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Class of 1983 Five Year Report

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A REPORT ON THE CLASS OF 1983
FIVE YEARS AFTER GRADUATION

"I'm glad that I attended the University of Michigan Law School. If I had it to do over, I'd attend again.

"I love practicing law."

"If I had it to do all over again I would not go to law school."

"I enjoyed law school more than I expected to, mainly because of the friends I made.

"I very much enjoy practicing law, but the pressure to bill hours and the amount of work I must do is difficult and disappointing. I would like to get involved in some community activities and devote some of my energy to something other than 'making my living,' but I don't have time to do that."

"As a general matter, I find lawyers to be too aggressive and the practice of law involves excessive hours. On the other hand, the pay is ridiculously good, and for reasons beyond my comprehension, lawyers are respected in our society. On the whole, however, I find that whenever I meet a bright, eager person who is about to enter law school, I am depressed, and have a mild urge to dissuade him/her from this pit."

Introduction

In the spring of 1988, the Law School mailed a survey to the 365 persons who graduated from the Law School in calendar year 1983 for whom we had at least some address. (For only three people did we have no address.) Two hundred thirty-five class members responded--a response rate of 64%, continuing the pattern of high response to the surveys that the Law School has been conducting since 1967.

Here is a report of our findings. We begin with some tables that sketch a profile of the class five years after graduation and follow with a more detailed look at class members before law school, during law school and in the settings in which they are now working. We end with the comments class members wrote in response to the last question on the survey, which asked for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever." A few examples are at the top of this page.

As you will see, five years after law school the great majority of the class is married, practicing in law firms, living prosperously but working long hours, contented with their personal lives and careers. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Some in the class have never married and many have married and divorced, many practice in settings other than law firms and many others do not practice at all, and many are only moderately satisfied with their lives.

Table 1
A Profile of the Class of 1983 in 1988
 Total respondents: 235 of 365

<u>Family Status</u>		
Never married		32%
Married once, still married		58
Divorced		5
Remarried after divorce		3
Other		2
 <u>Children</u>		
None		60%
One		23
Two		14
Three or more		3
 <u>Nature of Work</u>		
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>		
Solo practitioners		1%
Partners in firm		6
Associate in firm		62
Counsel for business or financial institution		6
Legal services, public defender		3
Government		10
Other		2
 <u>Class Members Not Practicing Law</u>		
Government executive, administrator		1%
Business owner or manager		4
Law teacher		3
Other		4
 <u>Average Hours Worked per Week</u>		
Fewer than 35		7%
40-44		12
45-49		14
50-54		26
55-59		17
60 +		25
		} 68%
 <u>Earnings in 5th Year</u>		
Up to \$35,000		18%
\$35,100-\$45,000		12
\$45,100-\$55,000		23
\$55,100-\$65,000		20
\$65,100-\$80,000		19
Over \$80,000		8
		} 47%

Life Satisfaction (Very Satisfied, In Middle, Very Dissatisfied)

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>VS*</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>VD*</u>
Their legal education at Michigan	56%	36%	8%
Their current family life	68	27	5
The intellectual challenge of their work	52	43	5
Their income	56	39	6
The balance of their family and professional life	34	55	12
Their relationships with co-workers	64	32	4
Their career as a whole	50	47	2

Politics

<u>Portion of Class Who Consider Themselves:</u>	
Very liberal	26%
More liberal than conservative	29
Middle of the road	19
More conservative than liberal	16
Very conservative	10

How Class Members

<u>Compare Themselves with Other Attorneys About the Same Age</u>	<u>Less than most**</u>	<u>About Average</u>	<u>More than most**</u>
Skillful at arranging deals	14%	31%	55%
Effective as writer	5	6	90
Aggressive	28	28	44
Compulsive about work	30	31	39
Concerned about impact of their work on society	15	37	49
Honest	2	6	92
Concerned about making a lot of money	49	32	20
Self-confident	14	27	59

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

**Questions asked on a 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1,2 and 3 as indicating person to be "less than most" and 5, 6 and 7 as "more than most."

Backgrounds and Life Before Law School

In one important respect, the class of 1983 was more diverse than the classes who entered several years before it. As ever, a majority of the class were male, but 30 percent of the class were women. By contrast, in 1973, just a decade earlier, only 9 percent of the graduating class were women. Over the same period, the proportion of the class who were Black, Hispanic or Native American remained essentially steady at about 9 percent.

As has been true for many years, the fathers of most class members were businessmen or professionals. Twelve percent of fathers were attorneys. Nine percent were blue collar workers.

