Class of 1989 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

Follow this and additional works at: http://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 Law School 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.
RESPONSES FROM THE MEMBERS OF
THE CLASS OF 1989
TO THE LAST QUESTION ON SURVEY ASKING FOR
"COMMENTS OF ANY SORT ABOUT YOUR LIFE
OR LAW SCHOOL OR WHATEVER"

* * * * *

Over the past three years, I have worked part-time as a means to support myself as a full-time graduate student. I worked two years full-time before that. I have found that working part-time has improved my attitude about practice. This may also be because I have worked in an environment supportive of my goal to become an academic. My current employers have also stressed my development as a lawyer, even though they know I am soon to leave the practice. I still think, even had I always worked in such an environment, I would have left the practice of law.

As a parent, I've learned life is a dear, precious gift. I feel thankful for my family, for living in peace, for food and shelter, for feeling healthy. As time goes by, the world seems more complex, more humbling; my own role less important. I've grown more aware of my limits as an attorney and citizen, unable to address so many problems facing this world, this society. I find this frustrating, yet still derive satisfaction in engaging the things within reach. Perhaps this is why I no longer read a major newspaper, yet find time to dig in the garden after work.

I am very proud to have attended the University of Michigan Law School. It has afforded me many advantages, including a wealth of friends and other acquaintances around the country.

My particular law school class was, by all accounts, even more neurotic and compulsive than most other law school classes. I think the main reason this was true was that very few of them had worked at all -- most had come directly from college. (While that was technically true of me, I had spent my last year of college working 40 hours/week.) Because these students had no other comparison for life, school was the only measure, and the class quickly became an older version of high school (this is not a compliment). I think admitting older students or students that have had significant non-academic interests and experiences would help a lot.

In addition, I think more courses and practical teaching for transactional practice would be extremely helpful. Not all of us intend to be litigators although you certainly couldn't tell that from the course offerings. But the learning curve in private practice is steeper for transactional attorneys than for litigators, in large part because of the lack of practical transactional courses in law school.

* * * * *
The Law School is a bit too big for its britches. The students are all cocky because they got in; the teachers are largely too busy to teach.

Perhaps it was only me, but I bought the notion that because we got in we were somehow special. Since getting in was assumed to be such an achievement, the time spent at school was viewed as simply the years we had to endure between getting in and getting out and setting the world on fire. The professors' approach and attitudes perpetuated this feeling. -- I did not get a lot out of my law school experience because I somehow got in my head that I didn't need to get a lot out of those years. When I got out I soon realized that the seas did not part upon the announcement of a lawyer from U of M. -- In fact at times the effect was the opposite when lawyers from "lesser" schools felt the need to prove themselves. A difference exists between pride and arrogance. It has taken me some time to un-learn some of the arrogance of the Law School.

---

I found that I disliked working in a medium size firm because of the hours and the control that others had over my life. Now that I have my own firm, I work as much or more, but I like the control I have over what I do and when I do it. I also like direct contact with clients. I would like to make more, and we are projecting improvement in that area this year, however, my income will never touch lawyers in larger firms in larger cities. The good news is that the cost of living in a small town is much less.

Generally, I would say that I like practicing law, but many days are frustrating for me. Trying to keep up with a general practice is hard. I also tire of the general rudeness of many members of the bar. I don't think that it is necessary to zealously represent clients.

---

Law school was an extremely positive experience. I did not realize at the time I graduated what a grind private practice in a large firm could be. The worst thing about practicing in my firm was that the work lacked any socially-redeeming value.

---

The Child Advocacy Law Clinic and Trial Practice were VERY helpful.

---

I thoroughly enjoyed law school. I enjoy my work too. It's sad that attorneys are held in such low regard in our society these days. I've run into very few who merit the bad reputation.

---

I read the questionnaires filled out by prior alums when I was a second or third year law student in Professor Weiler's class. (He wanted us to think hard about where we were headed -- or perhaps being led.) It was a worthwhile experience -- a real foreshadowing of the real life difficulties faced by graduates five years after leaving the Law School.
I am now in private practice with my father and I find it most rewarding. After nearly four years spent as a judicial clerk and associate at a large firm, I can (for the first time) truly say I am happy with my work and my work environment. (The clerkship was very helpful, but became monotonous after 7-8 months.)

So for big firms, my experience is that they are frequently populated by very competent, intelligent and decent attorneys. The problem is that the partnership system is fraught with real evils. I worked with great people, learned and accomplished a lot, but I was seriously overworked and over-stressed all the time. As my reputation for doing quality work grew, more and more work came my way. It was a vicious cycle and a never-ending pressure cooker. Despite the stress and my honest attempt to work with my "bosses" to moderate my work flow, it never worked out and I had no confidence that the problem could ever be corrected (given the way work flows in large firms).

Now, my basic salary is much lower but I can work (and learn) at my own pace. Better still, my potential income -- and my basic level of optimism -- have increased dramatically. A potential new partner may join our firm, we are bidding for new work and I generally feel quite optimistic about my ability to eventually earn a very good income while maintaining my sanity and developing a satisfying family life.

