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## Class of 1975 Fifteen Year Report

University of Michigan Law School

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL  
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1975  
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- \* "The U. of M. Law School lived up to every expectation that I had about law school. It was the most satisfying and rewarding experience of my life (other than my children)."
- \* "I found law school to be a very difficult experience. There was very little feeling of comraderie among classmates or willingness of professors to extend themselves to offer assistance. My results academically were spotty and disappointing to me since I had excelled at school until then. I never seemed to get the hang of it."
- \* "I can't believe I get paid this much to have this much fun! All those hours at the IM Building playing basketball and in the Lawyers Club playing pinball have really borne fruit!"
- \* "Although I enjoy being a lawyer (most of the time!), the increased pressures to bill, collect and work harder make the legal profession (at least in private practice) less and less pleasant."

### Introduction

In the spring of 1990, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 360 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1975 for whom we had at least some address. (For only six people did we have no address.) Two hundred forty-nine class members responded--a response rate of 68 percent, continuing the pattern of high response to the surveys that the Law School has been conducting since 1967.

Here is a report of our findings. We begin with some tables that sketch a profile of the class fifteen years after graduation and follow with a more detailed look at class members before law school, during law school and in the settings in which they are now working. We end with a compendium of the comments class members wrote in response to the last question on the survey, which asked for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever."

As you will see, fifteen years after law school the great majority of the class is married, practicing in law firms, living prosperously but working long hours, contented with their personal lives and careers. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Some in the class have never married and many have married and divorced, many practice in settings other than law firms or do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1  
A Profile of the Class of 1975 in 1990  
 Total respondents: 249 of 366

<u>Family Status</u>		
Never married		7%
Married once, still married		70
Divorced		9
Remarried after divorce		13
 <u>Children</u>		
None		21%
One		16
Two		37
Three or more		26
 <u>Nature of Work</u>		
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>		
Solo practitioners		6%
Partners in firms		57
Counsel for business or financial institution		7
Legal services, public interest		2
Government attorney		13
Other		1
		} 86%
 <u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>		
Government executive, administrator		1%
Business owner or manager		5
Law teacher		4
Other		4
		} 14%
 <u>Average Hours Worked per Week</u>		
Less than 40		5%
40-44		12
45-49		15
50-54		30
55-59		22
60 +		16
		} 68%
 <u>Earnings in 15th Year</u> (for persons not working part-time)		
Up to \$40,000		4%
\$40,100-\$60,000		15
\$60,100-\$100,000		29
\$100,100-\$150,000		25
\$150,100-\$200,000		16
\$200,100-\$250,000		4
Over \$250,000		8
		} 28%

## Politics

### Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	21%
More liberal than conservative	30
Middle of the road	22
More conservative than liberal	20
Very conservative	8

## Life Satisfaction (Quite Satisfied, In Middle, Quite Dissatisfied)

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>OS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>QD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	46%	47%	7%
Their current family life	70	29	1
The intellectual challenge of their career	59	39	2
Their income	47	46	7
The balance of their family and professional life	43	50	7
Their relationships with co-workers	60	37	3
Their career as a whole	60	40	1

## How Class Members

<u>Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age</u>	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About Average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	9%	22%	69%
Effective as writer	5	7	88
Aggressive	24	31	45
Compulsive about work	29	25	46
Concerned about impact of their work on society	12	36	53
Honest	1	9	90
Concerned about making a lot of money	50	34	16
Compassionate	7	21	72
Self-confident	10	29	61

\*Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1 and 2 as indicating person to be "quite satisfied," and categories 6 and 7 as "quite dissatisfied."

\*\*Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1, 2 and 3 as indicating person to be "less than most" and 5, 6 and 7 as "more than most."

## Background of Classmates

The class of 1975 also marked the early stages of the great surge in the numbers of women attending the Law School. Until the early 1970's, women represented three to five percent of the class. Seventeen percent of the class of 1975 were women. Today, about 36 percent are women. Among the graduates of the class, 10 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American.

The occupations of the parents of class members indicated that the majority of the class came from middle middle or upper

middle class backgrounds. The fathers of 59 percent of the class members were business owners, business managers, or professionals. Only nine percent of the fathers were lawyers. Twenty-six percent of the fathers were blue collar or clerical workers. The mothers of about 55 percent of the class were homemakers. Two mothers were attorneys.

