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Class of 1983 Fifteen Year Report

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**THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1983
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION**

- * “Keep up the good work – despite market pressure, alumni pressures, pressures from whatever source – don’t abandon your “liberal arts” approach to the law (i.e., courses in the history, philosophy, literary aspects, etc. of the law).
“I enjoy the work that I do – but I enjoy it more because I learned law at a great university instead of a trade school.”
- * “I have yet to see any comprehensive training program from scuba diving to carpentry to fire-fighting to teaching secondary education that does not make place for practical real-life simulations of the principles taught -- except for the law schools.
“U of M cheerfully sends law students into the world, many if not most of whom have never drafted a simple will or been inside a courtroom. U of M is very good at training very good law students. It does not even try to train good lawyers.”
- * “Law School was good, being a lawyer is better, I sure don’t miss those blue books.”
- * “At the time I was practicing law, I regretted the decision to attend law school. All I did was work. I had no personal life. Leaving the practice of law was the right decision for me, and one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. However, I no longer regret the time I spent practicing law, nor do I regret attending law school. The training in law school and practicing law has helped me tremendously in my current profession.”

Introduction

In the summer of 1998, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 368 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1983. Two hundred ten class members responded--a response rate of 57 percent.

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 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 law at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1983 in 1998
 Total respondents: 210 of 368

<u>Gender</u>	
Women	29%
Men	71
<u>Ethnicity</u>	
Black/African-American	5%
Hispanic/Latino	3
Native American	1
Asian American	1
White/Caucasian	90
<u>Family Status</u>	
Never married	14%
Married once, still married	71
Divorced	7
Remarried after divorce	7
Other	1
<u>Children</u>	
None	23%
One	13
Two	37
Three	20
Four or more	7
<u>Population of City Where Now Work</u>	
Under 100,000	18%
100,000 - 1 million	37
Over 1 million	45

Nature of Current Work

<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>	<u>78%</u>
Solo practitioners	9%
Partners in firms	40
Of Counsel/other status in firms	9
Counsel for business/financial institutions	12
Government attorneys	5
Legal services/public interest attorneys	2
Other	1

<u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>	<u>22%</u>
Business owners/executives	4%
Government executives/administrators/judges	6
Law teachers	3
Fulltime parent	5
Others	4

Average Hours Worked per Week (by workers)

Less than 40	10%
40-49	33
50-59	39
60-69	14
More than 70	3

Earnings in Fourteenth Year (for persons working full-time)

Under \$50,000	4%
\$50,000-\$99,999	28
\$100,000-\$149,999	19
\$150,000-\$199,999	20
\$200,000-299,999	16
\$300,000-399,999	7
More than \$400,000	7

Political Attitudes: Proportion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	27%
More liberal than conservative	23
Middle of the road	22
More conservative than liberal	14
Very conservative	14

How Class Members Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys about Their Same Age

	<u>Less than most</u>	<u>About average</u>	<u>More than most</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	9%	22%	69%
Effective as writer	3	4	93
Aggressive	34	27	39
Compulsive about work	35	28	36
Concerned about impact of their work on society	16	35	49
Honest	4	6	90
Concerned about making a lot of money	40	36	24
Compassionate	6	23	71
Self-confident	12	31	58

* 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."

Life Satisfaction: Proportion Who Report Themselves*:

	<u>Quite Satisfied</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Quite Dis- satisfied</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	61%	36%	4%
Their current family life	74	24	2
The intellectual challenge of their work	60	38	2
Their income	50	45	5
The balance of their family and professional lives	42	47	11
Their career as a whole	59	38	3

**Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1 and 2 as indicating a person to be "quite satisfied", and categories 6 and 7 as indicating "quite dissatisfied". Categories 3, 4, and 5 are classified as in the "middle".

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--61 percent strongly positive, a total of 79 percent positive rather than neutral or negative. Class members are most likely to regard with high satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, while regarding the career training provided by law school and the social aspects of law school with somewhat less enthusiasm. 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, trial techniques, and interviewing are far more common than the most often-mentioned substantive area (corporate and commercial law).

