Class of 1976 Fifteen Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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U-M did a great job -- it's a great school. Keep it up!

Law school was, by far, the worst 3 years of my life. It did, however, teach me a great deal. I have a very satisfying professional and personal life at present and owe it, at least in part, to law school.

Congrats to Lee C. on his deanship. I have fond memories of him as a friendly and compassionate contracts prof and case club advisor. On occasion, I repeat his tales of Chief Burger to astonished listeners.

Unfortunately, I'm completing this survey on a very "down" day. My life is pretty good -- a lot of people (or so I keep telling myself) would kill to be in my shoes: good job, nice house, decent and well educated son, hard working and attractive and kind husband, lots of "toys." Nonetheless I continue to be (clinically) depressed, but that's more about me than it is about "the law" or even this particular law firm.

I am repeatedly thankful for my U-M education and credentials -- they have proven helpful in tough times in my career. I'm not one of those people who think that being a lawyer is the only thing I could have done, but I don't at all regret becoming or being one.

The longer I practice, the more I value my Michigan Law School education. Even 15 years out of law school I recognize the contribution U of M still makes to my daily progress and learning as a lawyer. I am now involved in CLE for other lawyers in the community. This week I spoke to the real estate and financial services bar on 5 new/revised articles of the UCC, and received many compliments for how useful and informative my speech was. I honestly (after all these years) attribute my ability to do something like this to the grounding I got from J.J. White! I can still see his crew cut head drilling the UCC into our heads and I learned enough to, even today, draw upon it in understanding new law with which I was totally unfamiliar until preparing for my talk.

I don't favor an increase in clinical law experiences. Those 3 short years are the only opportunity we get to learn from brilliant scholars how to think like lawyers. We have the rest of our lives to learn the practical aspects, most of which can only be obtained by actually doing it.
I made financial commitments early in my career which were dependent on high levels of income. Now I find I'm not as willing to work as hard as is expected to make high income. While I am willing to take a reduction in pay, I find it very hard to do because it would mean significant adjustments in lifestyle, primarily the loss of our current home. We (my wife and I) would have been happier to have had less income all along than to be faced with these choices at this time. High income is not the same as high quality of life.

Law school ethics courses should address the ethics of billing clients and billable hours. The drive for increased "productivity" (billable hours) is one of the major forces in law firm life. Young lawyers should be prepared to deal with that force as it relates to clients, other associates competing for partnership slots, and the personal moral dilemmas that can be generated by that force.

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I continue to value the fundamental legal education I received. Many local practitioners are from a local law school and the difference in the quality of educations is obvious from the quality of respective practices. I've been in the same job for 12 years and continue to enjoy it -- plus have found a balance in my life between personal and professional. I didn't enjoy the education but I am grateful for it.

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I feel that the Michigan faculty has made some really strange hiring decisions -- passing up extremely well-known people for wholly unqualified people.

Also, of course, I oppose "affirmative action" in faculty hiring. But my first sentence was directed toward non-affirmative-action hires.

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This year (1991), my wife and I made a major change in our lives. I left a position as VP and corporate counsel for a well-run, profitable business of 90 people and we moved to Maine. The move was prompted by a desire for a different kind of life. I volunteer now with The Nature Conservancy, and we're having the best time of our lives.

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I believe that this survey is indicative of the value that the UM Law School places upon each individual student, and the importance of molding the School programs to better serve the interests of the students, both short term and long term. My reason for selecting Michigan over other quality law schools was its reputation for excellent faculty-student relations and caring about the well-being of its students. I was not disappointed.

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In selecting professors, try selecting some good teachers with good, broad intellects. Law Review membership, with the accompanying slightly higher grades than many other bright students, proves nothing about comparative intellectual ability or ability to be a good teacher (or even lawyer), especially when
measured against other graduates from Michigan or other top schools.

I left the law after two years. It was the best decision of my career. If I knew before law school what I know now, I would have never gone into the profession.

