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## Proof Positive: Brandy Blackwell

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## Proof Positive: Brandy Blackwell



**Blackwell helped Biology Chair R. Given Harper (shown in background) with his songbird research. “Brandy has a winning personality,” Harper says. (Marc Featherly)**

that they would support her “whether I went into the circus or medical school.”

In fact, medical school is part of Blackwell’s future plans: she has already been accepted to six medical schools, including the University of Michigan, one of her top choices. She says she’s considering becoming a pediatrician.

It was a student teacher at her Chicago high school who first recommended Illinois Wesleyan to Blackwell. “I hadn’t applied to that many small, liberal arts schools,” she says, calling her initial visit to campus “that ‘ah-ha!’ moment” when she realized she really enjoyed the “small school feel.”

Nearly four years later, Blackwell recognizes that Illinois Wesleyan has changed her. “I have become a more confident person. I’m not afraid to take that step from college to med school.”

For Brandy Blackwell, thinking positive is as essential to her life as breathing. So is staying busy. The biology/pre-med major and psychology minor is captain of Illinois Wesleyan’s cheerleading team and a member of the Black Student Union, and is involved in Tri-Beta, the biology honors society.

Blackwell seems to find a way to always remain upbeat. Though raised by her sister, she hasn’t let past challenges or her non-traditional family deter her from success. “I never look at misfortunes as a bad thing,” she says. Her three sisters have been “the most supportive people. I’m very, very blessed to have them in my life,” she says, explaining

While IWU's rigorous biology program has "definitely" prepared her for the future, "it was hard to adjust to the course load freshman year," she says.

Transitioning to upper-level courses and studying for the MCAT were other challenges she's glad to have overcome.

Professor and Chair of Biology R. Given Harper taught one of Blackwell's ecology classes and supervised her as she and a student team researched pesticide levels in dickcissels, small sparrow-like songbirds that breed in grasslands in North America. "It was a real pleasure to have had her as a student in my class and as a research student," Harper says. "Brandy has a winning personality and she has overcome much adversity in her life. I am confident that she will be a very dedicated, compassionate physician who will provide health care to people in need."



**Blackwell (shown far right) was a Titan cheerleading captain, a member of the Black Student Union, and was involved in Tri-Beta, the biology honors society.**

But her life isn't all academics. Blackwell has fond memories of her 2004 May Term trip to South Africa, as well as a water fight with friends that started on the quad but later progressed to her Dodds suite. "We had buckets of water," she recalls, laughing.

Another source of laughter and support was Blackwell's "Coffee Shoppe family" at the Memorial Center, where she was hired "the very first day I was on campus." Her friends there are part of the group of "people I want to take with me when I leave Wesleyan," she jokes.

Looking back on her experiences here, Blackwell says, "The benefits of Illinois Wesleyan are not all laid out on the surface. You have to be willing to accept the opportunities at Wesleyan and come in with an open mind. You've got to work hard to be here."