Class of 1987 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/alumni_survey_reports

Part of the Legal Education Commons, and the Legal Profession Commons

Recommended Citation

This Response or Comment is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Michigan Law School Alumni Survey Project at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in UMLS Alumni Survey Class Reports by an authorized administrator of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact mlaw.repository@umich.edu.
The greatest value from my law school education appears to be integration of different legal disciplines (contract, commercial law, securities law, bankruptcy, etc.) in developing approaches to complex issues raised by modern business. Narrow application of a single discipline would not serve the interests of industry or provide adequate certainty to underpin a complex transaction. In this light, Michigan's emphasis on the philosophy and historical development of law have proved highly valuable in the longer term. It was not necessarily those courses with a direct nexus to my current work which contributed most, however. By selecting courses on the basis of interest in the subject and esteem for the professor I gained more than if I had stuck narrowly to courses I thought "useful."

I do resent that I am still $35,000 in debt (down from $42,000) some five years after graduation. In the first year of repayments I felt like Brazil, and similarly ended up renegotiating with Sallie Mae for a longer term and lower rates. Given that only a minority of students at the law school qualify for any financial aid, I wish that more were done to help those that do. That said, I consider the cost a worthwhile investment and I have no significant regrets.

I really enjoyed law school. If I could suggest changes, my suggestions would be to:

(1) mandate a writing class each term for the first two years;
(2) add more clinical or practical classes to the curriculum -- law school shouldn't teach us solely how to "think like a lawyer" but also how to best present the ideas we have.

It took about 3 years and two wars before I returned to the person I was before law school. I'm happy now.

I feel the School may put too much emphasis on the supposed benefits of working for large firms to the exclusion of other types of practices. I made a conscious decision to practice in a smaller area for a medium-sized firm. Though I started out making less than half of some of my better-compensated classmembers, I now am a partner making much more than most fifth-year associates in large New York firms. Moreover, I am happily married and own my own home. This, I suspect, is not the norm. Granted, it is unlikely I'll make $500,000 per year, but then again, neither will most people. In the shuffle to obtain often shaky employment at a big firm, life goals are often short-
changed and I feel the Law School should do more to address that mentality.

At the time, the placement office was not particularly helpful in assisting individuals interested in public interest or government positions.

I practiced law as a litigator for 5 years. I burned out on it and decided to do something completely different -- working for a nonprofit corporation. It was a great decision, though I took a huge pay cut -- from $60,000/year to $25,000. In fact, it was the best decision I've made in a long time.

Law school was the most intellectually stimulating experience of my life.

Government has been very satisfying; particularly when so many lawyers in private practice are finding their jobs insecure. If I didn't find being (somewhat) financially dependent on crazy in-laws, I'd want to do it forever.

In general I have been pleased with my experience in working with a large law firm, which is counter to my expectations. I have been fortunate to work with a group of people who are supportive and offer me the opportunity to have substantial responsibility with interesting work. The law firm I work with is also not as political as others which I am familiar with. However, I hope to soon get into other areas, such as teaching. I would also like to take some time and work overseas for a short time. I worked and studied overseas on quite a few occasions before practicing law, and even though my present situation is quite comfortable, I believe there are much more important things in life than making money. Along those lines, I perceive that the practice of law has become more bottom-line oriented than ever, and I therefore plan to go out and do other things in the near future.

(1) There is, as everyone knows, no professional need or justification for three years of law school; it ought to be cut to 1 or 2 at the most, with the third optional for those with special professional or intellectual interests. Lawyering is still, in the end, taught through apprenticeship.

(2) UM Law School provided ample opportunity and resources for serious intellectual work in and around the law; for this, it is to be commended.

(3) As with all higher education, greater thought needs to be given to pedagogy in law school. The so-called "Socratic" method -- which is not Socratic, but Sophistic (since it teaches, if it teaches anything, facility in arguing contrary points of view independent of questions of truth or rightness) -- yielded confusion as often as insight with respect to such basic issues as: the subject-matter of a particular area of law; the major
substantive or doctrinal issues within the area; the boundaries
between doctrinal issues; etc.

(4) The examination system rewards facility with language and
on-the-spot cleverness; it seems a poor indicator of success in
lawyering. (I say this as someone who did well on exams --
better than I should have on many, had they been better gauges of
my knowledge of the law.) There is no intellectual or
professional justification for closed-book exams -- they should
be abolished.

--------
I do not like my productivity (usefulness) to be measured in
billable hours -- as it is to a large degree right now.

A lot of my job can be very tedious and uninteresting -- too
detail-oriented for my personality.

--------
I find that law school did relatively little to prepare me for my
work as a transactional lawyer. It should have done more.
Courses like "Property" should be recast as courses like "Real
Estate" to deal less with ethereal questions and more with
information necessary to avoid malpractice. I believe that
Contracts, Corporations (Enterprise Organization), Civil
Procedure, Securities Regulation and other courses should all
deal much more with issues which practicing lawyers actually
face; I went through law school having taken all of the foregoing
but without ever having seen a merger or asset purchase
agreement, a loan agreement, a complaint, a prospectus or
registration statement, etc. Law school can teach these
fundamentals and still teach people to "think like a lawyer."

Overall, I enjoyed U of M Law School, met my best friends there,
and owe it a lot in terms of career opportunity.

--------
When I ordered a copy of my transcript last year, I discovered
that despite having been told all through law school that
"Michigan does not rank," Michigan does rank, and once one's rank
is placed on one's transcript, one cannot obtain a copy of one's
transcript which omits the rank. I believe Michigan graduates
should be able to obtain copies of transcripts that do not
contain ranking information, if those graduates so desire.

