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Class of 1958 Fifteen Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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CLASS OF 1958
(Comments)

I would not trade my Michigan education for anything but would not advise one who plans to be a general practitioner in a state other than Michigan to attend U. of M. For me it was the broadening experiences which I needed particularly in view of my intention - at that time - neither to practice law nor to return to live in my hometown - both of which I have been doing for the past 6 1/2 years.

I feel, however, that my failure to attend Indiana University Law School deprives me of valuable contacts in my home state both in the practice of law and in attaining professional & career objectives. (My advice to a young man intending to practice in his hometown & state would be to attend the best state law school in his own state. For those not sure of their intentions or desirous of extending their horizons beyond the hometown Michigan is ideal.)

(In light of my specialized practice, the traditional law school courses (e.g. real property, torts, criminal law) have been of no substantive benefit. The public law courses (e.g. administrative law, constitutional law, legislation) have been invaluable. In retrospect, I would have been better prepared had there been more options, in terms of seminars and individual projects, in the final three semesters in the field of public law. I also believe more diversified legal writing would have been helpful - the writing of lengthy appellate-type briefs is of minimal value to the average practitioner, whereas experience in digesting facts and presenting shorter pleadings and motions would be of far more benefit.)

I would prefer to have my children go into other fields than law. However, I would certainly not oppose any of them who might be interested in the law. I say this because, although I hope one or more will become a lawyer, I believe law is a very difficult field, especially in the trial arena, to be successful without doing an injustice to one's health. (Having it to do over, I believe I should choose a less combative profession, although the law has been good to me.)

(While I am not in active practice of law, I have a strong belief that my legal training (as distinguished from legal knowledge) has served me well in a business career.)

(I cannot help but feel that the studies you~~re~~ intending to pursue with the information sought in this questionnaire are of less value than the integrity of one's privacy. Therefore, I must decline to cooperate with you in this.)

(Recommend against a graduate choosing initial employment with a corporation unless the corporation can show that they have a staff both competent and interested in training the graduate to apply his legal ability.)

I am doing exactly what I prepared myself to do through all my college years, i.e. working as an independent oil and gas operator in Michigan. (I have not used my legal training as a practicing attorney would but find my

background in law as well as my ability to personally handle certain legal tasks indispensable.) Anyone who spends 3 years learning a discipline such as law and then never practices the discipline has to question whether he has used his training wisely. These questions never bothered me much. I am happy with my profession and consider my legal training as invaluable preparation for this profession.

I have no children, so this is too remote a possibility to speculate on -- but, if I were sending someone to a law school, there's no doubt but that Michigan would be my first choice.

Sorry, but I'm not going to fill-out the next page. I don't think my income is anybody's business. I will say that my income during the first few years out of law school was a hell of a lot less than starting lawyers seem to think they should have today. There's no substitute for experience; and even the smartest law school graduates aren't worth the starting salaries many of them seem to expect lately, because law school doesn't really teach them how to practice law.)

1. The present review is excellent and I will be most interested in the results.
2. There is no doubt in my mind that my choice of the U. of M. Law School was the correct choice.
3. If I had to do it all over again, I would do it exactly the same way.)

Michigan is a fine law school but E. Blythe Stason was Dean when I was there and he was ineffective in providing leadership to the school.

I am too remote from the University to make a valid assessment. But I have read of riots in Ann Arbor with fornication in the streets. The news media gave the impression, as I recall, that: 1) U. of M. students were involved in this and other destructive acts; and 2) U. of M. officials essentially winked at the misconduct. Also I have received the impression that the law school is involving itself in social, anti-establishment programs, as opposed to concentrating on teaching the law as it is. These are impressions only so I hesitate to rely on them.

I would change the curriculum by dropping the case method in 2nd and 3rd years, teaching all present subjects by brief, outline (survey) courses, and devoting the time saved to legal writing, practical problem solving and broader non-legal courses.)

In spite of being involved in what might be regarded as a rather narrow specialization, I find legal questions arising in all of the 18 categories listed in item XVI (with the exceptions of No. 9 and 10). (It is my view that exposure to all of these categories is desirable and that specialization in law school be minimized. Specialization can be developed after graduation.) With respect to Item XIX, box 12 applies to my current compensation.

