Class of 1992 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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Responses to open-ended question at end of survey asking for “comments of any sort about life or law school.”

I have worked in private practice and as house counsel to a large corporation -- about as many years in each capacity. They are dramatically different work environments!

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My law school experience was tainted due to the small percentage of women in my class. Women were outnumbered and “outvoiced” in classes. The tone of class discussions was probably altered for the same reason. Also, outstanding women seemed not to be recognized by men in the class as intellectual talents – although men often spoke about male “standouts” in the class.

I also feel that Michigan could improve the overall quality of the law school experience by mentoring the students more. Coming (as I did) from a family unfamiliar with the legal community, with corporations, etc., I was sorely unprepared to understand the ramifications of being on the Editorial board of law review, of whether a clerkship is important, what classes to take to prepare me for my career, etc. The students whose parents or other family members were lawyers really had a jump on the rest of us. I did well my first year – and yet no professor or school official helped me to understand what my options were. Perhaps if I had merely asked, I would have received advice, but (unfortunately) the tone emanating from professors was that they were too busy “publishing” to take time to advise a student. I really feel as though I got “lost in the shuffle.”

I hope this is helpful!

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I have conducted surveys before. This one is a bit long (it took 40 minutes or so to complete) and may explain a less than 100% participation rate.

However, do not get discouraged. I’m glad you are conducting the survey and I believe that it will benefit the Law School and future students.

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My ambivalence about whether I’d go to law school again is based on uncertainty about market for graduates. I was “caught” in the 1991-92 “downsizing” trend, and changed my career path (probably for the better) by getting a state government legal position.

As a stay-at-home father, I probably seem to have given inconsistent responses to some questions. “Current job satisfaction” is my highest ever, in any case.

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(Here's my typical stream of consciousness gripe)

I like my job when I spend more time here because I learn more, do more, and do a better job. When I do that I get good feedback and I guess I am happiest when I get that feedback. But, spending time here means I pay a price at home. When I am at work I am not helping at home and my wife becomes overworked and upset. Three kids are a lot to handle when she works. When she is upset she is also short tempered with me and the kids. So then I spend more time at home, but then I am worried about work and the feedback turns negative when things are not done on a timely basis. Then my wife feels guilty about keeping me from work and worried about my job. I am basically just managing to stay afloat on both fronts, but in the long run it is going to ruin both my job and my family. Why then, you may rightfully ask, do I do it? I don't know. Money? Maybe. Three kids in day care is expensive (now $30,000/year). Inability to figure out what else to do? More likely, although money plays into that as well. My skills have developed in antitrust, and so to play to those skills I am stuck at large firms in large cities. I have explored government enforcement, but I don't know if the time is all that much better and the pay is certainly less. I wish everyone could simply agree to earn less and take more time off. I recently attended an ABA conference and it was a great feeling to be doing something with my skills other than cranking out work product. It made me feel good to think I was part of a larger enterprise. But there is simply no time for it. As it was I had to leave important work undone to even go to one of the three days of meetings. That didn't endear me to anyone (neither the partner whose work was not done nor my wife who went without help for what was an optional activity). I spend my time trying to make sure my employer is not unhappy enough to fire me and my wife is not unhappy enough to leave me. The only consistently positive feedback I get is from clients. Maybe that is why I continue. At the government I'd still have time demands and less money, but wouldn't have clients. Help? Would you pay me to come back as a professional student? I loved my days in Ann Arbor.

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I enjoyed law school very much. A balance between work and non-work activities might be an appropriate topic to cover with third years. That balance is a lot harder to keep than it seems.

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I've recently shifted from a big litigation firm in DC to a large regional firm in NC. I do much smaller cases now.

My primary concerns as a practicing litigator are -1. How to develop my own clients at a large firm (because I want to, not because I have to), -2. How to get trial experience (because I want to, not because I have to), and -3. How to get along with the bureaucracy of a large firm. Things are better now than they were, but I still ponder these issues.

On a personal front, I'm looking at the challenge of new family obligations with the arrival of my first child and looking around for areas of community involvement.

