within a community whose sole purpose is to create a conduit for supreme prosperity for those who are locked out of the traditional mechanisms of success—good old boy clubs, secret societies, and multi-generational wealth. AASU set the stage for how others on campus would convene and navigate the often-difficult terrain of graduating from an elite institution such as HBS. Fifty years of community building, mentoring, business creation, family forming and above all, knowledge transfer. An investment in knowledge pays the best interest.



Neil Wusu [MBA 2015]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

Know your vision and believe in yourself. People are remarkably bad at accurately gauging the potential of others. Knowing your vision gives you a north star by which to order your steps, and knowing your worth will give you the determination to press-on through all of life's headwinds.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

In December 2014, in the wake of the recent deaths of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, and Eric Garner, and disappointing legal proceedings thereafter, the general mood of AASU was tense. AASU members were hurt, disheartened, and angry. However, while it felt as if our collective worlds had been rocked, the mood on campus was unchanged. The traditionally apolitical climate of HBS meant that these issues were not being discussed among the general student body. In response, AASU organized a candlelight vigil where several students shared their personal stories of police brutality and racial discrimination. In addition, we assembled over 20 such stories and displayed them as part of a Portrait Project in the lobby of Spangler Hall. The event was the first of its kind at HBS and opened up dialogue in a way many thought was impossible.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

The high level of engagement we managed to maintain throughout our presidency. The AASU retreat sold out with over 90% participation, the AASU conference had some of the highest attendance in years, and my AASU class ended the year as even closer friends than when we began.



Alterrell Mills [MBA 2016]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

I would recommend that future leaders be fearless, be conscious of and be an advocate for the marginalized within the diaspora, and use your HBS privilege to lift as you climb.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

After the HLS incident, my Co-President and I worked closely with the SA to introduce professor-moderated town halls on the topics of race and inequality. These open forums, in addition to my Co-President's significant pushes with the HBS Stands Together campaign, provided school-wide and section opportunities to engage in tough topics.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

My proudest HBS moment has been advocating for and organizing a panel at the AASU Conference. The Black*Out panel highlighted Black LGBT professionals and the complexities, nuances and ways in which they navigate being one's full self at work. I leveraged my full network to source the panel and even cold emailed NBC's head of diversity. The response in the room made it clear that more intersectional stories should be told and highlighted at HBS and within AASU. I always dreamed I could be an "out" President of AASU, but this went beyond what I had expected.



Franci Girard [MBA 2016]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

My best piece of advice to the next generation of leaders is to be authentic in your leadership style and your interactions with others. Don't get bogged down by trying to be the person that you think other people want you to be. Invest time in trying to understand yourself to determine what really drives you and how you can genuinely help others.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The controversy over the HLS crest and the subsequent vandalism at Wasserstein Hall had a profound effect on the black community at HBS. While the racial incident didn't take place on the HBS campus, it became clear to everyone on campus, not just the black community, that there was still a lot of work to be done in making Harvard an inclusive and safe space for people of color. My co-president and I were able to work with the SA and HBS administration to facilitate real conversations around racial equality and diversity. Our ability to create such forums, where these issues could be discussed openly, led to a heightened awareness among the entire community and demonstrated that Harvard was invested in the success of all of its students.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 really means being part of a truly illustrious legacy of excellent leaders. AASU was such a source of pride, inspiration and support for me during my time at HBS. Having the opportunity to pay homage to those who came before me and made that experience possible is quite humbling.



Nkem Oghedo [MBA 2017]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

For me, most things come down to authenticity. Be brutally honest with yourself about what you want. Ask yourself: How do you want to live? What do you want to do? What are you willing to endure to achieve those goals? Then the rest will follow. At HBS and in business in general, there's a tendency to put on airs. I encourage us all to figure out how we can present our most authentic selves, because I think the best leaders are those who draw us closer with their radical honesty.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

After another documented police shooting of an unarmed black person, organizations around the country were coming together to take "Black Out" photos in solidarity of the Black Lives Matter movement, where people take a stand of solidarity for the black lives that have been lost due to police violence. We planned our own, which was taken on the Baker Library steps, and was attended by students, faculty, and administrators alike, including the Dean. Although this was a small gesture of support, I was very moved by the empathy and support of our classmates and the School.

Thinking back on your leadership role in AASU, what are you most proud of?

As we all know, social activities play an outsized role in the HBS experience. I will always be proud of spearheading the first annual AASU 90's Party. Not only was this a huge financial success for the club, but we were also able to set a positive tone for the AASU community and engage our non-black classmates while sharing a piece of our culture.



