Class of 1991 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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RESPONSES FROM THE MEMBERS OF
THE CLASS OF 1991
TO THE LAST QUESTION ON 5-YEAR SURVEY ASKING FOR
"COMMENTS OF ANY SORT ABOUT YOUR LIFE
OR LAW SCHOOL OR WHATEVER"

You have to keep in mind what should be most important to you--your faith and your family. Work will then fall into proper perspective.

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My sense is that in law school and in practice there is far too much emphasis on attaining the nth degree of achievement by external objective standards and far too little concern or recognition (let alone nurturing) of the inner growth we all require. I am struggling now to catch up, and a law firm is not exactly a helpful environment.

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More practical litigation skills; perhaps a mock case development from pre-filing research through filing of complaint, discovery, motions and trial utilizing the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. For future litigators the experience would be invaluable. For me, it took over two years in practice to see a case through, from beginning to end, and to really understand how the process works.

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Law school sets up a false hierarchy in which capable students from around the country are separated out and treated differently based on their performance on law school exams. An unstated assumption exists that how well one performs predicts how one will perform as a lawyer and is somehow indicative of a person's relative worth.

In fact, the ability to quickly analyze a legal problem is merely one factor that goes into being a good lawyer. I don't recall any professor of mine ever mentioning that things like interpersonal skills and, above all, judgment are critical to success. The more cynical might suggest that this is because these skills are not typically the strong suit of law professors.

I believe the Law School could take two steps to correct this situation. First, bring in more speakers from the real world to relate to students what really counts in their careers
and what training will serve them best. Second, hire more professors with some grasp of what practice is all about. A prestigious judicial clerkship followed by a year or two of private practice (if that) does not a worldly professor make.

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Law school does not prepare one for practicing law.

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It's not that I hated practicing law; it's just that I didn't love it. And I quickly learned that, for the amount of time and psychic energy it requires, it's not worth doing if the best you can manage is indifference to the work.

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I would like to see more efforts made to help students learn about public interest law careers and locate public interest law jobs. I was disappointed to see so many of my classmates go off to large private firms, but that was the path of least resistance. It was relatively easy to get that type of job, because that was the focus of on-campus recruiting.

I would also like to see an expansion of the loan forgiveness/debt management program. Also, levels of financial aid given during the first year of law school should remain consistent in the second and third years, unless the student's financial circumstances change.

Finally, I would urge the law school to require clinical experience for all students--mine was invaluable! I also had classmates who had little grasp of what it would be like to practice law, and clinical experience would have assisted them.

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Without trying to sound too negative, the amount of practical benefit I received from my law school education could have been conveyed in one year, maybe even a semester. When I visited U of M as a college senior, an assistant dean told me rather bluntly that the Law School's role was to teach the law and not to train lawyers. That attitude certainly proved true, and I hope it is starting to change. I hear a lot of resentment and dissatisfaction from my classmates at large law firms about lifestyle, workload, etc. which I assume will surface in the final results of your survey. If so, I encourage the Law School to give its graduates more leverage in trying to improve law firms' treatment of associates by providing its graduates with more practical skills, thereby making them less dependent on law
firms for their "real" education. Finally, even if most job openings are for law firm litigation associates and judicial clerkships, try to provide a well-rounded education (including classes on transactional work, specialized industries, etc.), and let your students make an informed career choice.

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Knowing what I know now about careers in law and about my interests, I would definitely attend law school again. However, I might not have attending the University of Michigan Law School, or any other exorbitantly-priced law school for that matter, not because I do not appreciate having gone to a school taught by some of the top professors and attended by some of the country's brightest students, but because it is a law school experience that less affluent students cannot afford unless they get a job at a high paying law firm. Graduates from the University of Michigan who upon entering the law school, to have more options, actually have less meaningful options because of their socioeconomic status. No one forced me to go to the U of M Law School, but having had no mentoring about the full import of taking out so many loans for school, I quickly found myself between a rock and a hard place. I think it would be beneficial to offer to provide students in such a position the opportunity to speak with a financial aid officer or placement officer about the impact their current decision will have on their lives.

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Law has become, or maybe always was, a business. It is a business driven by cramming the greatest number of billable hours in a day possible without regard to the rest of your life. Practicing law in a large firm can and will if you let it, take from you all that is human. Most lawyers I have met seem to have little regard for themselves or others around them. I am not sorry I went to law school, but I am sorry I decided to practice law in a large firm. I look forward to the day I will be free of such a practice.

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1) I think this survey shows that the Law School is genuinely interested in finding out what it should be preparing lawyers for--and was happy to find it in my "in" box. 2) Why are there no questions about sexual orientation? The exclusion of this subject suggests that the creators consider it irrelevant--but it is important to some of us.

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I think it is important for current female law students to
know that the glass ceiling still exists in commercial litigation.

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In two months I will move to Milwaukee to take a 7th Circuit Court of Appeals clerkship for 1 year, during which time I plan to review whether private practice is really for me or whether I need to change to in-house, governmental, or other law-related areas, or out of law altogether.