--------
I truly enjoyed the intellectual and social experience of law
school. Perhaps that enjoyment led to my utter disappointment,
until recently, with the practice of law in that the former had
so little to do with the latter. Since leaving private practice
to become a government lawyer, however, I have renewed my faith
in the practice and am beginning to recall why I went to law
school.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

--------
The thing that I find most interesting and most sad is how many
of my contemporaries in the legal community are unhappy. I
recently left private practice in favor of a corporate law department of a Fortune 500 company. Part of my rationale for leaving a large firm was that very few of those ahead of me were satisfied with their careers. Young partners and associates alike are frustrated with the unpredictability and time-consuming nature of their careers. Practicing law for senior partners might be a great lifestyle choice -- for those below them, it is not.

The overwork and the time pressures have undermined the collegial nature of private practice. Also losing in the push for improving the bottom line is good training. There is no longer any sense of apprenticeship in law -- there's no time. For these reasons, most of my friends are looking to move in-house or leave law altogether.

I believe that I received an excellent education at University of Michigan Law School. I treasure the education I received and the friends I made. I am now thinking of taking a break in my career to stay home with my baby.

I still feel like the atmosphere in law school was inhumane, but I do appreciate the value of the disciplined style of thinking that I learned there. I don't think the former is necessary to have the latter.

I wish you had a decent loan forgiveness program in our time. Working half-time through school, full-time through the bar exam, and then two jobs plus consulting for a year thereafter was my only way to realize my dream of working in a public interest organization.

During my first year of law school I found the atmosphere very intimidating. I found most, but not all, of my professors to be stiff and unapproachable. I found many of my classmates to be unfriendly and self-absorbed.

After my first year, I settled in somewhat. My grades were very good, which made me realize I could succeed and compete at that level. I also developed some lasting friendships with a few of my classmates (and several people a year behind me). As a general matter, I calmed down and enjoyed my second and third years much more than my first.

My enjoyment of the practice of law has also increased over time. The past two years I spent working for a government agency, doing work I found quite rewarding. I recently left that position for one as staff attorney for a large corporation -- practicing environmental law. I find this to be as rewarding as my last position and I look forward to continuing in this line of practice for many years to come.

I am quite dissatisfied with the quality of my life, especially the non-predictability of my hours. Due to the fact that the
market is so tight, I feel quite trapped in a job that at times I find stimulating but always all-encompassing. Had the market been different, I am sure that I would have already changed jobs.

Being a lawyer is better than most jobs but not ideal; it pays well but one must work too many hours.

I enjoyed attending U of M for law school, but I did not enjoy law school itself. Coming into law school with a broad range of interests, I found law school to be very limiting and narrowing. Unfortunately, I think that a lot of the creativity that we would like to see in young lawyers is bled from them in law school. I was uninterested in most of my courses, whereas I had always been very fond of school prior. What I enjoyed most at U of M was the diverse and extremely bright fellow students. I don't mean to sound snobbish, but it was refreshing to be in the presence of so many really intelligent people my age. Even dinner table talk at the Lawyers' Club was stimulating -- even if we were just joking around. Too bad that we couldn't all be studying something more intrinsically interesting -- like Sartre or the Romance Writers like Tennyson or Longfellow or Byron.

I just recently resigned from my law firm without definite future plans. Perhaps I will practice law in some other situation or firm. However, my gut tells me that I may need to expand my horizons and do something different. The practice has been changing so rapidly. It's a shame that I went to law school believing that the practice was something that no longer exists.

I consider my years at Michigan among the most enjoyable in my life. However, I attended at a time when almost everyone could get a job upon graduation. The stress I see in current students makes me wonder whether students today spend a great deal of time worrying about careers and job prospects, to the detriment of learning and intellectual curiosity and enjoyment of life.

I can't say that any particular course prepared me for what I am now doing (large corporate in-house position). Similar to my undergraduate liberal arts training, I learned the most from courses where professors taught analysis and method, and challenged students to think. I believe the Law School should add more training-oriented practical courses; but I also believe that the Law School must foster teaching and not merely scholarship on the part of professors. I would also support a movement away from the case method, which promotes laziness in professors and apathy in students.

The Law School, as a leading institution, needs to continue to promote excellence. It also needs to promote independence, and needs to play a greater role in turning out socially responsible lawyers, not just practitioners with good earning potential.

I hope that the Law School has improved race relations between
students of color and white students (and some faculty). This was a noticeable problem when I was there.

---------

Although the money is very good (if it were not, I definitely would not be practicing law), I do not think that I can continue to practice law as a career since I like it so little. Consequently, I have begun to think seriously about a career change and would consider new opportunities (especially non-legal careers), although I have yet to actively pursue a career change.

---------

If I had to interview again, I would inquire into the firms' policies concerning working mothers. It appears to me that at many firms it is not possible to put your career on hold while you have children. I realize some disparage the so-called "mommy track;" nevertheless it should be an option.

---------

I found that it was the teacher and not the course subject that determined my enthusiasm and involvement in the material. The law school classes which especially stimulated me and, in turn, which I thought were the most valuable were the same -- those taught by excellent teachers. I have to name Professors J. J. White and Doug Kahn as the two professors who taught me the most and whose teachings I still carry with me today. There were other classes which I was quite enthused about at the outset of a semester -- but which I got little, if anything, out of because of the teacher.

---------

Michigan Law School opened doors for me, even here in Arizona. Like many of my classmates (including my "living companion"), I took the easy route of interviewing with a firm on campus and taking a job with that firm.

But -- again like many classmates -- I found typical firm life to be stressful, limited in professional growth, and a lot of political bullshit. And I actually enjoyed the experience.

My point is this -- the Law School should let their students know that the typical private firm -- medium to large -- that most graduates go into, is not necessarily (and probably not) the most rewarding life they could choose. In fact, it is probably the most stressful and unbalanced.

My own decision to work in a small office out of my home so that I can spend more time with my children and less time commuting, politicking, driving to a sitter's, etc. may not suit everyone. But students should be thinking hard about their lives while they are in school, not just settle for the standard legal career.

