Class of 1980 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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I am very happy with the work I do and my life in general. I am able to do the work I do because I am an attorney, even though much of what I do is not legal work per se.

I did not like law school. This was due, in part, to my own immaturity. If I had it to do over again I do not know whether I would attend law school.

I think the Law School should be interested in a questionnaire for those alumni who leave the practice of law after several years -- their experiences in the practice and why they left, how their income and other circumstances were affected, etc.

I greatly value my Michigan experience. Although I do not believe a law school should completely abstract itself from practical aspects of the practice of law, I believe it should resist simply giving in to pressures for more and more clinical/practical work. It seems to me that success as a lawyer, particularly in novel situations, depends far more on creative thought processes (plus a knowledge of legal theories and underlying policy bases) than it does on the technical knowledge of practice rules, etc.

I found law school to be extremely unpleasant, but legal practice to be extremely satisfying and rewarding and enjoyable.

The U. of Michigan Law School, when I attended, was dominated by upper and upper middle class students who placed a high emphasis on social status. I was totally alienated from most of my classmates. As I was a small town middle-middle class midwesterner, the socratic method did nothing for me in terms of intellectual stimulation or as a tool for learning.

Law practice in a midwestern city of over one million people has been immensely satisfying, as I have found a niche in a hard working private firm with big litigation matters and no emphasis on social prestige or posturing.

I feel it should be stressed to U. of Michigan law students that despite the inevitable socialization which occurs, they should look for work which matches the type of person they were before they came. Also it should be stressed that for those who dislike law school, the practice of law is extremely different and they may actually be more attuned to law practice than their classmates who enjoy law school - they should not get too discouraged and should be persistent and determined, two
qualities which seem essential in private practice.

One of the insoluble problems with law school life is that law students don’t realize that what they’re doing is really not all that important. Law students take school too seriously when it really doesn’t mean that much at all. It’s just another step along the way, and nothing more.

LAW SCHOOL IS NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT!!!

After working fulltime for ten years (4 years before going to law school, part-time during law school, and fulltime for 5 years after law school) I have recently moved due to my husband’s transfer to another office of his law firm. Having a six month old and a 2 year old, I have chosen not to commit myself to outside employment yet at this time. It is extremely difficult to orient myself to my new role as fulltime mother and not have the intellectual and financial rewards of outside legal employment. However, I would not sacrifice these early years with my children for the sake of a few more "career years"—especially when there will be so many more years left to practice law. It is frustrating that society seems to fail to recognize the career-oriented mother and that the male-dominated law firms are still so backward in utilizing my skills on a part-time basis.

I feel rather strongly that an effort should be made to find and expose students to meaningful alternatives to traditional private practice. Hastings, in California, seems to make a real effort to present forums on public interest law, non-legal jobs for J.D.'s, they have an excellent advocacy program. Michigan is a wonderful school, but many of the extra-curricular offerings were academic/intellectual, which is fine and proper, but not everyone at Michigan fits into those two categories. I didn’t know what was in the legal community except teaching or private practice and I wish I had been exposed to those other options.

I have found more fulfillment in being a facilitator through my work than being a competitor.

Although I did learn some valuable things in law school I could have better spent the time and $ in an MBA program—either personnel or training. I find that work far more interesting than the law.

Reverse discrimination in employer hiring practices has resulted in unqualified co-workers, who should not be allowed to practice (and wouldn’t be if they were white males) law without further training.

I believe I received outstanding training at U of M Law School in "thinking like a lawyer"—e.g. analyzing problems, reading cases, etc. I (mostly) enjoyed law school and I have loved
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working as a lawyer in a variety of areas. I feel strongly that having substantial (non-legal) work experience before attending law school (I started law school 9 years after college graduation) has been very positive for my legal career. It has been my experience that the practice of law draws upon life experiences as well as academic legal training, and because of this, I recommend a period of other employment prior to attending law school. I am grateful to the Law School for the high quality of education I received, and since graduation have never regretted my choice of this profession.

Michigan Law School was a good place for me, both educationally and socially. Comparing experiences with graduates of other law schools, particularly Harvard, it has become clear that professor/student relations at Michigan are relatively superb.

Since law school certain professors, notably J.J. White and Peter Westen, have been helpful to me at times of professional changes.

On the down side, the Law School does not provide many good insights into the realities of practice. An inordinate amount of controversies are settled due to litigant wealth. Most lawyers take every available chance to abuse discovery. Courts are usually lenient or even if they aren’t, it takes forever to get a hearing. The issues are usually lost in a forest of procedural maneuvering.