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In no particular order:

1. The level of career counseling/advice at the law school was atrociously inadequate. Basically a bunch of kids (mostly) just out of college or recently graduated are supposed to be able to career counsel without any input. I sometimes get angry thinking of the classes I should have taken while at law school. How about sitting down one on one with each 1L and discussing what type of person they are, what they like/don’t like and the most likely career they will take. After that, maybe some discussion can occur on some courses that might prepare them for such a career.

2. Stream line the course offerings to minimize the self-indulgent nonsense like English Legal History, Blood Feuds, etc. This is a professional school – don’t forget it.

3. Why do you continue to operate an essentially private school, but charge Michigan residents a discounted rate? My parents and I subsidized them while I was a student – am I supposed to do so indefinitely as an alumni?

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Since law school, I have worked 1) in the public interest on a strict pro bono basis; 2) in the public interest in a salaried position; 3) worked in a large private law firm (current position).

While my work is very interesting, challenging and well compensated, the stress and time commitment that are required make having a normal family life difficult and an intellectual life outside the office next to impossible. I do not know how one can responsibly have children and such a career simultaneously. Indeed, it seems that the modern American elite is heading for its own destruction by failing to reproduce its quantity and quality.

It is difficult to acknowledge that beyond a certain compensation level, lawyers are still impelled to work more to make more. No matter how hard they work, they will never match the levels of their counterparts in business or banking. I do not know who should lead the fight for reasonableness and measure in private practice. We should be a moral and intellectual aristocracy rather than cogs in a merciless corporate machine.

Law school was on the whole a positive experience, but is deficient in many ways. Much of the subject matter is either boring or presented in a boring and/or confused or confusing way (as opposed to business or graduate courses, which are more focused and engaging). Much of this has to do with the ubiquity of the case method, which is completely divorced from the reality of much of modern day practice. Lawyers need more training at the university level in negotiation, accounting, management, finance, principles of drafting, logic. The main value of the case method is the development of argumentative and issue spotting skills, but even these would be better developed with more modern and less boring techniques. Certainly, 3 years of case method at astronomical prices is unjustifiable if the goal is to produce competent, ethical lawyers.

In many respects, law school has turned into an endurance test for bright people competing for scarce jobs, and where the subject matter studied is more a test of competence rather than a grounding in useful subject matter.

I do not suggest that legal education should be transformed into legal training, or a marathon clinical program. But the education needs to be more relevant, stimulating, organized, modern and diverse in order to justify its cost (in effort and money) and validity as a certification procedure for law practice.
Random Thoughts

I quit my job as an associate in a large firm to pursue a new career in zoology. I begin full-time studies for preparation for my Ph.D. in September. Presently, I am a contract lawyer for my old firm. But for the past 6 months, I was in Argentina studying penguins.

Before I left my job, my practice was 80% devoted to land conservation. I loved my work, but was highly disillusioned by rapidly escalating pressure by my firm to be more profitable and to work more hours. Lawyers at my firm were some of the most unhappy people I know, and I wanted out. When I entered law school, I planned to work at a big firm for 3-5 years to pay off law school loans and to gain legal experience. I then planned to transition to the nonprofit public interest sector. But I looked in my heart and decided to pursue my greatest passion – zoology – with a goal to study and preserve endangered/threatened species.

The 6 months I researched penguins were the happiest of my adult life. Law school was a abysmal experience for me. It was the most boring, homogeneous group of people I had ever encountered. But I made some wonderful friends, many of whom I am still quite close with.

I want you to know that the highlight of Law School of me was the administration. Dean Eklund and Dean Gordon were lifesavers for me. I had multiple personal tragedies during law school, and I never would have made it through to graduation without them. You have my eternal thanks and gratitude.

Oops, I forgot to mention that I believe the Socratic method of teaching is cruel to the segment of students like myself who became frozen when trying to speak in public. I had several professors who brutally humiliated me in class because I could hardly speak. I knew the required material. The rational that this as good preparation for trial fails – at least for the many of us who never planned to, and never have been, in court. I feel I could have learned so much, but the structure was not conducive for me.

I believe law school should be a 2-year program with a 1-year internship/apprenticeship. 3 years of what I went through was too much (in terms of life, education and cost).

