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Class of 1971 Fifteen Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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Recommended Citation

University of Michigan Law School, "Class of 1971 Fifteen Year Report Alumni Comments" (1986).

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RESPONSES FROM THE MEMBERS OF
THE CLASS OF 1971
TO THE LAST QUESTION ON SURVEY ASKING FOR
"COMMENTS OF ANY SORT ABOUT YOUR LIFE
OR LAW SCHOOL OR WHATEVER"

* * * * *

Michigan Law School was very difficult for me even though I graduated in the top 15% of my class.

The competitive, intellectual training to think and organize facts in law school was probably the greatest help to me in being a successful trial lawyer.

The law training at Michigan gave me an edge over many lawyers I have dealt with over the years.

I now hire many Cooley Law School grads. Some are or will become good lawyers. Many lack the fundamental basics of thinking and organizing information and analyzing factual and legal variations which was the daily diet at Michigan Law School. This latter was essential to me in becoming a good lawyer through my practical learning over the years since law school.

Thanks.

Law School at Michigan appeared to me at the time, and today still does, to be one of those extraordinary intellectual experiences that constituted a watershed event in my life and my understanding of it that went far beyond merely developing professional skills. I will always be grateful to Michigan Law School for the superlative job it did.

The practice of law and the very great time commitment it demands continues to challenge us all to be not only good lawyers but also good people who have time for spouses and children and our communities. It is, frankly, not easy to see those who spend less time more successfully in other fields. Were it not for the interest of the work itself it would be much more difficult to meet this challenge.

I wish that I had the opportunity now to attend law school (again). The law school experience would be more satisfying without concern about grades and with considerable experience about how people get things done. This reflects my impression that law school was less meaningful to me because of grades and because of my naivete.

The profession, including law schools, needs to start standing up for itself, instead of being so masochistic.

I believe the training at Michigan Law School was excellent, although I would emphasize further courses in legal writing,

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negotiation and fact analysis. I recognize that the principal purpose of law school is not to provide practical training, but those skills are difficult to learn in practice.

At times a featured guest lecturer from practice (private, corporate or government) would be quite helpful in keeping courses interesting. Perhaps those types of changes have occurred in 15 years.

Also, I now view the legal profession more critically and wonder whether lawyers unnecessarily complicate our lives and business affairs -- whether in the form of criminal defense, government regulation, or corporate lobbying -- and irrespective even of political ideology.

I believe we need fewer, but better lawyers and as a profession recognize we only should facilitate life and law is not an end itself but a means to an end -- a more productive, fairer (but not perfect), and better world.

In general, I found that law school left me ill prepared for the practice of law. By means of example, I took a course on Real Estate Finance. Instead of focusing on the different means of financing and the legal aspects thereof, we spent the entire semester learning about the statutory authority for the federal savings and loan system. This was of little comfort when I had clients ask me about sale/lease backs, mortgages, subordinates, etc.

I have often thought that law school was too esoteric and geared to students desiring to write appellate briefs. Also, I would not rely heavily upon the Socratic method of teaching.

Ann Arbor was a great and wonderful place to live, study and grow intellectually.

Law School with the egos of certain elite primadonnas and "the method" was intellectually deadening and awful.

Michigan did not turn out attorneys, nor did it attempt to. Unless you were on law review the general faculty attitude was that they had no use for you - with notable exceptions. There was a lot of talent in the class of 1971 that I am sure make good lawyers today in spite of the law school experience.

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

I was very pleased with my education and experiences at UM Law School.

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A law school degree has opened many doors for me. Much to my surprise, the school which confers the degree seems generally to be of little consequence.

Litigation today has become, I believe, a very serious threat to society. The cost of doing business in such an environment drives some to other sources of income. I believe that for the good of our society, some limitation must be established. If the profession will do it, the profession will benefit. If it is done from outside the profession, the consequences to the profession could be severe.

I suggest that both performance in law school as well as experiences thereafter are affected by both the undergraduate background and pre-law school work experiences. It is curious that your very detailed questions do not explore these experiences.

Michigan Law School prepared me very well. I have been very lucky and have had great jobs with much adventure--Panama Canal negotiations, spy trades, U.S.-Soviet crises, etc. Now I am Minority Counsel to Senate Arms Services Committee and enjoying it thoroughly.

In all of this Michigan has served me well and I am proud to have attended the Law School - keep it up.

