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Class of 1984 Fifteen Year Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1984
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"Law school was a wonderfully stimulating experience. It broadened my view of the world and permitted me to know and appreciate an enormous number of exceptionally capable people. It has given me friends I would otherwise never have known and exposed me to ideas far different from those in my prior existence. It gave me far more than I gave in return and I hope that my current involvement in community service will help repay some of the indebtedness I feel to the University of Michigan Law School."

"I found law school to be a difficult and occasionally brutalizing experience. It took me a long time to get past my resentment and catch on how to play the game. I think part of my resentment then (and a good part of my continuing feelings about the school) had and have to do with my sense that we were not given the skills we needed to be lawyers."

"I have come to learn that work and family -- if you really love them both -- take up a full 100% of one's time. There is no time left for personal, let alone charitable pursuits. I believe that many of us will do our "life's work" giving back to the community when we are 50 +, in semi or full retirement."

"I'm not cut out to be a lawyer. I love working as a sign language interpreter."

Introduction

In the spring of 1999, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 367 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1984. One hundred ninety-nine class members responded--a response rate of 54.2 percent.

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' careers since law school, especially in the settings in which they are working now. We end with an Appendix 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 majority of the class are married, practicing law in some setting, living prosperously but working long hours, and 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 do not practice law at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1984 in 1999
 Total respondents: 199 of 367

Gender

Women	34%
Men	66

Ethnicity

Black/African-American	5%
Hispanic/Latino	2
Native American	1
Asian American	1
White/Caucasian	92

Family Status

Never married	12%
Married once, still married	72
Divorced	4
Remarried after divorce	9
Other	3

Children

None	27%
One	15
Two	38
Three	14
Four or more	6

Population of City Where Now Work

Under 100,000	16%
100,000 - 1 million	27
Over 1 million	57

Nature of Current Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	3%
Partners in firms	33
Of Counsel/other status in firms	9
Counsel for business/financial institutions	15 70%
Government attorneys	5
Legal services/public interest attorneys	1
Other	4

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government executives/administrators/judges	6%
Business owners/executives	5
Teachers, educational administrators	5 30%
Full-time parents	5
Other	9

Average Hours Worked per Week (by workers)

Less than 40	14%
40-49	25
50-59	49
60-69	10
More than 70	2

Earnings in 1998

(for persons working full-time)

Under \$50,000	5%
\$50,000-\$99,900	21
\$100,000-\$149,900	17
\$150,000-\$199,900	22
\$200,000-299,900	18
\$300,000-399,900	9
\$400,000 or more	9

Political Attitudes

Proportion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	28%
More liberal than conservative	30
Middle of the road	19
More conservative than liberal	13
Very conservative	11

How Class Members

Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys about Their Same Age

	<u>Less than most*</u>	<u>About average</u>	<u>More than most*</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	17%	17%	66%
Effective as writer	8	6	86
Aggressive	30	24	46
Compulsive about work	35	23	43
Concerned about impact of their work on society	19	29	52
Honest	4	9	87
Concerned about making a lot of money	49	31	20
Compassionate	8	21	71
Self-confident	22	23	55

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

Life Satisfaction

Proportion Who Report Themselves:

	<u>Quite Satisfied**</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Quite Dissatisfied**</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	50%	48%	2%
Their current family life	79	19	2
The intellectual challenge of their work	64	31	5
Their income	54	37	10
The balance of their family and professional lives	43	50	7
Their career as a whole	56	39	5

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

Looking Back on Law School Today

When they look back on law school today, most class members have positive feelings about their law school experience—50 percent strongly positive, a total of 77 percent positive rather than neutral or negative. Class members are most likely to regard with high satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, while regarding the career training provided by law school and the social aspects of law school with somewhat less enthusiasm. When asked what areas of the curriculum should be expanded, class members typically cite areas of skills training rather than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase courses in legal writing, trial techniques, and interviewing are far more common than the most often-mentioned substantive area (corporate law).

Life Since Law School

Fifteen Years After Law School in Comparison to Five Years After

For 30 years we have surveyed our graduates five and fifteen years after law school. In 1989, when we last surveyed the class of 1984, the class members were at very different stages of their careers. At that point, 70 percent of the class worked in private firms and the huge majority were associates. At 15 years out in 1999, only 45 percent were in private practice, but the great majority who were in private practice were now partners. Over time, the proportion of those working as corporate counsel's office has increased from 5 percent as a first job to 15 percent today. The proportion not working as attorneys has increased from 5 percent of the class to about 30 percent at 15 years.

Along with changes in settings and status has come an increase in income. In 1989, the median earnings of full-time working members of the class of 1983 was \$55,500. Ten years later, when we surveyed the class in 1999, the median had increased to \$150,000.