On the monetary side, partners and clients are much more concerned about cost than I ever dreamed. This is of course because I make more money than I ever dreamed I would. Lawyers’ fees are too high and lawyers are too greedy. Many problems arise because lawyers fear to reveal honest ignorance or past mistakes.

These things matter and ought to be taught somehow. They can make one’s life miserable.

The most difficult "life" issue for me has been the balancing of my professional and family life. Quite simply, it is virtually impossible to work in a large litigation firm in a major city and devote any sufficient time to one’s wife, children, etc. My choice was to take an in-house legal position. I would be interested in knowing how others have dealt with this dilemma.

Law school should have focused more on (1) the actual lifestyle and day-to-day activities of lawyering, (2) litigation strategy (in civil procedure), (3) should have included first-year instruction on what professors are looking for in exams and how to take them.

Law school was fine but there are some things one can only learn by experience. 1st year students should be encouraged to clerk.
Not a day passes that I am not grateful for the fabulous education I received at Michigan. The faculty was seriously committed to law as an intellectual discipline and to education, which made the experience tremendously stimulating and rewarding. Thank you.

Law schools tend to be diploma mills for big corporations, etc. Michigan is less so than most, and I'm glad I attended. However, I am very concerned about the supportive or at least supine position of the legal profession with regard to the gutting of welfare (e.g., absence of ethical standards), and general crassness of American society in the Age of Reagan. I'm just now able to overcome some of the tunnel vision inculcated into attorneys, and I feel more should be done to foster a broad perspective and social consciousness. The hour is very late, yet short-term greed controls--a situation which will, in all probability, have disastrous results very soon.

I object to the question regarding the legal services corporation since I do not feel that increased funding will be used to provide increased legal services to the poor. It is more likely to be used in the bringing of generic cases for ideological purposes. If increased funding would result in improved legal services for poor people, I would support it.

I feel that Michigan provided me with a good theoretical and conceptual legal education but not a good practical legal education. I have received a good practical legal education in my current job, nonetheless and am not convinced that it is possible for a law school to provide that type of education. Therefore, I am very satisfied with the education I received at Michigan.

Legal practice was a real relief for me. I was a "nontraditional" law student--female, a little older than average, married, with an infant. I felt throughout law school that I didn't belong. In the "real world" I'm a damn good lawyer and that is all that counts. Due to the excellence of my work product I was readily accepted by peers and clients. There must be some way to make the law school experience more positive for the nontraditional students. Law school should build confidence because confidence leads to superior performance for legal work.

I moved from Colorado to Nevada in 1985 at the request of my boy friend (ostensibly we were to get married) and had to sustain a large drop in income in relocating to a state without reciprocity and having to take the bar exam over again. I suspect this has caused my answers to be somewhat more negative than they otherwise would have been although I enjoy my new firm very much.
It has certainly caused a drastic change in the types of cases I work on and an increase in the time I spend in court although I still do basically litigation. (A previous job change caused a similar but not quite as drastic shift).

No one promised that law school would be fun. Unfortunately, I believe that the faculty turns off many promising lawyers with their arrogance. It's one thing to teach students to think like lawyers (a good thing), it's another to discourage or inspire resentment that consumes the student's energies and takes away from the opportunity to learn. I believe that much more could be accomplished in an atmosphere of mutual respect and interest in the subject matter.

More than any other single thing, I think law school measures and trains one's endurance and tolerance for long hours of work and concentration. Work and stress more than substantive areas of law seems to be the greatest overlap between law school and practice.

The substantive law and "tricks of the trade" are more meaningful and efficiently learned on the job (at least for me). I wouldn't have it any other way. I was not pursuing a vocational training at the law school, and feel more fulfilled and rounded because my education was not oriented to be "vocational" in the stricter sense of the word.

I miss the luxury of being able to reflect on and study the law for itself rather than as means to my clients' (and my own financial) ends.

I resent the materialism and economic motivation of practice and life (notwithstanding the banality of this thought). And I resent the professional rewards paid to "work-aholism." (I cannot suggest how these gripes can be remedied on a societal level.)

Although I did very well in Law School, I found law school very distasteful. The style of teaching puts enormous pressure on students and is often demeaning to students. My first year in law school was the most unenjoyable time in school I have had. However, I do enjoy practicing as a lawyer. Finding answers and giving advice to clients is satisfying. Work is generally much less stressful although at times it is stressful. The most stressful part is trying to keep billable hours up while still trying to keep current on new legal development and do promotional work.