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- 1) I can't say I have been fully satisfied with my legal career at this point.
 - 2) I have become much more cynical (mature?) about politics and government.
 - 3) Practicing in a corporate/business setting, perhaps I place less emphasis than my counterparts in private practice or government on the importance of law in the overall scheme of things.
 - 4) To this day, I don't understand the public's love-hate relationship with lawyers.

The "clinical" course which would have been most helpful would be one which focused on contract preparation (drafting) and interpretation. The approach of Contracts, Commercial Transactions, etc. provided sound analytical skills, but little in the way of drafting. A good legal writing course in the third year which dealt with documentation in sophisticated financial transactions, rather than appellate briefs, would be helpful.

Legal Services have become another "big business" where lawyers and work-product are all part of the numbers. Law schools need to address the "big picture" as to the role of attorneys in society and the impact of excessive numbers of attorneys on the profession and society. The law schools are obviously caught-up in the numbers game as well.

U. of M. Law seems to strike a good balance between theoretical and bread-and-butter. Certainly prestigious (and the fact that I don't mention my Mich. degree in the first 2 minutes after I meet a lawyer help impress him or her that I'm a pleasant fellow).

Great school. My main criticism (which applies to the whole university) is that they seem to take themselves too seriously, by and large. Maybe it goes with the territory.

I had little idea what lawyers did when starting law school, and gained very little idea during law school. This led to course selections and career choices that were almost random. Fortunately, these choices have worked out fairly well. Still, they could have been helped by my learning what practice in a firm amounts to during my legal education. At least, students might be cautioned to educate themselves in this respect.

Don't misunderstand -- I loved my Law School experience, and love my Michigan education.

Concerning career counselling, I think law school professors should schedule meetings early in the fall (for 2nd and 3rd year students to choose electives) to discuss various career objectives.

In the last class survey in 1976 I was surprised at the number of adverse statements by the women. In my experience women lawyers were often given better career and promotion opportunities because they were women.

I am distressed about the "de-professionalizing" of lawyers. Law practice has become too much of a business for too many lawyers.

Many of my lawyer colleagues work too hard at their families' expense. It's difficult to do one's best work for clients and also devote adequate time and energy to other activities.

I feel that the Law School was a significant factor in my success. I believe it is important to maintain the high standards of the Law School and its very favorable national image.

We have encountered a significant problem in locating attorneys who are not only capable, but also can relate to clients and develop new business. I recommend more attention be paid to the personality of law school applicants.

Law school should have some reflection of contract drafting; contract negotiation; charter drafting--possibly have corporate practitioners give seminars or non-credit workshops, etc.

I am happy with my choice of school and career!

In the fall of 1968, when I and my classmates entered the law school I was unprepared for the rigorous, intellectual exchanges that attended every class discussion, study group argument and Saturday afternoon bull session. At first it was very hard to accustom oneself to defend every statement. However, after fifteen years of law practice, I have learned that those exercises helped prepare me for the true practice of law. What made me realize this was the constant need to know the law and apply it on a case by case basis as a prosecutor and the corresponding need as private practitioner. What helped me in law school was the type of student Michigan attracted in the late 60's, early 70's.

They were of varying backgrounds but all brought with them a desire to learn the law, legal reasoning and the requirements for a good legal background. The law professors of that time challenged each student to examine the law, understand the reason behind it and to think. These were not exercises in memory. They were rigorous attempts to induce math, English and language majors to think like lawyers. In my class, the students accepted the challenge and, considering the events of that era, they applied arcane concepts of contract, tort and agency law to a myriad of problems. Looking back at it now, I feel fortunate to have been a part of it.

The change of status of lawyers as perceived by the public; expansive legal requirements of law practice conduct relative to preventing malpractice; number of hours required to earn a good but not great income, particularly when compared with clients' incomes; an unsatisfactory marriage and many general problems of life in the 80's has contributed to making me very dissatisfied.

Generally, being an attorney is just a job. I had thought it was something special, but it is not. I find outside interests much more stimulating.

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.

I continue to be very satisfied with my Law School experience. However, my legal education did almost nothing to prepare me for the practice of law. Skills training was almost nonexistent (my trial ad class must have had 100 students--a meaningless experience) nor did my traditional courses give me the slightest inkling of how the concepts being taught had any application in real life. Thus, I learned the law concerning, for instance, depositions but had no idea of what one looked like or how it was conducted, objections made, etc. The need for clinical and

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skills courses is now very evident to me.

