Class of 1988 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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I recently left a large, prestigious law firm doing some of the best corporate work in the country, and joined a start-up company as primarily a business person with some assistance in the legal area. I have never been happier than now, and I have never been unhappier than I was in the law firm. Who in their right mind would want to be a lawyer in a large law firm given the stress, lack of control, impossible demands, and harsh environment with little teamwork, common goals or collegial atmosphere.

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Virtually all of my friends at work, all of whom have a lot of student loan debt, bitterly regret having gone to law school. You have very little control over your life, but you can't do a lot about it because you're up to your neck in debt. I honestly believe that I would have been much better off if I had become a high school teacher. I hope that I, and my friends, feel better about it in a few years. The past five have been pretty disappointing.

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At Michigan everything seemed possible. It was the height of the go-go 80's and there was an intense demand for lawyers. Since the "white collar" recession there has been a strong contraction and law is much more a dog-eat-dog existence. I miss those carefree law school days.

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Current Life: I enjoy my work as a lawyer (I am a litigator) and am surprised at the high percentage of classmates and colleagues who don't. We have relatively safe high paying jobs for writing, thinking and talking. The practice of law, if done right, is rarely boring and often intellectually challenging.

Law School: Law school should spend more time on preparing students to think like lawyers and not like law professors.

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It took me a few years to realize how biased people are against female lawyers. Although I have been extremely successful overall, what it boils down to is that people aren't prejudiced against me, they just don't think of a woman for the job. I'm always having to insert myself to make sure I'm being considered, and then I have to work twice as hard to prove I was the right person for the case. At a 200+ person firm, I have been one of the highest billing lawyers since I started.

After a few years of working nonstop, I finally started to be accepted and rewarded. When I decided to have a child this year, my clients and superiors were completely shocked. I lost track
of how many people said, "I can't believe you're having a baby! You seem so professional."

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A. A 100% improvement in job satisfaction since going into solo practice in March, 1992.
   1) More time and flexibility for family, community and church
   2) Total independence with client relations and practice decisions
   3) No employer, "superior," co-worker induced stress
   4) Time and ability to develop my client base, not preserve the client base of another.
   5) Direct personal satisfaction for job well-done on behalf of clients
   6) Income trade-off is more than worthwhile.

B. Suggestions based on above:
   The career path mentality at the Law School is driven by the "Big Firm" and the almighty $. The majority of summer job activity reinforces this mentality.
   From the standpoint of life-style intangibles and long-term career alternatives offered by solo practice, small firm practice, and small town practice -- the Law School offers little insight for the students.
   Suggestion: A career symposium with solos, small firm, large firm, public sector, public service, etc., alumni for the current students.

I wish that I had been more appreciative of how brilliant a number of my law school professors (i.e., Yale Kamisar, John Reed, J. B. White) were.

Ironically, I've become much more academically-oriented since law school. I realize the value of knowledge much more today than back in the "evil '80's," when starting salary seemed to be the be-all and end-all of life.

Please don't ever let the Law School shift its focus from legal theory to legal practice. Anybody can practice law. Very few receive the benefit of the wisdom of Yale Kamisar.

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I thoroughly enjoyed my life at U of M Law School, but can think of three ways in particular that I would strongly advocate change. First, my wife and I graduated law school together with a combined student loan debt of more than $100,000. There must be a way to make more grants available to students, like me, who were forced to pay for all tuition, books, etc., with no support from their parents. I feel as though the size of my student loan debt continues to preclude me from career choices, even though I make nearly twice what my father did per year.

Second, U of M should offer more clinics/practicums/courses which stress the practical, day-to-day challenges facing attorneys in today's professional climate. While I certainly appreciated "learning to think like a lawyer," I would also have enjoyed more
hands-on training in the day-to-day practice of law. For example, I can recall just one time in 5 years that I have dealt with a constitutional law issue. Yet every day I am on the phone with clients and opposing counsel discussing cases, making settlement overtures, and structuring resolutions of various disputes. "Lawyer as Negotiator" trumps "Con Law" on a daily basis, yet is a 2-credit elective taught once a year to 15 or 20 students who are lucky enough to get in the class. More emphasis should be placed on the real life, and less on the theoretical aspects of "THE LAW."

Finally, the Law School should consider offering a class or lecture series, or some sort of resource for those students (and alums) who decide that practicing law isn't all it's cracked up to be. Statistics show that more lawyers than ever are leaving the profession. A course which discusses possible avenues for utilizing one's legal training in non-traditional settings might prevent a naive law student from stumbling blindly into the hell-hole that private practice can be.

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There are too many lawyers in the legal system. Law students are trained to be advocates for the system as it stands, rather than for truth, justice, honesty, efficiency, etc. Take tort law, for instance. What an absurd system! And 30% efficient, to boot! And then look at the calls for "tort reform" -- all suggestions for ways to continue the absurdity.

