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Class of 1976 Five Year Report

University of Michigan Law School

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University of Michigan Law School
 Alumni Survey
 Summary of Findings
 Class of 1976

In the fall of 1981, the law school mailed a survey to the 355 persons who graduated from the law school in calendar year 1976 and for whom we had current addresses in the United States. Two hundred and seventy-five persons, or 76%, completed and returned the questionnaire, a high return rate for mailed surveys and average for the other ten classes sent questionnaires 5 years after graduation.

Here then is a brief report of our findings. We begin with a few tables that provide a profile of the class five years after graduation, and follow with some additional explanatory text. We end with a compendium of the comments class members wrote in response to an openended question on the survey asking for views "of any sort about your life or law school or whatever."

As you will see, five years after law school most of the class is married, practicing law in private settings, living prosperously, contented with their personal lives and careers. On the other hand, there is much diversity. Although most class members have been married once and remain married, one in every seven has been divorced at least once. Similarly, although most class members work in private practice or in corporate counsel's offices, a quarter of the class either is not practicing at all or is practicing for the government or other nonprofit entity.

A Profile of the Class of 1976 after 5 years

Total Respondents: 277 of 360

<u>Family Status</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Never Married	24%
Married Once, Still Married	61
Divorced	8
Remarried After Divorce	7
Other	<u>1</u>
	100%
<u>Children</u>	
None	54%
One	29
Two	12
Three or More	<u>4</u>
	100%
<u>Nature of Work</u>	
<u>Class Members Practicing Law</u>	
Solo Practitioner	4%
Partner in Firm	18
Associate in Firm	41
Counsel for Business or Financial Institution	10
Legal Services	3
Government	11
Other	<u>1</u>
	88%

Life

Class Members Not Practicing Law

Government Executive	1%
Business Owner, Manager, Supervisor	2
Teacher	5
Other	4
	<u>12%</u>

Earnings in Fifth Year

Under \$20,000	8%
\$20,000-30,000	10
30,000-40,000	33
40,000-50,000	25
50,000-60,000	18
Over \$60,000	6
	<u>100%</u>

Life Satisfaction*

<u>Portion of Class Who Report Themselves:</u>	<u>Very Satisfied</u>	<u>In the Middle</u>	<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>
Their Legal Education at Michigan	41%	52%	7%
Their Current Family Life	71	24	5
Their Career as a Whole	46	53	1
The Intellectual Challenge of Their Work	58	40	2
Their Ability to Solve Problems for Clients	60	39	1
Their Income	46	50	4
The Balance of Their Family and Professional Life	41	52	7

Politics

<u>Portion of Class Members Who Consider Themselves</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Very Liberal	25%
Somewhat More Liberal Than Conservative	29
Middle of the Road	17
Somewhat More Conservative than Liberal	21
Very Conservative	8
	<u>100%</u>

Vote in 1980 Presidential Election

Anderson	21%
Carter	43
Reagan	30
None or Other	6
	<u>100%</u>

Attitudes on a Few Issues

	<u>Favor</u>	<u>Neither Favor Nor Disfavor</u>	<u>Disfavor</u>
Reducing Federal Regulation Intended to Improve Environment	19%	8%	73%
Passage of Federal ERA	66	17	17
Increase Funds for Legal Services Corporation	58	16	26
Mandatory <u>Pro Bono</u> Work for Lawyers	27	16	57

*Questions asked on 7-point scale. We have combined responses 1 and 2 as "very satisfied," responses 3, 4 and 5 as "in the middle" and responses 6 and 7 as "very dissatisfied."

More Information on the Class of 1976

Life Before Law School

About 23 percent of the class of 1976 were women and 10 percent were Black, Hispanic or Native Americans. Most of the class was from the Middle West and had lived in small towns or cities. About 45% of the class members grew up in Michigan, another 25% in other Great Lakes States, and 20% from the Northeast. A majority of class members grew up in communities of less than 100,000 population, but a quarter in communities of over one million. Ten percent had a lawyer father and none had a lawyer mother. Almost 60% went directly from undergraduate school to law school, with 37% having employment in the interim and 16% some graduate school.

Three-quarters of the class had never been married when they began law school, and nearly all the rest were married for the first time. Only 5% had any children. Over three-quarters retained the same marital status during law school, with nearly all those who changed status getting married for the first time. Only 8% of respondents had any additional children while in law school.

The Law School Experience

Nearly half of the class began law school with no well-formed long-term career plans. The most common plan remembered was working in a large law firm—one-sixth of the class had this initial expectation. The major changes in long-term career plans during law school were a substantial reduction in the proportion who had no plans, and a substantial increase in the proportion planning to work for a large law firm, although the changes were much more complex at an individual level—more than half had changed career plans during law school.