I seriously encourage law graduates to get the important experiences which can only be derived from clerkships and large firms but to also consider and explore the possibility of small firm practice. That may mean foregoing or delaying some luxuries, but I would never go back to the life I had been leading when, as an associate in a large firm, I often had no control over my personal life.

Like, it seems, many of my classmates, I decided to go to law school because I was a soon-to-be-unemployed liberal arts major with no readily marketable skills and nothing better to do. I had no practical idea what law school or legal practice entailed, but I realized that a law degree would confer upon me a credential that someone somewhere would value enough to offer me a job. Not surprisingly, I spent much of my three years at U-M ruing this decision and wondering whether I hadn't made a horrible mistake. Although in retrospect law school seems like a pretty pleasant place, or at least not a horribly unpleasant place, to spend three years, I can't say I much enjoyed law school. In fact, I remember being genuinely surprised whenever I would meet someone who didn't actively dislike law school. The intervening years, however, have caused me to be more appreciative of the experience. The relatively benign and relaxed world of issues and classes that seemed deathly dull at the time seems much more interesting compared to the pressures, misery and mundane chores involved with actual legal practice.
Anyway, I don't practice law as such these days (I work in the administration of a university), and am happier for it. I have come to value the education I received at Michigan, and wish I had not viewed it as pre-professional training and worried about jobs, grades, interviews, etc. I am still not convinced that going to law school was such a brilliant idea for me, but I certainly could have done worse things with my life, and picked much worse places to do them. I have a job I enjoy that I would not have if I hadn't gone to law school, and that, as I recall, was the whole point.

What attending a top-rated law school and graduating cum laude did not prepare me for was the law firm downsizing that occurred in the early 90's, of which I was a victim. There is nothing more debilitating than only having a very short period of time to get adjusted to law firm practice and then to be advised your services are no longer required.

Though a door closed, a window opened and I had to look toward an alternative though law-related field to find employment where I am much happier than I was practicing law. However, I think that UM's placement office concentrated too heavily on three areas -- clerkships, public interest and big-name firms. One realizes fairly quickly that one does very little independent legal work at a large firm. I know of dozens of would-be litigators who saw the light five years into their careers when they realized they had never made an appearance in court, and therefore jumped ship to smaller insurance defense firms where they have their own cases and clients.

While the study of law at Michigan was a great intellectual exercise, it did not provide preparation for the realities of law firm practice. Large law firms, by and large, have neglected or rejected quality of life issues in favor of working associates interminably for the benefit and glory of the partners. Law practice in smaller firms can be more humane, as can practice in the private or public sectors. These alternatives should be stressed for those not willing to sacrifice their time, health, and personal relationships for the glory of people who don't appreciate the sacrifice.

I believe all law students should be required to take a clinical law course; I believe the experience would be invaluable.

While in law school, more career planning discussions should be available, especially regarding law-related jobs and jobs with law firms and corporations which might be more "family-friendly" than the traditional large firm.

When searching for my first job, I felt trapped into going to a large firm. For me, the experience was disastrous. Only after not working for two years (during which time I cared for my two young children) was I ready to return to the work force -- a much wiser job seeker. I have been extremely fortunate; I now work
three days a week for a law firm. These types of options should be discussed in law school along with a realistic discussion of practicing in large, corporate firms.

My answers to the questions in this questionnaire were based upon my current employment. However, as of June 30, 1994, I will be leaving my position to take several months off. After the time off I expect to work either part-time or on a contract basis, and I may eventually seek a completely different career. The practice of law in a large firm is not conducive to a happy life. The hours are long. The work is often mind-numbingly boring and the thanks are few. Discrimination on the basis of race or sex is too subtle to be easily understood or acknowledged by the overwhelmingly white and male hierarchy, so "it does not exist," they say. But nothing could be further from the truth. It is everywhere. In the past six months, including myself, five of approximately 25-30 women have left my firm. Only three men have left out of 110 or so in the same time frame. The law as it is practiced in my firm is for men only.

I am a living example that a Michigan alum can receive an excellent and expensive legal education and find happiness and satisfaction outside the practice of law -- and still manage to pay off my law school debts. I practiced law in a big firm in a big city for a year before my husband joined the Foreign Service. We have been living in Eastern Europe since 1991 and I have never for a moment regretted giving up the big bucks and prestige to be a Foreign Service spouse. I have a fascinating and rewarding contract job with the State Department, working in the Consular Section of an Embassy. At our next post, however, there may be no job for me. I would like to return to the practice of law eventually after my husband retires. In the meantime, I get to live overseas in places that overworked lawyers get to visit two weeks a year if they're lucky -- and I come home at 5 every day with my husband to spend time with our terrific little kids, now 3 and 1 years old.

I have been disappointed with the practice of law due to its predominantly negative effect on society. I have consequently returned to school to earn a medical degree. I only work part-time now to pay for my tuition. I have no regrets leaving law; I greatly regret going to law school in the first place.

