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# A tribute to Larry Kalevitch, Man for All Seasons, Differences in Professional School Cohorts in Law, Medicine, Business, Nursing and Education

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# **LARRY KALEVITCH, MAN FOR ALL SEASONS: DIFFERENCES IN PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL STUDENT COHORTS—LAW, MEDICINE, BUSINESS, NURSING, AND EDUCATION**

ALLEN E. SHOENBERGER\*

Larry Kalevitch was a force of nature, a vital, engaged and engaging person, who was virtually impossible to stop whenever he set his mind to something. Whether it was action in the classroom, or the tennis court, he was always pressing, trying to do better, to do more. Yet he practiced his profession as a teacher with a rare degree of grace and good humor, just as he practiced his friendship.

I had the fortune to be associated with Larry in a multi-year funded research project.<sup>1</sup> Little did we know how complicated a research project we had undertaken. That project involved survey research of students in the professional disciplines: law, medicine, dentistry, social work, business, and nursing. During that project an enormous amount of data was collected, from students at various schools of each variety, over multiple years, three years for law schools, medical schools, and dental schools, and two years for MSW, MBA, and graduate nursing degrees. It is in partial tribute to Larry that some of the more interesting conclusions are listed below. They testify to Larry's quest for answers about basic questions; questions about how life is organized—at least professional life—if it is. Would similar answers be given by current students in these professional disciplines? While that question cannot be directly answered, we were surprised with the degree to which law students in an earlier study in the 1950's answered similarly to law students in the 1970's.

## **WHEN DO STUDENTS DECIDE TO GO TO PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS?**

When students are freshmen in college, 85% of nursing students report they already have decided on their profession. Slightly more than 40% of medical and dental students report the respective professions as their profes-

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1. The National Institute of Education funded a joint project on professional education, Grant No. NEG 00 3 0071. Virtually all of the data reported herein is contained in Shoenberger and Kalevitch, *Professional Education Project, Interim Report*, submitted to the United States Secretary of Education, 1978. To simplify this brief essay, footnotes are omitted, but the voluminous report is available from the author.

sion of choice. Only slightly more than a third of law students (36%) indicate law was their first choice as a freshman. About one in seven professional students in social work (MSW) or business (MBA) report such an early choice.

By their senior year in college, 73% of medical and 72% of dental students indicate they have settled on their choice of profession. Law students indicate law their first choice at the level of 64%. Nursing students indicate nursing their first choice at a 95% level. By contrast fewer than half of MBA students and social work students indicate that they had determined their choice of an MBA or MSW by their senior year in college.

#### WHAT MOTIVATES A STUDENT TO SELECT A PROFESSION?

Contrary to popular expectations, books, television, and movies were reported as minor factors. Fewer than 10% of each professional student group reported such influences as determinative.

Far more important was personal contact with members of the profession, particularly for medical and dental students (at a 70% level). Nursing, MBA and social work students reported personal contact determinative between 50 and 60% of the time. The most surprising data was that only about a third of law students indicated personal contact with lawyers determinative.

Work experience was prominently mentioned as most important for 69% of social work students. Only 19% of law students and dental students reported such experience. Nursing came in at 45%, and MBA and medical students at 33 and 31% respectively.

Thus, law students appear to enter the profession of law with the lowest prior contact with lawyer professionals and with the practice of law. What does this portend for the profession? Does this absence of contact contribute to a high drop out rate from the practice of law? Alternatively, does this suggest that there is a relatively more important role of professional modeling for law schools?

In sharp contrast, in the health professions nearly half of the medical students and over 60% of the nursing students reported having some exposure to the profession in a work setting.

#### DID THE STUDENTS MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE AS PERCEIVED IN THE FIRST YEAR OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL?

Data existed on this parameter for an earlier cohort of law students in the 1950's. Law school respondents in both decades similarly reported that law was the only career they perceived as satisfying. Thirty-one percent in the 1950's and 27% in the 1970's. After a year of law school, both studies

indicate a modest drop off in commitment to a legal career, demonstrating perhaps stability both of students in law school over the several decades, as well as in the law school experience.

#### HOW SUCCESSFUL DO PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS EXPECT TO BE IN THEIR PROFESSIONS?

Business students reported the highest level of self-expectation, fully 52% of MBA students expected to be in either the top 1% or 10% of their peers. Comparable percentages for other professions were also high: law 41%, medical 38%, dental 37%, social work and nursing 37%.

A year of professional school resulted in declines of these expectations for medical students, although only by 6%. Social work students in contrast reported slightly increased confidence (40%), while nursing students jumped substantially to 50%. Business students continued to rate themselves highly, although the self reported 49% figure was slightly below first year MBA students.

#### ARE LAW STUDENTS MORE COMFORTABLE WITH COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY THAN OTHER PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS?

Law students report enjoying competition at a consistently higher level than most other professional student groups. Over three years, 43, 49, and 47% of all law students indicated that they enjoy competition. Comparable figures for the other groups of professional students are 34, 34, and 28%. Business students, however, report even higher level of enjoyment of competition than law students, reporting 53 and 49% over two years that they enjoy competition. Social work students and dental students report they dislike competition at the highest levels, 47 and 48%. Nursing students and medical students similarly report that 35 and 37% respectively dislike competition.

Personal enjoyment of competition closely tracked attitudes towards competition's value to society. The most positive attitude towards competition was registered by MBA students, 51% first year and 65% second year. However, nurses were not far behind with 41 and 45% respectively. As expected, far fewer social worker students, 24 and 25% thought competition good, results quite comparable to medical students, 24 and 31%. Law students and dental students reported similar scores of 30 and 39% (law) and 27 and 36% (dental).

