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Class of 1972 Fifteen Year Report

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A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1972
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"Life is sweet. I'm still a bit amazed that people actually pay me to be a lawyer! Every day I live what most people can only experience vicariously on the TV!

"My wife (first and only) and my children are happy and healthy. Our firm has grown from 4 lawyers to almost 40. And my handicap is down to 5. It can't get much better than this.

"Thank you, Michigan. Thank you."

"After 4 years of practice I left the law and have no regrets whatsoever. Unfortunately, I found it extremely boring and overly concerned with detail -- mostly of dubious value. Equally important, I grew to dislike dealing with other practitioners, either because I found them personally obnoxious or intellectually wanting."

"My life as a private practitioner, representing people who are principally engaged in business transactions, is not only satisfying to me and my clients, but is a principled life, useful to society."

"Who do I bill for this time?"

Introduction

In the fall of 1987, the Law School mailed a survey to the 413 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1972 for whom we had at least some address. Two hundred ninety-four class members responded--a response rate of 71 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 or do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1972 in 1987
 Total respondents: 294 of 413

<u>Family Status</u>		
Never married		5%
Married once, still married		67
Divorced		9
Remarried after divorce		18
 <u>Children</u>		
None		20%
One		13
Two		39
Three or more		28
 <u>Nature of Work</u>		
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>		
Solo practitioners		9%
Partners in firms		53
Counsel for business or financial institution		9
Government		5
Other		7
 <u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>		
Government executive, administrator		5%
Business owner or manager		5
Law teacher		1
Other		7
 <u>Average Hours Worked per Week</u>		
Less than 40		6%
40-44		9
45-49		19
50-54		23
55-59		18
60 +		26
	}	67%
 <u>Earnings in 15th Year</u>		
Up to \$40,000		7%
\$40,100-\$60,000		17
\$60,100-\$100,000		30
\$100,100-\$150,000		22
\$150,100-\$200,000		14
Over \$200,000		10
	}	46%
 <u>Politics</u>		
<u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u>		
Very liberal		16%
More liberal than conservative		30
Middle of the road		15
More conservative than liberal		28
Very conservative		11

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

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>QS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>QD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	57%	39%	5%
Their current family life	72	25	3
The intellectual challenge of their career	67	31	2
Their income	53	43	4
The balance of their family and professional life	42	52	6
Their relationships with co-workers	67	31	2
Their career as a whole	65	35	0

How Class Members

<u>Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age</u>	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About Average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	7%	17%	76%
Effective as writer	6	7	87
Aggressive	15	29	56
Compulsive about work	24	27	49
Concerned about impact of their work on society	21	33	46
Honest	3	7	90
Concerned about making a lot of money	35	37	29
Self-confident	9	24	67

*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."

**Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1, 2 and 3 as indicating person to be "less than most" and 5, 6 and 7 as "more than most."

Background of Classmates

The class of 1972 was one of the last Michigan classes that was nearly all white and nearly all male. Among the graduates of the class, only about 5 percent were women and 5 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native American. (By contrast, about 13 percent of today's entering class are minority group members and about 36% 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 61 percent of the class members were business owners, business managers, or professionals. Surprisingly, only 14 percent of the fathers were lawyers. Twenty-five 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, 25 percent of the class were

between 24 and 40 years old at the time they started law school, reflecting at least in part the effects of military service and of graduate work done previous to matriculation.

Sixty-eight percent of the class had never been married when they began law school, while 23 respondents were already parents. One person had four children before starting law school.

The Law School Experience

Forty-seven 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, over two-thirds expected to enter private practice. The next largest group--about 14 percent--hoped to work in government or in politics. Only two percent planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Fifteen 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--57 percent strongly positive and only 5 percent strongly negative. Class members are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, (77 percent strongly positive), while regarding the career training provided by the experience with less enthusiasm (54 percent strongly positive). Less than one-third were strongly positive about the social aspects of law school. 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).

Life Since Law School

Five Years After Law School

In 1977, we surveyed the class of 1972 when it had been out of law school five years. At that point, 67 percent of the class worked in private practice, 26 percent practiced in some setting other than private practice, and 6 percent worked in settings, such as teaching or as business management, where they did not regard themselves as practicing law at all. A look at the table above reveals that, over the ten years that have followed, the proportion of the class in private practice has declined slightly (from 67 percent down to 62) while the proportion working outside of law altogether has risen substantially (from 6 percent up to 18 percent). Of course, for those who are in private practice, statuses within firms have changed markedly over the ten years. In 1977, only about a third of those in private firms were

partners. In 1987, at the time of the fifteen year survey, almost all those in private firms were partners. By much the same token, earnings increased dramatically over the ten year period. In 1977, the median earnings for the class members (in private practice or otherwise) was about \$28,000. In 1987, it was about \$95,000, three-and-a-half times as much.

