Class of 1982 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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Law school is excellent background for the business of life and the business of business. From what I have seen of actual practice of law, however, I think that good, challenging, satisfying positions in the actual practice of law are few.

"If you can eat sawdust without butter, then you can learn the law."

Practice: As one of my colleagues commented, it's not like playing shortstop for the New York Yankees.

U of M provided an excellent legal education. I regret not having taken the securities course that was available. The corporations course could be expanded and split into two courses, one basic and one focusing on finance, mergers and acquisitions, and other contemporary corporate issues in these areas. I do not recall a course in banking regulation. Now I would find that very valuable, though I wonder whether I would have known enough to take it during law school, not knowing my current specialty.

I was surprised, at my 5th class reunion, that of the 40 or so people who attended, only two of us still worked for the huge corporate law firms we started with -- and I plan not to be much longer. The people who stayed with the big firms, and didn't come to the reunion, tended to be the people we didn't particularly want to talk to anyway. I just did not expect this groundswell of classmates all striking out in favor of sanity in their lives.

And in the big firms, corporate politics does count more than performance. I know we were warned, but who among us bright-eyed midwestern kids wanted to believe it?

Anybody who really wants to work that hard to help the rich get richer deserves what he gets.

It's hard to believe that all those brilliant professors and classmates could have made law school so boring (intellectually) when law itself is so stimulating.

Law practice in private firms is so much more competitive than I would have expected. The lawyers I have encountered have been honest in their legal practice but very hard-hitting when it comes to the economics of their time and law firm practice. One of the results is great pressure to work very hard. I find that this has required great sacrifice in the areas of personal, family, community, social, political and cultural life.
way, law practice is a rewarding intellectual, business, practical discipline. In another way, it drains the blood out of people and tends to cast them aside mercilessly as dried out husks. To succeed in private firm practice and retain a balance of social dignity and familial and community relationships is a relentless task which demands far more energy and rigor than even law school led me to suspect.

Another unpleasant surprise was the lack of personal care and attention senior lawyers generally give to junior lawyers in the training process. No one should leave law school with the delusion that he or she either knows anything that will be useful in practice or will be inculcated in any such thing on the job. The learning of practical skills and technical knowledge in my view derives primarily from one's own efforts to gather what sophistication one can, where and when one can; and one is at serious peril to think that it is not expected that one has accumulated such sophistication already on one's own.

Looking back, I believe that the process of identifying and applying for judicial clerkships during law school was a disgrace. I was made to feel that since I wasn't on Law Review or near the top of my class, that I would be wasting my time even applying for a clerkship of any sort. I now know that this wasn't true, and I feel badly that I never even got to bat for a clerkship which I would really have liked to have.

I don't think I had any idea what lawyers did when I started law school. Yet I enjoy the practice of law tremendously. I believe it is an ideal career for me.

The hours are long, but can be managed. The environment at my firm is sufficiently comfortable that I believe it will adapt to my demands for more time now that my first child is on the way.

The premise of several questions is that law school should be intellectual. It would be more practical and helpful to treat it as a training course for an occupation.

I suppose every graduate's attitude toward his or her law school experience mellows as the experience recedes in time. In general, my appreciation for my own law school experience has increased in proportion to my growing recognition of how well it prepared me for the practice of law. In my first couple of years of practice, I sometimes felt at a disadvantage in comparison to graduates of well-respected but less "national" law schools who actually knew more law than I did, and were more familiar with the sometimes arcane workings of this state's legal system. As my responsibilities as a practitioner increase and my perspective broadens, however, I find myself relying increasingly on my ability to reason clearly, to separate fact from opinion, and to think through problems, and I credit my law school training with enabling me to do this.
Although I found law school overall to be a stimulating
environment, I think this was because I thought the study of law
was intellectually stimulating. In fact, my chief complaint
about Michigan was, and still is, that it treated the study of
law too much as an intellectual discipline to be mastered, and
not enough as a complex, constantly changing body of rules for
ordering certain kinds of human events. In other words, I felt
the study of law was generally divorced from the circumstances
from which it arose. Similarly, although I was reasonably active
in student affairs and a good, though not exceptional, student, I
developed no close relationships with professors, who I generally
found to be aloof and preoccupied.

I expect these last comments will fall basically on deaf ears, as
I guess they should. Michigan would probably not be considered
to be one of the very best law schools in the country if it did
not elevate the study of law to the status of a pure intellectual
discipline relatively unsullied by real world concerns. In fact,
if I had attended the kind of law school I described earlier,
which spent a lot of time teaching the black letter law of the
jurisdiction in which it was located, I would probably send back
my fifth year alumni questionnaire complaining that my training
was not sufficiently conceptual. Basically, if I was applying to
law schools today, and knew I could go anywhere, I would still go
to Michigan.

I generally enjoyed my overall experience at the Law School.

In retrospect I do think that the Law School's placement services
are skewed too heavily toward large firm private practice.

I have left the practice of law and entered a family-owned
manufacturing business which had recently fallen on hard times.
We are in the process of turning the company around. The
technical legal knowledge I gained in law school and in practice
has been of relatively little value; however, the work standards,
the discipline and the competitiveness which I gained in law
school and in law practice have proven to be extremely valuable
to me in the business world. Although I do not intend to return
to the practice of law and I did not enjoy the practice of law, I
wouldn't trade my legal experience for another background.

The one thing that never ceases to amaze me (and my colleagues)
is how ill-equipped I was for the real practice of law. This
seems to be institutional -- most law professors never practiced
real law, or if they did, it was only for a short time in some
intellectual capacity. I know the age-old excuse for this is
that law firms take care of teaching the actual practice;
however, I find this inexcusable. It is an absolute jungle out
there and no one ever taught me how to deal with it (and many
seem to pretend it doesn't exist). I have run into very few
attorneys whom I can trust which makes me feel poorly about the
entire profession. No one ever taught the art of simple writing,
or even stupid writing, which often wins because the vast
majority of all judges are lazy, stupid, or pre-disposed. No one ever taught the importance of economy, even at the expense of quality, because clients either cannot afford or are too cheap to pay their bills.