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On Law School, Life and Lawyering--The best law professors I had were great lawyers. Some law professors were great law students, which is something different. A great lawyer must enjoy the job. Unless you're lucky (or tenured) you will work for a person or in a market which will want that job done quickly, cheaply and well. There's not much you can do about that except play the lottery. So, by all means, find a way to be happy. Too often law schools seem to attract and reward those who have come to rely on the approval of others. Unfortunately, in the real world such dependence is preyed upon by manipulators. The result is alienation. People who are bright enough to be lawyers and lucky enough to have choices should be able to be happy on their own terms. I think success is something like this.

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I do not like all of the wasted time and effort put forth in law firms in trying to impress clients.

I do not like the overall lack of respect that law firm partners show toward associates.

When I talk in general terms about my job as a patent lawyer, I seem to like it. When I think of all the day-to-day activities I perform, I wish I had another profession.

Billing sucks. Just getting the job done is not valued enough.

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The practice of law in this firm no longer values the individual mentorings, of the "profession." It's all bottom line, more hours = more dollars. When one arrives at the threshold of partnership (if one gets there), the partners find
an excuse, however far-fetched, to toss you.

I am supposedly a “super star” here (a) I don’t believe it (b) I don’t like my personal and family life and (c) I don’t really want to be a partner with these materialistic people. But I’m here because it pays the bills.

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After a couple of months at a law firm, I knew it wasn’t the right atmosphere for me. Inertia and law firm salaries, however, are both powerful forces. Fortunately, the decision to leave the firm was made for me when several associates were laid off en masse.

A policy-oriented, in-house position has left me more time to develop outside interests. I am definitely happier and more interesting since I left my firm. Although I like my current job, I still am struggling to find a way to turn some of these outside interests into a creative (and viable) career.

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As someone who does a fair amount of on-campus recruiting, I have been aware of how tough it is now to secure good employment. The market is rough and, unfortunately, for many young lawyers in lots of different settings the quality of life at work is depressingly low. I feel very lucky to have the level of stimulation, collegiality, and quality of life I’ve got at my firm.

I think law school was very stimulating and Michigan did a decent job of preparing me for the challenges of professional life. Substantively, I was quite well prepared. My biggest gripe when I graduated (in 1991) was about the legal writing program, but I understand that it’s been much improved in the last few years.

As a place to go to law school, it’s hard to imagine anything better than Michigan. The classes were generally very good, and the students were a great, and fun, bunch of people.

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A grand experience. The great strength of the law school is that which looks, at first blush, like frills: comparative law and legal philosophy in all their forms. Too many lawyers I have met professionally are so caught up in the task at hand that they
forget to practice law. Nowhere but law school can an appreciation of the global view be taught--and it is at this teaching that Michigan excels.

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I have found practicing law and interacting with clients and communities immensely satisfying. I have also enjoyed teaching, including my one-on-one interactions with students and other professionals (e.g., physicians and social workers) in the clinical teaching setting as well as classroom teaching and writing. While my law school experience (including those three years spent in Ann Arbor) was on the whole pleasant and at times interesting, I found it did not prepare me for any aspect of practice--at least not the kind of practice I have done since law school; nor did it prepare me for law teaching (although perhaps the reputation of University of Michigan has opened doors that might not otherwise have been so readily accessible). Apart from the legal research part of the 1st year writing course, the writing program was woefully lacking. I came into law school with strong writing skills which continue to serve me well but had neither the instruction nor the opportunity to write much in law school (except in an externship program and during the summer). I did not benefit from instruction by students and would have liked to do more writing and analysis/research in class--perhaps a writing requirement also would have been helpful. I had a one-week course on professional responsibility and learned virtually nothing about law practice. When I started my law practice as one of two beginning attorneys in a remote legal services office with little research material or other resources, I knew nothing about drafting pleadings, or motions, conducting a client interview and maintaining a lawyer-client relationship, professional responsibility, procedure, jurisdiction, etc. With the patience and help of clients and my one colleague and lots of nerve-wracking, hard work, I learned an incredible amount and fortunately, did not commit any acts of malpractice (that I yet know of). Clinical courses were scarce and discouraged (along with most other practical work) by most professors. Public interest jobs and other non-corporate/big-law-firm experiences were not widely promoted by the law school. Indeed, the needs and issues of poor individuals and communities, Indians and other minorities, and the environment did not seem to be part of the law school consciousness. I am pleased to see Michigan is revamping its writing program and expanding its clinical law program. The New Section and its integrated problem-solving approach (e.g. combining torts, procedure and other subjects in negotiation exercises, legislative drafting, and other team projects) was a positive program, and I hope it's
continuing to develop. Opportunities to explore different aspects of law practice during law school would have been helpful as would more writing—pleadings, agreements, briefs, memos, research articles, etc. Attention to socially relevant issues re: poverty, the environment, Native Americans and other minorities would also be a good idea.