[Handwritten signature]

It seems so long that it is difficult to accurately assess some aspects of Law School at this late date.

The above "yes" under F.2 should be qualified. (If the U. of M. continues to decide admissions and give grades on partially an egalitarian basis, I will not send any of my children there. Admission policies and grading of performance should be determined purely on merit. I feankly do not understand by what rational process, the law school established a double standard depending on the race of the applicant and student. The function of the law school should be to train excellent lawyers and not to lower its standards to solve what it sees to be social ills. You now have two standards: merit and color. When will you establish standards for sex, religion, economic status, etc. etc. etc.)

The Michigan Law training was superb.) I feel (and find) that I can compete favorably with any other lawyer in the state of New Jersey

The law school failed in two respects from my point of view:

1. Failed to provide good conseling as to what courses would be most useful to me in my career. For example, more stress on taxation should be required.
2. Failed to utilize the case method in a practical way - i.e. by combining it with text matters so that you don't have to read the facts in the case except to understand the issue and to have text material which will summarize more and give one a better feeling for the viewpoint in most states - Harvard's case books seem to do this much more than the U. of M. used to.)

Your entrance requirements, particularly today, are based too much on scholarship ability. There are other qualities that make a good lawyer, which law schools usually fail to measure in granting or denying entrance; i.e., the desire to help one's fellow man, the degree of ethics in one's conscience, the ability to express oneself forensically, aggressiveness, determination, courage, etc.

You obviously deny entrance to many potentially good future lawyers each year. I suggest you take in a certain % each year whose entrance is based upon these other considerations, so long as they have at least a law school "C" grade capability.)

Law School did not prepare me in everyday business aspects of being a lawyer. Education was high caliber but not practical.

The problems of legal trining are practically impossible to deal with in a classroom situation. Learning the lawyer's language is about all you can teach. This of course involves teaching some general concepts, but most of a lawyer's training will be on the job. The use of appellate cases is convenient for teachers, but gives a distorted picture of law practice.)

I believe the hopeful trial and appellate advocate is a necessary, and badly neglected, student. As a result very few students are motivated toward trial practice and there is a shortage of same. Trial practice seminars, etc. should be extended and practicing lawyers should be used. I mean real trial lawyers who live their lives in a courtroom. Legal writing and drafting also need attention.

My stepson Stephen Spurr graduated from U. of M. Law School and now works for Cahill, Gordon in N.Y.

Aside from the invaluable training in substantive law, research and writing I have always felt that the most lasting and valuable legacy of the law school in my career has been an almost subconscious feeling that nothing less than first rate work, whether it be brief, letter or argument, should be forthcoming from someone who has graduated from the law school at Ann Arbor. (In short, there was somehow instilled the idea that if you are a Michigan Law Graduate you are expected to demonstrate the very highest degree of professionalism in handling legal matters. I hope this intangible but critical quality is never lost in the program at the law school.)

I thought that the idea was that the faculty had practiced law and would therefore thoroughly beef up the theory with the practical aspects. However, this didn't happen often enough.)

I feel that I have learned vastly more about the law since law school than I ever learned at law school. Emphasis on the case method is to my mind a big mistake. It tends to make something immensely complicated that really is quite interesting and not too difficult. If it were my say so I would, for instance, have 2 texts for real property - the law school case book and the P.L.I. books on contracts and conveyancing of real estate.)

The Leckie award scholarship made it possible for me to attend the Uni. of Mich. Law School for which I am grateful and indebted.

Comparison of U. of M. graduates to other applicants indicates you are still producing superior lawyers.) Don't change the curriculum to eliminate intellectually oriented courses at expense of "how-to-do" or Pro Bond work. Anyone can fill out a form, but broadly based legal background produces the competent or superior older lawyer.

I have found from my own experience here in Montana and from associating with other graduates of Michigan, as well as graduates of other schools, that Michigan offers a better legal education than most other law schools.)

Other than present position it might be of interest that I practiced law for 8 years in NYC in a large firm before joining my present corporate employer.

If a child of mine wanted to be a lawyer, I would unhesitatingly recommend U. of M. However, I feel the practice of law is rapidly changing and not for the better. The failure of the organized bar to respond to attacks upon the profession leaves me with a very pessimistic outlook for the future of the legal profession.