I am somewhat dismayed to see the Law School slipping in recent rankings. This appears to reflect a corresponding drop in relative admissions requirements. In addition, Michigan does little to promote itself in national publications or in the media.

Finally, I was disappointed that members of the Law School faculty were not more strident in their opposition to the University's well-publicized attempts to curb free speech and to impose "politically correct" restrictions on the student body. If Law School professors do not take a firm stand against such unconstitutional measures, we can anticipate more of the same in future years.

Many of the questions in this survey were very difficult for me to answer, because my situation is both unusual and volatile. I practiced in two large firms, an insurance company, a small firm and a medium-sized firm during my first ten years as a lawyer. I never enjoyed my work, and generally quit about the same time as I was or would have been fired. I finally decided the only way I might be comfortable practicing law was solo, and commenced solo practice in March, 1987. My practice has been mostly estate planning, but occasionally has involved purchase or sale of a business, domestic relations matters, real estate, income tax problems, and general personal advice.

Although I have found solo practice more enjoyable than my earlier jobs, it has its drawbacks. I am not very enthusiastic about it, and do not market myself aggressively or discipline myself to work very hard. So I don't make as much as I'd like to, especially with my kids reaching college age. I recently became affiliated with a small firm in Boston, formed four years ago by a friend I met when we were both associates in a large firm there ten years ago. I do the estate planning work for them, and am designated as "of counsel." Over the coming few weeks I expect to discuss with that firm the possibility of joining them full-time, which I will consider doing, with some trepidation, if it seems to offer enough flexibility. I require substantial time away from law work for Naval Reserve activities (especially short periods of active duty), and I would like to be able to take time off in the summer to spend it with my children.

Generally, I haven't been happy with my choice of law as a career. I wonder about the value of what lawyers do, and feel that it is a national tragedy that so many of our brightest young people have entered the practice of law rather than contribute to the conquest of cancer, hunger, environmental destruction, war,
and poverty. (Although the question always remains, how does one earn a living while pursuing noble goals?) But I have very positive memories about U-M Law, and look forward to attending my 15th reunion this autumn.

I think law schools should provide practical knowledge, as well as theoretical, to students. Law schools should provide internships for credit, client counseling instruction, stress management, etc.

Law school seems quite a long time ago now, and quite remote from my current professional activities and concerns. The practice of law, as such, has been quite satisfying. The business aspects, particularly economic performance expectations within the firm, firm management responsibilities and increasingly competitive relations with other partners, are less satisfying but tolerable. The greatest continuing challenge is finding time for both work and family. Although time with my family is the most enjoyable, it is often the time demands of the office that are the most insistent.

Rule 1: Don’t sweat the small stuff.
Rule 2: It’s all small stuff.

The racial and gender (and age) discrimination to which I refer is reverse discrimination against me as a white male.

Litigation, not pedantry, is the true test of legal ability. For all their arrogance and armchair generalship, none of the Law School professors that I had would stand a chance in a real courtroom.

My greatest career frustration since law school was becoming partner in a major, nationally recognized firm. Despite the substantial success of most large firms during the past 15 years, I found the competition for fewer and fewer partnership slots much more daunting than I expected when I graduated. I found it necessary to switch firms more than once, and to re-focus my practice areas, before I finally made it. I am happier now in my practice than I have been since my second or third year after school, perhaps because it took me longer to "make it" than many of my peers.

I would not recommend the practice of law to my worst enemy. I have strongly advised my children against it. I do not trust most lawyers -- they let the lure of money distort their values. I have only rarely seen real justice prevail. The American legal system is in a sorry state and getting worse.

I was very disappointed with the people who practice law. I hoped they would be honest and ethical like the military and engineering professions, but, with many exceptions, they were not. Prosecutors would over-charge the defendant to get him to plea bargain and cheat him out of trial. Civil attorneys would
waste clients’ money in worthless discovery. Probate attorneys would charge what the load would bear rather than hourly billings for work done for large estates. And, of course, there are outright crooks. Too many lawyers are in the profession for the money.