Although I am sometimes frustrated by the time involved in being a good lawyer, the rewards have always outweighed the compromises that I have made regarding my personal life. I am about to begin working as an Assistant US Attorney, a job I have always dreamed of doing. I hope that it will allow me to use my skills at interacting with people more often than commercial litigation, but fear that it may be less intellectually challenging. It may be more difficult to be enthusiastic about my decision to be a lawyer after I have children. The time compromises will then be more costly.

I thought I would hate private practice. I only went to a firm because my husband is a grad student and I’m sick of poverty. Turns out I actually like my job and my boss. I feel like I
lucked into a place that is relatively humane – we’re expected to bill 1900 hours year, yet a big portion of the lawyers leave around six and most are gone by 7. Most folks seem to get enough time with their families and like their jobs as much as anybody likes any job. This is partly because in Denver everybody wants to have a life.

I think coming into a firm as a non-firm lateral was perfect. I don’t have to endure the first and second year crap and already knew a lot about my area when I came in – I got immediate responsibility and client contact without having to live 20 hours a day in the library first. Of course, the years on a nonprofit salary and the hit I took on my seniority as a result have affected my long-term finances. But I know what a lot of other lawyers don’t – there really are other options if you hate practicing law, but frankly a job is a job is a job, and nothing is a real thrill 10 hours a day, and no job is stress free if you care about it.

As for law school, I’d like to see an end to the pomp and circumstance about how people’s former selves will vanish and new people who think like lawyers will emerge. The best lawyers don’t think like all the other lawyers. And despite the efforts to break students down and rebuild them as lawyers, they really do recover and find their pre-law school selves again, if they’re lucky. Students should be encouraged to hold on to their uniqueness. The pull to become another law firm drone is strong enough without the school actively encouraging students to relinquish their former selves.

Signed, Another Law Firm Drone

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I never intended on practicing law, a belief that was strongly confirmed the summer I spent at a large law firm. The culture, which I consider typical, was stifling and demeaning. I found law school intellectually challenging and constantly stimulating. My reasons for attending law school were for a training of the mind unlike any other offered through formal education. As I have spent 3 years in a political election and then several on the mayoral staff of the victor, I have found the education invaluable. My experience thus far in business further evidences the invaluable training law school provided.

Although I find the legal profession necessary, I consider it an awful way to make a living. The interaction of the profession and our social corruption has created a deplorable system with which I gladly disassociate myself. I loved law school.

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I enjoy being a lawyer, but I was not happy with my law school. I paid a lot of money – I paid, not my parents or the school or anyone else – and felt like I was ripped off. I was taught by a lot of has-beens and intellectuals who never practiced and have no idea about how the law works or how it effects people. Law professors at Michigan were embarrassed about being lawyers, and felt they had to excuse the fact by doubling as “policy wonks” or “philosophers.” If I could do it over again, I would have gone to a cheaper school which is on its way up the rankings, and not a stale, over-priced school which has rested on its laurels for a long time.

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I didn't like law school.
I don't like most lawyers.
I don't like being a lawyer.
I don't think lawyers serve an important role in society, by and large.
I look forward to the day when I am no longer a lawyer.

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I loved law school—it was intellectually stimulating, eye-opening and exciting. Law firm practice, however, stinks. Too much puffing, stress, devotion to people who could care less about me or what they were doing. I would really have profited from knowing about this before hand and knowing about the other career alternatives available to lawyers. Right now I'm stuck between abandoning the field altogether, a field I do well in and enjoy on an intellectual basis, or starting a new career altogether.

Also – where do females/mothers fit into the practice?

Law firms would benefit from dropping billable hour requirements if an attorney is willing to take a commensurate pay cut. People would not burn out so much if they had this option.

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The best thing about my law school experience was the intellectual discourse with fellow students. We had a "new" section when I was a student. I was not in it and feel that I missed out a great deal. I hope that the "experiment" has made its way into the curriculum as a whole.

Overall, with the exception of 1) a visiting professor (Motamura) from Colorado; 2) Schneider; 3) Syverud; 4) Child Advocacy instructors, I did NOT feel the faculty were approachable/had open door policy that really worked. For $75,000, I felt cheated in this respect.

The curve was too harsh, in my opinion giving the intellectual level of students there and how it compared to other law schools/grad programs. I am only now getting over the insecurity from law school. We all have to pass Bar exams in order to practice. There should be some way of instilling greater confidence in us and at the same time providing us with the necessary tools to practice/think competently. Moot Court and the Clinic helped as did the pros identified above, but overall, law school was a traumatic experience with notable highs.

