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Class of 1971 Fifteen Year Report

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A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1971
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"I was extremely well prepared for my career by Michigan. I would be very reluctant to suggest any changes in such an excellent institution."

"The practice of law has been good to me but I am beginning to question more seriously and frequently the family and personal sacrifices necessary to practice at the highest levels."

"My clients would probably not believe I am writing this because they generally think that I am one of the best attorneys alive and that I can spin straw into gold. They should only know what a pain in the ass I think they are."

Introduction

In the spring of 1986, the Law School mailed a survey to the 359 persons who graduated from the law school in calendar year 1971 for whom we had at least some address. (For only five people did we have no address.) Two hundred twenty-nine class members responded--a response rate of 64 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 fifteen years after graduation and follow with a more detailed look at class members before law school, during law school and in the settings in which they are now working. We end with a compendium of the comments class members wrote in response to the last question on the survey, which asked for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever."

As you will see, fifteen years after law school the great majority of the class is married, practicing in law firms, living prosperously but working long hours, contented with their personal lives and careers. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Some in the class have never married and many have married and divorced, many practice in settings other than law firms and many others do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1971 in 1986
Total respondents: 229 of 359

Family Status

Never married	5%
Married once, still married	73
Divorced	8
Remarried after divorce	13
Widowed	0.4

Children

None	15%
One	12
Two	50
Three or more	23

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	8%
Partners in firms	48
Counsel for business or financial institution	12
Government	7
Other or missing	4

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government executive, administrator	1%
Business owner or manager	7
Teacher	2
Other	5

Average Hours Worked per Week

Less than 40	2%
40-44	12
45-49	21
50-54	31
55-59	11
60 +	24

Earnings in 15th Year

Under \$40,000	11%
\$40,000-\$60,000	18
\$60,000-\$100,000	32
\$100,000-\$150,000	25
Over \$150,000	15

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

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	QS*	M	QD*
Their legal education at Michigan	62%	36%	2%
Their current family life	75	24	1
Their career as a whole	62	37	1
The intellectual challenge of their career	61	35	3
Their prestige in the community	53	44	3
Their income	47	42	11
The balance of their family and professional life	44	52	4

Politics

Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	2%
More liberal than conservative	40
Middle of the road	26
More conservative than liberal	32
Very conservative	0.4

<u>Attitudes On a Few Issues</u>	<u>Favor</u>	<u>In Middle</u>	<u>Disfavor</u>
Reducing federal regulation intended to improve environment	13%	10%	77%
Increase funds for Legal Services Corporation	57	21	23
Mandatory pro bono work for lawyers	28	14	58
Stronger enforcement of lawyers' ethical rules	70	10	9

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

Background of Classmates

The class of 1971 was one of the last Michigan classes that was nearly all white and nearly all male. Among the graduates of the class, only about 6 percent were women and fewer than 3 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American. (By contrast, about 10 percent of today's entering class are minority group members and nearly 40% are women.)

The occupations of the parents of class members indicated that the majority of the class came from upper middle class backgrounds. The fathers of 73 percent of the class members were business owners, business managers, or professionals. Surprisingly, only twelve percent of the fathers were lawyers. Twenty-seven percent of the fathers were blue collar or clerical workers. The mothers of nearly two-thirds of the class were homemakers. One mother was an attorney.

As in preceding classes for many years, a considerable majority of the class entered law school immediately after graduating from college. Still, 18 percent of the class would be between 27 and 40 years old by the time of graduation, reflecting at least in part the disruptive effect of military service on several of the class members, or of graduate work done previous to matriculation.

Seventy-two percent of the class had never been married when they began law school, while 14 respondents were already parents. One person had four children.

The Law School Experience

Nearly 40 percent of the class began law school without a long term career plan for what to do with their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, the majority expected to enter private practice. The next largest group--about ten percent--hoped to work in government or in politics. Only two percent planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (15 years later, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice are

working there, as are the great majority of those who had no plans. About the same proportion of the class who intended to enter government are now there, but as table 1 reveals, a great many more people are working in corporate counsel's offices than foresaw that they would.)

When they look back on law school today, most class members have positive feelings--62 percent strongly positive and only two percent strongly negative. Class members are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, (80 percent strongly positive), while regarding the career training provided by the experience with less enthusiasm (54 percent strongly positive). When asked what areas of the curriculum should be expanded, the respondents typically listed areas of skills training rather than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase courses in legal writing, negotiation, and trial technique were far more common than the most often-mentioned substantive area (Corporations). These recommendations paralleled class members' views of their own skills on graduating. At the time they left law school, only half the class considered their negotiating and interviewing skills to be "adequate," whereas more than 95 percent believed their skills were sufficiently adequate to identify legal issues and conduct legal research.