On the other hand -- although this seems somewhat mercenary -- a couple of years in a medium-sized firm or small firm where a young lawyer can get good experience, client contact, and quality training -- may be a good sacrifice to make before striking out on your own.

---------
I switched six months ago from private practice (large law firm) to an in-house counsel position and am very happy with the move. I work 45-50 hours a week instead of 50-60, and face a lot less stress. This company is sympathetic to family concerns. I am four months pregnant and feel that with the flexibility this company offers that I will be able to continue working. I did not have to take a cut in pay -- and offer this advice to those who are in law firms and unhappy -- there is life outside of the law firm environment!

I would not describe my practice as thrilling, and I would rather be in a position in which I could see a more direct, positive impact on society, but on a day-to-day basis I am satisfied with what I'm doing.

Among the positive aspects of my "big law firm" work: a national law practice representing some of the country's most successful businesses, connections to the legislative process in Washington, and high income. Among the negative aspects: lack of control over my work, big-firm politics, and arrogant/inconsiderate opposing counsel.

I enjoyed my law school classmates and still am in contact with a number of them.

I also thought U of M was a positive place to go to law school although I wish there had been more encouragement and guidance in public interest areas.

Clinic and classroom exercises should be emphasized more to make the curriculum more relevant. It's asking too much of the case and Socratic methods to expect to spark the interest of students with minimal business or legal experience. Those methods can work with a good teacher, but are mediocre otherwise. In any event, the first week of any class should provide more content for the subject matter. Ultimately, more clinics, exercises and explanation could make law school classes less passive and keep students more engaged.

Please take greater pains to direct students away from big law firms. I left government for a law firm with my eyes open -- I knew what I was getting into -- and I still hate it.

For now, I'm trying to develop the financial independence necessary to move on, which I will do as soon as practicable.

I don't blame my firm -- in fact, I think it's one of the best and most humane -- but the price one pays for the bucks just isn't worth it in the long term.

Although I have not experienced any ethnic or gender discrimination, I have been discriminated against because of my political or social views and I have been subject to extreme
insensitivity (and even discrimination) against me because of my religion.

I am extremely satisfied with my career/family balance. After the birth of my first child, I quit my position at GM as a patent attorney. I then became an "outside attorney" for them. I handle only their work and it is all done from home so I can enjoy my children. My husband is also a patent attorney, so we have our own practice.

I feel very fortunate!

While I personally enjoyed my 4 years as a legal services lawyer, I often felt that I was not doing enough for my clients professionally. At best, I acted as a band-aid, alleviating an immediate crisis, but doing nothing to address the deeper problems that exist on a societal and individual level. This left me feeling very frustrated and empty. As a result, I left the legal profession altogether to pursue my first love -- psychology.

In general, I was very satisfied with my experience at Michigan and still am. Its strong reputation certainly was helpful in looking for a job.

I do feel that the Law School does not accommodate the needs of the vast majority of its students to learn how to become practicing lawyers. The curriculum instead is geared to teaching us how to "think like a lawyer." I know that this allows Michigan to produce some great legal minds. But let's face it -- most of its alumni are practicing attorneys in a very competitive legal market. More coursework which teaches practical lawyering skills (and more emphasis on and appreciation of these skills in existing coursework) would better prepare students to enter the world of real law and to succeed.

The Clinical Law Program was valuable to me because it taught the basic lawyering skills which I needed. One of J. J. White's great strengths in the classroom was his ability to deal with complex legal issues and to apply them to practical situations. On average, however, too many of the professors were so caught up in the nuances of legal theorization that they failed to convey the practical value of their subjects to a young practitioner.

Dean Lee C. Bollinger does a superb job as Law School dean. I believe that he is the person who can best prepare the University of Michigan Law School to move into the 21st Century as a venerable institution with strong traditions, which simultaneously stands at the forefront in addressing the critical issues of our time. Moreover, Dean Bollinger's commitment to study and address the needs of minority law students is commendable.
The men and women of the faculty make the University of Michigan Law School a very attractive place to study law. I have great respect for the diversity of philosophy among faculty members. I urge the Law School to seek additional race and gender diversity.

1) Why is civil procedure taught so fast and furious in the first semester? It went over my head. Trying to teach people with no concept of the different courts in the system (state/federal, trial/appellate) about pendent jurisdiction and such is absurd. Start with more basics and go more slowly with this course.

2) I wish I were not so burdened with loans. I'd have more choices, and maybe would not be in the job where I am.

My experience at Michigan Law School was very enjoyable. I believe that I was as well prepared, or better, for the practice of law as my co-workers from other schools.

Given the significant amount of time that negotiations make up as a percentage of total work hours, more offerings on negotiations (theory & practice) would be helpful.

The Law School needs to vigorously support the "basement" groups both as a means to get practical experience, specialized experience, and to have a social/networking tie to the school, classmates, and alumni.

The most helpful change the Law School might make would be to try to cater, somewhat, to students who are interested in a large firm transactional practice. I have found that most law students are unprepared (myself included) for becoming an associate in a large firm practicing in a transactional area. Most students are prepared to become litigators. Too little time was spent in school negotiating and drafting basic transactional documents and preparing to counsel clients concerning business matters. More emphasis in the first and second years of law school should be placed on these matters.

I find myself trying to talk people out of going to law school or out of "preparing" for law school. I serve as mentor to an undergrad student leadership fellow who wants to go to law school. As we went over her schedule for fall, I suggested she steer away from law-related coursework and go for more interesting courses. Most of the attorneys I know also steer young students away from law (or if they're already into it, away from the idea of work being #1 priority).