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I worked at an IP law firm during my 2nd and 3rd years of law school (and summers). I was just asked to join the partnership at this same firm. Although my work experience during law school has certainly enhanced my career, I do feel as though I missed out on the cultural and social activities of law school. Fortunately, I met several great friends my 1st year in the Lawyers Club, many of whom I still keep in contact with.

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I went to law school to be a public defender. I received almost no help obtaining a job in the field and was alternately unsuccessful.
My answers are based upon my current position in legal services – supervising a free legal clinic. Prior to this, I worked in a private firm and despised the practice of law, worked longer hours and was generally very unhappy. I looked actively for a new position for the entire time I was employed before moving to legal services. When I left law school I had no idea that finding a position in legal services would be so difficult. I now believe that the years I spent in law school could have been better used toward advancing my career and finding my niche. When people ask my advice I always suggest pursuing other means of achieving their goals and desires, but not to attend law school. I feel that law school was an interesting experience but wholly unpleasant and far too expensive. The public is much less impressed with law schools and lawyers than the schools and lawyers are with themselves.

You didn’t ask “Why U-M”? or “Would you have gone someplace else if you had it to do again” (no, I wouldn’t).

You might survey spouses/partners; their input is important and could be very different!

Like many people, I went to law school as a sort of general liberal arts graduate school. I realize now that while it has some value in that regard, it’s not worth the money if you don’t want to be a lawyer. If Mom and Dad are paying, fine. But I buried myself in over $80,000 worth of debt. With interest it is now over $100,000. This fact has significantly affected my lifestyle and my emotional well-being. Since I chose not to practice law after spending 11 miserable months at it, I now look at law school as 3 years taken from my life with little to show for it other than a degree and a crushing mountain of debt. Graduating when I did, in 1992, and with a “B” average, I found many doors closed to me. The U of M degree didn’t carry the prestige I had hoped it would. It opened no doors. Perhaps I just had bad luck graduating in a recession, but I feel the law school should dedicate a larger staff to placing students in good jobs. My credit history is ruined and I regret ever having gone to law school. I made some lasting friendships and enjoyed Ann Arbor, but I would caution students against attending if they can’t afford it. I still can’t.

I was surprised how fast I get bored with the law and tired of the politics involved. I practiced in a health-care firm and a large, litigation “blue blood” firm before going part-time and back to school.

Actually, I enjoy my current practice more than I did the more prestigious ones I had previously. The attorneys involved are less pretentious and hold few illusions about being noble and doing good for society. They are on the whole more cheerful and enjoy their profession more than others I have worked with who are, for the most part, disillusioned.
I chose to return to school for 2 reasons:
1) To feed my intellectual curiosity and end my intellectual boredom, and
2) To have a profession that, while replete with political problems of its own, has more tangible benefits to offer to society as a whole.

The support I have from my wife, parents and siblings is essential.

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When I came to Law School I had the intent to work in Health/Environmental Policy. When I got to Law School I found a trade school that taught me to be a lawyer rather than a graduate level education that would teach me to use the law in wider pursuits.

I then practiced law for four years, which also failed to help me towards any policy goals. I now am a post-doctoral fellow in a research institute. This one year has done more to move me towards my goals than any other single thing.

The law school should recognize that it is doing more than training lawyers, it is teaching the law. The anecdote I tell my friends to show the absurdity of my legal education is as follows: The entire time I was in law school I heard one of my professors present original research exactly once. When I found out about it accidentally and trudged halfway across campus to the women’s studies program.

Because of my experience when I meet intelligent committed individuals I dissuade them from law school as a general education. (I also dissuade them from the practice of law but I can’t expect the law school to reform the nature of the practice. Though I hope it will try.)

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I enjoyed Law School (and undergrad) at Michigan. My biggest complaint is that I was charged “out-of-state” tuition even though I was considered an “in-state” student for admissions purposes. Michigan Law School has (or at least had) a very strict policy on “in-state” tuition.