Life Since Law School

The Class as a Whole

It is difficult to generalize about the lives of the class of 1971 fifteen years after graduation. They live in towns of all sizes, in all parts of the country and, although a majority are in private practice, the settings of practice are remarkably diverse. Some of the diversity in their lives is conveyed in the tables at the beginning of this report. Here is some more detail.

Fifteen years after graduation, more than a fifth of the class work for the same employer or firm that gave them their first job after law school. On the other hand, many others have held several jobs. A quarter have held four or more. One person has had fifteen different jobs. Despite all the movement, nearly half the respondents have held their current job for at least ten years, and nearly three-quarters have been in their current job for at least five years.

What kinds of jobs do people hold 15 years after graduation? As the tables above reflect, about 79 percent of the class regard themselves as practicing lawyers. Of the 33 persons who did not regard themselves as practicing law, two work in government agencies or courts, 15 are business owners and managers, and four teach law. The diversity of the nonpractitioners' work makes it difficult to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible: the nonpractitioners are, in general,

as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1971 who are practicing law, 60 percent are in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in other settings work as corporate counsels or government attorneys. Only three persons are currently working in legal services, for a public defender, or for what the respondents characterized as a public interest firm. In order to permit some generalizations about those working in settings other than private firms, we have combined the results of our surveys for the classes of 1970 and 1971. (The class of 1970 was surveyed in 1986 with an identical questionnaire.) By combining, we have enough persons to permit comparisons between the private practitioners and the lawyers in government and in corporate counsel's offices. Even with combining, we do not have enough persons working in legal services to permit generalization.

Of the 40 persons in the two classes working as government attorneys, the group was evenly divided between those who worked for the federal government and those who were employed by state governments.

Forty-one persons in the two classes worked in corporate counsel's offices. Over half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies; most of the others worked for banks or financial institutions. Over two-thirds of the corporate counsel group had spent a year or more working in private firms before coming to their current positions.

Table 2 offers some comparisons among the three groups: those in government, in corporate counsel's offices and in private firms. In general, the people working in settings other than private practice worked nearly as many hours as the private

Table 2
Classes of 1970 and 1971
Comparison of Government Attorneys,
Corporate Counsel Office, and Private Practitioners

	<u>Government</u> N=28	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=247	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=41
Average number of other attorneys in same office	30	56	19
Average work hours per week	48	52	50
Proportion who average over 50 hours per week	50%	72%	6%
Total pro bono hours worked per year (average)	48	83	23
Earnings in 15th year (average)	\$54,000	\$119,000	\$101,000

practitioners, but earned less money. In fact those working in government settings averaged less than half as much as the combined average income of the other two groups.

How satisfied are the persons in these settings with their careers? We asked respondents about various dimensions of satisfaction on a seven-point scale. Table 3 reveals the proportions of each group who indicated that they were very satisfied (categories 1 or 2 on the 7-point scale). As table 1 above suggests, very few persons said that they were very dissatisfied--categories 6 and 7--with any aspect of their careers. Most who are not very satisfied are in the middle. All three groups were, in general, very satisfied with the intellectual challenge of their work. The non-private-practitioners are much less likely to be satisfied with their incomes, which is not surprising in the case of government attorneys, who make less than half as much as their private firm counterparts, but is somewhat puzzling in terms of those who work as corporate counsels, since the average income of this group is only 15 percent lower than that of the private practitioners. On the other hand, the government attorneys are much more satisfied with the balance between their family and professional lives than are the other two groups.

Table 3
Classes of 1970 and 1971
Comparisons of Government Attorneys, Corporate Counsel,
and Private Practitioners

	<u>Government Attorneys</u>	<u>Corporate General Counsel</u>	<u>Private Practitioners</u>
Proportion of group who are <u>very satisfied with:</u>			
The balance of their family life and professional life	61%	39%	40%
The intellectual challenge of their career	68	59	63
Their prestige in the community	41	40	57
Their current income	29	34	53
Their careers overall	54	54	61
The value of their work to society	79	20	32

Class Members in Private Practice

For purposes of our own analysis, we initially divided the private practitioners into four groups--those in solo practice, those in firms of up to ten lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 to lawyers, and those in firms of more than fifty lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There are no natural dividing lines between small, medium-sized, and large firms: some small, very specialized firms have practices that more closely resemble the practices of the largest firms than the

practices of most firms their own size. Moreover, what is regarded as a big firm in Ann Arbor or Ramsdale, Connecticut, would probably be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York or Los Angeles. Nonetheless, in very broad ways, as we will see, firm size is revealing. (Because the numbers of persons in solo practice were small, we have again combined the classes of 1970 and 1971.)

