Class of 1985 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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The University of Michigan Law School (and all others as well to the best of my knowledge) failed utterly to address the single topic of greatest impact on the careers of young lawyers: the business of law. How are law firms structured? Who is considered for partnership? How much money is required to run a law firm (partnership draws, operating expenses, etc.) and from where does that money come? What are the different types of partnership structures in law firms (general vs classified, etc.)? What are the current trends in law firm structure? There is obviously a tremendous variety among law firms and this type of education may be considered too "trade schoolish" for The University of Michigan Law School, but I have found that the work environment is the most important element of attorney satisfaction after graduation. A third year mini course would be an appropriate vehicle for addressing this most important area of the practice of law.

Law school at U of M was a very satisfying experience. Although I was not the greatest student and did not attend every class (or always stayed awake), I look back on my 3 years at Ann Arbor very fondly. I was not the type of student who was dying to get out of law school.

However, the attitudes of my peers since law school is very distressing. Most lawyers seem to hate their jobs (probably in private firms) and are generally unhappy. Possibly law schools need to put less emphasis on the big money, private firm mentality and emphasize quality of life.

The practice of law is great for making money, but lawyers and the law are vastly overrated and boring.

Practicing law is more challenging, more time consuming and much harder work than I imagined when I went to law school. However, I have been able to earn a comfortable living for my family and have a fair amount of flexibility with my schedule. I keep hoping one day I will magically know the answers to all the questions my clients ask, but I don't think that ever happens. I do enjoy the opportunity to continue to learn and grow professionally. The biggest drawback is the amount of time the job requires. It is difficult to balance the job and motherhood, but it can be done if your husband is willing to help a lot.

Contrary to what I have often heard said about traditional law school education, I found my education to be intellectually interesting and extremely helpful in preparing me for a broad-
based commercial private practice. (It also helped me for the even broader-based issues that arose during my federal judicial clerkship.) I think that the educational process was intact for those students who wanted to take advantage of it. While there was not a great deal of "practical" training, I disagree with those who believe that a law school should be a "trade" school (e.g., teaching how to draft pleadings). The most important training is "thinking" and "issues" -- there is all too much time to learn the more mundane aspects of practice after law school, and little time for "thinking" and learning new areas with the same degree of exploration.

I feel that I obtained a legal education second to none (although a number of the professors were too aloof -- others were approachable, and I consider professional friends of mine).

Large law firm life is exciting and dull at the same time. A bright and motivated mid-level associate has opportunities for many challenging and rewarding tasks. However, the hours in big law firm practice are suffocating and do not leave enough time for personal life and professional development (such as keeping up with case law).

On balance, I have been surprised by how obstreperous my opposing counsel have been (more so those from large law firms), and I suspect more than a few have acted unethically. On the other hand, I am pleased to say that I consider most of the lawyers in my firm to be ethical. Of course, I wonder how much of this is a perception problem.

It annoys me that the Law School perpetuates the notion that the only two options for graduates are working in large corporate firms or "public interest" entities -- feast or famine. Government work is really public interest work, often there is greater responsibility than in law firms, and the pay is better than in the so-called "public interest" entities.

UM Law, I suppose like most other law schools, seems to be a tremendous waste of student, faculty and administration time. I do not know of another institution where such a collection of diverse and intelligent persons are put through such a lengthy course of stultifying exercises to emerge without any particular practical skills than might be gained in six months' training in legal method and writing or is later gained in associate "apprenticeship."

I daresay a UM Law degree is marketable (which is no small thing), but if the course of legal education at UM Law is content to settle for mere marketability rather than practical professional training and in-depth scholarship and writing, then it remains a waste of the great bulk of talent drawn to it. UM Law should be a leader in clinical programming, which not only is the sole effective tool for imparting practice skills, but also would serve a continuing crying need for community legal
services. UM Law should be a leader in exploring alternatives to the Socratic technique, which all too often (in the hands of inartful professors) obscures rather than illuminates the workings of the law. UM Law should be a leader in emphasizing testing and teaching techniques which reward analysis and writing skills over the course of a term rather than speed typing and rote memory of buzzwords.

I like being a lawyer. I am grateful to have a UM Law degree that opened so many doors. But despite having had a "successful" law school experience, I look back on it as six months of learning the game, and two-and-a-half years of repetitive annoyance that rarely stimulated, informed or trained me. I got my ethical, practical and analytical legal training during summer clerkships or as an associate after graduation. What a shame UM Law does not mean more to me.

1. The present bluebook grading system doesn't work well at a school like Michigan where the students all come from such excellent academic backgrounds. It might be meaningful at schools where some part of the student body is not motivated or does not have such skills, however, I would bet that at Michigan the differences between, say, a C+ and a B+ exam are not always significant, although the consequences for students are great. I would encourage some portion of grades to be allocated on a different basis -- papers, a few multiple choice, or at least more time on the exams.

