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# Class of 1988 Five Year Report

University of Michigan Law School

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL  
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1988  
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- \* "Law school was wonderful -- I found it challenging but also had a lot of fun -- more than many of the people I've met that went elsewhere."
- \* "Law school should spend more time on preparing students to think like lawyers and not like law professors."
- \* "As for what I do now, in spite of frequent whining about how stressful it is and how I have no life, I like my job. I work with great people (clients and other lawyers), I get intellectually challenging work, and I feel useful."
- \* "I am not very happy with the practice of law in a big law firm. I do not get any satisfaction from the work I do and I suffer from a lot of stress."

### Introduction

In the spring of 1993, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 382 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1988 for whom we had at least some address. Two hundred fifty-five class members responded--a response rate of nearly 67 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 1988 in 1993  
 Total respondents: 255 of 382

Family Status

Never married	34%
Married once, still married	58
Divorced	4
Remarried after divorce	2
Other	2

Children

None	73%
One	16
Two	8
Three or more	4

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	4%	
Partners in firm	4	
Associate in firm	61	
Counsel for business or financial institution	8	
Legal services, public defender	2	
Government attorney	8	
Other	4	

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government	1	
Business owner or manager	2	
Law teacher	2	
Other	5	

Average Hours Worked per Week

Fewer than 40	6%	
40-49	24	
50-59	49	
60-69	19	
70+	3	

Earnings in 5th Year

(for persons not working part-time)

Up to \$40,000	10%
\$40,100-\$50,000	9
\$50,100-\$60,000	22
\$60,100-\$75,000	25
\$75,100-\$90,000	27
\$90,100-\$110,000	6
Over \$110,000	3

[NOTE: In all tables, numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding.]

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

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>OS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>OD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	51%	44%	5%
Their current family life	69	25	6
The intellectual challenge of their work	43	52	5
Their income	53	39	8
The balance of their family and professional life	28	55	17
Their career as a whole	37	55	8

Politics

<u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u>	
Very liberal	33%
More liberal than conservative	26
Middle of the road	14
More conservative than liberal	18
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	17%	33%	51%
Effective as writer	5	10	86
Aggressive	28	33	39
Compulsive about work	34	24	43
Concerned about impact of their work on society	19	32	49
Honest	3	10	88
Concerned about making a lot of money	52	31	17
Compassionate	6	25	68
Self-confident	15	25	60

\*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 1988 was more diverse than the classes who entered several years before it. As ever, a majority of the class were white and male, but 32 percent of the class were women and 12 percent of the class were Black, Hispanic, Asian or Native American. In the 1960s, less than 5 percent of the graduating classes were women and only about 1 percent were Black, Hispanic, Asian or Native American.

As has been true for many years, the fathers of most class members were businessmen or professionals. The fathers of 12 percent of class members were attorneys. The fathers of 18 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, 43 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. Fifteen percent of the class of 1988 started law school three or more years after finishing as undergraduates.

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

#### The Law School Experience

Nearly a 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, about half expected to enter private practice and most of the rest 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 or public interest work.)

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 87 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-four percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience but only 36 percent had strongly positive views about the law school as career training.) In a similar manner, only 46 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, clinical law, and trial techniques were each more common than recommendations for any substantive subject. (The most commonly mentioned substantive subject was corporate law.)

A distinctive feature of the lives of the class of 1988 has been the educational debts many faced upon graduation. Year after year during the 1980s, the average debts of class members grew and, even though initial salaries after law school also rose greatly during the same period, debts grew at an even faster pace. For the class of 1988, 78 percent of the class had some debt on graduation and the average debt of those with debt was \$29,200. Twenty-one percent report debts of over \$40,000. (In the class of 1980, by comparison, a smaller proportion of the class had any debt and the average debt of those with debt was \$11,700.)

In the years since law school, over half of those with debts in the class of 1988 say they have experienced little difficulty in paying them off (categories 1 or 2 on a scale of 7 in degree of difficulty), but about 20 percent report considerable difficulty (categories 5, 6 or 7), a figure that has also been growing over the years. Payment has been particularly difficult, not surprisingly, for those with the largest debts and those who have worked at any point as attorneys in government, legal services, or public interest work. (To give you a glimpse of a problem that is continuing to worsen, for the class of 1995 who just graduated this last May, the average debt of those with debts was \$37,000.)

### Life Since Law School

#### The Class as a Whole

It is difficult to generalize about the class in the 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.

What were class members' first jobs after finishing law school? Eighteen percent took a judicial clerkship (a slightly larger percentage than in any class since we began conducting these surveys). For those who did not take a clerkship and for those who completed a clerkship, the huge majority -- 91 percent -- took an initial job in private practice. Indeed, 63 percent of the class took a first job in a firm with more than 50 lawyers. (These figures are also higher than for any preceding class.) Only 4 percent of the class took jobs in government, legal services, or other public interest work.

Now five years later, 43 percent of the class as a whole are still in the same job they took immediately after law school (excluding any judicial clerkship). On the other hand, 24 percent of the class have held three or more jobs. Two people have held five jobs.

What sorts of jobs did people hold when we surveyed them five years after law school? As Table 1 above reports, 91 percent regarded themselves as practitioners and 69 percent worked in private practice, all but a few of them in firms. (Of those who began in a firm with more than 50 lawyers, 63 percent are still working in a firm with more than 50 lawyers.) We will say more about the various settings of practice below.

