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## Class of 1978 Five Year Report

University of Michigan Law School

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
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HUTCHINS HALL  
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48109

July 9, 1985

REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1978  
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"I really enjoyed my years at law school. I think I was well prepared for the practice of law."

"The law school did an excellent job of teaching me to think, research, and write legal memoranda or briefs. It made no effort to teach courses that would assist one in advising businesses on business (as well as legal) problems nor was I prepared to counsel clients or draft contracts upon graduation."

"My years at U of M remain a bad, painful memory for me, but I am convinced that the school's reputation significantly advanced my career."

Introduction

In the fall of 1983, the law school mailed a questionnaire to the 349 persons who graduated from the law school in calendar 1978 for whom we had at least some address. (For only five people did we have no address.) Two hundred fifty-seven classmembers responded--a response rate of 74 percent, continuing the pattern of high response of previous classes to the surveys that the law school has been conducting since 1967.

Here is a report on our findings. We begin with a profile in table form of the class five years after graduation and follow with a more detailed description of classmembers before law school, during law school, and in the settings in which they are working. In parts of the report, we combine the information for the class of 1978 with information on the class of 1979, which we also surveyed five years after their graduation. We close with a compendium of the responses to the last question on the survey, which asked classmembers for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever."

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

Table 1

A Profile of the Class of 1978 after 5 years

(Total Respondents: 257 of 349)

<u>Place of Current Work</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Michigan	27%
Wayne and Oakland	(16%)
Rest of the State	(11%)
Other Great Lakes/North Central	21
New York, New England	14
Other Midatlantic (including D.C.)	15
South and Southwest	7
West Coast	15
Other	2
	<u>101%</u>
<u>Family Status</u>	
Never Married	23%
Married Once, Still Married	63
Divorced	8
Remarried After Divorce	6
	<u>100%</u>
<u>Children</u>	
None	60%
One	28
Two	9
Three or more	3
	<u>100%</u>
<u>Nature of Work</u>	
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>	
Solo Practitioner	3%
Partner in Firm	13
Associate in Firm	45
Counsel for Business or Financial Institution	10
Legal Services, Public Defender	3
Government	11
Other	2
	<u>87%</u>
<u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>	
Government Executive	1%
Business Owner, Manager, Supervisor	4
Teacher	4
Other	4
	<u>13%</u>

	<u>Percentage</u>
<u>Hours Worked Per Week (Average)*</u>	
38 or fewer	13%
38+ - 42 hours	31
42+ - 46 hours	22
46+ - 50 hours	19
more than 50 hours	6
	<u>101%</u>

<u>Earnings in Fifth Year</u>	
Under \$30,000	15%
30,000-40,000	26
40,000-50,000	31
50,000-60,000	19
Over \$60,000	10
	<u>101%</u>

<u>Life Satisfaction**</u>	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>In the Middle</u>	<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>
<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>			
Their Legal Education at Michigan	46%	48%	6%
Their Current Family Life	72	24	4
Their Career as a Whole	44	54	2
The Intellectual Challenge of Their Work	58	42	0
Their Prestige in the Community	45	52	3
Their Income	53	42	5
The Balance of Their Family and Professional Lives	41	53	6

<u>Politics</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
<u>Portion of Class Members Who Consider Themselves:</u>	
Very Liberal	10%
More Liberal than Conservative	57
Middle of the Road	22
More Conservative than Liberal	10
Very Conservative	1
	<u>100%</u>

<u>Attitudes on a Few Issues</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Neither Favor Nor Disfavor</u>	<u>Disfavor</u>
Reducing Federal Regulation Intended to Improve Environment	10	9	81
Passage of Federal ERA	68	13	19
Increased Funds for Legal Services Corp.	72	10	18
Mandatory <u>Pro Bono</u> Work for Lawyers	35	15	50

\*Billable and nonbillable hours but excluding bar and charitable activities.

\*\*Questions asked on 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1 and 2 as "very satisfied," responses 3, 4 and 5 as "in the middle" and responses 6 and 7 as "very dissatisfied."

### Life Before Law School

In some important respects, the Class of 1978 was more diverse than the classes who entered several years before it. As ever, a majority of the class were white and male, but 25 percent of the class were women and 14 percent of the class were Black, Hispanic or Native American. By contrast, in 1968, just a decade earlier, only 3 percent of the graduating class were women and less than 1 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American.

As ever, the class was primarily from the Middle West. At the time of entry into law school, about 42 percent of the members resided in Michigan and another 25 percent in other states in the Great Lakes-North Central region, although every region of the country was represented. Similarly, about half the class grew up in towns with fewer than 100,000 residents, but a quarter came from large cities of over 1 million.