2. The school should not be so reticent about publicizing its high academic status, which is not always as well known as it should be in other areas of the country. I think this situation has improved under the new dean.

1. There is a wide-spread belief among law students that the probing and questioning of law school is a waste of time because, once you are in the practice, all the questions have been answered. In fact, the thing that law school does best is give you a taste of the moment-to-moment ambiguity that is the practice. It lays the groundwork for the exercise of judgment.

2. I started at a large firm working for the wealthiest entities in our society. I am much happier and more fulfilled at a small firm representing labor unions, working people and disabled children. I do not know how or why my contemporaries continue wearing large firm crowns of thorns.

I believe I received an outstanding legal education from the University of Michigan.

The problem I see with the practice of law is not that it is inherently less satisfying than other occupations, but that the satisfactions it offers are not in proportion to its demands. I basically enjoy my job, but it leaves too little time for family or more socially-useful activities such as work with charitable
organizations and it doesn't offer anything to make up for those losses.

On the one hand, I think that the work of most lawyers, especially those in private practice, is slipshod, not because they don't work hard and aren't intelligent, but because they are too greedy. They (firm management) take on more work than they can competently handle and therefore the clients suffer. (As well as the associates).

On the other hand, I think that there is too much emphasis on "excellence." Doing quality work is fine, but what good is "excellence" in trivial matters, or excellence in representing the financial interests of wealthy clients while families fall apart and people live on the street? Yet a person who has different priorities or doesn't put his work first is suspected of moral failings. This is a problem that law schools tend to intensify. We as a profession should focus more on the big picture. I have seen a lot of dazzling briefs that totally miss the point and a lot of brilliant lawyers who also don't have any concept of what is important in life.

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Practicing law has proven, for me, to be incredibly dull and boring. I was told, and I believed that law school would be great training and background for business; I would not give that advice to someone seeking my counsel. Lawyers, speaking very broadly, are narrow minded in their focus because of the law school training. We are not taught to think of the big picture. We also are conservative by training, hired to think about what could or might go wrong. This, some might argue, is good training for business. In my experience, though, it makes lawyers afraid to move and take risks for fear of what could or might happen. I am making a transition to the business world and find that I need to quit "thinking like a lawyer" and start thinking differently. I am optimistic about my own success but would not recommend this route to others.

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I have just switched from practicing law to teaching law. I enjoyed practice very much but found the lack of control over my workload and personal life to be especially difficult.

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Law schools should change both their admission criteria and their instruction of those admitted. Admission should be based on critical thinking ability. Basic, critical thinking should not be taught in law schools. It should be brought in and focused. There is no such thing as "thinking like a lawyer:" there are only "thinking" and "not thinking." Law schools should be open to those who can think.

What to do with the thinkers? Focus their abilities. Unfortunately, the Socratic Method fails at this. It is too Socratic, too much like Socrates's method in The Dialogues: a series of leading questions, a game of "Guess what's on my mind." This is a waste. Law is not a guessing game. It is problem
solving, problem foreseeing, problem avoiding. Instruction should focus accordingly.

How should such a focused curriculum be structured? It should teach the theory and practice of law. Students should be taught theories of what law is, why it is, what it should be. Many would say that theory is already taught, even overtaught. It is not. Theory is merely given lip service in the fuzzier nooks and crannies of the current curriculum. This is a lost opportunity. Law school is the only time most lawyers will have a block of time for theory, for deciding what they think about law and the legal profession.

And practical training needs to be improved in every way imaginable. At graduation, Dean Sandalow ridiculed a lawyer who complained that Michigan graduates did not know which side of the courtroom the plaintiff sat on. Sandalow was missing the lawyer's point, a point that makes a telling comment on the education we had received. We did not know which side the plaintiff sat on because we did not know how to get to court in the first place, and we doubly did not know what to do when we found our way there. We were unprepared to solve real, legal problems for real people.

The profession already has more people suited only to be professors, clerks, and large firm associates, people sheltered from the realities of law practice, than it needs. Law schools do no good producing more. Law schools should produce people who can take a matter for an individual or small business and turn it into a winning case, or better yet keep it from becoming a case in the first place. There will never be enough of these lawyers.

Michigan treats its students and alumni who are in need of financial assistance like second class citizens. Since the amount of money one has to live on is a big part of the law school experience it is hard to come away from law school with positive feelings after being thoroughly demeaned by the financial aid office.

What you should do is set up an independent person to oversee them. A person who students or alumni could go to with their complaints.

Nice building
Smoked a lot of dope
Played a lot of frisbee
Too bad I never finished my Law Review note....
(I still intend to, really....)

