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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1986
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- * "Law school was great, but I really wish I had known the horrors of where the resulting debt would take me -- private practice."
- * "I can be thankful that law school lasted only three years, and that the practice of law has proved to be much more satisfying."
- * "The practice of law is brutal. Even for someone like me who believes strongly in his work, enjoys his clients, and finds a lot of his duties challenging and fulfilling, the hours are murder. The phone calls, correspondence, motion practice, etc., etc., are relentless."

Introduction

In the spring of 1991, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 374 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1986 for whom we had at least some address. (For only three people did we have no address.) Two hundred sixty-eight class members responded--a response rate of 72 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 five 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 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." A few examples are at the top of this page.

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. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Many in the class have never married and some have married, divorced and remarried, many practice in settings other than law firms and many others do not practice at all.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1986 in 1991
 Total respondents: 247 of 374

<u>Family Status</u>		
Never married	32%	
Married once, still married	59	
Divorced	5	
Remarried after divorce	4	
Other	1	
 <u>Children</u>		
None	70%	
One	22	
Two	6	
Three or more	3	
 <u>Nature of Work</u>		
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>		
Solo practitioners	3%	} 87%
Partners in firm	2	
Associate in firm	63	
Counsel for business or financial institution	8	
Legal services, public defender	3	
Government attorney	7	
Other	1	
 <u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>		
Government	1	} 13%
Business owner or manager	2	
Law teacher	3	
Other	7	
 <u>Average Hours Worked per Week</u>		
Fewer than 40	2%	
40-49	25	
50-59	47	} 73%
60-69	21	
70+	5	
 <u>Earnings in 5th Year</u> (for persons not working part-time)		
Up to \$40,000	10%	
\$40,100-\$50,000	13	
\$50,100-\$60,000	14	
\$60,100-\$75,000	20	
\$75,100-\$90,000	21	
\$90,100-\$110,000	14	
Over \$110,000	8	

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

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>QS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>OD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	43%	54%	4%
Their current family life	62	37	2
The intellectual challenge of their work	56	39	6
Their income	52	41	7
The balance of their family and professional life	25	60	15
Their relationships with co-workers	55	40	6
Their career as a whole	42	55	4

Politics

<u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u>	
Very liberal	26%
More liberal than conservative	29
Middle of the road	16
More conservative than liberal	20
Very conservative	9

How Class Members

<u>Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age</u>	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About Average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	15%	26%	59%
Effective as writer	3	13	84
Aggressive	25	29	46
Compulsive about work	34	24	42
Concerned about impact of their work on society	22	30	48
Honest	1	7	92
Concerned about making a lot of money	50	30	19
Compassionate	6	23	71
Self-confident	17	27	56

*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."

**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."

Backgrounds and Life Before Law School

In one important respect, the class of 1986 was more diverse than the classes who entered several years before it. As ever, a majority of the class were white and male, but 37 percent of the class were women and 14 percent of the class were Black, Hispanic, Asian or Native American. By contrast, in 1976 just a decade earlier, only 23 percent of the graduating class were women, and 10% were Black, Hispanic or Native American.

As has been true for many years, the fathers of most class members were businessmen or professionals. The fathers of 8 percent of class members were attorneys. The fathers of 17 percent were blue collar or clerical workers. About one-third of the mothers of classmates worked as homemakers. Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, 35 percent were teachers, other professionals, or business managers. Only one 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 1970s toward classes with higher proportions of members who began law school after a break. Twenty-two percent of the class of 1986 started law school two or more years after finishing as undergraduates.

Eighty-eight 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. Nine respondents began law school with children. (One class member had four.)

The Law School Experience

One-third of the class started law school without a plan for what to do with their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, 60 percent expected to enter private practice and about 30 percent hoped to work in government, politics or legal services. Only two 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 or public interest work are working either in those settings or government or not practicing law at all. On the other hand, somewhat 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--43 percent strongly positive, a total of 86 percent more positive than negative. Class members were most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, displaying somewhat more skepticism about the law school as career training. (Sixty-three percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience but only 37 percent had strongly positive views about the law school as career training.) In a similar manner, only 32 percent were strongly positive about the social aspects of law school.

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 corporate law.)

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, 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.

The great majority of the class of 1986 took jobs in large firms after graduation. After completing any judicial clerkship, 68 percent of the class members took jobs in firms with 50 or more lawyers. Today, five years later, 61 percent of those who began in a large firm remain in a large firm. Of those who have left, nearly half are working in smaller firms and another quarter are working in corporate counsel's offices.

About 36 percent of the class as a whole are still in the same job they took immediately after graduation. On the other hand, 26 percent of the class have held at least three jobs. (Two persons have held 5 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, 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), 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: most nonpractitioners were quite satisfied with their careers overall, substantially more satisfied than their classmates practicing in firms.

