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Class of 1979 Fifteen Year Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1979
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- * "My law school years were some of my best. I met great friends, was intellectually challenged, and enjoyed the social side of school."
- * "Law school seemed like a very cold and sexist place when I was there. Very few professors gave any indication whatsoever that they cared about the students. I suppose it was a good transition for life in a big firm, but it was very stifling at the time."
- * "I am as 'satisfied' with my career as it is humanly possible to be!"
- * "Life is too short. Go climb a mountain. Do not let work get to you."

Introduction

In the spring of 1994, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 398 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1979 for whom we had at least some address. Two hundred thirty class members responded--a response rate of almost 58 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 are married, practicing in law firms, living prosperously but working long hours, and 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 (and remarried), many practice in settings other than law firms or do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1979 in 1994
 Total respondents: 230 of 398

Family Status

Never married	7%
Married once, still married	75
Divorced	5
Remarried after divorce	12
Other	1

Children

None	17%
One	14
Two	45
Three	16
Four or more	8

Population of City Where Now Live

Under 100,000	31%
100,000 - 1 million	34
Over 1 million	35

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	7%	<div style="border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 100%; width: 100%; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> } 83% </div>
Partners in firms	54	
Of Counsel/other status in firms	2	
Counsel for business/financial institutions	13	
Government attorneys	5	
Legal services/public interest attorneys	2	

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government executives/administrators/judges	4%	<div style="border-top: 1px solid black; border-bottom: 1px solid black; height: 100%; width: 100%; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> } 17% </div>
Business owners/executives	4	
Law teachers	2	
Others	7	

Average Hours Worked per Week

Less than 40	9%
40-49	36
50-59	45
60-69	9
More than 70	1

Earnings in Fifteenth Year

(for persons working full-time)

Up to \$40,000	4%
\$40,100-\$60,000	9
\$60,100-\$100,000	23
\$100,100-\$150,000	31
\$150,100-\$225,000	16
\$225,100-\$300,000	11
More than \$300,000	6

Politics

Proportion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	22%
More liberal than conservative	26
Middle of the road	22
More conservative than liberal	19
Very conservative	11

Life Satisfaction (Quite Satisfied, in the Middle, Quite Dissatisfied)

Proportion Who Report Themselves:

	<u>OS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>OD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	47%	46%	7%
Their current family life	77	20	3
The intellectual challenge of their work	59	39	2
Their income	49	47	4
The balance of their family and professional lives	36	54	10
Their career as a whole	49	50	1

How Class Members

Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age

	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	7%	25%	68%
Effective as writer	4	7	89
Aggressive	29	36	35
Compulsive about work	32	27	41
Concerned about impact of their work on society	14	38	48
Honest	1	11	88
Concerned about making a lot of money	49	36	15
Compassionate	9	24	67
Self-confident	14	31	55

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

**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."

Background of Classmates

Among the graduates of the class of 1979, 24 percent are women and 10 percent are Black, Hispanic, or Native American. (By contrast, about 44 percent of today's entering class are women, and about 21 percent are minority group members.)

The occupations of the parents of class members indicate that the majority of the class came from middle middle or upper middle class backgrounds. The fathers of 60 percent of the class members were business owners, business managers, or professionals. Ten percent of the fathers were lawyers. Twenty-eight percent of the fathers were blue collar or clerical workers. The mothers of over half of the class were homemakers. Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, 54 percent were teachers, other professionals, or business managers. Two of the mothers were attorneys.

As in preceding classes for many years, a considerable majority of the class entered law school immediately after graduating from college. Still, 16 percent of the class had finished their undergraduate education three or more years before starting law school, reflecting at least in part the effects of military service and of graduate work in other disciplines.

Seventy-three percent of the class had never been married when they began law school, while 5 percent were already parents. One class member had four children before starting law school.

The Law School Experience

Thirty-nine percent of the class began law school without a long-term career plan. For the remaining 61 percent who did have a plan, over half hoped for a career in private practice, and about a third for a career in government or public interest work of some sort. Only three persons planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Fifteen years later, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice were actually doing so. On the other hand, of those who had plans for government, legal services, or public interest work, only 28 percent were working in such settings (although about 56 percent of them had worked in such a setting at some point after law school). Many more people were working in a corporate counsel's office than had planned to do so while in law school (28 in all).)

When they look back on law school today, most class members have positive feelings about their law school experience--48 percent strongly positive, a total of 90 percent more positive than negative. Class members are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school (76 percent

strongly positive), while regarding the career training provided by the experience with somewhat less enthusiasm (38 percent strongly positive). Just under 40 percent are, in retrospect, strongly positive about the social aspects of law school. When asked what areas of the curriculum should be expanded, class members typically cite areas of skills training rather than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase courses in legal writing, negotiation, trial techniques, and interviewing are far more common than the most often-mentioned substantive area (corporate law).

