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Class of 1969 Fifteen Year Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
LAW SCHOOL
HUTCHINS HALL
ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN 48109

July 9, 1985

A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1969
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"Michigan is a first class law school, despite its mediocre football teams."

"Michigan Law was an incredible experience. Life is great--the lawyer aspect of it being merely a slightly distasteful way to earn a living."

"I found law school to be a high-pressure environment to which I reacted very negatively. The memories are still painful."

Introduction

In the spring of 1984, the law school mailed a survey to the 346 persons who graduated from the law school in calendar year 1969 for whom we had at least some address. (For only five people did we have no address.) Two hundred twenty-five classmembers responded--a response rate of 65 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 classmembers before law school, during law school and in the settings in which they are now working. We end with a compendium of the comments classmembers 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 1969 in 1984
 Total respondents: 225 of 346

| <u>Current Place of Work</u> | <u>Percentage</u> |
|---|-------------------|
| Michigan | 28% |
| Wayne and Oakland Counties | (10%) |
| Rest of the state | (18%) |
| Other Great Lakes/ North Central | 19 |
| New York and New England | 15 |
| Other Midatlantic (including D.C.) | 16 |
| South and Southwest | 6 |
| West Coast | 15 |
| Other | <u>1</u> |
| | 100% |
| | |
| <u>Family Status</u> | |
| Never Married | 8% |
| Married Once, Still Married | 72 |
| Divorced | 11 |
| Remarried After Divorce | 8 |
| Widowed | <u>1</u> |
| | 100% |
| | |
| <u>Children</u> | |
| None | 20% |
| One | 14 |
| Two | 46 |
| Three | 16 |
| Four or More | <u>4</u> |
| | 100% |
| | |
| <u>Nature of Work</u> | |
| <u>Class Members Practicing Law</u> | |
| Solo Practitioners | 9 |
| Partners in Firms | 52 |
| Counsel for Business or Financial Institution | 12 |
| Government | 10 |
| Other or Missing | <u>4</u> |
| | 87% |
| | |
| <u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u> | |
| Judge | 3% |
| Business Owner or Manager | 3 |
| Teacher | 4 |
| Other | <u>3</u> |
| | 13% |

Table 1 continued

| <u>Average Hours Worked per Week</u> | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|-------------|
| 38 or fewer hours | 22% |
| 38.1-42 hours | 32 |
| 42.1-46 hours | 19 |
| 46.1-50 hours | 20 |
| more than 50 hours | 7 |
| | <u>100%</u> |

| <u>Earnings in 15th Year</u> | |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| Under \$40,000 | 10% |
| \$40,000-60,000 | 20 |
| \$60,000-100,000 | 30 |
| \$100,000-150,000 | 25 |
| Over \$150,000 | 15 |
| | <u>100%</u> |

| <u>Life Satisfaction*</u> | Very Satisfied | In the Middle | Very Dissatisfied |
|---|----------------|---------------|-------------------|
| <u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u> | | | |
| Their Legal Education at Michigan | 66% | 29% | 5% |
| Their Current Family Life | 76 | 21 | 3 |
| Their Career as a Whole | 68 | 30 | 2 |
| The Intellectual Challenge of Their Career | 70 | 29 | 1 |
| Their Prestige in the Community | 55 | 40 | 5 |
| Their Income | 59 | 34 | 7 |
| The Balance of Their Family and Professional Life | 57 | 40 | 3 |

| <u>Politics</u> | Percentage |
|--|-------------|
| <u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u> | |
| Very Liberal | 5% |
| More Liberal than Conservative | 53 |
| Middle of the Road | 26 |
| More Conservative than Liberal | 17 |
| Very Conservative | 1 |
| | <u>100%</u> |

| <u>Attitudes On a Few Issues</u> | Favor | Neither Favor Nor Oppose | Oppose |
|---|-------|--------------------------|--------|
| Reducing Federal Regulation Intended to | % | % | % |
| Improve Environment | 16 | 16 | 68 |
| Passage of Federal ERA | 43 | 19 | 28 |
| Increase Funds for Legal Services | | | |
| Corporation | 58 | 18 | 24 |
| Mandatory Pro Bono Work for Lawyers | 20 | 9 | 71 |
| Stronger Enforcement of Lawyers' | | | |
| Ethical Rules | 69 | 16 | 15 |