Since I have left the practice of law altogether, I have often "second-guessed" my decisions (1) to attend law school in the first place and (2) to pursue a legal career after law school. My decision to attend law school was not made after much soul-searching about what I wanted to do with my life, what I enjoyed, etc. Rather it was motivated by a prospectively large income and
thoughts such as "Well, what else am I going to do?" I fear too many of my peers made similar decisions.

I'm not sorry I went to law school, however, except for the time it took. I enjoyed law school. And I'm not sure at age 22 when I decided to go to law school that I knew precisely what I wanted to do anyway -- so it was a "default" decision. These must be commonplace and students should be warned of the danger in making hasty career decisions.

Worse by far was my decision to pursue a legal career. I am angry with myself that I failed to recognize (during law school and working at three firms over two summers) the aversion I would have to practicing law. Granted, it may have been just the firm or the type of work, but I believe I was "suckered" by all the hoopla and summer parties and prestige and money. Nobody to blame but myself, I suppose, but perhaps students should be counseled to "soul-search" a great deal more before leaping into the fray.

Now that I'm "out" and doing what I really enjoy, I'm a different and very satisfied person!

---

I found life at a big law firm to be very unsatisfying intellectually. It was glorified paper shuffling, and I know for a fact that I had more responsibility and freedom than peers at other big law firms. It was outrageous how much I got paid and how much I got billed out at for work that didn't require a lot of talent. Basically, a lawyer's role in a business deal is not as important as the lawyers seem to think.

I left my $80,000 per year job at a good law firm to work for my friend's growing mortgage banking company for $36,000 per year, and I am delighted that I did.

---

Every legal decision I make is always related to how a non-lawyer will react/use the information. Legal training could benefit from a focus on the interaction of legal issues/judgments and the rest of the world.

---

When I was in law school, most people wanted to work on Wall Street at places like Drexall, Burnham; Skadden, Arps; etc. I hope that has changed.

---

Law school places too much emphasis on competition to some degree, setting the stage for more adverserial interactions in the practice of law. There is far too little focus, discussion and/or opportunity for cooperation, compromise development of a sense of collegiality that might carry over into the practice of law.

---

With respect to question #11 concerning discrimination based on race or gender, I believe the question should be expanded to include law school experiences. I sincerely doubt that I am the
only female and/or minority who had adverse experiences at U of M Law School.

--------
I have found private practice to be a miserable, cynical life with no sympathy for other aspects of one's life. I found law school to be a poor preparation for law practice, not a very good teaching environment and law school generally to be a subsidized think-tank where academicians teach law students as the price they must pay to be in an "academic"/think-tank setting. They really would prefer to just research and write.

--------
I do not have any regrets for going through law school and practicing for a couple of years. But I have chosen to be a professional musician and to practice law only 5-10 hours per week, just to get by when my income as a free-lance musician and teacher are inadequate. I am very happy with this lifestyle choice.

--------
I'll break my comments into two parts: law school and post-law school.

Law school: As I look back on law school, I remember thinking that many of the classes didn't seem like they had any relevance (or practical application) to private practice. I would suggest a clinical class requirement. Those classmates that did take part in a clinical program thought it was their best class in law school. I would also suggest more counselors to help us pick classes. Those counselors might even be lawyers who would come in during registration time and explain what classes would have what type of relevance to a student's life as a lawyer. I know that I didn't have a clue what I was picking. I didn't have a mother or a sister who was a lawyer who could give me some guidance. (On the other hand, if I was as assertive as I am now, I would've sought someone's guidance!) I do regret not exploring other job options. I took the path of least resistance -- the private firm. It was the easiest thing to do because they were all in Room 200, but I wish I would've had a sense of what other type of jobs were available. I would also like to have known what non-legal options there were for someone with a J.D.

Post-law school: As a corporate lawyer in a law firm, I felt like I wasn't part of a team because the client wouldn't bring the lawyers in until there was a problem. At that point, the client was a wreck and needed the problem solved immediately, if not sooner! I also felt that I wasn't contributing to society -- helping a company purchase another company is not adding to society, it's only shifting things around. But, as a corporate lawyer I feel limited in how I can practice law that would contribute to society. Working for NOW, legal aid or the ACLU would involve litigation and I don't want to litigate!

I certainly would not recommend that someone should set their long-term goals on practicing in a law firm. I thought it was a good experience for a few years but I didn't want to be there
forever. At my firm, for example, the partners have no job security. There have been a number of associates (including me) and partners laid off in the past 2 1/2 years. Additionally, I resented the invasion of my private time. It was as if I was on call -- I had so many Friday and Saturday night plans canceled because a client or partner decided they wanted some document to read on a Monday a.m. flight.

It is sad to note that most of my friends who are lawyers are dissatisfied with their jobs/careers. Some of that is normal complaining -- something most lawyers learn in law school, I think. But a large number of those dissatisfied friends would like to leave the practice of law and do something else. The problem is discovering what that "something else" is.

I don't regret going to law school but I do not want to practice in a law firm again. I want to get involved in educational policy, especially as it affects underrepresented students. Now, all I need is to find that perfect job!

It's a good questionnaire -- I hope you find it useful. Thanks.

Debt is a killer. It really creates a lot of stress and limits career choices. If you wonder why I don't contribute to the Law School, it seems to me I'm still paying for it. I look back very fondly on law school. However, I think there should be more seminar and paper-oriented (as opposed to exam-oriented) classes. It's amazing to me how many of my friends would just as soon get out of law, though, if they could think of something else to do that would pay.

Practicing law as a big firm, corporate litigation attorney can be very invigorating and satisfying. But more often it is frustrating and stressful, with tangible results elusive. Given the increasing economic pressure on lawyers to minimize fees (but bill a lot), and to be extremely careful due to more and more malpractice filings (but also to be very efficient), a litigator's life has to be obsessive, compulsive and stressful -- unless one is blessed with a personality type that frees them from the need for self-preservation. Also....

