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**THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL:
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1992
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION**

- * “I loved law school – it was intellectually stimulating, eye-opening and exciting. Law firm practice, however, stinks.”
- * “I am a happy associate at a large law firm. The reasons are: realistic expectations, a good firm, and a good spouse and family.”
- * “I didn’t like law school.
“I don’t like most lawyers.
“I don’t like being a lawyer.
“I don’t think lawyers serve an important role in society, by and large.
“I look forward to the day when I am no longer a lawyer.”
- * “I thought I would hate private practice. I only went to a firm because my husband is a grad student and I’m sick of poverty. Turns out I actually like my job and my boss.”

Introduction

In the fall of 1997, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 421 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1992 for whom we had at least some address. Two hundred sixty-one class members responded -- a response rate of 62 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 you 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 a few have married and divorced, many practice in settings other than law firms and many others do not practice at all.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1992 in 1997
 Total respondents: 261 of 421

Gender

| | |
|-------|-----|
| Women | 34% |
| Men | 66 |

Ethnicity

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Black/African-American | 7% |
| Hispanic/Latino | 4 |
| Native American | 1.4 |
| Asian American | 2 |
| White/Caucasian | 85 |

Family Status

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Never married, no partner | 25% |
| Married once, still married | 65 |
| Lives with partner | 7 |
| Divorced | 0.4 |
| Remarried after divorce | 2 |

Children

| | |
|---------------|-----|
| None | 62% |
| One | 22 |
| Two | 11 |
| Three or more | 5 |

Population of City Where Now Work

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Under 100,000 | 11% |
| 100,000 - 1 million | 32 |
| Over 1 million | 57 |

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

| | |
|---|--------|
| Solo practitioners | 5% |
| Partners in firm | 4 |
| Associate in firm | 57 |
| Counsel for business/financial institutions | 11 86% |
| Legal services/public interest attorneys | 3 |
| Government attorney | 5 |
| Other | 1 |

Class Members Not Practicing Law

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|
| Government executives/administrators | 3% |
| Business | 4 |
| Law Teacher | 2 15% |
| Fulltime parent | 4 |
| Others | 2 |

Average Hours Worked per Week by Workers

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Less than 40 | 5% |
| 40-49 | 23 |
| 50-59 | 43 |
| 60-69 | 22 |
| More than 70 | 7 |

Earnings in Fourth Year (1996)

(for persons working full-time)

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| Up to \$40,000 | 10% |
| \$40,100-\$50,000 | 7 |
| \$50,100-\$60,000 | 9 |
| \$60,100-\$75,000 | 26 |
| \$75,100-\$90,000 | 18 |
| \$90,100-\$110,000 | 15 |
| More than \$110,000 | 15 |

| How Class Members Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age | Less than most** | About average | More than most** |
|--|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Skillful at arranging deals | 17% | 27% | 56% |
| Effective as writer | 3 | 8 | 90 |
| Aggressive | 27 | 30 | 43 |
| Compulsive about work | 33 | 27 | 40 |
| Concerned about impact of their work on society | 26 | 33 | 41 |
| Honest | 4 | 8 | 88 |
| Concerned about making a lot of money | 42 | 33 | 26 |
| Compassionate | 6 | 23 | 71 |
| Self-confident | 13 | 22 | 65 |

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

Politics

Proportion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-----|
| Very liberal | 19% |
| More liberal than conservative | 30 |
| Middle of the road | 20 |
| More conservative than liberal | 20 |
| Very conservative | 13 |

Life Satisfaction

Proportion Who Report Themselves:

| | Quite Sat.* | Mid. | Quite Dis.* |
|---|----------------|------|----------------|
| Their legal education at Michigan | 44% | 50% | 6% |
| Their current family life | 67 | 30 | 3 |
| The intellectual challenge of their work | 53 | 45 | 5 |
| Their income | 53 | 42 | 10 |
| The balance of their family and professional lives | 32 | 51 | 18 |
| The value of their work to society | 28 | 58 | 14 |
| Their career as a whole | 47 | 49 | 4 |

*Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1 and 2 as "quite satisfied," 3 through 5 as "middle" and 6 and 7 as "quite dissatisfied."