When I was in private practice in a large firm, I was very unsatisfied with my career and my stress level was incredible. Then, I went to a smaller firm, where the quality of work and intellectual challenge were still high. For a while, that was a good situation and I enjoyed the work I did, especially appeals. However, as a result of small office politics and personalities (it was a family-run business and I wasn't family and the wife hated me), the stress, combined with regular attorney/litigation stress, became unbearable. Now, I practice law part-time as a solo practitioner, volunteer my legal services to charitable organizations, and help my "significant other" run his business.
My satisfaction level has increased dramatically, my stress has decreased, but so has my income. Overall, though, it's much better this way -- doing what you like, making a difference and helping others. Please send money!!

---------

Given the option of spending more time in law school or practicing law, I'd choose going back to law school.

---------


---------

My time spent at Michigan was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Law school convinced me that I should pursue an academic career, and that I would find both professional and personal satisfaction in doing so. This has proven to be the case -- partially because of the support I received from David Chambers, Bill Miller, Fred Schauer, and Peter Westen. I would like to thank them.

I am, however, struck by the irony that what I didn't find at Michigan was any particular desire to become a lawyer. The study of law as a social institution is fascinating. The practice itself is something I feel no urge to pursue. And when I see how many of my classmates feel ambivalent about, or even trapped by, the realities of legal practice, I have a kind of guilty sensation about my own good fortune. It seems that for many people the practice of law is becoming a very difficult and problematic way to make a living -- even, or perhaps especially, when it's a highly paid living. That I can do exactly what I want to do through the preparation of others to do what I have fled from troubles me. Michigan, which, perhaps more than any other contemporary law school, has emphasized the intellectualist side of legal study over the professional school model, is a sort of institutional embodiment of this irony. Of course that is one of the things that makes it such an interesting place.

---------

I did not enjoy my three years at the University of Michigan Law School. I found the administration to be insensitive to issues of race, intra-student relations and student quality of life. I found the faculty similarly insensitive and believe certain members of both groups, without any apparent opposition from the remaining members of these groups, actively attempted to polarize the student population.

Overall, I found the faculty regularly took steps, or committed "errors" of judgment, which encouraged a high degree of close-minded conservatism in the student body and needlessly increased the competition among individual students and between student groups. Moreover, I find these views are shared by a great many of my classmates.

Specific examples of the steps referred to include: (i) the release of confidential data from student applications to the
School's student newspaper; (ii) the lack of supervision of the review of student work by senior judges and junior clerks and the faculty's unwillingness to directly address accusations of abuse or incompetence on the part of such judges and clerks; (iii) the request by specific members of the faculty that ethnic students submit to video-taped interviews following a bad review from an independent consultant on the School's dealings with such students; (iv) the invitation of the head of the FBI to speak at graduation following student protests concerning FBI recruiting at the School; and, finally, (v) the general unwillingness of the faculty and administration to meet with the students and discuss these and other issues except at the very end of the second semester each year.

Generally, I found the faculty to be more interested in their independent scholarship than in assisting the students. Along with many of my classmates, I was given a brisk dismissal after asking several "renowned" faculty members for career guidance. The attitudes reflected by these faculty members was that it was not worth the time to speak to the students outside the lecture hall.

In conclusion, after graduation I found that I was very well prepared for the practice of law. However, I do not think the quality of my Michigan education was worth either its monetary or its psychological cost.

Although I enjoy my job very much, I sometimes feel regret at the amount of time spent away from my family.

The legal profession has a long way to go before there is any true equality of opportunities for men and women. The profession is dominated not just by men, but by the attitude of machismo which accepts women only if they will act like men; i.e., 80 hours/week and no family life. This attitude, especially in the litigation field, is supported by people who claim that litigation simply requires constant availability to the client due to its unpredictable nature. Bullshit! While a certain flexibility is required in order to meet the client's (and court's) needs, round-the-clock consultation is unreasonable.

If the client can accept that his powerhouse macho attorney is out of town on another case -- or golfing with the client (or another client) -- why can he not accept that the attorney is out of the office afternoons caring for her children? Because real men don't do that! They may shoot the shit on the golf course and stroke each other's egos, but they do not change poopy diapers.

Like any other entity, the legal profession can and will adapt only when it must. As long as women are forced to choose between their children and "the law" -- and there continue to be men who will gladly take their places -- women will always be considered second class lawyers. This is because they very often choose
their families. Thus women are selecting jobs (now already considered a bit female, like trust and estates or part-time in-house positions) which assure that they stay out of the male provinces of litigation and business. Or they drop out for a while, or permanently.

Yes, I know that an amazing number of women combine their multifaceted lives with success, but they must be persistent, focused, and a little lucky. A great many of my personal acquaintances work part-time, but this is not something the profession regularly allows to outside hires. The firms may brag about their flexibility, but they are generally flexible only after a woman has put in several years of service and proven her "dedication." Then she may be allowed to work reduced hours (9/day), while she increases the stress in her life as everyone whispers about what a slackard she is.

These attitudes begin in and are fostered in law school. Whatever the reasons for their maintenance in the profession, it is most assuredly not because "the law" demands it. Rather, unrealistic expectations are the rule, a rule which unfairly excludes women (specifically those with families) from the highest reaches.