As in preceding classes for many years, a considerable majority of the class entered law school immediately after graduating from college. Still, 25 percent of the class had finished their undergraduate education three or more years before starting law school, reflecting at least in part the effects of military service and of graduate work done in other disciplines.

Sixty-three percent of the class had never been married when they began law school, while 15 respondents were already parents. Two class members had three children before starting law school.

### The Law School Experience

Forty-four percent of the class began law school without a long-term career plan for what to do with their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, 58 percent expected to enter private practice. The next largest group--about one-third--hoped to work in government, politics, or legal services. None planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Fifteen years later, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice are working there, as are the great majority of those who had no plans. As table 1 reveals, a great many more people are working in corporate counsel's offices than foresaw that they would.)

When they look back on law school today, most class members have positive feelings--46 percent strongly positive and only seven percent strongly negative. Class members are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school (68 percent strongly positive), while regarding the career training provided by the experience with somewhat less enthusiasm (53 percent strongly positive). Less than one-third were strongly positive about the social aspects of law school. When asked what areas of the curriculum should be expanded, the respondents typically listed areas of skills training rather than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase courses in legal writing, negotiation, and trial technique were far more common than the most often-mentioned substantive area (Corporations).

### Life Since Law School

#### Five Years After Law School

In 1980, we surveyed the class of 1975 when it had been out of law school five years. At that point, 65 percent of the class worked in private practice, 26 percent practiced in some setting

other than private practice, and 9 percent worked in settings, such as teaching or business management, where they did not regard themselves as practicing law at all. A look at the table above reveals that, ten years later, the proportion of the class working in these settings has remained remarkably stable. The proportion in private practice is nearly the same in 1990 as it was in 1980. The largest change is among those working outside of practice altogether, where the proportion has increased from 9 to 14 percent. Of course, for those who are in private practice, statuses within firms have changed markedly over the ten years. In 1980, less than a third of those in private firms were partners. In 1990, at the time of the fifteen year survey, almost all those in private firms were partners. By much the same token, earnings have increased dramatically over the ten year period. In 1980, the median earnings for the class members (in private practice or otherwise) was about \$37,000. In 1990, it was about \$107,000, three times as much.

### Fifteen Years After Law School

#### The Class as a Whole

The remainder of this report is devoted to a portrait of the class fifteen years after law school. In some ways, generalizations are difficult. Class members live in towns of all sizes, in all parts of the country and, although a majority are in private practice, the settings of practice are remarkably diverse. Some of the diversity in their lives is conveyed in the tables at the beginning of this report. Here is some more detail.

For nearly a quarter of the class, their first job after law school was with a firm or other employer for which they had worked in the summer after their second year of law school. Fifteen years after graduation, almost a quarter of the class work for the same employer or firm that gave them their first job (not counting judicial clerkships) after law school. On the other hand, many others have held several jobs. One-quarter have held four or more. Despite all the movement, 44 percent of the respondents have held their current job for at least ten years, and 69 percent have been in their current job for at least five years.

What kinds of jobs do people hold 15 years after graduation? As the tables above reflect, about 85 percent of the class regard themselves as practicing lawyers. Of the 35 persons who did not regard themselves as practicing law, one is a judge, 11 are business owners, executives or managers, and 10 teach law. The diversity of the nonpractitioners' work makes it difficult to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible: the nonpractitioners are, in general, as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

## The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1975 who are practicing law, 73 percent are in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in other settings work as corporate counsel or government attorneys. Only four persons are currently working in legal services, for a public defender, or for what the respondents characterized as a public interest firm. In order to permit some generalizations about those working in settings other than private firms, we have combined the results of our surveys for the classes of 1974 and 1975. (The class of 1974 was surveyed in 1989 with an identical questionnaire.) By combining, we have enough persons to permit comparisons between the private practitioners and the lawyers in government and in corporate counsel's offices. We also, at the end, compare the experiences of women and men in the two classes.