Backgrounds and Life Before Law School

In one important respect, the class of 1992 was more diverse than the classes who entered a generation before it. As has been true throughout the history of the school, a majority of the class were white and male, but 34 percent of the class were women and 14 percent of the class were Black, Hispanic, Asian or Native American. As recently as the late 1960s, fewer 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. In the class of 1992, the fathers of 15 percent of class members were attorneys, about the same as in most other recently surveyed classes. The fathers of 19 percent were blue collar or clerical workers, also about the same as in other recent classes. Twenty-eight percent of the mothers of classmates worked as homemakers. (Ten years before, in the class of 1982, about 45 percent of the mothers were homemakers.) Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, 61 percent were teachers, other professionals, or business managers. Two 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 and 1980s toward classes with higher proportions of members who began law school after a break. 19 percent of the class of 1992 started law school three or more years after finishing as undergraduates.

Most classmembers were single when they started law school. Only 12 percent had ever been married, and only three percent of the class began law school with children.

The Law School Experience

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, about half expected to enter private practice and most of the rest hoped to work in government, politics or legal services. Only five 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 nearly 60 percent of those who had no plans and nearly 60 percent of those who 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 feelings about their law school experience--44 percent strongly positive, a total of 73 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. (Seventy-two percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience but only 31 percent had strongly positive views about the law school as

career training.) Only 36 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 subjects were corporate and commercial law.)

A distinctive feature of the lives of the class of 1992 has been the educational debts many faced upon graduation. Year after year during the 1980s, the average debts of classmembers grew and, even though initial salaries after law school also rose greatly during the same period, debts grew at an even faster pace. Seventy three percent of the class of 1992 had some debt on graduation. Of those with debt, the average debt was \$45,800 and 23 percent of those with debt had debts of \$60,000 or more. (In the class of 1987, only 5 years earlier, a smaller proportion of the class had any debt and the average debt of those with debt was \$25,000.)

In the years since law school, half of those with debts in the class of 1992 say they have experienced little or no difficulty in paying them off (categories 1 or 2 on a scale of 7 in degree of difficulty), but 29 percent report considerable difficulty (categories 5,6 or 7), a figure that has also been growing steadily over the years. Payment has been particularly difficult, not surprisingly, for those with the largest debts and for those who have practiced at any point since law school as attorneys in government, legal services, or public interest work.

Life Since Law School

The Class as a Whole

We pointed out above that few members of the class began law school married or with children. By five years out of law school, most classmembers have been married and many have children. In our surveys, we have watched many years of decline in the proportion of the class married or with children. The class of 1992 marks a change in a different direction, with more classmembers married five years after law school -- 65 percent -- than any class since the late 1970s. (Of those who are married or who have partners, 36 percent of the women and 26 percent of the men have a spouse or partner who is an attorney.) The proportion of the class with children (38 percent) is also higher than it has been for many years.

It is difficult to generalize about the class's work experiences in the five years after graduation. The respondents are geographically dispersed, work in towns of all sizes, in all parts of the United States and in several foreign countries, 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 more detail.

What were classmembers' work experiences immediately after finishing law school? Twenty percent took a judicial clerkship (twice the proportion of the class that graduated a decade before). The first jobs people took after completing any clerkship were overwhelmingly in private practice. Eighty-one percent of the class took an initial job in private practice. Indeed, 61 percent took a first job in a firm with 50 or more lawyers, 43 percent of the entire class in a firm of 150 or more lawyers. About 12 percent took initial jobs in government, legal services, or other public interest work.

Now five years later, 38 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, 28 percent of the class have held three or more jobs. Six people have held five jobs and one has had six.

What sorts of jobs did people hold when we surveyed them five years after law school? As Table 1 above reports, 86 percent regarded themselves as practitioners and 66 percent of the class worked in private practice, all but a few of them in firms. Eight percent worked as lawyers in government, legal services or other public interest work, slightly fewer than worked in such settings as their initial jobs. We will say more about the various settings of practice below.

About one person in every seven in the class did not regard himself or herself as practicing law at all. Several were administrators or officials in government or working in business, several more were fulltime parents and a few were law teachers. 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 Classmembers Practicing Law

We now shift to a more detailed look at the practitioners. As we have seen, the great majority of this group, over two-thirds, were in private practice. Most of the remainder practiced in government, legal services (or other public interest work), or in corporate counsel's offices. 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 1992 and 1993. The class of 1993 was surveyed in 1998 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1992.