I had grown up in Michigan and went to Michigan undergrad as an “in-state” student, but because I worked and lived out-of-state for two years between undergrad and law school, I “lost” my “in-state” status according to U of M Law School and was never able to regain it because I spent summers outside of the state. All of this period (during Law School) my parents were Michigan tax payers and I had no other home state! I appealed this decision, but was denied.

This caused me to have twice as much debt as I otherwise would have. Because of this, I do not plan to give any money to the Law School ever, despite the fact that I had a good law school experience and otherwise love U of M.

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I strongly recommend that the law schools look for applicants who have some prior work experience. Law Schools and law firms should try hard to remember that competent attorneys are not just “grades” they are also people whom clients feel they can trust and interact with.
I may have appreciated law school more if I had taken time in-between undergraduate school and law school.

I did not appreciate paying for three years of law school and then having to pay for a bar review course to learn the information needed for the bar exam!

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The law school needs a better grant program as part of its financial aid. I was forced to work extremely heavy hours (20-30 per week) during law school. This kept me from devoting the time needed for my law school studies. I was not able to get a high-paying summer job while in law school, which compounded the problem. The loans I had to take out as a result of this, together with my spouse's student loans, have severely crippled our efforts to get ahead.

The law school was also very misleading about job prospects when I first started. The severe grading curve and inadequate placement office made matters worse. A huge portion of my graduating class was unable to find adequate work by the time of graduation; others, myself included, took jobs at pay that was significantly lower than the pay I had expected upon entering law school.

I did feel that the quality of the instruction was very good, and generally intellectually challenging. Because of the financial constraints that were placed upon me while in law school, however, I did not get the most out of my law school experience. My career has suffered, and will continue to suffer in the near term as a result.

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I should have done something else with my talents. While often satisfying, I had no idea that by going into litigation I was setting myself up to be the daily recipient of bad treatment by opposing counsel, judges, and at times, even clients and partners. There is so much negativity in this job. I should have done something that involved producing something or helping someone, rather than slinging mud all day!

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I believe that I did not take ample advantage of the opportunities offered by the Law School outside of classroom activity. I felt that there was not enough attention paid to real life issues. When I began my practice I realized that I did not enjoy many aspects of private practice in the corporate setting - in particular that the clients interests often were not the primary concern of the attorneys and that "right v. wrong" rarely was an issue. For this reason I lost interest in practicing law. I still value both my experience in law school and at the law firm and have found that it helps in all aspects of my professional life. While I do not think I would attend law school again, I so not regret my choice and still consider the education I received at U of M Law School a valuable asset.

I think that as a school more emphasis should be placed on ethics, the role of the attorney in business and elsewhere, and on the importance of education others about how to use, not reuse, our legal system. I also feel that the Clinic was the highlight of my time and should be a required element for all students.
In addition to research and writing, case club should teach basic legal drafting skills. Upon starting work at the law firm, partners expected me to know and be able to draft basic documents — but law school did not teach me how to do this. Law students rarely even see what a legal document looks like when they are in law school.

It is amazing to me the absolute lack of balance in a career as an attorney. I have to fight all the time for balance with family life, community activities, exercise, etc. There is a widespread misperception that a person cannot be a good attorney unless s/he works 60+ hours/week. As a result many attorneys are compulsive, competitive and experience problems with drugs, alcohol, family lives, etc. It might be helpful for the law school to address some of these things to better prepare the students for the careers ahead of them.

I work a reduced hour (4 days/week) schedule in-house at a “family-friendly” Fortune 500 company. Still, every day is a struggle for balance. Although the company as a whole is often praised for being family friendly, the law division still largely values the attorneys based upon how many hours we work each week.

When will the law school stop charging exorbitant tuition? Graduates of the law school have little choice about where they can work given the huge loans accrued during school. What percentage of the endowment is spent each year? I would be willing to bet it is a de minimis amount. If those running the law school have any interest in the future of its students, they should address the tuition/loans issues.

I am currently at home caring for our 10-month-old son. I would like to find a 3-4 day in-house position practicing corporate securities law with a large public company in the Detroit suburbs. We have recently relocated to Michigan from Cleveland where I enjoyed practicing in a large law firm. I am disappointed with the reluctance of firms/companies to hire for reduced or flexible positions. I enjoyed law school very much, for both the intellectual challenges and friends I made there.

