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Class of 1985 Fifteen Year Report

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THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LAW SCHOOL
A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1985
FIFTEEN YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"Law school opened up a whole new world to me which has added immeasurably to the richness of my life. I also relished and benefitted greatly from my classmates. I loved law school."

"I do not think that law schools have really figured out what they want to be. The focus on case books full of appellate decisions renders the process intellectually boring. Yet at the same time, law schools, for the most part, are aggressively impractical. Therefore, law schools are not a place that challenges students to think "great thoughts" as would a normal graduate school, yet at the same time does not actually prepare them to be practicing lawyers."

"For me, law school was pure misery. However, on balance, it was worth the suffering because I have had a wonderful career. Although I have had job frustrations, I have loved my work. I love the law and truly believe that the American legal system, with all of its real and perceived flaws, is the best legal system in the world. I also believe that to be a lawyer is not only a worthy occupation that benefits society as a whole, but is one of the most intellectually challenging areas that a person could chose."

"Billing time in 6 minute increments is no way to live."

Introduction

In the spring of 2000, the Law School mailed a survey questionnaire to the 365 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1985. Two hundred twenty-four class members responded--a response rate of 61 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 majority of the class are married, practicing in some setting, 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 1985 in 2000
 Total respondents: 224 of 365

Gender

Women	34%
Men	66

Ethnicity

Black/African-American	5%
Hispanic/Latino	4
Native American	0
Asian American	2
White/Caucasian	89

Family Status

Never married	12%
Married once, still married	75
Divorced	4
Remarried after divorce	7
Other	2

Children

None	20%
One	15
Two	38
Three	20
Four or more	7

Population of City Where Now Work

Under 100,000	12%
100,000 - 1 million	34
Over 1 million	54

Nature of Current Work

Class Members Practicing Law

Solo practitioners	3%
Partners in firms	35
Of Counsel/other status in firms	9
Counsel for business/financial institutions	11 71%
Government attorneys	10
Legal services/public interest attorneys	2
Other	1

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government executives/administrators/judges	4%
Business owners/executives	5
Law teachers or educational administrators	7 29%
Full-time parent	5
Other	9

Average Hours Worked per Week (by workers)

Less than 40	11%
40-49	33
50-59	39
60-69	12
More than 70	5

Earnings in 1999

(for persons working full-time)

Under \$50,000	4%
\$50,000-\$99,900	22
\$100,000-\$149,900	23
\$150,000-\$199,900	11
\$200,000-299,900	21
\$300,000-399,900	8
\$400,000 or more	12

Political Attitudes

Proportion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very liberal	22%
More liberal than conservative	30
Middle of the road	22
More conservative than liberal	19
Very conservative	8

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%	19%	73%
Effective as writer	3	4	93
Aggressive	28	30	42
Compulsive about work	29	31	41
Concerned about impact of their work on society	17	32	51
Honest	1	8	91
Concerned about making a lot of money	47	33	20
Compassionate	7	22	72
Self-confident	11	25	64

* 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

<u>Proportion Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>Quite Satisfied**</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>Quite Dissatisfied**</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	52%	46%	2%
Their current family life	78	20	2
The intellectual challenge of their work	68	30	2
Their income	54	41	5
The balance of their family and professional lives	34	59	7
Their career as a whole	59	39	3

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

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—52 percent strongly positive, a total of 77 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

law).

Life Since Law School

Fifteen Years After Law School in Comparison to Five Years After

For 30 years we have surveyed our graduates five and fifteen years after law school. In 1990, when we last surveyed the class of 1985, the class members were at very different stages of their careers, though in some surface ways the positions of the class as a whole remain much the same. Then, as today, the largest group of the class worked in private practice with the next largest numbers working in government and within business. But today, fewer are in private practice than then (48 percent today v. 68 percent then) and, of those who are in private practice, the great majority are, unsurprisingly, partners rather than associates. Moreover, of those working 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 1990, the median earnings of full-time working members of the class of 1995 was \$57,500. Ten years later, when we surveyed the class in 2000, the median had increased to \$150,000.