Michigan may be a fine school to attend for those who want to work in a big law firm after graduating. However, for those of us who had no intentions of sweating our lives away in big law firms doing research, Michigan's placement office was absolutely useless. I often heard there were "so many things" I could do
with my law degree, but never learned from the placement office exactly what these "things" were. Michigan needs to improve its placement resources. I found that Georgetown's placement office was much more helpful than Michigan's. They have information about employment opportunities other than with law firms, which tend not to hire minorities, anyway.

Law school must become more practical. The notion the school should confuse is absurd. Professors should try to understand the practical effect of what they teach. As an example, J.J. White was excellent at this. Reed (who is gone) and St. Antoine were good, too. Others get hung up on esoterica that is meaningless in actual practice. I feel that if someone had just explained what the point of each area of inquiry was, I could have learned, instead of just mimick or regurgitate.

The first three years after law school I practiced corporate law with a firm of 175 attorneys in the mid-west. During that time I experienced more than a little but not a lot of race-based discrimination from my superiors and my peers. At one point during my association with the firm, the senior partner that I reported to indicated that if a partner was not giving me work solely because of my race, it was my problem and I had to solve it on my own. Race is still an issue in the legal profession and even more so in the big firms, and the National Law Journal statistics seem to support that fact year after year.

In addition, there was some very unethical behavior exhibited by some of the partners that went unreported. There are two issues that need to be addressed by law firms and law schools. How to address them is a question that I have been unable, at this time, to come up with an answer for.

Grades in law school are extremely important to most of your graduates for getting jobs. To have grades hang on one three-hour exam that must be graded fairly quickly (How can one professor read 100 exams in two weeks or less and do an adequate job?) is to guarantee inaccuracy in evaluations and unfairness. Moreover, your tests emphasize thinking "off the top of your head," writing as much as humanly possible, and proving that you're a good technician. Taking time to think about theoretical problems and the implications of your conclusions for the community and social good is discouraged.

I spent the most boring three years of my life in law school at The University of Michigan. I think you ought to revise your curriculum, throw out your case books, and teach your students to think in greater depth rather than to "massage the facts." I think you also need to teach your professors how to teach. I took my last semester of law school at the University of Pennsylvania Law School and wished I had gone there for the full three years.
Still, some professors I had at Michigan were really thought-provoking. Professors Whitman and Schneider stood out.

Law school was boring and the professors were generally very narrow minded. Wade McCree, Ted St. Antoine, and James White were good.

The financial aid office was terrible. After being approved for an externship at the NAACP,LDF in New York for the second semester of my 2nd year, the financial aid office cut my financial aid making the externship impossible.

I enjoyed law school a great deal and learned a lot but it has so little to do with almost any of the work I have done since that I am sometimes astonished.

1. UMLS should devote much more energy to understanding the underlying nature of all the conflict in our world, and less energy on manipulations of legal labels.

2. My 3 years at Ann Arbor left me EXTREMELY ALIENATED from the U., especially the Law School. Appeared to me that most of the faculty could not deign to relate to students in a personal way -- this emotional coldness dramatically reduced my interest in and enthusiasm for the intellectual life of the School.

I would suggest you find faculty members who really value and care about students, and rid yourself of the many egomaniacs I had to put up with as part of my legal education.

Virtually everything I knew about the law I learned in practice or in my bar review course. I hope medical students are not as unprepared for practice as I was. While I recognize the importance of a good general education, the fact is that the U-M Law School, like other leading schools, does not train its students how to be lawyers. This should be the function of a "law" school, in my opinion -- otherwise, it is a long program whose orientation serves little purpose for the vast majority of its students.

The legal education which I received at the University of Michigan was excellent. Keep up the good work. Thank you.

I run a political consulting firm and serve as an elected official. The questionnaire doesn't capture it at all. I doubt you get any useful info from it, but it sure is fascinating to see what expectations you hold.

While I don't care for the practice of law I am still very proud of my degree from U of M Law School.

I think one of the biggest failings of the School is to send these kids out into the profession who have never had any experience with it via family members or whatever. I've seen a
lot of disillusionment develop with my peers as they learn through experience that law is a very competitive business, rain making is king and that good "legal" skills buys little more than an admission ticket to the competition. I see nothing wrong with the profession being this way, but I came out of school having a good sense that it was this way through my father who has practiced for many years.

I feel the School should put some effort into educating its students about the realities of the business so they'd at least have some clue of what to expect.

Evening lectures on the economics of the business, where clients come from for various specialties, etc. by successful practitioners may prove worthwhile.

Being a lawyer isn't a bad job. It's probably more satisfying and rewarding than most jobs. But I rarely look forward to going to work. I hate the stress, and I don't see it getting any better. I'm hoping to find something better to do.