About one person in 10 in the class did not regard himself or herself as practicing law at all. 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 occupations. 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 women and men differ, but only slightly. Eighty-seven percent of women took first jobs in private practice and 65 percent still work in private practice after five years. By comparison, 94 percent of men took first jobs in private practice and 74 percent are still there. A slightly (but not significantly) larger proportion of the women work today in government, corporate counsels' offices, and nonpractice settings. (Ten years ago, when we surveyed the class of 1978 when it had been out of law school five years the differences were much greater: at that time, 46 percent of the women were in private practice in comparison to 70 percent of the men, and many more of the women than men were in government or corporate counsel's offices.) For the class of 1988, the more significant difference between the current work situations of the women and men is that 14 percent of the women but none of the men were currently working part-time or not working in the labor force at all to take care of children.

### The Practitioners

Of those who were practicing law, about three-quarters were in private practice. Most of the remainder practiced in government or in corporate counsel's offices. Only four 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 1988 and 1989. The class of 1989 was surveyed in 1994 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1988.

Eight percent of the combined classes--39 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, three-quarters worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for

state and local governments. A third of the government attorneys worked as prosecutors. Most of the rest did civil rights or administrative agency work.

Another eight percent of the combined classes--37 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Over half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 16 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and 30 percent worked for other business enterprises.

Two percent of the combined classes--13 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Almost all of this group worked in settings in which they primarily or exclusively served individuals as clients.

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 1988 and 1989  
Five Years After Graduation  
Setting of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=39	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=13	<u>Private Practice</u> N=328	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=37
Average work hours per week	49	48	52	52
Proportion who regularly average 60+ hour work week	16%	0%	23%	18%
Proportion of time on litigation-related activities (average)	30%	20%	28%	12%
Earnings in 5th year (average)	\$53,600	\$38,400	\$75,600	\$72,300
Total pro bono hours per year (average)	15	----	76	34

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 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.)

Table 3  
Classes of 1988 and 1989  
Five Years After Graduation  
Settings of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=39	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=13	<u>Private Practice</u> N=328	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=37
Proportion of group who are quite <u>satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of their private life and professional life	40%	50%	18%	40%
The intellectual challenge of their work	45	36	45	57
Their current income	26	17	59	40
The value of their work to society	69	42	14	38
Their careers overall	60	33	34	46
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	24	18	49	20
Proportion expecting to be in same job in 5 yrs.	45%	9%	46%	63%

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

\*\*That is, a 6 or 7 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 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 are highly satisfied with the value of their work to society, but few are well-satisfied with their incomes. Particularly striking are the differences in overall career satisfaction. Many more of those working in government are satisfied with their careers than are those working in legal services, 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 1988 and 1989 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.

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 4  
Private Practitioners  
Classes of 1988 and 1989  
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	48	15%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	50	16
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	66	21
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	<u>153</u>	<u>48</u>
	317	100%

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 1988 and 1989 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.

Table 5  
 Private Practitioners  
 Classes of 1988 and 1989  
 Five Years After Graduation  
 Settings of Work and Types of Clients

	Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=48	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=50	Firms of <u>51-150</u> N=66	Firms of <u>more than 150</u> N=153
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	3	29	98	331
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	38%	22%	10%	7%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	40%	53%	53%	78%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	36%	12%	4%	2%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	20%	38%	63%	73%

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 1988 and 1989  
Five Years After Graduation  
Work Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=48	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=50	Firms of <u>51-150</u> N=66	Firms of more than <u>150</u> N=153
Average number of hours worked each week*	47	53	53	54
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	13%	26%	19%	26%
Proportion of time spent on litigation-related activities (avg.)	28%	36%	29%	26%
Total hours per year working on a pro bono/no fee basis (avg.)**	64	75	74	79
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$113	\$133	\$139	\$168
Income from practice in fifth year (avg.)	\$50,200	\$68,000	\$72,000	\$87,500

\*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 1988 and 1989  
Five Years After Graduation  
Satisfaction with Career

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=48	Firms of 11-50 N=50	Firms of 51-150 N=66	Firms of more than 150 N=153
Proportion who are quite satisfied* with:				
The balance of family and professional life	27%	20%	27%	11%
The intellectual challenge of work	50	40	46	45
Their current income	17	38	59	79
The value of their work to society	34	8	12	11
Their careers overall	44	29	33	33
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**				
	33	42	44	58
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years				
	67%	46%	51%	38%

\*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 table 3 we report that, among the classes of 1988 and 1989, only 34 percent of the persons in private practice reported themselves as quite satisfied with their careers. These low figures are the most recent numbers in a general pattern of low satisfaction among practitioners in our recent 5-year surveys. On the other hand, persons working in government and public interest settings have been somewhat more satisfied with their careers overall, though in the classes of 1988 and 1989 that higher satisfaction appears only for the government lawyers.

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 fourteen consecutive years, from the classes of 1976 through 1989. 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 1989  
Five Years After Graduation

Proportion of Class Members  
Quite Satisfied with Career Overall\*

Persons who were in:

	<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>
Classes of:			
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%
1988-89	36%	33%	53%

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

mid-sized firms, in larger firms and in government, legal services or public interest firms who indicated 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 bobbed up and then has been moving slowly downward for several years--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 lower levels, though in the most recent surveys the numbers have slightly improved. Maybe we are seeing a turnaround.

The story for lawyers in government, legal services, or public interest work is quite different. From the classes of 1976 through 1987, there was a steady upward trend in satisfaction. For the two most recent classes, the levels of high satisfaction declines, but remains significantly higher than the satisfaction levels of private practitioners. We have not yet sought to analyze the possible sources of the comparatively higher (and, until the most

recent surveys, increasing) satisfaction of the government and public interest lawyers. It may in part simply reflect an awareness of the dissatisfaction all around them of their classmates and others 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.