I feel that I did not know enough about what "practicing law" meant as a career/lifestyle before beginning my career. If I had known more about private, civil practice, I'd have chosen a different path, a more fulfilling path. It is difficult to break out of the law -- the golden handcuffs -- because you're not trained to do any other specific job. Yet, practicing law does teach you business and organization skills that can serve you in other jobs.

I think the Law School Placement Office should put more emphasis on career opportunities outside of private practice. I recall that such employment opportunities were not only not emphasized, but difficult to find. This is a disservice to those students, like myself, who were unaware of the variety of career options.

I had no idea what it would be like to practice law in a large private firm even after having clerked at one during 2nd year summer. I spent my first three years in a large firm and could not believe the boredom generated by large firm litigation practice and the continually increasing billable hour requirements. I found myself asking whether there was something wrong with my desire to have a life outside of work. To the partners at my old firm, there seemed to be. To this day, I wonder how they pull the continual 6 to 6½ day weeks without losing sight of the other aspects of their lives. Maybe they have. I moved to a smaller firm, bill about 1500 hours per year, and have found that my practice is now enjoyable rather than tedious and stressful. I don't think my practice has changed that dramatically but the extra time away from the office has done wonders for my enjoyment of my time spent at work. I took a
pay cut to make the move, but I got more bang for the buck with that cut than I ever could have gotten had I been paid the money and continued working at the large firm.

In general I enjoyed law school but came to realize I was not prepared to practice law when I left. To some extent I was not intellectually ready to give law school my full attention. I understood the concepts but not the big picture. I think the law school curriculum contributed a great deal to this problem because of how little practical instruction we received. For example, I think several classes were taught with too much emphasis on theory and historical roots and not enough instruction on actual practice. Civil procedure is a good example. While the professors were fascinated with the historical underpinnings of jurisdictional and forum issues, these are usually self-evident in real life. It would have been much more valuable to receive a practical explanation of the essential elements of a suit and then to walk slowly through the rules to see how they would apply (i.e., how to draft a complaint and discovery documents, and how to respond accordingly).

When I went to law school I somewhat naively believed the practice of law would be like one of the liberal arts or humanities, except you got paid better. While studying law at U-M was often like that, in terms of intellectual challenge and broad perspective, I found practice in a large corporate law firm quite disappointing in that regard (probably I was the only one to be surprised by this). I find now that law teaching is very satisfying in that regard, and I am quite happy with my career change. I am still a bit uncomfortable, though, with training my students to do something I myself found so frustrating and unfulfilling. I'm still working on that one.

Too many people go to law school for money not realizing what it is like to be a lawyer.

I needed more procedural training but that's my fault in choosing classes and not the law school's.

Students need more exposure to the real practice of law on a day-to-day basis.

Five years of the practice of law in a private law firm has brought me (a) excellent income, (b) great status, and (c) an amazing view, but it has not delivered, nor have I found, job satisfaction, a sense of self-worth, or a feeling of confidence that I could go out with my "skills" and do something productive for society.

Unfortunately, I feel strapped into staying at a high paying corporate law firm (which I find unsatisfying) because of my law school loans. If I had to do it again, and despite how much I enjoyed Michigan, I might consider less expensive alternatives,
or not going to law school at all. Until I pay off these loans, my options are slim.

--------

I felt that the Law School was, at best, indifferent towards its Gay and Lesbian students, as was the rest of the University. By and large, I have found that to be the case at work as well. That did not deter me from becoming active in Gay and Lesbian organizations while in law school. Nor has it deterred me in taking these issues on in the work place. I now spearhead a Gay and Lesbian employees group at work, which I founded about a year ago. My activism on these issues has, thus far, not been a detriment to my career, and has in fact led to my appointment to an EEO Advisory Committee at work.

--------

**Best Classes:** Jurisprudence-related. This stays with me; passing case law was good for 1st year only.

**Strange Twist in Area of Practice:** Shortly after the Christopher Commission issued its report on the Los Angeles Police Department, I was drafted to join the Kolts Commission, which studied excessive force in the L.A. Sheriff's Dept. For the next two years, I work on semi-annual audits re: compliance with our recommendations. It's fun work. It's not litigation work; more like "watchdog" work in narrow areas of community-based policing, excessive force, risk management.

Never expected this work to come to me.

--------

Law school was an enormously intellectually liberating experience. The many friends I made there are terrific people whom I am proud to know. I look back fondly.

As for me, I have interesting work, high pay and terrific peers at work, but also suffer from long hours and a cretinous partnership that hates one another. Even assuming I could become a partner at my firm, of which there is maybe a 10% likelihood, I don't think I want to. If I'm here in two years, I'll be surprised.

--------

I thought that law school was a great intellectual experience, a crummy social experience and a fair but not great preparation for the life I face as a lawyer.

Personally, the only big change I would recommend is a very thorough (and not just in Saturday morning speeches) and **mandatory** section or bridge week focused on careers post-law school. This should include all possibilities, not just those strictly law related. It should also include persons who are currently happy with certain callings and others who are less happy.

Also -- I was very impressed with the "New" section and wonder if the School will ever institute it for everyone.
My first job was a very prestigious, well paying corporate law firm. I had a huge office, lots of perks, etc. I was very unhappy. They were anal and paranoid.

