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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Law Firm Recruiting Volumes Inch Up, Making Modest Gains After Recession-Era Declines**

After losing more than 45,000 jobs during “the Great Recession,” the legal sector continued to erode jobs, albeit at a much slower pace, through the end of 2011, even as the national employment picture as a whole began to improve. Nevertheless, recruiting volumes by U.S. law firms on the campuses of U.S. law schools showed modest gains during the late summer and early fall of 2011, reflecting some growing confidence by law firm leadership. Entry-level recruiting volumes have certainly not returned to the robust levels routinely measured in the years leading up to the recession, but 2011 marked the second year in a row in which law firms returned to law school campuses in somewhat greater numbers than the year before after slashing their recruiting efforts in 2008 and 2009. These are among the key findings reported in NALP’s just-released *Perspectives on Fall 2011 Law Student Recruiting*, an annual report based on NALP surveys on selected aspects of fall recruitment activity and the experiences of both legal employers and law schools.

Despite the additional recruiting volume, law firms continue to bring in small summer classes, barely increasing class size from recession-era lows. By contrast, offer rates have returned to the highs seen before the recession as firms follow through with their stated intent to make offers to the majority of their summer associates when they can. For the third year in a row, few firms ventured back into the 3L market, and thus, students with offers from their summer program found few competing offers on the table. Between that and smaller class sizes, it is no surprise that the overall acceptance rate of offers from summer programs remained at historic highs in 2011.

For members of the Class of 2012, those who were summer associates in 2011, the offer rate for entry-level associate positions climbed up four percentage points, to 91.4%, following an approximately 18 percentage point jump the year before, those jumps coming on the heels of a 2009 rate that plunged to only 69.3%. At 91.4%, the 2011 offer rate is the second highest in more than 17 years, topped only by the 92.8% rate measured in 2007. The offer acceptance rate for these summer offers, after dipping slightly in 2010, returned to 85%, very close to the rate of 84.5% for 2009. It is important to keep in mind that the average summer class size did not increase from its historic recession-driven size, remaining at just 8 for the second year in a row, while the median class size bumped up by one, from 4 to 5. Only 18% of offices reported returning to the market to look for 3Ls who had not previously worked for them, and of those, one-quarter made no offers at all. Of those offices that made an offer, most made only one. (This compares with 42% of offices recruiting 3Ls in 2007 and 53% in 2006 on the high end, and on the other end of the scale, a bare 3% in 2009.)

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The markers that are used to measure 2L recruiting also rose for the second year in a row, though like their 3L counterparts, they remain well below the historic highs of the pre-recession era. Across employers of all sizes, the median number of offers extended rose from 9 to 10, up from 7 in 2009, but well off the medians of 15 and 16 measured in the years prior to the recession. Similarly, the mean number of offers rose to 22, from 19, and while this is up from an historic low of 16 in 2009, it remains well below the figure of 39 that was measured in 2007. The percent of callback interviews resulting in offers for summer positions also rose for a second year, to 46.4%, up from 40.6% in 2010 and an historic low of 36.4% in 2009. However, this marker likewise remains considerably below the offer rates of 60% and 62.7% measured in 2007 and 2006 respectively. With more offers on the table, the offer acceptance rate fell just over three percentage points, to 37.1%, down from 40.4% in 2010 and 42.8% in 2009; the acceptance rate, however, is still considerably higher than the rates in the high 20s and low 30s that were the norm in all of the years leading up to the recession. The actual number of offers made for 2012 summer associate spots by individual law firm offices, of course, ranged tremendously, from a low of just 1 to a high of 145. Similarly, the actual size of 2011 summer classes ranged from a low of just 1 in some offices to a high of 51 in a single office.

“This is not a hot recruiting market,” says James Leipold, NALP’s Executive Director, “but this sort of modest growth may well represent the best we can hope for with year on year comparisons going forward. I would anticipate volatility in the recruiting market for some time. For instance, 2012 is off to a slow start economically for law firms, and we may see that reflected in the recruiting numbers this August.”

In 2011, both law schools and law firms reported a net increase in recruiting activity as measured by the number of campus visits made, though in the aggregate both schools and firms reported both increases and decreases, with the numbers reporting increases edging out those reporting decreases in almost every market.

While law firm recruiting activity and volume vary greatly from one office to another, these national aggregate numbers clearly demonstrate that recruiting volumes continue to inch up for the second year in a row as law firms try to gauge the new normal. It seems clear that in the near future summer class size is not likely to return to what it was before the recession, and in fact may never return to what it was in 2007. Yet with the continued dramatic constriction of the 3L hiring market, success in the 2L market has become all the more important for law students. Competition for one of the coveted summer associate spots is likely to remain keen for the foreseeable future, as law firms are likely to remain conservative in their overall approach to entry-level hiring.

To read the full report including all of the data tables go to [www.nalp.org/perspectivesonfallrecruiting](http://www.nalp.org/perspectivesonfallrecruiting).

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