Law school stressed the academic side of the profession and, to a degree, neglected the practical aspects of setting up and operating a law office -- essential for a solo practice.

I enjoyed law school and certain aspects of the legal profession, but not the administrative work.

Several years ago I woke up with a severe pain in my chest in the middle of the night and decided I would be better off not practicing law.

I have returned to graduate school to study politics/history/legal theory in part to find new intellectual challenge. I find I enjoy study and scholarship more. I also have gained more time (and responsibility for) my children. I now feel I have more control over my life albeit at some financial cost.

I'm on "sabbatical" of sorts. After returning to school for a degree in library science, I decided to stop practicing law for awhile. The interesting thing is that my legal skills come into play daily as I go about my "retirement" career as manager of a community library. I'm feeling very useful these days, more relaxed and never bored. There is more free time for music and other hobbies. The hardest thing about law practice was the lack of free time.

I have not changed my mind since law school or since the last questionnaire. If anything, I am even more convinced that our legal education was sorely lacking. Since I am teaching law and have been for several years, I feel more qualified to judge now — and I better understand how well-grounded my dissatisfaction was. In 1973-1976 the Law School had very few professors who cared about teaching, and I believe there was little incentive to teach well. All incentives were pointed toward encouraging scholarship. I find myself very poorly educated, with little knowledge of theoretical perspectives (such as law and economics, critical legal studies). Basically, most of my legal education was doctrinal, unchallenging -- in short, boring. I think the School has changed since then, but at the time it was way behind other top 5 law schools in its ability to educate and inspire.

Also, it was a hopelessly sexist place -- I hope that’s changed considerably.

I wonder if much of what lawyers learn and do are based on presuppositions that are becoming increasingly obsolete. Even as laws and lawyers, wildly proliferating, are called upon to solve more and more of today’s problems, the law and lawyers and the
adversarial notions and processes associated therewith may be increasingly a part of our problems. We seek power and rights and winning vis-a-vis our adversaries. Our only response to avoid adversarial combat in the courts is to set up written rules of conduct governing relationships -- and do via as an adversarial process.

Can it be that a focus on adversarial notions of relationship and stipulated rules of conduct to define them generate more problems, more alienation and less fairness? When our relationships are no longer intrinsically ordered by mutual restraint and respect, but are instead determined by the workers in an adversarial regulatory, judicial, political or personal process, can there ever be enough lawyers, courts, laws, bureaucrats, etc. to keep things going? Should we even want things to continue? Are we so polarized, so alienated that there is no other way?

Better law than violence; better a search for equal power and rights amongst adversaries than domination and subjugation? To quote Gregory Bateson, "adversarial systems are notoriously subject to irrelevant determinism. The relative 'strength' of the adversaries is likely to rule the decision regardless of the relative strength of their arguments. It is not so much 'power' that corrupts as the myth of power: ... He who covets a mythical abstraction must always be insatiable! As teachers we should not promote that myth. It is difficult for an adversary to see further than the dichotomy between winning and losing in the adversarial combat. Like a chess player, he is always tempted to make a tricky move, to get a quiet victory.... The player must have his eye always on a longer view, a larger gestalt."

Maybe the Law School should promote, and lawyers should foster solutions that are ultimately non-legal, non-adversarial. Instead of focusing only on winning each conflict one by one, assuming that it all adds up well in the end, should we seek to foster relationships that intrinsically resolve conflicts between values or individuals in their wider perspective of mutual relationships and community? If the extension of formal adversarial conflict and rules is undercutting these relationships and communities, thereby generating an increasing need for more adversarial solutions in a vicious circle, shouldn't a broader approach be sought?

Perhaps there is no alternative to extending adversarial processes and formal rules to more and more of our relationships. If we are on state of social development (referred to as State III - The Era of Cynicism by the Stanford Research Institute) where bureaucracies become large but barely comprehensible, leaders are more tolerated than supported, consideration and control increase as rapidly as their benefits decrease, apathy and cynicism reigns, shared values and goals are being lost. Is it any wonder that under such conditions the public denounces lawyers and legislators and administrators and laws even as they
aggressively call on their lawyer and legislator to fight in their interests against others. The pressure for intense adversarial conflict and well-defined rights would thus be as much a product of our societal evolution as it would be an effect of the proliferation of lawyers and their adversarial processes. The need is for all of us to see societal change in its wider perspectives -- all of us seeking ways to foster healthy relationships rather than legal bandaids?