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

Background of Classmembers

The class of 1969 was one of the last Michigan classes that was nearly all white and nearly all male. Among the graduates of the class, only about 4 percent were women and fewer than 2 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American. (By contrast, about 10 percent of today's entering class are minority group members and over a third are women.)

At the time the class entered law school, about 37 percent of the class members resided in Michigan and another 30 percent came from other states in the Great Lakes-North Central region, but every region of the country was represented. Similarly, about half the class grew up in towns with fewer than 100,000 residents, but about a quarter came from towns of over one million. There was less diversity in the occupations of the parents of classmembers. The fathers of 84 percent of classmembers were business owners, business managers or professionals. (Twenty percent of the fathers were lawyers.) By contrast, only 11 percent of fathers were blue collar or clerical workers. The mothers of two-thirds of classmembers were homemakers. No one in the class had an attorney for a mother.

As in preceding classes for many years, the great majority of class members began law school immediately after finishing their undergraduate education. Still, 11 percent of the class started law school with a break of at least two years, most of them either in the military or in graduate work in another discipline.

Eighty percent of the class had never been married at the time they began law school and nearly all the rest were married for the first time. Thirteen respondents began law school with children. One person had four.

The Law School Experience.

Over 40 percent of the class began law school without a 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 7 percent of the class--hoped to work in government or in politics. Only 2 percent planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Eighteen years later, fifteen years after graduation, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice are working there, but so also are the great majority of those who had no plans. A third of those who hoped to work in government are now working there and, 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--66 percent strongly positive and only 5 percent strongly negative. Classmembers are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, with somewhat more skepticism about the law school as career

training. (78 percent have strongly positive views about the intellectual experience, whereas 56 percent have strongly positive views about the law school as career training.)

Asked about areas of the curriculum that ought to be expanded, classmembers far more frequently listed areas of skills training than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase offerings in clinical courses, legal writing, negotiation, trial techniques and interviewing were each more common than recommendations for any substantive subject. These recommendations paralleled classmembers' views of their own skills on graduating. At the time they left law school, fewer than half the class considered "adequate" their own skills at interviewing and negotiating, whereas more than ninety percent believed their skills adequate at identifying legal issues and conducting legal research.

Life Since Law School

The Class as a Whole

It is difficult to generalize about the lives of the class of 1969 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.

Forty-seven percent of the class live in Michigan or other Great Lakes and North Central states--a large proportion but a decline by about 25 percent from the proportion on entering law school. The places and regions to which the largest net proportions of classmembers have moved since graduation are California; the Pacific Northwest; and the Midatlantic states other than New York (but including the District of Columbia). There has been a similar move from small and middle-sized cities to large cities. Despite a great deal of individual movement, however, about a fifth of the class report themselves living in the community where they grew up.

Fifteen years after graduation, about 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 ten different jobs. Despite a lot of job changes, half the class members have been in their current job for at least 10 years and three-quarters have been in their current job for at least five years.

What kinds of jobs do people hold fifteen years after graduation? As the tables above reflect, about 85 percent of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. Of the 28 persons who did not regard themselves as practicing law, 7 are

judges, 7 are business owners and managers, and 8 are teachers (almost all in law schools). 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 1969 who are practicing law, over two-thirds are in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in settings other than private firms work in government or in corporate counsel's offices. Only 2 persons are now working in legal services, for a public defender or for what they characterize 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 1968 and 1969. (The Class of 1968 was surveyed in 1983 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 37 persons in the two classes working as government attorneys, over half worked for federal government with the remainder primarily working for state or county governments. About two-thirds held supervisory or managerial positions. The kinds of work the government attorneys did was quite varied. About a quarter specialized in administrative agency work in fields such as labor, environmental law or securities. Another twenty percent worked as prosecutors.

