Class of 1994 Five Year Report Alumni Comments

University of Michigan Law School

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Responses to Open-Ended Question:
"We would like your additional comments of any sort about life or law school."

I think it is vital that the law school develop a real loan FORGIVENESS program for those working in the non-profit sector. This is essential or those of us in that sector will not be able to continue our work. The loans are a tremendous burden. Greater resources should go into supporting non-profit alums. Even alumni activities are difficult for non-profit alums to participate in because they are priced for those in the private sector.

The support of a number of faculty members has been very helpful to me in my career.

I practice corporate law for a large New York law firm and my course work during law school had very little relevance to this type of work.

Regarding life at large New York law firms (and probably large law firms elsewhere as well), a balanced life is virtually impossible. You have to either get comfortable with that fact for the rest of your career or find a new career. 90% of my colleagues have already left my firm in the five years since I joined. I plan to follow their example shortly.

Law school was disappointing in many ways. First, I was distraught to learn that because I was under age 35 yrs at admission, I had to report my parents income. Had I been married (even to someone unemployed) or over 35, this would not have been required. I haven’t lived home with my parents, nor depended on them financially since I was 22 and finished my bachelors degree. To not qualify for financial scholarships because of my age and marital status (secondary to reporting my parents income) was both discriminatory and unfair – and from such a “prestigious” law school. Consequently, I will never contribute to the alumni fund. I was working as much as possible to pay my living expenses, and keeping my grades up as best I could and the law school could have cared less – and then I was encouraged not to work – it’s like saying - Oh, just borrow more – no big deal. Well, now I’m in debt until 2009, for an education that was less than I had expected and which left me very disillusioned with the profession of law.

Some of the classes and professors were excellent and I enjoyed them, but just as many were a disappointment. Some professors are so wrapped up in the little world of their classrooms and academia that they lose touch with the real world.

After graduating and working in a law firm I quit after 1 yr. In an entire year, the 2 lawyers assigned to be my “mentors” had not once worked with me, or taught me anything. Their offices were on another floor and I never saw them. The firm, being moderate size, seemed oblivious and a paralegal and an attorney assistant usually gave me my assignments and feedback. I had been offered a full tuition scholarship at Univ. of Toledo but so many people encouraged me to attend U of M, that I passed it up. In retrospect, I’m glad to have been able to stay in Ann Arbor, but in terms of finances and the education, I think I probably made the wrong choice.
I learned in practice that the goal of teaching law students “how to think like a lawyer” is absolutely critical. I did not appreciate that fact during law school. Finally, it continues to amaze me that there is such extreme in quality of legal representation and practice. Although it goes against my liberal tendencies to admit, but it does matter where an attorney went to law school. The better law schools prepare better lawyers.

I’m currently in a judicial clerkship, and previously I worked for virtually three years as a state attorney at a state appellate court. I’m not entirely sure how to consider that in answering some questions, i.e. is that “practicing law”? I loved law school, I greatly miss times spent with friends there. I made some of my closest friends at law school. I also “came out” to myself as a gay man at law school.

The reason I had only moderate difficulty paying off my law school loans was because I received excellent counseling regarding money management and limiting my standard of living. I think a debt/money management workshop (8 hours) would be an excellent course to offer 3L’s.

I had considerable difficulty finding my first legal job, and received almost no assistance from the Career Services office after I graduated and moved away from Ann Arbor. I know of several other graduates in my class who had similar experiences. I would strongly encourage the Career Services office to become actively involved in the job searches of graduates who are still looking for their first jobs. I would also encourage other components of the law school administration to monitor closely the employment status of each graduate who has not found legal employment by graduation and, at the very least, let these graduates know that their employment is a priority of the law school.

Most lawyers do not write well. Most of my colleagues at U-M law school, as students, did not write well. Most lawyers do not – and most of my law student peers did not – appreciate how poor their writing skills are. Yet the ability to write in a clear, organized and thoughtful fashion is critical to a great variety of legal practices. So I would encourage the law school – as I always did when I was a student – to make legal writing a much stronger focus of the law school experience.

Legal writing has two aspects – (a) compositional skills; (b) effective (and correct) use of legal authority. The first year legal writing curriculum tends to stress the latter; I think the school should stress the former as well, in part by hiring liberal arts graduate students – the English, classics, and philosophy departments come to mind – to work with law students on their compositional skills.

To whom should I bill this .5 hour? Just kidding.
The question of whether I would recommend someone go to law school knowing what I now know.
If someone really wants to be a lawyer I would say go to law school, but if you are in any way not sure do not go.
It is a profession that takes an enormous amount of time because although one is new to the profession, people expect you to have the knowledge and experience of a person who has been practicing law for a period of time, which makes law interesting but also frustrating at the same time.

