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Some Associate Salaries Retreat from Their High But Remain Far Ahead of Salaries for Public Service Attorneys

Recent research from NALP reveals that associate salaries at law firms were largely flat between 2009 and 2010, although median salaries in some markets fell back. During this same period, salaries for lawyers working in the public interest have also been largely flat, and the gap between private sector and public interest lawyer salaries remains as large as ever.

NALP's *2010 Associate Salary Survey* shows that, although the \$160,000 salary for first-year associates still prevails at large firms in a number of markets, including Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington, DC, in other markets, such as Boston and San Francisco, the median has dropped back to \$145,000, reflecting salaries ranging from \$110,000 to \$160,000. Even in those markets where the prevailing figure remains at \$160,000, salaries of \$130,000 to \$145,000 figure more prominently than was the case at the time of the 2009 report, confirming the characterization of 2009 as the recent high-water mark for large law firm salaries.

The overall median first-year salary was \$115,000, and ranged from \$72,000 in firms of 2-25 lawyers to \$117,500 in firms of 501-700 lawyers, and \$160,000 in firms of more than 700 lawyers, with the latter figure accounting for 58% of reported first-year salaries in firms that size, and also representing the high. The median at firms of 251-500 lawyers remained unchanged at \$125,000, while that at firms of 500-700 lawyers declined by several thousand dollars, reflecting relatively more reporting of salaries of \$110,000, \$115,000, and \$145,000 compared with 2009.

NALP also recently published the *2010 Public Sector and Public Interest Attorney Salary Report*, a biennial report that provides salary information for both entry-level and experienced attorneys at public sector and public interest organizations. This report serves as a companion piece to NALP's annual *Associate Salary Survey*.

According to this new report, the median entry-level salary for an attorney at a civil legal services organization is \$42,000; an attorney with 11-15 years of experience can expect a salary of about \$62,000. The median entry-level salary for public defenders is about \$45,700; with 11-15 years of experience, the median is about \$76,000. The salary scale for local prosecuting attorneys is slightly higher, starting at \$50,000 and progressing to \$81,500 for those with 11-15 years of experience. Finally, salaries for attorneys in public interest organizations with issue-driven missions — such as those dealing with women's or environmental issues — start at \$45,000 and rise to about \$71,000 with 11-15 years of experience.

Together the two reports provide a basis for comparing private law firm and public sector/public interest salaries. The contrasts remain stark and alarming, notwithstanding salary decreases at some large law firms. For

example, the median salary for a fifth-year associate ranges from \$90,000 to almost \$190,000, depending on firm size. In contrast, attorneys with similar experience at public sector and public interest organizations can expect salaries of roughly \$50,000 to \$60,000. The \$160,000 first-year salary still offered at many big firms in big cities — or even \$145,000 or \$130,000 — is beyond what even the most experienced attorneys can reasonably expect at a public sector or public interest organization. Finally, it is also evident, based on comparisons to findings in previous reports, the first of which was in 2004, that salaries at public interest organizations have increased only modestly since then — by not more than \$15,000, and less for more junior attorneys. Although these changes are in line with those at small law firms, during this same period the typical first-year salary in a large firm in a major market increased from \$125,000 to as much as \$160,000.

“The *2010 Associate Salary Survey* makes it clear that associate salaries have come down in a small but measurable way, more so in some markets than others, but they have not come down nearly as much as we thought they might at the height of the recession,” noted James Leipold, NALP’s executive director. “The real story on associate salaries is that they have been largely flat during the recession, and that is actually better news than we might have hoped for.” Leipold went on to say, “Of more importance is the persistent gap between private sector and public interest lawyer salaries that these two surveys so dramatically document. Even as some private sector associate salaries have fallen back during the recession, this gap has not diminished, and is not likely to diminish in the near future.”

NALP’s Associate Salary Survey Provides Detailed Look at Lawyer Salaries in Years 1 - 8

A total of 588 offices provided salary information as of April 1, 2010 for NALP’s *2010 Associate Salary Survey*. With 11% of respondents representing firms of 50 or fewer lawyers and 40% representing firms of more than 500 lawyers, the report sheds valuable light on the breadth of salary differentials among employers of varying sizes at the national level.

As expected, each year of associate experience brings several thousand dollars in increased compensation: median salaries for eighth-year associates ranged from \$102,500 in small firms to about \$230,000 in the largest firms, with a median for all reporting firms of \$160,000.

The volume of data reported on this year’s survey allowed analyses for 28 individual cities as well as many additional states and regions not encompassed by those cities. These analyses reveal a wide range of law firm compensation. For example, the overall prevailing salary for first-year associates in firms of more than 700 lawyers was \$160,000 in all regions but the South, where the median was \$135,000. The highest first-year salary reported was \$170,000. Salaries of \$160,000 were not typical everywhere — the median in cities such as Detroit, Indianapolis, New Orleans, and St. Louis was \$100,000. Contrasts between large and smaller metropolitan areas are also evident. For example, in large metropolitan areas with a population of more than 5 million, the median first-year salary in firms of 250-700 lawyers was \$135,000; in metropolitan areas of fewer than 1.5 million, the median was \$100,000.