All in all, a Michigan degree has served me well and will continue to serve me well. There is no doubt that the degree is impressive and separates me from the rest. However, I question whether I was trained to perform as a lawyer rather than a philosopher.

I left a major Los Angeles law firm in the fall of 1986 to take a position with my family's small business and try my hand at setting up my own practice. The primary reason for leaving the law firm was one of personal priorities -- I wanted to do something other than make money (I was on partnership track). I did not view the idea of working from 7:00 a.m.-7:30 p.m. for the next twenty years as a fun lifestyle, even at the rich compensation that it offered. I prefer less money, more community activities (local politics, community groups) and more time with my family. I do miss the intellectual stimulation of big firm work, but on the whole, I believe I made the right decision.

The U of M Law School provided some of the best experiences of my life. I found it most rewarding in every sense of the word.

Law school provided a solid analytic foundation but little support/preparation for the job I am doing now. I went from a clerkship in D.C. to work for a public interest group (representing public defenders/lobbying Congress) to working at a young, liberal medium size litigation firm in Chicago. The people keep me here, and the tremendous responsibility. I'm a partner at age 29 with teams of lawyers on multimillion dollar cases. I've argued and won a 6th Circuit appeal and had tremendous success -- but at a personal cost. I am way too compulsive and my compassion and compulsion keep me at the office too long. I do, however, want to continue my service in government. I am very active in outside organizations, charitable and otherwise, was chosen a young leader of Chicago, host cable TV shows in my free time, work on campaigns and serve on various boards. But I'm exhausted. Although U of M clearly opened doors for me, it contributed to the "driven" mentality that is really not healthy. It also stressed the "gray" side of every issue, such that basic values got lost--any decision can be justified. I've found in the "real world" people like answers, directions and results. I understand law school was to give me the analytic tools but I'm not so sure. I think you have to determine a right and a wrong -- legally, ethically and individually. For me, personally, I am quite willing to give up "partnership" here to serve as a member of Congress or to be a full-time broadcaster. I hope that my success continues and that these random musings about life/law and whatever make some sense to the reader. I bought a poster as a freshman in college, which
hangs in my office today: a smiling Raggedy Ann and Andy.
Caption: Don't take yourself too seriously! I try not to.

My marriage and family life are very important to me. Consequently, my career goals fit around that part of my life. I am fortunate to have found a firm that has similar views. Although I have probably sacrificed some income and prestige, it's well worth it to have a balanced life. I think a lot of law students and lawyers lose their perspective on what they want for their lives and later complain because their personal or professional life has left them unhappy and dissatisfied. I think law can be a very satisfying and rewarding career if goals and perspective are maintained. I think the chief problem with U of M's law school, as with any other prestigious school, is that the recruiting process results in most students thinking only in terms of BIG -- big firm, big city, big bucks. It's sad and I wish there were some way to provide a different direction. However, I think I got a first-rate legal education!
P.S. - I should be made a partner this Christmas, although I'm not one now.

I recently returned to the Law School for the first time since graduating on a recruiting trip. I felt great pleasure and satisfaction at seeing once again the beauty of the School.

My experience in law school was rather unpleasant due to the contemporaneous marriage problems I had, which ultimately led to divorce. Additionally, since this was a mid-life career change, going from a respectable position with a comfortable life style to that of an impoverished student aggravated the problems.

The intellectual experience was first-rate. I cannot emphasize enough the need to beef up the legal writing program (I am not aware of what changes have been made since 1982). Writing is a critical part of every lawyer's work.

My wife just started law school. I have learned how much of the anxiety we forget about when we leave law school, and remember mainly the good things. I am not quite certain what steps can be taken to reduce the level of anxiety among law students. I suppose it is mostly self-inflicted: a result of the kind of person who enters school.

Overall, I was happy with my decision to enter law school, and happy with my experience at U of M.

I regret not socializing more with my fellow students at law school, particularly in light of a delightful fifth year reunion. The competitive aspect of law school with grades did act, to some degree, to polarize students and, at least with respect to me, inhibited fraternization with my law school colleagues.

1) It is extremely difficult to overcome the inertia created by one's first job out of law school. Most law students
overestimate their ability to switch from one area (e.g. law firm) to another (e.g. public interest work). This is one of the curses of law school debt since many students interested in government or public interest work accept jobs with law firms with the expectation of switching to the public arena after their loans are paid off, but aren't able to make the switch.

2) Most of my colleagues in private practice are dissatisfied with their lives.

I remember law school as being intellectually challenging, a natural extension of my liberal arts undergraduate training (B.A. Political Economy, Williams). I didn't (and don't) view law school as vocational training (although I did enjoy the opportunity to participate in the clinical law program). Not all courses were equally challenging, but all were worthwhile.

I regret that I did not speak up more in class. I think it is extremely important to do so.

I also regret not working on a journal to improve writing skills.

I think I received an excellent education at Michigan, both undergraduate and law school. Ann Arbor is a great place to go to learn. J. J. White's courses were the best practical training I received, but I enjoyed most of my courses at Michigan.

I wish you could rebuild the international program at Michigan. It seemed to be waning just as I left. I realize Ann Arbor is not ideally situated for that practice, but it has such a good international law faculty in the 70's and early 80's and I don't see it being rebuilt to such a stature.

I particularly appreciated the services and attitude of the Placement Office, both while I was in school and afterwards as a recruiter. I think the office should continue to de-emphasize grades -- the recruiters themselves more than make up for that. I do not think recruiters should be allowed to choose whom they interview or see transcripts in advance.