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Two comments:
(1) Educate incoming or potential law students on the debt load they should expect to encounter on graduation.
(2) Make the legal education more practical and geared toward actual practicing. I was extremely disappointed with the quality of the basics (i.e. contracts, torts, property). I regularly recommend that potential law students consider Wayne State because it graduates better lawyers, albeit with fewer potential law professors. Frankly, I learned more about the basics in reviewing for the bar exam than I ever did at Michigan.

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U of M Law School needs to become a much more student-centered institution if it expects to prepare more ethical, community conscious attorneys. Professors need to be more accessible, class sizes need to be smaller, and students need to understand the importance of team work and helping others.

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I am in federal government service – entered thru the Dept. Justice’s Honors Program – I never heard about this program at U of M Career Services – seemed the main push was to law firms, not fed. govt. This is an incredible place to work, I am surprised now that U of M didn’t push to get their students into the DOJ. I wouldn’t have considered it if the judge I clerked for hadn’t pushed me to do it. I hope these opportunities are being more widely broadcast now – DOJ hires right out of law school through their programs.

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While I have found law school and my legal career to be intellectually challenging, I was not prepared for the stress and long hours that this profession (at least litigation) requires. I suggest that the law school attempt to incorporate more externships and required courses on drafting pleadings and discovery requests for first year law students. I think students should really be made to understand that when a case you are working on is in litigation, your life is simply not your own to manage. Obtaining a summer associate position at a firm is not enough.

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My answers may be confusing – I worked full-time for a large firm in 1998 and switched to part-time with a small firm in 1999 when I had my son. I enjoy practicing law a lot more than I thought I would when I left law school. I didn’t care much for law school itself – I thought the legal education at
U of M lacked heart. It was all geared for success and power, but to be honest the experience wears better than I would have expected. I love my friends from law school.

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About life: Time has just flown. There are so many hours required to maintain a career that little is left for building a well balanced life. (i.e. meaningful relationships, family of one's own, etc...) (Or is it that we simply just don't know how to do that?)

More effort needs to be put into thinking about true future goals. Seems like we know all too well what is required of us to achieve our scholastic and professional goals, but not our overall life goals.

What I mean by that is: we know about SAT's; LSAT's; Law School/Med School applications; requirements to make us look like outstanding applicants (sports, extracurricular activities, etc...)(performing well on exams, interviewing, getting clerkships, etc...) Then we get "the job" and work... But what about the bigger picture? The hours required to maintain "the job" becomes an obstacle to marriage, children, vacations, quality time with aging parents, etc... It even gets in the way of time needed for proper financial planning!!

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UM Law School prepared me very little for the actual practice of law or for the bar exam. If I had it to do again, I would not attend the University of Michigan for the following reasons:

I was particularly disappointed (and angered) by the lack of assistance I received in job placement. I never was able to land a summer clerkship (and I graduated top 1/3 of my class), and had extreme difficulty finding a job after graduation – at least one in which I would be able to afford to pay my school loans from the exorbitant tuition charged out-of-staters by UM. (I will never contribute a dime to the school, despite the frequent solicitation.) Overall, my experience with UM was terrible. I had few classes where I learned anything of value to me in the practicing profession! The one bright experience was my participation in the clinical law program. Professor Kauper was also wonderful, but on the whole, I had the feeling that the professors cared little about the welfare of the students. I also didn’t appreciate the low bell curve employed during the majority of time at UM.

Life after law school (once I found a job) has been extremely stressful due to the $1000 a month I pay toward school loans (minimum amount due). Law school was not worth that sort of debt?

I hope this has been enlightening.

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Although I did not perform as well in law school as I had hoped (about middle of my class), Michigan proved to be a very rewarding experience. I made great friends and met many interesting people. Even though, due to the many loans I had to obtain, I am now rather financially encumbered, I have no regrets about having chosen Michigan. Many of the instructors are superb, and the classes are diverse and extremely intelligent. I have many fond memories of my law school experience, and I look forward to attending our class reunion this fall.

Unfortunately, the practice of law sucks.

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I found law school to be basically a trade school. While it was challenging in many respects, in my view, teaches students to think in a specific, limiting way (for instance, I remember being surprised, in law school, that you couldn’t, in many contexts, receive damages for non-economic injuries, no matter how severe, because they are hard to quantify; I am no longer troubled—except when asked to think about it—by the economic structure that has forced out what are, in many instances, non-economic problems)! Also, while law school students are very social, there is something constrained and repressed about the law school community—I remember in school talking to my friends about how common it was for law students to get together, only to talk about how they don’t like law students.

A couple of things I think could be VASTLY improved at the law school to give students a leg up after graduation, if they haven’t been improved in the years since I was there:

1) Admissions. This isn’t really a gripe—just something that admissions officials should consider. I came to Michigan from a middle-class background. I moved into the Lawyers’ Club in 1991, proud to have made it into such a prestigious school. I was stunned by my classmates, however. Not by their intellect, but by their WEALTH. This class difference showed up in numerous ways during my three year stint at Michigan—and not just in relations between students. Placement office staff routinely said things like, “Well, why don’t you just fly to California for the interview?” or “You really should have two interview suits.” (Um, I couldn’t afford to. I borrowed money for the first interview suit!)