While certain "front-line" activities are enjoyable (like motions, trials, certain depositions), the satisfaction these provide is tempered by systemic problems that disappoint the idealistic being in most of us. Both sides of lawsuits typically -- in fact almost always -- push their story to the limit simply to counteract the other side's similar charade, the only standard being "Rule 11." Settlements are usually reached after stripping away the B.S., but the "stripping away" is depressing. People just need to be more honest and forthright.

Law school had too much emphasis upon grades and not enough emphasis on applying the material taught. The heavy emphasis on grades, especially during the first year, often brought out the
worst in students. All in all, Michigan was a great place to
study law and experience intellect of the highest caliber.

The report should include a question about discrimination or
adverse treatment based on sexual orientation.

I am very happy with my current job; I work as a reporter for a
legal publication. I enjoy the work, the frequent contact with
other attorneys, and the people I work with. It's generally a
relaxed, friendly atmosphere, punctuated with bursts of stress
when press deadlines come up.

This job, however, is in sharp contrast to my experience as an
associate with a large law firm. I learned a lot while I was
there, and in many ways I'm grateful for the experience. But
continual stress, increasing emphasis on billable hours, and a
stunning lack of camaraderie made my tenure at the firm less
(much) pleasant than it could have been and less instructive than
it should have been. Success, for both associates and partners,
seemed to hinge on conformance to a rigid "cult of personality"—
one had to look, talk, and posture like the firm's idea of a
lawyer in order to be taken seriously. Even though I was the
first in my associate class to handle a jury trial solo, none of
the partners I worked with believed that I had "the right stuff"
to be a litigator.

Ultimately, I concluded that private practice was not for me.
But I wonder how much of that decision depended just on my
failure to conform to a culture that valued machismo, self-
aggrandizement, and relentless self-promotion as much as
substance. Perhaps at another firm my experience would have
been different. If I'd gone with a smaller firm after leaving my
old job, or gone into public interest law would I be practicing
law now? A lot of my friends from Michigan did make that change
— now, they say they really enjoy practicing law.

I'm glad I went to law school; I'm glad I went to Michigan. I
only wish I had listened to Prof. Christine Whitman when she told
our seminar group that "my friends who went the standard big-firm
route are all unhappy. It's only my friends who went beyond the
interview process to look for what they really wanted who are
satisfied with their work."

If I could do it all over again, I'd have gone into sales.

While I had certainly read cases involving sex discrimination
during law school, I was unprepared for the amount of
discrimination I have encountered as a woman lawyer in a large
firm. Our firm has only one female capital partner
(approximately 35 total) and only 5 female non-equity partners
(approximately 27 total). Women are more often passed over for
partnership or made to leave before they reach that level. The
biggest problem is the lack of partners willing to be mentors for
the women associates and the related lack of access which women
associates (and women partners as well) have to partners, travel, business contacts, clients, and high profile assignments. The men need to become more comfortable working with women and need to recognize the unique contributions that women can make. Unfortunately, this firm, and apparently many others, is still a "boys" club.

Given the discrimination that pervades this firm I simply don't think the sacrifice of time and energy the partners seem to want from us is worth it. Even if I worked 2500 hours per year, I'm not at all sure I could overcome the sexual bias. It's pretty hard to chase the carrot at the end of the stick when it seems likely the carrot will be yanked away at the last minute for reasons unrelated to merit.

-------

After law school I worked as the legal investigator for the Washtenaw County Prosecutor's Office. The job basically involved writing briefs on appeal, as well as a variety of nonlegal semiclerical tasks. The position was typically filled by a recent law grad studying for the bar and was thus designed to end when the graduate passed the bar. I took the job because it offered a short work day. My son, born after my second year of law school, was only one and I wanted to be available to him. However, I still felt an enormous guilt at leaving him in daycare every day, although his daycare was superb. When we moved from Ann Arbor in September '88 I continued to work, but after one month of commuting, quit to stay at home.

I attempted, after a month, to find a job as an associate, part-time, but with no luck. In November 1988 I was hired on a part-time contractual basis by the State Appellate Defender's Office. I worked 2 days a week, earning only $9/hour, writing briefs on appeal. I eventually expanded my hours to three days a week and took on some case responsibility, but was laid off in January 1991 due to a budget cut. I was aware I could have stayed on if I was willing to work full-time, but by then my daughter had arrived, and was only a year and a half.

I accepted criminal appellate assignments, but had to take on additional work to bring money in to pay for daycare because payment on assigned cases is not made until after the appellate brief is filed -- sometimes as long as a year after the work is done. Accordingly, I have been working on a contract basis with two attorneys in Detroit, both specializing in criminal law. As a part-time contract employee, I receive no benefits, must pay my own taxes, and spend little time in court.

After four years of working part-time I constantly question my decision to place parenthood above my career. I would love to work full-time, but believe the 50 to 80 hour work week required of many young attorneys would wreak havoc on my family life, upsetting my children and placing a greater strain on my husband, who himself works 50 to 70 hours a week. Unfortunately, most of the jobs in my field offering regular hours are also low paying,
so that the added time away from my family seemed financially unjustified.

I feel strongly that my skills are in large part being underutilized and that I am being professionally penalized because I have chosen to place my family before my career. I am sure many other women are in the same situation, having to accept second-class work when they have first-class skills, simply because our profession seems to refuse to accommodate the needs of parents.

Although I would not take back the time I have had to watch my children grow, I still find it galling to see other attorneys, less capable than I believe myself to be, taking on jobs with both prestige and distinction -- and relying on people like me to work as glorified clerks.

I would be interested in knowing how other women cope with this problem and with the constant guilt which accompanies whatever choice is made -- guilt about neglecting children, guilt about failing to realize your own potential.