The work settings of the men and women in the class of 1986 are, on the whole, very different. Many fewer women than men are in private practice--57 percent of the working women and 77 percent of the working men are private practitioners. Many more women than men report themselves as working in jobs in which they do not practice law at all. Another major difference between women and men is that a substantial number of women--14 percent--are either not working fulltime or are not working outside the home, the great majority in order to care for children. None of the men report working parttime or not working outside the home in order to care for children. Incomes of men and women also

differ somewhat--fulltime working women averaged \$67,200 in their fifth year, fulltime working men averaged \$75,100. On the other hand, total family income of women was slightly higher, on average, than total family income for men. Whatever the differences between them, the women are as satisfied as the men with their careers overall.

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 eight 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 1986 and 1987. The class of 1987 was surveyed in 1992 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1986.

Ten percent of the combined classes--45 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, almost 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.

Eight percent of the combined classes--34 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Almost two-thirds of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 9 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and 27 percent worked for other business enterprises.

Three percent of the combined classes--15 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Eighty percent of this group worked in settings in which they primarily or exclusively served individuals as clients. Three persons 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 or public interest settings averaged less than half as much as those in private firms.)

Table 2
Members of the Classes of 1986 and 1987
Five Years After Graduation
Setting of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=45	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=15	<u>Private Practice</u> N=335	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=34
Average number of other attorneys in same firm or department	95	51	203	32
Average work hours per week	49	53	53	50
Proportion who regularly avg. 60+ hour work week	10%	33%	25%	26%
Earnings in 5th year (average)	\$49,100	\$34,800	\$79,900	\$69,700
Total pro bono hours per year (avg.)	23	181	63	22

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

Table 3
Classes of 1986 and 1987
Five Years After Graduation
Settings of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=45	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=15	<u>Private Practice</u> N=335	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=34
Proportion of group who are quite <u>satisfied*</u> with:				
The balance of their private life and professional life	50%	33%	14%	42%
The intellectual challenge of their work	71	60	46	61
Their current income	29	13	64	52
The value of their work to society	81	93	14	21
Their careers overall	71	73	31	39
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	27	53	54	12
Proportion expecting to be in same job in 5 yrs.	49%	47%	49%	33%

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

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

various subgroups who were quite satisfied with each of four aspects of their careers and with their careers overall. We counted persons as "quite satisfied" if they rated themselves as a 1 or 2 on the 7-point scale. (As the "Profile" table above indicates, very few persons recorded themselves as quite dissatisfied--a rating of 6 or 7--on any dimension of their careers. Most persons who did not rate themselves as quite satisfied as to any aspect of their career put themselves somewhere in the middle.)

As table 3 indicates, there are some substantial differences in satisfaction among the groups of practitioners. Those in private firms tended to be quite satisfied with their current incomes but less satisfied with other aspects of their lives--and particularly less satisfied with the balance of their private lives and their professional lives and with the value of their work to society. Most persons working in government and legal services are highly satisfied with the value of their work to society and the intellectual challenge of their work, but few are well-satisfied with their incomes. Particularly striking are the differences in overall career satisfaction. Many more of those working in government or in legal services or in other public interest settings are satisfied with their careers than are those in private practice or corporate counsel's offices. (See section at end of report for more on the declining satisfaction of private practitioners.)

Class Members in Private Practice

Two-thirds of the classes of 1986 and 1987 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 divided the firm practitioners into four groups--those in solo practice or in firms of up to 10 lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers, those in firms of 51 to 150 lawyers and those in firms of over 150 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.

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1986 and 1987
Five 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	14%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	55	17
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	74	22
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	<u>156</u>	<u>47</u>
	332	100%

As table 4 displays, when we do divide the private practitioners into these groups, we find that a substantial number worked in firms in each of the ranges of firm size (though many fewer of the Michigan lawyers work in solo practice or small firms than is the case among lawyers nationally).

Table 5
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1986 and 1987
Five Years After Graduation
Settings of Work and Types of Clients

	<u>Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=47	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=55	<u>Firms of 51-150</u> N=74	<u>Firms of more than 150</u> N=156
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	4	26	99	366
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	39%	13%	8%	3%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	28%	66%	62%	80%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	33%	10%	5%	3%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	17%	42%	61%	73%

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 1986 and 1987 who worked in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers often worked in small cities and spent a considerable portion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the middle size and large firms, not surprisingly, tended to work in very 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, as groups, to work long hours, although, as we've seen, the same could be said for most of the government attorneys, legal services attorneys and corporate counsel in the survey.