In my three years at Michigan, I met a grand total of six or seven people who were from economic backgrounds to similar mine. I thought it was a shame that Michigan didn’t have a class that was more ECONOMICALLY DIVERSE. When I started school at Michigan, I considered myself economically average. So why weren’t there more economically average people at the school? Why does everyone seem to be upper-middle class or upper-class?

2) Asking for Money. On that note...during orientation, my section was walked across the street, where we paid our first semester’s tuition and fees. Afterward, we walked back to the law school, bank accounts emptied, to hear a welcome speech from then-Dean Bollinger. He spoke for twenty minutes on the importance of giving money back to the school after we graduated. Many in my class still joke about that speech today. You might want to encourage the current Dean—or whoever gives the orientation welcome speech—to refrain from mentioning money of the very first day of school.

3) Placement. My classmates and I agreed that if you weren't in the top 5%, placement could really care less about you. Forgive me, but how come the middle of the class at Michigan (me) is constantly beat out for jobs by people at the top of their class at middle-tier schools? I decided not to accept a scholarship to any of the middle-tier schools because Michigan told me that being anywhere in my class at Michigan made me a better hire than being number one at my local, middle-tier law school. That’s just not so. Here’s why, and here’s how Michigan can MAKE IT BETTER for those who aren’t in the top 5% or on Law Review:

a) Placement isn’t scrappy like at small schools. Small schools go LOOKING for jobs for their students. They're on the horn finding positions and getting those interviewers on campus. At Michigan, I was told by the placement director, "We don’t need to do those kinds of things. Firms just naturally want to come interview our students." Well, yes, some firms do. But many firms don’t. When the market’s tight, like it was in '93 and '94, schools need to be scrappy. ALL schools. Get on the phone. Give firms incentives to come interview Michigan students—or at least don’t charge them an arm and a leg to do so.

b) Michigan only focuses on the biggest firms. Because I was scrappy hunting for jobs, I managed to get great ones during my two summers. My first year, I went to a 35-lawyer firm in the Midwest. My second year, a 9-lawyer boutique firm (the partners broke off from [law firm names]). I
was told during both summers by the hiring partners that, “Michigan just charges us too much for us to bother going out there to interview.” Apparently, Michigan charged $1,000 per room, per day, for firms to interview. I really hope this isn’t still the case. While large firms can afford that, smaller ones can’t – especially if they’re from out-of-state and have to incur travel costs to come to Ann Arbor. The hiring partner at one firm put it this way, “Multiply $1,000 times the top ten schools. Then add on the cost of travel to each of those schools. We’re spending the same amount of money to interview for two hires as we’ll spend on their salary for the summer. I’ll go down the street to the two local law schools and take my chances, thank-you-very-much.”

When I asked the placement director why they didn’t do more to entice small- or mid-sized firms to campus for interviews, I was told, “Most Michigan students don’t want to work for those firms.” In my experience, Michigan students want to know ALL their options. In addition, during a very tight market, many students just wanted work, period. Placement can be VERY out of touch on that point.

c) Michigan doesn’t look at alternatives. This is a BIGGIE. Michigan needs to make more of an effort to educate its students about the employment opportunities available to them once they have their degree. A lot of students aren’t interested in working for a megafirm, but they don’t know what the alternatives are. I went to the placement director during my third year to ask what alternative jobs there might be for someone with a law degree – I told her that I’d worked in firms both summers, and while it was a good experience, it wasn’t what I wanted to do in the long run. The placement director’s response: “Have you considered looking at small or mid-sized firms?”

When I replied that I had, but that I wasn’t particularly interested in working for a firm, she asked if I’d considered the government. I told her yes, I’d interviewed for several government positions, but that it was difficult to learn about positions that didn’t entail practicing law per se. She said, “well, I think you’ve done everything!” and cheerfully told me I’d get a great job because “you’re a Michigan student!” Unfortunately, she missed the point. I wanted to learn about ALTERNATIVES to practicing law, not about practicing with a different size firm or with the government.

Here’s what placement should do to improve that situation for its students:

(I) Bring back graduates who do non-law jobs for a career panel. Have alumni talk about their jobs and how they got them. I am a freelance writer. I know someone else who’s a children’s book author. Another graduate who’s the director of business development at a biotech company. Another who works running the upstate New York AmeriCorps. I’m sure these graduates – and hundreds of other graduates who no longer practice law – would love to help current U of M students find their niche.

