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Class of 1981 Five Year Report

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A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1981
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"For both personal and professional reasons, my years at U. of M. were ones of tremendous growth and were incredibly satisfying socially and intellectually."

"I am disappointed to see that the practice of law, particularly in the high quality firms and organizations that the University of Michigan encouraged us to aspire to, has developed a life style that makes it impossible to have a normal family life."

"I am happy to say that I have succeeded in practicing law in a satisfying position in spite of the hellish ordeal that I endured at the University of Michigan Law School."

Introduction

In the spring of 1986, the Law School mailed a survey to the 359 persons who graduated from the law school in calendar year 1980 for whom we had at least some address. (For only five people did we have no address.) Two hundred forty-three class members responded--a response rate of 68%, 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, five 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 and many others do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1981 in 1986
 Total respondents: 243 of 359

<u>Family Status</u>	
Never married	26%
Married once, still married	69
Divorced	4
Remarried after divorce	1
Widowed	0
 <u>Children</u>	
None	65%
One	18
Two	14
Three or more	3
 <u>Nature of Work</u>	
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>	
Solo practitioners	1%
Partners in firm	8
Associate in firm	66
Counsel for business or financial institution	5
Legal services, public defender	3
Government	7
Other	0.4
 <u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>	
Government executive, administrator	2%
Business owner or manager	2
Teacher	2
Other	3
 <u>Average Hours Worked per Week</u>	
Fewer than 35	2%
40-44	10
45-49	19
50-54	44
55-59	17
60 +	6
 <u>Earnings in 5th Year</u>	
Under \$30,000	13%
\$30,000-\$40,000	18
\$40,000-\$50,000	30
\$50,000-\$60,000	20
\$60,000-\$75,000	12
Over \$75,000	6

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

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	VS*	M	VD*
Their legal education at Michigan	51%	42%	5%
Their current family life	73	24	3
Their career as a whole	48	50	1
The intellectual challenge of their work	57	41	2
Their prestige in the community	46	51	3
Their income	55	39	6
The balance of their family and professional life	32	55	13

Politics

<u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u>	
Very liberal	3%
More liberal than conservative	54
Middle of the road	19
More conservative than liberal	24
Very conservative	0.4

<u>Attitudes On a Few Issues</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>In Middle</u>	<u>Disfavor</u>
Reducing federal regulation intended to improve environment	7%	8%	85%
Increase funds for Legal Services Corporation	78	10	12
Mandatory pro bono work for lawyers	41	11	48
Stronger enforcement of lawyers' ethical rules	45	15	40

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

Life Before Law School

In some important respects, the class of 1981 was more diverse than the classes who entered several years before it. As ever, a majority of the class were white and male, but 26 percent of the class were women and 9 percent of the class were Black, Hispanic or Native American. By contrast, in 1971, just a decade earlier, only 6 percent of the graduating class were women and 3 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American.

As has been true for many years, the fathers of most class members were businessmen or professionals, but, unlike most nearby classes, there were more members of the class whose fathers were blue collar workers (13 percent) than there were members whose fathers were lawyers (12 percent). About half of the mothers of classmates worked as homemakers. Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, more than half were teachers, other professionals, or business managers. Three were attorneys.

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 1970s toward classes with higher proportions of members who began law school after a break. Twenty-five percent of the class of 1981 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 1971.

Eighty-four percent 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. Five respondents began law school with children (one person had four).

The Law School Experience

About a quarter 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 15 percent hoped to work in government or in politics and another 10 percent hoped to work in legal services or a "public interest" setting. Only three 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 great 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, 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 class members had positive feeling about their law school experience--51 percent strongly positive, a total of 75 percent more positive than negative, and only 6 percent strongly negative. Class members were most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, displaying somewhat more skepticism about the law school in terms of career training. (73 percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience but only 45 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, class members far more frequently listed areas of skills training than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase offerings in legal writing, negotiation, trial techniques and interviewing were each more common than recommendations for any substantive subject. (The most commonly mentioned substantive subject was Corporations.) These recommendations paralleled class members' views of their own skills on graduating. At the time they left law school, no more than half the respondents considered themselves to have adequate skills in interviewing or at negotiating or drafting legal documents, whereas 95 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 40 percent of the class are still in the same job they took immediately after graduation. On the other hand, 20 percent of the class have held at least three jobs. Five years after law school, almost two-thirds of the class had been in their current job for three or more years.

