



1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401

Washington, DC 20036-2405

Phone: (202) 835-1001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 14, 2021

Contacts: James G. Leipold, NALP Executive Director, jleipold@nalp.org

Danielle A. Taylor, NALP Director of Research, dtaylor@nalp.org

Phone: (202) 835-1001

First-Year Associate Salaries Show Modest Growth at Large Firms; 2020 Salary Reductions Put in Place Due to the Pandemic Don't Have Lasting Impact

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The **National Association for Law Placement** (NALP) today released its **2021 Associate Salary Survey** report, showing that the overall median first-year associate base salary as of Jan. 1, 2021 was \$165,000, up \$10,000 (6.5%) from 2019, the year of the last survey administration. Law firms of more than 250 lawyers accounted for about 78% of the 572 responses.

“Despite widespread media reports of austerity measures implemented by law firms during the pandemic, including delays in partner draws and in some cases temporary salary reductions for lawyers, the findings from NALP’s latest *Associate Salary Survey* show that associate compensation has continued to grow over the last two years, with first-year associate compensation of \$190,000 now measured as the most common starting salary, reflecting the continued strength of the legal sector despite a difficult year,” said James G. Leipold, NALP’s Executive Director.

Salary increases were not universal across firm sizes. The greatest salary growth was observed in firms of 101-250 lawyers, where median first-year base salaries increased \$15,000 from \$115,000 in 2019 to \$130,000 in 2021 (13.0% increase). First-year salaries in firms of 251-500 lawyers and more than 700 lawyers each grew by \$10,000 as compared to 2019, rising to \$170,000 and \$190,000, respectively. Salaries in firms of 501-700 lawyers were down slightly, dropping from \$160,000 in 2019 to \$155,000 in 2021. This decrease is not indicative of firms of 501-700 lawyers lowering their first-year salaries since 2019, but it is because of differences in the composition of firms that fell into this firm size between the two years.

The full **2021 Associate Salary Survey** report is available at www.nalp.org/bookstore.



1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401

Washington, DC 20036-2405

Phone: (202) 835-1001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Continued from page 1)

Key Findings:

- Although several firms announced \$190,000 first-year salaries back in 2018, the overall median salary was still shy of that amount by \$25,000 in 2021. However, the median first-year salary in firms of more than 700 lawyers did reach \$190,000 for the first time in 2021, accounting for 53.3% of all first-year salaries in this firm size.
- Across all firm sizes, a \$190,000 salary was the modal, or most frequently occurring, first-year associate base salary reported, accounting for 39.6% of all salaries.
- Despite the fact that nearly 63% of offices reported implementing salary reductions for associates in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, all of these offices indicated that salary reductions were no longer in place as of January 1, 2021, thus, ultimately having little to no impact on 2021 salaries.
- Geography continues to have a considerable impact on salary differences across regions, cities, and states. This year's report contains analyses for 23 individual cities as well as additional states and regions not encompassed by those cities. These analyses reveal a wide spectrum of law firm compensation, with median first-year salaries by city ranging from \$115,000 to \$190,000. Outside some of the largest markets, \$190,000 salaries were still not the norm. Regionally, the highest median first-year associate base salaries were in the Northeast (\$175,000), followed by the South and West, both at \$170,000. The lowest salaries were in the Midwest (\$130,000).

Detailed Data on Associate Salaries

Published by NALP since 1996, the **2021 Associate Salary Survey** report provides information about associate and summer associate salaries by firm size, region, and the metropolitan area population; detailed salary analyses for 23 major markets; analyses of salaries for offices using a levels-based compensation system; base salaries for class of 2021 associates by firm size and city; salaries for intellectual property lawyers, salaries for law clerks and staff attorneys; and more. Purchase your copy of the **2021 Associate Salary Survey** report at www.nalp.org/bookstore.



1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401

Washington, DC 20036-2405

Phone: (202) 835-1001

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Continued from page 2)

Median Base Salaries by Associate Year and Firm Size
(in \$ per year unless otherwise noted, as of January 1, 2021)

Firm Size — Number of Lawyers

Associate Year	50 or fewer		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
First	\$85,000	15	\$127,500	18	\$130,000	68	\$170,000	63	\$155,000	56	\$190,000*	184	\$165,000	404
Second	126,250	11	127,000	17	127,250	66	162,500	70	160,000	56	197,925	208	170,000	428
Third	137,500	8	124,500	16	135,250	66	165,000	71	163,200	59	209,575	206	182,500	426
Fourth	142,500	10	140,000	17	150,000	65	173,000	73	166,150	54	221,275	217	192,075	436
Fifth	142,500	9	143,500	16	155,000	67	185,000	73	181,550	58	236,850	210	205,000	433
Sixth	173,000	5	151,000	18	165,000	67	192,000	74	192,825	54	250,000	217	213,500	435
Seventh	160,000	8	153,200	18	185,000	59	200,000	72	200,000	55	263,750	210	227,500	422
Eighth	160,000	9	130,000	12	175,000	59	210,000	59	218,175	58	260,000	202	225,000	399

Summer Associates (\$/week)

1st year	—	—	2,200	7	2,500	41	2,975	60	2,875	40	3,175	220	3,075	370
2nd year	2,825	8	1,850	16	2,650	47	2,975	67	2,800	45	3,175	226	3,075	409
3rd year	2,300	5	—	—	3,650	9	3,650	22	—	—	3,175	83	3,650	130

Note: All figures are based on average salaries reported. A dash indicates that fewer than five salaries were reported.

* This figure was reported by more than half of the offices in this category and is also the high and prevailing salary for this category.

The "# Rept." column indicates the number of offices reporting. For purposes of this summary report, medians have been rounded to the nearest \$25.

About NALP

NALP is an association of more than 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That's why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and ethical principles for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For 50 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of our members and the lawyers and law students they serve. NALP maintains an online archive of press releases at www.nalp.org/pressreleases. For additional information, contact NALP at info@nalp.org or call (202) 835-1001.