The enormous debt that goes with a Michigan education makes it very difficult to do work that makes the world a better place. This is one of the central conflicts in my life. I wish I had thought this through before I went to law school.

After law school I participated in the debt management program. The administration of that program was shockingly inept. My payment was delayed by 14 months despite a barrage of
letters on my part. My letters, or copies of letters, which I sent to the Dean and Assistant Dean were never answered or acknowledged. My attitude toward Michigan was strongly affected by this experience, and I will certainly never provide it with financial support.

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Law school taught me little about the practice of law – except for the general trial practice clinic. My clinical experience taught me more about the practice of law as a litigator than all other law school courses combined. My second day of clinic was my first court appearance! (Boy, was I nervous!) I took my first deposition in clinic, interviewed my first clients in clinic, and settled my first case in clinic. Although I did not try my first case in clinic, I did put my first witness on the stand in open court while there.

Paul Reingold, Mark Mitschkin, Nick Rine, and Julie Field did a fabulous job with the general trial practice clinic. My retread experience (as a second semester clinic student) helped me decide to become a litigator.

Clinic was the only law school experience that came close to the true practice of law – the rest of the courses were just background information, much of which I've never used in real life. I suggest that Clinic become mandatory – especially for anyone considering a career as a litigator.

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Too many of my professors conducted interesting theoretical classes but gave purely black letter exams. If black letter law is highly prized, students should be told.

U of M needs to watch its grade curve. I've done recruiting for 2 years, and I know that a lower curve is harder to explain. Let's be competitive.

Journals, while nice resume enhancers, predominate too many peoples lives (mine included). We would have been better served by more pro bono opportunities.

Deans Eklund and Gordan were fantastic people to work with as was Suellyn Scarnechia.

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The demands of large firm practice are unrealistic and an oppressive burden.

The law school funnels us into this positions so we can make a lot of money and give back to the school in return. I resent the school for this.

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I am a happy associate at a large law firm. The reasons are: realistic expectations, a good firm, and a good spouse and family. People who seek happiness in materialistic pursuits will seldom find it. I don’t care much about money, but am fortunate to have a wife who loves our simple life. (Throwing away our TV helps a lot.)

I also think most people place far too much emphasis on a career as a primary source of fulfillment. As we drift away from our rootedness in community, from God, and all too often from our spouses, we try to substitute for these true, proven sources of happiness the elusive “perfect job.”
I don’t think there is such a thing. I know smart people who never went to college who are far happier than some of my law school classmates. Too many people go to law school for the familiar “wrong reasons.” The happiest lawyers I know have modest income expectations, solid marriages, and a willingness to work hard without self pity.

The admissions office should seek applicants who exhibit curiosity about life. Good grades in a variety of courses, and a career before law school are good indicators, I would think, of people who will stay in law.

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I think the practice of law would be a much better profession if I could afford to spend about 75% of the time that is demanded of me. The biggest “problem” I have with private practice in a large law firm is the lack of control I seem to have over my time. I do not enjoy working long hours and weekends. The work can be quite interesting and exciting, at times, but it is still work and not personally satisfying in many instances. To have balance in your life, you must be willing to say “no” to increased work load.

I have been fortunate that my hours have been “reasonable” by big firm standards. However, I have made an effort to make “balance” a priority (and may suffer some career consequences because of my priorities).

The lawyers I know who are most satisfied work for firms/companies when there is an understanding on corporate culture which values balance in personal and professional life. This translates into fewer hours demanded (and fewer dollars).

I enjoyed law school because it was intellectually stimulating. As every lawyer says, the practice of law is very different than law school. In the real world, you have clients, and most of the time, clients are not happy to deal with you. Litigation is not a wonderful experience. In transaction work, clients often consider you a speed bump.

Even with all its negatives, the practice of law requires the greatest variety of skills of any profession to be successful, and that is why it is challenging/fun to be part of the legal profession.

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I was very disappointed with the U of M career planning. They only knew about the large firms who interviewed on campus (basically all they did was act as secretaries organizing which firm came on which date) and when I asked specific questions about non-big firms, their reply was “check Martindale-Hubbell”! I don’t need career planning to tell me about Sullivan and Cromwell, they will find me anyway. If you did not want to work at a big firm or wanted to explore other options, career planning was useless.

Law school alumni relations is also lame.

