

# Increasing numbers of women in University School of Law exhibit increasing sense of identity

The composition of the University's School of Law over the last three years has been showing a steady increase in the number of women admitted and enrolled. From a total of 11 women of the 151 students enrolled in the fall class of 1970 to the 40 women members of the 149-member fall 1972 entering class, the University, like law schools across the country, is no longer a solidly male domain.

Established in Portland in 1884, the law school took up residence in Eugene in 1915 where it became a regular part of the university system.

As far as available records show, 86 women have graduated from the law school since 1896. For a 77-year period that's a little over one woman per year.

If most law schools have followed a similar pattern, that is one explanation for the 1963 count of the total number of women practicing law in the United States. At the time of that census 2.7 percent of all practicing lawyers were female.

## Diversity of goals

If anything characterizes the University's female student lawyers, it is their wide diversity of goals and backgrounds, their refusal to place themselves or each other in a single pigeonhole labeled "women law students."

On just about every relevant issue — from political stance to opinions on faculty approachability and administrative responsiveness — positions can be found among the women on either end of the spectrum and all degrees in between.

James White, while teaching at the University of Michigan Law School

published an extensive research report in the 1966-67 Michigan Law Review, seeking to clear up what he saw as some of the contradictory and confusing rumors "about the composition and status of this female segment of the bar."



Bobbie Sheperd

Judging from the women studying law here at the University, White might find it interesting to run his study again and update his findings. There appears to be not

just an increase in the number of women entering the law profession, but marked differences between the women coming to

by social convention as belonging to men requires self-confidence and determination. A positive self image, one not

Stories by Paula Ross Photos by Trish Weisman

the law in the 70s and those of the 50s and early 60s — the population from which White drew his sample.

Women law students at the University have advanced degrees in the sciences and work experience in courtroom reporting and journalism. Some entered law school directly out of college and others have taken time to marry and rear children before beginning their law careers.

There is among these women a strong awareness that as a group they command a wide variety of viewpoints, experiences and perceptions and that variety makes them an extremely interesting collection of people.

## Wide range of interests

This wide range of social interests, academic training and job experience is certainly due in part to the simple increase in numbers of women attending the law school. And the growth of the women's movement can be given some credit for creating an atmosphere in which more women, if not actually encouraged to embark upon "male" careers, are not actively discouraged either.

But some other factor seems to be operating with the women at the University — something more basic than feminism. The impression is that whether or not women as a group had been moved to initiate changes in their social and economic positions, these women would still be here.

The decision to enter a field designated

terribly dependent on social approval for its maintenance, is necessary to effectively deal with both overt and subtle



Julie Andersen

disapproval of such a course of action. It appears these women possess the requisite assurance and motivation to pursue whatever goals they see as appropriate. General approval to them is hardly relevant.

The women also display a much stronger sense of determination and motivation to succeed than is found in men of similar backgrounds and capabilities. Realizing that, in addition to the rigorous training and long hours of study expected of law students, they are also flying in the face of social expectations of what are considered fitting career pursuits for women. By the time they reach the point of actual professional training, they have narrowed themselves down to a pretty tough group.

## No sex discrimination

None of several women law students interviewed were willing to attribute any feelings of differentness or discrimination to their sex. Although most readily admitted that prejudice against women exists, none felt they as individuals had been or were victims of prejudice.

Florence King will be entering her second year of law school this August. She has two daughters, one a graduate music student in Boston. Third year student Joyce Benjamin's family has been growing up in the years prior to her entrance into law school. These women expressed a consciousness of being older than their colleagues — both male and female — rather than feeling any distinction due to sex.

## Analysis

Jo Pickford, a second year law student, feels that her scientific training, if anything, is the significant factor setting

her somewhat apart from the majority of her fellow students. And for Wendy Weiss, second year, there is a tremendous gap between her involvement and continued interest in non-



Jennifer Wyman

conventional politics, and what she perceives as a much less energized and radical climate for politics and social movements at the University.

The emphasis, it appears, is on dimensions other than sex, which by itself seems to exercise little, if any, influence on these women's perceptions of their positions in law school.

## Success 'not unfamiliar'

Success is not unfamiliar to most of the women. They are accustomed to academic competition and achievements. And often they have been involved in other male-dominated fields prior to their entrance into law school.

So, whereas there is a general consensus that prejudice against women in the profession exists, it appears irrelevant to the individual women who succeed. Their qualifications and credentials, along with their own refusal to acknowledge anything unusual about themselves, tends to neutralize the fact of their sex. They seem to have developed somewhat of a buffer between them and experiences of sex discrimination.

"It just never enters my head to think that I won't be listened to, or my opinions won't be counted simply because I'm a woman," summed up Wendy Weiss.

That attitude seems to discount the complaint of some social critics who feel that men in society, not women, are encouraged to be verbally aggressive and analytical, and are reinforced for taking strong positions and logically defending them.