In about 1962 I helped a newly graduated Michigan lawyer prepare a criminal assignment. He had no knowledge except of criminology and his supposed criminal law text was basically a criminology/sociology text. Cardozo and Brandeis aside a lawyer must know law and three years is short enough time to learn basics. I have been told that Michigan Law School has been emphasizing social aspects of law. This is for legislators and not lawyers. Such knowledge should be gathered in undergraduate school. I would not recommend Michigan Law School to my son until I learned for myself what the current Michigan Law School curriculum attitude is.

I liked law school at Michigan and believe it was good training. With some exceptions for specialized areas of the practice, I believe my legal education adequate to enable me to cope with the problems I encounter, if I apply myself. Please don't let Michigan become like say Yale, where you can graduate without knowing any law. Broad and better courses make lawyers - not sociology, philosophy and the like.

Marvelous School, Fine Teachers, Good Luck. I think certain background questions would have been valuable as explanation - age at entrance, veteran, experience, jobs between college graduation and law school. I think it would have been interesting to know which year was most (and least) valuable - bearing on whether law school is too long (or too short). and a couple of attitude questions - about law school in addition to ~~FWIW~~ XVIII and life - would have been interesting.

Encourage the law school faculty and administration to emphasize "Listening" especially to students and public officials - and prospective clients of their students. Law School and institutions of higher education generally should be seeking new relationships - partnerships with other institutions, especially in the private sector.

There is a need for greater "relevance" in law school education - i.e. practical application of skills, to practical problems - How to draw a complaint, and answer - Fill out a tax return - Draw a will -

Law is too often taught in a vacuum - Let the student see what the practice is all about.

I found law school to be a generally unpleasant experience. In all candor, however, I suppose much of the unpleasantness was a direct consequence of my own character deficiencies - primarily lack of a desire to motivate myself and an attitude of "what the hell; I can make it without killing myself." This is verified by the way my grade average plummeted after my first year - when I realized I had a large enough "pad" because of better than average, in fact quite good, grades to make it difficult to "flunk out."

I wish some way were available for a fine law school such as U. of M. to offer a more intimate relationship with its students, many of whom are thrashing around without any sense of what they can achieve. I graduated from law school without the slightest notion that I would enjoy - and be good at - plain old criminal defense work!

I assume the chief purpose of this survey is to see if the "profile of my class" indicated any changes which might profitably be made in the program of the Law School. On that assumption, I respectfully offer the following:

1) Give students teachers who teach. Almost without exception, the widely published famous names (who no doubt establvish a law school's reputation) were in my experience abusmal "teachers." Oppenheim was one exception, but perhaps the others were preoccupied with coping with the "publish or perish" problem or had another problem or something (I'm trying to be charitable), but for whatever reason, they were inadequate "teachers." Professors who are not thoroughly familiar with the subject matter are, of course, inexcusable (I had at least 2 at Ann Arbor -- one visiting summer professor; another who was ~~xxxx~~ assigned out of his field and into another for a semester) Suggestions:

-- give your people a year's sabbatical every so often (every 5 years?) just to write. But none of that while they're carrying a full course load, -- make your people attend a "how-to-teach" cpurse before turning them loose on students. Trial judges do it ("how to be a judge"); lawyers do it, etc. etc. why not you? Teaching, qua teaching, and writing are two separate talens and no one is born with either. Q.E.D.

2) I don't know what your're doing now, but my judgment is that after the first semester, the first 2 semesters at the latest, the "case system" is a colossal waste of precious time. There is simply too much to learn in three years to perpetuate a method suitable only to rap sessions around a Cromagnon campfire.)

It is my feeling that admission standards have become too high. I would prefer some determination of a level at which students can be expected to perform capably in law school and as lawyers, and then select the admittees by lot from that group, rather than simply taking the highest applicants. I graduated in the top 10% of my law school class, and as I now understand the admission standards, I would not be accepted in Michigan Law School. Additionally, I don't want the new lawyers too much smarter than the judges.)

I personally believe that the practice of law in a large urban area is quite alien to that which is learned in law school. This is especially true, I should think, for the sole practitioner such as myself.)

Re F.: I would not seek to motivate (or hope) for or against a choice of law as a course of study. If my child chose law and the U. of M continued it s fine standing, I would recommerid it.