I do not expect law schools and lawyers to have all the answers. I do not expect them to abandon the adversarial process, nor our treasured notion of individual rights. They are essential. But something is terribly wrong and no one seems to be looking beyond the next battle. Isn’t that what law schools can do best?

Fortunately, the practice of law is much more enjoyable and rewarding than law school.

Regarding question 10, it is the professor who is usually intellectually stimulating, not the particular subject matter.

There are just too many lawyers for the good of society or the profession.

While I have remained with one law firm since graduation, I have practiced in a number of fields of specialization, adjusting my practice to meet the firm’s needs and to respond to the local market. This has led me to appreciate that the real value of law school lies in its teaching of the thinking process and basic legal principles and not in the teaching of substantive law. The former is always of use, the latter eventually becomes out-dated or irrelevant to a practitioner.

On a more personal note, it has become more and more obvious with each year that money and professional recognition are goals which have to be balanced against time with family and for self. That is the challenge I suspect many of us now face.

I have become disillusioned with the legal system. Clients and their lawyers file and/or extensively defend suits with little or no merit and cannot be held responsible for the consequences of their actions. The system does not work well any more. Lawyers’ inaction to remedy the situation has rightfully given lawyers a bad name.

I didn’t even know any lawyers when I entered law school, and had no idea of how the world worked or the most basic economic interrelationships among partners, associates, billing expectations, etc., or even after law school. Also no knowledge of ethics, conflicts of interest, etc., even after completing law school. Also basic work skills of organizing, time sheets, etc. had to be learned on the job under pressure -- only TV lawyers have one case at a time.
I believe U of M is a fine law school. You will note, however, that I did not enjoy my law school experience. Although my current job is the best that I have had and I am in many ways grateful for it, I still do not enjoy practicing law.

Moving from a small firm general practice to an in-house counsel job saved my sanity! Someone else pays the secretary, there is a dental plan, and no one has called me from jail at midnight in four years. The balance of career and motherhood and "wifehood" is much easier to accomplish with more regular hours (and an older child).

From my current position as a legal educator, I have 2 basic criticisms of my legal education: 1) it was not intellectually demanding -- essentially, it required only the mastery of a large quantity of material, rather than hard thought; 2) it was too narrow, focusing almost exclusively on the content of the law and very little on giving students introductions to other disciplines which help evaluate legal problems (philosophy, statistics, economics) or on either practical problems of practice or the management skills increasingly necessary to lawyers.

I had a great time at law school, and believe the education I received gave me a wide range of employment opportunities and has served me very well since. I am disappointed, though, not to encounter more alumni in government or public interest work. Harvard and Yale seem to contribute more.

I work full time practicing law. I work most of the time in my home because I must care for a handicapped adult son. I have a library/office in my home, and a secretary and office space in downtown Detroit, where I see clients, etc.

The reason lawyers rightfully have such a bad public image is not that they have no ethics, but that they have no conscience. The canons allow zealous advocacy of any "arguably legal" position, whether or not it is fair or compassionate. But too many lawyers will do anything for money, rationalizing that if it is legal and "ethical," then it is OK. Ordinary people (non-lawyers) know that just because something does not violate the bar disciplinary rules does not mean it is ethical. The existence of "judicial rules of ethics" should not be an excuse to abandon all additional personal ethics. But that is what lawyers do, and that is their disgrace. Others can do the same, but lawyers have such power over people's lives that they should have a higher standard. Yet they seem to have a lower standard.