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I was very frustrated and disappointed with the debt management program—it is far less than touted to be. The program is unfair in that there is no cost of living adjustment, so living in New York City earning $29,000 per year I was given $150 per year from U of M after harassing the Financial Aid Office for 10 months to simply respond! Many of my friends (with only one exception) were treated similarly. I refused to become a favorable statistic and thus did not accept the money. It is for this reason I will never make a financial donation to the law school.

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During my second year of law school, a group of students met with then-Dean Bollinger to express our concern about the lack of courses focused on corporate and transactional law, particularly given the explosion of first and fourteenth amendment classes. We were told that our concerns were unfounded, that we had the wrong attitude because any course offered by the Law School would prepare us for whatever field we chose to practice in and that trying to train for a specific field of practice was a mistake. Now that I have the benefit of five years’ of practice, I am more certain than ever that what Dean Bollinger told us was wrong. A significant portion of the graduates of the Law School practice transactional law and enter private practice woefully prepared. The Law School has made great strides to developing practical training courses for future litigators (e.g. clinics, trial advocacy, etc.), but continues to fail the future transactional attorneys. An effort should be made to offer exposure to contract drafting, to the basic features of an asset purchase versus a stock purchase, to basic securities filing and so forth. Given the harsh realities of the legal job market, law students cannot afford to indulge the pedagogical whims of a faculty more interested in theory than practice. If students are not trained to practice, they will be unable to find employment allowing them to repay their debt load and, eventually, market forces will drive people away from the practice of law.

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Aside from learning to "think like a lawyer", the only really useful class was clinic. I try cases 85% of my time. I successfully defended a first-degree murder case. The classes that assumed "my firm" would teach me how to litigate were wrong. I "learned it in the streets," as it were, and from my clerkship (Federal District Court), and from trial and error. We're sending a generation of bright young people into courtrooms WOEFULLY unprepared. While I have a friend who never saw the inside of a courtroom for four years, that's not been my life-plan and we shouldn't assume it's for everyone.

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I appreciate the good name and excellent reputation U of M Law School has in the legal community.

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These comments are random and off-the-cuff:

The training students get in law school is indispensable. The problem is, what do you do with it once you get out and are faced with a huge debt to repay? There isn't a day that goes by that I do not rack my by brains for alternatives to practicing at a law firm, but my debt obligations make such alternatives things that are put off for another day. I look forward to my last loan payment.

However, my sense is that the sentiment that the practice of law in law firms is frustrating runs deeper than just financial consideration. Today, law firms want more in less time, from fewer people, for the same money. I recently commented to a colleague that proofreading is a thing of the past; you just get the work out and hope that there are few to no mistakes. The work at times lacks sufficient interest for the effort expended. I grudgingly find myself the instrument of those who can afford my services and use them to achieve their own individualistic goals as opposed to that which is most beneficial to society at large, a free-flowing waste of resources. In answering the survey, I found it interesting that I spend 40% of my time doing something that I do not much enjoy.

The firm at which I work is not reflective of society. I am the only minority attorney at the firm. I have not discerned any indications that the attorneys at the firm believe I am less talented than the white associates. However, the hiring practices of the firm make it less likely that minority
interviewees will be hired as the firm is now adhering to requiring high academic performance, even in their consideration of majority students.

I have discerned that there is a disparity in treatment between male and female attorneys. The careers of male attorneys appear to be more guided and mentoring relationships more common. I speak with female attorneys at the firm and find that most would rather abandon the practice and raise families. But most of the sentiments seem to be reactions to a lack of recognition by those for whom they work and long hours away from their families. All of the women are equally, if not more, talented than the male associates. I am amazed by the sacrifices made by the women who do stay to become partner.

When I interact with attorneys outside the firm, I must constantly remind myself that the prejudices and discrimination women and minorities in the law suffer are real and are alive and well, especially on the bench. So, no matter how hard I work to build my case, or no matter how meritorious my client’s case, I walk around with a great fear that my client’s interests may be seriously compromised just because I am a woman, although much less because I am a minority. Who could I possibly express this sentiment to? Clearly not the people who rely on my client for their bottom line and who count on me to increase that bottom line. You just keep plugging at it.

There have been some tremendously exciting experiences since I have been practicing. I have worked with people with great integrity, known in the legal community for their honesty. I have worked on matters which have impacted social policy despite ever thinking my practice would allow me to have such exposure. There accomplishments were the result of someone who has taken an interest in my career.

Finally, the quality of life at a firm is not what I thought it would be. I was not naive about the rigors of firm life. I was naive about the toll it can take over time. I am learning fast that there is not enough money to compensate you for the loss of things which sometimes can not be replaced: opportunities to spend time with friends and family, stimulating experiences, etc. Five years have passed and I feel like I have spun my wheels for the last four, after the reality of practicing law sunk in. Hopefully, when I complete the fifteen year survey, the results will be different.

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Law school was boring and dull, in part because the professors were boring and dull. I do a lot of trial work and my memory of my Michigan training is that, except for Paul Reingold, none of the professors would have a clue on how to talk to a jury.

Michigan professors are a bunch of geeks, bright but incompetent.