I have no complaint about the number of hours I work; however, the hours that I am at work are highly stressful. The gap between partners and associates is ever widening. Fewer and fewer associates are being made partners and many others are being let go. Although these changes are economy-based and not related to a lower intelligence among associates than among those lawyers who have already made partner, law firms are very reluctant to admit this. They choose instead to lengthen the partnership track and tighten the merit-based criteria. This lack of honesty and communication deepens the rift between partners and associates, many of whom feel (after 6 or 7 years) that they have few other options available. Partners understand this and tighten the noose. Competition among associates increases, leading to a lack of camaraderie and collegiality. I believe this situation will lead to many associates pursuing alternate careers.

There is still a disparate impact upon women in law firms trying to become partners/shareholders/decision-makers. Adverse impact of flexible work schedule decisions for family choices and business development activities and opportunities.

Law school would have been much more straightforward and less stressful if a third-year had talked with the first-years about what was expected...what professors wanted to see for a good performance.

While I cannot truly say I regret the law school experience, I look back on it with a shudder. It was a very deadening time for me. While my grades were fair (B+ average), I felt I never knew what the hell was going on. The Socratic method was ineffective; a waste of my time; a stupid game of "can you guess what this is
all about." I do not understand why most professors couldn't or wouldn't just simply impart information.

In my current business, my legal background has saved me money in negotiations, corporate matters and the like. Mostly, it has been an effective "stick" in dealing with persons who don't want to take businesswomen seriously.

While I fervently hope I never have to practice law again, or even set foot in a law library, I do value the comfort of knowing I can do something lucrative and (though less now) secure. I hope I don't have to use it though -- it just about killed my spirit! Besides, I felt very uncomfortable parading myself as a "lawyer" -- it felt like the emperor with no clothes -- could they tell how little I really knew in spite of the $55,000 salary I was paid?

When you boil it down, the thing I really detested about law school was how stupid it made me feel, an emotion I had never previously encountered. Humility was a hard lesson.

-------

1) U. of M. has a poor curriculum and generally horrendous teaching (perhaps with the exception, during my stay, of Seligman and Schauer). I was quite disappointed with my education. The faculty should be ashamed. Most of the so-called "star" professors are buffoons and oafs. The non-star professors may not be as offensive, but they are equally pathetic. The "teachers" should learn how to teach. No excuses.

There also is no excuse for any law school to renege on its obligation to teach its students how to be lawyers. That is what students pay for. Students do not want to pay for professors to write law review articles. Who reads them (other than other law professors maybe)? Who cares? A law school's primary service should be as a vocational school for the legal profession. That means, scrap the case method after the first semester; instead, emphasize black letter law, drafting skills and negotiation.

In short, not only is the faculty bad at what it is supposed to be doing, but (to add insult to injury to my career), they teach the wrong things.

2) Assuming the faculty can teach, and assuming they teach the right things (both a stretch at U. of M.), law school should be two years. Yes, you can keep the first year as it is -- a grounding in the basics. Second year could be devoted to area-specialization. But the third year is worthless (and yes, during my third year I actually went to all my classes and read all my books, unlike most of my classmates). Instead of a worthless third year in law school, students should get practical experience in apprenticeship, clinics or social work. Of course, the professors would never stand for this; one-third of them would get the boot. Maybe they'd have to get a real job where they could learn what lawyers really do.
3) I learned more about law in my thirty-day bar review course than I learned in three years at U. of M. And the bar review was much more fun and interesting. Honest. Could have saved myself some dough.

4) In case you're thinking of asking, don't expect even a single cent from me for the U. of M. alumni fund. I am still waiting for a refund of part of my tuition. The quality of product provided by U. of M. would make an oleaginous used car salesman blush.

5) Whoever designed, approved, funded and built the law school library addition (I mean the addition to the old library; not the new underground library) should be banished to upper Greenland. How embarrassing for all of us.

6) One good point: Nancy Krieger and her entire staff during my years at U. of M. were nothing less than awesome.

7) Thank you for this opportunity to air my views. Doubtless nothing will change. Why should it?

Law school -- what a scam. U. of M. knows that scam well.

------

I do practice law but not in the traditional sense. I've been an attorney with the Secretariat (2 years) in Kenya for the recently signed treaty on biological diversity. I also work assisting developing countries on strengthening and/or establishing effective environmental legislation, policies and institutions.

------

During the past 5 years, since my graduation from law school, I have been struggling to come to terms with my extreme dislike of private practice. I enjoyed law school at Michigan -- I thought the teaching I received was very good and I found many aspects of law school quite intellectually rewarding. I also felt part of the law school community and I remember very few instances (if any) of discriminatory treatment of women and minorities at the Law School. My experiences at Michigan did not prepare (could not have prepared) me for the oppressiveness of private practice. I find the work I do boring and completely meaningless, the atmosphere at the firm unpleasant and increasingly competitive, the prospects for partnership elusive and ultimately unattractive, and the opportunities available to women and minority attorneys much more restricted than those available to white men. It is difficult for me to overstate the degree to which I feel alienated from my law firm. For the last several years I have been saving money and positioning myself to be able to leave my firm, and I will leave one year from now. I joined the firm expecting to make my career here, and my subsequent disillusionment has been very painful for me.
I really hated law school. I had wanted to go to law school since I was ten years old. I thought it would be the ultimate intellectual challenge. First semester, I did enjoy it. I loved learning a new way of thinking and analyzing problems. When I returned for second semester, I discovered, to my dismay, that there wasn't anything else to learn. Every class was exactly the same. The material changed, but the approach remained mind-numbingly similar -- case books, pseudo-socratic method, lack of appropriate historical context, etc. In disappointment, I asked myself, "Is that all there is?" By and large, it was. I put it on auto-pilot and cruised. By third year, I didn't even bother to buy books, and still graduated cum laude. There is no way it should take three years to learn how to "think like a lawyer."