As an alum, I am very concerned with what I hear about the well-publicized decline in the prestige of U of M Law School. If I were running the place, I'd re-evaluate admission priorities and stop discriminating against the brightest and best students in favor of poorly thought out (and failing) attempts at social engineering.
A society that needs as many laws and rules as ours in order to function is truly sick, and lawyers are a symptom of the disease. I have fun (and too much stress) in my role as one of society’s "symbolic analysts," yet it is difficult to see how mankind (or even our legal system) has benefited from one more of my kind passing through its portals.

By far my biggest regret from my law school experience was my failure to nurture and enjoy relationships within a community of the most intelligent folks in which I will ever be fortunate enough to live and/or work. Anything the School can do to encourage communication, interaction, development of relationships, etc. among classmates and with professors is great. Of all things, this includes teas and cocktail parties and the like, as well as group studying and any other collaborative learning processes. This is also the 90’s model for lawyer behavior, both within and outside law firms, and so would not only enrich the law school experience, but would also help at law work after law school.

I enjoyed law school, socially and intellectually, very much. But I was disappointed that, unlike my other university experiences, law school friendships did not long survive graduation.

In law school, I do not think I had an adequate appreciation of what it is lawyers do on a day-to-day basis. I also did not have any appreciation of how difficult it would be to combine the practice of law with raising a family.

The practice of law is a great first career. I expect to be practicing law in five years, but not in ten. While I was on a recent sabbatical I decided that I would not retire but that I didn’t want to spend fifty years after law school being a lawyer. Twenty to twenty-five is quite enough, thank you. All in all, it does not seem to be a bad way to spend a couple of decades. The opportunity to view people in action in the world is unparalleled. The financial rewards have not been bad either. I’ve certainly made more money than I ever thought I would (and, of course, I’ve kept much less of what I’ve made than I would have predicted if someone had told me fifteen years ago what my salary would be today).

Law school should be limited to two years of classroom work. My third year was largely a waste of time taking courses I did not need.

The first year’s curriculum covered all I really needed, and one additional year provided all the opportunity I needed for specialty courses.

If a third year is continued, it should be a mandatory clinic in pro bono public interest law.
My greatest criticism of U of M Law School is that the School seemed to be very interested in and oriented toward the top 10% or so of the class. Much, much more could have been done to enrich the experience and enhance job opportunities for the bulk of the student body who were not standout students academically. Given that virtually all law students at U of M were high academic achievers as undergraduates, it would be difficult to exaggerate the sense of failure one feels at being average (or worse) for the first time in life. I think the School has a responsibility to those students as well as the small proportion who continue to be high academic achievers.

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I've worked part-time since 1984. My kids are now 8 and 11 and my part-time schedule has been the only way to keep things in balance. I hope to continue the schedule as long as possible. The trade-off -- I'm not a partner but am "of counsel." It's certainly a "mommy track" but I'm happy with it so far.

Generally, I think the issue of balancing family and work is one of the most difficult ones our generation faces. It should be a "parent" issue not a "mother" issue, but we're not quite there yet!

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The value of a Michigan Law School education lies not in the acquisition of substantive legal principles. Indeed, U-M probably teaches less "black-letter" law than most schools. Rather, a U-M legal education should result in the acquisition or refinement of certain skills. To be admitted to U-M Law School (even back in 1973), a successful applicant would have mastered -- at the least -- the rudiments of analysis, organization and presentation. Ideally, during our three years in Hutchins Hall, we refined those skills by honing a legal emphasis to our incoming abilities. Often as not, we had no idea how successful that process was upon graduation. Only years later could an honest assessment be made.

Therefore, I cannot suggest adding more courses per se to the law school curriculum. Obviously, as new areas of the law emerge, courses should be added. It is most logical and efficient to combine skill-honing with substance. But whatever the course, the emphasis must be on aiding students to become as proficient as they are able in the skills of analysis, organization and presentation. Those skills can survive changes in practice, practice area, locality and insure that no matter what we're doing, we have the tools (and self-confidence) to do it well.