My current job is with the District Attorney's office. I make less than half as much money. I share a small office with 3 people. We have fun. I like my job. The people I work with are my friends.

Michigan, perhaps inadvertently, steers its students into the "sophisticated firms." I think that is a disservice to both society and the students. Aside from that -- I loved Michigan and the intellectual rigor I shared during those years.

--------
1) I enjoyed law school, having had no idea of what lawyers really do.

2) I thought my classmates sheltered and obnoxiously arrogant; I didn't know just how arrogant until I got into the real world. Michigan fosters a sense of super-importance which has served America poorly.

3) My generation, the yuppies, have hardly reformed. I was one, but have been terribly poor too (having come from the solid middle class, it was hard at first) and my values now cannot take second place to my profession. Unfortunately the Wall Street mentality which encouraged over-spending in the eighties has just made people meaner in the nineties.

4) Other than not having my son due primarily to the bias of the judge towards money and whiteness, my life is wonderful. I am doing exactly as I please, and am lucky enough to offer services people seem to need.

5) I started my business with no money rather than work at McDonalds after a $75,000 position and death-threatening illness. It changes one.

--------
I figured out early in my post-law school career that I had to look at the long-term personal and professional goals which I wanted to achieve in order to succeed in both areas of my life. Such introspection was relatively new to me, but has proven to be extremely valuable. I would encourage my classmates to determine what they want out of life in general and not to be afraid to make adjustments in their professional life in order to achieve those personal goals.

--------
Litigation, my main area of practice, is bad and getting worse. The professionalism and integrity of the bar -- both in and outside of New York -- is greatly diminishing. Discovery is out of hand. It's a great waste of time, energy and money, and the new rules make it worse. These factors make it much less enjoyable to practice.

--------
Law students in my class generally had no idea what to expect from large private practice and the time demands and pressures associated with that type of practice. Many of my classmates experienced disillusionment and an awareness that there is more to consider in a career than the alluring and exorbitant starting salary of a large firm.

My biggest complaints about law school are: 1) that we were all programmed to go into large law firms, with the implicit (and even explicit at times) indication that those who didn't were lesser attorneys; and 2) that we never learned how to do basic legal research and writing.

Students should be very wary of borrowing heavily to finance school. I feel trapped in my career because of my debt burden. Students should realize that the competition for academic jobs is very high and jobs are nearly unobtainable absent prestigious clerkships or publication or second graduate degrees, i.e., Ph.D.

When I graduated in 1989, Michigan placed far too much emphasis on overly theoretical BS from professors who fancy themselves Supreme Court justices in the making. Intellectually challenging and rigorous classes could (and all too rarely did) focus on examination and teaching of the law without pompous pronouncements from the great theorists.

The non-megalomaniacs (St. Antoine, Seligman, Fred Schauer, Israel) who taught what the law was, were valuable teachers. I learned from them. From the rest, I learned that law school was 3 years of pedantics with no relation to the actual practice of law. Judge Edwards was right.

Define and Defend your personal boundaries of integrity and honesty. Realize that this may mean that your personal definition of success may have to be adjusted.

I fear and regret the reality that law schools are failing to teach in one unfortunately unavoidable, pragmatic way. Law students are taught how to practice law ethically if they so desire -- but they are not taught how to contend with and prepare for those lawyers who do not feel constrained by rules of ethics (or morality or even civility). Learning this lesson on the job is both painful and disturbing, and is a primary reason for professional dissatisfaction and disillusionment.

I feel I have experienced, in several instances, a lot of discrimination because I am a short, petite, young-looking woman. The questions I have been asked, for example, on interviews (How would you respond to a large, male attorney if he became very aggressive in arguing a legal issue with you?) have been dispiriting.

Although I have thoughts and desires to work in a smaller or different setting for the practice of law than that in which I
now work, the enormous burden of servicing student loans to the tune of $700 per month after tax (loans which were all taken to pay for an extremely expensive law school education) makes any realization of those desires a distant fantasy.

Law school was a waste of time and money. With the high intelligence of the students, the experience should have been golden and exceptional. As it was, there were tradition-bound "instructors" (using the term loosely) who were only in the classroom because they received inordinate amounts of money and prestige for being there.

They did not know how to teach or what to teach. They did not have the slightest touch with reality nor what is happening in the courtroom. A kindergarten teacher could present the material better.

I resent the time and effort, not to say money, wasted. The schooling made most of my classmates swear they would never take a course again -- they hated the place when they graduated. The place is an intellectual cesspool.

I feel that law school was extremely poor preparation for the practice of law. On the other hand, I enjoyed my time in law school and found many of the classes (and many of my classmates) intellectually stimulating.

I found the intellectual climate of the Law School to be first rate. Although I held values and philosophical ideas that were radically different from those of other law students, I appreciated the diversity of opinions and thought and the conviction with which they were expressed. Classroom discussions were often filled with heated debate, as articulate Titans clashed with one another. We relished the debate, but feared our colleagues' perceptions of us and our arguments. It was this unrelenting fear of criticism that taught us each how to word our thoughts carefully and methodically. This climate helped to mold me into a critically-thinking lawyer. I am, therefore, deeply indebted to the Michigan Law School experience.