One of those "Insider's Guide to Law Schools" said of Michigan: "Some would say the social environment is like high school. Others disagree. They say it is more like junior high." True enough. There was a childishness and a meanness of spirit about the students when I was there. Jealousy was rampant, and there was little tolerance for differences. A favorite pastime was criticizing classmates and professors behind their backs. The cartoons of the anonymous "Dr. Fegg" were one representation of this phenomenon. Another was the Barristers. (You have got to wonder about a group that lands one of its initiates in the hospital with alcohol poisoning). Each year they put out the "humor" magazine, the Raw Review. I enjoy and appreciate good satire, but this rag was little more than meanness, attacks on students and professors this self-appointed socially elite group decided they didn't like. Interestingly, many of the students attacked were those who participated in class and/or were on law review. A bit of sour grapes, perhaps?

Another problem I have with Michigan is in the area of career guidance. The place is like a factory churning out automatons to work for big firms. Actually, I don't know if this is the fault of the school, the students or both. I came in wanting to teach, but became disgusted with legal education. So -- what to do? I went to the Placement Office to inquire about public interest jobs and was referred to a dusty notebook that hadn't been updated in years; a lot of the places mentioned no longer existed. As for public sector jobs, I wasn't given a clue that they existed or how to get them. I did what was by far the easiest thing -- big firm interviews. The Placement Office was full of information about Everything You Never Wanted to Know About Law Firms, and the firms came right to campus. Everyone I knew was doing it.

I loathed working for a firm. I decided that law school was a colossal mistake and walked away from law. I worked in a department store, which was a lot more enjoyable than law firm life. Two years later, I finally decided to take the Bar, and by sheer luck landed a judicial clerkship in state court with a great judge (yes, the Michigan degree does open a few doors) and realized that I do love criminal law and want to work at a
District Attorney's Office. (I think I always did love this area of law, but succumbed to the peer pressure. Ivan Boeskyism was at its height and corporate stuff was so much cooler. It never dawned on me I could actually work in an interesting area.) Easier said than done because I am up against graduates from the local law schools who had for-credit internships at such places while they were in school. My fancy degree means nothing compared to that experience, and I cannot compete. There are firms who would be glad to put me in their law library 80 hours a week. The job market is so bad now, that most people think I'm crazy for not settling for what I can get, but I don't go back to that. If I can't get the kind of job in law I want, I'd rather sell shoes. I will not spend any more of my time making myself miserable doing something I hate. I wish I had known more about my options while I was in law school. Do your students a favor and go out of your way to make them aware that there are other things out there besides Cravath, Swaine & Moore. Many come in not sure of what to do, and not real assertive about finding out, so they just get swept up in law firm mania. A lot of folks are lost. Also, stress the importance of public service. I rarely got the message from anyone at law school that lawyers are public servants and there is more to the job than winning and making the big bucks. Which leads me to my next complaint....

I am now a clerk in federal court, and I am appalled at some of the things I see. I have seen lawyers conceal and/or destroy evidence and lie about it to the court. I see cases drag on for years; when one side moves for a simple extension of time, the other files a 50-page brief in opposition with exhibits. Abusive discovery is commonplace. In whose best interest is this? I have seen the rise of a new dubious litigation tactic, giving some pretext for needing to depose opposing counsel when the ultimate goal is to have this counsel disqualified. I see lawyer egos get in the way of serving their clients' best interests. Sadly, it is the younger attorneys who seem to be the worst offenders. (Maybe they were Raw Review editors?) The older practitioners have a code of chivalry of which the newcomers do not seem to be aware, or which they choose to ignore.

I cannot believe that this type of behavior constitutes being a good lawyer. If it does, then I want no part of it. If it does not, then law schools have failed in their mission to train good lawyers. More emphasis needs to be placed on ethical litigation and, to use a current political cliche, values. Maybe it's old fashioned, but I feel law schools ought to shape, not just minds, but character. Places such as Michigan are educating those who will be the leaders of our country. Let's try to make them moral and ethical leaders as well as intellectual ones.

Lawyers are collective neurotic overworkers with distorted values. Law school is the training ground for compulsive self-destructive behavior. The Law School helps condition lawyers to destroy their lives for the sake of work and money. It's only getting worse. I essentially hate the life. Lawyers seem to
think that $$ will soothe all wounds. (Apparently, I don't have what it takes to make it in this setting.) Most of my peers agree with me in one way or another. My firm is worse than many in this respect, but the problem is endemic.

On the other hand, lawyers are more ethical, sensitive, honest, decent people than the public, or lawyers themselves, give themselves credit for.

I read the article on the 5-year survey. I find the results hard to believe. My experience is that lawyers like the work, but are starting to loathe the life.

Of course U-M Law School, like law firms and lawyers generally, conveys the message that "hard work" and professional accomplishment are the true virtues of life ($ too).

Michigan suffers from the problem inherent in many of the so-called "elite" law schools -- in its desire to assemble, and maintain, a "star" faculty, the administration has at times ignored the realities of law school. In this vein, I found question 12 of this survey right on the nose. When I was at the School there were few mentors who could assist you with such mundane problems as how to compare different law firms or how to go about trying to get clerkships or non-law firm jobs. In 3 years I never once heard any professor, including criminal law professors, mention my current job of Assistant U.S. Attorney. Bridging the gap between the School world and the practical world is where the School needs to improve, with the professors and not just "placement specialists" getting involved. Given the number of cities that our grads go to, no one professor can hope to know the answer to the questions that students are genuinely interested in -- but the professors can show they are interested.

I've let go of some illusions about the practice of law. Over the past 5 years, I have realized that money is the only thing most lawyers think about. Not solving problems, not justice, not even quality of work. What most lawyers use as a measure of success is money. Sometimes they also think in terms of beating other lawyers -- as defined by how much more money they make than other attorneys, or how they fooled opposing counsel into accepting a settlement figure that does not reflect the true value of the case.

