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Class of 1976 Fifteen Year Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1976
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- * "I have fond memories of the University of Michigan. Actually had fun in law school."
- * "Thank heavens that the practice of law is infinitely more interesting and varied than the study of law."
- * "The practice of law has changed dramatically during the 15 years I have been in practice. It is much more of a business, with all the attendant headaches, and much less a profession. Had I know 15 years ago that it would be like this, I might have chosen a different career path. I guess there's still time, but inertia being what it is, I'll probably practice 'til I drop."
- * "I am starting a 4th life -- getting rich at last, marrying a young woman with small children, and making an impact as a good criminal defense attorney. I love it!"

Introduction

In the spring of 1991, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 357 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1976 for whom we had at least some address. Two hundred and forty-eight class members responded--a response rate of almost 69 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 (and remarried), 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 1976 in 1991
 Total respondents: 248 of 357

Family Status

Never married	10%
Married once, still married	68
Divorced	8
Remarried after divorce	14
Other	<1

Children

None	25%
One	14
Two	40
Three or more	21

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	8%	} 76%
Partners in firms	47	
Counsel for business or financial institution	10	
Government attorney	7	
Legal services, public interest	2	
Other	2	

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government executive, administrator	4	} 24%
Business owner or manager	7	
Law teacher	6	
Other	7	

Average Hours Worked per Week

Less than 40	7%	
40-49	34	
50-59	43	} 59%
60-69	14	
70+	2	

Earnings in 15th Year

(for persons not working part-time)

Up to \$40,000	5%
\$40,100-\$60,000	15
\$60,100-\$100,000	35
\$100,100-\$150,000	19
\$150,100-\$225,000	16
\$225,100-\$300,000	6
Over \$300,000	5

Politics

Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	23%
More liberal than conservative	30
Middle of the road	16
More conservative than liberal	21
Very conservative	10

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

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>QS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>QD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	40%	54%	7%
Their current family life	72	25	4
The intellectual challenge of their career	55	42	3
Their income	42	52	7
The balance of their family and professional life	39	53	8
Their relationships with co-workers	56	41	3
Their career as a whole	47	50	3

How Class Members

Compare Themselves with Other

Attorneys About the Same Age

	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About Average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	14%	21%	65%
Effective as writer	8	10	82
Aggressive	30	33	38
Compulsive about work	28	28	44
Concerned about impact of their work on society	16	38	46
Honest	6	9	85
Concerned about making a lot of money	43	38	20
Compassionate	7	27	66
Self-confident	19	25	56

*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 1974 was the first class in which more than 10 percent of the class were women. Among the graduates of the class of 1976, 23 percent were women and 10 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American. (By contrast, about 40 percent of today's entering class are women and about 24 percent are minority group members.)

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 62 percent of the class members were business owners, business managers, or professionals. Eight percent of the fathers were lawyers. Twenty-four percent of the fathers were blue collar or clerical workers. The mothers of over half of the class were homemakers. Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, 47 percent were teachers, other professionals or business managers. None were attorneys.

As in preceding classes for many years, a considerable majority of the class entered law school immediately after graduating from college. Still, 20 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 in other disciplines.

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

The Law School Experience

Forty-five percent of the class began law school without a long-term career plan for their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, over one-half expected to enter private practice. The next largest group--about one-third--hoped to work in government, politics, or legal services. Only one 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. About the same proportion of the class who intended to enter government are now there, but 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 about their law school experience--40 percent strongly positive, a total of 93% more positive than negative. Class members are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school (64 percent strongly positive), while regarding the career training provided by the experience with somewhat less enthusiasm (44 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, trial techniques and interviewing were far more common than the most often-mentioned substantive area (corporate law).

Life Since Law School

Five Years After Law School in Comparison to Fifteen Years After Law School

In 1981, we surveyed the class of 1976 when it had been out of law school five years. At that point, 63 percent of the class worked in private practice in solo practice or in a firm. Twenty-five percent practiced in some setting other than private practice, and 12 percent worked in settings, such as teaching or business management, where they did not regard themselves as practicing law at all. Over the ten years that have followed, the proportion of the class in private practice has declined (from 63 percent down to 56 percent) while the proportion working outside of law altogether has risen substantially (from 12 percent up to 24 percent). Of course, for those who are in private practice, statuses within firms have changed markedly over the ten years. In 1981, only about a third of those in private firms were partners. In 1991, at the time of the fifteen year survey, almost all those in private firms were partners. By much the same token, earnings increased dramatically over the ten year period. In 1981, the median earnings for the class members (in private practice or otherwise) was about 40,500. In 1991, it was \$90,000.

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.

The great majority of the class of 1976--68 percent--took jobs in private practice after graduation (and any judicial clerkship). Of those who began in private practice fifteen years ago, most are still there: 67 percent of those who began in private practice are still in private practice. Of those who have left, nearly half are now working as businesspersons or in some other nonpractice setting, and another third are in corporate counsel's offices.

For one-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, about 30 percent of the class still 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. Nearly one-quarter have held four or more (again not counting judicial clerkships).