I am very discouraged with "the law." Five years of practice in a "prominent, N.Y.-based" firm has led me to conclude that: (1) the employer/employee relationship in this context is among the most archaic in our society, rivaled only by the hiring of migrant farm workers, (2) lawyers spend their careers either (a) assisting powerful clients in their never-ending quest to fleece consumers and the disadvantaged, or (b) "tilting at windmills" (i.e., representing consumers and the disadvantaged), and (3) Shakespeare was right....

Law school did not prepare me for the tremendous degree of gender discrimination that still exists in the profession. I experienced it most acutely while teaching law school, but it persists in private practice as well. Women at my level are
leaving private practice in great numbers, due to discrimination and the inability to practice law and share family responsibilities. Billable hour requirements are effectively shutting the majority of women out of the profession, either because those women choose to be primary caretakers or because society still expects this of them.

Law should be an undergrad major. This should be followed by four years of work as an "associate" paid about $30,000-$40,000. Then you should be sent to one year of specialist school (e.g., litigation, tax, etc.). Upon graduation from that, you should be admitted to the bar. This would greatly reduce cost to clients, improve morale and increase quality of lawyering and save students time and money.

I have felt since I left law school that the third year of law school could be put to far better use than it is at most institutions. The current format is little more than a retread of second year. While I am sure this serves some value, I think the students would gain far more by being required to serve a year -- unpaid -- in some practical setting, probably distinct from the one they intend to pursue following graduation. This would give students a practical taste of work life and an opportunity to broaden and apply their knowledge. Further, with so many students going to large firms, it would give them a taste of work life that is not governed totally by the billable hour.

I am concerned that the Law School tends to be more attentive to "intellectual" pursuits instead of focusing attention (short of trial practice, an elective, give-up-your-spring-break class) on reality-based, nuts and bolts advanced courses (e.g., other than Civil Procedure, etc.).

I also am concerned about the Law School, and society in general, focusing on "rights as a member of a group" instead of the "individual rights" found in the Constitution. The law school education I received was primarily from "left-leaning" professors who, manifestly or latently, injected social justice political views into the curriculum. The curriculum should be more balanced, with all sides presented factually and open debate encouraged and MODERATED, with hissing and booing, etc., discouraged.

I always knew I would love law school, but I have been pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoy the practice of law. My litigation work is extremely varied, and I work with bright, articulate, intense colleagues. I'm very proud of our firm. My only disappointments stem from the relatively slow growth of my salary and the uncertainty of the partnership track.

When I entered law school, I did not know essential facts about the judicial system in the U.S. and about the dual source of laws in this country, statutes and common law. This all seems obvious now but was not then. It became a critical deficit when I began
a summer associateship, and I quickly had to bone up on issues such as "What's the difference between a federal district court and a court of appeals?" While I do not advocate that law schools become overly clinical or practical, some basics could be taught in the otherwise useless research and writing class.

----------
I wish I knew each of you better.

----------
My principal complaint about U-M is that the placement office did not have enough info/resources about nonprofit opportunities. Many of my classmates were frustrated at their inability to obtain information about positions at public interest organizations (although they were highly qualified).

Also, I am immeasurably more satisfied with my life (home, work, self, etc.) since I left private practice and began teaching law.

----------
Like many (or most) of my classmates, I've spent the last several years struggling to define my career goals and, most importantly, my personal work interests. I think the lure of big law firms and the recruiting process pulled a lot of us away from our planned career tracks. Fortunately, I've managed to get back into a public interest career, but it really is hard to give up the prestige of corporate law.

Even though I no longer practice law and probably won't again, I have no regrets about attending law school or my years practicing with a private law firm. I believe these experiences helped me learn to think critically and to develop sound judgment, and if I had it to do all over again, I would.

----------
I really enjoyed my three years in law school, in large part, because I had plenty of time to do things other than study law.

I am saddened by the fact that at least two of our law school classmates have died of AIDS.

----------
I currently work at a private firm which very recently merged with a large (200+ attorney) firm. I intend to leave for a job in the federal government in the near future.

----------
A majority of my practice involves defense of malpractice claims, particularly attorneys. Thus, I have, in most cases, two "clients," the insured attorney and his or her carrier.

----------
After three years of law school and nearly five years of practice, I am just now beginning to realize that the study and practice of law can be somewhat rewarding and enjoyable. I attribute this change of heart entirely to switching from large-firm practice to a corporate in-house position. Being a lawyer in-house allows me to see (and learn) the inner workings of a business at every level, as opposed to being involved only when expensive problems arise.
In thinking about why it took so long to experience this epiphany, I'm sure my own indifference to law school is the primary culprit. However, I think the Law School could do more in the way of career planning functions. I think the mental health of young lawyers would improve markedly if the lemming-like march from law school to large firm/big city practice slowed or ceased.

As for the curriculum, my consistent lack of attendance at class probably disqualifies me from commenting. I will say that I think the students would benefit from imbuing the class work with a more practical hue. Frankly, I didn't find that the study of law as a purely academic exercise held my attention.