Despite these similar efforts as measured by time, the economics of practice varied by firm size. Interestingly, as table 6 displays, the differences in average earnings among those in firms of under 10, of 11 to 50, and 51 to 150 were modest. Only those in firms of over 150 averaged much higher earnings than others (though all, as groups, prospered by any American standard). Those in the largest firms averaged about 40 percent more than those in the small firms. Attorneys in the smallest and largest firms gave the most time to pro bono work.

Table 6
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1986 and 1987
Five Years After Graduation
Work Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=47	Firms of 11-50 N=55	Firms of 51-150 N=74	Firms of more than 150 N=156
Average number of hours worked each week*	48	51	53	54
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	21%	23%	16%	30%
Total hours per year working on a pro bono/no fee basis (avg.)**	67	49	49	74
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$127	\$124	\$135	\$160
Income from practice in fifth year (avg.)	\$65,700	\$69,400	\$73,300	\$90,000
Proportion who earned over \$80,000	28%	33%	37%	61%

*Instructions were to count all work whether billable or nonbillable.

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

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. In firms of all sizes, only a minority of persons were quite satisfied with the balance of their family and professional life and with the value of the work to society, but lower satisfaction with these dimensions of their careers was particularly prevalent among persons in the large and very large firms. Only as to their incomes did a substantial majority of

the larger-firm lawyers express high satisfaction. Distressingly few in firms of all ranges were well satisfied with the value of their work to society.

Table 7
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1986 and 1987
Five Years After Graduation
Satisfaction with Career

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=47	Firms of 11-50 N=55	Firms of 51-150 N=74	Firms of more than 150 N=156
Proportion who are <u>quite satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional life	24%	15%	12%	12%
The intellectual challenge of work	54	49	49	42
Their current income	22	49	69	77
The value of their work to society	37	21	7	8
Their careers overall	46	35	29	28
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	24	49	56	63
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	68%	55%	50%	45%

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

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

Changing Patterns of Career Satisfaction

In the last table we report that, among the classes of 1986 and 1987, only 29 percent of the persons in firms of 51 to 150 and 28 percent of the persons in firms of over 150 were quite satisfied with their careers. These low figures are the most recent numbers in what seems to be an accelerating pattern of low satisfaction among large-firm practitioners in our 5-year surveys. On the other hand, persons working in government and public interest settings are liking it better and better.

In every year since 1981, when we surveyed the class of 1976, we have asked the members of the 5-year class how satisfied they are with their careers overall. We thus have information on career satisfaction for the 5-year classes for a dozen consecutive years, from the classes of 1976 through 1987. When we look at lawyers in different work settings at the time of the 5-year survey, we find quite different patterns of satisfaction over the years. Consider table 8. Here we show the proportion of class members in small and

Table 8
Classes of 1976 through 1987
Five Years After Graduation

Proportion of Class Members
Quite Satisfied with Career Overall*

Classes of:	<u>Persons who were in:</u>		
	<u>Private Practice Solo or Firm of 50 or less</u>	<u>Private Practice Firm of More than 50</u>	<u>Government, Legal Service or Public Interest</u>
1976-77	45%	53%	46%
1978-79	40%	54%	49%
1980-81	52%	42%	56%
1982-83	50%	44%	58%
1984-85	41%	38%	60%
1986-87	39%	28%	71%

* Indicating a 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale.

midsized firms, in larger firms and in government, legal services or public interest firms who indicated they they were quite satisfied with their careers overall after 5 years. (The mean level of satisfaction for each group tracks quite closely the proportion who were quite satisfied. We use the proportion who were quite satisfied because it is easier to understand.)

Look first at the column of persons in solo practice or firms of under 50. About 45 percent of the practitioners from the classes of 1976 and 1977 indicated that they were quite satisfied when they were surveyed in 1981 and 1982. Thereafter, in later classes, the size of the quite satisfied group has bobbed up and down and is currently down somewhat. But not as far down as those in large firms.

The large firm lawyers started at higher levels of satisfaction but later classes have slid to substantially lower levels. Indeed, in our last class surveyed, the class of 1987, only 21 percent of the class members practicing in large firms indicated that they were quite satisfied, the lowest proportion of any group in any work setting for any year since we began asking questions about satisfaction.

By contrast, in recent years, more and more of the lawyers working in government, legal services, or public interest work, report themselves quite satisfied five years after law school. Thus, at the same time that the satisfaction levels reported by large firm lawyers hit their lowest levels, the satisfaction levels of government and other public interest lawyers has hit their

highest--the highest we have seen for any work setting since we began asking questions about satisfaction. We have not yet sought to analyze the possible sources of the increased satisfaction. The high reported satisfaction levels may in part simply reflect an awareness by some government and other public interest lawyers of the dissatisfaction all around them of persons in private firms.

The unhappiness of lawyers with private practice, and particularly large firm private practice, is echoed over and over in the open-ended comments that follow this statistical report. For more and more of our graduates in private firms, professional life is not much fun.