Thirty-nine percent of the mothers of classmates worked as homemakers. Of those whose mothers held jobs outside the home, 31% were teachers, other professionals, or business managers. None were attorneys.

As in preceding classes for many years, a majority of the class began law school immediately after finishing their undergraduate education. There was, however, a trend during the 1970s toward classes with higher proportions of members who began law school after a break. Twenty-two percent of the class of 1983 started law school two or more years after finishing as undergraduates.

Eighty-four percent of the class had never been married at the time they began law school, and nearly all the rest were married for the first time. Eleven respondents began law school with children (one person had four).

The Law School Experience

Over a quarter of the class started law school without a plan for what to do with their law degree. Of those who did have a plan, the majority expected to enter private practice but 15 percent hoped to work in government or in politics and another 13 percent hoped to work in legal services or a "public interest" setting. Only three percent planned to work in a corporate counsel's office. (Eight years later, five years after graduation, the great majority of those who planned to work in private practice are working there, but so also are the great majority of those who had no plans or planned to work in government. Most of those who hoped to work in legal services are working either in private practice or in government. On the other hand, somewhat more people are working today in corporate counsel's offices than planned to be there.)

When they looked back from the vantage of five years out, most class members had positive feeling about their law school experience--56 percent strongly positive, a total of 75 percent more positive than negative, and only 8 percent strongly negative. Class members were most likely to regard with satisfaction the intellectual aspects of law school, displaying somewhat more skepticism about the law school as career training. (Seventy percent had strongly positive views about the intellectual experience but only 44 percent had strongly positive views about the law school as career training.) Half were strongly positive about the social aspects of law school.

When asked for advice about areas of the curriculum that ought to be expanded, class members far more frequently listed areas of skills training than substantive subjects. Recommendations to increase offerings in legal writing, negotiation, trial techniques and interviewing were each more common than recommendations for any substantive subject. (The most commonly mentioned substantive subject was Corporations.)

Life Since Law School

The Class as a Whole

It is difficult to generalize about the class five years after graduation. Class members are geographically dispersed, work in towns of all sizes, and, though a majority are in private practice, the settings of practice are remarkably diverse. Some of this diversity is conveyed in the tables at the beginning of this report. Here is some more detail.

About 55 percent of the class took a first job after law school (and after any clerkship) with a large law firm of 50 or more lawyers. Of this group, 69 percent still work in a large firm, 11 percent work in smaller firms, 7 percent work in a corporate counsel's office, and 8 percent have left the practice of law altogether.

About 48 percent of the class as a whole are still in the same job they took immediately after graduation. On the other hand, 19 percent of the class have held at least three jobs. (One person has held 7 jobs.) Five years after law school, almost two-thirds of the class had been in their current job for three or more years.

What kinds of jobs did people hold five years after graduation? As Table 1 above reports, 90 percent of the class regarded themselves as practicing lawyers. Of those who did not regard themselves as practicing law, several were business owners, managers, or executives, several more were teachers (almost all in law school), and the rest were scattered across an enormous range of occupation. The diversity of the nonpractitioners makes it nearly impossible to generalize about their careers. One important generalization is possible nonetheless: the nonpractitioners were, in general, as satisfied with their careers overall as the practitioners.

Another generalization about the class of 1983 can be made: prior to 1980, a much higher proportion of women than men worked in settings other than private practice (such as government, corporate counsel's offices, and law teaching). While this is still true, the gap is rapidly narrowing. The proportion of both men and women in private practice is increasing, but the rate of increase among women is much greater.

The Practitioners

Of those who were practicing law, two-thirds were in private practice. Most of the remainder practiced in government or in corporate counsel's offices. Only six persons were working in legal services, for a public defender or for what they characterized as a "public interest" firm. In order to permit some generalizations about the relatively smaller numbers of persons working in settings other than private firms, we have

combined the results of our surveys for the classes of 1982 and 1983. The class of 1982 was surveyed in 1987 with a questionnaire identical to the one we used for the class of 1983.

Nine percent of the combined classes--46 persons in all--were working as government attorneys. Of these, almost two-thirds worked for the federal government, while the rest worked for state and local governments. Many government attorneys specialized in administrative agency work in fields such as labor, environmental law or securities.

Nine percent of the combined classes--45 persons in all--worked in corporate counsel's offices. Over half this group worked for Fortune 500 companies, another 18 percent worked for banks and financial institutions, and 29 percent worked for other business enterprises.

Two percent of the combined classes--12 persons in all--worked in legal services, public defender or public interest settings. Nearly all this group, in fact, worked in settings in which they primarily or exclusively served individuals as clients. Most worked in legal aid settings handling civil matters. Two worked for public interest firms.