I do have strong positive feelings about the school and would be happy to assist if I can, particularly with recruitment of potential students.

The thing I enjoy most about practicing law is the intellectual challenge of learning one or two complex areas of the law very well. I find the minimum number of attorneys (in the town in which I practice) necessary to allow specialization to be 10 or so.

While I learned my basic legal research skills in law school, I find little use in my daily work for the substantive subjects I took in law school, other than tax courses. The course which I feel was most valuable was Tax II with L. Hart Wright, more because of his attitude and the approach to learning he took than
because of the subject matter.

I feel that the curriculum is too litigation-oriented. Most lawyers engage in planning, documenting or structuring transactions or courses of action for clients. The skills these activities require were not even touched on in 98% of my legal education. Transactional analysis should be emphasized to a greater extent.

I feel that I will never be able to achieve the optimal balance between career and family. I am always stealing from one or the other just to keep up with the bare minimum expectations I set for myself. I think that competent practice of law and competent "spousing" and parenting are incompatible.

Life since law school has been a struggle to find a comfortable situation that meets my financial needs as well as my need for time with my family. Although I enjoy my work doing bankruptcy litigation for the IRS, I don't expect it to be my last job.

Course offerings: As far as I know you now offer two securities law courses -- Securities Law and Enterprise Organization. The tender offers/takeovers area might profitably be split off to form a third course that could focus on advanced topics in both corporate and securities law.

Law Review: Why don't you give writing credit for Law Review notes? In retrospect, I learned more from working on the Review than from anything else, including course work.

I really am happy that I went to Michigan Law School -- I feel it gives me a lot of credibility both professionally and socially, and I believe I never could have gotten the high paying job I have now without it. I primarily do tax law now, which I find very challenging and interesting as a substantive matter -- what I find difficult about practice is all the games you have to play to "get ahead," the politics, the insidious discrimination against women both from lawyers and clients. When I first started at my current job, I really wanted to make partner, both because I really loved the work my firm has and for the money. Now, however, I am married (for all of one month) and already my attitude has changed. The b.s. here just doesn't seem worth it. What I'd like to do is hang on here a couple more years, save a lot of money -- and if I make partner, great (I'm not even sure I'd continue long as a partner) -- and if I don't make partner, I'd like an in-house corporation job with 9-5 hours so I can lead a more "normal" life -- the number of hours here aren't what kills me, it's the inability to plan anything, since on Friday at 4 PM you may suddenly discover you must work all weekend. In sum, though, I'm glad I went to Michigan and I'm overall satisfied with my career to date -- I just feel now it may not be for me forever.

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My comments are purely personal in nature. Although I found the Law School to be an excellent academic and professional institution and would highly recommend it to others, I would do so with one caveat. Specifically, I would warn a potential applicant to expect a "cold" atmosphere from both professors and staff (exclusive of Sue Eklund) and, perhaps more important and more disturbing, from one's classmates. Although one meets a number of exceptionally intelligent students at the Law School, many are exceedingly competitive and aloof. Moreover, while providing for one's financial security is a worthy goal, I believe that a disproportionately high number of law school students focus excessively on how much money they intend to make in private practice.

In short, while the Law School provided a superb professional education, I found it difficult to establish meaningful friendships; I maintain steady contact with only two persons in our graduating class. I frankly must admit to you that while I have the greatest respect for the Law School as an academic and professional institution, I do not have "warm feelings" for the Law School as a result of my interactions with the people I met there, the most important of whom were other students. Were I to enter law school today as a first-year student, I would select the University of Michigan; but I would do so with the expectation that the experience would be intellectually and professionally stimulating while at the same time personally and spiritually difficult.

I specialize in defending ski areas in personal injury actions. I could not have hoped for a better specialty. While in law school I wrote an article about ski area liability. This article was published and I was approached by my current firm as a result of this article.

I have recently moved from a big city (San Francisco) to a small mountain community (Tahoe City, California) to open a branch office for the firm. The change of pace has been great.

The prestige of the University of Michigan Law School opened many doors for me. I am certainly glad I attended the Law School for this reason. Additionally, my class and section (Section Four) were very tight-knit.

I am glad the Admissions Director (Dean Stillwagon) looked to "outside activities and interests" in selecting applicants from the "pool" for admission. Not only because I was accepted that way (I was a ski bum) but because it made for an interesting and energetic mix.

Again, many thanks. Call me if you have questions.

I have begun looking for part-time positions. The firm with which I am employed does not believe in such positions (they think I work part-time now since I don't generally stay past 6:30
or come in on the weekends). The managing partners don't appreciate that they all have traditional marriages with wives who take care of them. I could use a wife, too. However, as a result of their attitude I have looked elsewhere and have found other firms to be far more receptive than I expected concerning part-time positions.

Another reason I would like to work part-time is to free up additional time for my husband in his career track. I would like him to devote as much time as he thinks he needs to making partner. I frankly am ambivalent about whether I make partner as long as my husband does. Although I do not think I could stop working completely, if I can devote more time to the house and the children, then he can feel more comfortable pursuing his career expectations and goals. We were raised with traditional values and role-models and it's awfully hard to break away from them.

You should understand that my husband is very much an equal partner in our family responsibilities. There is no such thing as "woman's work" or "man's work" in our household and I'm very appreciative of that. It would be impossible for our family to function otherwise. Still, when people tell me they don't know how I do it all, I politely thank them, all the while thinking that not only do I not do it all but I don't have the time to do anything as well as I would like.

Re: Law School. After 5 years in the real world, I must take exception with the Law School's policy of not encouraging students to work during their law school educations. Although I couldn't do my estate planning without my estate & gift tax class in school, the practical experience of drafting wills and trusts and dealing with clients is at least as important.