Most respondents relied primarily on their families for financial support during law school, receiving over half of total support from that source; employment was a distant second, at about 23% of total support, and law school loans and grants third at 12%. Only half of the respondents had employment at any time during law school, though the proportions and hours involved increased from the first to the third year, and most of this employment was not law-related. For those who did have employment, the average weekly number of hours employed varied from 12 to 17.

Over 65% of the class of 1976 indicated they were satisfied with their law school experience, intellectually, as career training, and overall, with most of those indicating modest degrees of satisfaction. Less than 20% indicated dissatisfaction on any of these aspects. The highest levels of satisfaction were found among those who were most satisfied with their careers, and who had higher law school grade-point averages.

Respondents from the class of 1976 recommended changes in the law school curriculum primarily in terms of increasing course offerings in "skills" areas such as negotiation clinical law practice, trial techniques, legal writing, interviewing, counselling, discovery, legal research, and office administration. Among "substantive" courses, only two areas—banking and corporate and commercial—had even 10% of respondents recommending increases.

Life Since Law School

Geographic relocation since law school graduation has resulted in a decrease in the proportion of the members of the Class of 1976 (compared to parent's residence at

law school entry) living in Michigan and other Great Lakes States, and increases in the proportions on the Pacific Coast and the District of Columbia. Only one-quarter of respondents now live or work in the same communities in which they grew up and less than half in the same region of the country.

Three-fifths of respondents in the Class of 1976 have married once and remain in that first marriage. Another 7% remarried after a divorce, 24% never married, 8% are divorced. Sixty-three percent of respondents have the same marital status as when they left law school, and 24% went from never married to a first marriage, and the remaining 13% had experienced a divorce since law school. Respondents averaged less than one child (half had none, 31% had one, 13% had two, and 4% had three or more, nearly all born since law school.

A high level of satisfaction with family life was indicated by 71% of respondents in the class of 1976, with the highest levels among married persons, senior partners in law firms, and managers in non-firm settings.

Only 42% of respondents in the class of 1976 were still in the first job they took after law school; the average number of jobs since law school was 1.9. One-tenth had had one or more non-legal jobs. Twenty-eight percent had had three or more legal jobs. Most job-changing seems to have taken place in the early part of these respondent's careers, since almost 60% have now spent more than half their careers in their current jobs. About one-third of respondents had spent at least some time since law school in law practice other than private practice.

Eighty-eight percent of respondents in the class of 1976 are now lawyers, with only a few percent being judges, government officials, business owners or executives, or teachers.

Among the lawyers, 72% worked in law firms, 10% in business enterprises, 12% in government. Of those in law firms, 7% were solo practitioners, 30% were partners, and 62% associates. Less than half of those in business and government were managers.

The typical law firm in which respondents from the class of 1976 worked had 25 attorneys, 5 legal assistants, and 25 nonlegal staff, although the range was great. One-third of firm respondents were in firms with over 50 other attorneys.

The average lawyer respondent in the class of 1976 reported working the equivalent of a 52-week, 42 hours per week year. The activities on which this time was spent varied widely among individuals, with drafting legal documents and client counseling being the only activities on which the average respondent spent more than 10% of his or her time. Similarly, substantive specialties were widely varied. If a "specialty" is defined by spending more than 25% of one's time on a substantive area, 58% of respondents had one specialty, 33% two, 3% three, and 5% had none. The most common specialties were corporate and commercial law (36% of respondents), torts and personal injury (15%), and real property (11%).

As to clientele, respondents in the class of 1976 averaged 25% of their time on work for individuals, 20% for small businesses, 37% for larger businesses, 17% for government and other organizations. Despite UM Law School's image as a producer of lawyers for large firms serving large corporations, 41% of respondents spent a majority of their time serving individuals and small businesses.

Earnings from principal occupation reported by members of the class of 1976 averaged \$16,500 in the first year after law school, and \$40,500 in the fifth year. (In 1982 inflation-adjusted dollars, the amounts were \$26,200 and \$42,900.) In 1982, only 13% of the class of 1976 had incomes below \$25,000, 68% in the \$25,-50,000 range, and 20% from \$50,000 to \$100,000. Lawyers tended to earn about 10% more than nonlawyers, solo practitioners and firm partners more than others, persons in larger cities more than those in smaller, those in larger offices more than those in smaller.

The majority of respondents were satisfied with their career overall and with the balance of family and professional life, income, ability to solve problems for specific clients, intellectual challenge, prestige in the community. There was one area of dissatisfaction: only 13% were highly satisfied with their ability to bring about social change. Overall, 72% of respondents were satisfied with their careers, and only 4% dissatisfied. Lowest levels of satisfaction were associated with low incomes, associate status in a firm or nonsupervisory status elsewhere, and being unmarried. The six aspects of career satisfaction appear to make fairly equal contributions to overall satisfaction, with intellectual challenge and prestige having somewhat more weight than the others.