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Class of 1981 Fifteen Year Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL:
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1981
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

- * "I loved law school and I genuinely enjoy practicing law. I am frustrated, though, by the enormous inefficiency and waste I see in the American legal system."
- * "I am proud to be a Michigan graduate. However, the experience, classmates, Professors, etc., do not evoke warm memories. I do enjoy the Law Quad Notes and may even come to The class reunion. Most of all, I miss steaks on Friday."
- * "Why didn't anyone ever tell us that having a fulfilling career, raising children and havin any personal life/hobbies was so hard! I'm balancing/juggling better than most, but sometimes I wish we could slow down just a bit."

* * * * *

Introduction

In the spring of 1996, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 359 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1981 for whom we had at least some address. Two hundred thirty-one-eight class members responded--a response rate of 64 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' careers since law school, especially in the settings in which they are working now. We end with an Appendix 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 1981 in 1996
 Total respondents: 228 of 351

Gender

Women	26%
Men	74

Ethnicity

Black/African-American	4%
Hispanic/Latino	4
Native American	1
White/Caucasian	91

Family Status

Never married	9%
Married once, still married	73
Divorced	8
Remarried after divorce	9
Other	1

Children

None	20%
One	17
Two	37
Three	23
Four or more	3

Population of City Where Now Work

Under 100,000	13%
100,000 - 1 million	27
Over 1 million	60

Nature of Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	4%	}	78%
Partners in firms	44		
Of Counsel/other status in firms	10		
Counsel for business/financial institutions	10		
Government attorneys	7		
Legal services/public interest attorneys	2		
Other	1		

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government executives/administrators/judges	4%	}	22%
Business owners/executives	2		
Law teachers	5		
Full-time parent	3		
Others	8		

Average Hours Worked per Week

Less than 40	13%
40-49	30
50-59	39
60-69	14
More than 70	4

Earnings in Fifteenth Year

(for persons working full-time)

Up to \$40,000	4%
\$40,100-\$60,000	8
\$60,100-\$100,000	23
\$100,100-\$150,000	27
\$150,100-\$225,000	18
\$225,100-\$300,000	11
More than \$300,000	9

Politics

Proportion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	23%
More liberal than conservative	32
Middle of the road	20
More conservative than liberal	17
Very conservative	8

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

<u>Proportion Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>QS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>QD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	50%	45%	5%
Their current family life	73	24	3
Intellectual challenge of their work	60	39	1
Their income	54	38	8
The balance of their family and professional lives	33	59	8
Their career as a whole	54	44	2

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

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	10%	26%	65%
Effective as writer	3	5	92
Aggressive	30	31	39
Compulsive about work	32	24	44
Concerned about impact of their work on society	18	38	44
Honest	1	6	93
Concerned about making a lot of money	51	29	20
Compassionate	10	24	65
Self-confident	18	27	55

** 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."

Looking Back on Law School Today

When they look back on law school today, most class members have positive feelings about their law school experience--50 percent strongly positive, a total of 73 percent positive rather than neutral or negative. Class members are most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school (66 percent strongly positive), while regarding the career training provided by the experience with somewhat less enthusiasm (46 percent strongly positive). Thirty-seven 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

We survey all classes five and fifteen years after law school. In 1986, when we last surveyed the class of 1981, the class members were at very different stages of their careers than they are today, though in many surface ways the positions of the class as a whole remains much the same. Today, as then, the considerable majority of the class -- 68 percent -- work in private practice, mostly in firms. But changes have occurred. Most obviously, nearly ninety percent of those working in firms five years after law school were still associates, while today, the vast majority, over 80 percent, are partners, the considerable majority of them in the same firm at which they were working ten years before. The three work settings in which considerably more class members work today than worked ten years ago are solo practice (1 percent at 5 years, 4 percent at 15 years), corporate counsel's offices (5 percent at 5 years, 10 percent at 15 years), and law teaching (2 percent at 5 years, 5 percent at 15 years).

Along with changes in settings and status has come an increase in income. In 1986, the median earnings of full-time working class members was \$45,000. In 1996, it had increased to \$130,000.