Fifteen Years After Law School: The Class as a Whole

The graduates of the class of 1985 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, 19 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. About a third of the class had held four or more.

What kinds of jobs did people hold fifteen years after graduation? As Table 1 shows, over two thirds of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. We will speak more about this group in the remaining sections. Of the 62 persons who said that they were not practicing law, 11 were business owners, executives or managers, 9 were government officials, and 14 were teaching in law schools or universities or serving as educational administrators. Another 10 were full-time parents. The diversity of the nonpractitioners' experiences makes it difficult to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible: the nonpractitioners were, on average, more satisfied with their careers overall than the practitioners.

The Practitioners

Of those members of the class of 1985 who were practicing law in any setting in 2000, two thirds 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 1984 and 1985. (The class of 1984 was surveyed in 1999 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1985.) 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.)

Nine percent of the respondents in the combined classes--31 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.

Fourteen percent of the combined classes--50 persons in all--worked in corporate counsels' offices. Slightly more than half of this group worked for Fortune 500 companies or for large financial institutions. The great majority (86 percent) of those working in corporate counsels' offices had previously worked for at least some time in a private firm.

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, nearly as long hours as those in private practice or corporate counsel's office but earned much less. In fact, those working in government settings averaged less than 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 1984 and 1985
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> N=27	Private <u>Practitioners</u> N=195	Corporate <u>Counsel</u> N=48
Mean work hours per week of full time workers	48	51	49
Proportion who average over 55 hours per week (among full time workers)	19%	37%	21%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities(mean)	27%	27%	19%
Total pro bono hours worked in preceding year (mean)	9	77	14
Earnings in preceding calendar yr of full time workers(mean)	\$84,100	\$232,600	\$183,800

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 a 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 were not very satisfied were in the middle. The government attorneys were much less likely than others to be satisfied with their incomes. On the other hand, many more of the government attorneys were very satisfied with the value of their work to society and somewhat more were very satisfied with their careers overall. Those working as corporate counsel's offices were somewhat less satisfied overall with their careers.

Table 3
 Classes of 1984 and 1985
Comparisons of Government Attorneys,
Private Practitioners, and Corporate Counsel

	<u>Government</u> <u>Attorneys</u> N=27	<u>Private</u> <u>Practitioners</u> N=195	<u>Corporate</u> <u>Counsel</u> N=48
Proportion of group who are quite satisfied* with: _____			
The balance of their family life and professional life	40%	25%	42%
The intellectual challenge of their work	74%	70%	45%
Their current income	32%	61%	58%
The value of their work to society	68%	30%	19%
Their careers overall	67%	53%	45%
Percent finding current job quite stressful**	4%	11%	7%
Percent expecting to be in same job in 5 years	63%	81%	67%
Percent strongly agree that they would attend law school again**	43%	39%	29%

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

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

Classmembers 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 1984 and 1985.)

Table 4
Classes of 1984 and 1985
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	47	27%
In firms of 11-75 lawyers	35	21
In firms of 76-250 lawyers	35	21
In firms of 251 or more lawyers	<u>57</u>	<u>31</u>
	170	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 various sizes. As the table reveals -- and as no one will be surprised to learn -- the larger the firm in which a classmember 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 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioners
Settings of Work and Type of Clients

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=47	Firms of 11-75 N=35	Firms of 76-250 N=35	Firms of more than more than 250 N=57
Mean number of other attorneys in same firm	3	37	162	527
Percent who have worked in more than one firm	81%	77%	48%	41%
Percent working in cities of over 1 million	50%	55%	65%	76%
Percent of time serving large businesses (mean)	25%	57%	64%	71%
Percent of time serving low or middle income individuals (mean)	28%	5%	6%	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. Those in solo practice and the smallest firms performed the most pro bono work.

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.