I am most proud of Michigan and what it has done for me. But always facing a challenge throughout school, I feel corporate practice has been most disappointing. It is a job for underachievers and those totally oblivious to the social waste created by hungry plaintiffs' attorneys and insecure judges, even at the federal level.

I expect to leave this practice soon. I can't continue to waste what Michigan was so successful in giving me.

Overall, the practice of law is very different from what I expected in law school. I expected a lot more court time and a somewhat academic/disassociated day to day practice. Instead, it's been much more of a business, with daily contact with clients and a constant concern attracting new clients and collecting bills. While I don't think law school prepares you for those practical aspects of the practice, it provided me with the fundamental knowledge of legal principles and methodology which I use on a daily basis to serve my clients.

While I think some time should be spent in law school with the business aspects of the practice, I think law school should remain a place where legal theory and not practical aspects are emphasized.

Great School, Great Training, Great Experience.

Over the past few years I have become increasingly dissatisfied with my work.

A lot of the work (mostly drafting) is extremely tedious. There is not enough people contact, either with superiors or clients. I rarely see the end result of my efforts. There is virtually no
feedback on my work other than "the bill is too high." A lot of times clients (mostly Fortune 500 companies) treat lawyers with contempt, viewing us as impediments to doing business.

I do feel, however, that both my law school training and my work experience have taught me to be very analytical and to think well. I plan to use these skills and my experience to launch a business career in the very near future.

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My law school experience was very negative. I felt the Law School was very insensitive to the needs of the few low income students who managed to be admitted there. As a divorced mother of two children, I was told I could not qualify for any financial aid from the Law School. Consequently, my children and I lived like dogs while I tried to achieve the requisites of what I believed would be a better life for us. I shall never forget that I could not afford even to buy a newspaper while I was a law student at the University of Michigan. I am now very comfortable financially, thanks to my law degree, and so I do not write this out of any sense of bitterness (although I do feel bitter when I think of it), but in the faint hope that by bringing my experience to someone's attention, I may do some good that will benefit others.

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Although I much enjoyed my education at the Law School, I have the following 2 suggestions:

1. The legal writing program ("case club") must be improved. It should be more comprehensive; it should be a much more significant part of the law school education, not an afterthought of sorts. Moreover, it was (is?) not consistent as among the various case clubs.

2. The seminar requirements should be increased, and the disincentive that now exists should be eliminated (the disincentive is that if one, in an effort to take more than one seminar class, opts for his/her second seminar choice, it is less likely, if not impossible, for him/her to later take his/her first choice because those who have not taken any seminar, and who typically wait until third year anyway, have a priority).

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Performance in law school has no direct relation to, and is not a predictor of success on bar exams or in legal practice.

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Very disappointed with the quality of judges. Most are incompetent, unnecessarily nasty, extremely egotistical, and lazy. I often feel that when justice is done, it is due only to luck.

I am also disappointed with lawyers' ethics. Winning and making money is paramount, to the extent that many will lie, and take clearly unwarranted positions in order to prevail. There is far too little respect for the law and for fairness.
1. My law school years prepared me significantly better than the "average" attorney and better than most of my partners/associates who did not attend Michigan. I did not share this view upon graduation.

2. I am very concerned about what appears to be a trend at the Law School in hiring too many young, inexperienced, liberal "intellectuals" vs. a balance of instructors more representative of the legal community.

Law school was great. It was exactly what I expected and wanted. It really opened my eyes to the social system and developed my skills of logical analysis. It also exposed me to some amazingly intelligent and interesting people -- both students and professors. As far as careers, it didn't aim me in any definite direction and didn't limit me in any way -- and that's what I wanted. Oh, yeah, I met my wife at the Law School. That was definitely the biggest benefit.

Life is generally unsatisfying, unstimulating, and problematic. Furthermore, the level of discourse in our society is unfortunately low, non-objective, non-analytical, and short-sighted.

Let us accept academia for what it is: a dreamland. This is o.k., but my experience there was that the level of discourse tended more to the dogmatic and less to the reasoned, which is extremely unfortunate considering the training which is supposed to be occurring.

I think more practical oriented activities ought to be taught -- I'm not advocating elimination of the "teach students how to think" mentality, but what about discussing a house closing in a real property course; or filing a protest in a tax case or reviewing the negotiations of a creditors committee in a bankruptcy course.

I have often felt that my legal education did nothing to orient me to real life law practice.

It's easy to get swept up and lose sight of your personal goals or values in law school. It's too easy to find traditional legal jobs and a lot of work to investigate alternatives to traditional legal practice. We know a lot of people who are looking for alternatives to private practice and having a hard time making the change.