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I found law school to be a highly intellectually challenging experience, but was grateful that Michigan was also relatively non-competitive as far as law schools go.

I would have welcomed a far stronger public interest program while I was at law school. Include public interest advising (no career services offered when I attended), as well as additional
practical experiences (externships, etc.).

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Your survey takes a very limited view of the futures of your graduates. It seems the first question you should have asked is “Are you presently involved in the practice of law, working for a branch of government or a government agency or otherwise associating professionally with attorneys on a regular basis?” If the answer to that question is no, as it is for me, the responses to most of the remainder of the survey, judging by the narrow focus of the questions, is probably of no interest to you. Because I am not using my legal education in my professional life, at this time, I found completing your survey difficult – which is the reason I did not return it until your third plea. Perhaps I am the only student in the history of the Michigan Law School who chose not to practice law at graduation (or the number may be too small to consider in your survey), but a modicum of respect seems appropriate. I returned to my technical roots professionally following graduation, and firmly believe that I am both enjoying my career more, and making a more positive contribution to society because I did. Your survey apparently makes no allowance for this possibility, and in so doing strengthens the insular and ego laden nature of the profession.

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1. You should include a question about religious discrimination. With the current focus on race and gender, religious bias has slipped through the cracks. I have witnessed and experienced it in both firms with which I have been associated.

2. I hope that it becomes clear from my and my fellow graduates’ responses that the cost of legal education is out of control. Tuition inflation has forced law school graduates to rely too much on borrowing which inevitably reduces one’s career choices. I simply could not afford a public interest career path. The economics of a legal education and career have (and should) discouraged many bright people from taking the path I did.

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The intellectual challenge and stimulation (which is what I sincerely love about my profession) seems to be constantly ignored due to greed – both the client’s greed and the law firm’s greed.

Additionally, I have seen far too much dishonesty and outright deceit by lawyers of all kinds. As my career continues, it seems that lawyers have “earned” their reputation.

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Since I am a hardcore Libertarian, I do not believe that I fit on your axis [in the question asking about liberal to conservative political attitudes]. I wish you had asked about discrimination on the basis of religion and sexual orientation.

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When I considered entering the University of Michigan, the law school was not very forthright about the lack of financial aid that would be available to students or the weight of the likely debt burden. I also found the placement department to be of very little assistance in securing employment, particularly during the lean years in the legal industry from 1990-1993.

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Law school did not prepare me for the “nuts and bolts” sort of practice (primarily in the divorce arena) that I have been practicing for most of my career. Law school should offer more opportunity to focus on “how to” instead of simply theory.

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I am a patent litigator in Silicon Valley. I enjoy patent litigation; however, I have strongly mixed feelings about the practice of law in general. My work is at times very interesting, and I especially like the teaching aspect of patent litigation (i.e., learning and then teaching new technologies to help resolve commercial disputes). I also enjoy my lifestyle and living environment. On the other hand, I have serious misgivings about the professional culture. An alarmingly high proportion of the lawyers I have dealt with (in both government and private practice) are more devoted to the practice than anything else in their lives, including their families. I prefer to lead a more balanced life, and while I have been able to do this so far—barely—I am concerned that in the long run my insistence on maintaining that balance will cost me professionally. I also feel that if more persons in the profession acted (not just felt) more moderately, I (and others similarly minded) would not have to sacrifice professionally, because I (and others) would better fit into what would be a more tolerant culture. I have, however, no pretensions about changing the world, and plan to remain in the profession as long as I can maintain a reasonable balance between my personal and professional life.

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I have felt for a long time (but only since beginning to practice law) that the legal “community” is in dire need of an overhaul. In no other industry have I seen the same level of emotional, social and psychological sickness as I have in our profession, which is marked with greed, pettiness and a general disregard for the well-being of coworkers. I feel fortunate to have moved into a position with a company where my coworkers have retained basic social skills and a respectable level of human decency.

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I was at UM Law School from 1989-92, and my husband (who worked while I was in school) then completed his BS at UM in physics (1992-95). During that entire time, both of us were required to pay non-resident tuition. We both feel strongly that we were treated unfairly in that respect. We both consider the difference between resident and nonresident tuition (for all of his and the last 2 years of my education) to constitute a forced contribution to the school.
Consequently, we refuse to contribute to any campaigns or fundraisers by the UM except as they directly benefit us (such as through alumni directories).