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From September 1989 to July 1992, I practiced with Hogan & Hartson in Washington, D.C. I left the law firm to enter the Society of Jesus and I am currently a novice in the Maryland Province of the Society of Jesus. I very much enjoyed my time at Michigan, and feel as though I received the best legal education available in the country. I know that the critical reading and writing skills that I refined at Michigan will be of great use to me in whatever endeavors I find myself pursuing within the Society of Jesus in the years to come. Those endeavors might include teaching law.

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I have to say that the time I spent at Michigan Law was, so far, the best years of my life. The atmosphere, the students and some of the courses were tremendous. Any short comings in my career have been my fault principally. I don't think I was as self-aware as I could have been in choosing the practice area I have ended up in. I have had a lot of opportunities, largely because of Michigan: (i.e., 7th Circuit clerkship, big firms, etc.). However, due to lawyer saturation, I have found it difficult to "actualize" and have had, for financial reasons, to practice in what was available. C'est la Vie.

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I loved law school and I thought Michigan was terrific. Unfortunately, the bureaucrats made a lousy decision about my residency, and that cost me about $30,000. With an "imputed contribution" of $500 per year, charging no interest, I will
begin supporting the Law School Fund in 2048. I hope you will pass the word along that such decisions have consequences.

Law school was wonderful -- I found it challenging but also had a lot of fun -- more than many of the people I've met that went elsewhere. However, the high cost of tuition at Michigan has forced me to continue in a large firm much longer than I thought I would and for at least two years past the time that I stopped enjoying my job. I get so little enjoyment out of my job and I spend so much time working that I'm not sure I could recommend to anyone considering law school that they make the choice I did -- go to the best school possible no matter the cost. My brother went to the best school he could afford, has almost no loans, works for a 3-person firm in a large midwestern city and loves his life. I have a hard time saying I am better off than he.

The Conservative Movement was in full bloom in 1988. This permitted certain individuals and organizations (the "federalist" group) to influence the debate at the Law School. If I thought it was truly on intellectual/legal terms, that would have been fine. However, I always felt an undercurrent of resentment toward the mere presence of minority students. The majority of the student body and the Class of '88 were great folks. Yet this did leave a bad aftertaste.

I found the faculty to be exceptional, and, for the most part, fair. I did feel however that some members had developed the type of egomania that results from academic insulation, i.e., bright, impressionable students kissing their asses to curry favor. The Law School allows some faculty members to elevate themselves over the communication of the law.

My appreciation for the outstanding level of legal education I received has grown over the five years since graduation. My research, writing and analytical skills were given a superb foundation at Michigan, and the partners for whom I work recognize the difference.

However, I believe that the Law School should do more to expose its students to the practical side of the practice. My summer associate experiences were so dismal that I chose not to practice at all for some time after graduation. Most graduates have little understanding of what lawyers actually do and how difficult it is to establish a successful practice. Peer pressure to go the big firm, big salary route is tremendous. Other options are seen as second rate, yet the quality of life is known to be terrible in large firms. I believe that many students are under the mistaken impression that practicing law magically becomes easier and more enjoyable upon making partner. The partners I know work just as hard as associates, and have added risks and administrative burdens. The Law School has a responsibility to make its students aware of the high dissatisfaction level among lawyers and to help its students explore more workable alternatives.
To that end, faculty members should be encouraged to relate their personal practice experiences (if they have any) to students. The gulf between faculty and students is tremendous. I believe that an individual mentoring program should be established.

Finally, as a woman in the practice of law, I am increasingly frustrated at the continuing epidemic of gender bias. I am proud that Michigan is a leader in combating the problem. I remain hopeful that there will be a way to combine family and private practice, which is a major issue for most women in the profession.

Responses to prior questions were based upon prior practice. I am in the process of changing my area of specialization from litigation to public law as a result of my dissatisfaction with litigation. I found it too confrontational, too much involved with peripheral matters which didn't lead to prompt resolutions and too stressful.

Five and a half years out of law school, I feel I've finally found myself career-wise. I consider myself extremely lucky, since I had no solid plans or career goals when I left Michigan. I'm happier in my personal and professional life than I've ever been. I'm still very drawn to academia, and I look back fondly on my time in law school.

I loved law school and would definitely do it all over again, all things considered. Interestingly, what I do now as a business lawyer is entirely different from what I studied in law school. I enjoyed what I learned in law school and found it interesting but very little of it is applicable to what I do now. I'm happy about that because I've had plenty of time while practicing law to learn the practical aspects of business. Law school was more appropriately spent exploring the possibilities.

As for what I do now, in spite of frequent whining about how stressful it is and how I have no life, I like my job. I work with great people (clients and other lawyers), I get intellectually challenging work, and I feel useful. It has its ups and downs, but it's a good profession.