Thirty-nine persons in the two classes worked in corporate counsel's offices. Over half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, a few worked for banks and the rest worked for other business enterprises. Over two-thirds of the corporate counsel group had spent a year or more working in private firms before coming to their current positions. At the time of our survey, about sixty percent held supervisory positions.

Table 2 offers some comparisons among the three groups: those in government, in corporate counsels' offices and in private firms. In general, the people working in settings other than private practice worked as long hours as those in private practice--indeed, slightly longer on average--but earned less money. (In fact, those working in government settings averaged less than half as much as those in private practice.)

Table 2

Classes of 1968 and 1969
 Comparison of Government Attorneys,
 Corporate Counsel Office, and Private Practitioners

| | <u>Government</u> N=35 | <u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=36 | <u>Private Practitioners</u> N=307 |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Average number of other attorneys in same office | 51 | 35 | 49 |
| Average work hours per week | 43.8 | 44.6 | 42.3 |
| Proportion who average over 48 hours per week | 44% | 35% | 25% |
| Earnings in 15th year (average) | \$51,900 | \$91,400 | \$109,700 |

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 aspects 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. (There is no statistically significant difference among the groups here.) The non-private-practitioners are much less likely to be very satisfied with their incomes, which is not surprising since they generally earned much less than the private practitioners. They were also, on the whole, slightly less satisfied with their careers as a whole and with the prestige attached to their careers. On the other hand, the government attorneys, at least, were more satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives.

Table 3
 Classes of 1968 and 1969
 Comparisons of Government Attorneys, Corporate Counsel,
 and Private Practitioners

| | <u>Government Attorneys</u> N=35 | <u>Corporate General Counsel</u> N=36 | <u>Private Practitioners</u> N=307 |
|---|---|--|---|
| Proportion of group who are very satisfied with: | | | |
| the balance of their family life and professional life | 67% | 44% | 52% |
| the intellectual challenge of their career | 64% | 62% | 71% |
| their prestige in the community | 39% | 40% | 60% |
| their current income | 25% | 43% | 65% |
| their careers overall | 54% | 49% | 68% |

Classmembers in Private Practice

Over two-thirds of the class of 1969 are in private firms, but the settings in which they work vary greatly. We can convey some of this diversity by dividing the class into groups by the size of the firms they work in.

For purposes of our own analysis, we initially divided the private practitioners into five groups--those in solo practice, those in firms of up to 10 lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers, those in firms of 51 to 100 lawyers and those in firms of over 100 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There are no natural dividing lines between small and medium or medium and large firms. Some small, very specialized firms have practices that more closely resemble the practices of the largest firms than they do the practices of most other firms their own size. Moreover, what is regarded as a big firm in Ann Arbor and Lexington, Kentucky, would probably be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York and 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 1968 and 1969.)

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1968 and 1969
Fifteen Years After Graduation
Size of Firm

| Persons working: | <u>N=</u> | <u>% of total</u> |
|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| As solo practitioners | 41 | 12% |
| In firms of 10 or fewer lawyers | 97 | 32 |
| In firms of 11-50 lawyers | 78 | 26 |
| In firms of 51-100 lawyers | 34 | 11 |
| In firms of more than 100 lawyers | 54 | 18 |
| | <u>304</u> | <u>100%</u> |

Median (including solo practitioners): 14
Median among persons in firms: 20

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. For those who would guess that recent Michigan graduates typically find their way into large firms, the table may provide something of a surprise. The median number of other lawyers with whom the graduates of the classes of 1968 and 1969 in private practice work is 14, not 50 or 100. On the other hand, it is true that 18 percent of the private practitioners in the two classes work in firms of over 100 lawyers, a much higher proportion than would be found among the graduates of the same age of most other law schools.