Tsion Tsegaye [MBA 2017]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

As a recent graduate, my advice for current AASU students is to commit to intellectual curiosity and question the status quo. As future business leaders, you will have an immense amount of influence and power not just in the private sector, but also in shaping public policy. Use your platform to make both big and small changes that will have impact in our community.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

The biggest geopolitical event during my time at HBS was the election of Donald Trump. Similar to a lot of places in America and around the world, there was a sense of shock and bewilderment around campus. This sense of shock was not limited to African American students but it was particularly troubling for students in our community given Trump's racist rhetoric during his campaign.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 to me is an opportunity to honor and celebrate generations of black students that paved the way for us. Although there are many more students of color in each graduating class than 50 years ago, there is still a long way to go to close the opportunity gap. As we celebrate 50 years of the accomplishments of African Americans at HBS, we should also renew our commitment to open doors of opportunity for the next generation.

Andrew Levette [MBA 2018]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

As a developing leader, I'd pass on the following advice:

- AASU has had a long legacy of excellence and the next generation of leaders should determine a unique direction for the organization while staying true to AASU's core mission and continuing its legacy.
- Establish a "home" for the AASU community early on, whether that be a physical space or regularly occurring events.
 - Even though our community has strong, natural ties, it can be difficult to know where to find each other to develop the informal relationships that often form the foundation of true friendships. In light of the constraints on time that the HBS experience enforces, I think AASU should play an even more pivotal role in facilitating these types of connections both inside and outside of the HBS bubble.
- I encourage future leaders to continue to use their platform to reach out to the other communities at Harvard, to the alumni for their wisdom, and to those that will follow in your footsteps. This network is unique and must continue to be cultivated.
- My final piece of advice is simply to do the best that you can while understanding that it will never be perfect. Stay true to your mission/goals, listen to your community through the good and bad times, and remember to take time for yourselves as you attempt to give back to the AASU family.
- You are truly a part of the next generation of leaders in the world. Consider this a type of testing ground and take risks/find lessons accordingly.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that event impact the climate at HBS and African American students?

One of the most significant cultural events was the release of Black Panther. AASU had the opportunity to experience the phenomenon together on opening night as a part of this year's Black History Month celebration. The movie served as both a catalyst for intellectual discussions, and a release of exaltation as we celebrated a revolutionary moment in cinema.

I could sense that the community was emboldened by this example of Black excellence, and this spirit permeated throughout campus and the surrounding areas. All throughout Boston, Black people would approach each other and the question "have you seen Black Panther yet" would serve as part of the greeting. The examples of fellowship this movie inspired were remarkable.



Tiana Williams [MBA 2018]

Co-President

What advice do you have for the next generation of leaders?

I have three pieces of advice for future leaders—cultivate risk-tolerance, improve upon the status quo, and be present.

First, as a leader you need to make decisions that are in the best interest of the organization even if those decisions are unpopular in the short-term. Therefore, you need to be comfortable with the risk that you may alienate people and strain relationships. Cultivating the ability to take risks, especially through hard choices that generate criticism, will serve you well.

Second, do not be complacent. The progress that African-Americans have made at HBS, in business, and in society over the last 50 years cannot be underestimated. However, we would be doing a disservice to future generations if as leaders we were not constantly seeking new opportunities to improve the experience of all students, alumni, and faculty at HBS.

Finally, leadership can be an isolating experience. In the process of leading the organization, do not lose sight of the fact that you are also a member of the community and that it is important to be present and enjoy the experience. Remember to take a step back from the planning and enjoy the process of getting to know the people around you.

During your presidency, what was the most significant event and how did that impact the climate at HBS and African-American students?

The election of President Trump occurred shortly before my Presidency started and created a challenging environment on campus. Trump's presidency created a sense of instability because it raised questions around whether America was taking a step back on issues of diversity and inclusion. There seemed to be a tension between how individual students were impacted versus how the overall HBS community was impacted. Although many students, and African-American students in particular, were deeply upset, that stood in sharp contrast to the business as usual environment on campus.

What does AASU50 mean to you?

AASU50 is a reminder that I am one piece of a broader legacy of African-Americans at HBS. It is incredibly humbling to reflect on the work that so many generations of AASU members have contributed, which allows me to be here today. AASU50 inspires me to think about how I can continue to build and improve upon the foundation that I have inherited so that the AASU community is even stronger for the next 50 years.