LAW SCHOOL -- METHODOLOGY IS CRUEL AND MISDIRECTED. All who attend are of roughly equal skill and intelligence. (Yes, even the professors are not much above the average.) Yet, only a select few (the ones with the high grades) are selected for special recognition. It's all the most ridiculous, pompous, and humiliating farce perpetrated in the whole of academia! If law professors were true teachers, then they would recognize that it is the teacher's responsibility to correct and guide. How much energy is directed at teaching those that do not perform as well on your written exams? There is no secret to law school, no logic unique to the profession (i.e., no such thing as "thinking like a lawyer"). Have the courage to ask questions that go to the heart of the structure of law school.
LEGAL SKILLS -- An even bigger lie. The consumer groups are correct. The Bar is undeniably corrupt. While cronyism is the rule for appointments and profit is way of life, the Bar pretends to cleanse itself of corrupting influences by wasting society's focus on such non-issues as lawyer advertising. Why don't we mandate pro bono? Why don't we focus on the large, "prestigious" law firms and their contributions to the S & L mess? How about the hiring of minorities by law firms to defend against sex, age, handicap or race discrimination. Why do we reward large firms for their ability to produce mountains of unneeded discovery?

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It was difficult to answer some questions [about my current job] because I changed jobs several days ago. For the 5 years since graduation, I worked for two of the biggest firms in the country -- one a California-based firm and the other a New York-based firm with a branch in California. The New York firm provided a better experience, both in terms of the responsibility given me and the atmosphere of the office. Ultimately, however, a rash irritation of the smug, superior and wasteful ways of law firms led me to move to an in-house counsel position. So far, it seems like a good move, even though it involved a 33% pay cut. I have the following observations about large firms:

1) They waste human resources by giving drudge work to young lawyers. The work enervates the spirit and destroys self-confidence.

2) The increasingly illusory pot of partnership gold is fool's gold which requires enormous personal sacrifice in pursuit of socially useless goals. However, because of the cognitive dissonance inherent in working at a firm yet rejecting its values, many otherwise sane young lawyers convince themselves that billing 3,000 hours a year to become a partner who continues to work at such a pace is worthwhile.

3) Women quit. Especially women with children. The men who work like maniacs have stay-at-home spouses or no personal life. Feminine traits and values are not honored in law.

4) Many male lawyers, even young ones, harass women. Now, however, they do it with the disclaimer that they know they are harassing you but after all, it's all in good fun -- which makes complaining about it even more difficult. In five years of practice, I have been harassed overtly in every conceivable situation:

   A partner who constantly commented on my body to the point where I cried at night from the stress;
   A partner who constantly commended on my clothes, with the above disclaimer;
   A client who wrote me mash notes about the way I looked at him and asked for a picture of me for his wall;
   A client who asked me to bear his children;
A partner who engaged in a constant, semi-joking, commentary about "babes" and whether specific female lawyers were "getting any";
Opposing counsel calling me "bitch" and "sweetheart";
Comments from deponents on my appearance.

5) They overbill. Billing by the hour creates an atmosphere of clock-watching and a perverse delight in working constantly, even if the work is unnecessary.

6) Government lawyers truly believe that the rules do not apply to them. Because they have no paying clients, they believe that endless wars of attrition are the only way to litigate. (Apologies to all dedicated government lawyers who do not behave this way.)

7) The true value of lawyering -- efficiently solving problems for people and businesses -- has been largely swamped by greed.

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Early in 1992, about 6 months after my first child was born, I requested a lighter hours requirement in exchange for a lower rate of pay. I now work 9 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday only (unless I'm working on a closing). I am still "on track" for partnership. It makes a world of difference in my satisfaction about my work-home balance.

The ethnicity discrimination I have experienced was surprising. I'm a non-Jew in a primarily Jewish firm. I never expected to be treated differently -- but I have been!

The disparity between what was taught in law school and the reality of law practice is immense. Law school prepares you to be a litigator (somewhat). It does not prepare you to be an estate planner, corporate lawyer, tax attorney, draftsman (of anything other than a brief), negotiator (of anything other than a suit settlement), etc. It also does not acknowledge the harsh realities of legal practice -- unrealistic demands, long hours, lack of camaraderie and client development.

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I have been practicing law since September 1988. For the first 4 ½ years, I fantasized constantly about escaping from my career. The only thing that kept me practicing was my enormous debt. I spent 3 ½ years in a very large Chicago firm. I liked my practice (bankruptcy), I liked the partners and associates with whom I worked directly and I had many good social friends at the firm. Nevertheless, I hated the value system, culture and demands of the firm as a whole and almost all of the partners outside of my small practice group. I often analyzed whether Michigan Law School helped create my attitude. Along with my friends from U-M, I came to the conclusion that because U-M was, on the whole, a positive experience, I wasn't prepared for the ugliness and moral barrenness of firm practice. I watched associates who had literally suffered daily at "lesser" Chicago schools adapt much more easily to firm life. My conclusion:
their law school experience taught them that their career was going to be a long unpleasant struggle -- I had to find that out in my first year of working.

Although I believe I am a better educated, more well-rounded person for having gone to U-M Law School, I wish I had realized (and had had someone tell me) what my career and its demands would truly be. My choice would have been different. I now believe I would serve myself and society much better as a high school teacher and coach -- not as a lawyer.