Fifteen Years After Law School: The Class as a Whole

Members of the class of 1981 work in towns of all sizes, in 32 states 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.

Fifteen years after graduation, 20 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 quarter had held four or more. Two people report having held 8 jobs.

What kinds of jobs did people hold fifteen years after graduation? As Table 1 shows, about 78 percent of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. We will speak more about them in the remaining sections. Of the 48 persons who said they were not practicing law, 8 were government officials, 5 were business owners, executives or managers, 6 were full-time parents and 11 were teaching in law schools. 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 1981 who were practicing law in any setting in 1996, three-quarters were either 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 six 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 1980 and 1981. (The class of 1981 was surveyed in 1996 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1981.) 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. (Even with combining, we do not have enough respondents working in public interest settings to permit generalizations about them.)

Seven percent of the respondents in the combined classes--35 persons in all--were working as government attorneys at the time they were surveyed. Of these, over seventy percent worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. About a sixth of the government attorneys worked as prosecutors. Most of the others worked in administrative agencies, including several doing environmental work and several doing securities work.

Fourteen percent of the combined classes--61 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Slightly more than half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 20 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and the rest worked for other business enterprises. Nearly all (92 percent) of those

working in corporate counsels offices had previously worked for at least some time in private practice.

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 or corporate counsel's office and earned much less. In fact, those working in government settings averaged only about 40 percent of the earnings of those in private practice. Despite their long work hours, private practitioners devoted a great deal of time to unpaid pro bono work, much more than those in the other two settings.

Table 2
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=35	<u>Private</u> <u>Practitioners</u> N=239	<u>Corporate</u> <u>Counsel</u> N=61
Average work hours per week	46	51	51
Proportion who average over 55 hours per week	6%	34%	32%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (average)	20%	27%	8%
Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year (average)	4	68	20
Earnings in fifteenth year (average)	\$83,200	\$194,500	\$146,900

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 quite dissatisfied--categories 6 and 7--with any aspect of their careers. Most who were not quite satisfied were in the middle. All three groups were, in general, quite 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 attorneys were very satisfied with the value of their work to society than

were attorneys in the other two groups. Corporate counsels were most likely to be satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives. They were also slightly, though not statistically significantly, more satisfied with their careers overall. Private practitioners much more frequently reported high stress in their work than did the lawyers in the other settings.

Table 3
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government Attorneys</u> N=35	<u>Private Practitioners</u> N=239	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=61
<u>Proportion of group who are quite satisfied* with:</u>			
The balance of their family life and professional life	29%	26%	43%
The intellectual challenge of their work	72	62	69
Their current income	31	60	57
The value of their work to society	69	26	33
Their careers overall	53	49	61
Percent finding current job quite stressful**	22	49	24
Percent expecting to be in same job in 5 years	66	86	76

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

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

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 1980 and 1981.)

Table 4
Classes of 1980 and 1981
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	66	28%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	50	22
In firms of 51-150 lawyers	51	22
In firms of 151 or more lawyers	65	28
	232	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

Table 5
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Private Practitioners
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	<u>Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=66</u>	<u>Firms of 11-50 N=50</u>	<u>Firms of 51-150 N=51</u>	<u>Firms of more than 150 N=65</u>
Average number of other attorneys in same firm	3	27	102	331
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	28%	22%	8%	3%
Proportion working in cities of over 1 million	52%	54%	62%	84%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	32%	57%	59%	68%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	27%	6%	7%	1%

various sizes. As the table reveals, the private practitioners in these two classes now typically practice in large cities, regardless of firm size. More than half of those in solo practice or working in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers typically worked in cities of more than one million. Those in the small firms were far more likely than those in larger firms to be serving low- and middle-income individuals as clients. Not surprisingly, the larger the firm in which a class member worked, the more likely she was to spend most of her time serving large businesses as clients. 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 significantly, 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 worked long hours, regardless of firm size. They also devoted, on average, substantial amounts of time to pro bono work.