These skills are assets in going after a legal degree.

Having actually sought out and achieved admission to a graduate program, odds are that women have some ability for debate.

The aggressive, verbally agile students, termed "the articulate minority" by Jo Pickford, do have an edge over the less

aggressive majority. However, the women students agreed that most male students, as well as female, must deal with and attempt to avoid being buried beneath the barrage of legal pyrotechnics engaged in by a few of their classmates.

The women at the University Law School emerge as competent, self-confident, highly individual people. They possess their sex in common, but little else. Competing in a so-called men's world is for most of them a comfortable, familiar activity.



Jo Pickford



Ode to Joy

Law Professor  
Barbara Aldive:  
'She wouldn't  
acknowledge . . .  
being different  
than the men.'

Barbara Aldave, assistant professor, came to the Law School in 1970 from the Eugene law firm of Johnson, Johnson and Harrang where she had been an associate.

Though she made the initial move in seeking out a faculty position, she remembers that subsequent contacts eventually leading to her appointment were carried on by the Law School itself. It was only after she had joined the faculty that the School was interested, during the time she was being considered, in hiring a woman. That was not an obvious factor to her while negotiations were going on prior to her engagement.

Like the women students she teaches, Aldave could not or would not acknowledge any sense of feeling different than her male colleagues — in spite of the fact that she is the only full-time female on the faculty.

She originally planned a career in law but wound up in chemistry for a while. She said when she attended high school, during the 50's Sputnik era, "anybody with scientific talents was strongly encouraged, almost swept up into a science career."

Even in her job as a chemist, however, she had many contacts with lawyers, patent lawyers in particular. And when she weighed the three years of law school against the longer commitment required for advanced training in chemistry, she decided to follow up her initial interest in law.

There was little or no adjustment to make in coming from chemistry to law — women are a minority in both fields.

And for the minority of legal women there have always been areas of law considered to be their territory. One of those areas is juvenile law.

Aldave found juvenile law "extremely satisfying" during her practice. She feels that most other areas of the law require very basic reforms before any one person can bring about change. But she thinks individual solutions are possible in juvenile law.

And she feels that she was able to accomplish some of those solutions herself.

The classes she is responsible for in the Law School, however, do not fall into the category of "women's subjects." If any of her male colleagues have reservations or think that she's encroaching on their turf, she says they keep pretty quiet about it. But she adds there probably just isn't much objection to her presence in the school that potentially could be expressed.

When asked if she saw any difference between the women who choose law as their profession today and those with whom she attended law school at the University of California at Berkeley, she pointed out two major distinctions:

There seems today to be a much stronger emphasis on social issues at the expense of being highly successful financially.

And the women she observes today just starting their law careers seem to possess a definite group identity as women. They want to be "women" lawyers dealing with legal issues particularly relevant to women. Her classmates, she says, were a definite minority, but had no sense of themselves as a conscious group.

Aldave expressed general sympathy with the goals of the women's movement. She believes the increase in the number of women applying to and entering law school may well be due in part to the movement.

Certain "radical fringes," as she called them, are responsible for some unreasonable demands that she cannot accept as valid. But she said any movement is going to have its fringes and those people serve a purpose. Not only do they call attention to the movement or group as a whole, she said, but the radical or "far-out" demands and goals of those on the edge make by comparison the majority's views that much more acceptable.

As far as discrimination in the legal profession goes, Aldave feels that it is not the law schools that present the major obstacles. Academia tends traditionally to be more liberal on issues of equality of treatment than does the society at large, she said. It is legal firms and businesses in which the greatest amount of resistance to women in law is to be found, she added.

And that is one reason why Aldave is emphatically against the preferential admission of women to the law school. Admitting women who have little possibility of success when they have to compete on the job market will furnish law firms with a perfect excuse to continue their discriminatory hiring practices, she stressed.

As it is now, complaints that there just aren't many qualified lawyers who also happen to be women, are invalid, she observed. Aldave believes women in law are as a group more qualified and highly motivated than men as a group. They have had to be, she said, in order to survive.

Aldave will be on leave from the University during the 1973-74 academic year.

But her replacement will be another woman.

## Women assume administrative roles

A large part of the responsibility for the smooth functioning of Oregon's law school is in the hands of two women — Lois Ackerman, administrative assistant and Becky Anderson, admissions officer.

Ackerman's job, which she has held for some thirteen years, involves a lot of student contact and problem-solving. She does some class scheduling, handles transcripts and manages staff. In general, she can answer just about any question having to do with the law school, or at least knows where to start looking for the answers.

Beginning as assistant admissions officer, Anderson became admissions officer a little over a year ago. She describes her position as partly public relations — explaining law school policies and decisions — and partly advisory.

Senior undergraduates wanting information about different law schools, what they offer, how to apply to them, go to Anderson for help. There is also a mound of paper work involved in admissions procedures. She either does or sees that it all gets done — a rather formidable job all by itself.

