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Associate Salaries Rise in Some Markets, But National Median Remains Unchanged

WASHINGTON, DC — The **National Association for Law Placement (NALP)** today released its **2017 Associate Salary Survey** report, showing that the overall median first-year salary as of January 1, 2017, was \$135,000, the same as in 2015, the year of the most recent previous survey — with both survey years reflecting response pools in which offices in firms of 251+ lawyers accounted for about 70% of responses. The median for firms of 501-700 lawyers was \$160,000 as of January 1 of this year, compared with \$125,000 in 2015; the median in firms of 701+ lawyers was \$155,000 this year, compared with \$145,000 in 2015. The full **2017 Associate Salary Survey** report is available in the NALP bookstore [here](#) for \$160 plus shipping and handling.

Significant Findings:

- **Many firms are not yet paying first-year associates a \$180,000 starting salary.** While in some markets such as New York, Los Angeles/Orange County area, and Washington, DC/Northern Virginia many large firms have adopted a \$180,000 starting salary, overall not nearly enough firms reported a \$180,000 salary to push the median up to that level, even among the largest firms.
- Though seemingly counterintuitive, the findings suggest that **as more law firms have grown through acquisitions and mergers, the largest law firms are not as similar to one another as they used to be.** In addition to elite global law firms, there are many firms with more than 700 lawyers that are made up of many smaller regional offices, many of which don't pay a first-year salary of \$180,000, and as a result, a large percentage of large law firm starting salaries fall below that mark.
- **The overall median has remained the same as in 2015**, when this survey was last administered. Just as in 2007 when the movement to a starting salary of \$160,000 began, it took several years to become the prevailing salary at the largest firms.
- **Region and geography still play an important role in salary differentials.** This year's survey contains analyses for 30 individual cities as well as additional states and regions not encompassed by those cities. These analyses reveal a wide range of law firm compensation. For example, the overall median salary for first-year associates in firms of more than 251 lawyers was \$135,000 but ranged from \$90,000 in firms of 50 or fewer attorneys to between \$150,000 and \$160,000 in firms of more than 250 attorneys.

"It's not what I expected to see," says James Leipold, NALP's executive director. "After all of the publicity surrounding the move to \$180,000, I fully expected to see the national median starting salary for law firms move upwards, but what the data reveal is that for the most part only the largest firms in the largest legal markets made that move, and while many

offices are paying \$180,000 to start, many are not. The result is upward movement in some law firm size bands while the national median has remained unchanged.”

Median Base Salaries by Associate Year and Firm Size

(as of January 1, 2017)

Associate Year	Firm Size — Number of Lawyers													
	50 or fewer		51-100		101-250		251-500		501-700		701+		All Sizes	
	Median	#	Median	#	Median	#	Median	#	Median	#	Median	#	Median	#
First	\$90,000	25	\$115,000	21	\$113,500	90	\$150,000	83	\$160,000	43	\$155,000	188	\$135,000	450
Second	100,000	26	123,000	21	115,000	85	155,000	80	170,000	39	160,000	181	142,250	432
Third	100,000	26	125,000	20	120,000	83	165,000	85	180,000	39	170,000	183	145,000	436
Fourth	105,000	27	125,000	17	137,500	88	175,000	81	192,000	40	176,250	181	155,000	434
Fifth	107,250	25	133,000	19	138,850	84	197,000	78	201,250	40	187,750	176	161,500	422
Sixth	129,000	22	141,000	19	152,000	86	210,000	77	246,250	36	190,000	180	170,000	420
Seventh	121,550	20	140,000	21	155,500	84	220,000	78	225,000	39	195,000	181	175,000	423
Eighth	122,500	15	149,350	17	160,000	75	186,500	70	240,000	39	201,200	165	185,000	381
Summer Associates (\$/week)														
1st year	1,825	13	2,000	9	2,100	50	2,875	69	2,900	39	2,875	175	2,600	355
2nd year	1,775	20	1,950	18	2,250	66	2,850	68	2,900	43	2,975	183	2,600	398
3rd year	1,400	9	—	—	2,350	8	3,500	13	3,450	15	2,600	74	2,700	121

The "# Rept." column indicates the number of offices reporting. For purposes of this summary report, medians have been rounded to the nearest \$25. Figures come from NALP's 2017 Associate Salary Survey. © NALP 2017. www.nalp.org.

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Published by NALP since 1996, the **2017 Associate Salary Survey** report, available in the NALP bookstore, provides information about associate and summer associate salaries by firm size, region, and the metropolitan area population; detailed salary analyses for 30 major markets; analyses of salaries for offices using a levels-based compensation system; base salaries for class of 2017 associates by firm size and city; salaries for intellectual property lawyers, salaries for law clerks and staff attorneys; and more. Purchase your copy [here](#).

About NALP: NALP is an association of over 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 standards for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For more than 40 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 about NALP research, contact Judith Collins (judithcollins@nalp.org), Director of Research, or James G. Leipold (jleipold@nalp.org), Executive Director, at 202-835-1001.

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