The *2010 Associate Salary Survey* also gathered information on salaries for intellectual property lawyers as well as on salary levels for staff attorneys and law clerks. Information on salaries for intellectual property attorneys was more limited, and in large part reported by firms of more than 250 lawyers. The information reported suggests that, compared with these size firms as a whole, IP lawyers may command a salary that is about \$20,000 higher for junior associates but that the differential is larger among more senior associates.

However, when IP salaries are compared with those of the very largest firms (those of more than 700 lawyers) as a whole, medians are very similar. Also, not all firms with IP lawyers have a differentiated salary scale.

Salaries for staff attorneys are typically just over \$100,000 per year and were most commonly reported by small firms of 50 or fewer attorneys and midsize firms of 101-500 attorneys. Median hourly salaries for law clerks range from \$24 to \$50 per hour depending on firm size.

More detailed results by city and region for associates through the eighth year, information on compensation structures, and new information on salary ranges and bonuses are found in the complete *2010 Associate Salary Survey* report, now available from NALP's bookstore for \$135 plus shipping and handling.

Median Base Salaries by Associate Year and Firm Size (as of April 1, 2010)

Associate Year	FIRM SIZE — Number of Lawyers															
	2-25		26-50		51-100		101-250		251-500		501-700		701+		All Sizes	
	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept	Median	# Rept
First.....	\$72,000	21	\$95,000	21	\$95,000	49	\$105,000	96	\$125,000	107	\$117,500	80	\$160,000*	69	\$115,000	443
Second.....	76,500	18	103,000	25	99,775	52	110,000	85	125,000	96	122,700	80	165,000	89	120,375	445
Third.....	82,800	21	101,500	25	104,000	49	111,950	86	130,675	96	135,000	85	170,000	88	127,500	450
Fourth.....	83,750	18	103,500	26	104,250	52	117,000	85	135,000	98	137,500	86	176,800	88	132,400	453
Fifth.....	90,000	19	106,500	23	103,000	49	120,000	81	144,000	100	143,750	78	188,750	93	137,500	443
Sixth.....	94,300	18	109,425	20	105,500	49	120,000	81	147,000	91	151,500	71	210,000	91	144,000	421
Seventh.....	110,000	15	112,000	21	120,750	46	126,750	80	156,700	92	166,400	69	225,000	85	153,850	408
Eighth.....	102,500	14	114,950	18	125,225	40	135,000	73	161,625	88	177,500	60	235,675	79	160,000	372
Summer Associates (\$/week)																
1st year.....	1,025	10	1,275	12	1,100	29	1,800	59	2,100	37	1,775	38	2,875	49	1,925	234
2nd year.....	1,200	17	1,525	22	1,550	39	1,900	92	2,400	63	2,300	57	3,075	77	2,125	367
3rd year.....	1,000	9	1,700	6	1,900	10	1,800	14	3,075	23	2,100	17	3,075	37	2,500	116

The "# Rept" column indicates the number of offices reporting. Medians have been rounded to the nearest \$25.

* This figure was reported by 58% of firms responding in this size category, and is also the high figure.

Public Sector/Public Interest Report Offers Analyses by Type of Public Service Employment and Years of Experience

The *2010 Public Sector and Public Interest Attorney Salary Report* is based on a nationwide survey conducted by NALP among civil legal services organizations; offices of public defenders; local prosecuting attorneys; and public interest organizations. The survey was completed by 572 organizations, and the study benchmarks salaries for each type of organization for each of the first seven years, then in increments for attorneys with 8-10 years of experience, 11-15 years of experience, and more than 15 years of experience. In addition to national salary figures, the report provides sub-national analyses based on region of the country and population. The report also provides information about selected benefits and workplace policies, including the availability and cost of health and dental insurance, and whether or not the employer contributes to a retirement plan or has a Loan Repayment Assistance Program.

The “public interest organization” category is also further analyzed to focus on several subcategories of organizations based on the kinds of cases handled or issue areas advocated: international human rights/immigration law; women/children/domestic violence; health/disability law; and housing/homelessness. This categorization allowed for salary comparisons among organizations performing the same type of work. For example, the median entry-level salary at organizations involved with issues related to women/children/domestic violence is \$41,000, compared with \$48,700 at organizations involved with housing/homelessness issues. The report also has a section devoted entirely to compensation for federal government attorneys.

The full report, which includes more detail on all of the items mentioned above, is available from NALP for \$50, plus shipping and handling.

Median Salaries for Public Interest Attorneys by Type of Organization and Years of Experience (as of January 1, 2010)

Years of Experience	Civil Legal Services	Public Defenders	Local Prosecuting Attorneys	Public Interest Organizations
Entry-level	\$42,000	\$45,700	\$50,000	\$45,000
5 years	49,435	60,280	62,320	53,560
11-15 years.....	62,550	76,160	81,500	70,875

About NALP: Founded in 1971, the National Association for Law Placement, Inc.[®] (NALP) is dedicated to continuously improving career counseling and planning, recruitment and retention, and the professional development of law students, lawyers, and its members. NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at www.nalp.org/pressreleases. For additional information about NALP research, contact Judith Collins (jcollins@nalp.org), Director of Research, or James G. Leipold (jleipold@nalp.org), Executive Director, at 202-835-1001. Mailing address: National Association for Law Placement, 1025 Connecticut Avenue NW, Suite 1110, Washington, DC 20036-5413.