After fifteen years I am still happy that I attended Michigan. It was indeed a once in a lifetime opportunity. I do on occasion wonder if I would have been better off financially if I had gone to a local school and graduated in the top there rather than in the middle at Michigan. I am a better person for having been better educated.

I am embarrassed that I can't be more generous in refunding my Leckie scholarship.

In the questionnaire we received in 1976, I opined that law school should continue to be primarily an intellectual experience, not technical training. I believe law firms are much better equipped to teach lawyers how to practice than are law schools, but that the practice of law is a horrible place to think about legal matters. Thus, law school should not waste these 3 precious years on clinical or practical experience. I'll bet less than 1% of the U of Michigan Law School graduates enter solo practice without first having learned how to practice from another firm or corporation or government agency. Thus, the training will come after law school, not during it.

As a result of these beliefs, some of my answers may not seem consistent. I am very satisfied with my education at Michigan. The breadth of my experience and courses is the most useful aspect to me today. My law firm, however, trained me in the practice.

One other point. I notice with our summer associates that Michigan students have a lot less writing experience after first year than do those from other schools like U of Chicago. It hurts their summer experience.

I have experienced recently (last 2-3 years) a number of attorneys in the 35-40 age group who are quite disillusioned with the practice of law. The disillusionment in large part is fostered by what is perceived as a trend within the profession of winning at all costs rather than seeking consensual ways of resolving problems. This perception includes a lack of honesty or trustworthiness, a decline of other ethical behavior, attacks on the lawyer, and a lack of courtesy and the traditional amenities. I share this perception and disillusionment. I wonder how many others of this age group or other groups share these feelings.

I also wonder what the attitudes are towards advertising in the profession.

I enjoyed law school in the late 60's, early 70's primarily because the clash of values existing in society then were

magnified on campus and especially in the law school. I wonder also if I would enjoy law school now, whether the clash of values exists and is nurtured, or whether law school would just be a grind of grade seeking/obtaining employment/making lots of money.

One thing that has surprised me is the pervasiveness of sexism in the business and legal community. Of the fifteen or so women in my class, I am the only one I know who is a partner in a major law firm. Since I was only an average student, I attribute this to a variety of other factors, most of which affect only women. Moreover, I continually face overt ("I can't retain you for this work because you're a woman.") discrimination. I fear that because of my age (39 edging toward 40) I will always have to deal with it because my age group is the first to reach each new barrier. For example, I was the first female associate to have a baby, and risk delay or loss of partnership. I am now the only woman partner in my (new) firm, and feel tremendous responsibility for the women associates.

I seriously feel that the successes we had in the 1970's, such as opening up recruiting at Michigan to include women, are being eroded. The next barriers are not falling: executive positions at the top of the corporate world, boards of director seats, law and accounting management, federal judgeships, the U.S. Senate. I hope that today's students are not lulled into a false sense of security, simply because they are now able to go to law school, and get hired at their first job.

I remember the shock on the faces of the all-male faculty when we told them we were going to sue a major law firm for hiring discrimination. If only the succeeding battles were so easy to win.

Started law school at age 30 with a wife and two children. Was interested in getting a ticket to work in a job in which

- 1) I could essentially be my own boss
 - 2) make a reasonable living
 - 3) live with my family on the farm where I grew up.
- Have so far met these goals.

As an executive running a business, I have found my legal training to be invaluable. As to my law school experience, I was 27 years old when I started and could tell within the first two classes whether or not the professor had ever practiced law. I would suggest that integrating more real life examples and clinical experiences would have enriched my education significantly.

I found U-M Law to be a profounding frustrating, stultifying experience, leaving me ill-prepared to ply skills in a real practice of law (i.e., non Wall Street-big firm environment). I hope it has improved.

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.

With each year that goes by, especially as I encounter more and more lawyers from other law schools, the more I appreciate the excellent legal education I received at Michigan. I have had to draw upon the essence of what I learned there many times, frequently in a setting where there was no time for advance preparation or where unexpected developments called for fast footwork. It has been my experience that other law schools often produce lawyers who do not know how to do legal research competently and efficiently, who cannot grasp the central legal issues involved in a matter under dispute, who cannot write coherently, and who are unable to differentiate between important and unimportant legal distinctions. Not so at Michigan.

I am also grateful for all the friends and colleagues I came to know at Michigan. The camaraderie developed during late night study sessions and classroom discussions has been an invaluable asset to me throughout my legal career, both socially and professionally. When, after three different jobs, I set up my own practice and sent announcements to my classmates around the country, I was touched by the number who sent me congratulatory letters--and later sent me business. And whenever I have a client who needs an out-of town attorney, I always try to refer the client to a fellow Michigan grad, because I know he/she will do a good job and because I want to share the goodwill I have received from fellow grads.