As has been true for many years, the fathers of most classmembers were businessmen or professionals, but, unlike most nearby classes, there were more members of the class whose fathers were blue collar workers (16 percent) than there were members whose fathers were lawyers (8 percent). The class of 1977 was also one of the first classes in which a majority of the classmembers' mothers were not full-time homemakers. Of the working mothers, a majority were teachers, other professionals or business managers, though none was an attorney.

As in preceding classes for many years, a majority of the class began law school immediately after finishing their undergraduate education. There was, however, a trend during the 1970's toward classes with higher proportions of members who began law school after a break. Twenty-one percent of the class of 1978 started law school two or more years after finishing as undergraduates, a proportion roughly twice as high as the late starters in the class of 1968. By the time they started law school, about 14 percent of the class had done some graduate work in another discipline.

Three-quarters of the class had never been married at the time they began law school and nearly all the rest were married for the first time. Eight respondents began law school with children. (One person had four.)

## The Law School Experience

About 30 percent of the class started law school without a plan for what to do with their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, the majority expected to enter private practice but 14 percent hoped to work in government or in politics and another 14 percent hoped to work in legal services or a "public interest" setting. Only 1 percent planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Eight years later, five years after graduation, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice are working there, but so also are the majority of those who had no plans or planned to work in government. Most of those who hoped to work in legal services are working either in private practice or in government. On the other hand, as we shall see, a great many more people are working today in corporate counsel's offices than planned to be there.)

When they looked back from the vantage of five years out, most classmembers had positive feelings about their law school experience--46 percent strongly positive, a total of 69 percent more positive than negative, and only 6 percent strongly negative. Classmembers were most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, with somewhat more skepticism about the law school as career training. (59 percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience, but only 35 percent had strongly positive views about the law school as career training.)

When asked for advice about areas of the curriculum that ought to be expanded, classmembers far more frequently listed areas of skills training than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase offerings in clinical courses, legal writing, negotiation, trial techniques and interviewing were each more common than recommendations for any substantive subject. These recommendations paralleled classmembers' views of their own skills on graduating. At the time they left law school, fewer than half the class considered "adequate" their skills at interviewing, at negotiating, or at drafting legal documents, whereas more than ninety percent believed their skills were adequate at identifying legal issues and conducting legal research.

## Life since Law School

### The Class as a Whole

It is difficult to generalize about the class five years after graduation. Class members are geographically dispersed, work in towns of all sizes, many married, many not married, many with children, many without, and, though a majority are in private practice, the settings of practice are remarkably diverse. Some of this diversity is conveyed in the tables at the beginning of this report. Here is some more detail.

About half the class live in Michigan or other Great Lakes and North Central states--a large proportion, but a decline by almost 30 percent from the proportion on entering law school. The places and regions to which the largest net proportions of classmembers have moved since graduation are Cook County, Illinois; California; the Pacific Northwest; and the Midatlantic states other than New York (but including the District of Columbia). There has been a similar move from small and middle-sized cities to large cities. Despite a great deal of individual movement, about a quarter of the class report themselves living in the community where they grew up.

Since law school, most classmembers have held at least two jobs. Only a third are in the same job they took immediately after graduation, while a quarter of the class has held three or more jobs. Five years out of law school, most people have been in their current job at least three years.

What kinds of jobs were people in five years after graduation? As Table 1 above reports, 87 percent of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. Of those who did not regard themselves as practicing law, several were business owners, managers, or executives, several more were teachers (almost all in law school), a few were government executives, and the rest were scattered across an enormous range of occupations. The diversity of the nonpractitioners makes it nearly impossible to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible nonetheless: the nonpractitioners were, in general, as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

#### The Practitioners

Of those who were practicing law, over two-thirds were in private practice. Most of the remaining third practiced in government or in corporate counsel's offices. Only 8 persons were working in legal services, for a public defender or for what they characterize as a "public interest" firm. In order to permit some generalizations about the relatively smaller numbers of persons working in settings other than private firms, we have combined the results of our surveys for the classes of 1978 and 1979. The class of 1979 was surveyed in 1984 with an identical questionnaire.

Eleven percent of the combined classes--57 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, over half worked in federal departments or agencies with the remainder primarily working for state or county governments and very few working for municipal governments. About a quarter were in supervisory or managerial positions. The kinds of work the government attorneys did was quite varied. About a third specialized in administrative agency work in fields such as labor, environmental law or securities. Another twenty percent worked as prosecutors.