My personal feeling is that "The Law," its practice and its practitioners fall woefully short of their potential to make a meaningful contribution to any real concept of justice. I once heard a widely-heralded practitioner say that "Justice is
whatever you get," essentially that "justice" is the label attached to the product of the legal system. Frankly, that seems to be true. This profession is a business, much like any other. Abstract notions of "good" or "right" have little to do with it. The profession is dominated by white, male, upper-middle-class, middle-aged people who are much like the people who run America as a whole. Their primary considerations are profit and winning and all the high-sounding rhetoric, ethical considerations, etc. simply serve to put a gloss of civility on it all. As a non-white who (apparently) has not yet been entirely seduced, it is distressing to see the extent to which my fellow barristers are the champions of America's headlong march back to social darwinism. In a "us-them" world, minorities are perpetually at risk. Too often, I find this profession distressing and/or disgusting (and myself the more so for seeming to have a knack for functioning in this system). I rather expect that I will soon leave the profession, or lose all semblance of self-esteem. So what do you think?

Law School: Michigan must do something about its writing program. I was totally unprepared for the stringent requirements of a large practice. My first two projects were awful. The only reason I am a relatively good writer now is that one of my partners spent a great deal of time training me. He could have just given up, in which case I probably would have been encouraged to work elsewhere and never would have learned how to write in a coherent, persuasive manner.

I would blame my rural upbringing (Marquette, MI) for my poor writing skills or my own tendency for verbosity, but the problem was apparent in other Michigan "grads" who have worked for me. Three relatively recent graduates were advised to look elsewhere - one had particularly bad writing skills. All three of these individuals had poor analytical skills as well. I really hate to say this but I have been much more impressed with the abilities of our associates from Ohio State of all places.

Life: I have balanced my family and career relatively well. I do work too hard but my husband is very supportive so we survive. I also have great kids. I think that employers in all areas, law firms, corporations, government, etc. must give reasonable pregnancy leaves. I had to fight for mine. I also think that part-time positions should be offered where appropriate. Three attorneys have had children (other than myself) since we established our leave policy. All three have left the firm because they could not work the requisite number of hours and handle their families. At least two of the women were excellent lawyers. It is unfortunate that alternatives were not made available to them.

I do not experience a great degree of sexism in my practice. Most of my clients are far more concerned about the quality of my
services than my sex. I have, in fact, actively tried to create old girl networks with female lawyers at some of my larger clients.

I hope that Michigan will keep its fine reputation and will make more efforts to assure that the graduates live up to that reputation. I have found the "failure" of our recent graduates at our firm to be personally embarrassing. I tried to help but obviously I could only do so much.

Law and its rules are dehumanizing. Law School, because of its emphasis on a limited range of human talent, is also dehumanizing. Faculty members who have thrived in that limited range owe students a special responsibility to recognize the breadth of human values. Spend more time with students, make an impression of accessibility, remind students that life and success are not measured by grades. The law school atmosphere, as well as that of the legal community, will be healthier for it.

I firmly believe the Law School should strive to hire faculty on the basis of their ability to teach and deal with students -- and not the ability to publish "ivory tower" articles.

I spent my first 3 years at Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher in LA, LA's second largest firm.

Once I decided to become a litigator, I applied and was accepted as an Asst US Attorney in LA. The trial experience has been great. After another couple of years in government, I plan to return to private practice.

Although I left the practice of law in 1984, UMLS was an invaluable part of my broader education. I did not decide to go to law school to become a lawyer; I did not practice law with a view to practicing all my life. I sought from each experience exposure to challenging individuals and an intellectual, ethical framework. My time at UMLS, in retrospect, provided a tremendous foundation for grappling with the subtleties and complexities of life in the "real world." I find that my life now requires, in no particular order, the following qualities: an ability to orchestrate very complex events skillfully, a high tolerance for ambiguity, an ability to seek business opportunities where they are not readily apparent, an ability to foresee alternative paths of action as events unfold, and an ability to anticipate solutions--mutually acceptable compromises--to likely problems. In all of these areas, I credit the UMLS with a substantial contribution to my capacities.

U-M Law School's diversity of students -- age, nationality, race, sex and class was its strongest asset. I came from a low-middle class urban background and found the experience of meeting the upper-class views and ideals invaluable. Please do not ignore
the importance of the "rabble rouser" to your curriculum. The academic training was excellent, the intellectual stimulation exciting -- too bad it doesn't last past law school.

The practice of law is very stressful and requires social skills as well as intellectual skills. Though Michigan prepared me very well intellectually, it did not prepare me to face the pressures or social requirements of practice.