Life Since Law School

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

For 30 years we have surveyed our graduates five and fifteen years after law school. In 1988, when we last surveyed the class of 1983, the class members were at very different stages of their careers than they are today. In some surface ways the positions of the class as a whole remains much the same. Then, as today, the majority of the class worked in private practice with the next largest numbers working in government and within business. Then as today, few worked in small cities. But today, fewer are in private practice than then (57 percent today v. 70 percent then) and, of those who are in private practice, the great majority are now, of course, partners rather than associates. Moreover, of those working today in government and business many are now officials or managers rather than practicing attorneys.

Along with changes in settings and status has come an increase in income. In 1988, the median earnings of fulltime working members of the class of 1983 was \$54,500. Ten years later, when we surveyed the class in 1998, the median had increased to \$145,000.

Fifteen Years After Law School: The Class as a Whole

The graduates of the class of 1983 work in towns of all sizes, in all parts of the country, and although a majority are in private practice, the settings of practice are remarkably diverse. Some of the diversity in their lives is conveyed in the tables at the beginning of this report. Here is more detail.

Fifteen years after graduation, 23 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). A third of the class had been in their current job 11 or more years. On the other hand, many others have held several jobs. Almost a third had held four or more positions. One person reported being in his tenth job since law school.

What kinds of jobs did people hold fifteen years after graduation? As Table 1 shows, nearly four fifths of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. We will speak more about this group in the remaining sections. Of the 43 persons who said that they were not practicing law, 12 were government officials, 7 were business owners, executives or managers, and 5 were teaching in law schools. Another 9 were fulltime parents. The diversity of the non-practitioners' experiences makes it difficult to generalize about their careers. One

important generalization is possible: the non-practitioners were, on average, fully as satisfied with their careers overall as were the practitioners.

The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1983 who were practicing law in any setting in 1998, three quarters were in solo practice or private firms. Nearly all of those practicing in other settings worked as corporate counsel, as government attorneys, or in educational institutions. Only two people were 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 1982 and 1983. (The class of 1982 was surveyed in 1997 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1983.) 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.)

Six percent of the respondents in the combined classes--27 persons in all--were working as government attorneys at the time they were surveyed. Of these, slightly more than half worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. About a fifth of the government attorneys worked as prosecutors. Most of the others worked in administrative agencies, including several doing environmental work and several doing civil rights work.

Twelve percent of the combined classes--52 persons in all--worked in corporate counsels' offices. Slightly more than half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies. The great majority (86 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 1982 and 1983
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Government</u>	<u>Private Practitioners</u>	<u>Corporate Counsel</u>
number of respondents	27	195	48
Average work hours per week	46	52	51
Percent who work 55+ hours per week	11%	37%	35%
Percent of time spent on litigation activities	31%	27%	8%
Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year	13	66	22
Earnings in fourteenth year (average)	\$76,400	\$203,300	\$150,400

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. As Table 1 above suggests, very few persons said that they were very dissatisfied with any aspect of their careers. Most who were not very satisfied were in the middle. All three groups were, in general, very satisfied with the intellectual challenge of their work. The government attorneys were somewhat less likely to be satisfied with their incomes, but not as much less as might be guessed given how much lower their incomes are. On the other hand, many more of the government attorneys were very satisfied with the value of their work to society than were attorneys in the other two groups. The government attorneys were somewhat more satisfied overall with their careers but the differences are not statistically significant.

Table 3
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Comparisons of Government Attorneys, Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

<u>Sector</u>	<u>Government</u>	<u>Private Practitioners</u>	<u>Corporate Counsel</u>
number of respondents	27	195	48
Proportion quite satisfied* with:			
The balance of their family life and professional life	50%	32%	27%
The intellectual challenge of their work	74	64	56
Their current income	44	52	52
The value of their work to society	70	28	21
Their careers overall	74	54	58
Percent finding current job quite stressful**	24	50	47
Percent expecting to be in same job in 5 years	70	85	65

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

**That is, categories 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 75 lawyers; those in firms of 76 to 250 lawyers; and those in firms of more than 250 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 1982 and 1983.)