Perhaps as an alternative to finding a job in the relatively small Ann Arbor legal community, the school could offer a course of a clinical nature in drafting documents, e.g. agreements, wills, trusts, etc. By creating fact situations and learning about how documents are drafted to alleviate problems or avoid problems, e.g. using representations and warranties, certain "standard" clauses, the new graduate would have a better feel of what to expect in the real world besides the summer experience. The course would provide a reference book to help make the first years of practice a little less stressful.

As I noted in the questionnaire, I recently started a new job working in a mid-size law firm in the tax department. I am very unhappy there.

My prior job was completely different and very satisfying. I was a judge advocate doing criminal defense work in the U.S. Air Force. I had interesting cases, both factually and legally, and was given responsibility for running my own office, representing my own clients, and trying my clients' cases. I was active in
the military community and respected for my expertise.

I decided to go into a tax practice upon leaving the Air Force for several reasons. Though I enjoyed being a litigator, I expected civil litigation to be much more frustrating than criminal work, due to the protracted pretrial stage. Criminal work became too stressful for me. I also thought that a tax practice would be somewhat productive -- I could be solving problems rather than creating them.

I am still uncertain whether my current dissatisfaction stems from the nature of a tax practice or the lack of stimulating work. I do know that a change in level of responsibility has been the most frustrating aspect of the career switch.

I believe that law school trained me well for "thinking like a lawyer," and that such training is important in becoming a competent lawyer. However, I do not believe that law professors more than most students. I also tended to have less respect for my professors than most students. I also feel that the University of Michigan Honors College was vastly more intellectually stimulating than law school.

Law is probably a bad career choice for a young woman who wants to have children. No one could have dissuaded me at the time, but now that I have a 3-month old daughter I wish I had a job I could quit and re-enter in a few years without major career damage. Especially in today's market of high salaries and brutal hours expectations, it's so hard to find enough time for family. There's no getting around that child rearing takes more of a toll on the mother (even with a fabulously involved father). I've just made the decision that if my job suffers, screw them.

Practicing is a thousand times better than law school. I wasn't very happy at Michigan. I was so tired of school. Counseling should be available and advertised at Michigan. Was it available at all -- geared especially for law students? I always wished someone would have stood back before we started and told me "Here's what we're going to do." The big picture was very hard to grasp.

Law school disappointed me, in that it was essentially a trade school, designed to stuff students with practical or semi-practical knowledge rather than encourage a deep intellectual affinity for the law. The concept that one is taught to think like a lawyer is largely fraudulent. 3 years of close analysis gives one familiarity with the logical pathways of legal problems, but the means of thought is the same as any other analytical discipline. My biggest problem with law school was its complacency. For example, we presumed that our system is inherently correct, that advocacy is, despite its problems, unchallengeable, that certain rights are fundamental. Fundamental in this world we make, yes, but only because we make them so. My other main criticism of law school is that most of
the teachers run class as a sophisticated version of the 3rd grade, where the class is intentionally led around an answer until the teacher, at the bell, brings it home. That is not true intellectualism.

Practice of law can be wonderful. Its big problem is that it stifles individuality. Lawyers work long hours and converse only with lawyers (or secretaries). I left law because the life bored me. So few matters involve real exchanges of ideas and to be limited to the conversations of other lawyers (focusing on restaurants and movies) drove me crazy. Perhaps the problem is that law school and law in general attracted the boring achievers and not the creative ones. A pity.

The pace at which the material was thrown out at us (primarily in the form of heavy reading assignments) left much too little time for absorption. As a result, I found law school to be a very un-intellectual experience. The fact that at least some of the law school professors with whom I shared this thought were surprised suggests a fundamental problem; being a law professor undoubtedly is intellectually stimulating but it doesn't mean the students are having the same experience.

I had the rather unusual opportunity to attend another law school for the 2nd semester of my third year. Class sizes were smaller; more of the teachers appeared genuinely interested in teaching and in fostering thought-provoking discussion in class (rather than in terrorizing or embarrassing the students); the atmosphere was more relaxed and the students less competitive.

In short, I think Michigan should focus a lot more on the experience it provides to its students. The caliber of students accepted into the School is so high, comparatively, that there is little doubt it can turn out volumes of good legal practitioners. Molding good members of the legal profession, community leaders, thoughtful practitioners -- that should be the School's goal.

I have been giving serious thought to careers outside of law. Inertia and salary considerations have made me stay. I thought prior to and in law school that litigators went to court and did trials. They don't. They just push paper.

I enjoyed law school more than I enjoy law practice, despite the fact that I now have money. In school, I felt I was progressing. Here, I stagnate.

If I knew way back then what I know now, I never would have gone to law school. I would have gone to journalism school. I have wasted away here, while feeling that my creativity was atrophying.

It's the money I make and the money and time spent to get here that keeps me here. Maybe a smaller firm or government (DA/US Atty) work would help. I just never really thought much about
what I was going to do as a lawyer and I had naive, incorrect notions about what to expect. I don't want you to hurt your business, but maybe you could somehow let people know what it's really like after leaving Hutchins Hall behind.

The consistent and widespread high regard for a Michigan legal education (and law degree) has benefitted me in many ways .... some tangible (employment), some less easy to measure (an assumed level of competence). I maintain pride in having graduated from Michigan, and recommend the school highly to potential applicants.

The values and quality of my classmates remains a source of inspiration and pride. My friends and colleagues from law school are by and large good people, committed to more than the pursuit of individual success. I'm not sure we learned our ethic of service from Michigan, but I'm always pleased to learn of new public and private endeavors of my peers.

We have changed jobs frequently it appears (as a group). At weddings, reunions and other get togethers it seems that each year more and more of my classmates have left their first job. I'd be interested to see the survey results. Family and life outside of work is becoming more important. I'm glad to see us learning to balance private lives with professional lives.