I love practicing law, but I never found out until after Michigan.

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While I do not regret going to law school, if I had it to do over again, I am not sure I would follow the same course. As it is, I recently left the practice--and the legal field altogether--to pursue a career that is more suited to my intellectual interests and personal needs. While my future work will be quite unrelated to law, I believe that my law school experience and subsequent working experiences will be a bonus for me, simply in terms of the skills and polish I have gained therefrom. Beyond that kind of generic advantage, I haven't got much positive to say about law school and legal practice. Lawyering has become a field in which, with few exceptions, only people who are primarily business-oriented, or are willing to subordinate their other interests, will be both successful and happy. The intellectual challenges are lost among the competing dollar signs; money, as opposed to justice or even logic, drives every transaction, every case, every policy decision. I know very few people who are really satisfied practicing law. Indeed, my decision to leave the law was questioned by a few non-lawyers; the lawyers, on the other hand, responded with understanding, encouragement, wistfulness and jealousy. I feel lucky to have had a quality legal education and legal jobs that were prestigious and demanding and financially rewarding. I feel even luckier to have been in a position, financially, mentally and otherwise, that allowed me to leave the law and pursue a career that I fully believe will be more satisfying, more challenging and more rewarding in every way except financially. I wish Dean Lehman and the Law School well, and I hope that my and my classmates' comments in this survey will assist the Law School in providing the best possible legal education on an on-going basis.

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It has been extremely disheartening trying to find a public interest job. There are none! But, maybe for the best for me since it pushed me into solo practice where I can be a full-time mom and still support my student/husband and family. Solo is the
way to go! But I wish some management (law-firm) seminars/workshops would have been offered in law school to help me out now: buying malpractice insurance, accounting, setting up a business, etc....It also would be great to have a U of M sponsored usenet group for solo practitioners!

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My work is challenging, "prestigious" and lucrative, but life is very hectic.

Work has become much more interesting as I've gained experience in my field; for me, the first two or three years practicing at a big law firm were quite tedious and demoralizing. Sometimes it was difficult to see how I was adding any value to the firm's work product.

My sense is that (on average) alumni of Michigan Law School look back on law school with more fondness than most lawyers do.

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UM Law could have done a better job at preparing me to be a lawyer. Many professors could have made their courses more practical and a better selection of practical courses should be offered. In addition, better career counseling could have been offered (perhaps even required). Informal networks of students form, but advice is not often consistent or even correct.

Of course, there are many great things about the UM law experience, but there is also room for serious improvement. When I was there, I met many outstanding people (deans, professors, and fellow students), but overall it lacked some cohesiveness. Individual people stood out, but some overall leadership and direction for the student was needed.

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Law school places too much emphasis on working in a big firm.

For the most part, my law school experience was great intellectually, practically and socially, but I would have benefited from some more practical skills, like depositions, drafting and answering discovery requests, counseling clients, and motion practice.

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The placement office needs to be revamped. Although I found a good job, I can say with little reservation that the placement office was of no help in finding work. It is a weak spot in a
very good institution.

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Law school (87-91) was a tremendous experience on all levels—academic, social, intellectual—and I would recommend it to anyone. I believe that my experience would have been less satisfying on all of these levels at most other institutions.

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Many of the people I attended law school with are disappointed and disillusioned with their law school experience. Many people I knew were unable to find jobs anywhere—in either the private or public sector. The law school was not then, though it may be better prepared now, prepared to handle the poor job market and continually brushed off student's concerns and gave poor advice with respect to finding a job. While my experience has been different, I feel that I should speak out for those I know were ignored by the Law School.

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I changed jobs in the fall of 1994. Prior to doing so I went through an extensive process of self-evaluation followed by the actual job search. During this time I was in contact with the career office at the Law School and at my college. The Law School career office was of ABSOLUTELY no assistance. Despite repeated requests for any input on my resume, I received no response. I found this shameful in contrast to the response I received from my college which included advice on my resume, repeated counselling calls from one of the career counsellors and a informal survey of other alumni in my field and geographic area to assist me in putting everything into perspective. I really enjoyed by 3 years at the Law School. However, this more recent experience left me less than satisfied and I can assure you that it has and will continue to flavor my respective financial support of the two institutions

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I wish I had known about non-firm options while I was in law school. Only law firms interviewed on campus. Classes were (mostly) out of touch.

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The practice of law is changing, and not for the better.
Not only is it a business, but it is a poorly organized and unpredictable business. The entire partnership structure at law firms is senseless. It trains people for 7 years to do work that most of them will no longer do at the end of the associate line. It is the only business I can think of where more experience is actually a detriment to your career. Lawyers at my level appear to realize that we are at the wrong end of the pyramid scheme and are sensibly leaving the practice. I suspect that something will eventually have to change, but those changes will probably come too late to keep many of us in the practice of law by the time we next receive one of these surveys.

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I don't think I had the appropriate life experience to understand what law school, or the practice of law, are all about, nor did I have the good sense to leave when it became clear that there was a mismatch.