Notwithstanding all of this, my new job as in-house bank counsel is much less offensive. I'm pretty good at what I do (mainly commercial bankruptcies) and the hours and demands are much more reasonable. Consequently, I no longer fantasize about getting out of law. Maybe that's not a good thing. Maybe now I'll never be brought to the jumping point and I'll be a worthless lawyer all my days.

I don't have much else to say. My life is certainly not what I expected it would be when I finished school, but it's not all that bad either. I am unsatisfied working in private practice and feel that a move in-house would significantly improve my satisfaction level with my work as well as my life in general. There are plenty of days when I'm sorry I even went to law school and became a lawyer -- it's not all it's cracked up to be. But you've caught me on a relatively good day, so I have no major complaints. Things could be a lot better with my life in general, but they could sure be a lot worse too!

I enjoyed my law school experience immensely and feel it prepared me fairly well for the career I have chosen. I have learned by talking with colleagues that it was a fairly stress-free and non-competitive environment. The diversity of the student body was a big plus. I hope the Law School continues to emphasize diversity and a healthy, non-competitive learning environment. It would help if it were less expensive! While I have enjoyed my practice, I have felt somewhat constrained to pursue a particular path in order to pay my educational debt -- 100% of which is attributable to law school. I could not afford anything other than a well-paying private practice job.

I have a few additional thoughts with respect to the last question on discrimination or adverse treatment due to gender. It's a difficult issue, particularly where my firm is involved. On the whole, I don't think attorneys in the office give much thought to this issue, except insofar as they credit themselves for insuring that entering classes are at least 50% women. In the first two or three years, there is virtually no difference on a professional level in how men and women are treated. What I have seen happen, unfortunately, is that as associates move up, there is a tendency to trust women less; a hesitancy to place women on cases as senior associates in charge of others; to allow us to argue substantive motions in court, etc. In short, women
start to fall behind the men in my office on the experience curve during the critical mid-years, so that by the 6th-7th years they have generally either left the firm or in some cases worked out alternative arrangements (e.g., part-time). I have yet to see a woman make partner here in litigation.

This form of discrimination is very subtle, and all the more insidious because it is, I truly believe, unintentional, a result of subconscious perceptions of who is more capable of handling the increased responsibilities and pressures of senior level associates. It's important, too, to recognize the effect on the receiving end of this treatment -- a questioning of one's own ability, greater anxiety associated with whatever demands are made. Perhaps this is a variation of the glass ceiling. In any event, while difficult to describe, there does appear to be a demonstrable trend here of women leaving before the opportunity to make partner even arises.

I think lots of people go to law school without really knowing what they're getting into or why. I may have told myself I wanted to be a lawyer to "do good" and "make the world a better place" and that sort of thing. But, in reality, I went for the wrong reasons: my dad wanted me too; I didn't find a satisfactory job right after college; I scored well on the LSAT; I didn't really know what else to do. Unfortunately, I believe lots of my classmates -- and thousands of law students across this lawyer-infested country -- went for similarly lame reasons.

I nearly dropped out after my first year because I had determined that I didn't really want to be a lawyer. I also did not find law school intellectually stimulating -- it was challenging enough, but most of the courses I took (combined with the personalities that populated law school and, no doubt, my own cynicism) sapped, rather than spurred, my intellectual curiosity. But I finished, at my parents' urging, with the understanding that I might not practice upon graduation.

In the four years I spent practicing law, there were many times that I really hated it. I disdained the concept (and pressure) of the billable hour, the sleaziness of some of the attorneys I encountered, the Dickensian absurdity and futility of the system, and the stodgy atmosphere of some law firms. I longed to get out, and eventually did. Most of my friends from law school have experienced similar feelings, and only one or two are still working for the same firms they started with after graduation. Many of those still practicing would rather not.

However, having "retired" from the law a year ago, I realize that there were things that I enjoyed about practicing: the thrill of winning a trial or arbitration; the ability to help clients solve their problems; the respect (or perceived respect) people have for lawyers, even as they joke otherwise; and some of the things I was cynical about -- the money, the office with a nice view, and a dedicated support staff. Sadly, little of what I
retrospectively liked about the law has much to do with "doing good" or "making the world a better place."

When asked about law school by those considering it, I always advise them to get a solid handle on what law school is all about, what the profession is really like, and why they want to attend. I suspect there are still far too many people coming to law school for the wrong reasons. Some may end up liking the profession. Others will spend years despising their jobs and trying to figure out if law school was really such a good idea.

Despite the cynical tone of these musings, I do value my legal education. At Michigan Law School I gained at least two things: some great friends and a good deal of self-confidence. Was it worth it? Ask me in another five or ten years.

Although I am all in favor of teaching The Law, rather than specific "laws," I think there should be some sort of clinical requirement for all law students so that they can do more than research and writing upon graduating.