Perhaps I should have been clued in by the fact that the graduation address by Dean Sandalow was on "intellectual autonomy" rather than intellectual integrity or by the fact that the vast majority of my fellow students appeared to care little for anything other than their own academic standing (to the point of removing hornbooks from the library at exam time) and the fact that most of my professors had no interest in doing a good job of teaching (and hence deserving their salary and position), but I was completely unprepared for the reality of law practice. I thought bribing judges was the exception, not the rule; that someone without the "right" political connections or of the "wrong" ethnic background or profession could get fair treatment from the courts and their officers; and that there was actually something which existed by the name of "justice" and "ethics." Instead, I find graduates of the finest law schools (including Michigan) who lie, cheat and, essentially, steal from their clients and bar associations who look the other way. No wonder no course on "professional ethics" was required at Michigan--you simply have no interest in destroying that term's current status as an oxymoron.

U of M Law School was the worst school I've ever attended. Class size, lack of preparation by many professors, lack of opportunity for students to participate due to class size and type of assignments (e.g. - only reading casebooks) reflect an indifference to or lack of awareness of the needs of the students. The socratic method as described in Plato's Republic certainly did not involve discourse among a hundred.

Lawyering is fun; law school was a miserable waste of time for many of the hours spent in class.

The language of the law and the language of law practice are divorced from the realities of the lives most of us lead. With the exception of criminal and divorce law, it seems that the subjects of love, sex, power, hopes, desires, religious feelings, knowledge of and contact with other societies, cultures and histories, are strangers to the language a lawyer uses in daily practice. The fear I have is that the extraordinarily narrow use of the American-English language which lawyers employ will, after a time, limit the lawyer's view of the world and him/herself as well. (I do not mean only to complain about the legal formalisms such as "enclosed herewith" and "pursuant to our conversation."
These are merely symptomatic trade terms which are the more obvious markings of a detachment from the emotional lives which may be placed further and further away from our consciousnesses.) If day in and day out we do not articulate our thoughts, feelings, and reactions about the things which underlie our lives, we may well be in the process of excising those issues from our lives altogether. Will the artificial and quite limited use of language by lawyers in their daily work cause them to lose a sensitivity and perspective on the more meaningful aspects of the world in which they live? I am beginning to fear that the stilted and artificial use of language in our profession may be limiting our hearts and minds as well.

After practicing law for 3 years, I went into consulting in my specialty. I find it much more rewarding for me; I enjoy the variety of individuals with different backgrounds and the opportunity to work with clients in a variety of aspects of a project—not just on the legal side.

My experience in private practice (3 years) gave me a good, in-depth knowledge of my specialty (employee benefits) from a legal perspective. I found, though, that the experience was not well-rounded. Other friends in legal practice have expressed this same concern to me.

My recommendation would be to expand interdisciplinary learning and experiences. This would include informing law students of the wide variety of opportunities open to them, beyond the need to "make partner in a large corporate law firm." The kind of intellectual training you receive in law school is a great background for many occupations and pursuits.

In the long-running debate on whether our law schools should emphasize practical, skills-oriented teaching versus more reflective, "academic" pursuits, Michigan has always been on the "academic" side. I support this approach, although I believe some "practical" exposure in law school should be required. Having ingrained the contemplative, analytical approach learned at Michigan has improved my absorption and development of the practical side of the law. Nuts and bolts training in law school should not be separated from the academic. For example, a clinic on cross-examination should require cross-examination about some substantive theory. It's empty and useless unless it conveys clear thought and cogent analysis. The Law School is best equipped to thoroughly explore the academic. It should open the door to the practical side, without altering its primary focus.

My experience has been that the intellectually-oriented curriculum at Michigan and its emphasis on so-called "thinking like a lawyer" to the exclusion of teaching specific skills has stood up well to the demands of practice. Specific skills like drafting and negotiation have been easy enough to learn as I have
gone along, but there is not time within the confines of an active practice to teach someone to analyze or to focus on the significant. These skills are best taught in law school and Michigan did a fine job. Michigan should not jump on the bandwagon of clinical legal education.

I can't say whether your survey will reflect my own informal survey of lawyers from the U-M class of 1980 (or other schools, for that matter), but most of them (65% or so) want to do something else -- or anything else.

I will preface my remarks by saying that I had a difficult decision to make between pursuing a law degree and pursuing a Ph.D. I opted for the law degree with misgivings. Those misgivings continued and increased during my law school career. I nearly quit with only one semester left for my degree. In retrospect I would not go to law school if given the choice again.

Our present legal system does not function well. It does an inadequate job of establishing rights, and the rights that are established are inadequately protected. The system is inefficient and expensive. I am not particularly proud to be part of the system.