I don't think a lot of the substantive law learned in school helps much in practice. I suppose if you know your practice area in school, like tax, you could learn what you need in school. For most people, I think the focus should be on writing and expressing yourself effectively. I believe more clinics and seminars would help in this regard.
Overall, I am not satisfied with my current choice of careers. I had hoped that I would be a member of a profession. A "profession" in my naive view involved nobler aims. But I find the modern practice of law to be just a business. This is even true in Iowa where the bar is relatively small and the standards of ethical conduct are high. Even bar activities seem to me to be primarily geared to advance a lawyer's business, rather than his/her profession. I wonder if my quite cynical view is unusual!

Law School was very enjoyable.

I found this survey difficult to answer, because while I have two jobs, I do not have a "primary" job in terms of time devoted or income -- I have two jobs of equal ranking, both of which can, depending on the particular week of the year, take up my full time. (My wage-earning job is a firm commitment for an average of 20 hours a week but is a wholly flextime position.) I am also a landlord and property manager for rental property in my duplex home.

I currently have a solo practice specializing in computer and high-tech issues, and I also run a local arts council. While the latter feels a lot like a public sector service job, it is for the most part a privately funded nonprofit agency.

If I were to select one of these occupations as a primary job on the basis of which I am most likely to be doing ten years from now, I would select the arts council directorship. I have been dissatisfied with law practice and will probably stop practicing within the next five years. I was an associate at a mid-sized business law firm in a small town for four years which was feeling a lot of economic pressure from competition and client attrition. I intensely disliked the deadline-critical, billing-oriented atmosphere and the demands placed on my time outside of the business day. The difficulties of practicing business law part-time and reconciling client expectations and demands with my decreased availability due to my other jobs lead me to believe that I will eventually give it up.

I thought the survey question about expectations and future indebtedness was well-targeted. An entrepreneur and quasi-public-sector wage-earner today, I never considered that law school debt would become a millstone around my neck if I wanted to leave a private practice salary for another type of work. I had vague positive feelings about how a law degree would "increase my marketability" and show versatility -- I didn't think about the cost to me at the time.

When I attended law school I had not researched the profession and had no idea that the average lawyer worked far in excess of the forty-hour work week. Although I am not married and do not have children, I am very active socially and in arts organizations and did not realize that a law career would
conflict with the amount of time needed to continue involvement with and enjoyment of these activities.

I think the biggest problem facing lawyers today is how to integrate work and family. This tends to be more of a problem for women, due in part to the fact that men have no choice at all: It is generally considered completely unacceptable for a man to stay home with kids or work part-time. I do not understand (a) why lawyers work so hard, and (b) why there is not more progress being made to satisfactorily resolve the family-work tension. I would love to hear a rational explanation of what economic and market forces require us to work as hard as we do.

Although I am very satisfied with my current position as an in-house counsel to a bank, it took me five years to get this position. After working for two mid-sized law firms in New York City it became apparent to me those positions did not reflect the high value I place on lifestyle and collegiality. There should be a lot more frank discussion with graduating law students about the advantages and disadvantages of different jobs in the legal profession (i.e., in large vs small firms, government vs private practice, inhouse vs firm). Such discussions could help students avoid pursuing choice for employment for the wrong reasons. This might avoid experiencing first hand the consequences of making the wrong choice.

I have been very fortunate. I enjoy my work and I have a wonderful home life -- now. I am not sure that the balance existing in my life today will be as easy to maintain once I decide to have children. Unfortunately, large law firms are not very accommodating to family life. While not ready to give up working, I know that I have decisions to make and they will not be easy ones. Part-time work means a minimum 30-hour week billed and a derailing on the partnership track. Women have come quite far in the profession, unfortunately the profession hasn't kept up.

A. I tried to take clinical law courses on several occasions but each time I was closed out because of limited space. Clinical practice should be a more integrated part of the curriculum!

B. The amount of discrimination based on race/ethnicity is astounding. Very few minorities are given real opportunities for employment at law firms, or even in government. Even if a minority attorney is hired, he or she is not given the respect he or she deserves. The legal profession has set up insurmountable obstacles that would allow minorities to succeed in law.

Having worked both as an associate in a large law firm and as a federal prosecutor, I find the latter much more personally rewarding and intellectually stimulating. Unfortunately, the gross pay disparity between the public and private sectors will probably cause me to leave the government in order to be able to
afford to buy a home and adequately provide for my family. I do not see how the government will be able to attract and retain qualified personnel in the future as the "pay gap" continues to grow larger.

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The most unpleasant aspect of litigation is dealing with unethical attorneys. Neither the bar nor the courts do anything even when the lawyer's conduct is blatant, such as blatant perjury or blatant false pleading. It seems that lawyers and judges believe in the "good old boy" idea of not disciplining anyone in the club. Lawyers are also afraid that someone might complain about their behavior. Unless the courts and the bars tighten up, we will reach a situation where outside regulation is required.

As to Michigan Law School, my three years were the best of my life. I learned so much and now find that I was better prepared by Michigan than any of my competitors. The Law School was great, the administration was great, the students were great, the competition was great, and the professors (even with their overinflated egos) were great.