The legal profession is also much more sexist than I expected, and more sexist than the Law School environment.

I noticed these problems in the private firms where I have worked. Working for a trial court judge restored my faith in the legal system, if not my illusions about being a lawyer. The court cares about justice, fairness and quality of work even if the lawyers don't.
My work experience can be summed up as follows:

Mamas, don't let your babies be corporate lawyers.
They'll work all the time,
Not come home very much.
Let 'em be government lawyers and such.

And Mamas, money ain't all there's to live for.
What good is the pay,
When you're stressed, cross and gray?
It's best to do something you love.

A large firm taught me a lot about litigation. However, I knew that it would never train me to be a good trial lawyer. I joined a prosecutor's office -- and consider that to be the best decision of my life. Every day I deal with poor people who need the help of my office. Much of my work involves prosecuting domestic violence. I also deal with many gang-related crimes. I feel that my work is very meaningful -- and I am grateful that I am doing it. I do not plan to return to the private sector.

Loved Michigan! Great help to get me where I am today which is farther professionally than my peers most elsewhere.

1. I loved law school, but I do not love practicing law. If I could afford it, I would go back to school so I could do something else.

2. Although I value my Michigan Law education, I deeply regret that I went to a law school that caused me to incur so much debt. My debt has limited my employment options. It has caused me stress to the point of panic attacks. When people who are thinking of going to law school ask me about law school, I try to talk them out of it. If I can't talk them out of it, I tell them to go only if they can go without getting into debt.

3. Perhaps I hate practicing law because I do it in a large law firm. I don't like the long hours and the pressure to bill a lot of time but not too much time to any one client. There is no nurturing, mentoring, or cooperation. Everyone is looking for a scapegoat. Also, there is no certainty regarding the future. There are 30 people in my class. The firm makes 5 or 6 associates partners each year. Rumor has it that only 2 people will be made partner out of those up for partnership this year. Rumor also has it that when they take you off partnership track they treat you horribly because they think that will enable them to get you to stay at a low salary.

I have been trying for a year and a half to get a government job, an in-house job or a teaching job, but have had no luck in this economy.

4. The one thing I like about my job is that it is intellectually challenging. I think I could like this job if 1) partners were
nicer to associates, 2) clients were nicer to their attorneys, 3) the hours were shorter and 4) I had any idea whether I have a future here. I would gladly take a 50 percent pay cut in exchange for these changes.

5. It is too bad that the people in the legal profession aren't more idealistic, responsible and human. The legal profession is filled with such potentially wonderful, bright, energetic people. Incredible things could be accomplished. But all anyone cares about is money.

I left the law in March 1992 in order to write. I still occasionally practice law on a case-by-case basis. I was really concerned that if I stayed in the Law I would become a pasty-faced jock with a mortgage to pay and a nice car and I would spend the rest of my life toiling beneath fluorescent lights and fighting with jerks. I feel that I have ESCAPED! I'm very happy!

First year law school courses are by far the most important for a legal career. The only things I recall and use from law school I learned during my first year. The next 2 years were good for sharpening legal skills like writing, analysis, etc., but not much else. Michigan should continually strive to insure that first year classes receive the highest priority and the best teachers (vs. "professors," who may be more interested in research).

This has become a cliche, but that doesn't make it less true: big law firms do not provide satisfying legal careers. Compared to Army Jag, where I spent my first 4 years, my practice is dull, provides me with very little client contact, and does not give me a sense of accomplishment at the end of the day. And I like my firm! Students should be strongly encouraged to seek out jobs in the public sector, with smaller firms, etc, so they can develop skills other than legal research, analysis of complex facts, and filing papers.

I attended law school because I didn't want to start work. At Michigan, I generally enjoyed life, thought the faculty and administration were excellent, however, I learned early on I did not want to practice law. Unfortunately I did practice international trade for two years before forming my own company in 1989 involving import and export from China. I was able to get out of law because I am not adverse to risk but I know many people who get channeled into firms and remain although they are very unhappy. I think Michigan could do a better job of letting its students know it's all right not to practice law -- in a corporate environment or maybe not to practice at all. When I say all right I mean from an economic and prestige standpoint. Anyway if UM has any programs for students on non-legal opportunities I would be happy to provide insight from someone who has happily quit the law.
I believe that Michigan prepared me very well for my present career. The high quality of the faculty is, in my estimation, the chief reason that I am able to analyze and "think through" the legal problems I face in my practice.

-------

Regarding law school generally, I believe the Socratic method and traditional ways of "legal" teaching should give way to modern methodologies that work better generally. I felt that much of my coursework and law school experiences were unnecessary and, as a result, annoying.

-------

The University of Michigan Law School Placement Office is, and has always been, a JOKE! The School would be better served by abolishing this useless department and reallocating the $150,000 or so that is wasted on office salaries and supplies to students in the form of yearly scholarships, or better yet, post-graduation loans. I say this because I, and undoubtedly countless others, have yet to ascertain just what function this office performs. I can count on my closed fist the number of stories I have ever heard of this office actually "placing" any student in a job. What the School administration has always failed to realize is that during the fall recruitment period, students "place" themselves in positions of employment. Our glorious Placement Office only provides a meeting place for transactions between student and employer to occur. Six figures is a lot to pay for a "Department of Meeting Services."

The outplacement services offered by U of M are atrociously deficient. Unless you plan to practice in the State of Michigan, you can forget expecting any help from your good ol' alma mater in locating a job -- any job -- in the other 49 states. Personally, this is a great disappointment, because one of the chief reasons I selected Michigan was because of its supposedly strong alumni network and contacts spread across the U.S. (i.e., a "national" school). I have struggled greatly since leaving law school to find suitable employment, but sadly, I have never received any appreciable support or assistance from the University of Michigan Placement Office.

-------