Table 4
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Private Practitioners: Fifteen Years After Graduation by Size of Firm

<u>firm size</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Solo or in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers	56	29%
In firms of 11-75 lawyers	46	24
In firms of 76-250 lawyers	56	29
In firms of 251 or more lawyers	<u>38</u>	<u>19</u>
total	232	100%

As Table 4 indicates, when we combine the private practitioners in the two classes and then divide them into these groups, we find substantial numbers working in solo practices and in firms in each of the ranges of firm size.

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings for work and types of clients of the persons working in firms of these various sizes. As the table reveals -- and as no one will be surprised to learn -- the larger the firm in which a class member practices, the more likely he is to work in a very large city and to serve large corporate clients. Indeed, in general, only those in solo practice and firms of fewer than 10 spend any significant part of their time serving low and middle-income individuals. Persons who worked in the medium-sized firms (11-75 lawyers) had practices that more closely resembled those of persons in the larger firms than those of persons in the smaller firms.

Table 5
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Private Practitioners: Settings of Work and Type of Clients

<u>firm size</u>	<u>solo or less than 11</u>	<u>11-75</u>	<u>76-250</u>	<u>more than 250</u>
number of respondents	56	46	56	38
Mean number of other attorneys in firm	2	39	171	549
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	36%	15%	5%	3%
Proportion working in cities of over 1 million	44%	48%	62%	84%
Proportion of time serving large businesses	13%	45%	59%	76%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals	46%	6%	2%	1%

Although the nature of their practices varied 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, though many devote large numbers of hours and many others give few or none.

Whatever their efforts as measured by time expended, the economics of practice varied substantially by firm size. In general, as Table 6 indicates, 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.

Table 6
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Private Practitioners: Hours, Fees and Earnings

<u>firm size</u>	<u>solo or less than 11</u>	<u>11-75</u>	<u>76-250</u>	<u>more than 250</u>
number of respondents	56	46	56	38
Average weekly hours worked*	49	54	51	53
Proportion working 55+ hours weekly	28%	46%	30%	47%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities	35%	32%	16%	25%
Pro bono hours worked per year				
Average	58	49	91	62
Median	35	35	50	25
Usual hourly rate	\$173	\$195	\$233	\$289
Income from practice in 14th year	\$146,100	\$167,500	\$220,600	\$308,500
Proportion earning \$250,000 or more	10%	13%	25%	55%

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

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

Table 7
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Private Practitioners: Satisfaction

<u>firm size</u>	<u>solo or less than 11</u>	<u>11-75</u>	<u>76-250</u>	<u>more than 250</u>
number of respondents	56	46	56	38
Proportion who are quite satisfied* with:				
The balance of family and professional lives	48%	36%	23%	16%
Their control over the work they do	70	52	53	53
The intellectual challenge of their work	54	63	69	68
Their current income	43	44	55	71
The value of their work to society	37	26	30	16
Their careers overall	55	53	55	50
Percent finding current job quite stressful**	36	40	57	68
Percent expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	80	80	91	87

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

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

As grouped by firm size, only a minority of any of the groups was very 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. Unsurprisingly, the largest firm lawyers were the group most likely to express high satisfaction with their income. They were also 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 the classes of 1982 and 1983 about 29 percent of the graduates were women. During the early years of this century and continuing through 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. In the classes of 1982 and 1983, there remained differences in initial jobs between men and women but the differences were small: 75 percent of women and 86 percent of men took a first job in private practice.

Wider differences in women's and men's career paths appeared later. As Table 8 reveals, at 5 and 15 years after graduation, while women and men were alike in that at each point fewer were working in private practice than at the start of their careers, they were different in that at each point a higher proportion of women than men had left private practice. Today, 15 years after law school, about the same proportion of women and men are working in corporate counsel's offices (14 percent of women, 15 percent of men), but far more women than men work in government or public interest work (16 percent of women, 5 percent of men).