Six percent of the combined classes-- 26 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, 68 percent worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. The government lawyers report all manner of specialties. Four are prosecutors, three specialize in environmental work, and the rest are spread in many other areas.

Another nine percent of the combined classes -- 41 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Nearly 70 percent of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies. Unsurprisingly the largest numbers of this group specialized in corporate and securities law, including mergers and acquisitions.

Four percent of the combined classes--17 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Nearly half this group, 7 of the 15 for whom we have information on specialties, were working as public defenders.

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. As the table reveals, those working in corporate counsels's offices worked as long hours as the private practitioners and averaged slightly higher incomes. (We will later see that there are great differences among private practitioners that relate to size of firm.) Those practicing in government, legal services or other public interest settings also worked long hours, but earn much less. (In fact, those working in legal services or public interest settings averaged far less than half as much as those in private firms or corporate counsel and only slightly more than half as much as those working in government.)

Table 2
Classes of 1992 and 1993
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

| | <u>Government</u> N=26 | Legal Services <u>Etc.</u> N=17 | Private <u>Practice</u> N=308 | Corporate <u>Counsel</u> N=41 |
|--|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Average work hours per week | 50 | 48 | 54 | 53 |
| Proportion who average over 55 hours per week | 25% | 13% | 50% | 58% |
| Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (average) | 30 | 22 | 35 | 10 |
| Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year (average) | 19 | -- | 60 | 16 |
| Earnings in fourth year (average) | \$63,800 | \$36,700 | \$86,600 | \$93,300 |

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.)

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 far less satisfied with the balance of their private lives, the control over the work they do, and the value of their work to society. Few persons working in government or legal services are highly satisfied with their incomes, but most are highly satisfied with the value of their work to society. (In a section at the end of this report, we will say more about changing patterns of career satisfaction of the alumni in our five year surveys over the past two decades.)

Table 3
Classes of 1992 and 1993
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

| | <u>Government</u> N=26 | Legal Services <u>Etc.</u> N=17 | Private <u>Practice</u> N=308 | Corporate <u>Counsel</u> N=41 |
|--|---------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Proportion of group who are <u>quite satisfied* with:</u> | | | | |
| The balance of their family and professional life | 38 | 47 | 21 | 41 |
| Their control over the work they do | 45 | 73 | 37 | 51 |
| The intellectual challenge of their work | 54 | 47 | 55 | 56 |
| Their current income | 33 | 7 | 59 | 51 |
| The value of their work to society | 63 | 100 | 20 | 23 |
| Their careers overall | 50 | 86 | 47 | 58 |
| Percent finding current job quite stressful** | 25 | 47 | 44 | 18 |
| Percent expecting to be in same job in 5 years | 48 | 47 | 58 | 80 |

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

** categories 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale.

Class Members in Private Practice

Two-thirds of the classes of 1992 and 1993 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 this 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 75 lawyers, those in firms of 76 to 250 lawyers and those in firms of over 250 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There are 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 generally be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York or Los Angeles. Nonetheless, as we will see, 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 of graduates worked in firms in each of the ranges of firm size (though, if we were looking at a national sample, we would see that many fewer of the graduates of Michigan work in solo practice or small firms than is the case among lawyers nationally.)

Table 4
Classes of 1992 and 1993
Private Practitioners
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 | 40 | 15% |
| In firms of 11-75 lawyers | 59 | 22 |
| In firms of 76-250 lawyers | 75 | 29 |
| In firms of 251 or more lawyers | <u>89</u> | <u>34</u> |
| | 263 | 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 (and as no one will find surprising), the larger the firm, the more likely the lawyers are to be practicing in a very large city and to serve large corporations rather than middle income or low income individuals.