(ii) Placement should keep job listings for viable non-law positions. I told the placement director about a publication at the Graduate Library that contained hundreds of job listing a week – many of which were well-paying teaching positions and administrative positions that Law School graduates would be qualified for. I told her it cost $12 or so a week to get this publication – would it be possible to get it for the Law School? She told me it was too expensive. When the placement office is charging firms $1,000 a day to interview, I think ONE firm’s payment could be allocated to pay for additional job listing s without hurting the law school too much.

I also think it’d be a terrific service to students to keep a current listing of administrative positions within the government. There are literally hundreds of well-paying, challenging positions within the government where a law degree isn’t required, but is certainly an asset – and they aren’t just in DC. They’re all over the country. By the same token, management consulting and investment banking firms are more than willing to hire people directly out of law school – again, for high-level, well-paid positions. However, most students – particularly those whose parents never held these types of jobs – don’t know these positions are out there for them. Perhaps placement should consider allocating some of its budget to acquire non-law job listings or attract non-law interviewers to campus. The students will thank them for it.
I look back on law school as an exciting time at first and a very intellectually stimulating experience. However, the theoretical and big firm orientations of Michigan at the time I was there (1992-1994) squelched a lot of the idealism and confidence I feel I had when entering. I do not regret my decision to go to law school or to Michigan in particular, but I am still searching for a career path that is truly satisfying to me.

Law schools should do more of what business schools do and encourage students to work for a year or two before attending law school.

Please try to provide more grant money to law students – it would open many more opportunities for graduates to pursue work about which they are passionate (rather than a job that will pay off the loans).

I found out I was unexpectedly pregnant the April before I graduated from law school. I went ahead with my plans to work at a medium-sized private law firm. People at the law firm tried to be sensitive to my situation, but it was difficult. I was the first associate to ever take a maternity leave. My husband had gone back to graduate school, so he had a flexible schedule and was able to pick up a lot of the slack. I often felt I was not as good of a mother or a lawyer as I would like to be. When my husband graduated and got a job, we decided to have another child and I would take some time off from my career. It is difficult to balance a family and a legal career. When I return to employment, I will not return to private practice.

Unfortunately, I think I went to law school and became a lawyer for the wrong reasons. I knew I wanted to get an advanced degree and make a good salary. I knew I wanted to work with smart people. I knew I had strong analytical skills. I thought I could “use a law degree to do anything.” I got sucked into the path of least resistance – private practice in a large firm. I dislike the lack of control over my work and my life. I am tiring of litigation and of spending my days arguing. I am on my 3rd job in 5 years – currently with a small firm. Although my current job is the best place for me in terms of a law firm – casual and collegial atmosphere, great people to work with, challenging work – I’m still not happy. I recently started a non-profit organization on the side and have decided that non-profit work (in a non-legal capacity) is my “calling.” I am currently looking for work in the non-profit community and am finally ready to “leave the law.” I hope the pay cut and loss of “prestige” will be worth it. I really believe that an increase in job satisfaction will result and I (somewhat anxiously) look forward to the change.

Disappointed that law school is fighting lawsuit to bring admissions policy into conformance
with the Constitution and federal law.

The law school needs to attract more mid-career professors to shore up faculty that is long on old giants and promising new hires, but weak on the middle.
Pleased to hear that writing and advocacy has been revamped.
Overall very pleased with law school experience.

I look back at those years in law school with great fondness. The law school was very good to me.

1) I don’t think law school prepares you for or makes you aware about the varieties of settings in which you can practice law.
2) I think law school was excellent intellectual preparation, but I wish there was more emphasis on “real world” skills.
3) I don’t think that I received adequate legal writing instruction. I would focus more on this because it is so crucial in practice.
4) There should be more of a focus on cooperation in law school – i.e. – such as group projects.
5) In general, I have had an excellent post-graduate experience. I think my experience has been better than most of my classmates. I enjoy what I do.

It strikes me that legal practice has sped up tremendously. I’m sure everyone always worked hard, but the advent of email and electronic documents has sped up business, and legal practice much more. Some days fielding email, fax and voice mail is dizzying. I don’t know if I can keep this up.