I think U-M Law School provides excellent preparation for young lawyers. Its standards of excellence should not be diminished; it should not discard the Socratic approach in favor of wholesale lectures; it should emphasize, a little more, clinical programs during the third year.

I find the ever-increasing trend towards narrow specialization to be distressing.

I very much appreciate the excellent education I received at the University of Michigan Law School. The emphasis placed there on hard work and careful analysis has proven to be of immense value to me in my career. Thank you.

I was a transfer student. In fact, because I came from Cooley Law School I was told I was a "guinea pig." That didn't bother me though, because I knew it was true. I came to Michigan, worked hard and nearly graduated with honors (J.J. White's final pulled me down -- my own fault). Anyway what an opportunity and what an experience it was to go to school there. I hope admissions will give some other guinea pigs a chance to run the gauntlet. It sure is worth it.

One thing I would have liked to have seen in law school is a more practical view of what it is like to be a lawyer. Some students may have relatives or friends who are lawyers, but I had absolutely no idea of what "being a lawyer" meant. The role models I had in law school were (in my case) all male professors.
When I clerked at a large Washington law firm after 2nd year, I thought that was really what it was like to be an associate! What a rude awakening I received when I graduated and started work. After several jobs which I have hated, I have finally learned to hold out for something that is right for me and will hold my long-term interest.

For 2nd and 3rd-year students, there is undue emphasis on pleasing interviewers and maximizing the number of offers you get. I completely fell into this and ended up clerking and became an associate at large firms, where I was not at all happy. It would have been helpful to have associates from firms come and talk to small groups to give us a feel for this type of practice. What I would see as great would be a small-group seminar on career planning, where speakers/visitors following different career paths, both happy and disillusioned, come and talk casually with the students. Also, students should be encouraged to be honest with themselves and with prospective employers about what they want. Otherwise, there can be a lot of disillusionment.

Also, please expose students to the difficulties of combining a career with raising a family. A lot of time and money and dreams are invested in career training and plans, and these may have to be put on hold or put aside completely in order to take care of children. Legal careers seem especially prone to this. Some alumni education would also be helpful, since I am finding part-time work to be a success, despite many firms' policies against it.

One compliment -- I found the first year of law school to be quite satisfying intellectually -- the material and professors continued to be good, but smaller classes would work better after 1st year to keep students' interest.

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I found law school to be a devastating experience from the standpoint of my self-confidence. When I entered law school, I think I had a fairly realistic idea of my intellectual abilities -- I knew I was fairly bright and competent. When I left law school, however, after 3 years of being called on in class and hassled by professors who deliberately tried to make me feel foolish (with a few notable exceptions), I was a basket case. I felt I was stupid, incompetent, not as good as my classmates, etc. etc. etc. I worked extraordinarily hard in school but ended up in the middle of my class -- probably more because I convinced myself I was inadequate than because I was in fact inadequate. Five years later, I still suffer from fairly low self-esteem, even though I have been pretty successful professionally. Isn't there a way to make law school a more humane endeavor? To enable those who are not comfortable being called on in class to avoid the humiliation, rather than being devastated by it? To give a little positive feedback to students along the way? To ask students for input periodically, so the professors know how they're feeling? If it were not for a wonderfully supportive
group of friends & classmates, and for the superhuman efforts of Susan Eklund, I think I would have left the Law School after my first year. I think I'm a good lawyer, and a sensitive human being -- it's too bad that law school nearly destroyed my faith in myself.

I wish that more emphasis could have been placed on the "lure" of summer clerkships with "big name" law firms. It's extremely tempting to accept that job offer for big dollars, although, too often, that decision is regretted after only a few years. One wonders whether that time wasn't wasted.

1. Course load too heavy in first year as compared to second and third years.
2. Much more in the way of mid-term exams and papers as opposed to having your entire grades rest on the final exam.
3. Much more emphasis on clinical experience and on-the-job training.
4. Take other appropriate measures to reduce the pressures on first-year students.

One significant aspect of my law school experience was being a summer starter, June 1980. I attended two summer sessions, '80 and '81, resulting in my graduating in December 1982, in a very small graduating class of approximately 40. I was very happy to have the opportunity to be a summer starter and to accelerate the program, but I was sorry that I was unable to feel part of a particular group. Most of my fellow summer starters did not attend another summer session and therefore graduated in 1983, while others attended the next two summer sessions and graduated ahead of me, in August 1982. I technically graduated in the class of 1982, but I hardly know any of my fellow alums mentioned in the alumni news. The summer experience was, in retrospect, a very positive one. It was informal, classes were small, visiting professors abounded, always favorably impressed with the Ann Arbor summer.

The second aspect I would like to mention is the Law School setting. Of all the schools I have visited, the U. of M. has by far the best campus. Ann Arbor is a wonderful place, extremely conducive to learning, studying, and discovering. Unsurpassed (in the world) library facilities don't hurt the image either.

Finally, I sincerely hope that the Clinics remain a viable choice for students. I participated in the Child Advocacy Law Clinic, which was the best experience the Law School gave me as far as preparation for the legal work I do.

Thank you for the chance to express these thoughts. I am sorry it has taken me this long to respond.

I don't think most of us realized that legal practice is a business and that it is a business now subject to a great deal of change. The lofty ideals that we were taught in law school bear
little relation to practice. Practice is not as intellectually stimulating as law school and is much more repetitive. And, unfortunately, we don't produce anything tangible, so it is hard to say that one left one's "mark" in life. I also think that the profession has been significantly de glamorized in the business world -- lawyers are now viewed in much the same way as accountants (although perceived to be much more expensive and counterproductive). I wish I'd gone for an MBA -- MBA's seem to do much more interesting and useful things.

I'm content with my present job. It allows me a lot more time to do things outside of work, and the outside activities are where my main enjoyments come from, not work. (I think that's the way it should be. When I first graduated I placed too much emphasis on my job -- 60+ hour work weeks -- and forgot to have fun for a couple of years.)