Table 5
Classes of 1992 and 1993
Private Practitioners
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

| | Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=40 | Firms of <u>11-75</u> N=50 | Firms of <u>76-250</u> N=75 | Firms of more than <u>250</u> N=89 |
|--|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Average number of other attorneys in same firm | 3 | 37 | 164 | 481 |
| Proportion working in cities of under 200,000 | 28% | 18% | 12% | 1% |
| Proportion working in cities of over 1 million | 35% | 55% | 63% | 84% |
| Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average) | 15% | 49% | 68% | 82% |
| Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average) | 43% | 6% | 3% | 2% |

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, 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 greatly by firm size. Those in the largest firms earned about 70 percent more than those in the small firms. (On the other hand, even those in the small firms earned, on average, considerably more than most attorneys in the United States five years after law school.) Attorneys in the largest firms gave the most time to pro bono work.

Table 6
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Private Practitioners
Hours, Fees and Earnings

| | Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=40 | Firms of <u>11-75</u> N=50 | Firms of <u>76-250</u> N=75 | Firms of more than <u>250</u> N=89 |
|--|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|
| Average number of hours worked each week* | 53 | 54 | 53 | 56 |
| Proportion who average 55+ hr. work wks | 40% | 46% | 55% | 53% |
| Proportion who spent over half their time on on litigation | 31% | 43% | 41% | 38% |
| Pro bono hours worked per year (average) | 39 | 50 | 42 | 89 |
| Usual hourly rate (average) | \$136 | \$146 | \$169 | \$208 |
| Income from practice in fourth year (average) | \$61,300 | \$74,300 | \$86,900 | \$104,500 |
| Proportion who earned \$100,000 or more | 16% | 14% | 25% | 58% |

*Instructions were to count all work hours, whether billable or not.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. As the table reveals, only a minority of persons were quite satisfied with the balance of their family and professional life and with the value of their work to society. In our surveys over the years, these are a persistently troubling aspects of life for those in private practice. In general the larger the firm, the fewer the numbers of persons who were quite satisfied with the balance of work and family or the value of their work to society. Those in small firms were the least dissatisfied with the balance and the least likely to report their work was highly stressful. Since they work nearly as long hours as those in the large and very large firms, it appears that their higher satisfaction with the balance of work and family is related to their higher satisfaction with their control over the work they do. Those in the largest firms are, however, more satisfied with their incomes than any other group.

Table 7
Classes of 1992 and 1993
Private Practitioner
Satisfaction

| | Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=40 | Firms of 11-75 N=50 | Firms of 75=250 N=75 | Firms of more than 250 N=89 |
|--|--|---------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <u>Percent who are quite satisfied* with:</u> | | | | |
| The balance of family and professional lives | 40% | 22% | 21% | 12% |
| Their control over the work they do | 59 | 44 | 28 | 29 |
| The intellectual challenge of work | 58 | 70 | 43 | 56 |
| Their current income | 43 | 44 | 61 | 73 |
| The value of their work to society | 42 | 20 | 14 | 17 |
| Their careers overall | 56 | 54 | 45 | 39 |
| Percent finding current job quite stressful** | 33 | 44 | 42 | 49 |
| Percent who have worked for another firm before this one | 55 | 41 | 43 | 34 |
| Percent expecting to be in this firm in 5 years | 74 | 64 | 62 | 45 |

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

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

Two Special Reports

The Careers Patterns of Women and Men

Women first began attending Michigan Law School in substantial numbers in the 1970s. At the beginning of the decade women represented only 6 percent of the graduating class. By the end of the decade they were 29 percent of the class. In the classes of 1992 and 1993, the proportion who were women had reached 36 percent.

Even though the numbers of women vastly increased and even though women became more and more integrated into the life of the law school during the 1970s, throughout the decade substantially fewer women than men entered private practice upon finishing law school. Many more entered government and legal services or took jobs outside private practice altogether. By the early 1980s, however, this difference in starting jobs had largely disappeared. More and more of both women and men began their careers in large private firms and the gap between women and men almost completely disappeared. In the classes of 1992 and 1993, the difference has disappeared. Even though far more women than men in these classes entered law school planning a career in government or public interest law, 81 percent of women and 80 percent of men took a first job in a private firm (after completing any judicial clerkship).

The career paths of women and men diverged later, after the first jobs. At five years after graduation, somewhat fewer women than men were working in private practice -- 60 percent of women and 69 percent of men were working in solo practice or private firms. Among those who had ever worked in private practice, 36 percent of women, but only 23 percent of men had left to work in other settings. In addition, fewer women than men who had started in some setting other than private practice had moved into private practice.