I did not have a job after graduating, so after passing the Michigan Bar (with flying colors!), I got a temp job doing data entry while living with my parents. So when my first job offer came in January (8 months after graduation) I felt I had to take it. I moved to a Detroit suburb (which I hated after 7 years in Ann Arbor) and took a job with a formerly sole practitioner. It was terrible – he told me he did employment law, but he really only handled PI cases. I had none of the basics – my first assignment was to draft and file a motion, and I did not have a clue. (Later, when I had an intern from Michigan, I realized this was not just me.) I was offered, but then never given, benefits. I was treated badly, often working 80+ hours, weeks, nights, weekends, etc., while only being paid a fraction of what my big firm classmates were getting. I was let go after 2 months, having only been hired to get my employer through a busy period (I did not know it was temporary). My next job was worse – with a husband/wife firm. The wife half took every opportunity to verbally abuse me and the secretary, as well as put me down in front of other lawyers. The poor secretary was always crying. The wife would treat clients according to how much money the case could make. Clients with difficult cases were yelled at and lied to. I was again promised benefits, but never got any, and my hours were even worse – I worked July 4! My pay was not enough to pay my loans. I left after 5 months. Then I got a Legal Aid job. My colleagues and office was better, but hours were still long and pay even lower. I learned a great deal, and feel I did very important work. However, it was incredibly stressful. I planned my own wedding while
doing very difficult divorce and custody work. I had to deal with abused spouses, neglected kids, drug and alcohol problems, poverty, on top of normally stressful divorce work. I took it too much to heart, and the poor, battered clients, in addition to dealing with often hostile judges and unscrupulous attorneys, affected my whole life. My health and marriage suffered, and after intense soul searching I realized I was not cut out for divorce practice, or even litigation, which is what I had wanted to do. In fact, after wanting to be a lawyer since I was a kid, I was no longer sure I wanted to be a lawyer, which was extremely difficult to deal with. I quit my job and moved all the way across the country, to the Pacific Northwest. I took several months to write and figure out what I wanted.

I now work for 2 municipal courts, in a law-related, but non-lawyer, position. I manage the domestic violence victim advocacy program, and work closely with victims, police, and prosecutors. It is difficult and stressful, but very rewarding, and I have a flexible schedule and work independently. The pay is still relatively low, but I don’t have to deal with the stressors of litigation practice. It is good for now. After this, I don’t know what I will do, but now I realize that is what makes life interesting.

I wish I would have known:
1) That the debt would be so burdensome. Since I don’t make very much, I have had a hard time with it. I have only recently been able to make regular payments. I don’t know when or if I will be able to afford to buy a house.
2) That law practice really restricts you to a state: Even if I wanted to do, I couldn’t practice law in this state. The Bar exam plus studying for it are expensive and difficult. Joining is another expense. I couldn’t afford to do it again anytime soon.
3) That law is not a noble profession. There are dishonest lawyers all over. There are judges who are just plain mean. I have been lied to; I have had my professional judgement called into question when it shouldn’t have been; I have had lawyers take advantage of inexperience; and I have witnessed lawyers break ethical rules time and time again. The almighty dollar rules above justice.

All in all, I probably would not choose to be a lawyer. I was misled, or perhaps only heard and saw what I wanted to about the profession, or both. There are so many things I would rather do, but now I can’t, as I am saddled with tremendous debt. But I have learned a lot about life and about myself in the short time since law school. And law school was a great intellectual experience. I just wish law itself could have been that, too.

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Michigan was an academically rigorous experience, but I always felt that the professors had no idea that the vast majority of us would be practicing lawyers. There were several old school faculty members who not only did not consider our future careers, and the reason we were there, but whether or not their teaching was effective in any way.

I hope this has changed.

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In general, the high points of law school for me were activities I did outside of law school. The main benefit from Michigan professionally is the ability to say I went to school there. I made some good friends at Michigan and liked some of the work I did but a lot of the time I found the environment (intellectually) stifling and irrelevant. I definitely would not go to Michigan if I had to do it over again – I think I would go to a school that was more current in its thinking and that had a faculty a bit more in touch this reality.
1) I don't know the exact numbers, but I would think that a good number of UMLS grads are non-practicing attorneys. The law school should recognize that, and allow some flexibility in course work and think about creating different courses designed for people who go to law school who do not end up practicing law. Some areas that come to mind include:
- business courses (accounting, finance, etc.)
- technology-oriented courses
- international relations/private international law.

2) Go international! I've spent almost half of my legal career overseas (primarily Asia), and this will be the trend! Law school grads should come out of law school with an international focus.

3) The law school should consider continuing professional education for practicing lawyers, sort of like the B-school's executive training courses.

Do not let the University of Michigan slip any more in the rankings!
Get Joel Seligman back!
More intellectual property. That is truly the wave of the future.

I love my job, but question whether it will really be feasible to have small children and continue to work at the level I do now. Many partners are very resistant to the idea of part-time work for women with small children. Also, the degree of time and energy required to be a very good lawyer seems somewhat incompatible with raising children with adequate or sufficient parental guidance and supervision. Many of my female attorney friends are going to end up quitting because they feel that their law firms are not supportive of their role as working mothers – which is rather sad and a waste of talented people.

As for law school, while there and now, I feel/felt like the law school gave preferential treatment to the minority students, for example, with their semi-secret MAP program. Once in law school, all students must sink or swim on their own. This program is an attempt to elevate selected students at the expense of others – especially during the first year when the students are forced into a curve. I am very happy to see that public support for affirmative action is waning and hope the law school and the University move with the times and abandon their programs in favor of racially-blind programs that support all deserving and needy students.