What kinds of jobs do people hold 15 years after graduation? As the tables above reflect, about 78 percent of the class regard themselves as practicing lawyers. Of the 55 persons who did not regard themselves as practicing law, 16 are business owners, executives or managers, 9 are government officials, and 14 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, fully as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1976 who are practicing law, 55 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 people 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 1976 and 1977. (The class of 1977 was surveyed in 1992 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1976.) 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.

Ten percent of the respondents in the combined classes--32 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, about two-thirds worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. Many government attorneys specialized in administrative agency work in fields such as labor, environmental law or securities.

Fourteen percent of the combined classes--52 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Seventy-five percent of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 14 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and 12 percent worked for other business enterprises.

Table 2 offers some comparisons among the three groups: those in government, in corporate counsel's offices and in private firms. Persons in corporate counsel's offices worked as long hours as private practitioners but, on the whole, earned less. Persons working as government attorneys worked, on average, somewhat fewer hours than those in private practice and earned much less. In fact those working in government settings averaged only about 40 percent of the earnings of those in private practice.

Table 2
Classes of 1976 and 1977
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=32	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=286	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=52
Average number of other attorneys in same firm or department	26	127	32
Average work hours per week	46	51	51
Proportion who average over 60 hours per week	3%	17%	16%
Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year (average)	28	67	23
Earnings in 15th year (average)	\$65,500	\$161,800	\$119,400

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 quite 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

Table 3
Classes of 1976 and 1977
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government Attorneys</u> N=32	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=286	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=52
<u>Proportion of group who are quite satisfied* with:</u>			
The balance of their family life and professional life	40%	26%	35%
The intellectual challenge of their career	65	56	63
Their current income	16	53	47
The value of their work to society	42	24	27
Their careers overall	45	45	46
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	19	43	31
Proportion expecting to be in same job in 5 years	65%	88%	73%

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

**That is, a 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale.

intellectual challenge of their work. The government attorneys are much less likely to be satisfied with their incomes, which is hardly surprising. On the other hand, more of the government attorneys than the other two groups are satisfied with the balance between their family and professional lives and with the value of their work to society. There are no significant differences among the groups in their overall satisfaction with their careers.

Class Members in Private Practice

For purposes of our own analysis, we divided the private practitioners into four groups--those in solo practice and 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 Battle Creek 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 1976 and 1977.)

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1976 and 1977
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	90	32%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	48	17
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	55	20
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	88	31
	<u>286</u>	<u>100%</u>

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.

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 1976 and 1977 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 suprisingly, 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 1976 and 1977
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=90	Firms of 11-50 N=48	Firms of 51-150 N=55	Firms of more than 150 N=88
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	3	26	93	324
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	56%	26%	9%	1%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	23%	40%	59%	81%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	19%	53%	51%	67%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	37%	10%	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 nearly as long hours as large firm lawyers.

Table 6
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1976 and 1977
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=90	Firms of 11-50 N=48	Firms of 51-150 N=55	Firms of more than 150 N=88
Average number of hours worked each week*	49	52	52	51
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	15%	17%	12%	22%
Pro bono hours worked per year	64	70	51	80
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$136	\$165	\$188	\$229
Income from practice in fifteenth year (avg.)	\$116,400	\$146,000	\$164,900	\$214,500
Proportion who earned over \$150,000	21%	32%	44%	72%

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

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 and the less their average income was overall.

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

Table 7
Private Practitioner
Classes of 1976 and 1977
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=90	Firms of 11-50 N=48	Firms of 51-150 N=55	Firms of more than 150 N=88
<u>Proportion who are quite satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional life	36%	17%	24%	22%
The intellectual challenge of work	51	52	59	61
Their current income	38	55	61	64
The value of their work to society	39	21	23	13
Their careers overall	46	41	43	46
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	33	45	46	50
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	92%	94%	82%	87%

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

**That is, a 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale.

Roughly speaking, as firms got larger, the proportion of lawyers in them who were very satisfied 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

From graduation to today, at every point, the work histories and work settings of women and men in the classes of 1976 and 1977 have differed. Approximately one-quarter of the classes were women. From their first jobs, until today, far more men than women have been in private practice. At the time of the fifteen-year survey, 41 percent of women and 64 percent of the men were working in solo practice or a firm. Somewhat more women

than men are in nearly all the other types of settings where class members work. Women are also far more likely than men to have taken time out of full-time work to care for children. At the time of the fifteen-year survey, 23 percent of the women reported themselves as either not holding a paying job or as working part time in order to care for children. Only one man reported himself working part time to care for children and no men reported stopping work altogether.

How have the differing experiences of women and men affected their career satisfaction? A few years ago, many of you participated in a study by David Chambers that, among other things, compared the career satisfaction of the women and men. Chambers reported that women were on the whole as satisfied as the men and, somewhat surprisingly, that at the time of the five-year survey women who were mothers were, on average, more satisfied with their careers overall than were women who were not mothers and than men, whether parents or not. Now, at the point when the respondents have been out of law school for 15 years, women remain as satisfied with their careers overall as men. Many more of the women have children (up from about 35 percent at the five-year survey to about 70 percent of the women at the time of the fifteen) and the women with children are, in general, satisfied with their careers, not more satisfied than other women and men but fully as satisfied. The women who now work full time but who at earlier points have taken substantial periods out of the work force or in part-time work to care for children are, in general, as satisfied with their careers as other women with children who have taken little time off and as women without children.