The other difference between the careers of the women and men, much more dramatic, exhibited itself for those with children. Over the years between the 1970s and the 1990s, the numbers of both women and men who had children by the time they were 5 years out of law school substantially declined. In the classes of 1992 and 1993, by the five-year point, only 36 percent of women and 33 percent of men had a least one child. The great difference between Michigan's women and men occurred in their response to having children. Among the 64 women with children, 25 percent reported working parttime and another 20 percent reported not working in the labor force at all when they responded to our survey five years after law school. Nearly half, that is, were working parttime or not working outside the home. In stark contrast, of the 94 men with children, only one reported working parttime and only one reported not working outside the home, to care for children.

What about career satisfaction? Women have left private practice in larger numbers than men and have adjusted their lives to care for children. Are they less satisfied with their careers than men? Apparently not. Among the classes as a whole, there is no significant

difference in the overall career satisfaction of the women and the men. (Women are very slightly more satisfied, on average, than men, but the difference is not statistically significant.) Women in private practice earn as much as men and are as satisfied overall. The same is true for women and men in other settings. Nor is it the case that the women with children are less satisfied with their careers than men or than women without children. Nor, finally, among the women with children, are those who are working parttime or temporarily not working at all less satisfied with their careers overall than those who are working fulltime.

In large numbers, the Michigan women from these classes who have children have shaped their careers in ways that permit them to find as much satisfaction as others, even though they have made major adjustments to care for their children. Whether they will have the same positive view of their careers in another 10 years we cannot say, though we can say that the women who graduated 10 years earlier, in the classes of 1982 and 1983, reported as high satisfaction as their male classmates reported when we surveyed them fifteen years after graduation. Men in the classes of 1992 and 1993, despite having partners who work in the labor force much more often than was true a generation earlier, have made few adjustments to share in childrearing, at least as measured by hours worked, by working parttime, or by taking time out of the labor force.

We do not want, however, to appear to make extravagant claims for the satisfaction of either women or men, with or without children. Our claims are comparative only. Remember, as reported above, that 5 years after law school, only about 47 percent of the graduates in these two classes were quite satisfied with their careers. In the next section, we say more about the changing pattern over time in the satisfaction of those of our recent graduates.

Changing Patterns of Career Satisfaction: Downs and Ups

In every year since 1981, we have asked the members of the 5-year class how satisfied they are with their careers overall. We now have information on career satisfaction for the 5-year classes for eighteen consecutive years, from the classes of 1976 through 1993. When we consider lawyers in various work settings, we find quite different patterns of satisfaction over the years. Consider table 8. Here we show the proportion of graduates, by pairs of graduating years, who were working in private practice, in government, or in 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 private firms. When the classes of the late 1970s were surveyed in the early 1980s, about half of those in private practice reported themselves quite satisfied. That pattern continued for a few years, but changed abruptly with the classes of 1984 and 1985 when they were surveyed in 1989 and 1990. In

those classes and in the succeeding classes through the classes of 1991, eight consecutive years of surveys, private practitioners became progressively less satisfied. Then, starting with the class of 1992 and continuing with the class of 1993 there has been a major move upward in satisfaction among private practitioners. The class of 1993 reports higher levels of satisfaction than ever before for those in private practice. This is very good news.

Table 8
Classes of 1976 through 1993
Fulltime Practitioners
Five Years After Graduation

Proportion of Class Members
Quite Satisfied with Careers Overall*

Persons who were in:

| Classes of: | <u>Private Practice</u> | <u>Government, Legal Serv. or Public Interest</u> | <u>Corporate Counsel</u> |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| 1976-77 | 48% | 46% | 42% |
| 1978-79 | 46% | 49% | 47% |
| 1980-81 | 47% | 56% | 65% |
| 1982-83 | 46% | 58% | 58% |
| 1984-85 | 38% | 60% | 40% |
| 1986-87 | 32% | 71% | 38% |
| 1988-89 | 34% | 53% | 44% |
| 1990-91 | 32% | 67% | 48% |
| 1992 | 42% | 59% | 55% |
| 1993 | 52% | 67% | 58% |

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

The pattern is more erratic for those working in government and public interest work and those working as corporate counsel, but in each case in recent years, persons working in those settings have been substantially more satisfied than those in private practice and, even for the classes of 1992 and 1993, with the great increase in satisfaction of those in private practice, those working in these other settings continue to report slightly higher levels of satisfaction. In all years since the class of 1984 was surveyed in 1989, those in government, legal services or public interest work have reported the

highest overall levels of satisfaction. As the open-ended comments reflect, some of the happiest members of the class are those who left private practice to work in another setting.