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I have to say that I am disappointed by the poor standard of morality that the Law School encourages, i.e., promoting homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle and liberal views on drug use. Also, in the name of “political correctness”, the school places too much emphasis on affirmative action and taking minority applicants over others. The school dedicates so much of its time, energy and resources to these activities that it has practically created a hostile environment for a conservative white male. All that being said, I was encouraged to see that Jeffrey Lehman was named as Dean and I believe that he is a step in the right direction. However, more effort should be made to swing the pendulum back to center and away from the left. I believe that many of the school’s older, richer donors would cease giving if they were aware of the school’s stance on moral issues. I will not be a significant contributor as long as that is the case.

I am proud to be a Michigan graduate, but saddened to see the school so out of touch with the real world on issues of morality and affirmative action.

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I was discouraged by the placement office from being a sole practitioner. I find it to be much more rewarding than a corporate law practice, and feel that I have now found my niche. I am very satisfied with my law school education, although I feel I learned as much from my moot court experience as I did from all my other classes combined.

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If you had sent me this two years ago, you would have gotten very different answers. I am much less satisfied with my job now. The more I practice law, the more my eyes are opened to office politics, unethical or highly questionable litigation practices and general disrespect for a person’s choice of family over work. Although some of these issues are not singular to the practice of law, I think that the private practice setting encourages these problems. I am proud to have attended the University of Michigan Law School, but I would not do it again!

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Law school is a life-changing experience. I wish there were some way to slow down that period of learning to put things in perspective, to discuss where law fits in with the fabric of our society.

It seems like many students and practitioners get caught up in the perception that the law is more important than other social institutions. Rather than seeing law as a means of resolving disputes, we elevate jurisprudence to an almost mystical plane of importance. Then we get caught up in attempting to be clever, and lose sight of solving problems on a human level.

I believe the legal system is more cumbersome and less effective than other dispute resolution processes. It also has the potential to inflict enormous emotional and financial damage to the parties and their counsel. We should spend time looking at the true costs of the work we
do, and explore options that provide better results at lower cost.

It will be easier for students to consider other modes of dispute resolution if they are able to see that the legal process is simply one process of many. Once law is seen as being one option on a continuum of options, it becomes easier to see that law does not rest on some higher intellectual plane, and that a true legal craftsman will consider all options on the continuum to best serve the needs of the client.

I believe that some people are searching to fulfill emotional and social needs on a level others do not perceive. To make law school and law practice palatable to those people, it is essential to connect the practice of law with providing for the greater social good. If that connection can't be made and sustained, the profession loses talented and committed people.

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I disliked law school, while I was attending. And, I dislike it still. But – I like being a lawyer, and like it more and more as I get more experience. I could never figure out why I disliked law school so much. After practicing for awhile, I think I have more insight.

I feel like law school was a big game of “hide-the-ball.” Most of my classes were boring and seemed pointless. I don’t think the case method makes much sense out of context. And, I think more nuts-and-bolts classes like Civil Procedure or Evidence would be much more clear – and fun – if students were put in practical situations. I hated Civil Procedure in law school, but now that I actually practice, and see the purposes of the rules – I love it.

I am not anti-intellectual – most of my favorite classes were con-law, theory-type classes. However, I think law school should be more practical to give the theory some context.

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During my five years since graduation, I clerked for two years, ran for state senate, worked as a litigation associate and appellate attorney. I also was a political appointee to the State Board of Education for two years. I now practice corporate law.

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I liked law school. I, like many others, was moved by the big firms. I never knew I could make so much money. I hated it! Greed lasted six minutes. Since, I’ve worked in Africa, Asia, and Europe for an international organization (thanks to a Michigan professor); now, I work for two lawyers who specialize in civil rights. I’m at the bottom (started over to move back to the United States) but I love it.

I regret wasting my summers in corporate firms. It was, however, the best way to learn what I did not want. I know the law school tries to promote non-big firm careers – Keep it up!

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The law school must do more to warn potential students of the heavy debt burden many of them must assume to complete law school. My debt burden has limited my job choices and created an incredible amount of financial strain. The law school should also do more to reduce