My law school experience represents three of the best years of my life. First year was challenging and difficult, but the benefit of the relationships I made with other law students more than made up for it. I do not feel that law school prepares you very well for the daily practice of law, and I think that the School should look at various things it can do to make it more practical.

I was disappointed with law school. I felt like a number; classes were extremely boring and not geared toward the practice of law; professors were dull and pompous; the administration did not really care for the students then attending, but only those who they hoped would attend.

Enjoyed New Section -- really helpful to integrate courses.

During law school the pressure to aspire to the national law firm, big city, high salary positions and lifestyle was prevalent. It was still the age of "L.A. Law." I allowed myself to be seduced by the perception and peer pressure that the New York firms and the huge salaries were the only way to go. Over two years ago I turned my back on that situation, took a large pay cut, and began work at a small firm in a smaller town. I only regret that I allowed myself to spend two years not enjoying my practice.

Students should be encouraged to investigate all types of law practices and situations, not just big city, national firms and judicial clerkships. The Placement office should encourage small firms, private foundations and nonprofit organizations, and corporations to come to Michigan so all types of practice settings are represented in the recruiting process. Likewise, students should be encouraged to investigate and evaluate more fully all the possibilities and the ramifications of each practice type so each student is able to make the right choice for that individual straight out of school and not just after years of frustration. A University of Michigan Law School degree opens many doors -- including doors at smaller firms and organizations.

---------
Law school was a mental challenge, but not an intellectual one. I sought -- and found -- intellectual stimulation outside of the Law Quad, principally by engaging other members of the Lesbian & Gay Rights Organizing Committee, which was very active as a political body during my time in Ann Arbor. All together, my Ann Arbor experiences prepared me to be a disciplined activist for social justice. This has been evidenced by my participation over a period of years in an AIDS Task Force and on local and regional committees organized to lobby for full civil rights for homosexuals, including an end to the ban on homosexuals in the U.S. armed forces.

Perhaps more significantly, my Ann Arbor experiences re-directed my professional focus, leading me to eventually seek a career as a university professor rather than a lawyer with a large, private firm.

I have worked in private law firms the entire five years since law school, essentially because my school loans left me very little option to do otherwise (given that I am the primary breadwinner in my family.) I have found two of the three firms in which I have worked to be particularly soul-destroying places in which I have had no success in finding mentors. It has toughened me, for sure, and my closest friends and loved ones have told me that they believe I have managed to maintain my integrity thus far, but I feel very alone, and it is very clear to me that, no matter how good my work is or how solid my credentials are or even how many clients I have, I am nowhere without mentors within my firm.

I was unprepared for how difficult it would be, and have unfortunately learned most of my lessons the hard way. Perhaps some attention could be paid to teaching survival skills, particularly for women. Perhaps such training should be offered post law school, since it's within the first two to three years that you find out what the real battles are.

I am also at a loss for role models who have survived these firms with their integrity intact. Perhaps there are some such role models in prior classes whose experiences might benefit and encourage women like me...?

If I had it to do all over again (where have I heard that before?) I would not attend law school. My personal belief is that my mind has atrophied as a result of practicing law. The worst part is that by the time I get home at night I no longer have the energy to read or do other mind expanding activities.

It is a great luxury to have had the kind of intellectual experience and opportunity for reflection that law school offers. I only wish the practice were as intellectually satisfying.

While law school was, in its own unique way, intellectually stimulating, and while it trained me generally how to think
carefully about legal problems, unfortunately, a lot of what was taught was not practically applicable to the practice of law, at least as I am experiencing it. More emphasis and resources should be placed on/into clinical or other training programs. Just as everyone is required to take legal research and writing (which has been most useful for me), so should everyone be required to obtain some clinical/practical experience representing clients.

A word to law students about personal finances: the high salaries paid at the expensive firms include a large premium to account for the risk that you'll be fired. Pick your housing, car, and other "lifestyle" expenses as if the top $20-30,000 weren't there. I admire the people who, unlike me, recognized this and finish 5 years of practice with enough money around that they can leave a job, or even the profession, with financial security.

On the collegiality of the profession, I find that, in firms, situations of warm trust and professional respect coincide almost perfectly with situations of short-term financial return for the firm. Work hard at your job, because money is a good thing; but don't neglect family and friends because of your job. The job can be yanked away due to circumstances beyond your control; but family and friends will always be there.

I graduated from U of M in 1989. At that time, most graduates expected to take jobs with large corporate law firms in major metropolitan areas. Although I don't think many of us truly expected to continue our practice in such settings, I don't think any of us spent time thinking about the next step. I keep in touch with a lot of my classmates. Almost all of them who practiced initially with large firms hated their lives and their practices after 2-4 years. I imagine the attrition rate at the end of 5 years is fairly high. This should be communicated to law students, so that when they reach that point, assuming that most will, they will have thought about where to go and what to do. I think the frustration level of these future attorneys could be reduced substantially!

I have been representing the Rainforest Action Network, a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of tropical rainforests and the indigenous people living within them, on a pro bono basis for the past three years. The experience has been very rewarding.