On the downside of following friends over 15 years of legal practice, there appears to be a lot of "burnout" among many of them. We were a highly ambitious group in the Class of 1971, and we have by and large done very well. But it is often not easy to balance the demands of work and family. Those of us who have struck a balance we are happy with--and I include myself in that category--have taken a step back at some point to reassess our goals and the direction our careers have taken, in an effort to create a work environment that is conducive to a full life, one filled not only with a satisfactory legal career, but a life outside the office that is equally fulfilling. Many of my friends, however, have not done that and now find there is something missing, either in their work or in their private lives.

Practicing law in 1986 is a much more competitive enterprise than it was when we graduated. The huge influx of new lawyers has changed the expectations for jobs, income and long-term security. And the advent of computers/word processors has really changed the way legal research is done. I find as a sole practitioner that I am better able to compete with the big firms since I

bought a computer. It is in many ways the big equalizer for solos and small firms vis-a-vis big firms.

U of M Law School was, without a doubt, the best academic and intellectual experience I have had. I appreciate the standards which the Law School set for me. I also very much appreciate the financial aid which made it possible for me to attend.

I am very satisfied with my life and my professional status among my professional peers. As a government attorney, I often feel that the private bar, especially from a school where the average income is as high as at U of M, does not recognize the deliberate financial choice I made in my career.

I live in a large city with very many lawyers. I feel a minor sense of lack of prestige because I'm "lost in the crowd." I also would like to be more active politically, but am prevented by law from so being (I work for the Federal government).

My one basic criticism of my law school training is that it is at once not theoretical enough and not practical enough, either. My teaching experience at an urban law school, with a large, adjunct faculty has shown me the value of law teaching by experienced, highly qualified practitioners. This was lacking at U of M. At the same time American law education in general lacks the firm, theoretical training and teaching in such areas as legal history, legal philosophy, etc., all of which are routinely part of a European legal education. Thus, many beginning lawyers here have little practical knowledge but also lack the theoretical concepts to expand what training they do have to seemly unrelated areas of the law.

Law School would have been more meaningful and bearable had I had some pre-law school experience as a "lawyer" and/or had my future plans been more concrete. The fact that I was single and financially independent decreased the value and pleasure I got from Law School. I felt then, although less now, that Law School was too academic, i.e., divorced from the real world. It sometimes seemed as though it was designed to prepare students only for work at Wall Street firms.

I did enjoy one year in the Law Club.

I remember feeling (somewhat accurately) being intellectually intimidated by my classmates.

In the end, I hold a good low stress salaried job practicing my vocation in a fairly competent and thorough fashion with little court room work. The law as my spouse reminds me has become my life apart from my family and I have actually come to enjoy reading advance sheets and the like.

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I am surprised to reflect that I have had almost no direct contact since 1971 with either the Law School or any of my class mates.

I do try to return annually, if possible, to see Prof. John Reed et al at the Advocacy Institute. I do feel that the faculty should be given credit for being an effective practical teacher as well as for esoteric publications.

In my experience the U of M Law School enjoys an excellent reputation (although 2 or 3 seem to have slipped through).

I hope the curriculum has changed to provide more emphasis on (or at least opportunity for) trial work, facts investigation, discovery techniques. Since you have to research most of the legal questions anew, law school ought not to concentrate on teaching substantive law, but more on things you only otherwise learn by doing--have mock trials, courses on how to do investigating, discovery, etc. Assuming one gets enough out of the substantive law areas to do the "issue-spotting" necessary to pass the Bar, leave it to the bar review courses to teach the substantive law. (Of the 20 or so topics that could have been covered on the bar exam, I had had only about 10 covered in law school courses.) In fact, while it's not particularly in the Law School's interest, I think law school shouldn't be a prerequisite to the bar exam, and that the bar exam shouldn't be a prerequisite to practicing law; rather a good clinical experience (supervised through the Law School?) plus a good bar review cram course, should be all that's required. Maybe the Law School should propose such a program.

The further I get from law school, the more I appreciate the fine education in the basics of constitutional, contract, corporate and other substantive areas of law.

I urge the law school to consider a mandatory ethics course. I had Judge Gilmore's course that he taught on Saturday morning and have on many occasions fallen back on the solid ethics information he imparted to students. However, very few students took the course.