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Overall, I was very pleased with my law school experience at Michigan. I learned a great deal and I'll always be deeply grateful for the insights I gained from greats like Yale Kamisar and Wade McCree. I found the atmosphere at Michigan to be conducive to learning and the development of friends. I strongly recommend it to law school candidates I counsel.

My only modest recommendation for change for the Law School is that the curriculum should be slightly modified to reduce the number of courses or credit hours during the first year. The pressures of adjusting to the first year are very rigorous and reducing the course load would ease the pressure slightly by letting students focus on the remaining courses. These courses could more easily be carried later over the remaining four semesters after the law student knows the routine and the pressure has eased.

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One of the great imponderable difficulties for a woman lawyer's career choices is whether she can have flexibility to move to pursue her career while in a long-term relationship or marriage. I thought it would be possible, although difficult, while in law school. I now believe it is not possible, and I am married to a man who "supports" my career.

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In place of a clinic (and for scheduling and financial reasons), I attempted to arrange an externship. My application was, I believe, completely arbitrarily denied. I was told, for example, that the program I had designed was at once too intellectually oriented, and too practically oriented.

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When I received this survey, I was somewhat dismayed that 5 years had already passed since graduation, but I also welcomed the
opportunity to offer constructive criticism.

Although I believe that we all regard the faculty and Law School as excellent, I do not know a single former classmate who regarded his or her 3-year Law School experience as excellent. This should be a cause of concern.

If the students, faculty, staff, atmosphere and facilities are all first-rate, then why isn't the Law School experience first-rate? Or perhaps I should say, why -- in my opinion and in the opinions of a limited number of classmates that I stay in touch with -- might not the Law School experience be all that it potentially could be?

I certainly don't know the answer, but perhaps I can offer a few more questions to consider. What values about our society and world are universal? What values can reasonable people differ on? How does/should a legal education help each of us and our institutions actualize or represent these values? Where and how do state and local legislatures fall short in promoting universal or widely held values and how do special interest groups, which do not represent broad social values, impede the legislative process? Can a legal education promote change, or "involvement", in our institutions? Does the Michigan legal education overemphasize the private sector? Does our society overemphasize the private sector and bureaucracies? Are too many societal resources devoted to tax collection and avoidance? What should be the role of a "national" law school?

No one prepared me for the type of stress which I have experienced every day at work during the time I have practiced as an attorney. I don't know if it would be possible, but it might be helpful if the curriculum included some sort of stress management course, perhaps in conjunction with the first-year research and writing course. It might also be helpful if the placement office could provide more information regarding careers which do not include working as a practicing attorney (i.e., business, certain government work, etc.). Otherwise, it is all too easy to slide right into practicing at a large firm, since relatively little information regarding career alternatives is available to law students.

I wish my law school education had included classes that promoted working with others as a team. The two classes that I took at U of M Business School while in law school did promote group projects and I found that helpful in developing the skills necessary to analyze others' ideas effectively and provide constructive criticism.

I think practice has essentially met my expectations. I also think, however, that by the end of law school my expectations had diminished significantly. I left private practice for an in-house corporate position because I didn't want to sacrifice all my own hopes and plans in order to find a place in an abusive
pyramid system that pressured me to bill more and more hours while demanding that I develop clients for the firm (even as a junior associate). I find my present work holds my attention and makes me realize the use and value of my skills. It's not always stimulating; practice doesn't pause for hypotheticals or very extreme situations the way law school does. But it does provide me with a good livelihood, which in turn allows me to plan and provide for my family.

Although I had intended to go to law school since I was in high school, the actual experience was quite unsatisfactory. It was the only academic setting I was ever in where the faculty was at best indifferent to the majority of the law students, at worst openly hostile (especially to those who did not equal the faculty's own intellectual achievements). Furthermore, the faculty/administration did not give students a sense of the practical aspects to being a lawyer.

Remarkably, I could count on one hand the number of young lawyers who are truly satisfied with their careers. It is unfortunate, but most young lawyers merely "tolerate" the practice, and hope for something better. At least in my case, I was very disillusioned to discover that, at least in private practice, it is not how smart and efficient you work that matters, but how hard you work. Anyone can be a lawyer; and, by and large, the client cannot distinguish a good lawyer from a very mediocre lawyer. Unfortunately, not everyone who practices does so with the benefit of a U-M education.

Unlike many of my colleagues, I have realized that while I enjoy my practice in a so-called "big law firm," I can walk away and survive and come back. The large number of jobs (4) I have held in the past five years reflects my decision to relocate 3 times in the past three years because of marriage. I left Los Angeles for Kansas and eventually came back to L.A. by way of Detroit. This movement has made me much more realistic of my expectations as well as law firms' expectations. Large law firms are corporations with corporate goals, mindsets and desires. The faster one realizes that the faster one can adapt. Camaraderie and collegiality notwithstanding, I am an employee. I have no illusions otherwise.