Both my spouse and I are ex-litigating attorneys after 7 years and 4 years of practice, respectively. Our income has decreased, but the quality of our lives has improved markedly since leaving the legal field. We have time to enjoy life now. Lawyers, in general, are a bit too full of their own self-importance. There is a lack of humility, decency, and social value in the legal profession which is present in other professions.

I choose not to denigrate my law school experience. Except for the debt, I have no regrets. I was treated well, especially by Sue Eklund. My warmest regards to her.

Law school at Michigan was a great experience!

Looking back at law school now, I think my greatest misgiving about U of M is the lack of encouragement faculty members gave to students who were not in the top 10% of the class. I will never forget a conversation I had with a professor designated to "assist" students in finding judicial clerkships who told me not to bother applying for federal appellate clerkships because my credentials were not good enough. Instead, I was advised to apply for District Court clerkships. This advice surprised me because I was in the top 15% of the class and an editor on the Journal of Law Reform. Fortunately, I ignored that advice. I applied for and was selected for an appellate court clerkship. There I developed an interest in criminal law that has led to very rewarding work.
The faculty at Michigan is of such high intellectual caliber that sometimes they seem to forget that those of us just a notch below are still among the best and brightest in the country. A few professors, most notably David Chambers, recognize that. What a wonderful law school U of M would be if the entire faculty encouraged the entire student body.

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While I did not recognize it at the time, the gap between law students, like myself who had little understanding of the mores of the legal profession and those who did, must have been tremendous. Law school should do more to acquaint its students with the customs and practices of the working world of the lawyer. This could be done, in part, by bringing in legal practitioners to speak to the students. Ideally, this should begin with orientation and continue throughout the 3 years.

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1. Law school should be made a two-year program. The benefits of an extra year in the real world -- both as a matter of personal growth and contribution to society -- outweigh whatever benefits accrue during the third year of law school. Being a lawyer is no more challenging than being a businessperson and business people manage to get along with just two years of business school -- or maybe none at all.

2. Michigan and other law schools should get rid of student-run law journals. Too many students waste too much time preparing articles that no one reads. Students should instead be encouraged to work in activities that have some social utility. To replace the one benefit of journal activities -- developing writing skills and critical thinking -- more course work should emphasize writing. This would include all students and not just those who qualify for journals. Again, we should compare the legal community to the business community: professionally run journals better serve the community than the thousands of legal journals.

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I don't think law school directly prepared me as far as practice skills for practicing law but I do not think it should change in that direction. Much of my practice and I think that of many attorneys is skills bordering more on technical in their detail -- I would think the Law School would be ignoring larger issues and ideas if it turned more to technical knowledge.

I am personally not very satisfied with my law practice. I am working in a corporate legal setting -- by that I mean doing legal work for corporations. I did not come into law school with ideas of changing the world with law -- quite frankly I had no real image of myself or what I would do after law school. I thought I would have the three-year period to study and learn -- the almost immediate interviewing for summer jobs was quite a shock to me. I never seriously considered taking a job in a setting other than a law firm -- partly from lack of knowledge or imagination I am sure. My experience with law is that it is hard to keep it from taking over your life and that spending large amounts of my time and emotional energy working for corporate
entities is not fulfilling to me. What I am doing may be a
decent job from most people's point of view but from my point of
view it is not a great life. My heart is not in being a
corporate attorney and I hope I have the courage to get out of it
soon. I don't know now if I will stay in law but change areas
dramatically or if I will totally start something new. I may use
contract work for law firms as a way to support myself in between
pursuing other interests. I do now have a skill I can use to
support myself and others if I need to.

I do not regret going to law school -- that was a wonderful
experience. I do have some real questions about what I have done
with my life since then and will most likely make some changes in
the future.

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As a minority law school was difficult. The difficulty was due
in part to the professors not taking an interest in you. Also,
the other students grouped together and ignored you. I
experienced the feelings of being an outsider and no matter what
my abilities were from some professors I was not going to get a
good grade.

Professors favored students whose families they knew. Often
special help was given to these students.

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Law school was a great experience intellectually but left me
unprepared for the practicalities and compromises in every day
practice. Law school is like preparation for an appellate court
argument. Everyday practice and the politics of working in a
large law firm are another world. The inability and huge
caseload of judges makes quiet deliberation impossible. Good
writing and effective advocacy are not stressed enough in law
school because, to learn these skills, requires greater time and
energy -- two commodities not available from the faculty. I am
not angry at the Law School, however. I found school to be a
mind-expanding, although often numbing, experience. There is no
reason for three years of classroom work. Clinical and writing
courses should be the entire third-year curriculum. Mechanics
are not trained by studying physics--neither should lawyers be
trained exclusively, as they are now, in how to persuade the
Supreme Court. I say that even though I have had, compared to my
peers, a lot of appellate experience. I have briefed and/or
argued six appeals. Good luck.

Since filling out this questionnaire a couple of months ago, I
received an offer I could not refuse and have formed a real
estate investment partnership. I doubt if I'll ever practice law
again (but you never know!).

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Despite the fact that I found it exhausting, I thoroughly enjoyed
law school. My instructors and classmates were amazingly
stimulating, diverse, and with few exceptions, very enjoyable. I
would very willingly repeat the whole experience.

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By the way, I cannot say enough good things about the value of section 4!

The classes which were the best were those not taught in the abstract but, rather, those that brought legal principles and problems to bear upon current "real-world" events. A good example was Prof. Kennedy's Debtor Reorganization course: every class would commence with him reading something bankruptcy-related out of The Wall Street Journal or other newspaper, followed by a discussion on the problems raised.

As good as the Law School faculty was, I found that the greatest educational resource was my very bright friends at the School. Our discussions outside the classroom did much to hone my intellect and whatever wit I now possess.