What kinds of jobs did people hold five years after graduation? As Table 1 above reports, 90 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), two were state legislators, and the rest were scattered across an enormous range of occupation. 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.

Another generalization about the class of 1981 can be made: prior to 1980, a much higher proportion of women than men worked in settings other than private practice (such as government, corporate counsel's offices, and law teaching). While this is still true, the gap is rapidly narrowing. The proportion of both men and women in private practice is increasing, but the rate of increase among women is much greater.

The Practitioners

Of those who were practicing law, over three-quarters were in private practice. Most of the remainder practiced in government or in corporate counsel's offices. Only five persons were working in legal services, for a public defender or for what they characterized 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 1980 and 1981. The class of 1980 was surveyed in 1985 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1981.

Twelve percent of the combined classes--41 persons in all--

were working as government attorneys. Of these, more than three-quarters 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.

Ten percent of the combined classes--36 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Half this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another third worked for banks and financial institutions, and the rest worked for other business enterprises.

Three percent of the combined classes--11 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Nearly all this group, in fact, worked in settings in which they primarily or exclusively served individuals as clients. Most worked in legal aid settings handling civil matters. Three worked for public interest firms.

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, comparable to the hours worked by the private practitioners, but earned less money. (In fact, those working in legal services setting averaged only about 60 percent as much as those in private firms.)

Table 2
Members of the Classes of 1980 and 1981
Five Years After Graduation
Setting of Practice

	<u>Gov.</u> N=41	<u>Legal Aid, Etc.</u> N=11	<u>Private Practice</u> N=355	<u>Corp. Counsel</u> N=35
Average number of other attorneys in same office	74	19	84	32
Work hours per week (avg.)	48	52	52	50
Proportion who regularly avg. 60+ hour work week	54%	55%	72%	58%
Average earnings	\$36,700	\$29,800	\$49,900	\$46,800
Total pro bono hours per year (avg.)	18	8	59	10

How satisfied were the different groups with their careers? Class members 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 1980 and 1981
Five Years After Graduation
Settings of Practice

	<u>Gov.</u> N=41	<u>Legal Services</u> N=11	<u>Corp. General Counsel</u> N=36	<u>Private Practice</u> N=354
Proportion of group who are very <u>satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of their family life and professional life	44%	36%	44%	27%
The intellectual challenge of their work	66%	55%	58%	59%
Their prestige in the community	56%	55%	44%	53%
Their current income	22%	9%	50%	63%
Their careers overall	54%	64%	64%	47%
The value of their work to society	63%	73%	25%	24%

*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 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 substantially longer hours than those in nonfirm practice. Perhaps they felt they had less control over their time. Conversely, the firm practitioners were more often satisfied with their income than the other groups, especially the government and legal services attorneys. (Not surprising. They earned more and they and the others probably knew it.) There were no marked differences among the four groups in their satisfaction with the intellectual challenge of their work or with their careers overall.

Interestingly, legal services attorneys registered comparable levels of satisfaction with the other groups in all areas except income, despite the fact that the surveys were conducted in the wake of Congressional budget cuts that had reduced the size of the Legal Services Corporation--an organization that the Reagan Administration wishes to dismantle. It must be noted that the size of this group--11 attorneys--does not lend itself to very reliable analysis.

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 1970 and 1971 fifteen years after graduation, the overall career satisfaction of the attorneys in government and in corporate counsel's offices was approximately the same as their counterparts in the classes of 1980 and 1981. 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 1980 and 1981. Sixty-one percent of the private practitioners in the two earlier classes were very satisfied with their careers overall in their fifteenth year.

