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Class of 1977 Five Year Report

University of Michigan Law School

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University of Michigan Law School
 Alumni Survey
 Summary of Findings
 Class of 1977

In the fall of 1982, the law school mailed a survey to the 371 persons who graduated from the law school in calendar year 1977 and for whom we had current addresses in the United States. Two hundred and sixty persons, or 68%, completed and returned the questionnaire, a high return rate for mailed surveys, although well below the 75% average return rate for the other ten classes sent questionnaires 5 years after graduation.

Here then is a brief report of our findings. We begin with a few tables that provide a profile of the class five years after graduation, and follow with some additional explanatory text. We end with a compendium of the comments class members wrote in response to an openended question on the survey asking for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever."

As you will see, five years after law school most of the class is married, practicing law in private settings, living prosperously, contented with their personal lives and careers. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Although most class members have been married once and remain married, one in every eleven has been divorced at least once. Similarly, though most class members work in private practice or in corporate counsel's offices, a fifth of the class either is not practicing at all or is practicing for the government or other nonprofit entity.

A Profile of the Class of 1977 in 1982

Total Respondents: 261 of 383

<u>Family Status</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Never Married	31%
Married Once, Still Married	60
Divorced	6
Remarried After Divorce	3
Other	<u>1</u>
	100%

<u>Children</u>	
None	62%
One	22
Two	13
Three or More	<u>3</u>
	100%

<u>Nature of Work</u>	
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>	
Solo Practitioner	4%
Partner in Firm	13
Associate in Firm	48
Counsel for Business or Financial Institution	14
Legal Services	3
Government	7
Other	<u>1</u>
	90%

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government Executive	1%
Business Owner, Manager, Supervisor	2
Teacher	2
Other	5
	<u>10%</u>

Earnings in Fifth Year

Under \$20,000	7%
\$20,000-30,000	10
30,000-40,000	34
40,000-50,000	25
50,000-60,000	18
Over \$60,000	6
	<u>100%</u>

Life Satisfaction*

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>In the Middle</u>	<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>
Their Legal Education at Michigan	40%	54%	6%
Their Current Family Life	72	25	3
Their Career as a Whole	47	52	1
The Intellectual Challenge of Their Work	60	39	1
Their Ability to Solve Problems for Clients	68	31	1
Their Income	52	44	4
The Balance of Their Family and Professional Life	40	53	7

Politics

Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:

Very Liberal	28%
Somewhat More Liberal than Conservative	22
Middle of the Road	20
Somewhat More Conservative than Liberal	23
Very Conservative	6
	<u>100%</u>

Vote in 1980 Presidential Election

Anderson	17%
Carter	44
Reagan	29
None or Other	10
	<u>100%</u>

*Questions asked on a seven-point scale. We have grouped responses 1 and 2 as "very satisfied," 3-5 as "in the middle" and 6 and 7 as "very dissatisfied".

Attitudes on a Few Issues

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Neither Favor Nor Disfavor</u>	<u>Disfavor</u>
Reducing Federal Regulation Intended to Protect Environment	21%	12%	67%
Passage of Federal ERA	70	14	16
Increase Funds for Legal Services Corporation	60	17	23
Mandatory <u>Pro Bono</u> work for Lawyers	25	17	58

More Information on the Class of 1977

Life Before Law School

About 24 percent of the class of 1977 were women and 10 percent were Black, Hispanic, or Native American. About 45% of the class members grew up in Michigan, another 25% in other Great Lakes States, and 20% from the Northeast. Most of the class was from the Middle West and had lived in small towns or cities. A majority of class members grew up in communities of less than 100,000 population, but a quarter in communities of over one million. Ten percent had a lawyer father and none had a lawyer mother. Almost 60% went directly from undergraduate school to law school. Thirty-seven percent had employment in the interim and 17% had some graduate school.

Three-quarters of the class had never been married when they began law school, and nearly all the rest were married for the first time. Only 5% had any children. Over three-quarters retained the same marital status during law school, with nearly all those who changed status getting married for the first time. Only 8% of respondents had any additional children while in law school.

The Law School Experience

Nearly half of the class began law school with no well-formed long-term career plans. The most common plan remembered was working in a large law firm—one-sixth of the class had this initial expectation. The major changes in long-term career plans during law school were a substantial reduction in the proportion who had no plans, and a substantial increase in the proportion planning to work for a large law firm, although the changes were much more complex at an individual level—more than half had changed career plans during law school.

Most respondents relied primarily on their families for financial support during law school, receiving over half of total support from that source; employment was a distant second, at about 23% of total support, and law school loans and grants third at 12%. Only half of the respondents had employment at any time during law school, though the proportions and hours involved increased from the first to the third year, and most of this employment was not law-related. For those who did have employment, the average weekly number of hours employed varied from 12 to 17.