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Clients often treat lawyers as if they are prostitutes -- they assume that if they pay you, you must do anything, on their schedule. Most people, and clients, have no idea what lawyers do, or why they must charge for their services. While most lawyers in this community are honest and trustworthy, the public perception is the opposite.

Law school was worthless in preparation for the practical skills
needed in private practice -- drafting documents, negotiations, fee agreements, ethical issues. The trivia and minutiae involved in most "law review" publications, and their opaque prose, make them useless to most practicing lawyers. Most publications by legal academia are irrelevant and ignored, except by other legal academics. "Law Review" activities provide little training for proper writing or advocacy.

Law school in 1974-76 was a rigorous academic experience, but not nearly the learning experience of undergrad. Most of your stronger "academics" have little contact with real practice, and less interest in imparting practical skills. The arrogant, show-off professors could easily be fired without any loss to the program. Most of the Law School "stars" would be eaten alive if they had to practice law.

In common with a majority of the lawyers of my age (40) or close to it, I would probably choose not to become a lawyer or practice law and would not recommend my child practice law. As with most of these lawyers, I feel I'm unable to switch professions because of economic conditions (how can I pay bills and support family?) and difficulty of starting new job at this stage in my life. Those feelings are based on stress in professional, difficulties in dealing with other attorneys, clients and constant changes in law, as well as complications inherent in law practice.

I don't feel law school prepared me for real life practice of law. I may have learned legal reasoning, theory and even some law, but nothing about client relations, getting and keeping clients, economics, finances, etc. I don't think this problem is limited to Michigan Law School but is true of every law school.

I look back at law school as a very special time of my life. In some ways it seems strange to me that I should feel this way, because I have not practiced law for almost eight years. Seven of those years I spent as a full-time mother, and for the past year I have been a student at a theological seminary, preparing (if God wills) for the ordained ministry or for a teaching career. Yet I feel convinced that my time at Michigan Law School was in no way wasted.

The opportunity to study under the professors who teach at Michigan Law School is a great privilege. I believed this while at school, and I believe it still. The training that I received is of enormous help to me now, as I apply my skills to research and writing in a new setting.

I also have wonderful memories of the many friends I made at law school. It was a good group of people, and I thank God for them.

Wish more Michigan professors (just one or two!) had been willing to act as mentors or help me in thinking through career-related decisions (law teacher) over the years. Only one ever did, perhaps because I did not meet "professor profile" when I
graduated. I have since turned to others at other institutions, but have always regretted the lack of generosity I felt from my professors as I made my way in teaching.

Overall, it’s been a pretty good career choice. But it’s much more competitive (both within and without the firm) than in the 1970’s and early ’80’s. The practice is just another business now -- not really the "profession" I saw my father enjoy so much. Clients want top service -- right now -- but don’t want to pay for it. Work never leaves your desk -- if you fax out a letter in the morning, you get an answer back that afternoon. When you leave at night, the ball’s right back in your court, like it was last night. For the price you pay in terms of stress and demands on your time at the expense of your family, the money just isn’t enough.

It would have been helpful if there had been much more counseling/free non-credit classes on "how to succeed" or "what you really need to know about making it in the business/professional world." It took me years to realize the importance of goal-setting, self-promotion, etc.

My views on law school curriculum are self-contradictory. On one hand, most lawyers write inadequately, argue inadequately. So students need more preparation in those areas.

On the other hand, the opportunity for intellectual excess, reading and classroom debate, is unavailable outside the walls of the law quad. So, in a way, I regret the time I spent in the clinical program.

I am a litigator. One of my best "teachers" in practice was an experienced federal litigator, with little gentility, who savagely 'x’’d out most of my first brief with the comment, lavishly debossed, "this is shittt!!" I really was a decent writer at the time. But it was. And he taught me well.

Law school was wonderful!! I was privileged to attend. Someday, with a lot of $$ in the bank, I will give back some of what I have received.

In the meantime, I hope that legal services work, public interest law, and government service have compensated society for its gift.