Teach analysis, writing, legal "thought processes" and problems solving, less fact memorizing. Many law students today think the law is a profession rather than a business. Try to avoid doing too much to disabuse them of such notions - you might even try reinforcing them, albiet at the risk of some disgruntled alumni.

Law school was a depressing, tedious experience. The teachers may be scholars, but are not outstanding in conveying the subject matter. More practical work is essential starting in the 1st year. Client interview, preparation of pleadings and instruments, trial prep and practice. Law Review is a waste of time.

This is a good questionnaire. But Question XVI is futile. Law School must offer basic courses in all subjects, and I doubt that any one subject could receive an abundance of courses to the detriment of others. I'm sure the answers I've given are colored by my specialty after I got out of school, and the same with others who return this questionnaire.

It may be useful to include questions on post-law school education (unless XVIIIIE is intended to cover this).

My career has admittedly been unconventional, but having had the opportunity to influence events in a meaningful and constructive way, I feel that it has been worthwhile. #224

I feel that I received a superior legal education which would have qualified me for any law related occupation. I think more could have been done at the law school with regard to career guidance, specific areas of interest and eventual employment.

I'd say the so-called "bread and butter" courses should be emphasized, as they provide legal tools which are useful in more specialized areas. "How to do it" education should also be available, but not necessarily as course offerings for credit.

All the time I attended Univ. of Mich. Law School I felt out of place. I barely met the minimum requirements at that time. My main reason for attending U of M was because I wanted to return to Midland, Mich, and become a corporate lawyer for Dow Chemical Co. At that time it was practically a requirement of employment in the Dow Legal Deptment to have graduated from Harvard, Yale, or Univ. of Mich. Law School. As it worked out I was not hired by Dow, but I have become quite successful as a liberal criminal lawyer in a conservative town. I believe the law school did nothing to prepare me for this kind of life, nor do I believe I was ever taught the true meaning of being a lawyer, the responsibility and dedication it requires. I am not so sure any of the professors at the law school at that time knew themselves what being a lawyer is. I must add, however, that I have had a great amount of contact with students from the law school the last three years, and they seem to be learning a great deal more about the practice of law than I ever did. So perhaps the school is changing or I just did not belong at the University,

I think that the law school's admission policy is terribly unfair. My brother lives 6 blocks from the school, and has to drive to Detroit each day to attend law school. There are many students in law school who do not intend to make a career in law. I realize that this is somewhat irrelevant, but it is extremely important to me.

This questionnaire does not really fit my career. I was on active duty in the Coast Guard under orders when I went to law school, hence my answers to III are really misleading, but the best I can fit into your questions. VIII A also required an atypical response. I am at the moment a professor at the Academy, but the prior 14 years consisted of 10 years of practice of law in the Coast Guard and four years on our ships (two in command) and I will return to active practice sometime between 1974 and 1976. Likewise XVIII D is out of context of my career. I have, for example, been instrumental in the successful prosecution of over 100 Refuse Act cases in 1971-72. I consider this an important contribution to society, but it is not really a "civic activity."

I would like to help organize a 15th class reunion for this fall of our law scgoo class of '58 #028

I haven't revisited Ann Arbor since 1958 and cannot comment on conditions there. I have no intention of "hoping" my child to become something against his or her will.

~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ - politics and law practice do not mix. Participation in politics hurts more than helps ones law practice. I have also found that grades in school mean very little in practice. Its the ability to attract business, inspire confidence in the clients, and the ability to win law suits which are mostt important, i.e. a fightng spirit plus guts. Our law school is the best. I had to work very hard, but the mental discipline and toughening process paid handsome dividends.) I started practice on my own, and through extremely good luck and good fortune, the practice has been a success beyond my wildest imagination and expectations. I represent some 10 insurance companies as defense counsel, plus a bank and other companies, together with many individuls. I am constantly in volved in litigation and trial work and the trial ability and performance is improving steadily. (I wish to make some personal observations and recommendations- let's encourage our law students to start their own practices - that' where the action is - not to be buried in some large law firm. One can be successful anywhere if one starts on one's own. With me - now - the only negative feature of the practice is simply too much pressure, too much work and not enough time to get it out.)

Your compensation schedule is grossly understated - should go much, much higher. (XIX)