Table 8
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Work Settings of Working Women and Men

<u>gender</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
number of respondents	124	334
<u>Percent of class working in private practice:</u>		
As first job (after any clerkships)	75%	86%
5 years after graduation	62	75
15 years after graduation	42	59

A second major difference between the career patterns of women and men, even more striking relates to their responses to having children. As Table 9 reveals, nearly half (48 percent) of the women with children but only 1 percent of the men with children are working part-time or not working in the labor force at all in order to care for the children. (The greater exodus of women than men from private practice reported above is not explained by the women who have left the work force altogether. Table 8 reports the work settings only of men and women who are currently employed.)

Table 9

Classes of 1982 and 1983
Women and Men, with and without Children
Parttime Work, Fulltime Work, and Nonwork

	<u>Gender</u>		<u>Men</u>	
	<u>Children</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>
number of respondents		40	78	247
Work fulltime		85%	50%	98%
Work parttime to care for children		0	24	1
Work parttime for other reasons		10	1	0
Fulltime parent		0	24	0
Other		5	1	3

The lives of women with children and men with children differ in many respects other than simply in whether they do or do not work fulltime. They differ in the additional ways that American men and women differ in general, ways that persist even for high-earning professionals. The women with children in the classes of 1982 and 1983 are typically married to a very high earning spouse (nearly half of whom are lawyers) and virtually none are married to a homemaker. The mothers who work fulltime earn high incomes, but seem to make adjustments in their lives to permit them to work somewhat fewer hours than other women and men. In stark contrast, the men with children frequently have wives who are homemakers, and if their wives work, they typically earn much less than the men do. (The incomes of the partners of women with children were nearly four times higher, on average, than the incomes of the partners of the men with children.) Sad to say, the men with children work somewhat more hours on average than men without children, and many more hours than fulltime working women with children. On the other hand, they also earn significantly higher incomes than the women with children and than men without children.

Table 10

Classes of 1982 and 1983
Women and Men, with and without Children

<u>Gender</u>	<u>Women</u>		<u>Men</u>	
	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>
<u>Children</u>				
number of respondents	40	78	55	247
Proportion who are now married	48%	86%	39%	95%
Of those who are married, proportion				
with homemaker spouses	0%	1%	3%	38%
with attorney spouses	43%	48%	24%	15%
Income (of fulltime workers)				
all work settings	\$125,900	\$127,700	\$142,000	\$202,500
private practice only	\$159,900	\$175,600	\$160,500	\$214,000
Income of working spouses	\$117,300	\$212,000	\$58,000	\$55,800
Total Household income	\$201,000	\$288,400	\$181,300	\$251,900
Average weekly work hours (fulltime workers)	49	45	49	52

How did the differing responses to children and family affect women's and men's career satisfaction? At both five and fifteen years after law school, there are no statistically significant differences between the overall career satisfactions of women and men. Indeed, fifteen years after law school, the fulltime and parttime working women with children are slightly more satisfied with their careers overall than men without and without children and than the women without children. It appears to be the case that the women with children in our sample have worked to find settings in which they can earn a substantial income but strike a tolerable balance between work and family. This is a group of women who, for all the stresses of managing work and family, have, as a group, come as close to "having it all" as any group of working women in our society. Men with children have either made no adjustments in their careers because of children or (as hinted by their higher incomes and longer work hours) have adjusted to parenthood by concentrating on maximizing their incomes for their families.

Table 11

Classes of 1982 and 1983
Women and Men, with and without Children
Career Satisfaction

	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Women</u>		<u>Men</u>	
	<u>Children</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>yes</u>
Respondents		40	78	55	247
Proportion quite satisfied* with:					
<u>Their career overall:</u>					
Fulltime workers		56%	73%	54%	61%
Parttime workers		**	65%	**	**
<u>The balance of their family and professional life</u>					
Fulltime workers		38%	46%	28%	40%
Parttime workers		**	65%	**	**

*Responses 1 and 2 on a 7-point scale

** few or no cases in these groups