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1970 and 1971
Seventeen Years After Graduation
Size of Firm

<u>Persons working:</u>	<u>N=</u>	<u>% of total</u>
As solo practitioners	37	15%
In firms of 10 or fewer lawyers	72	29
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	60	24
In firms of 51 or more lawyers	80	32

Median (including solo practitioners): 56 other lawyers

As table 4 displays, when we do combine the private practitioners in the two classes and then divide them into these groups, we find substantial numbers working in solo practices and in firms in each of the ranges of firm size. However, the trend toward the expansion of the biggest firms is plainly reflected in the statistics. The mean number of attorneys per firm in firms with over 50 attorneys is 150--and this group of firms of more than 50 contains one-third of the class members from the two classes. The mean number of attorneys per firm for all four groups is 56, but again, this figure is inflated by the sizable minority of the classes who work for the biggest firms. Two-thirds of the class members work for firms of 50 or fewer or as solo practitioners and the mean number of attorneys per office for these groups is 13.

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings for work and types of clients of the persons working in firms of these various sizes. As the table reveals, members of the classes of 1970 and 1971 who were in solo practice or working in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers typically worked in smaller cities and spent a high proportion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the largest firms, not surprisingly, tended to work in much larger cities and to spend much of their time serving large businesses. Those in the medium-sized firms fall in between.

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, solo practitioners worked slightly shorter hours, on average, than others, though there was a great deal more variance among solo practitioners than among lawyers in the other groups: the solo practitioners

Table 5
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1970 and 1971
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	<u>Solo Practitioner</u> N=37	<u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=72	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=60	<u>Firms of more than 50</u> N=80
Average number of other attorneys in same office	2*	5	24	150
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	42%	42%	13%	3%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	31%	30%	50%	71%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	13%	23%	30%	60%

*Many solo practitioners shared office space with at least one other attorney.

also included some of those who put in the longest hours. The lawyers in firms put in substantial hours, regardless of firm size, though those in the large firms worked slightly shorter hours.

Table 6
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1970 and 1971
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	<u>Solo Practitioners</u>	<u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u>	<u>Firms of 11-50</u>	<u>Firms of >than 50</u>
Average number of hours worked each week*	47	52	54	53
Proportion who regularly average 50+hr. work weeks	53	74	73	78
Pro bono hours worked per year**	91	83	76	89
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$98	\$107	\$132	\$162
Income from practice in fifteenth year (avg.)	\$60,400	\$92,500	\$122,900	\$162,400
Proportion who earned over \$100,000	13%	30%	53%	81%

*Figured on 49-hour week, 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)."

Whatever their efforts as measured by time expended, the economics of practice varied greatly by firm size. In general, as table 6 displays, the smaller the setting in which class

members worked, the less they typically charged for their time when working on an hourly basis. In a similar manner, average income was strongly related to firm size. Those in large firms averaged more than two-and-half-times as high earnings as those in solo practice and about 70 percent more than those in small firms. Those are large differences. Despite the fact that they earned less, however, solo practitioners and small firm lawyers were as generous with their time in performing pro bono legal work as their counterparts in larger firms.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. In general, the attorneys in the larger firms were dissatisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives but pleased with the other aspects of their careers. Solo practitioners express more dissatisfaction about their income and their sense of prestige, while a majority of those in small firms reported themselves very satisfied in every category except income.

Table 7
Private Practitioner
Classes of 1970 and 1971
Satisfaction

	<u>Solo Practitioner</u> n=37	<u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> n=72	<u>Firms of 11-50</u> n=60	<u>Firms of >50</u> n=80
<u>Proportion who are very satisfied with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional life	41%	51%	32%	36%
The intellectual challenge of work	50	58	68	68
Their prestige in the community	36	54	60	66
Their current income	22	43	66	68
The value of their work to society	37	34	35	25
Their careers overall	51	49	58	68

Roughly speaking, as firms got larger, the proportion of lawyers in them who were very satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives declined, but the proportion who were satisfied with most other dimensions of their practice rose. The large-firm and medium-firm lawyers included more who were satisfied with the intellectual dimensions of their work, with their current incomes, and with their careers overall. On the other hand, the large firms also included the smallest proportion who reported themselves very satisfied with the value of their work to society.