Nine percent of the combined classes--49 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Nearly two-thirds of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, a few worked for banks and the rest worked for other business enterprises. Over two-thirds of the corporate counsel group had spent a year or more working in private firms before coming to their current positions. At the time of our survey, about 30 percent held supervisory positions.

Three percent of the combined classes--15 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Nearly all of this group in fact worked in settings in which they primarily or exclusively served individuals as clients. All but two or three worked in legal aid settings handling civil matters. One other worked as a public defender handling criminal matters. Fewer than half of this group had spent any time in private practice. About half now held supervisory positions with the organization for which they worked.

Table 2 provides some comparisons of these three groups with those working in private firms. Given the differences among the groups in the types of work they do, not many relevant comparisons suggest themselves. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, those practicing in settings other than private firms worked long hours, as long hours as those in private practice, but earned less money. (In fact, those working in legal services settings averaged less than half as much as those in private firms.)

Table 2

Members of the Classes of 1978 and 1979  
Five Years After Graduation  
Settings of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=55	<u>Legal Aid, Etc.</u> N=15	<u>Private Practice</u> N=355	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=49
Average Number of Other Attorneys in Same Office	34	7	69	30
Work Hours Per Week (Average)	43.3	40.4	42.2	42.8
Proportion Who Regularly Average 48+ Hour Work Week	26%	33%	33%	30%
Average Earnings	\$37,100	\$23,200	\$48,000	\$43,400

How satisfied were the different groups with their careers? Classmembers were asked about several areas of satisfaction on a seven-point scale. Table 3 sets forth the proportions of the various subgroups who were very satisfied with each of four aspects of their careers and with their careers overall. We counted persons as "very satisfied" if they rated themselves as a 1 or 2 on the scale. (As the "Profile" table above indicates, very few persons recorded themselves as very dissatisfied--a rating of 6 or 7--on any dimension of their careers. Most persons who did not rate themselves as very satisfied put themselves somewhere in the middle.)

Table 3

Classes of 1978 and 1979  
Five Years After Graduation  
Settings of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=55	<u>Legal Services</u> N=15	<u>Corporate General Counsel</u> N=49	<u>Private Practice</u> N=335
Proportion of Group Who Are Very Satisfied* With:				
The Balance of their family life and professional life	63%	57%	65%	34%
The intellectual challenge of their work	58%	53%	60%	64%
Their prestige in the community	39%	20%	40%	49%
Their current income	37%	7%	42%	61%
Their careers overall	52%	40%	46%	46%

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

As table 3 indicates, there are some substantial differences in satisfaction among the groups of practitioners. Those in private firms were far less often very satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives, even though, as shown in table 2, they did not report themselves as working any longer hours than those in nonfirm practice. Perhaps they felt they had less control over their time. Conversely, the firm practitioners were far more often very satisfied than the other groups with their current incomes. (Not surprising. They earned more and they and the others probably knew it.) There were no statistically significant differences among the four groups in their satisfactions with the intellectual challenge of their work or with their careers overall.

In comparison with the other three groups, fewer legal services attorneys were very satisfied with their careers overall or with any aspect of their careers except the balance of their family and professional lives. In some ways, it is surprising that the legal services attorneys did not express much lower levels of satisfaction. The surveys were conducted in 1983 and 1984 when Congress had cut dramatically the budget of the Legal Services Corporation and the Administration was trying to end federal support altogether.

Are the satisfaction levels reported by all groups a cause for concern? Across each of the four groups, about half the practitioners were very satisfied and half were not. Some might

say that discontent is healthy. Readers will have to draw their own conclusions. A recent large survey of private practitioners by the ABA reports that career dissatisfaction is high among attorneys, and especially high among persons in their first several years of practice. (See The Barrister, Winter 1985.) In our own recent surveys of the Michigan classes of 1968 and 1969 fifteen years after graduation, the overall career satisfaction of the attorneys in government and in corporate counsel's offices were approximately the same as their counterparts in the classes of 1978 and 1979. On the other hand, the lawyers in private practice in those earlier classes were more satisfied overall than the private practitioners in the classes of 1978 and 1979. Sixty-eight percent of the private practitioners in the two earlier classes were very satisfied with their careers overall in their fifteenth year.

### Classmembers in Private Practice

As indicated above, over two-thirds of the class of 1978 are in private practice, but the settings in which they work vary greatly. We can convey some of this diversity by dividing the class into groups by the size of the firm in which classmembers worked.