Many of the attitudes taken by the organized bar, and many of the attitudes of individual attorneys I have encountered, are offensive to me. Stands that are taken in the name of "protecting the public" are all too often easily translatable to "protecting the pocketbooks." This is, however, not all the fault of the law or lawyers. I think it is essential for the continued growth of our society that we reassess and fundamentally restructure our educational system to instill more humane values in our citizens. We must teach people to ask "How are we going to get along?" instead of "How am I going to get ahead?" We need to change the emphasis, prevalent in our legal system, from being combative or confrontive to being cooperative. A lawyer is urged to be an advocate for a position, and s/he is judged by the success in winning that position. The lawyer and the law schools could shift their focus from advocacy to harmony. Michigan Law School, as a leader in legal education and a supplier of leaders for society, should take an active role in reevaluating the role of the lawyer in our society.

When I entered law school, I was very happy to be able to attend U of M but I didn't think my law school would be important to other people once I found my first job. It has been a surprise to me how impressed others continue to be with a U of M law degree and the respect afforded based upon it. The more years I practice, the more I appreciate the opportunity I had to attend U of M Law School and the education I received. I also enjoy and appreciate the continued friendship of my classmates around the
Combining professional and family lives has proven to be far more difficult than I had anticipated while attending law school. The law firms for whom I have worked have been most accommodating. However, the practice of sophisticated commercial law is itself unsuitable to what I envisioned as being a "normal family life." I am doubtful that any law school curriculum could successfully address this problem.

I found law school to have been a generally unsatisfactory experience. Perhaps "disappointing" would be a more accurate description. Having graduated with a double major in History and Philosophy from U-M, I found law school to have been intellectually disappointing. Many of the professors taught in a manner more suited to nursery school or perhaps a school for insomniacs. Rather than being good lawyers, many of the professors were "good" law students. In other words, they were the kind of students that can get an "A" on an exam by regurgitating what the professor has taught, but one who wouldn't last 5 minutes in a courtroom, a real life courtroom, that is. They rewarded stale thinking and punished students attempting to break such molds. Of course there were exceptions--Janet Tooley was one hell of an advocate. Yale Kamisar was often brilliant. Joe Vining was one of the most intelligent men that I have ever met. Unfortunately these were the exceptions.

Also, I found that many of my law school classmates had no social conscience. All they cared about, all they were obsessed with, was making "Law Review," being hired by some gigantic big city defense firm, making a lot of money and finally "making partner." So many arrived at U-M Law School, the sons and daughters of the wealthy, the socio-economically upwardly mobile. Few had ever worked other than as a bourgeois past-time. Few had ever lived or worked with the poor, with the lower middle class, the working class, whose labor makes America run. This, apparently, is no more true of U-M than other law schools, as evidenced by my present colleagues.

Suggestions: (1) Hire experienced trial lawyers to teach classes such as Evidence, Civil Procedure, Torts, Contracts, etc. (2) Do away with the LSAT as a gauge for admission, relying instead upon GPA, interviews and essay examination testing an individual's ability to think logically, spot issues, support their positions and test their fund of general knowledge, including literature, history and so forth. (3) Change law school exams so that outlines, nutshells, etc. will be of little or no value.

Before closing, I should say that some of the nicest persons that I met at U-M Law School included Deans Eklund and Martindale. I found both of them to be helpful, concerned and sincere.
Most lawyers I know look back on their law school experience as a nightmare. I had a great time in law school despite the volume of work. Currently, I am a trial lawyer with a medium sized firm engaged in labor law. I also teach part-time at a local law school and I try to impart some of my good memories to the students. I especially enjoyed writing for the Journal of Law Reform and I still subscribe.

Marriages among law students have proven remarkably unsuccessful, based on the number of divorces I have heard of in the last two years.

Before I began law school, I was not sure I wanted to be a lawyer. I was counselled by more than one person that law was "a good, general degree." I decided--after much thought--not to practice law. So far, my degree has been of marginal, if any, use. My guess is that it will become more useful as I move on and get more experience in a career. But the degree did not seem worth much to employers as I looked for those first jobs out of school. As an aside, I felt it was useful, as sort of a "real world" lesson in how organizations and power work. But I am the child of an academic and I went straight through school. It also has helped the way I approach problems. I did learn to "think like a lawyer."

I wish I had known more about the practice of law and about other jobs for someone with a law degree. I’m not sure if that should be the responsibility of the law school--but so many graduates end up not practicing law after a few years, it would be useful to have a "career" class.

I find I have a lot of energy to talk with people--students--who are planning to attend law school and to explain what it is and what it isn’t. I want them to know what I didn’t know about what they are getting into.