I also had no clear idea of what I wanted from law beyond some vague sense of a public interest career which began to melt away throughout law school.

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I cannot express how completely and utterly miserable I was during law school. Fortunately, practicing law has been rewarding and satisfying by comparison. Nevertheless, given the financial burden I assumed in the form of student loans and the toll that law school look on my self-confidence, I continue to question whether I would do it over again, knowing what I know now.

While having a law degree has opened career opportunities to me that I might not have otherwise had, I am not sure whether it is worth the financial and emotional price I paid during school. I believe that significant barriers continue to exist for women, both in law school and in the practice of law.

In addition, I believe that I and other future lawyers would benefit from a more practical rather than theoretical approach to law as it is taught at Michigan.

Regarding career placement, I think that opportunities in government were not given the consideration that they deserved and that large law firm placement was over-emphasized.

Despite the above criticisms, the good news is that I have found an area within the law that I love to practice and where I feel I am making a difference. To others who may be considering leaving big-firm practice for public interest or government employment, I highly recommend it.
My greatest regret is not taking Law School seriously and I think I missed out on a great educational experience. But if I had taken it seriously, perhaps I would still be practicing law. I suppose things always work out for the best.

When I reflect on my years at M. Law, I am very satisfied with my education. However, I am very dissatisfied with my outrageous debt and the school’s failure to consider reality. I have been financially independent since I moved out of my parent’s home after high school. Although Michigan undergrad considered me independent and granted some scholarships and grants, when I began M. Law, all I received was loans, even though tuition more than doubled. Loans are a bitter pill.

I am still bitter about how my placement problems were handled. During 3rd year interviewing, through 25 interviews, my grades were not released to prospective employers. When I discovered this, the career office admitted this was their error. However, it was never rectified. Dean Bollinger refused to meet with me. This was a travesty.

Now, I am a successful trial attorney. However, I am still bitter. If my career can be dubbed a “success”, I don’t feel like I owe much to U of M Law.

My feelings about my law school experience are largely negative. I believe that law professors (and lawyers) create false mystique about what it takes to “think like a lawyer.” All through law school, I never felt like I was able to think like anyone besides myself, so I had no confidence that I had caught on. This insecurity generated a lot of unnecessary stress for me all through law school that made it difficult for me to absorb and enjoy the interesting and intellectually challenging information that was being presented. Unfortunately, I think law school is, and always will be, one of those experiences on which one looks back and thinks, “If I knew then what I know now....”

My career choice was largely driven by the amount of debt with which I graduated law school. After my clerkship, I had hoped to enter a public interest job, but after looking into the
“debt forgiveness” program, I decided that was not realistic. The “debt forgiveness” program is of little assistance during the first two years one is in practice (when one needs it the most), and in particular, does not help with bar expenses. I felt like I had little choice but to enter private practice. Fortunately, however, I am really enjoying my work with the firm and currently plan to stay on here. I don’t really regret my decision to enter private practice, and I do believe I would have eventually ended up here. It would have been nice, however, to not have my choice dictated by the cost of law school and the unavailability of any real financial aid.

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There is no question on the form about job security. Being a lawyer (in a firm!) is one of the most insecure positions you can hold. You don’t care about clients—you care only about guessing correctly what the partners want, and then putting all your energy into pretending to be that. It’s horrible. Job insecurity for me has led to a lot of stress and has inhibited me from speaking up about issues like money, hours, workload, etc. because they’ll hold you back and/or fire you if you’re a troublemaker.

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I have definitely missed the bus so far when it comes to a constructive mentoring situation. I did not actively seek such a member among the professors of the Law School but now wish that I had, as the vast majority of partners I have encountered have been people unsuitable for this role. Either they were just too busy to care, or they were people you in no way, shape, or form wanted to be at all like to 20 years. If I could change one thing about the Law School, I would mandate that every second-year student pick a faculty member to be a “advisor-mentor”, and that each faculty member had to give each student assigned them at least two hours a semester of their time for the remainder of the law school, and at least one hour of time each year after Law School, as long as the alumnus wanted it.

Negotiation skills should definitely be beefed up in the curriculum, either as an additional part of Case Club, or as a mandatory part of the second or third years.

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1. The placement office was grossly inadequate. It seems to be content to have firms come to the school, and make no further effort. By third year, I tried to determine which firms
would not consider someone with my GPA, the head of the placement office would only give me the names of a handful of firms that were out of my range.

2. Many professors were lazy.

3. I made the mistake of leaving Evidence for my last year (to have it fresh in my mind for the bar). It ended up being a two-credit course. At the "midterm", we were told that if our progress continued unabated, "we'd all get A's." The result after a multiple choice exam?--a C curve.

4. I would never get into any seminars. In spite of many attempts, I only got into one.

5. Only two people "wrote on" to the Law Review in my year.

6. It was revealed during my tenure at the school that minorities were getting special help sessions from professors, including graded practice exams, sometimes professors would give the same questions on the real final exam. Professor Simpson once wrote half his exam with such practice questions.