Of the 49 persons in the two classes working as government attorneys, the group was almost evenly divided between those who worked for the federal government and those who were employed by state or local governments.

Thirty-three persons in the two classes worked in corporate counsel's offices. Sixty-one percent of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies. About two-thirds of the corporate counsel group had spent a year or more working in private firms before coming to their current positions.

Table 2  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,  
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=49	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=270	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=33
Average number of other attorneys in same firm or department	26	92	19
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	32%	23%	21%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	12%	4%	4%
Average work hours per week	48	52	50
Proportion who average over 60 hours per week	8%	23%	9%
Total pro bono hours worked per year (average)	22	71	11
Earnings in 15th year (average)	\$63,200	\$149,800	\$133,100

Table 2 offers some comparisons among the three groups: those in government, in corporate counsel's offices and in private firms. In general, the people working in settings other than private practice worked, on average, only slightly fewer hours than the private practitioners, but earned less money. In fact those working in government settings averaged only about 42 percent of the earnings of those in private practice.

How satisfied are the persons in these settings with their careers? We asked respondents about various dimensions of satisfaction on a seven-point scale. Table 3 reveals the proportions of each group who indicated that they were very satisfied (categories 1 or 2 on the 7-point scale). As table 1 above suggests, very few persons said that they were very dissatisfied--categories 6 and 7--with any aspect of their careers. Most who are not very satisfied are in the middle. All three groups were, in general, very satisfied with the intellectual challenge of their work. The government attorneys are much less likely to be satisfied with their incomes, which is not surprising since they earn, on average, less than half as much as either the private practitioners or the corporate counsel. On the other hand, the government attorneys are substantially more satisfied than the other two groups with the balance between their family and professional lives and with the value of their work to society.

Table 3  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,  
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government Attorneys</u> N=49	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=270	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=33
<u>Proportion of group who are quite satisfied with:</u>			
The balance of their family life and professional life	61%	34%	46%
The intellectual challenge of their career	57	57	52
Their relations with co-workers	57	61	66
Their current income	25	52	42
The value of their work to society	65	29	16
Their careers overall	53	59	56
Proportion expecting to be in same job in 5 years	67%	91%	67%

### Class Members in Private Practice

For purposes of our own analysis, we initially divided the private practitioners into four groups--those in solo practice, those in firms of up to ten lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers, those in firms of 51 to 150 lawyers and those in firms of more than 150 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There are no natural dividing lines between small, medium-sized, large and very large firms: some small, very specialized firms have practices that more closely resemble the practices of the largest firms than the practices of most firms their own size. Moreover, what is regarded as a big firm in Ann Arbor or Ramsdale, Connecticut, would be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York or Los Angeles. Nonetheless, in very broad ways, as we will see, firm size is revealing. (In the tables that follow, we have again combined the classes of 1974 and 1975.)

Table 4  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Fifteen Years After Graduation  
Size of Firm

<u>Persons working:</u>	<u>N=</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Solo or in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers	104	39%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	59	22
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	46	17
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	58	22

As table 4 displays, when we do combine the private practitioners in the two classes and then divide them into these groups, we find substantial numbers working in solo practices and in firms in each of the ranges of firm size. Year by year in our surveys, the proportion of our graduates working in large and very large law firms continues to grow.

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings for work and types of clients of the persons working in firms of these various sizes. As the table reveals, members of the classes of 1974 and 1975 who were in solo practice or working in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers typically worked in smaller cities and spent a high proportion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the largest firms, not surprisingly, tended to work in much larger cities and to spend most of their time serving large businesses. Among our graduates, those in the medium-sized firms (11-50) have practices much more similar to the larger firms than to the smaller.

Table 5  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=104	Firms of 11-50 N=59	Firms of 51-150 N=46	Firms of more than 150 N=58
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	3	26	79	228
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	22%	21%	20%	27%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	5%	2%	3%	5%
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	52%	25%	9%	5%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	24%	42%	47%	76%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	15%	48%	59%	69%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	46%	9%	5%	2%

Although the nature of their practices differed greatly, in many ways the work habits of the lawyers in the various sizes of firms were much the same. As table 6 reveals, the lawyers in firms put in substantial hours, regardless of firm size. At least among Michigan graduates, small firm lawyers work as grueling hours as large firm lawyers.