Class Members in Private Practice

As indicated above, over two-thirds of the class of 1981 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 class members 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 120 lawyers and those in firms of over 120 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 Colorado Springs 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 there were only six solo practitioners in the combined classes of 1980 and 1981, the data from this group has been for the most part excluded due to its lack of statistical reliability.)

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Five Years After Graduation

	Size of Firm N=	Percent of all Private Practitioners
Solo practice	6	2%
Firms of 10 or fewer	64	18
Firms of 11-50	116	32
Firms of 51-100	76	21
Firms of over 100	<u>95</u>	<u>27</u>
	357	100%

Median: 84

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 1980 and 1981 were in solo practice, but that a substantial number worked in firms in each of the ranges of firm size. However, the trend towards large firm jobs for Michigan graduates is becoming more and more apparent. The median number of other lawyers with whom the graduates of the classes of 1980 and 1981 work is 84--up substantially from the numbers reported by five-year alumni even in the late 1970s. Nearly 30% of the combined classes now work for the largest firms, and the median size of these firms is 207 attorneys.

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings and types of clients of the persons working in firms of the various sizes. As the table reveals, members of the classes of 1980 and 1981 who worked in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers often

Table 5
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Five Years After Graduation
Settings of Work and Types of Clients

	Firms of <u>10 or fewer</u> N=64	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=116	Firms of <u>51-120</u> N=76	Firms of <u>>120</u> N=95
Number of other attorneys in same office (average)	5	29	88	207
Proportion who worked in cities of under 200,000	40%	13%	3%	3%
Proportion who worked in cities of over 1,000,000	33%	62%	61%	76%
Proportion of time serving individuals as clients (average)	35%	21%	13%	14%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other substantial business (average)	8%	14%	22%	34%

worked in small cities and spent a considerable portion 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.

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, although the same could be said for the government attorneys and corporate counsels in the survey. In the medium-sized and larger firms, more than three-quarters of the respondents reported that they regularly worked 50 or more hours per week.

Table 6
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Five Years After Graduation
Work Hours, Fees and Earnings

	<u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=64	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=113	<u>Firms of 51-120</u> N=75	<u>Firms of > 120</u> N=95
Average number of hours worked each week*	49	53	54	54
Proportion who regularly average 50+hr. work weeks	50%	76%	78%	79%
Total hours per year working on a pro bono/no fee basis (avg.)**	36	56	45	79
Usual hourly rate	\$92	\$104	\$109	\$117
Income from practice in fifth year (avg.)	\$39,800	\$49,100	\$52,000	\$56,700
Proportion who earned \$40,000 or less	58%	29%	18%	5%

*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 working "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 class members worked the less they typically charged for their time and the less they typically earned. Those in the largest firms averaged about 40 percent higher incomes than those in the small firms. (Our surveys of the classes of 1970 and 1971 fifteen years after graduation suggest that this difference will increase as time passes. In those classes, the large-firm lawyers earned on average nearly twice as much as their classmates in firms of

10 or fewer attorneys.) Interestingly, the only significant difference in the amount of pro bono work done among the classes of 1980 and 1981 was between the lawyers who worked for the largest firms and the rest of the private practitioners. Those in the largest firms averaged many more hours of pro bono work than those in firms of other sizes, but those working in firms of all sizes typically gave many more hours of pro bono time than their classmates working in corporate counsel's offices.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. Among those in private practice, those in the smallest firms, as a group, included 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. This group was nevertheless as satisfied with their careers as those working in larger firms--which suggests that their lower incomes didn't stand in the way of overall career contentment.

Table 7
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Five Years After Graduation
Satisfaction with Career

	Firms of <u>less than 10</u> N=6	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=64	Firms of <u>50-120</u> N=116	Firms of <u>more than 120</u> N=75
Proportion who say they are very <u>satisfied with:</u>				
The balance between their family life and professional life	39%	19%	23%	30%
The intellectual challenge of their career	53%	59%	67%	55%
Their prestige in the community	51%	48%	58%	54%
Their current income	44%	60%	68%	73%
The social value of their work	39%	24%	17%	17%
Their careers overall	49%	51%	40%	45%