As far as I can determine, the skills tested by most law school examinations correspond to no role whatsoever in the legal profession. Why not simply hand out the exams the first day of class and let the students chew on them all semester -- I have yet to be called upon to analyze a fact-situation and to write an intelligible evaluation of it within the time typically allowed in law school finals.

I am a partner in a production company. While most of my responsibilities are legal/business oriented, the most important elements of my careers are: 1) I work for myself, 2) I can produce what I like, 3) I am involved in creating marketing advertising and production.

1) I find it fascinating to read about all the wonderful theoretical people the Law School keeps adding to the faculty. Has it ever occurred to anyone in Ann Arbor that most of us out in the "sticks" (i.e., somewhere other than D.C. or N.Y.C.) do not concentrate in areas such as constitutional law or feminist jurisprudence? I get the feeling the Law School is increasingly drifting away from practical, real world, everyday law -- torts, contracts, corporations, procedure, evidence.

2) The Law School was very weak in helping students look for and obtain judicial clerkships when I was there -- that is, judicial clerkships other than a few plums, such as the more prestigious circuits. I'm glad to see in the Law Quadrangle that more and more students are clerking with a wide variety of state and federal district court judges. I wish in many ways that I had clerked.

I am not very happy with the practice of law in a big law firm. I do not get any satisfaction from the work I do and I suffer
from a lot of stress. If I knew what I would be doing now, I would not have chosen this field, or at least not have chosen to work in a big law firm.

I am very seriously considering changing careers into something more rewarding and satisfying -- such as elementary school education.

For personal satisfaction the best move I ever made was to leave the large corporate law firm where I had been since graduation and start a solo practice serving small software and technology companies. Although I do miss the regular paychecks, I would never return to a large firm again. I've grown too used to running my own show, and I am confident that the money will come.

Law school for me was a waste of time. Nothing I "learned" in law school has been terribly helpful in any aspect of the law I have practiced. In law school, grades had no correlation with how hard I worked. It's nice, since being out of law school, to have success in life correlate with my efforts again. I have a very enjoyable life now. I control how much work I do, what cases I take, what charitable work I wish to do, and I make a very good living.

What I have seen as being a significant problem for law students transitioning into large practices is how to handle the disappointment and where to look for alternative career paths. A forum/seminar on this topic for 2nd/3rd year students would be helpful.

Too many people are going to law school who have no idea that it's not about making money or attaining status. It's a lot more stressful and not as rewarding as one might think.

While in law school I took out thousands of dollars in student loans, fully expecting to be able to repay them with little difficulty because of the high salaries at the firms which were recruiting at Michigan generally and recruiting me specifically.

However, during my judicial clerkship, I became pregnant. The thought of working the long hours necessary to work for the large well-paying firms while trying to raise my child became very disturbing. Instead I gave birth a week after finishing my clerkship, took four months to care for the baby and then went into solo practice so I could make my own hours. Working without the net provided by senior attorneys proved to be very scary, and I did not enjoy the client contact at all. Soon after starting to shift my work toward teaching I had another baby. I am now trying to spend even less time in private practice and work primarily in teaching (part-time). The pay is abysmal, and (when my children are school age) I will have to make much "bigger bucks" to get out of the debt we are encountering. I wish I had thought of this possibility before taking out student loans, and
I wish there had been some alternative to student loans to complete my law school education.

Law school should last two years. The third year is not taken seriously. It is the devil's workshop and is, like the first two, expensive. It's time to stop acting as if the larger part of legal training takes place in school -- it does not.

I thought the married students were, to a large extent, isolated from much of the grapevine type of communication that was so important in formulating post-law school life/career. For example, I wish I'd have had more info/encouragement regarding clerkships, etc. I never even knew what a clerkship was until my 3rd year, which, of course, was too late to pursue one.

Also, I think the first year research/writing course should be expanded or developed into something more than just a Pass/Fail ordeal to get through. Perhaps it could be integrated with our other first-year courses to give it some meat.

It is twice as difficult to be a married student than a single student. I don't know what that really has to do with anything, but it's true, yet I don't think that it's acknowledged by anyone: faculty, employers, etc.

I look back on law school as one of the best periods of my life. It was not a particularly good preparation for me, however, professionally, as I am no longer practicing law. I do believe that Michigan attempts to emphasize public interest law -- it's just that students, primarily because of their debt load, are attracted to private practice firms. For myself, I wish there had been some introduction to careers that law graduates could pursue in politics, lobbying, government relations, etc. That is, finally, the area I am in after spending three miserable years in private practice, virtually unaware of this alternative. Now I find many lawyers in my line of work -- just none from the University of Michigan (which is a shame because my class was filled with people who would excel in the political arena).

If I could afford it, I would prefer to do public interest work or anything that was socially productive. However, I still owe thousands of dollars.

1) The Law School was intellectually challenging, but had very little to do with the actual practice of law. Much more emphasis should be placed on legal writing and research, moot courts, clinics, and the proper drafting of agreements and other legal documents. Train us to do a job, not only to be pie-in-the-sky professors. Few of us will end up in that role, but all of us flail around for the first few years after law school, trying to learn our profession on our own.