For purposes of our own analysis, we initially divided the firm practitioners into five groups--those in solo practice, those in firms of up to 10 lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers, those in firms of 51 to 100 lawyers and those in firms of over 100 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There were no natural dividing lines between small and medium or medium and large firms. Some small, very specialized firms have practices that more closely resemble the practices of the largest firms than they do the practices of most other firms their own size. Moreover, what is regarded as a big firm in Ann Arbor or Lexington, Kentucky, would probably be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York or Los Angeles. Nonetheless, in very broad ways, firm size is revealing. (Because the numbers of persons in solo practice were small, we have again combined the classes of 1978 and 1979.)

Table 4

Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1978 and 1979  
Five Years After Graduation  
Size of Firm

	<u>N=</u>	<u>Percent of all Private Practitioners</u>
Solo practice	17	5%
Firms of 10 or fewer	70	21
Firms of 11-50	111	33
Firms of 51-100	49	15
Firms of over 100	89	26
	<u>336</u>	<u>100%</u>

Median: 33

As table 4 displays, when we do divide the private practitioners into these groups, we find that only a few persons in the classes of 1978 and 1979 were in solo practice, but that a substantial number worked in firms in each of the ranges of firm size. For those who would guess that recent Michigan graduates typically find their way into large firms, the table may provide something of a surprise. The median number of other lawyers with whom the graduates of the classes of 1978 and 1979 in private practice work was 33, not 75 or 100. On the other hand, it is true that 26 percent of the private practitioners in the two classes worked in firms of over 100 lawyers, a much higher proportion than would be found among the graduates of most other law schools.

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings and types of clients of the persons working in firms of the various sizes. (In table 5 and the tables that follow, we have combined the firms of 51-100 with those of over 100 lawyers, because in almost all the areas on which we report the responses of the classmembers in these two groups were similar.) As the table reveals, members of the class of 1978 and 1979 who were in solo practice or working in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers typically worked in small cities and spent a high proportion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the large firms, not surprisingly, tended to work in large cities and to spend their time primarily serving large businesses.

Table 5

Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1978 and 1979  
Five Years After Graduation  
Settings of Work and Types of Clients

	<u>Solo Practice</u> N=17	<u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=70	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=111	<u>Firms of More than 50</u> N=137
Number of other attorneys in same office (average)	1.7*	5	27	144
Proportion who worked in cities of under 200,000	50%	57%	19%	4%
Proportion who worked in cities of over 1,000,000	25%	22%	45%	72%
Proportion who were now partners in their firms	--	56%	12%	4%
Proportion of time serving individuals as clients (average)	59%	41%	19%	10%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other substantial business (average)	7%	26%	47%	61%

\*Many solo practitioners shared office space with other attorneys.

Those who worked in small firms were much more likely to have become partners than those working in large firms. In fact, partnership by the fifth year was a real rarity in the large firms. While over half of the classmembers working in firms of 10 or fewer had become partners (or formed partnerships) by their fifth year, only 4 percent of those working in firms of 50 or more were partners (6 of 137 -- and 2 of these 6 characterized themselves as junior partners without full voting rights). Even in the middle-sized firms, only 12 percent (13 of 112) had become partners.

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, they all tended to work long hours, though no longer than their classmates in government and corporate counsel's offices.

Table 6

Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1978 and 1979  
Five Years After Graduation  
Work Hours, Fees and Earnings

	<u>Solo Practice</u> N=17	<u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=70	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=111	<u>Firms of more than 50</u> N=138
Average number of hours worked each week*	45.7	44.3	45.0	45.7
Proportion who regularly average 48+ hour week	56%	28%	29%	38%
Proportion of time working on a contingent fee basis (average)	12%	16%	4%	2%
Proportion of time working on a pro bono/ no fee basis (average)**	2.1%	3.6%	1.4%	2.2%
Usual hourly rage (average)	\$72	\$79	\$86	\$101
Income from practice in fifth year (average)	\$34,100	\$41,500	\$47,400	\$52,500
Proportion who earned \$30,000 or less	42%	27%	4%	0%

\*Question asked how many hours person worked a year. Instructions were to count all work whether billable or nonbillable, but not bar or charitable activities. We assumed a 49-week year with 3 weeks vacation.

\*\*Question asked for percent of time worked "no fee/pro bono (count explicit initial agreements only)."

