

## University of Michigan Law School

[by Mike Murphy]

One of the oldest and most respected law schools in the country, the University of Michigan offers students a top-notch legal education and a close-knit community.

Founded in 1859, the University of Michigan has one of the oldest law schools in the nation; a public, top-ten U.S. News & World Report-ranked law school nestled in the center of one of the nation's largest universities.

It's also in the prettiest part of town. The William W. Cook Law Quadrangle is the poster child of the University of Michigan campus; pictures of it grace the cover of university recruiting materials and end up in countless tourist and wedding photo albums. When a character from the NBC drama ER moved to Ann Arbor to start medical school, the "law quad" stood in for the medical school campus. It makes sense; the quad is a sheltered oasis of green in a bustling part of campus, and its late Gothic architecture really is breathtaking - so long as you disregard the admittedly ugly addition from the 1970s, currently slated for demolition at some point in the future. The law quad also houses about 260 students in the "Lawyer's Club," a law-student only dormitory housing mostly first-year students.

Michigan Law may be considered one of the best public law schools in the nation; but it's as expensive as any top private law school - probably because the school receives virtually none of its operating budget from its parent university. For all intents and purposes, it is a private school. Expected tuition for Michigan Law students in 2003-2004 is \$27,850 for Michigan residents and \$32,850 for non-residents. Grants, especially for out-of-state students, are not uncommon.

The law library is rather new and, literally,

underground. Built underneath the Legal Research building, it offers over 941,000 volumes and goes down to three sub-levels. Admission into Michigan Law isn't easy. For the class of 2006, 5,436 applicants produced a class of 406, the school's largest since the Vietnam War (read: draft) era. Median GPAs of 3.6 and LSAT scores of 167 are daunting, but not unassailable; the school prides itself on creating a diverse entering class and really does take all factors into account for its admission decisions. The law school's admissions policies recently stood up to a legal challenge before the Supreme Court. A June, 2003 decision in *Grutter vs. Bollinger* upheld the use of affirmative action by the law school in its decisions to admit students.

Two-thirds of Michigan Law students work for private firms upon graduation; another 20% go on to judicial clerkships. The remainder of graduates find work in a mix of government, public interest, business, and academia - adding to an employment rate of nearly 100%. For those remaining students interested in devoting their efforts solely to the government or public sector, Michigan Law makes an effort to help, offering a student-funded fellowship program that subsidizes some (not all) of students' summer jobs in public interest internships. Michigan also boasts a progressive debt forgiveness program in an attempt to offset potentially prohibitive large student loan debt.

Michigan Law is proud of its International and Comparative law programs. All students are required to take a course in Transnational Law, a unique requirement among U.S.

law schools. The school boasts six study-abroad programs and encourages students to initiate their own. Externships abroad are encouraged and common among students with interest in International law; workshops in International law and "language lunches" for bilingual students are weekly occurrences.

Communicating in English is also common, whether in class or in the pages of Michigan Law's several student publications. The Michigan Law Review is one of the best and most-cited in the nation. Publishing since 1902, its annual book review issue is traditionally one of the most-cited law review issues. Michigan also offers the Michigan Journal of Law Reform, Michigan Journal of Race & Law, Michigan Journal of Gender & Law and Michigan Journal of International Law and the Michigan Telecommunications and Technology Law Review. There's also a student newspaper, the *Res Gestae* (a Latin term meaning "things done," a legal term for an obscure rule of evidence that allows otherwise hearsay evidence to be admissible in court) which has been publishing student news and commentary for over 50 years.

That sort of pedigree, combined with an average class size of 350 means an extraordinarily large alumni base. With over 19,000 alumni, it may be a challenge to find a large law firm in America that doesn't have a Michigan State alum on staff. Three Supreme Court Justices are alums, as well as several dozen other famous alumni, including Clarence Darrow, Senator Richard Gephardt and conservative columnist Ann Coulter.



Ann Arbor is widely regarded as a cultural hub of the Midwest; its art fair in the summer months attracts thousands of visitors. It's a town whose population increases by one-and-a-half times its size (to about 115,000) from August to April. The University of Michigan football team is a perennial contender for both the Big Ten title and National Championship; Michigan students know better than to try and drive in or out of the city on football Saturdays. (Nearly 115,000 fit into Michigan Stadium to see a football game against Notre Dame last year). The closest major airport, Detroit Metropolitan, is 30 minutes away. Students needing a break from the smaller atmosphere of Ann Arbor can go to Detroit and its large metropolitan area 50 miles to the east, or take a train or bus to Chicago in a couple of hours.

Students hailing from a warm climate should be warned -- Michigan winters have been arguably mild in recent years, but are generally not for the faint of heart or the easily chilled. Cold snaps and snowfalls of several inches are not uncommon a few times each winter. An old wives' tale has it that long ago M-Law students once sued the University for their tuition money back after a snow day of canceled classes; regardless of the story's veracity, classes haven't been canceled due to inclement weather in anyone's memory. Most Michigan Law students live at the law quad in ample (not cheap) student housing a short walk from campus; that short walk can seem long and dangerous on icy mornings and late-night returns.

Michigan is one of few national schools to offer a summer starter program; about one-fourth of each year's entering class matriculates in late May. Summer starters enjoy a relaxed first-year class schedule and the opportunity to take a semester off or graduate a semester early; the program is offered mostly to students who've taken a break between undergraduate study and their law school career. Most students wouldn't want to go directly from graduating with a bachelor's

degree to law school, and the admissions office at Michigan understands that.

Michigan Law is also surprisingly accommodating for clinics, externships and studies abroad. Joint degree students are also common; the University of Michigan has top-ranked programs in business, medicine and science. Non-joint degree students can take up to nine credits pass/fail from outside of the law school. Many students take advantage of this option to study a language or take a business course (or two). In any given year, 60-75 students earn joint degrees.

The social scene among Michigan Law students is surprisingly congenial and helpful for a school of its reputation. A wireless network covers about 75 percent of the school and is free for students; laptops are ubiquitous in class and instant messaging is an art form among classmates. Michigan Law students help each other succeed, and students who sacrifice friendships among classmates in exchange for better class performance are rare and generally not popular. Students of different ethnicities and sexual orientations are widely accepted and their differences overlooked; few students hail from the surrounding area, but most feel at home.

In the same vein, Ann Arbor may be extraordinarily friendly and progressive, but it also isn't too large of a city. The upside is that it's difficult for one to go to Michigan Law and not make close friends for life, the downside is that it's not uncommon to have a difficult time trying to get away from one's classmates. With a large portion of the first year class living in the same dormitory, mere feet from the library and classrooms, life as a Michigan Law student can quickly resemble life in a fishbowl. That said, it's all in good fun. Michigan Law students are generally a positive, sociable bunch who learn together, eat together, and go out together; and the University of Michigan is more than an accommodating environment for who they are and what they do.