Table 2 provides some comparisons of these three groups with those working in private firms. Given the differences among the groups in the types of work they do, not many relevant comparisons suggest themselves. Nonetheless, broadly speaking, those practicing in settings other than private firms worked long

Table 2
Members of the Classes of 1982 and 1983
Five Years After Graduation
Setting of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=46	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=12	<u>Private Practice</u> N=349	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=45
Average number of other attorneys in same office	44	6	142	20
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	33%	53%	21%	24%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	8%	17%	4%	3%
Average work hours per week	50	49	52	53
Proportion who regularly avg. 60+ hour work week	22%	8%	24%	30%
Earnings in 5th year (average)	\$38,800	\$27,100	\$57,900	\$54,400
Total pro bono hours per year (avg.)	27	39	57	27

hours, comparable to the hours worked by the private practitioners, but earned less money. (In fact, those working in legal services setting averaged less than half as much as those in private firms.)

How satisfied were the different groups with their careers? Class members were asked about several areas of satisfaction on a seven-point scale. Table 3 sets forth the proportions of the various subgroups who were very satisfied with each of four aspects of their careers and with their careers overall. We counted persons as "very satisfied" if they rated themselves as a 1 or 2 on the scale. (As the "Profile" table above indicates, very few persons recorded themselves as very dissatisfied--a rating of 6 or 7--on any dimension of their careers. Most persons who did not rate themselves as very satisfied as to any aspect of their career put themselves somewhere in the middle.)

Table 3
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Five Years After Graduation
Settings of Practice

	<u>Government</u> N=46	<u>Legal Services Etc.</u> N=12	<u>Private Practice</u> N=349	<u>Corporate Counsel</u> N=45
Proportion of group who are very <u>satisfied* with:</u>				
The balance of their family life and professional life	44%	58%	23%	50%
The intellectual challenge of their work	64	75	54	52
Their relations with co-workers	73	67	61	71
Their current income	18	0	65	44
The value of their work to society	73	92	21	25
Their careers overall	51	83	46	58

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

As table 3 indicates, there are some substantial differences in satisfaction among the groups of practitioners. Those in private firms were less often very satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives, even though, as shown in table 2, they did not report themselves as working substantially longer hours than those in nonfirm practice. Conversely, the firm practitioners were more often satisfied with their income than the other groups, especially the government and legal services attorneys. (Not surprising. They earned more than the government and legal services attorneys, and they and the others probably knew it.)

Those working in legal services, small in number, and government were most satisfied with the value of their work to society. In fact, more of the legal services group were very satisfied with their careers than any other group. It must be noted that the size of this group--12 attorneys--does not lend itself to very reliable analysis.

Are the satisfaction levels reported by all groups a cause for concern? Across each of the four groups except the legal services group, about half the practitioners were very satisfied and half were not. Some might say that discontent is healthy. Readers will have to draw their own conclusions. A recent large survey of private practitioners by the ABA reports that career dissatisfaction is high among attorneys, and especially high among persons in their first several years of practice. Far fewer of these young lawyers were well satisfied than is the case among our graduates. (See The Barrister, Winter 1985.) In our own recent surveys of the Michigan classes of 1972 and 1973 fifteen years after graduation, the overall career satisfaction of the attorneys in government and in corporate counsel's offices was approximately the same as their counterparts in the classes of 1982 and 1983. On the other hand, the lawyers in private practice in those earlier classes were more satisfied overall than the private practitioners in the classes of 1982 and 1983. Sixty-five percent of the private practitioners in the two earlier classes were very satisfied with their careers overall in their fifteenth year.

Class Members in Private Practice

As indicated above, two-thirds of the class of 1982 are in private practice, but the settings in which they work vary greatly. We can convey some of this diversity by dividing the class into groups by the size of the firm in which class members worked.

For purposes of our own analysis, we initially divided the firm practitioners into five groups--those in solo practice or in firms of up to 10 lawyers, those in firms of 11 to 50 lawyers, those in firms of 51 to 120 lawyers and those in firms of over 120 lawyers. Our divisions by firm size were necessarily arbitrary. There were no natural dividing lines between small and medium or medium and large firms. Some small, very specialized firms have practices that more closely resemble the practices of the largest firms than they do the practices of most other firms their own size. Moreover, what is regarded as a big firm in Ann Arbor or Colorado Springs would probably be regarded as a small or medium-sized firm in New York or Los Angeles. Nonetheless, in very broad ways, firm size is revealing.