### ARE THE STUDENTS WORKING FOR MONEY DURING SCHOOL?

A high proportion is working, in *each* of the professional student groups. Law students report that they have paying jobs over the 3 year law school experience at rates of 44, 70 and 83%. Non-law students report working at rates of 66, 69 and 51%. The drop off for non-law students primarily reflects the fact that social work, MBA, and nursing graduate degrees are two years in length, thus the professional cohorts change substantially. The percentage of medical students and dental students working similarly increased from second to third years, from 40% to 53% in medicine and 30 to 48% for dental students.

The study looked at whether there were significant differences in the rates of law student working at different "levels" of law schools under a resource ranking developed by Professor Charles Kelso. These rankings were an early attempt to rank law schools that preceded the *U.S. News and World Report* rankings. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this data is that each level of law school, as self reported by students, contains substantial numbers of students who are working during law school's second year. Overall, by the second year of law school, 43.9% of law students were working part-time jobs averaging 19 hours per week. With the current high cost of law school tuition and competition for post graduation jobs, little reason exists to believe fewer students are working today.

### ARE THERE DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES BETWEEN THE DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL COHORTS?

Differences exist on a multitude of variables. In a short article it is only possible to report on a few of these differences.

Law students are far more *interested in political affairs* (67% very interested) than any other professional students. Business and social work students claim they are very interested slightly less than 50%. Medical students and dental students comparable reports are in the 30% category, and nursing students below 20%.

The student groups differ in *gregariousness*, with dental students and social work students spending the least amount of time talking to fellow students in casual conversation. Dental students report the highest amount of class preparation time. On the whole, business students, social work, and nursing students report far less class preparation time than law, medical, and dental students. However, for these last three groups, there is a significant drop off in class preparation time for the second year of professional school.

Comparisons within different resource levels of law school, at least in the first year indicated significant differences. At one of the 'high ranked'

law schools, there was a significantly higher amount of class study time reported in the first year. However, by the second year of law school this difference disappeared.

*Anxiety* is a problem for all professional students. Surprisingly, however, dental students and nursing students express the highest degree of anxiety the first year of professional school. Law and business students overall express the lowest levels of anxiety! Both law students and medical students report that anxiety decreases between the first and second year of professional school. Dental and social work students also report some decrease in anxiety, but not to a statistical significance. Nursing students report an increase in anxiety the second year, but not significantly so.

By comparison with the last year of college, mental stress and pressure was ranked far higher by dental students (68%) and law students (63%) the first year of professional school. Medical students reported stress far higher at a 39% level, social work and MBA at 33 and 32% respectively, and nursing far higher 17%.

Within the law school cohort, differences of stress were reported at a statistically significant level, ranging from far higher at one school at a 38% level to two schools reporting far higher stress at a 78% level. The two rural law schools reported similar stress levels, 76% at each. It thus appears that one of the major differences between law schools is the perceived stress level.

How do *grades* factor into this perceived stress? We inquired as to perceptions of how important grades were in relation to career success. Nurses, interestingly enough, rated such a relationship the highest. Closely behind were law students, however, followed by a cohort of medical, dental, and social work students. MBA students thought grades the least important factor in success.

The different professional cohorts report statistically different attitudes towards the *importance of a pleasing personality in professional success*. Dental, medical and nursing students rate this very important at a much higher level than do law students. The first year ratings were respectively: Dental, 63% most important, medicine 50%, nursing 49%, law 33%. MBA and social work were quite close at 46 and 45% respectively for the first year.

Attitudes towards *cheating* differed significantly between the different professional cohorts. Law, medicine, and nursing indicated the fewest number of do-nothing responses. Dental students were next, then business and social work students. The most frequent action likely to be taken, however, was to talk to the fellow student. Within law schools there were significant differences regarding cheating. At one school, nearly 30% indicated they would report cheating to an authority. At other law schools, no student indi-

cated they would do so. Strong support exists for the proposition that school culture strongly contributes to the likelihood of action about cheating.

The study inquired into the perceived importance of grades, good social background, concern with the welfare of others, knowing the right people, the ability to put aside everything but work, the ability to analyze problems, extensive knowledge of facts, research ability, luck, ability to get along with others, writing and other specific abilities, as well as a host of other factors as they contribute to potential success in the respective professions. Frequently sharp differences were displayed between different professional cohorts—suggesting that there are substantial differences between the people who enter the different professions.

The study examined the perceived atmospheres of various law schools over a three-year study period. None of the factors studied are contained as factors in the U.S. News and World Report rankings. Yet it is abundantly clear that statistically significant differences exist between the law schools in relationship to school atmosphere characteristics, such as tension. For a potential law student, perhaps this should be significant criteria in choosing a particular law school over another.

Law students uniformly reported that they were less well-prepared for class as they proceeded through the school years, until by year 3, fully 42% confess they are usually behind in class preparation. No other professional school cohort demonstrates such a sharp fall off in preparation.

Finally, the survey indicated that law students as a group were significantly different on a number of criteria from other professional cohorts. Some of these factors aptly describe Larry Kalevitch.

Courage, independence, disrespectful, and valuing an exciting life are several such categories. Larry left a well established law school in Chicago, my school, to help form a newly created school in the wilds of Florida. No doubt he fostered a school in his image, a school of courage, independent thinking—disrespectful and exciting. He will not be forgotten.