2) Quit discouraging students from applying for clerkships. The Law School should actively encourage every student to apply, and
should assist in the process. Michigan loses prestige by "weeding out" those deemed unworthy by faculty. The whole thing was too damn mysterious.

3) Law school was three fun years, but it probably could have been two years with the same exact results. Third year is just marking time.

4) The Placement Office is too oriented toward large firms. We needed better information about alternatives to that practice. How about a "flyback" week in the autumn so students don't miss so much class?

5) Bring in outside speakers and hold seminars with a more practical bent. The legal world is larger than a mere professor's faculty club.

6) Paul Reingold's clinic was excellent. Expand it. Fund it. Make it mandatory.

7) Get rid of the aluminum siding on the library stacks tower.

8) Force the professors to interact with the students outside of class. Despite three years at Michigan, there is no one I could ever consider asking for advice, much less a reference. (I was not a lousy student.)

9) More emphasis on teaching skills, less on publishing academic articles.

10) All of these suggestions should not be interpreted as an overall negative critique, as I enjoyed law school immensely, and consider it a worthwhile experience.

School can only do so much to prepare a person for life. As life gets more complicated, more demands are made on schools. The demands made on schools to teach morals, values and discipline come to mind first, but many of us also have unrealistic expectations for our legal education because we come to law school at such a formative time in our lives and expect it to put us on a path and set us up for the duration. It can't do that. If it makes us think in new ways, it has accomplished a lot.

Law is a vocation, to be learned by doing, ideally through an apprenticeship. And it takes time. At least it has taken me years, and I expect that if I keep at it I will feel the same way about my present level of proficiency and expertise that I do about the skills with which I began my practice. Perhaps law school could prepare students more for this reality, but I doubt it.

I find it extraordinarily difficult to keep any sense of perspective about my job; it is far too easy to have it swallow
up the rest of my life. Of course, firms encourage a "destroy your life for the firm" mentality.

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For a long time after I left the practice of law I thought that going to law school was a mistake. Now, while I still think that I might have had a better experience had I taken some more time off between college and law school, I don't regret it anymore. A U of M law degree opens doors and it impresses people (not that it necessarily should, but it does). I may not be a better person for having gone to Michigan Law School, but I know that it was an important step in getting me where I am today. Now if I could only find my way back....

Seriously, if I had to do it over again, I'd probably do it more or less the same way. Hell, if it weren't for my going to U of M, I'd never have experienced a Zingerman's "Farmer Randy." As the song goes, "Thanks for the memories...."

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My law school experience was a good one overall. However, I wish that more emphasis and attention were given to the realities of practice and alternatives for practice in small firms and in smaller communities.

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Although I had been accepted to a number of top-tier law schools, I chose UM because of its reputation, cost and the grant money which I would receive. Although I was initially granted a 5K per year grant, this was revoked after I accepted and after I began classes. The reason, the income of my parents -- from whom I had received no financial support for over 4 years. As a result, I was compelled to take out significant loans (which I expected) and work substantially full time (which I did not). This greatly diminished my law school experience.

Needless to say, I have not and will not contribute any money to U-M, although my wife and I do give large amounts to other worthy causes (and notwithstanding that my Firm matches such contributions).

While 15K now seems an insubstantial sum of money, it did cause great hardship to a struggling law student. Although my career is on track, I do not attribute this to my law school experience, which was, due to your financial aid department, very difficult.

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I have decided to leave the law firm which I have worked with for the past five years to pursue a Masters degree in counseling and family therapy. I hope to use the law degree and counseling degree to provide mediation services and family therapy.

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I resent the fact that each year, while tuition went up, my law school grants decreased -- a kind of 'bait and switch' because there is nothing we could do after we arrived.

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I loved U.M. Law. I loved the school, I loved the administrators, and I loved my interactions with classmates and
professors. I wish the professors had been more open and available, though. I wish you the best with your survey and please give Dean Sue my regards!

P.S. I would not have filled this out if I had not loved U.M. I have enough stuff to fill out as it is!

I found life as an associate in a large law firm intellectually and personally unsatisfying, as well as stressful and disruptive of my personal life and outside interests. I am very pleased to have left private practice.

Re: Law School:
The academic life/environment of law school was both rigorous and challenging. As a student away from home, family, and friends, the "life" was both satisfying and depressing. Now that this is behind me, I look upon it with mostly fond memories. I would never trade the "experience." It will continue to shape me for the rest of my life.

When I think and write about the harder things, my experience back at the Law School is like a "well" from which there is no shortage of confidence upon which to draw. That is what the Law School has given me.

Re: Life:
Now that I am on my own (sole practitioner), I have/enjoy the flexibility to begin to enjoy and rediscover life apart from a firm setting. Accordingly my satisfaction quotient is going upward and I fully expect it to remain on an upward trend for the foreseeable future.