7. There was precious little practical preparation for legal work.

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The law field is no longer capable to absorb the amount of law school graduates that enter the market every year. Increasingly, graduates are forced into "alternate career paths" that render their training somewhat, or completely, unnecessary. Much of the responsibility for the situation resides with the law schools, who paint an overoptimistic picture to students. The school's need for tuition dollars places it in a position in which it has to "sell" itself to students who will likely not be needed by the field.

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One thing I regret the most about my law school experience is the lack during my years of clinics in the criminal law area. (I am now a prosecutor.) I think we should increase the clinics in that area and I would be interested in helping out.

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My first 3 years in practice I worked first at a small private municipal law firm which handled some business litigation. From there I went to a small firm which did mostly insurance defense work. Together, these 2 firms exposed me to the widest possible variety of cases--from civil rights and police misconduct to employment law, environmental, franchise, ordinance and even slip-and-falls. The most important benefit of
such broad experience is that when I started my next position, I knew that it was exactly the kind of work I can make my life’s work. I work in a government agency handling child abuse and neglect cases. I love it. While we are vastly overworked, under-budgeted and underpaid and work in the most dire of physical surroundings, we enjoy the opportunity to do the most important work lawyers can do—protecting children. We spend 90% of our time in court, try up to 7 cases a day plus perhaps 20 other hearings, and have an intimate view of the panoply of human experience. My case load is approximately 1200 families. I’m also privileged to work with a fine group of warm, dedicated attorneys whose humor makes our fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants existence fun as well as personally rewarding. Everyone should love their work as much as I do. If you don’t, maybe it’s time to move on and try something new.

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I graduated in 1991 during the recession, in the bottom half of my class and failing the bar exam. I had always been told that everyone at U of M Law School gets a job. Not true. I did not, and I can name others with better grades, and who did pass their respective state bars who also did not get a job, immediately after graduation. There is a major glut in the legal market for which I was unprepared, and for which Michigan Alumni and the Law School did little to assist in my job search. It took me two years to find a job and now find myself suffering under 60K of (Law) student loans and making a salary which in any other profession would allow me a working wage. I have never defaulted on these loans and am a success in my field with no thanks to my degree, the school or alumni!

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I regret that the law school did not do more to prepare me for the realities of law practice. All students should be required to clerk for a semester at a law firm or government agency. Students should be required to take substantive clinics and courses in several areas of law including corporate, securities, real estate, employment (not just pro bono or “legal aid” practice areas). I was completely unaware of and unprepared for the reality of billing hours, marketing pressures, client contact and development, how the legal system really worked, the importance of writing skills, etc. In retrospect, the University of Michigan appeared to be an ivory castle, intent on protecting its students and professors (many of whom had barely practiced outside of academia) from the reality of today’s practice of law. If I had known then what I know now, I definitely would be in a
different work setting and I may have left law school altogether. In speaking with attorneys who attend "lesser local law schools," I find that they came to the practice of law much better prepared for this reality than I did.

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There should be more discipline in the grading of the non-first year classes. After the first year, the curves are all over the map, and the grading process can be manipulated by, for example, taking as many seminars as possible.

Also, professors should not be allowed to adjust grades after the blind grading of the exams; it defeats the purpose of the blind grading. I believe that at least one professor abuses this privilege significantly.

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I vacillate between hating my job and wishing I were doing almost anything else and being content with what I do when I look realistically at the alternatives open to me considering my responsibility to my family and the path I have chosen (whether actively or passively) in life. Very rarely, in fact never, do I love my job with as much passion as I hate it. I constantly struggle, therefore, with what to do. Should I consider myself lucky that I experience moments of content contentment at work? Should I strive to find a job that provides me with intense positive feelings and occasional negative ones? Should I give up what I’ve worked toward for the past 8 years and walk away from the law? Several years ago, my reaction was to make radical changes in career, location, life_choices. Now I tend toward making adjustments and fine-tunes. My concern about this is that I’m not sure whether it means I’ve grown-up or quit living.

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1. Law School: It would have been much more useful if the law professors had taught at least one bridge week on just how sleazy, rotten and abominable the greedy, shitbag lawyers who succeed in large law firms really are, rather than just attempting to make everyone liberal, sensitive, and consequently, totally unprepared for life in the real world.

2. Law Practice: Sucks, but at what else can one possibly make so much money doing absolutely nothing? Also--has exactly the same effect of certain popular narcotics.

3. Life: If you’re a lawyer, don’t marry a non-lawyer who isn’t at least twice as smart as you, otherwise, you will end up like me, divorced before you’re 30.
Nonetheless, I remain an optimist.

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I am not sure whether the law school realizes it or whether this survey is designed to discover it but the law school does not do a very good job regarding the loyalty of its students while they are in law school. With some exceptions (that were notable), I felt that students were tolerated rather than appreciated. Much of the faculty appeared to regard teaching as a chore necessary so they could do those things they really wanted to do. Administration (again, with some notable exceptions) often seemed to "deal with" or "handle" student concerns rather than to participate with students in solving problems.