Life Since Law School

Five Years After Law School in Comparison to Fifteen Years After Law School

In 1984, we surveyed the class of 1979 about their experiences during the five years since they had graduated from law school. At that point, 67 percent of the class worked in private practice, in solo practice, or in a firm. Twenty-three percent practiced in some setting other than private practice, and 10 percent worked in settings such as teaching or business management where they did not regard themselves as practicing law at all. During the ten years that followed, the proportion of the class in private practice declined slightly (from 67 percent in 1984 to 63 percent in 1994), while the proportion working outside of law altogether rose somewhat (from 10 percent in 1984 to 17 percent in 1994). Of course, for those who remained in private practice, statuses within firms changed markedly over the ten years. In 1984, only about 9 percent of those in private firms were partners. In 1994, at the time of the fifteen-year survey, almost all of those in private firms were partners. By much the same token, earnings increased dramatically over the ten year period. In 1984, the median earnings for the class members in private practice was about \$48,000. In 1994, it was \$168,300.

Fifteen Years After Law School: The Class as a Whole

The remainder of this report is devoted to a portrait of the class fifteen years after law school. In some ways, generalizations are difficult. Class members 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 more detail.

The great majority of the class of 1979--76 percent--took jobs in private practice after graduation (and after any judicial clerkship). Of those who began in private practice, most are

still there: 72 percent of those who began in private practice were still in private practice in 1994. Of those who had left private practice, the majority had left practice altogether to work in business or elsewhere; most of the rest went to work in corporate counsel's offices.

For slightly more than one-third of the class, their first job after law school was with a firm or other employer for which they had worked in the summer after their second year of law school. Fifteen years after graduation, 31 percent of the class still worked for the same employer or firm that had given them their first job after law school (not counting judicial clerkships). On the other hand, many others had held several jobs. One-fifth had held four or more. Two people had held eight jobs.

What kinds of jobs did people hold fifteen years after graduation? As Table 1 shows, about 83 percent of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. Of the 33 persons who did not regard themselves as practicing law, 9 were business owners, executives or managers, 8 were government officials, and 4 taught law. The diversity of the nonpractitioners' work makes it difficult to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible: the nonpractitioners were, in general, fully as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1979 who were practicing law in 1994, 75 percent were in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in other settings worked as corporate counsel, as government attorneys, or in educational institutions. Only five people were then 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 1978 and 1979. (The class of 1978 was surveyed in 1993 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1979.) By combining these groups, we have enough persons to permit comparisons between the private practitioners and the lawyers in government and in corporate counsel's offices. We also, at the end of the report, compare the experiences of women and men in the two classes.

Six percent of the respondents in the combined classes--27 persons in all--were working as government attorneys at the time they were surveyed. Of these, slightly over half worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. About a third of the government attorneys worked as prosecutors. Most of the others worked in administrative

agencies.

Twelve percent of the combined classes--53 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Sixty-two percent of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 11 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and 23 percent worked for other business enterprises.

Table 2 offers some comparisons among the three groups: those in government, in corporate counsel's offices, and in private firms. Persons in corporate counsel's offices worked hours as long as those worked by private practitioners but, on the whole, earned somewhat less. Persons working as government attorneys worked, on average, somewhat fewer hours than those in private practice and earned much less. In fact, those working in government settings averaged only about 40 percent of the earnings of those in private practice.

Table 2
Classes of 1978 and 1979
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=27	<u>Private</u> <u>Practitioners</u> N=250	<u>Corporate</u> <u>Counsel</u> N=53
Average work hours per week	46	51	50
Proportion who average over 60 hours per week	4%	15%	10%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (average)	29%	24%	14%
Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year (average)	23	67	19
Earnings in fifteenth year (average)	\$68,100	\$168,300	\$136,300

How satisfied were 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 quite 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 were not very satisfied were in the middle. All three groups were, in general, very satisfied with the intellectual challenge of their work. The government attorneys were much less likely to be satisfied with their incomes, which is hardly surprising. On the other hand, more of the government

Table 3
Classes of 1978 and 1979
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> <u>Attorneys</u> N=27	<u>Private</u> <u>Practitioners</u> N=250	<u>Corporate</u> <u>Counsel</u> N=53
<u>Proportion of group who are quite satisfied* with:</u>			
The balance of their family life and professional life	59%	29%	32%
The intellectual challenge of their work	52	56	60
Their current income	22	54	46
The value of their work to society	69	23	23
Their careers overall	41	42	55
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	23	44	26
Proportion expecting to be in same job in 5 years	59	83	87

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

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

attorneys were satisfied with the balance between their family and professional lives and with the value of their work to society than were attorneys in the other two groups. There were no significant differences among the groups in their overall satisfaction with their careers.