.....I found people to be friendly, the atmosphere warm. Although I am a shy person who finds it hard to meet people, this was not a problem at Michigan. I met some very good friends there and wish I had taken advantage of the situation more. I find working in a law firm very lonely. I don't find being a lawyer very rewarding -- it gives me very little pleasure and I am seriously considering another career, possibly in engineering.

Why did this problem arise? Perhaps because I was very young and naive when I went to law school (I didn't know any lawyers when I started law school) and didn't know what it meant to be a lawyer. This was furthered by the fact that I got very little, if any, information or counseling at Michigan as to what it's like to be a lawyer. Perhaps more of this information and career-counseling is necessary at Michigan.

My specialty today is litigation. I was fortunate to have taken Ed Stein's trial practice course, which proved quite valuable. I would urge the School to make the course more available to interested students. When I was a 3rd-year student only two small sections were available.

Although I believe the litigation skills curriculum could be strengthened, I would caution against too much of this. Students who take summer clerkships (now nearly all students do) learn many of the "how to" skills needed for practice, if they take advantage of the experience. The strength of my Michigan education was the manner in which a great faculty taught me to approach legal problems and the exposure to great legal issues. With rare exceptions, these experiences cannot be duplicated in practice. The practical skills needed to practice law, by contrast, can be acquired after graduation in CLE programs, firm training programs, and by personal investigation. Keep Michigan in the best tradition of liberal legal education.

I believe my legal degree from Michigan will assist me in eventually becoming an academic in social work.
I don't think you can be a good mother and practice law, full or part-time. It's a terrible profession to be trained in if you want children (and are a female) because it's not a career you can stop for 5-10 years and then go back to like teaching or a myriad of other professions. I consider the whole 3 years a waste.

You may wish to solicit information on other jobs/experiences alumni have had. I, for example, have worked in the federal government for 2 years and lived abroad (fellowship) for 7 months in between law firm jobs.

If I had it to do, all over again--
I'd go to Michigan Law School again, if only for the friends I made, and the experiences I had--
But I wouldn't practice law.

My primary concern is increasing the emphasis on ethics and morality in the Law School. One important area is client advocacy. Few competitive law students need to be taught to advocate for the client who pays their firm's bills. What the law student does need to learn is the limits of advocacy -- when does an associate have a legal or moral obligation not to do what a partner or client requests. The lessons of morality must be taught in the classroom, for they will not be taught anywhere else. Professors should discuss subjects such as how to handle a partner's request to "sanitize" a file before a document inspection and how to properly prepare a witness without suborning perjury.

An equally important concern is selecting clients and/or the appropriate law firm. No law school should ever teach students that the obligation of a lawyer is to represent any client who comes in the door and can pay the bill. Rather, the attorney has a personal and professional obligation to determine whether his advocacy assists or hinders the overall well-being of society. Unfortunately I see less and less discussion of whether the client's cause is a moral and just one. In the sixties we saw the healthy discussion about an attorney's responsibility to society that is lacking now.

As one college professor put it, law is an unusual profession -- one day you're the doctor, the next day you're the disease. At the simplest level, no lawyer should believe that he is serving the cause of justice by successfully defending the child molester so that he may again do what he does.

While I do not suggest the School espouse liberal or conservative views, it should teach that morality and social responsibility does not end at the law firm door. Perhaps this can be done in the context of a year course of legal ethics, which is one of the most important courses the student will ever take, given the ethical dilemmas and problems which the practitioner must face and solve.
Let me close by thanking the Law School for the opportunity to attend. It was a worthwhile experience and I continue to have the highest regard for the University of Michigan Law School.

There should be more emphasis on practical training. This is probably not necessary as much for those going into big law firms but is absolutely essential for anyone contemplating solo practice. Perhaps an ideal arrangement would be a co-op system where students attend classes 1 semester and work 1 semester for the second and third years.

I believe that being a lawyer and having a good family life are incompatible and that is why I am not a practicing attorney now. I don't think there is anything inherently unprofessional in putting one's family first but it seems that the legal profession does. This is certainly the impression I received as a young mother interviewing for a summer job and also the continuous impression I received from most lawyers I came in contact with.

I think the Law School put too much emphasis on "academic" law (e.g., Constitutional law, criminal procedure, federal jurisdiction, etc.) and not enough on "practitioner" law (business organizations, commercial transactions, wills and trusts, etc.).

I also think that students put too much emphasis on achieving "glamorous" judicial clerkships and positions with "prestigious" law firms and not enough on learning to provide high quality services to clients at reasonable prices. However, I don't know whether this was the Law School's fault or whether this was just the Law School's response to the attitudes of my generation of students.

Upon graduation in 1982 I moved to Houston where I had never lived and had no family or friends other than my girlfriend. In an effort to develop roots in the community I became increasingly involved in volunteer work with a poor Hispanic church in the inner city. Although work at my firm was intellectually rewarding and I was well-paid, I did not feel fulfilled in my legal career. I felt that my work with Hispanic teenagers was more important to society and much more fulfilling personally. Thus, after two years I quit the formal practice of law to work in religious education and youth work in the inner city.

I have continued to practice law, but only on a pro bono basis for persons I know or who seek me out. Most are simple criminal matters or family law matters. I was the third chair and primary work-horse on a capital murder case involving a woman who attempted to drown herself and her seven children in the Bayou near downtown Houston. She had suffered sexual, psychological and physical abuse at the hands of her husband for several years. Eventually, the life of extreme poverty, alienation in a foreign country and society and the pressures of raising several handicapped children, led her to seek the end. After extensive
research and preparation, we were able to obtain a 10-year deferred adjudication from the judge on the day before the jury selection was to begin. She was a woman who I passionately believed should not be imprisoned even though 2 children died. The law came alive for me during this period.