I greatly appreciate and value the fact that my diploma states "The University of Michigan." What I would like that to mean is another issue, however. I would like the School to make a commitment to legal ethics and instill the honor of being part of this profession. I believe too many U-M grads come away instilled more with the dollar value of their diploma rather than the honor it bestows.

I have to admit that having a law degree from the University of Michigan always garners respect and opens doors that would probably not be open otherwise. I would also concede that the time I spent in law school sharpened my analytical skills.
(although I deny that I learned to "think like a lawyer").

Otherwise, it was one of the most miserable experiences of my life. There was overwhelming pressure to conform one's thinking and one's life into very narrow categories. Competition, money and prestige became a part of the life of everyone I knew. The values of white middle- to upper-class males were disseminated uncritically and uncriticized. In retrospect, the damage to my self-esteem and life goals was almost immeasurable.

More time and effort needs to be spent in law school discussing and examining the role that the law and the legal system play in our society, whose interests it serves and why, and whether or not that is desirable. Ethical considerations need to be discussed much more fully than in the obligatory professional responsibility class. Greater encouragement must be given to various points of view. Public interest work should not be shunted off into a corner, but supported intellectually, emotionally and financially. When I was in school, the treatment of all students, but especially minorities and women, was degrading. In addition, I believe practical skills and preparation were shamelessly disregarded, to the point of leaving students unprepared for future careers.

I am obviously one of the disenchanted, but I believe law school gives its students an overinflated social posture, and a meager package of skills in exchange for their souls.

At least at the large firms and corporations, the practice of law has grown contrary to human nature and, perhaps increasingly, beyond human ability. Highly detailed, complex and all-absorbing, the practice demands a level of commitment that leaves little time for other pursuits, and imposes a degree of stress that heightens the already compulsive nature of many practitioners. Moreover, too many practitioners, and too often the most "successful" lawyers, grow to become cynical, self-absorbed and, by all appearances, concerned only with their own wealth, status and power over others. Whatever the reasons -- and they undoubtedly are many -- the result is a spiritually bankrupt environment.

Law school for me was probably not the experience it could have been. In part, this was due to medical problems, and due to being so far away from home for the first time. However, I would have gotten much more out of the experience had I been older and more experienced in life. If I could do it all again right now, I'm sure that I'd get much more out of the law school experience, and I would have much more to offer the class. This may lend validity to the proposition that it is best to enter law school after life has been experienced more fully.

I would like to see the Law School offer more classes concerning trial advocacy. Being an effective advocate in the Courtroom is something that cannot be taught in a two hour course. Although
trial advocacy is an art, the Law School could do more to provide a stronger foundation for those students who want to be trial attorneys.

While our class caught a rising tide in private firm salaries, which has eased my law school concerns about loan repayment, this benefit has not been without cost. I find myself expected to do so much work -- particularly for smaller clients -- that my hopes for pro bono activities have almost disappeared. Now, as business tightens, it becomes even more difficult to justify giving up billable hours in a small firm. Perhaps the attitude is different at larger firms, but here pro bono is accepted if done on your own time.

I am also disappointed in the UM Law School's reputation (or lack thereof) in business circles. While well regarded in academia, I find UM considered equivalent to any other state school by many in business. Perhaps this is East Coast bias/ignorance, but I had anticipated a greater "prestige" factor when I chose UM over several "big-name" private schools I thought intellectually inferior. (I may have a personal bias on this point -- I think UM's lack of prestige hurt my chances of getting a clerkship in my home area but I had no interest in applying elsewhere for personal reasons.)

Among my classmates, there were altogether too many cold technocrats. There were too few women and minorities on the faculty. There was not enough counseling, or encouragement, for those who did not want to work for huge, sprawling law firms in huge, sprawling cities.

Law school was great training for life. It was probably the worst/best experience I've ever gone thru. But for better or worse, I am marked as a lawyer, and will carry this with me to my grave. Not that I mind it, I think?

My work experience showed me that I did learn to think critically and to write logically as a result of my education at law school. I was always disappointed, however, with the emotional instability, pettiness and avarice that marred the character of a number of law students.

I feel that Michigan did a very poor job in providing effective financial aid to me. Consequently, I do not plan to provide financial assistance to the University or Law School. (I am currently providing financial assistance to my undergraduate alma mater, a private university.)

I also feel that the administration at Michigan Law School did an extremely poor job of balancing the interests of students with those of the University.