The biggest challenge facing young lawyers today is to find balance in their lives while dealing with the usually high stress levels associated with being a first-rate professional. At some point, one can't help but feel that he has to choose between being an excellent attorney and an excellent person in his family and social circles.

1. Some of the questions in this questionnaire are misleading, vague, or unclear. I would be extremely careful about drawing conclusions from the "Activities and Opinions" section or from the "discrimination" questions.

2. I changed jobs recently; most of your questions do not seem to take this possibility into account.

3. I found law school too much oriented toward litigation.

4. Several U-M law professors seem to be on their own little liberal crusades. They should take time off from the academic environment, work in the "real world" for a while, and perhaps
grow up a bit. Maybe then they would be more open to opposing viewpoints in the classroom.

5. I am disappointed with the current trends in legal scholarship. Law review articles and the like are becoming too politicized, reflecting the dangerous attempts of some to create public policy through the judicial system, rather than the legislature. Moreover, too many legal "scholars" are only interested in advancing their careers by being the first to propound a novel theory of liability or a "new" application of an old statute.

6. All in all, I am proud to have attended U-M Law School.

7. I noticed that the financial aid I received from U-M, particularly in the form of grants or scholarships, declined substantially after I enrolled, requiring me to borrow more in my second and third years.

Professor Kamisar pointed out that a lawyer need not be an expert in an area to make a meaningful contribution, particularly if the lawyer brought fresh insights.

I have been using what Professor Browder taught me in Real Property and Estate Planning regularly in my practice.

The practice of law has left me disappointed and dissatisfied after five years. I anticipate doing something radically different in 2-3 years (teaching, starting a business, etc.).

In some ways, it is very difficult to complete this form in a way that reflects my experience. I divided my first year out of school between working at a Detroit firm and living abroad. I returned to a federal district court clerkship. Since my clerkship, I have worked at home raising two small children. I have done a limited amount of research and writing for a small firm.

Needless to say, my law school experience did little to prepare me for what I am doing today, except that it gave me a tool, which I hope to use to shape some sort of non-traditional legal career. My decision to work at home was very difficult, because of the sacrifices it involved. In law school, many students talked about the value of sacrificing high pay to do socially relevant work. Few that I know followed through on this ideal. But virtually no one, faculty or students, seemed to take seriously the possibility of sacrificing prestige. It's not necessarily that we were encouraged to go to firms, though that was the path of least resistance. Rather, I felt there was a steady emphasis on a hierarchy of universities and agencies. On the whole, mentoring or direction seemed more focused on what was the best position I could get, in someone else's judgment, instead of on what I wanted and valued and what my long-term goals were. Some of this is my fault, because I did not know how
to seek a mentor. But some is also the result of the Law School caring more about its reputation than about its students.

I have recently re-established contact with Suellen Scarnecchia, someone I worked with in the Child Advocacy Law Clinic. It is clear to me that she knows more about mentoring and is better at it than anyone else I encountered while in school. She was full of resources and ideas, entirely willing to share them, but completely supportive and accepting of my work at home. Concerns about prestige, which I think impede many faculty members' ability to mentor without self-interest, were irrelevant to her. It has been a relief to contact her, but it has pointed out to me how little real mentoring I've received along the way.

The problem with law school is that it needs to be more responsive to career practice. I did not know anything about pleadings, discovery and so forth. The sub-problem is that there are so many types of legal practice that it's difficult to train specifically for them -- especially since when you're in school you don't have a clue about the personal aspects of each type of law and how they will affect your desire to practice in that area, i.e., you have to be a workaholic with a basic love for money to stay with a large firm. I think law schools should offer personality testing and offer information on what personalities do well in what types of law. That would be a start in the right direction.

I practice specifically in the areas of juvenile criminal defense and defense of the mentally ill. I tried a lot of other areas and did not find any meaning there. Increasingly, I am dissatisfied with what I am able to do as a lawyer and the methods with which I must work. I do not think arguing for a living is healthy. Moreover, I do not see many happy lawyers -- most are looking for a way out of the profession and are quite open about that.

Law school was great. (Could be more intellectually stimulating.)

But the practice of general civil business litigation in a large private law firm is highly stressful, demands more time than a healthy balanced life can commit, and is incredibly boring all at the same time!! Nobody warned me about this!

Most of the stress comes from ego-centric, inconsiderate partners who are not held accountable for how they treat associates. The whole system needs to be revamped so that more individuals and smaller businesses can receive good, cost-effective legal representation and so that lawyers will not be so dissatisfied. I wanted to contribute to the world, but so far this has been a very unfulfilling career. I am investigating other options.