Over half of the class of 1977 indicated they were satisfied with their law school experience, intellectually, as career training, and overall, with most of those indicating modest degrees of satisfaction. Less than 20% indicated dissatisfaction on any of these aspects. The highest levels of satisfaction were found among those who were most satisfied with their careers and those who had higher law school grade-point averages.

Respondents from the class of 1977 recommended changes in the law school curriculum primarily in terms of increasing course offerings in "skills" areas such as negotiation clinical law practice, trial techniques, legal writing, interviewing, counselling, discovery, legal research, and office administration. Among "substantive" courses, only two areas—banking and corporate and commercial—had even 10% of respondents recommending increases.

Life Since Law School

Geographic relocation since law school graduation has resulted in a decrease in the proportion of the members of the Class of 1977 (compared to parent's residence at law school entry) living in Michigan and other Great Lakes States, and increases in the proportions on the Pacific Coast and the District of Columbia. Only one-quarter of respondents now live or work in the same communities in which they grew up and less than half in the same region of the country.

Three-fifths of respondents in the Class of 1977 have married once and remain in that first marriage. Another 3% remarried after a divorce, 31% never married, 6% divorced. Sixty-five percent of respondents have the same marital status as when they left law school, and 25% went from never married to a first marriage, and the remaining 10% had experienced a divorce since law school. Respondents averaged less than one child (60% had none, 23% one, 14% two, and 3% three or more, nearly all born since law school.

A high level of satisfaction with family life was indicated by 72% of respondents in the class of 1977, with the highest levels among married persons, senior partners in law firms, and managers in non-firm settings.

Only 33% of respondents in the class of 1977 were still in the first job they took after law school; the average number of jobs since law school was 1.8. Thirteen percent had had three or more legal jobs. Most job-changing seems to have taken place in the early part of these respondent's careers; since over 60% have now spent more than half their careers in their current jobs. About one-third of respondents had spent at least some time since law school in law practice other than private practice.

Ninety percent of respondents in the class of 1977 are now lawyers, with only a few percent being judges, government officials, business owners or executives, or teachers.

Among the lawyers, 73% worked in law firms, 12% in business enterprises, 9% in government. Of those in law firms, 6% were solo practitioners, 20% were partners, and 72% associates. Less than half of those in business and government were managers.

The typical law firm in which respondents from the class of 1977 worked had 25 attorneys, 5 legal assistants, and 20 nonlegal staff, although the range was great. One-third of firm respondents were in firms with over 50 other attorneys.

The average lawyer respondent in the class of 1977 reported working the equivalent of a 52-week, 42 hours per week year. The activities on which this time was spent varied widely among individuals, with drafting legal documents and client counseling being the only activities on which the average respondent spent more than 10% of his or her time. Similarly, substantive specialities were widely varied. If a "specialty" is defined by spending more than 25% of one's time on a substantive area,

58% of respondents had one specialty, 33% two, 3% three, and 5% had none. The most common specialties were corporate and commercial law (36% of respondents), torts and personal injury (15%), and real property (11%).

As to clientele, respondents in the class of 1977 averaged 25% of their time on work for individuals, 20% for small businesses, 37% for larger businesses, 17% for government and other organizations. Despite UM Law School's image as a producer of lawyers for large firms serving large corporations, 41% of respondents spent a majority of their time serving individuals and small businesses.

Earnings from principal occupation reported by members of the class of 1977 averaged \$18,400 in the first year after law school, and \$41,300 in the fifth year. (In 1982 inflation-adjusted dollars, the first year amount was \$27,100.) In 1982, only 17% of the class of 1977 had incomes below \$25,000, 59% in the \$25,-50,000 range, and 24% from \$50,000 and \$100,000. Lawyers tended to earn about 10% more than nonlawyers, solo practitioners and firm partners more than others, persons in larger cities more than those in smaller, those in larger offices more than those in smaller.

The majority of respondents were satisfied with their career overall and with the balance of family and professional life, income, ability to solve problems for specific clients, intellectual challenge, prestige in the community. There was one area of dissatisfaction: only 13% were highly satisfied with their ability to bring about social change. Overall, 72% of respondents were satisfied with their careers, and only 4% dissatisfied. Lowest levels of satisfaction were associated with low incomes, associate status in a firm or nonsupervisory status elsewhere, and being unmarried. The six aspects of career satisfaction appear to make fairly equal contributions to overall satisfaction, with intellectual challenge and prestige having somewhat more weight than the others.