I enjoyed my time at Michigan—but mostly because of my experience with other students. I am disappointed to say that my loyalty to Michigan left with the students. Although I sincerely hope things at Michigan improve with regard to sensitivity to student concerns, it does not hearten me that I hear from and about the Law School now more than I did when I was there. Hopefully this survey will help.

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This questionnaire assumes that the graduate is practicing/working in the United States. I assume that an increasing percentage of graduates are working outside the US and it would be helpful to have at least one question to obtain data in regard to this trend.

Given the current structure of most medium-sized to large law firms, it still does not seem to be possible to balance a law firm career with responsibility as the primary caregiver for children, at least without full-time family or paid assistance. I fully believe it is possible to structure law firms in such a way as to make a balance achievable but I also fear that the necessary changes may never be made as the lawyers most interested in the problem continue to pursue other paths. Seminars and articles on the problem seem to focus on choices a lawyer can make, or on additional services a firm can provide, not on possible structural reforms. I would be interested in learn other graduates thoughts on the subject.

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I have never practiced law. I worked in a big Washington firm the summer after my second year, but decided to turn down my offer from them. I spent the summer after law school studying
for the bar and looking for a public interest job. I finally ended up working for a Member of Congress (starting out very low on the food chain indeed) but have worked my way up to a very interesting job (no longer on the Hill). Today I'm very glad I made the career choices I have--despite the low pay and low prestige of the first couple of jobs I had. A lot of my friends who went to big firms are looking for any way to escape. A lot of women lawyers quit work altogether when they have children. I had a rough time starting out--which I chose. Now I have a great job and am confident I will find another when I want/need to.

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I am currently seeking new employment. While I find the employment newsletter helpful, I would appreciate if the Placement Office had assistance available for government/public interest alumni in national searches for employment via internet or otherwise.

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Without question, I look back on my law school experience fondly. To me, Michigan was a place where diversity was encouraged, both in people and ideas, professors were (for the most part) interested and accessible, the curriculum was challenging, and the physical school itself was beautiful and welcoming. Perhaps it was the benefit of taking several years off before attending law school that helped me enjoy and appreciate it so but whatever the cause, I would wholeheartedly encourage anyone who would be a law student to study at Michigan. My primary caveat to this enthusiastic endorsement is the unbelievable debt I acquired for the privilege of attending Michigan. It is unfortunate that parental income is considered in aid calculations regardless of the actual availability of those funds. As my debt verifies, not all of us have access to those resources.

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Michigan Law School gave me a strong legal foundation, not only to become a front-line litigator, but also to see and experience the profound implications the development of the law has for all of human society. If it is possible to love the law, we must see it as part of the grand human experience. Michigan taught me to love and gave me the unique vision of humanity and culture.

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I'm afraid these answers might be misleading as I am currently in school making the transition from working as a lawyer to working as a law librarian. I found I did not have the personal constitution (ie. combination of aggressiveness, ambition and intellectual curiosity) that I takes to continue as a lawyer. I work at the library and therefore answered the questions about work although I am only working part-time. I worry sometimes that I have chosen the easy path rather than struggling through to find something more attractive which would also make me happy. However I enjoy working in the library very much. The most difficult thing about the transition has been adjusting to the relatively humble positions librarians occupy in the hierarchy of occupations and in the eyes of the world.

Going to work for a law firm after graduation and growing dependent on the accompanying salary was the worst mistake of my young life.
Now I have consumer and educational debt. Either I'm trapped in a high-paying stressful associate position or I have to face Chapter 13 bankruptcy.

Law school is failing to train lawyers. The assumption that students will learn research skills and writing skills "on the job" no longer applies now that there are no "jobs." Even the larger firms can no longer afford the luxury of hiring and training new attorneys. The reality is that when you graduate from law school now you must be completely prepared to make your own way. I would trade all my foofy con law classes for one or more good skills classes.

Blue book exams should be abolished in favor of graded work assignments and (dare I say it) professors should place more emphasis on being prepared for class. Trash the case books and make people find the answer. This is what lawyers do. It is wrong to leave this sort of training to law firms and other employers...an injustice to the student and a drag on their ability to find work out here in this competitive world.

I enjoy what I do, but don't enjoy living in large cities. My hope is that "telecommuting" will become accepted as being not unusual, so that I can do what I want from where I want. Am I alone--or are there others--who feel this way?
Law School - Intellectually, law school was exhilarating. Paradoxically, this exhilaration was balanced, if that's the right word, by the deep disappointment I felt about the ways in which that education was structured and measured. The ways in which many of the more traditional professors teach--using recitation techniques, giving no credit for classroom performance, one all-important test per semester, and, notwithstanding the "Socratic" concept, a vast emotional distance from and indifference toward the students--left me wondering when, if ever the Law School(s) will finally enter the post 19th century period of education. Too much of the traditional method rests on military and otherwise "male" methods of education, and relies on the prestige, rather than the substance, of what is taught. Too much, also relies on what the administrators and money-raisers can commit to based on alumni contributions.