I have very good feelings about Michigan Law School, my education there, and especially friends I made in law school. Only five
years after graduating, however, I have concern about the future course of the Law School. Michigan is falling in the ratings. Two full professors who had the greatest impact on my education have left. Bread-and-butter commercial law courses and research appear to be neglected compared with the fashionable (but methodologically questionable) law-and-something else approach. I benefitted from being a guinea pig in "the experimental section," but this bold move to update the staid first-year curriculum (to include, for example, the teaching of statutory law in a legal world now dominated by statutes) appears to have been abandoned. I don't know the course, but Michigan should be vying with Harvard and Yale for number 1, not struggling with Columbia, Chicago, Stanford, Berkeley, NYU, and such in a losing, defensive, conservative, rear-guard action. The faculty and administration need to wake up and smell the coffee.

I hope the Law School continues to educate and stimulate its students today as it did when we were in law school. Although I'm not currently practicing law, my pride in my Michigan J.D. (and the respect it commands when people learn of my legal education) has not diminished. I know lots of law grads from lots of different institutions, and my Michigan colleagues stand out as being the most loyal, appreciative and (still) fun-loving of the bunch!

You may find a number of respondents who started out in the private sector and who decided during the firm shake-outs and RIF-ing of the recession to go into the public sector for security and, most importantly, for the responsibility and experience they could never get in private practice. The loss of income and prestige has been more than made up for by the profit of doing what I always thought a lawyer did: taking a client's case to the jury.

1) Top law schools train their students to be aerospace engineers, but the vast majority of their graduates wind up as auto mechanics. If more time were spent teaching students to change oil and less were spent on teaching them to design the space station, these schools would put out graduates more able to practice law and less surprised at how dull it is.

2) My experience both at Michigan and while practicing law have led me to conclude that there is more wasted intellectual horsepower in the law schools and law firms of this country than anywhere else in the world. Time and again I have been dumbfounded that such intelligence and talent could be wasted performing menial chores for far less able "business" people. I believe that this, not ridiculous tort awards, is the true waste of the U.S. legal system.

I was employed until 3/93 when I left to ease the transition of a family move on my daughter, then 18 months. The move was approximately 2000 miles so that I now face a new bar as well as a new job search. This may be a relatively rare situation,
however, I wish I had better access to placement facilities after graduation.

Emphasis must be placed on translating the intellectual/book-oriented approach with the practical/hands-on approach; be it through the obvious -- clinics, pro bono in the community, mentorships, clerkships/apprenticeships -- to the more subtle forms in the classroom, where hypos often miss the mark of marrying legal theories/doctrine/seem rules of "real-life" situations. Instead of helping those who have made it through the "weeding-out" process by being admitted to law school, the experience can often be disjunctive and disorienting. By helping students think like lawyers, helping make that connection(s) to achieve goals formulated by developing facts with the guidance of THE LAW, the entire profession will be enriched and prosper as a result in a variety of contexts.

In my second and third years of law school, one of my principal activities was serving as a member of the Michigan Law Review. While I felt this was a valuable activity, it took an inordinate amount of time, to the point where it was impossible to adequately prepare for most of my classes. Perhaps something could be done to alleviate this problem, such as giving credit for part of law review work.

I think the interview process was almost solely focused on getting us placed in larger private firms. There was a status about the largest and highest paying firm which was subscribed to by the Law School's representatives (Nancy Krieger) as well as the students. As we found out, the large, high-paying law firms were unhappy places. We worked far too many hours in atmospheres that were debilitating to our personal lives. Most of my classmates changed jobs after 2 years. Of the class I entered my firm with consisting of 12 people, only 3 remain at the firm today.

I got an interesting perspective of the world we graduated to after law school when I worked for a solicitor's firm in England for two years. Their billing targets for a year were half their U.S. counterparts. People expected to have work respect their family lives. People were much happier and much less stressed in my solicitors' firm (which was the same size as the U.S. firm I worked for).

There should also be a focus on jobs other than private firms. It's easy to focus on the large firms because they come to the School on their own. You need to be more proactive in seeking out the alternative jobs, educating the students on them, and helping to get the right type of student in that position. I was placed in a large firm because it was the easiest way to get a high paying job. I know that I would have liked an alternative type of position more because of my personality. Law students are naive for the most part. I certainly was. I think the placement system owes something to the students to help them find
a position that is suited to them, not just the one that will earn them the most money.

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My experience in private practice was good for the background. I have gained a lot of practical knowledge, but I cannot explain how cruel and disillusioning that environment was. An associate from Harvard Law School committed suicide just two weeks before my departure. His suicide was precipitated by incredibly cruel treatment by the partners in his department. (He was shunned, given no work, etc.) (Another associate was fired because he is gay. There was no criticism of the quality of his work.) I am no longer working there, thank God. I am getting married in five weeks and am enjoying to the fullest this exciting time in my life. I will be looking for work in the fall.

I grew to dislike private practice. I was expected to sacrifice all aspects of a personal life in return for the possibility of being terminated as soon as the firm experienced any financial shortfall. I was not terminated, but every 3-4 weeks another associate was run out the door, including other Michigan Law School graduates. One partner I worked for came in after 9:00, disappeared around 5:00, but claimed 1800-2000 billable hours a year! The System is a joke.

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