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. (In table 5 and the tables that follow, we have combined the firms of 51 to 100 with those over 100 lawyers, because in almost all the areas on which we report, the responses of the classmembers in these two groups were similar.) As the table reveals, members of the class of 1968 and 1969 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 work in much larger cities and to spend their time primarily serving large businesses. Those in the medium-sized firms fall in between.

Table 5
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1968 and 1969
Settings of Work and Types of Clients

| | <u>Solo Practitioner</u> N=41 | <u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=97 | <u>Firms of 11-50</u> N=78 | <u>Firms of more than 50</u> N=88 |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Average number of other attorneys in same office | 1* | 4 | 26 | 138 |
| Proportion working in cities of under 200,000 | 51% | 49% | 20% | 2% |
| Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000 | 28% | 31% | 45% | 70% |
| Proportion of time serving individuals as clients (average) | 71% | 40% | 18% | 14% |
| Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average) | 9% | 26% | 43% | 63% |

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

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 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 1968 and 1969

Hours, Fees and Earnings

| | <u>Solo Practitioners</u> n=41 | <u>Firms of 10 or Fewer</u> n=97 | <u>Firms of 11 - 50</u> n=78 | <u>Firms of more than 50</u> n=88 |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--|
| Average number of hours worked each week* | 39.2 | 44.8 | 44.1 | 42.7 |
| Proportion who regularly average 48-hr. work weeks | 19% | 35% | 25% | 16% |
| Proportion of time working on a contingent fee basis (average) | 23% | 15% | 4% | 2% |
| Proportion of time working on a pro bono basis** | 2.3% | 1.5% | 0.7% | 1.1% |
| Usual hourly rate (average) | \$86 | \$102 | \$117 | \$140 |
| Income from Practice in fifteenth year (average) | \$52,700 | \$96,700 | \$119,300 | \$143,000 |
| Proportion who earned over \$100,000 | 12% | 33% | 63% | 82% |

*Figured on 49-hour week, instructions were to count all work, whether billable or nonbillable, but not bar and charitable activities.

**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 classmembers worked the more likely they were to handle cases on a contingent-fee basis, and the less they typically charged for their time when they worked on an hourly basis. In a similar manner, average income was strongly related to firm size. Those in large firms averaged almost three times as high earnings as those in solo practice and about 50 percent higher earnings than those in small firms. Those are large differences. Despite the fact that they earned less, however, solo practitioners and small firm lawyers were more generous with their time in performing pro bono legal work than the persons in the medium-sized and larger settings. (By the same token, although a majority of attorneys in all these groups opposed mandatory pro bono work, opposition was much stronger among those in the large and medium-sized firms than among those solo or small firms.)

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. Among those in private practice, solo practitioners, as a group, include the highest proportion who are very satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives but the lowest proportion of those who are satisfied with the other aspects of their careers or with their careers overall.

Table 7
Private Practitioner
Classes of 1968 and 1969
Satisfaction

| | <u>Solo Practitioner</u> n=41 | <u>Firms of 10 or fewer</u> n=97 | <u>Firms of 11-50</u> n=78 | <u>Firms of more than 50</u> n=88 |
|---|--------------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| Proportion who are very <u>satisfied with:</u> | | | | |
| the balance of family and professional life | 80% | 55% | 49% | 41% |
| the intellectual dimensions of their work | 61 | 66 | 78 | 75 |
| their prestige in the community | 49 | 59 | 59 | 72 |
| their current income | 28 | 50 | 78 | 84 |
| their careers overall | 56 | 60 | 78 | 74 |

The three groups of firm practitioners, grouped by firm size, exhibit some fairly clear patterns. 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 every other dimension 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. The large-firm lawyers included more than any of the other groups who were very satisfied with their prestige in the community.