Table 6
Classes of 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioners
Hours, Fees and Earnings

	<u>Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer</u> N=47	<u>Firms of 11-75</u> N=35	<u>Firms of 76-250</u> N=35	<u>Firms of more than 250</u> N=57
Mean number of hours worked each week*	50	48	50	51
Proportion who regularly average 55+ hr. work wks	33%	24%	29%	41%
Proportion of time spent on litigation activities (mean)	27%	29%	26%	25%
Pro bono hours worked per year				
Mean	98	63	60	86
Median	60	20	30	43
Usual hourly rate (mean)	\$193	\$218	\$247	\$325
Income from practice in fifteenth year (mean)	\$161,800	\$188,600	\$212,300	\$293,300
Proportion who earned \$300,000 or more	10%	13%	25%	55%

*Instructions were to count all work, 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 1984 and 1985
Private Practitioner
Satisfaction

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=47	Firms of 11-75 N=35	Firms of 76-250 N=35	Firms of more than 250 N=57
Percentage who are <u>quite satisfied*</u> with:				
The balance of family and professional lives	33%	29%	23%	17%
The control over the work they do	72%	54%	61%	44%
The intellectual challenge of work	63%	66%	73%	74%
Their current income	49%	51%	77%	66%
The value of their work to society	45%	20%	18%	31%
Their careers overall	53%	46%	47%	59%
Percentage finding current job quite stressful**	7%	17%	3%	14%
Percent expecting to be in same firm in 5 years	81%	71%	89%	83%
Percent who strongly agree that they would attend law school again*	40%	43%	26%	42%

*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 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. Unsurprising, those in the large or very large firms were more likely to express high satisfaction with their income. As to career satisfaction overall, those in firms of 11-250 lawyers were somewhat less likely to express high satisfaction than were the lawyers in either the smaller or larger firms.

The Accelerating Exodus of Men From Private Practice

The great majority of Michigan graduates, both women and men, begin their professional careers in a private law firm. Gradually, over the years that follow, many leave firms to join corporate counsel's offices or to become businesspersons. A few enter teaching or become government administrators. This pattern has been observed in our surveys for many years. It is also the case that, among those who begin their careers in private practice, more women than men have left for other settings by the time of the five year survey and by the time of the fifteen year survey. The new trend we are now observing is that, by the fifteen year point, men are leaving private practice in as large numbers as the women. The pattern is displayed in Table 8.

Table 8
Classes of 1972-1985
Percentage of Working Classmembers
in Solo Practice or a Private Firm
Fifteen Years After Graduation

Year of Graduation	Year Surveyed	Women	Men
Classes of 1972-1975	1987-1990	43%	67%
Classes of 1976-1977	1991-1992	45%	66%
Classes of 1978-1979	1993-1994	46%	67%
Classes of 1980-1981	1995-1996	47%	64%
Classes of 1982-1983	1997-1998	40%	60%
Classes of 1984-1985	1999-2000	47%	47%

As Table 8 displays, the proportion of women in private practice fifteen years after graduation has remained remarkably steady over the years of our surveys – a percentage in the mid-forty percents. For a long time, there was a similar consistency among men – the percentage still in private practice always in the mid-sixty percents. In the last four classes we have surveyed, however, the proportion of men in private practice has been dropping and, for the classes of 1984 and 1985, it has declined to 47 percent, exactly the same proportion as for women.

To what settings are the male graduates going in larger numbers than in the past? The largest increase has been in the increased proportion of men shifting to work in corporate counsel's offices or shifting to work in business as businesspersons.

Exactly why men are leaving private practice in larger numbers than before is not fully certain. Career satisfaction of men in private practice has declined over the years, but is no lower in the most recent surveys than it had been for several preceding surveys. Perhaps during the

time of the most recent surveys more men were simply willing to act on their dissatisfaction (in ways that women have been doing for many years). Perhaps also in the classes surveyed in the years immediately prior to September 11, 2001, there were attractive opportunities for shifting careers into business that hadn't been as available before. Whatever the reason, we will be watching the surveys conducted in after 2000 to see whether the pattern continues. Is it really a trend or was it just a momentary blip.