Michigan has served me well since graduation -- it has provided me with the skills necessary to build a career and has also given me a great deal of credibility with clients and other lawyers. The quality of one's education is apparent only after the real world puts it to the test. I feel confident that Michigan provided me with the very best in legal training, for which I will always be grateful. Since I met my husband there as well (I
was a first year, he was a third year), I suppose I owe a great deal more to Michigan Law than my legal education.

I've been working so hard to do well that I wonder sometimes whether I'm doing what I want to do.

I am experiencing, and have been for the last year or two, a feeling that I am not fulfilling my potential in life and I don't think I will as long as I stay in my current practice and lifestyle. I am uncertain whether I will stay in the practice of law or get out and do something different. I am afraid that if I don't make a change soon, I never will. This feeling pervades my personal life too, which I want to pay more attention to. It is just as important.

In the years after law school I have come to realize that I probably would have appreciated, enjoyed and gotten a better education during law school if I had worked between undergrad and law school. I think that some real life experience in the business working world would have been helpful in many respects.

I am extremely proud to have attended and graduated from the UM Law School. It is something that I enjoy sharing with others because of the fine reputation of the institution. I have also the UM Law School to thank for some of my closest friends, although many of them live in different parts of the country. Overall, I would do it all over again if given the choice today.

I think that the practice of law today is very difficult to balance with a life outside of work.

It is tough for women in private practice. The natural tendency of the men to "bond" with younger men (and thus provide better training/mentoring), together with clients' expectations of graying, father-figure type attorneys, are difficult obstacles. Unless you are hyper-aggressive, totally committed to work (to the exclusion of home/family) and very self-confident, the chances of competing successfully with male colleagues are slim. Partnership in a large firm is not available to many who seek balance in their lives (men and women alike).

The work-flow problem is particularly thorny. Men seem most comfortable working with other men, which leads to more opportunity for male associates. How are women to gain the experience necessary to develop legal skills if they struggle to get good projects? I did not notice this pattern until my third year or so, but now I find I must constantly "self promote" (more than the guys) to earn the confidence of the older, male partners who control the work.

Law school was for me a tremendously engaging academic and political experience. The luxury of intellectual debate with so many other talented individuals is not likely to repeat itself and I am deeply grateful.
The practice of law has been a big disappointment -- at least in the big-firm environment in which I've spent most of my time. There are so many compulsive people -- afraid to do anything creative or different. Each brief must look like every other. Filled with stilted, out-dated language. Being a lawyer has turned out to be so much more boring and pedestrian than I'd imagined. There is little true intellectual stimulation or excitement.

I'm embarrassed to say that I've remained in this environment -- devoid of emotional or intellectual satisfaction -- for so long. At least I've paid off my student loans and saved a little money. Perhaps my escape is at hand.

I will say this: I had a wonderful time in law school, three of the best years of my life. Too bad it's been downhill ever since.

Following law school, I practiced for 3 years. At the end of my first year, my father died and I realized that if I continued to practice law I would not be fully enjoying this one life I have. It took me the next two years to decide what I wanted to be when I grew up and to get up the nerve to give up the money.

In 1992 I went back to graduate school in Psychology. I am now a beginning therapist (while still in school) and get more joy and satisfaction from my work than I had ever thought possible. I also work part-time as a consultant for an organizational psychologist, recommending ways to make law firms healthier places to work. I hope to specialize in providing therapy (group and individual) to professional people, particularly women, and their families. Although I am very glad to be out, I am grateful to have been given insight into the professional world, and to see what it gives and what it takes from the people who work in it.

During my 3 years of practice I worked for three different firms and was unemployed for 3 months, as a result of layoffs. I felt that I had made an effort to enjoy the law, but was unable to do so. Except for missing the income (a lot) I have not regretted my career choice, nor do I regret having earned my J.D. from U. of M.

I was happy to hear Jeff Lehman was chosen as dean. I haven't been so happy about the School's tenure decisions; teaching ability seems to be completely discounted in favor of "scholarship." The loss of good instructors in various ways (here I have Litman, Schauer, Deveney in mind) is very disappointing.

My experience in law school was very positive. I attribute this in large part to the fact that I was in the "new" section. I
thoroughly enjoyed my first year of law school, and my 2nd and 3rd years of law school continued to be a wonderful intellectual experience. I took far more seminars, and fewer practical courses, than most. This put me at a disadvantage upon entering the working world but I do not regret it. I have the rest of my life to learn to become a great practitioner, but unless I teach I will not have the luxury of the deep and intense intellectual endeavor I did in law school. Thinking at a theoretical level for 3 years also gave me a confidence in my analytical skills that helps me today, especially with difficult cases.

My answers would have been quite different if asked three months ago while still working in a private law firm. In that case, job satisfaction would have been abysmal, and stress very high.

I felt that Michigan needed to foster a more collegial atmosphere with its students. Most of the faculty were quite aloof -- I missed the interaction I had had in undergrad and graduate school. I would say however that most of the faculty I had for instructors were good teachers.

I also would like to see the School put more emphasis on practical skills which we need after we graduate.