I believe there were three major failings with my law school experience.
First, there was insufficient emphasis put of the importance of personality in succeeding in the interview process. I have a low-key academic type personality. I have been interviewing off and on for jobs ever since I graduated from law school. I don't believe I have ever really gotten a job through an interview and have underachieved as a result. A bar association placement counselor finally made me see the light, i.e. that most attorneys have “type A” personalities and will look to hire people like them. This is especially true in private practice where personality is a key to rainmaking potential. It seems to me that I should not have had to wait four years to get the kind of personal attention that would enlighten me about my situation. This should have been addressed while I was in law school.
Second, I believe the law school grading system is fundamentally flawed. There is a desperate need for an empirical study determining just what, if anything, Michigan law school grades do (and do not) measure. In my other academic experiences, which include being an undergraduate at another Big Ten university and completing a graduate program in which the average student had even higher academic credentials than the average UMLS student, I have never had serious doubts about the “accuracy” of the grading system. However, at Michigan, there seemed to be little correlation between the grades I received—whether they be high or law—and my understanding of the material. I believe part of the problem is that traditional “issue-spotting” exams test a very narrow range of intellectual abilities. In particular, I believe they only test—for lack of a better term—a student’s “breadth” of analysis, not the quality or depth of analysis.

Third, I believe that the grading curve must be completely abandoned. Under the current system, grading decisions that can drastically affect a student’s career path are made on the basis of small, sometimes almost imperceptible, differences in answers to issue spotting exams. It is ridiculous that such important distinctions are drawn among such talented students with so little basis. Eliminating the grading curve would help to insulate that only real differences are used to distinguish among students. Note that I am not advocating eliminating grades altogether—as has been done already at Yale and Stanford. I agree that Michigan’s student body is not, overall, as elite as those at the latter two institutions. Thus, there is a need to have some means of separating out those Michigan students who are truly doing less than satisfactory work. Retaining some sort of grading system would permit this to be done. But eliminating a harsh, institutionally imposed grading curve would insure students who are doing satisfactory work are not trampled in the rush to draw distinctions without a difference.

Finally, I would like to add a congratulatory note for the law school’s elimination of the case club system. I always thought that the system was poorly managed and that many of the students selected to be instructors were never really up to the tasks they were asked to perform.

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So many of my classmates went to work for big firms, the school made this a focus. And I think encourages that path. How sad. Some of the best minds are now stuck in cubicles in NY and CA working on projects like little assembly line workers.

I was lucky. I went solo. I had to suffer financially the first 3 years. But, the work is very satisfying. I truly enjoy my life and my work. I am able to work out of my home, with my wife, keep a leisurely pace, excitement, and still make more money than the poor kid who went with a big firm.

I feel sad that so much of our school’s intellectual talent is wasted by promoting big firm placement.

I had the advantage of having attended a lower ranked law school for my first year. You might be surprised that I found the [law school name] in Chicago to be more intellectually stimulating. I love U of M, and appreciate the opportunity to have studied there. But, the first year program was a bit touchy-feely, and missed a lot of black letter theory.

Tell your students not to waste their lives working for large law firms.

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Based on my own experience to date, I feel that law school students need an honest introduction to the realities of paying for their education, working in big firm settings (the destiny for many) and the attendant stresses of a legal career.

While I heard a lot about big firms and long hours in a law firm, I had no idea of what reality was or how to deal with it. Lack of preparation translated into patterns of behavior which have put me in
difficult, stressful positions. I think with a better grounding, I could have approached my new career more constructively and have been on firmer financial and personal footing.

That having been said, Michigan was a tremendous learning experience for me and it has launched me into what I now hope is a rewarding career in law. I simply feel more guidance on some fundamentals; career choice, finances, etc.- would have been valuable.

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It is practically impossible to be or aspire to be considered for partnership in a large law firm and also be an involved parent. Over the last 5 years I've watched many women lose their position in their class or with a particular partner or damage their reputation by having a child.

I'd like to have stayed in private practice long enough to "teach" the men in my former firm that a female associate is worth keeping and giving work to even after she's had a kid. But, I decided I couldn't stick around that long.

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My initial employment experience was a disaster, despite graduating cum laude from Michigan with multiple A+ grades and journal participation. I sought summer employment in metro Detroit and ended up as a research aide at the law school after months of no offers, and only got a position a month or two before term's end (with an express statement that no permanent hires were planned).

After graduation, I worked a few months as a law clerk with a family friend in [city name] (following my wife to grad school) until she and I were laid off in a merger of a major client. I solo-practiced eight months as soon as I passed the bar, grossed $3000 and netted $300.

I took the next job that came along, hours from any major city which my wife hated, doing business law at $30,000 year for three years and got none of the promised raises. I haven't paid off one dollar of my loan principal.

While I like the intellectual content, I'm a poor negotiator and hate deadlines, time management, returning calls, and organization, (plus the hours).