Fifteen Years After Law School: The Class as a Whole

The graduates of the class of 1983 work 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 more detail.

Fifteen years after graduation, 18 percent of the class still worked for the same employer or firm that had given them their first job after law school (not counting judicial clerkships). A third of the class had been in their current job 11 or more years. On the other hand, many others have held several jobs. Almost 29 percent had held four or more positions. One person reported being in his tenth job since law school.

What kinds of jobs did people hold fifteen years after graduation? As Table 1 shows, more than two-thirds of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. We will speak more

about this group in the remaining sections. Of the 56 persons who said that they were not practicing law, 11 were government officials, 9 were business owners, executives or managers, and 9 were teaching in law schools or colleges or working as educational administrators. Another 10 were full-time parents. The diversity of the nonpractitioners' experiences makes it difficult to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible: the nonpractitioners were, on average, fully as satisfied with their careers overall as were the practitioners.

The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1984 who were practicing law in any setting in 1999, about two thirds were in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in other settings worked as corporate counsel, as government attorneys, or in educational institutions. Only two people were 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 1984 and 1985. (The class of 1984 was surveyed in 1999 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1985.) By combining these groups, we have enough persons to permit comparisons between the private practitioners and the lawyers in government and in corporate counsel's offices. (Even with combining, we do not have enough respondents working in public interest settings to permit generalizations about them.)

Nine percent of the respondents in the combined classes – 31 persons in all – were working as government attorneys at the time they were surveyed. Of these, slightly more than half worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. About a fifth of the government attorneys worked as prosecutors. Most of the others worked in administrative agencies.

Fourteen percent of the combined classes – 50 persons in all – worked in corporate counsels' offices. Slightly more than half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies or for large financial institutions. The great majority (86 percent) of those working in corporate counsels' offices had previously worked for at least some time in a private firm.

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 hours as long as those worked by private practitioners but, on the whole, earned somewhat less. Persons working as government attorneys worked, on average, nearly as long hours as those in private practice or corporate counsel's office but earned much less. In fact, those working in government settings averaged less than 40 percent of the earnings of those in private practice. Despite their long work hours, private practitioners devoted a great deal of time to unpaid pro bono work, much more than those in the other two settings.

Table 2
Classes of 1984 and 1985
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=27	<u>Private</u> <u>Practitioners</u> N=195	<u>Corporate</u> <u>Counsel</u> N=48
Mean work hours per week of full time workers	48	51	49
Proportion who average over 55 hours per week (among full time workers)	19%	37%	21%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities(mean)	27%	27%	19%
Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year (mean)	9	77	14
Earnings in preceding calendar yr of full time workers(mean)	\$84,100	\$232,600	\$183,800

How satisfied were 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 a 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 were not very satisfied were in the middle. The government attorneys were much less likely than others to be satisfied with their incomes. On the other hand, many more of the government attorneys were very satisfied with the value of their work to society and somewhat more were very satisfied with their careers overall. Those working as corporate counsel's offices were somewhat less satisfied overall with their careers.

Table 3
 Classes of 1984 and 1985
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> <u>Attorneys</u> N=27	<u>Private</u> <u>Practitioners</u> N=195	<u>Corporate</u> <u>Counsel</u> N=48
Proportion of group who are quite satisfied* with:			
The balance of their family life and professional life	40%	25%	42%
The intellectual challenge of their work	74%	70%	45%
Their current income	32%	61%	58%
The value of their work to society	68%	30%	19%
Their careers overall	67%	53%	45%
Percent finding current job quite stressful**	4%	11%	7%
Percent expecting to be in same job in 5 years	63%	81%	67%
Percent strongly agree that they would attend law school again**	43%	39%	29%

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

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

Classmembers in Private Practice

For purposes of our 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 75 lawyers; those in firms of 76 to 250 lawyers; and those in firms of more than 250 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 1984 and 1985.)

Table 4
Classes of 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioners
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	47	27%
In firms of 11-75 lawyers	35	21
In firms of 76-250 lawyers	35	21
In firms of 251 or more lawyers	<u>57</u>	<u>31</u>
	170	100%

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 -- and as no one will be surprised to learn -- the larger the firm in which a classmember practices, the more likely he is to work in a very large city and to serve large corporate clients. Indeed, in general, only those in solo practice and firms of fewer than 10 spend any significant part of their time serving low and middle-income individuals. Persons who worked in the medium-sized firms (11-75 lawyers) had practices that more closely resembled those of persons in the larger firms than those of persons in the smaller firms.