Class Members in Private Practice

For purposes of our analysis, we divided the private practitioners into four groups--those in solo practice and in firms of up to ten lawyers; those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers; those in firms of 51 to 150 lawyers; and those in firms of more than 150 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There are no natural dividing lines between small, medium-sized, large, and very 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 Battle Creek would 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. (In the tables that follow, we have again combined the classes of 1978 and 1979.)

Table 4
Classes of 1978 and 1979
Private Practitioners
Fifteen 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	80	33%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	53	21
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	41	17
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	<u>71</u>	<u>29</u>
	245	100%

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.

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 1978 and 1979 who were in solo practice or working in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers typically worked in small cities and spent a high proportion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the largest firms, not surprisingly, tended to

Table 5
Classes of 1978 and 1979
Private Practitioners
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=80	Firms of 11-50 N=53	Firms of 51-150 N=41	Firms of more than 150 N=71
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	4	27	100	330
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	50%	23%	13%	6%
Proportion working in cities of over 1 million	36%	42%	49%	76%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	21%	41%	51%	64%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	37%	8%	4%	2%

work in large cities and to spend most of their time serving large businesses. Persons who worked in the medium-sized firms (11-50 lawyers) had practices that more closely resembled those of persons in the larger firms than those of persons in the smaller firms.

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, the lawyers in firms put in substantial hours, regardless of firm size. At least among Michigan graduates, small firm lawyers work hours nearly as long as those of large firm lawyers.

Table 6
Classes of 1978 and 1979
Private Practitioners
Hours, Fees and Earnings.

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=80	Firms of 11-50 N=53	Firms of 51-150 N=41	Firms of more than 150 N=71
Average number of hours worked each week*	50	50	53	52
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	12%	12%	20%	19%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (average)	26%	25%	19%	23%
Pro bono hours worked per year (average)	74	56	72	67
Usual hourly rate (average)	\$144	\$174	\$207	\$244
Income from practice in fifteenth year (average)	\$113,500	\$144,700	\$204,400	\$219,400
Proportion who earned more than \$200,000	10%	17%	36%	50%

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

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 and the lower their average income was overall.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons.

Table 7
Classes of 1978 and 1979
Private Practitioner
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 <u>or fewer</u> N=80	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=53	Firms of <u>51-150</u> N=41	Firms of more than <u>150</u> N=71
Proportion who are <u>quite satisfied*</u> with:				
The balance of family and professional lives	40%	25%	29%	20%
The intellectual challenge of work	50	51	71	58
Their current income	44	42	66	69
The value of their work to society	34	15	24	17
Their careers overall	46	32	61	35
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**				
	38	34	49	57
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years				
	76	83	93	86

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

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

The proportion of lawyers who were very satisfied with the value of their work to society was highest for those in solo practice or in the very smallest firms. In contrast, the proportion who were very satisfied with their income was highest for lawyers in the very largest firms. There was no pattern in the relation between firm size and firm lawyers' satisfaction with their careers overall. Persons in firms of 51-150 lawyers were most satisfied with their careers, a pattern not observed in prior surveys.

The Differing Experiences of Women and Men

Since graduation, at every point, the work histories and work settings of women and men in the classes of 1978 and 1979 have differed. (Approximately one-quarter of the classes are women.) Beginning with their first jobs, and continuing to today, far more of the men than the women have been in private practice. At the time of the fifteen-year survey, 47 percent of the women and 68 percent of the men were working in solo practice or a firm. Somewhat more women than men were in nearly all of the other types of settings in which class members worked. The women were

also far more likely than the men to have taken time out of full-time work to care for children. Thirty-one percent of the women who had children reported themselves as either not holding a paying job at the time of the survey or as working part-time in order to care for children. Only two men reported working part-time to care for children, and no men reported currently caring for children full-time.

How did the differing experiences of women and men affect their career satisfaction? A few years ago, many of you participated in a study by David Chambers that, among other things, compared the career satisfaction of the women and men. Chambers reported that the women were on the whole somewhat more satisfied than the men with their careers overall, and, somewhat surprisingly, that women who were mothers were, on average, somewhat more satisfied with their careers overall than were women who were not mothers and than men, whether they were parents or not.

At the point when the respondents had been out of law school for fifteen years, women remained significantly more satisfied with their careers overall than men. Many more of the women had had children (about 73 percent, compared to about 36 percent at the time of the five-year survey), and the women who had had children were, in general, slightly more satisfied with their careers than were the women who had not. In addition, the women who worked full-time at the time of the fifteen-year survey but who had at earlier points taken substantial periods out of the work force or worked part-time to care for children were, in general, as satisfied with their careers as other women with children who had taken little time off and as women who had not had children. In short, having children did not seem to stand in the way of satisfying careers for women (at least in comparison to their classmates) and, for some, may have contributed positively to a greater overall sense of well-being.