The very recent trend toward higher satisfaction among those in private practice applies to those in firms of all sizes. As Table 9 displays, those in small, medium and large firms in the class of 1992 report higher levels of satisfaction after 5 years than any of the immediately preceding classes and those in the class of 1993 report even higher satisfaction. Over the two year period there has been an immense increase in reported satisfaction among all groups.

Table 9
Classes of 1976 through 1993
Fulltime Private Practitioners
Five Years After Graduation

Proportion of Class Members
Quite Satisfied with Careers Overall*

| Classes of: | Private Practice Solo or Firm of <u>10 or fewer</u> | Private Practice Firm of <u>11-75</u> | Private Practice Firm of <u>more than 75</u> |
|-------------|--|--|---|
| 1976-77 | 47% | 42% | 56% |
| 1978-79 | 34% | 46% | 56% |
| 1980-81 | 53% | 49% | 44% |
| 1982-83 | 47% | 50% | 44% |
| 1984-85 | 44% | 39% | 37% |
| 1986-87 | 48% | 30% | 30% |
| 1988-89 | 42% | 29% | 33% |
| 1990-91 | 41% | 30% | 31% |
| 1992 | 55% | 50% | 37% |
| 1993 | 58% | 59% | 48% |

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

What explains the downward turn in satisfaction among the classes of the mid and late 1980s and the sudden rise in satisfaction of the two most recently surveyed classes?

The unhappiness of lawyers in private practice, and particularly large-firm private practice, is echoed frequently in the open-ended comments that follow this statistical report (though there are somewhat fewer sour comments in this report than there have been in the past few). For more and more of our graduates in private firms, professional life is not much fun. We do not know all of what explains the decline in satisfaction of the lawyers in firms. It surely has many components.

One aspect of it that we have observed is this. During the period that overall satisfaction has declined and then risen again, we have also followed the changes in satisfaction with other components of private practitioners' careers -- satisfaction with the balance of work and family, income, intellectual challenge, and so forth. For those working in firms, and particularly those in large firms, satisfaction with income has not changed much over time. It has in fact remained generally high while overall satisfaction declined and rose again. (Money, as has often been said, does not buy happiness, at least among those who already have a decent amount of money.) On the other hand, during the years of decline in overall satisfaction, there *was* a comparable decline among the graduates in firms in their satisfaction with the intellectual challenge of their work, with the balance of their family and professional lives, with their relationships with superiors and coworkers at their place of work, and with their perception of the value of their work to society. In the last two years, some of these aspects of work have turned significantly around. There has been no change in the satisfaction with the balance of work and family. It began low, went lower, and remains abysmal. But there has been a huge increase in the satisfaction of private practitioners with the value of their work to society and with the intellectual challenge of their work and a more modest but significant increase in satisfaction with control over work and relationships with coworkers. Exactly why these aspects of work are viewed more positively in the last two years we are uncertain.

There has also been a huge increase in the classes of 1992 and 1993, for lawyers in firms of all sizes, in the proportions who think it is likely that they will be in the same firm in 5 years. Among lawyers in small firms, for example, about 55 percent of lawyers in the classes of 1988 through 1991 said "yes," or "yes, probably," in answer to a question asking whether they expected to be in the same firm 5 years later. For the classes of 1992 and 1993, this figure jumped to 74 percent. Among the lawyers in large and very large firms, the proportion expecting to stay went from 39 percent for the classes of 1988 through 1991 up to 53 percent for the classes of 1992 and 1993. Of course, for many, saying that they expect to be in the same firm is simply another way of expressing their satisfaction with their work, but, for many, it probably also reflects greater optimism that they will be *invited* to stay, greater confidence that the firm is prospering and will make a place for them.

Whatever the reason for the improvement in satisfaction among private practitioners in the two most recent surveys, we cannot, of course, know whether the trend will continue into the future. We certainly hope it will and that those in other settings remain at high levels of satisfaction as well.