Table 5
Classes of 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioners
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=47	Firms of <u>11-75</u> N=35	Firms of <u>76-250</u> N=35	Firms of more than <u>more than 250</u> N=57
Mean number of other attorneys in same firm	3	37	162	527
Percent who have worked in more than one firm	81%	77%	48%	41%
Percent working in cities of over 1 million	50%	55%	65%	76%
Percent of time serving large businesses (mean)	25%	57%	64%	71%
Percent of time serving low or middle income individuals (mean)	28%	5%	6%	1%

Although the nature of their practices varied significantly, 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 worked long hours, regardless of firm size. They also devoted, on average, substantial amounts of time to pro bono work, though many devote large numbers of hours and many others give few or none. Those in solo practice and the smallest firms performed the most pro bono work.

Whatever their efforts as measured by time expended, the economics of practice varied substantially 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 lower their average income. At the same time, even those in small firms averaged much higher incomes than American lawyers of their age in general.

Table 6

Classes of 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioners
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=47	Firms of <u>11-75</u> N=35	Firms of <u>76-250</u> N=35	Firms of more than <u>250</u> N=57
Mean number of hours worked each week*	50	48	50	51
Proportion who regularly average 55+ hr. work wks	33%	24%	29%	41%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (mean)	27%	29%	26%	25%
Pro bono hours worked per year				
Mean	98	63	60	86
Median	60	20	30	43
Usual hourly rate (mean)	\$193	\$218	\$247	\$325
Income from practice in fifteenth year (mean)	\$161,800	\$188,600	\$212,300	\$293,300
Proportion who earned \$300,000 or more	10%	13%	25%	55%

*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
Classes of 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioner
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=47	Firms of 11-75 N=35	Firms of 76-250 N=35	Firms of more than 250 N=57
Percentage who are <u>quite satisfied*</u> with:				
The balance of family and professional lives	33%	29%	23%	17%
The control over the work they do	72%	54%	61%	44%
The intellectual challenge of work	63%	66%	73%	74%
Their current income	49%	51%	77%	66%
The value of their work to society	45%	20%	18%	31%
Their careers overall	53%	46%	47%	59%
Percentage finding current job quite stressful**	7%	17%	3%	14%
Percent expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	81%	71%	89%	83%
Percent who strongly agree that they would attend law school again*	40%	43%	26%	42%

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

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

As grouped by firm size, only a minority of any of the groups was very satisfied with either the balance of their family and professional lives or the value of their work to society, but lawyers in the smaller firms were more likely to express satisfaction. Unsurprising, those in the large or very large firms were more likely to express high satisfaction with their income. As to career satisfaction overall, those in firms of 11-250 lawyers were somewhat less likely to express high satisfaction than were the lawyers in either the smaller or larger firms.

The Accelerating Exodus of Men From Private Practice

The great majority of Michigan graduates, both women and men, begin their professional careers in a private law firm. Gradually, over the years that follow, many leave firms to join corporate counsel's offices or to become businesspersons. A few enter teaching or become government administrators. This pattern has been observed in our surveys for many years. It is also the case that, among those who begin their careers in private practice, more women than men have left for other settings by the time of the five year survey and by the time of the fifteen year survey. The new trend we are now observing is that, by the fifteen year point, men are leaving private practice in as large numbers as the women. The pattern is displayed in Table 8.

Table 8
Classes of 1972-1985
Percentage of Working Classmembers
in Solo Practice or a Private Firm
Fifteen Years After Graduation

Year of Graduation	Year Surveyed	Women	Men
Classes of 1972-1975	1987-1990	43%	67%
Classes of 1976-1977	1991-1992	45%	66%
Classes of 1978-1979	1993-1994	46%	67%
Classes of 1980-1981	1995-1996	47%	64%
Classes of 1982-1983	1997-1998	40%	60%
Classes of 1984-1985	1999-2000	47%	47%

As Table 8 displays, the proportion of women in private practice fifteen years after graduation has remained remarkably steady over the years of our surveys – a percentage in the mid-forty percents. For a long time, there was a similar consistency among men – the percentage still in private practice always in the mid-sixty percents. In the last four classes we have surveyed, however, the proportion of men in private practice has been dropping and, for the classes of 1984 and 1985, it has declined to 47 percent, exactly the same proportion as for women.

To what settings are the male graduates going in larger numbers than in the past? The largest increase has been in the increased proportion of men shifting to work in corporate counsel's offices or shifting to work in business as businesspersons.

Exactly why men are leaving private practice in larger numbers than before is not fully certain. Career satisfaction of men in private practice has declined over the years, but is no lower in the most recent surveys than it had been for several preceding surveys. Perhaps during the

time of the most recent surveys more men were simply willing to act on their dissatisfaction (in ways that women have been doing for many years). Perhaps also in the classes surveyed in the years immediately prior to September 11, 2001, there were attractive opportunities for shifting careers into business that hadn't been as available before. Whatever the reason, we will be watching the surveys conducted after 2000 to see whether the pattern continues. Is it really a trend or was it just a momentary blip?