I am concerned that UM Law seems to be gravitating toward professors who have theoretical, as opposed to practical backgrounds. We need more law professors who have actually practiced law and fewer who have doctorates in English, philosophy, etc. I also feel that the younger faculty of this ilk tend to concentrate on what they would like the law to be, instead of on what the law is. The primary mission of the Law School should be to teach the skills and knowledge necessary to be a good lawyer, but now a significant number of professors
spend time advocating changes in the law, or even in society. I am rebelling against the notion of a politicized faculty or law school curriculum, whether of a liberal or a conservative slant. This trend reduces my desire to make alumni contributions to the School.

I have been treated poorly in every legal setting I have worked - two legal services offices and one law firm. In all three places my legal work was judged as excellent, as was my client rapport. However, I refused to coddle the egos of insecure male bosses. In the one legal services job and in private practice, I was grossly underpaid -- in private practice earning 30% less than the male who joined the firm 6 months later than I did, with 5 years less experience (I entered the firm with 6 years, he with 1 year). In the private firm I was forced to handle a caseload consisting of 85-90% domestic cases, despite the fact that the stress periodically gave me pneumonia (according to my pulmonologist) and despite my repeated requests for more varied assignments. As the "domestic lawyer," I ended up doing all the pro bono work and handling for free all the family law work of the firm’s attorneys and support staff. As a result, I brought in less gross income, thereby allegedly justifying my lower pay and partnership share.

I just left the firm after it once again failed to cover my cases during the two months I was out sick due to a miscarriage.

I have been discriminated against in a similar fashion by all of my non-law jobs since law school (at a prestigious university and a large bank). I have decided the only way I can avoid gross sex discrimination in employment is to be my own boss. I have also concluded that it is the only way I can work in an environment where the support staff (invariably female) is treated with respect and dignity, paid decently, and has its intelligence and creativity appreciated.

This is a sorry commentary on 20 years of paid employment. From my discussions with others, my experiences are far from unique.

I plan to use my skills now to encourage women lawyers to form their own firms rather than waste their lives trying to change an intractable male system. Since women lawyers are often even more conscientious and talented than their male counterparts, it is the male-dominated firms’ shortsightedness and ultimate loss that drives me and so many other talented women away.

In my current life as a mother of 3 small children, I spend a fair amount of time (in spurts) on friends’ and acquaintances’ legal problems. I find that, even to the very educated people I know, lawyers seem to talk jibberish. It is very hard for a lawyer to remember how to explain a legal problem to a non-lawyer. I spend a fair amount of time translating. Based on my experience, I think there is a great deal of room for more small, private law firms that would handle a broad spectrum of everyday
problems in this complicated and overly-regulated world -- from legal requirements of child care arrangements, and house closings to medicare (medicaid appeals for one’s elderly parents), drug and alcohol arrests of one’s children, fighting a university administration that is altering degree requirements for mid-life degree candidates (some of the "yuppie" problems I’ve seen recently). People long for a family attorney -- someone who could explain the basics, send them to experts when necessary and always interpret the complexities of the legal system to them. People want a lawyer they can trust to explain the law and other lawyers to them.

The last time I filled out this survey, I was working at the American Judicature Society, doing research on the courts and the legal system. I recall writing a response expressing my dismay that the survey at that time concentrated so heavily on law firm or corporate practice, ignoring alternates to practice. I was doing important work, at that time becoming a national expert in the area of judicial ethics, and I was unable to respond to most of the career-centered questions, because they did not address what I was doing. This survey was less offensive. Either I have mellowed with age, or there have been enough changes that those of us who have chosen not to follow a traditional career path can somehow fit our lives into the categories of questions.

Just as the main complaint I had the last time I did this questionnaire was dictated by my job at the time, so too my current "beef" is dictated by my current job. I am teaching Legal Writing at Northwestern Law School. Although it is a non-tenure track job and the pay is pathetic, I am in my eighth year. I often say, half in jest and half in truth, that the reason I have spent so long in this job is so that I can try to make law school better for at least some first-years than it was for me at Michigan. As bright as the second and third-year students who teach Legal Writing at Michigan may be, there is simply no way that they have the perspective, judgment or experience or even time to teach first-years all that Legal Writing entails. I only wish that there had been someone at Michigan in 1973 who could have explained why we were pulling rules out of cases, why we were asked to analogize or distinguish them, or how to synthesize cases. I wish someone could have explained what legal method was. I wish that someone could have explained that exams would be primarily issue spotting.