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I do not think I would rate other law schools higher; law school seems inherently, and perhaps necessarily, less interesting than college liberal arts study.

One of the best aspects of my curriculum was my externship with the National Wildlife Federation, since one of biggest career-planning questions was (and is) how to choose (or apportion time) between private practice and public interest.

Regarding the problem that a stimulating private practice tends to encroach excessively on one's time for "outside" activities (social, athletic, etc.): I have thought hard about how to reform the organization of private firms, but do not have a solution.

I have made a somewhat unusual job move: left my first firm (in Washington, D.C.) 2 years before expect to be made a partner, in order to practice in California for about 2 years, so that my girl friend can attend Stanford Business School. My old firm and new firm know that I expect to return to D.C.

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I thought that Michigan was a good law school, all in all, which was intellectually challenging and quite career-oriented. Its placement office was top-notch. The professors were academically very good. They were also very impersonal with little or no real concern for the students beyond the pursuit of academic achievement. Those who were not on Law Review or who did not excel academically in some other visible way were made to feel that they had failed and were of little importance. I went to a law professor once to discuss why a paper was late (I was experiencing a fairly significant health problem -- cardiac in nature) and his attitude was uncaring and insensitive. He missed an opportunity that day to make a real difference in my situation.

I did fairly well academically (graduated cum laude) so this is not a case of sour grapes. A lot of things go into preparing a student to be a good lawyer. I honestly believe Michigan, like many law schools, misses the mark in some areas. In our society, lawyers are called upon increasingly to be compassionate and well-rounded, with a breadth of vision that goes well beyond "issue-spotting" and purely academic issues. Clients want articulate, pragmatic, well-rounded attorneys who nevertheless can empathize with their situation and problems and solve the problems (or at least offer a good suggested solution) in a practical fashion. It may be that these types of skills cannot or should not be taught or "modeled" in law school. I do believe, however, that the approach and attitude of many of the
Michigan professors are not conducive to accomplishing these goals. One thing is certain. The classic approach to teaching law and law students is not in many cases accomplishing one objective: professional and personal satisfaction and fulfillment for those who choose to practice law.

I feel, by the way, that I am achieving satisfaction both professionally and personally (family, socially, etc.), but only because I "unlearned" some of the values and priorities that I at least perceived to be exorted in law school.

If lawyers are to be responsive to, and at the cutting edge of, the many very complicated ethical, social and legal issues facing our society, then law schools, including Michigan, must reorient their priorities and attitudes. Otherwise, an opportunity will be lost to make a valuable, positive difference.

Law School should adopt retroactive loan forgiveness policy for practitioners in legal services and other low income public interest positions. Should be more public interest practical and clinical offerings!

Although I am happy to have attended the University of Michigan Law School, upon leaving I could not help but feel that, as a minority student, there was a certain lack of warmth which I and other minority students experienced at that time. Maybe it could be explained by the turn of the country in general to more conservative ideas and opinions (Ronald Reagan was elected during my second year); however, I often felt that these attitudes were also fostered independently by those charged with the responsibility of administering the Law School. Unfortunately, I felt that these attitudes "trickled down" to faculty and many majority students who "questioned" implicitly my and my minority colleagues' qualifications for being there. To be perfectly honest, I am still somewhat bothered by the response of one professor, whom I approached following receipt of what I thought to be an unsatisfactory grade, who told me: "Well, it doesn't mean you won't become a good lawyer." Although it didn't explain why I received the grade I had been given it did begin a transformation of how I viewed the Law School and my role there: to get out with a degree, learn as much as I could notwithstanding the grades I might receive, and to become a good lawyer. Well, I am working very hard at being a good lawyer and I look forward to responding to your next survey in 10 years to let you know how well I am doing.

I really enjoyed my law school days a lot, the academic atmosphere, free time, everything about it. Although I'm very happy with my job and family life, more than anything else, I really miss the free time I had in school.

I had a wonderful time in law school. I met many intelligent, interesting people with whom I have maintained friendships. My main complaint with the U of M Law School is that it didn't
prepare me to work anywhere except in a large firm.* I think that I would have been happier in a smaller firm. I am home raising my two daughters now, but I plan to begin working in a small firm within the next several months.

*Perhaps it is more accurate to say that U of M made it so easy to work for a large firm that I didn't seriously consider any other options.

I knew no lawyers when I applied to law school, and had no idea what the practice of law entailed. While I found law school intellectually stimulating (a relief after working in business for 5 years after college), the practice of law in a high-powered large private law firm in a major city put me in a much more competitive and aggressive atmosphere than I personally desired. I did not feel I could reconcile that atmosphere with child care, and so, unfortunately, I quit. I have been a homemaker for 3 years now (our second daughter is 4 months old, and the oldest is three). I plan to contact the Career Services office in the future to examine other career paths -- more compatible with my temperament and child care.

I am extremely happy now that I am working as an independent contractor (for only 1 firm). I get paid for every hour I bill and can take off as much time (within reason) that I want. Currently I bill approximately 100-120 hours/month -- if I work most of the month. Between 1983 and 1986 I worked for a fairly large firm which was fairly oppressive. I left and spent 1 1/2 years traveling around the world and have never been happier about a decision. Although I may eventually go back to a more traditional law firm role -- or go out totally on my own -- I don't think I'll ever get in a situation again where my life revolves around the requirements of my job. Quality of life is much more important to me than making lots of money and working 2000+ hours/year.

I wish I could go back.

Michigan Law gave me the finest friends of my life. I did not fully appreciate while there how unlikely it was that I would ever again come across such a rare and fascinating (not to mention brilliant) collection of people...

My primary semi-professional satisfactions lately have come from political activities for which my law background has been very helpful. (My law buddies keep me on my toes from afar!) I am soon marrying another U-M Law grad, too...(we met at Mich. Law).

I wish Law School had made me think more realistically about the type of law career I was choosing.