I care less about "diversity" among the teaching staff (though it's important) than I do about the vibrancy of their teaching methods and their connectedness with the world outside the ivy walls. The world of even those members of the faculty who once practiced law is gone, and the intellectual insulation that the rest of them suffer from is staggering. Writing casebooks, treatises and articles ad infinitum is certainly necessary, but so is some acquaintance with the daily trials and tribulations of practicing lawyers, not to mention students. (The unholy boot camp regime to which first-year students are subjected cannot be justified by any reasonable person, yet it is so much a part of the fabric of law school existence, no one seriously calls it into question--why not?)

In the end, although I would not want to sacrifice the intellectual stimulation and training, I would want to see a much greater priority placed on clinical law classes and similar settings, with the faculty pay scale reflecting their value. I would also like to see greater availability of seminar and seminar-like classes because they reduce the alienation, increase the opportunities for comprehension, and avoid the one-shot test effect.

Practice--I worked in the Michigan Court of Appeals' prehearing sections for 10 months, and then went on to clerk for a Court of Appeals judge for one and one-half years. Both jobs had their stresses, but in retrospect, I tend to view them as
having been the Elysian Fields. I now work at a law firm of
approximately 30 lawyers who are all reasonably decent people and
who all (or almost all) would probably characterize themselves as
liberal politically. Unlike many other firms, my firm has an
1800 hour billable requirement (though qualified as "billed-and-
collected"), which is achievable and not, for most people, unduly
stressful. And at least with regard to lower-level associates,
the firm pays very well compared to many area firms. Finally,
the firm gives at least lip service to the concept of mentorship.

For all that, I often dread going to work. Some of it has
to do with the fact that I have a real life, with a husband,
three children, a dog, a house that needs constant attention (and
doesn’t get it) and a love of various extra-curricular activities
in which I no longer can indulge. I commute to work (45 minutes
either way) in Detroit, which in itself is a liability since it
is a joyless, barren city. But this is all peripheral.

Law firms, even the "nice" ones, tend toward tyranny. The
partners rule the roost and, not surprisingly, given their
background and education (read Law School, see comments on first
page), expect their subordinates to patiently endure what ever
abuse and deprivation the partners and senior associates
experienced as normal when they were themselves just beginning to
ascend the hierarchical ladder, and now choose to dish out in
turn. There is a lot of pettiness, territorialism, and
backstabbing. It’s possible that this happens to some degree in
all work environments, but I’ve worked in many different jobs and
never experienced it to this degree. It’s especially noticeable
in that all of my previous employments have been “at will” but I
have never felt that my job security was so vulnerable as I do in
this job, and that’s notwithstanding good comments, good
evaluation reviews, a senior partner who praises my work and has
me constantly on his various projects.

I have talked with many older lawyers who say that the
practice of law has changed; that it has gotten more heartless
and money-oriented than it was in the good old days. I can’t
speak to that because I do not come from a family of lawyers, and
I also find nostalgia generally suspect. Generally, though, I do
see that money drives the law firm machine, and it’s not just
money, because all businesses need to make a profit to survive,
it’s money, prestige and a sense of entitlement to be the ruling
class. Certainly, the work that lawyers do is often difficult,
and certainly also highly specialized, and for both reasons,
deserves appropriate and adequate compensation. But the same is
true of plumbers and electricians. What seems to separate the
lawyers’ expectations from those of other indispensable tradesmen
is that sense of entitlement I referred to earlier, the expectation that clients owe them enough money to support the cushy lifestyle lawyers in our society have come to expect. As a result, what I see is almost a gleeful form of parasitism rather than the symbiosis I associate with other types of socially supportive careers. It renders seriously suspect the pronouncements I hear regularly about “service to the client”: what it amounts to is “give good enough service so they don’t go somewhere else, but don’t sacrifice one dime unless they scream bloody murder.” Associates are told to work efficiently and well, but are simultaneously reminded that they have billable requirements to meet. Clients are “talked down” as “cheap” or, more euphemistically “fee-sensitive.” Personally, I have come to the conclusion that it’s a damn good thing that I am, myself, a lawyer because between what I know myself and what I can probably get through professional courtesy, I can probably get by without ever really needing a lawyer. I hope--very seriously--never to be in any client’s shoes, because for any thing more than basic estate or corporate transactions, their lawyers will see to it that they are bled dry by the time the crisis is over. (Of course, that’s not really the intent, but it is a known effect and one that lawyers are willing to shrug off with some comment like: “they don’t come to us if they’re not in trouble”.) Big clients are the best because they can hemorrhage for longer and still generally pay up. It’s not a pretty picture, and it doesn’t quite dovetail with the profession of political liberality.

I could say a lot more, but I won’t. I will conclude that I like being a lawyer, want to continue doing so, but wish I didn’t feel so constantly that I’ve sold my soul. I think that if the legal profession doesn’t develop a humbler, more appropriate self-image—a matter in which the law schools must lend their diligent assistance—there will be a revolution among our here-to-fore tolerant compatriots, and it will be richly deserved.