So my first comment to you is that I wish you would improve the quality of your Legal Writing course. Second and third-year students do not have enough professional experience or perspective to be truly effective teachers. Moreover, they do not have the time. They have their own course work and the pressures of finding a summer or full-time job. They simply cannot fully commit themselves to the learning needs of the first-years.

If your response is to say that Michigan students are so bright
that they do not need a course taught by full-time teachers, you are wrong. Michigan students often struggle in their jobs at first because they haven't had a good Legal Writing course. Not only would a better Legal Writing course help Michigan students in their jobs, it actually would enrich the first-year curriculum. I think Legal Writing helps put what is covered in the other courses in perspective. It shows why professors are often asking whether an answer would be different if facts were different. It helps students see from a practice-related perspective why in law school the answer is often less important than the thinking process that produced the answer.

My second comment to you is one that I am going to say because it needs to be said. It's a problem that exists at all law schools around the country, and mentioning it in this alumni survey isn't going to change anything. Nevertheless it needs mentioning, and one day if I want to write myself out of my non-tenture track job, I may even write an article on it. I am appalled that this job has such low status and pays so little. Sure I know that universities that pride themselves on being "prestigious," like Michigan or Northwestern, want their faculty to publish. Teaching is incidental. But teaching Legal Writing is pure teaching, it is labor intensive and it is totally devoted to students. Students know that and appreciate it. It bothers me the emphasis on publishing is so all-encompassing that law school faculties and administrations dismiss Legal Writing as something to be tolerated, but not respected nor embraced.

It bothers me even more that there is so little respect for Legal Writing that many schools will not allow their instructors to teach more than one or two years before requiring them to leave. Many schools evidently think that it takes no talent to teach this course and that there is no benefit to be gained from developing experience in teaching it. I truly do not understand why they should think this course is any different than teaching any other course, where the teacher learns from what he or she has done in the past and improves with time. I have tried new things every year. Some have worked and some have not. My failures have taught me as much as my successes, and I have no doubt that I have improved over the years.

That being said, I guess you have heard the last of me. My understanding is that this survey is done after five and fifteen years. It has taken me four months to find the time to respond to this one, and I am not prone to writing unsolicited letters, particularly when the chances of them leading to anything positive or constructive are slim.

I felt that UM Law School was very parochial in its concentration on domestic corporate law. This trend reflects the general U.S. policy of focusing too much inwardly and not enough on international aspects of law and business. Large corporations must now compete and survive in an international environment. The law supporting this effort, and the courses offered, should
reflect this reality. The need to better understand the corporate environment, including the legal framework, is particularly lacking in regard to Asia and the Pacific Basin. When I was at UM, the attitude about legal courses seemed to reflect the attitude of corporate America (particularly industrial mid-west). The competitive position of "the Big 3" now, and Japan's enlightened approach in Asia/Pacific Basin (which is currently capturing markets in Thailand, etc.) should send a signal to all of us on the need to increase our understanding of the international framework, including law, in which we must compete in the future.

Need more courses in international business, negotiations, law of the sea, international environmental efforts, etc. Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

(Some of these comments are based on my experiences while stationed in Hawaii, visiting Taiwan, Japan, Korea, PRC, etc.) Also, my wife attended school in Japan as part of her MBA program. The way they approach their courses, particularly the emphasis on learning the practices in foreign countries where there are investment opportunities, makes our approach to this area seem dismally inadequate.

My comments are based on my belief that UM is primarily a "corporate law school." Personally, I would have benefited from more international law courses unrelated to corporate issues -- i.e., law of the sea. Maybe some of my concerns have already been addressed by course changes since 1976.

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