Table 6
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Private Practitioners
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=66	Firms of 11-50 N=50	Firms of 51-150 N=51	Firms of more than 150 N=65
Average number of hours worked each week*	49	52	51	52
Proportion who regularly average 55+ hr. work wks	28%	38%	24%	43%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (average)	20%	36%	25%	23%
Pro bono hours worked per year (average)	61	80	57	73
Usual hourly rate (average)	\$170	\$194	\$220	\$255
Income from practice in fifteenth year (average)	\$131,500	\$174,900	\$204,300	\$235,600
Proportion who earned \$250,000 or more	8%	20%	26%	34%

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

Whatever their efforts as measured by time expended, the economics of practice varied substantially 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. At the same time, even those in small firms averaged much higher incomes than American lawyers of their age in general.

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

Table 7
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Private Practitioner
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer <hr/> N=66	Firms of 11-50 <hr/> N=50	Firms of 51-150 <hr/> N=51	Firms of more than 150 <hr/> N=65
<u>Proportion who are quite satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional lives	39%	29%	18%	17%
The intellectual challenge of work	59	56	61	69
Their current income	46	60	72	65
The value of their work to society	32	32	24	17
Their careers overall	54	50	43	51
Proportion finding current job quite stressful**	39	48	59	53
Proportion expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	80	88	92	82

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

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

As grouped by firm size, only a minority of any of the groups was quite satisfied with either the balance of their family and professional lives or the value of their work to society, but lawyers in the smaller firms were more likely to express satisfaction. The largest firm lawyers were the group most likely to express high satisfaction with the intellectual challenge of their work and with their income and most likely to report high

stress in their current work. There was no pattern in the relation between firm size and firm lawyers' satisfaction with their careers overall.

The Differing Career Experiences of Women and Men

Women first attended Michigan Law School in the 1870s, but it was not until the early 1970s that they constituted more than a tiny proportion of the members of any graduating class. In 1970, six percent of the graduating class were women. In 1979, 24 percent were women. During the early years of this century and continuing throughout the decade of the seventies, in class after graduating class, a far higher proportion of the men than the women began their careers after law school in private practice. Women were more likely to start and stay in government and other settings. The classes of 1980 and 1981 were different. Twenty-nine percent of the combined graduating classes were women and, for the first time, there was no significant difference in the proportion of women and men entering private practice as their first jobs (after any judicial clerkship). Eighty-one percent of women and eighty-five percent of men took a first job in a private firm.

The old differences in women's and men's career paths reappeared later, however. As Table 8 reveals, at 5 and 15 years after graduation, women and men were alike in that at each point fewer were working in private practice than at the start of their careers, but they were different in that a far higher proportion of women have left private practice than men. Women are now more likely than men to be working in corporate counsels' offices and in other law-related settings (such as teaching) in which they do not regard themselves as practicing law.

Table 8
Classes of 1980 and 1981
Work Settings of Women and Men

	Women (n=124)	Men (n=334)
<u>Percent of class working in private practice:</u>		
As first job (after any clerkships)	81%	85%
5 years after graduation	65%	76%
15 years after graduation	44%	64%

It is also the case that, 15 years after graduation, many women, but few men, are currently employed part-time or not employed in the labor force at all in order to care for children. Seventeen percent of women are working part-time to care for children. Another 7 percent are not employed outside the home at all. By comparison, 1 percent of men are working part-time to care for children and none reports being unemployed in order to care for children. (The greater exodus of women than men from private practice is not, however, explained simply by the women who have left the work force altogether. Many more women have left firms to take jobs in settings other than private practice than to stay at home to take care of children.)

How did the differing career paths of women and men affect their career satisfaction? At both five and fifteen years after law school, there are no significant differences between the overall career satisfactions of women and men. Nor are there significant differences between the career satisfactions of women with children and women without children. Among full-time workers fifteen years after graduation, women with children work shorter hours and earn considerably less than women without children and than men, with or without children, but their overall career satisfaction is as high. The women with children who are working part-time or not currently working in the labor force also report as high satisfaction with their careers overall. Most of the full-time working mothers seem to have found jobs in settings where they do satisfying work and still achieve a highly satisfying family life.