Finally, one of the problems I have with law school and legal practice is the lack of room for creativity. Law school was very different from my undergraduate studies.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I look forward to seeing the results.

I believe that many law students are not prepared for what to expect, and what the choices are, in practice. More time should be spent on such subjects.

More offerings, also, on negotiation and problem solving skills.

In general, the intellectual training in law school is superb.
The best thing for me that has come out of attending law school is that I met my wife there. Otherwise, if I had it to do over again, I wouldn't.

I must say, though, that Sue Eklund certainly made getting through law school easier and better than it would have been without her. I agree with whomever it was that wrote she's the nicest law school dean anywhere--give her a raise!

I thought that the faculty at Michigan had the appropriate balance between commitment to teaching and interest in scholarship.

The atmosphere at Michigan was intellectual and not competitive.

I am now teaching at another law school and find the students more competitive, more business oriented, and more concerned about their careers -- maybe the times have changed in the last 5 years.

My firm represents a number of organizations on a pro bono basis and reduced fee basis. As an associate, I am required to "bill" all of my time spent working on their matters, the same as I do for any client. The executive committee then writes off or writes down the time in accordance with their agreement with the organization. I am not always privy to those decisions. My best guess is that approximately 50 hours of my time is written off on that basis, and another 50 hours written down to cover fixed costs (rent, staff salaries, etc.).

I do not have additional comments about life or law school; however, I do have some suggestions for improving the alumni questionnaire for future surveys.

Part C - Work Since Law School: Please remember that some of us (albeit a minority) do not immediately get a job--or hold a judicial clerkship--after law school, but instead continue our education by attending graduate school, either in law or some other discipline.

Overall I believe I received an excellent legal education at U of M. I believe it could have been improved with more courses offering opportunities to learn and practice skills used by practicing lawyers at the expense, if necessary, of large lecture classes, especially in 3rd year. Keep up the good work!

I am pleased to receive correspondence from what seems to be stronger based minority student groups recently.

1) Re: my current position: I am currently specializing in appellate litigation as a staff attorney of a large federal
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agency. Because my agency is very active in its own litigation efforts (i.e., the Department of Justice permits my office to either do its own litigation or to take a very active role in the litigation of particular cases. We are somewhat unique in this respect.), I am able to write appellate briefs and do oral arguments in the U.S. Courts of Appeals through the country. I have argued several times in the Seventh Circuit and in the Eleventh Circuit and have had cases decided on my briefs in the Ninth Circuit, D.C. Circuit, Federal Circuits, etc. The areas of substantive law are labor law, employment discrimination, constitutional issues, and administrative law. I have been doing appellate work full time now for 2 years. When I first came to the agency, I was involved in federal district court litigation involving motions practice, civil discovery, trials, etc. The substantive areas were the ones mentioned above. I find my work very satisfying--particularly the fact that I have had much responsibility from the first year of my employment with this agency where I have been since graduation from law school. This responsibility always has included overall responsibility for my cases and for advising clients.

2) Re: Law School as preparation for being a practicing attorney: I found it did not prepare me as much as it could have even in the traditional law school areas of legal research and brief writing. I found law school very intellectually stimulating and helpful in defining legal issues and problems but of little or no help in practical attorney skills. I feel that I have developed these in the course of being an attorney, but I see many practitioners (opposing counsel, many times) who are incredibly inept in the courtroom--even appellate! I do not think it should be a matter of pride for the law schools to turn out practitioners who, unlike doctors, have never dealt with a client in law school and who have never performed any lawyering activity that they will later do as lawyers. I know the Law School philosophy has been it's enough to train minds, but I don’t think this is enough as I watch shoddy courtroom performances and other inadequate lawyering.

I also suggest an increased emphasis on legal ethics. I have had such issues come up in my practice numerous times and was glad I had taken Lawyers & Clients at Michigan.

3) Re: attending Michigan Law: Attending Michigan Law School was a very significant event in my life. My family background is one where my father went to the 9th grade and my mother was a high school graduate. I am the first person in my family to go to college and the first person to attend law school. I found Michigan Law made every effort to admit a group of diverse students who met the rigorous admission requirements. It was important to me as a student that the law school was committed to avoiding and eliminating sexist stereotypes and I did not feel treated differently as a woman. I understand, however, that this
was not always the case in previous years. But institutions change as does society. Michigan Law gave me an opportunity for which I am truly grateful.

We had a large group of nasty, brutish, immoral men who were socially popular and never should have been let loose on the world. To wit, the TCA's (self-named "Tight Clique of Assholes"). Their graduation, despite physical violence, intimidation of other law students, and other evidence of inherently unethical behavior is a disgrace to U-M Law School. Their behavior and the Law School's lack of functional response is my reason for loss of faith in the legal profession. Their behavior was responsible for personal, emotional crises for myself from which I am just beginning to recover.