I'm now paid market rates doing sophisticated estate planning and tax work, which is intellectually satisfying but morally void. I enjoy being a "lawyer" but not an "attorney," i.e., I like using legal knowledge but not acting as an efficient all purpose agent for clients. This job has so few creative outlets. I'm glad I went to law school, but am better suited to be a professor (I give seminars and talks every chance I can and have published an article).

If it weren't for debts and a baby on the way, I'd career shift now.

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I thoroughly enjoyed my law school experience. I felt that I couldn't have gotten a better education anywhere else. I liked the mix of liberal/conservative public interest/corporate views. I felt challenged by my peers and my professors.

The 2 areas that I think can be improved are 1. Prof./Student interaction, and 2. Career services. I wish I had had more contact with my professors. I never knew them outside the classroom. After leaving Michigan I feel no connection with the law school outside of my memories. With regard to the career services, I felt like we never had qualified people advising us. My peers and I always seemed to get conflicting advice. Also, it seemed like with law firm jobs, we didn't have the advantage of early interviews like at other schools or time off for interviews. Also, it seemed like we were competing against each other for jobs. This was not true, but somehow the competitiveness was fostered by process
or attitudes of our career office personnel. With government and public interest jobs, there never was any info to be found. I think these problems with career services improved after I left, with the opening of public service career office and new head of career services.

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Writing well is important. One of the deans told me it wasn’t during my first week at U of M law. I found that to be poor advice. Encourage good writing and communication skills.

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My judicial clerkship was a good experience.
I think however, the placement office should be more helpful in tipping students as to what employees are looking for. Honestly, law school has mostly ended up being a financial burden for me. Also, you need to come up with a policy regarding how to handle incompletes if a student drops out of school for a semester. I think you should be able to remove it from the record if you successfully complete the course at a later date. I think it unnecessarily prejudicially singles out students who have a single episode with illness. At the time, you allowed a student to remove the “I” only if they paid the tuition over again - unfairly favoring the wealthy.

More help with the Intellectual property front -- helping students to understand the integrity required would also be helpful.

I did not like the grade scale changes that went in effect in 1993 or so -- it seemed to hurt me. Hope Michigan isn’t continuing to fall in prestige as it did when I was there.

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- Expand writing courses to include more types of clerks and hire full time profs
- Provide offerings in tech law
- Try to help reduce debt burden/ costs becoming prohibitive

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Although I had a positive law school experience in many respects, I do not feel that Michigan prepared me well for the practical aspects of practicing law. The first year writing program (Case Club) was not adequate. Writing is a huge part of legal practice and this course needs to be more intensive and taught by a professor rather than students.

I believe that the Legal Assistance Urban Communities Clinic provided me with the best law school experience. Not only did I learn about a substantive area of law, I also learned how to work with a partner, how to deal with clients, how to teach and make presentations, and how to keep track of and report on the work I was doing.

One negative experience that I had in law school bears repeating. I received a request to be interviewed when a Constitutional law professor was being considered to aid the selection process. When I recommended not granting tenure, but delaying the decision, I was questioned about my grade in the course and how I felt about it. I was quite content with my grade, but had some concerns about the professor’s teaching ability because he did not know how many constitutional amendments there were (he said 24) and he seemed very uncomfortable speaking before a group of people. My interview lasted about 5 minutes. The person directly behind me spend at least 20 minutes with the interviewer. He told me later that he had recommended granting tenure. I would suggest if you are going to bother with
student interviews in the tenure selection process that the interviews be meaningful and not self-serving.

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There is no substitute for being self-employed.

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I recently completed a five year plan to work in and leave a large firm practice (prior firm had 340 attorneys) and start a small firm. The experience has been wonderful on many levels. I say this because my answers last year would have been very different.

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I enjoyed law school at U of M because I met wonderfully interesting and kind people and was challenged intellectually. However, my legal education provided me with virtually no training or skills for practicing law. I was completely unprepared for what the practice of law would be like. For example, I had never seen a complaint or an interrogatory until I got out of law school. When practicing as a litigator involves almost 100% discovery, it is astounding to me that there are almost no classes that teach you about the discovery process—e.g., depositions, written discovery, case strategy. Unfortunately, too many top law schools, like Michigan, think that they are above teaching practical skills and assume if they teach their students “to think,” that that will be enough. It’s not. As a young lawyer, you certainly can learn this on the job, but you come to the job not realizing what it really is like to practice law. It’s been quite a surprise to me, and very disappointing. Perhaps law schools expect that you’ll get a glimpse of real law during summer jobs, but that does not always happen, nor are summer clerk positions usually representative of real life as a lawyer. I loved law school, however, perhaps because life then truly was living in an ivory tower. I think all law schools, including Michigan, need to get more in touch with the practice of law and preparing their students for it. Perhaps more clinical law classes will help and externships.