Despite these similar efforts as measured by time, the economics of practice varied greatly by firm size. In general, as table 6 displays, the smaller the setting in which classmembers worked the less they typically charged for their time and the less they typically earned. Those in large firms averaged about sixty percent higher incomes than those in solo practice and about twenty-five percent higher incomes than those in small firms. (Our surveys of the classes of 1968 and 1969 fifteen years after graduation suggest that the gap in earnings will probably widen as time passes. In those classes, the large-firm lawyers earned on average nearly three times as much as their classmates who were solo practitioners and about 60 percent more than those in small firms.) Despite the fact that they earned less, solo practitioners and small firm lawyers were as generous with their time in performing pro bono legal work as the persons in the larger settings. In fact, the small firm lawyers were, in general, somewhat more generous with their time.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. Among those in private practice, solo practitioners, as a group, include the highest proportion who were very satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives but by far the lowest proportion of those very satisfied with their current incomes. The solo practitioners also included, however, the highest proportion who were very satisfied with their careers overall (which suggests that generally lesser satisfaction with income didn't stand in the way of their overall career contentment).

Table 7

Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1978 and 1979  
Five Years After Graduation  
Satisfaction with Career

	Solo practice N=17	Firms of fewer than 10 N=70	Firms of 11-50 N=111	Firms of more than 50 N=138
Proportion Who Say They Are Very Satisfied With:				
The balance between their family life and profes- sional life	59%	51%	31%	26%
The intellectual challenge of their career	47%	55%	67%	68%
Their prestige in the community	59%	37%	46%	58%
Their current income	18%	47%	60%	77%
Their careers overall	41%	37%	44%	54%

Leaving aside the solo practitioners, the three groups of firm practitioners, grouped by firm size, exhibit some fairly clear patterns. 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 declined, but the proportion who were satisfied with every other dimension of their practice rose. The large-firm lawyers included more who were satisfied with the intellectual dimensions of their work, with their prestige in the community and with their careers overall. Those in firms of 10 or fewer included not merely the smallest proportion, among private practitioners, who were very satisfied with their careers overall, but, as a look back at table 3 above reveals, the smallest proportion of very satisfied persons among all the groups of practitioners we examined.

#### Women in the Class of 1978

Within the last half-century, the greatest change taking place in the composition of Michigan's law school classes has been the entry into law school of large numbers of women and minority-group members. David Chambers of the law school faculty is currently conducting a study comparing the experiences since graduation of the men and women in the classes of 1976 through 1979. Many of you have responded recently to a new questionnaire he has sent out. The results of his survey will be available by about the end of the year. Within the next few years, Professor Chambers hopes to conduct a similar study of our minority graduates.

What prompted the close look at our recent men and women graduates was the indication from our five-year surveys of the classes of 1976 and 1977 that, in general, women's career patterns were somewhat different than men's. We now find that your class exhibits the same pattern.

We have reported earlier that 60 percent of the class of 1978 responding to the 5-year survey worked in private firms. This report is accurate, but, among the respondents, the distribution of men and women was very different. Of the class of 1978, sixty-six percent of the men but only 38 percent of the women work in firms. Put the other way around, roughly twice as high a proportion of the women than the men worked in settings other than firms. Where did the women work? Law firms were the single most common setting, but as Table 8 reveals, a higher proportion of women than men were working in each of the other categories of settings in which classmates found themselves, with particularly higher proportions in government and in nonpractice jobs such as business and teaching.

Table 8

Men and Women of the Class of 1978  
Settings of Work

	<u>Men</u>		<u>Women</u>	
<u>Practicing Lawyers</u>				
Law Firm (or Solo)	135	66%	20	38%
Corporate Counsel	20	10%	7	13%
Legal Services	6	3%	2	4%
Government	17	8%	11	21%
Other	3	2%	1	2%
<u>Not Practicing Law</u>				
(teaching, business, etc.)	23	11%	12	23%
	<u>204</u>	<u>100%</u>	<u>53</u>	<u>101%</u>

There are also differences in the experiences of the men and women who worked within firms. In their fifth year after graduation, the great majority of both men and women had the status of associate (and both men and women associates averaged about the same incomes). On the other hand, far more men than women had become partners. Five years after graduation, 25 percent of the men working within firms but only 11 percent of the women working within firms were partners. To be sure, the numbers of women in firms are small and thus generalizations are risky, but a much lower rate of partnership among women has now also appeared in our 5-year surveys of the classes of 1976, 1977, and 1979.

Professor Chambers hopes that his study of recent graduates will shed some light on why these differences exist or at least on the perceptions of the men and women in these classes about why they exist. Are women facing discrimination from firms in hiring and in promotions? Or are they choosing other settings because they prefer the work and conditions for reasons unrelated to gender discrimination? Or is there some of both? One important similarity between the men and women is worth mentioning--perhaps the most important similarity: on average, both women within firms and women in other settings are as satisfied as men with their careers overall and with the balance of their family and professional lives. There is not widespread career dissatisfaction among our women graduates.