Whatever their efforts as measured by time expended, the economics of practice varied greatly by firm size. In general, as table 6 displays, the smaller the setting in which class members worked, the less they typically charged for their time when working on an hourly basis. In a similar manner, average income was strongly related to firm size. Persons working in firms of 11-50 earned, on average, much the same as persons in firms of 51-150, but earned considerably more than persons in solo practice and smaller firms and considerably less than persons in the largest firms. Despite the fact that they earned less, however, solo practitioners and small firm lawyers were more generous with their time in performing pro bono legal work than their counterparts in larger firms.

Table 6  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or firms of 10 or fewer N=104	Firms of 11-50 N=59	Firms of 51-150 N=46	Firms of more than 150 N=58
Average number of hours worked each week*	50	53	54	54
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	20%	19%	24%	32%
Pro bono hours worked per year	87	77	56	50
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$116	\$150	\$174	\$212
Income from practice in fifteenth year (avg.)	\$102,100	\$152,600	\$151,300	\$235,500
Proportion who earned over \$150,000	12%	32%	45%	87%

\*Instructions were to count all work, whether billable or not.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons.

Table 7  
Private Practitioner  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=104	Firms of 11-50 N=59	Firms of 51-150 N=46	Firms of more than 150 N=58
Proportion who are <u>quite satisfied*</u> with:				
The balance of family and professional life	48%	31%	33%	16%
The intellectual challenge of work	57	52	59	64
Their relations with co-workers	62	63	57	60
Their current income	36	60	57	71
The value of their work to society	40	24	25	18
Their careers overall	62	54	64	53
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	91%	92%	91%	91%

\*That is, circling categories 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale.

Roughly speaking, as firms got larger, the proportion of lawyers in them who were very satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives or with the value of their work to society declined, but the proportion who were satisfied with their income rose. There was no pattern in the relation between firm size and firm lawyers' satisfaction with their careers overall.

The Differing Experiences of Women and Men

The classes of 1974 and 1975 graduated from law school at the point at which large numbers of women were first entering the legal profession. In their first jobs after law school (excluding judicial clerkships), many more women than men entered work settings other than private practice. As table 8 displays, twice as many women as men entered work in government and somewhat more women entered work in corporate counsel's offices. Among private practice settings, men were especially more likely to enter small firms of 10 or fewer lawyers and firms of 11 to 50 lawyers. These seem to have been the settings where women felt least welcome. As high a proportion of women as men entered firms of more than 50 lawyers.

Table 8  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
First Work Settings of Women and Men

	<u>Women</u> n=62	<u>Men</u> n=384
Private practice	48%	69%
Government	26	13
Legal services, public interest	8	7
Corporate counsel, business	11	7
Other	7	4
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

Fifteen years later, when we surveyed the classes in 1989 and 1990, the differences in the work settings of the women and men are even greater than they were at graduation. (See table 9.) Two of every three men, but only one of every three women, work in private practice and women are much less likely than men to be in either smaller or larger firms. Women remain much more likely than men to work in government. Significant numbers of both men and women are working in business and in law teaching and many women are working in "other" settings including teaching in nonlaw settings or practicing with a union or other nonprofit organization which the respondent did not classify as a "public interest" organization.

Given the much lower proportions of women than men in private practice and the higher proportion of women than men in government, it is not surprising that the average earnings of women overall are much lower than the average earnings of men--a

mean of \$94,600 for women working fulltime and \$135,200 for men working fulltime. However, within particular types of work setting--there are, within our data, no significant differences between the earnings of women and men. Nor are there any differences in the overall career satisfactions of women and men --63 percent of women and 60 percent of men report themselves quite satisfied with their careers (that is, a 1 or 2 on the 7-point scale).

Table 9  
Classes of 1974 and 1975  
Work Settings Fifteen Years After Graduation

	<u>Women</u> n=59	<u>Men</u> n=382
Private practice	37%	65%
Government	25	13
Legal services, public interest	3	2
Corporate counsel, business	13	13
Law teacher	8	5
Other	<u>14</u>	<u>2</u>
	100%	100%