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 some more detail.

For nearly a quarter 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, about a third of the class work for the same employer or firm that gave them their first job (not counting judicial clerkships) after law school. On the other hand, many others have held several jobs. Nearly a quarter have held four or more. One person has had thirteen different jobs. Despite all the movement, over 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 85 percent of the class regard themselves as practicing lawyers. Of the 46 persons who did not regard themselves as practicing law, 9 are judges, 21 are business owners, executives or managers, and 6 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 1972 who are practicing law, 75 percent are in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in other settings work as corporate counsels or government attorneys. Only one person is 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 1972 and 1973. (The class of 1973 was surveyed in 1988 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 36 persons in the two classes working as government attorneys, the group was almost evenly divided between those who worked for the federal government and those who were employed by state governments.

Fifty-eight persons in the two classes worked in corporate counsel's offices. Sixty percent of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies. 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 practitioners, but earned less money. In fact those working in government settings averaged only about 40 percent of the earnings of those in private practice.

Table 2
Classes of 1972 and 1973
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=36	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=393	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=54
Average number of other attorneys in same office	44	81	24
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	26%	17%	19%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	18%	4%	7%
Average work hours per week	48	52	51
Proportion who average over 60 hours per week	8%	27%	15%
Total pro bono hours worked per year (average)	17	75	15
Earnings in 15th year (average)	\$58,500	\$148,300	\$105,100

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. On the other hand, the government attorneys are somewhat more satisfied than the other two groups with the balance between their family and professional lives and much more satisfied with the value of their work to society.

Table 3
Classes of 1972 and 1973
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government Attorneys</u> N=36	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=393	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=54
<u>Proportion of group who are very satisfied with:</u>			
The balance of their family life and professional life	47%	41%	40%
The intellectual challenge of their career	56	63	63
Their relations with co-workers	61	68	66
Their current income	28	61	39
The value of their work to society	69	35	32
Their careers overall	50	65	55

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 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. (In the tables that follow, we have again combined the classes of 1972 and 1973.)

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1972 and 1973
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	151	39%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	85	22
In firms of 51-120 lawyers	56	15
In firms of 121 or more lawyers	94	24

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. Year by year in our surveys, the proportion of our graduates working in large and very large law firms continues to grow.

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 1972 and 1973 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

Table 5
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1972 and 1973
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	<u>Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=151</u>	<u>Firms of 11-50 N=85</u>	<u>Firms of 51-120 N=56</u>	<u>Firms of more than 120 N=94</u>
Average number of other attorneys in same office	3	26	79	228
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	13%	15%	19%	23%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	5%	2%	3%	4%
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	44%	27%	13%	2%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	28%	44%	51%	77%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	19%	49%	51%	65%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	39%	12%	4%	4%

clients. Those in the largest firms, not suprisingly, tended to work in much larger cities and to spend most 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, the lawyers in firms put in substantial hours, regardless of firm size. At least among Michigan graduates, small firm lawyers work as grueling hours as large firm lawyers.

Table 6
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1972 and 1973
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or firms of 10 or fewer N=151	Firms of 11-50 N=85	Firms of 51-120 N=56	Firms of more than 120 N=94
Average number of hours worked each week*	51	53	52	53
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	27%	29%	23%	27%
Pro bono hours worked per year**	82	67	73	76
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$113	\$141	\$151	\$180
Income from practice in fifteenth year (avg.)	\$111,100	\$152,800	\$146,800	\$187,300
Proportion who earned over \$150,000	16%	34%	36%	50%

*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 firms of over 120 averaged about 70 percent more income than those in small firms or solo practice. 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.

Table 7
Private Practitioner
Classes of 1972 and 1973
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer <u> </u> N=151	Firms of 11-50 <u> </u> N=85	Firms of 51-120 <u> </u> N=56	Firms of more than 120 <u> </u> N=94
Proportion who are <u>very satisfied with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional life	50%	42%	41%	26%
The intellectual challenge of work	59	64	64	67
Their relations with co-workers	74	64	64	66
Their current income	48	67	71	69
The value of their work to society	42	31	26	29
Their careers overall	67	60	62	65

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 or with the value of their work to society declined, but the proportion who were satisfied with their income rose. There was no pattern in the relation between firm size and firm lawyers' satisfaction with their careers overall.