With rare exception I found law school to be an intellectually disappointing experience. While a minority of professors seek to
connect the meaning and purpose of law with other disciplines in
the social sciences, the dominant atmosphere is closer to
vocational training. There is a lack of emphasis on the
theoretical foundations of law and the normative implications of
legal doctrine. While it's popular to dismiss the former in a
school primarily devoted to teaching practicing lawyers, it only
underscores the fact that a JD from Michigan, and indeed every
top law school in the US, is not a serious research doctorate.
No self respecting department in any other humanities or social
science discipline would permit a student to receive a doctorate
from it without a working knowledge of the theoretical and
methodological foundations of that discipline. American legal
education really consists of a B.A. program, albeit with the
requirement that entering students must already possess a BA in
some other field before embarking on legal study. The results
are mixed. While Michigan produces excellent practitioners, it
provides no rigorous basis for embarking on a research career.
In my job as a researcher and writer at an institution in
Washington I found that most of my research skills came from
graduate school in political theory, not from law school. While
the profession needs future practitioners trained, top law
schools should not cater to these vocational needs at the expense
of academic inquiry. While Michigan handles this issue better
than most law schools, the general ambivalence of American legal
education about the academy's role, and a strong streak of anti-
intellectualism, threaten to undermine the professional status of
lawyers and the contribution they can make to society.
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The quest for billable hours is unhealthy to family life, but a
business necessity.
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Learning practical litigation and drafting skills would have been
helpful, moreso than any particular missing "substantive" course.
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Law school could do a better job of teaching people how to write
and interact with clients. On the writing side, there is
effectively no rigorous program in place. Using 2d or 3rd year
law students to teach writing is not very effective. Only a
comparatively small number of students get journal experience,
and it is not clear that the style encouraged by those
publications is all that useful in practice. I think that
writing should be integrated into the entire 3 year program -- it
is what lawyers do, whether in practice or academia. On client
relations, the top law schools seem to produce alot of bright
ambitious graduates with little sensitivity to client relation
issues, and very little idea about where lawyers fit into the big
picture. No wonder many are relegated to the library -- I
wouldn't let some of them near a client!
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I've seen too many of us go through law school with our heads in
the grade-obsessed sand only to wake up, some five years down the
road, at some Big Firm of Great Prestige feeling miserable,
cheated and confused. I think more attention should be given to
other employment options such as the District Attorney's or
Public Defender's office. While the money obviously can't match that of the big firms the job satisfaction is tremendous. You actually find yourself EXCITED to get to work.

I left law school $25,000 in debt, with an $18,000 salary in public interest law. Although my work is psychologically and intellectually rewarding, the financial burdens on my family have been great. Although U-M Law School professes to believe in the ideal of service to the poor, its actual conduct does not demonstrate such a commitment. Its curriculum is corporate-oriented and abstract. Its support for S.F.F. is inadequate. Its loan forgiveness program is weak and mired in technicalities. I strongly encourage U-M Law to establish more clinical law programs with public interest organizations, to fund SFF so that motivated students are able to pursue their commitment to the disadvantaged, and to adopt a comprehensive loan forgiveness program comparable to other leading law schools. I know I sound bitter, and I am. I basically feel that while U-M Law voices the noblest ideals of public service, it does not share in the financial sacrifices necessary to make these ideals a reality. The simple fact is that without institutional support, students are not capable of exploring any interest in or inclination towards public interest law. With all due respect, U-M Law should put its money where its mouth is.

I'm desperately in need of a career change but have not yet discovered what area of the law (or any job) would fulfill me.

Until recently, I was a corporate associate in a large law firm. My practice was primarily in the securities and M & A fields and, of course, involved many long hours at the office, at the printer's, at the client's.... I loved the job -- the pace, the education, the negotiation, the responsibility, and my co-workers made the work enjoyable. Most of my friends and my activities were related to my job. Yet as much as I loved the place and the people, and as successful as I was in the job, I felt that I was becoming uni dimensional, uninteresting and a bit complacent. In addition, I was burning out. The tell-tale signs were there, working to the point of exhaustion and then taking a luxurious vacation, but returning not-quite refreshed and not-quite enthusiastic about jumping into the NEXT big deal or greeting the NEXT summer class. And, oh yes, I'm female and single.

Eight months ago I quit my job at the law firm, aware of its many upsides but able to see the downsides as well. I took a job with a non-governmental organization in Europe. In many ways it was the best time to do so. I was a Fifth-Year Associate apparently doing well and well-liked by my fellow associates.

I'm not as happy with the substance of my job -- it's not as challenging or as engrossing. But it doesn't matter because my life, overall, is much better. My priorities are back in line with my overall beliefs. The move helped me to figure out what balance I'd like to strike between work and personal life. While
not there yet, I'm on my way. I intend to return to private practice within the next 2 years, but now I'll "select" the firm in a manner I wasn't capable of after law school and until I took a step away from the frantic pace of life in a large law firm.

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