In the years immediately after law school I felt shorted by U of M in the practical aspects of law practice, such as how to file a motion. After those hurdles were overcome, I've grown to feel that the Law School emphasis on the theoretical and fundamental aspects of the law is correct for training lawyers.

I loved law school. I enjoy practicing law very much. I am looking forward to my daughter getting older so that I may have more time to contribute to the community.

The one fact about a law school education which was told to me

before I entered and has proven true is that it gives you great versatility. Although I enjoy the practice of law, it is nice to know there are other related occupations that I could take up.

Recollections: dimly lit, oversized classrooms; dank, dark hallways; "brilliant", with-it professors; a vague feeling of academic, as opposed to intellectual inferiority; more reading than I could handle (with a spouse and growing family); not a part of the law-school-scene; withal, an excellent education.

U of M was a superb experience for me in many regards. My only suggestion from an educational standpoint might be to add somewhat more emphasis, for the non-law review population, on drafting skills--both memorandum and contract. Keep up the good work.

It continues to amaze me that the only opportunity I had to learn trial practice was in the local Ann Arbor Legal Aid Society (bad place to learn...). It certainly reinforced the rumor that the U of M Law School only sought to prepare us to be associates in large corporate law firms. If Chief Justice Burger is correct about all of the misfits and incompetents in America's courtrooms, the law schools must assume some of the blame.

But, don't get me wrong! I really enjoyed my life in the academic womb! The intellectual stimulation was unparalleled and UM really did help me to "think" like a lawyer. What I'd give for one more hour in Beverly Pooley's contract class!

Law school was very stimulating. I was particularly impressed by the quality of the teaching and by the way the students were treated as adults and equals. There is a sense of community in law school fostered by the faculty that is somewhat endearing. Unfortunately, in my class that sense was resisted by the students. History of law should never have been deleted from the required courses. A professional should never be without a sense of history.

My experience indicates that there is a substantial difference between a legal education at a top law school (e.g. U/M) and a lesser law school.

I am keenly disappointed in the professional, ethical, and personal quality of the average attorney who comes before me. There is evidently an insufficient amount of time spent in developing the practical qualities of attorneys. Legal skill in research, yes, court practice - no!

Preceptorships or internships should be required before practice as a part of one's schooling.

After five years with a growing firm in a large city, I moved

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back to my hometown to practice law with a firm of 15. I have not regretted it. I sincerely believe this atmosphere is more conducive to "enjoying" the practice of law and life. You still can be financially successful, but the financial rewards seem less important to all concerned.

I continue to be most appreciative of my law school education. I am especially pleased with the friendships I have maintained with several professors. I, however, am surprised that I keep in contact with less than 10 classmates.

My weakest area is creditors' rights; in all areas except creditors' rights the foundation established by the faculty has enabled me to excel.

1) Classes which prepared me the best for the practice of law as I know it were those which were taught in the traditional case method.

2) It would be helpful to provide some counseling to students to help to better focus their legal training in certain areas. The laundry list of classes at a school like Michigan is so great that it is easy to miss courses which later in practice you find you need.

3) It would be helpful to prepare law students for certain realities of the practice such as: (i) the "associate slump" which occurs between years 3 and 6; (ii) the economic structure of law firms; (iii) the political structure of law firms; (iv) the admin aspects of law firm managements, etc.

Keep up the good work that the Law School is doing and please never lose sight of what we seem to do best at the Michigan Law School, teaching lawyers to identify relevant issues. An oftquoted line, worth repeating, should guide legal training,

"The answers are easy, it's the questions that are hard."

1. My legal training and practice experience were essential and invaluable in terms of my current business as president of real estate syndication and investment firm.

1. My firm is a family owned business formed in 1981. My wife is one of my business partners and as such there is a very unique blending of my personal and professional life.

3. I have no regrets about my decision to stop practicing law per se.

Seems like too much time was spent on the case method in second and third year.

Better solution is give students the specific principles in a lecture or similar setting and then have them use the principle to solve a problem. Let the 2nd and 3rd year people come up with

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a work product every week instead of waiting until final exams.
(Admittedly, the Law Review and Law Journal people may have
better opportunities in this regard).

I continue to be impressed with the quality of professionalism
generally displayed by U of M graduates and appreciate the
balance of practicality and theory generated at Michigan.

I also continue to wish that a survey would be undertaken of the
entering class of 1967 which as so affected by the Vietnam
conflict. Obviously I began in 1967.