Comment on mandatory Pro Bono work: Pro bono activities should be encouraged by the Bar and employers and, perhaps, made a requirement of employment by employers. I cannot, however, see how either the government or the bar could legally require pro bono service.

General comment: The most distressing factor I find in my professional life as a lawyer is the almost total lack of control I have over the content of my work. For any person whose sense of satisfaction comes from pursuing creative impulses or setting goals and meeting them, law is not the right profession. Dean Sandalow's commencement speech comments about a lawyer's lack of "intellectual autonomy" are as profound a commentary on the profession as any I've heard or read.

Most of my acquaintances and/or close friends who, like me, are with a large firm are narrowly specialized. Notwithstanding whether this specialization is good or bad, rewarding or frustrating, stimulating or suffocating, the point is that it is a real and present aspect of life in a large firm. Most of these people "fell into" their specialty based on firm needs or personalities or pure chance. Since many U-M grads go to large firms, the school should have a course (or some program) for exploring a wide range of specialties, the substantive content of practice in a specialty, and some of the practical aspects of being, for example, an insurance litigator, a bank's representative in leasing deals, a small company's labor attorney, a wealthy family's estate planner, etc.

Obviously from this questionnaire, it can be seen that I am not at work where I wished to be at this time. But since the midlife career change does not seem to be a rose garden, it is merely another delay in reaching a point where I can be a useful practitioner.

I hope within a year to have taken and passed the Florida Bar exam which now includes the Multi-State over again. This horror
plus the problems we have here with a long-time tenant who is a source of trouble and the cause of anxiety makes the outlook overcast despite the Florida sunshine.

I am grateful for the Michigan Law School’s taking a chance on me and I do hope to make a more practical and profitable use of that rare opportunity.

The Law School didn’t adequately prepare me to pass the (California) bar examination.

Upon leaving the Law School and taking a bar examination review course, I felt that I was suddenly thrown out into the cold financially. Not having any family financial support available (my father died when I was 8); not having a prospective law firm’s financial support available (no offer of employment with a law firm—not put on any law firm’s payroll); not having any post graduation scholarships, loans, grants or other financial assistance available; I found it mandatory to find any kind of employment available to merely survive. Working on a full-time graveyard job and attending a 4-hour a night bar review course made it impossible for me to compete with the other bar examination applicants. Not only did I not have the time to read and study the material like the others, but I ended up in a state of total fatigue and exhaustion by the time I took the actual bar examination, which consequently was extremely detrimental to my health. Looking back on what now seems like a super-human attempt of mine, I’m very surprised that I only barely missed passing the bar examination rather than a hands-down failure. Unfortunately, it has never been economically feasible for me to take time off from full-time employment and prepare for and pass the bar examination while still making payments for the necessities of life.

I believe that I have a greater appreciation now for the training I received in law school than I did when I first started to practice. I can see the value of the substantive knowledge and the training in issue spotting more easily now. However, when I first started to practice, I felt frustrated because it seemed that nothing I was doing as a transactional lawyer was related to my law school experience. The skills of handling clients, negotiating and drafting are the most important to my practice, but I feel that I’ve learned or improved those skills almost entirely after leaving law school. I know that the substantive law is important, and that the skills of negotiating and drafting can perhaps be learned later on; however, I know that there could have been more emphasis in law school on drafting of agreements or commercial documents, as well as a greater availability of negotiation practice opportunities. I felt that the training I received would have prepared me for some of the practical aspects of a litigation practice, but I was totally ignorant of what a business or transactional lawyer really does for 60 hours a week.
Comments 1980  (17)

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I would be interested in receiving more information about the purpose of this survey—i.e., who will be analyzing this information, what have past results shown, what conclusions do the authors expect or hope to draw, if any.
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I enjoy practicing law much more than I did shortly after graduation. I think this is because I feel more confident of my abilities and know more.
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To the extent that I have dissatisfactions, it is from the pressures of a career at a very large, demanding law firm. Generally, I have no dissatisfactions relating to the quality of the work I do. I have a stimulating practice, an exciting (to me) mix of major corporate, banking, securities, M & A and bankruptcy matters. But these major matters often demand a great deal of time. In the past two years I have billed approximately 5,800 hours, a staggering burden. This makes harsh demands on family life and I continually strive for more time with my wife and baby. So far I have not achieved a satisfactory equilibrium between work and leisure, although I am hopeful as a partner work will be less time-intensive.