Table 4
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Five Years After Graduation
Size of Firm

<u>Persons working:</u>	<u>N=</u>	<u>% of total</u>
Solo or in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers	54	16%
In firms of 11-50 lawyers	77	23
In firms of 51-120 lawyers	68	20
In firms of 121 or more lawyers	141	42

As table 4 displays, when we do divide the private practitioners into these groups, we find that a substantial number worked in firms in each of the ranges of firm size (though many fewer of the Michigan lawyers work in solo practice or small firms than is the case among lawyers nationally). However, the trend towards large firm jobs for Michigan graduates is becoming more and more apparent. The average number of other lawyers with whom the graduates of the classes of 1982 and 1983 work is 128-- up substantially from the numbers reported by five-year alumni even in the classes of the late 1970s. Over 40 percent of the combined classes now work for the largest firms, and the average size of these very large firms is 249 attorneys.

Table 5
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Five Years After Graduation
Settings of Work and Types of Clients

	<u>Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=54</u>	<u>Firms of 11-50 N=77</u>	<u>Firms of 51-120 N=68</u>	<u>Firms of more than 120 N=141</u>
Average number of other attorneys in same office	4	29	86	249
Average percent women among other attorneys in same office	15%	20%	21%	24%
Average percent minorities among other attorneys in same office	4%	3%	3%	4%
Proportion working in cities of under 200,000	40%	28%	7%	4%
Proportion working in cities of over 1,000,000	40%	45%	62%	81%
Proportion of time serving low or middle income individuals (average)	38%	7%	5%	4%
Proportion of time serving Fortune 500 or other large businesses (average)	18%	50%	58%	61%

Table 5 provides some information about the typical settings and types of clients of the persons working in firms of the various sizes. As the table reveals, members of the classes of 1982 and 1983 who worked in firms of 10 or fewer lawyers often worked in small cities and spent a considerable portion of their time serving individuals as clients. Those in the large firms, not surprisingly, tended to work in large cities and to spend their time primarily serving large businesses.

Although the nature of their practices differed greatly, in many ways the work habits of the lawyers in the various sizes of firms were much the same. As table 6 reveals, they all tended, as groups, to work long hours, although the same could be said for most of the government attorneys, legal services attorneys and corporate counsel in the survey.

Table 6
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Five Years After Graduation
Work Hours, Fees and Earnings

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer N=54	Firms of 11-50 N=77	Firms of 51-120 N=68	Firms of more than 120 N=141
Average number of hours worked each week*	51	51	52	54
Proportion who regularly average 60+hr. work weeks	25%	20%	18%	29%
Total hours per year working on a pro bono/no fee basis (avg.)**	68	45	45	67
Usual hourly rate (avg.)	\$95	\$110	\$119	\$130
Income from practice in fifth year (avg.)	\$42,700	\$49,900	\$57,500	\$66,600
Proportion who earned \$45,000 or less	60%	41%	20%	7%
Proportion who earned over \$65,000	10%	13%	19%	46%

*Instructions were to count all work whether billable or nonbillable.

**Question asked for percent of time working "no fee/pro bono (count explicit initial agreements only)".

Despite these similar efforts as measured by time, the economics of practice varied greatly by firm size. In general, as table 6 displays, the smaller the setting in which class members worked the less they typically charged for their time and the less they typically earned. Those in the largest firms averaged about 50 percent more than those in the small firms. The attorneys working in the largest and the smallest firms gave

more time to pro bono work than the lawyers working in firms of sizes in between. On the other hand, those working in firms of all sizes typically gave many more hours of pro bono time than their classmates working in corporate counsel's offices.

How satisfied were the various groups of private practitioners with their careers? Table 7 offers some comparisons. Few people in firms of any size were well satisfied with the balance of their family and professional lives or with the value of their work to society, and most, in firms of all sizes, were well satisfied with their relationships with co-workers. Not surprisingly, those working in the largest firms included the highest proportion who were well satisfied with their incomes.

Table 7
Private Practitioners
Classes of 1982 and 1983
Five Years After Graduation
Satisfaction with Career

	Solo or Firms of 10 or fewer <u>N=54</u>	Firms of <u>11-50</u> N=77	Firms of <u>51-120</u> N=68	Firms of more than <u>120</u> N=141
<u>Proportion who are very satisfied with:</u>				
The balance of family and professional life	30%	30%	16%	21%
The intellectual challenge of work	48	57	55	54
Their relations with co-workers	58	65	59	61
Their current income	35	51	65	83
The value of their work to society	32	21	18	19
Their careers overall	48	51	37	46