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I have a satisfying professional life writing fiction that has been well received by a major NYC publisher and look forward to the release of my first two books. The analytical skills and issues education I received at UMLS has helped me to craft intriguing plots that deal with complex social themes. I have also gained the confidence and became sufficiently articulate to serve as a leader/activist, especially as related to children in my Native American community. Former section mates remain among my closest friends and I’m happily married to a fellow graduate.

I did find as a spouse that my income/geographic needs were incompatible with my spouses’ who makes much more in patent law than I ever could have.

However, it was my goal upon entering law school to use my education in editorial endeavors, and I’m therein enjoying success. Go Blue!

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I intend to spend the rest of my working life in a government research position so I won’t have to deal with client recruitment.

U of M does not deserve its reputation.
The hardest part of having a successful life as a practicing lawyer is achieving a balance between the various demands on one’s time: work, family, community, etc. For me, the best decision I have made was to make clear to each employer that my family is important and that I need flexibility to work at home occasionally and may not always be available for travel on short notice. None of my employers have had any trouble with this including the large law firms. Once you prove that you go good work and will get the job done, the mechanics are less important. I also find that clients (particularly the women clients) appreciate the fact that I have a balanced life -- it makes me a much more pleasant person with whom to work. Too many young associates still believe that such flexibility is not available -- it is but you have to (1) ask for it, and (2) prove yourself responsible enough to warrant the flexibility.

Law school taught me how to think like a lawyer and how to research and write effectively. Skills I still needed to succeed after law school were time management, marketing, law firm politics and practice management. Because I believe most graduates work for law firms as associates after law school, I think the law school should offer more classes that prepare students for survival in the law firm environment.

My school loans have ruined my life. My credit is shot because I couldn’t make payments of $1400 per month while also supporting a family.

The main thing I regret about law school is the debt I incurred. I felt I was misled about the job opportunities and salaries that were available. The career placement center was pretty passive. I believe the attitude was that if you graduated from Michigan -- the name alone would get you a job. Maybe that was so years ago, but not so in 1994 when I graduated. The career placement center should’ve been much more aggressive.

I don’t feel that I got my money’s worth. Now I have a huge debt that seems insurmountable. My husband and I don’t know how we are going to pay off our school debts and buy a house. We are both graduates of this "prestigious" law school and frankly, don’t have anything to show for it but debt. It’s been my experience that I would’ve done much better if I had gone to a lower ranked law school on a “free ride” scholarship. The Michigan name has not been as beneficial as I had been led to believe. Both my husband and I work at places where there are people from various law schools- both high and low ranked. I had no idea that 5 years after law school I’d still be living hand to mouth- part of the reason I went to law school and Michigan in particular was to provide a better life for myself. It just didn’t happen and I regret it.

I generally enjoyed Michigan and am grateful for the education. However, my first-year grades were rather poor (all C+s except for 1 B) and it was very difficult for me to find a job both in law school and afterward. When I did get my first job after my state court clerkship, it was with a small, low paying firm. It was actually embarrassing when people would ask where I went to law school because they
wondered, sometimes aloud, why I was where I was when I went to U of M, such a great school. I now earn a decent living at a more prestigious firm, but there are firms that will not hire me because of my grades. It may be that I don’t belong at those firms and I don’t think it fair to blame people other than myself for my grades. However, I wonder if I would have had the same struggle if I had gone to NYU or Penn or Cornell where I was accepted or tried to go to Columbia or Duke where I was wait listed.

I am very proud to be a UM grad, enjoyed most of my classes, root for the Wolverines, and continue to socialize with good friends that I made there. I believe the Law School should continue to strive to produce the best lawyers it can. Maybe this is too obvious to even state but I wanted to put down that this should be the principle overriding goal, in my opinion.

I enjoyed my years at Michigan tremendously. Unfortunately, the practice of law has not been nearly as satisfying as the intellectual study of the law at Michigan.

I think you may find from the questionnaires that those of us in private practice are not overly satisfied with what we are doing. Many of us chose the law because of the interest in working in a profession, particularly the legal profession. The practice of law, however, has become big business with everyone (associates, partners, etc) working ridiculous numbers of hours. Worse, many young grads are stuck in the cycle because of the huge debt loads they are carrying. I think law schools would be wise to do more to counsel their students and align their expectations accordingly. I believe many students might well consider other careers (or cheaper schools) if they were fully informed.

The Lawyers Club shouldn’t be permitted to put law quad roommates together (at random) who are in the same section. Splitting section-mates up encourages a competition-free, more social environment.

A good question for future questionnaires: a) do you have to bill your time? B) what percentage of your salary would you give up if you could have the same job you have now but not be expected to keep track of billable hours?

The law schools should make an effort to educate students about the pressures, stress and responsibility that lawyers will have to deal with. Most of my lawyer friends who work in private firms, government or public interest were not at all prepared to deal with it. Presenting student with realistic career paths that involve practicing law for only a few years (or not practicing at all) would be an invaluable gift the school could give its students.