My law school education gave me an excellent academic preparation; I understood the theory more than adequately, but the theory was relatively far removed from the tasks I was asked to perform as a young associate. While I would not want to see the Law School’s academic excellence compromised, I suspect that there should be a greater integration of practical exercises (e.g., contract-drafting, negotiation, etc.) with the academic instruction, particularly in the statute-oriented, 2d and 3rd year classes.
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There are many aspects of practicing law that I find repugnant: i.e., the long hours, the unsettled nature of practice ("cancel that vacation -- we’ve just been served with a motion for a TRO"), the relative incompetence of many lawyers, the surprising lack of ethical concerns of lawyers, the tendency to spend hours and hours pushing piles of paper that have little or no impact on the merits of a dispute.
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Law school did not prepare me for the nuts-and-bolts realities of practicing law, but whether that’s necessarily good or bad is something I’m not sure about. I can say that having practiced for close to six years, I often long for the "good ol’ days" of law school, when the only responsibility was to be prepared for class and to take final exams. The intellectual rewards of school came so constantly that I never appreciated them. Now, in practice, they come so infrequently (or, possibly, in a guise I cannot recognize) that they are the exception rather than the rule.
In regard to law school, I feel that students would greatly benefit from more emphasis being placed on clinical law courses, perhaps requiring completion of at least 1 clinic course for graduation.

In spite of the fact that I am not working at present, I am very satisfied with my life and activities. And I find that one still has opportunity to use a law school education in other everyday pursuits.

What disturbs me most about my current position with a large corporate firm is the often times useless, and wasteful work product generated for the purpose of anticipating every angle. I consider myself to be an 'above average' writer and advocate but what talent I may possess is untapped, misdirected or ignored in an unrelenting effort to pile up the billable hours. My recent decision to work part-time was the result of my recognition that despite many hears of "Higher education" designed to prepare me for induction into the professional world, spending time with my giggling one year old is more engaging and more sustaining than any project I have participated in at any law firm.

When I witness the desperate need for caring advocates I feel a sinking sensation which approaches guilt and impotence because I know that what I do at work is not unique, is rarely constructive, and, at least in the context of litigation, ceaselessly disingenuous. It may well be time for a change, but when you have a family whose obligations have adjusted themselves to an above average income, it is difficult to take the first step.

It would have or might have been helpful to have had some further career guidance both at the college level and during law school. For example, even now, after 5 years of practice I have considerable difficulty envisioning myself practicing in any other position. What kinds of positions are available to a young lawyer other than to conventional law firm setting, government, etc.? What can one do with a law degree other than "practice law"?

That will be during the three year period I plan to be a fulltime mother. Thereafter, I will be returning to corporate life.

I have found most in-house counsel to be extremely ethical, and most private practitioners to be extremely unethical.

I am a corporate executive who practices for the Corporation. My time is split about 60%-40% between things that require my law degree and those that do not.

Far more emphasis on career objectives and goals should be
included as part of the regular curriculum. Students naturally respond to the big firm offers without really investigating other possibilities. Almost all of my law school colleagues have left their first big firm and are now working in small firms or corporations. I find working for a corporation to be far more tolerable than working for a bunch of senior partners who are concerned only with their bottom line. As a young attorney, one can receive far greater respect, job security and self-confidence at a corporation than a large firm. Seven years is simply too long to wait for the type of rewards that all of us deserve now.

I have been meaning to set out for you a number of comments concerning my experiences in law school, but I have unfortunately not found the time. In lieu thereof, however, I am enclosing an article from Harvard Law School's alumni magazine (Harvard Law School Bulletin Winter/Spring 1985) which discusses some of the same criticisms I would make of traditional legal education (as practiced at Michigan) and which proposes what seems to be a very promising solution. I would hope that the Michigan faculty is considering a like program -- it is at least worthy of robust debate.

Thank you for the survey. It is an excellent idea and the form is well thought-out.

I hope that the concern expressed in your questionnaire for minorities and women extends also to those who are economically disadvantaged, regardless of race and sex.

One of the best times I have had.

Intellectually stimulating. And an enjoyable social experience, but proved to me I did not want to practice law.

There are too many marginally competent judges. The bench should also be more strict with lawyers who do not follow rules, proper procedures, and the like.

1) U-M Law School was a fantastic preparation for my legal career.

2) Ann Arbor is a wonderful place to go to school.

3) U-M law students were very friendly and very bright.

Law School should prepare you more for the stress you encounter in everyday practice. When I was there I was discouraged from trial practice and clinical programs, which in retrospect, I wish I had taken. Also there was too little information available (easily) on alternatives to private practice.