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Class of 2017 Notched Best Employment Outcomes Since Recession

Overall Employment Rate for New Law School Graduates Up Modestly

Employment in Legal Jobs Up More

Washington (DC) — The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) today released its *Employment for the Class of 2017 – Selected Findings*, a summary of key findings from the upcoming annual *Jobs & JDs: Employment and Salaries of New Law School Graduates — Class of 2017* report, coming out in October 2018. This year’s Selected Findings show a rise of more than one full percentage point in the overall employment rate for the Class of 2017, to 88.6% of graduates for whom employment status was known, compared with 87.5% for the Class of 2016, even though the number of jobs found by graduates fell again, by more than 1,200 compared with 2016.

“The employment outcomes findings for members of the Class of 2017 are surprisingly strong. Most notable is a bar passage required employment rate that jumped more than four percentage points from the previous year, and a private practice employment rate that has now increased for six years in a row,” noted James G. Leipold, NALP’s executive director. “Barring another economic slowdown or interruption and barring a significant jump in law school enrollment as a result of rising applications, the employment outlook for recent law school graduates looks brighter (if not exactly rosy) than it has at any time since 2008, and that is good news.”

Selected Findings — Other Highlights

- For the third year in a row the actual number of jobs obtained was flat or went down in virtually every sector except the largest law firms of more than 500 lawyers. Members of this class secured just 16,390 jobs in law firms of any size, down by more than 4,000 since the number of those jobs peaked for the Class of 2007. And while the largest law firms of more than 500 lawyers hired more law school graduates than at any time since the recession, the number of entry-level jobs at those firms is still off by nearly 600 positions compared with the peak hiring measured with the Class of 2008.
- The size of the 2017 graduating class was smaller, with just 34,922 graduates entering the job market compared to the historically large Class of 2013 that produced 46,776 job seekers; this represents a contraction of more than 25% over four years.
- The national median salary for the Class of 2017 was \$70,000, up from \$65,000 for the Class of 2016. The national mean for the Class of 2017 was \$95,320, compared with \$90,305 for the Class of 2016. For the Class of 2017, salaries of \$180,000 accounted for just over one in five of the full-time long-term salaries reported.
- The mean law firm salary also rose 4% to \$119,740, nearly \$5,000 more than the previous high measured in 2009. The effect of the \$180,000 salaries can be seen in the national median salary at law firms, which, based on reported salaries, climbed to \$117,000, the third increase in a row. Salaries of \$180,000 accounted for almost 37% of reported law firm salaries, compared to about 28% for the Class of 2016.
- Beyond the improvement in the overall employment rate, the single most important indicator of an improved market was the increase in the percentage of graduates taking jobs for which bar passage is required or anticipated, from 67.7% to 71.8%, a single-year increase greater than in the previous four years (2013-2016) combined.

- JD Advantage jobs fell to just 12.3% of graduates for whom employment status was known, lower than the rate measured at any time since 2010. This suggests that despite the growth of new JD Advantage opportunities in areas like compliance, many law graduates prefer bar passage required jobs practicing law if they can be found.
- The percentage of jobs reported as part-time has declined for six years in row, and now stands at 5.4% of jobs, compared with 6.1% for 2016. As a result, the figure is now comparable to that of 2007 and the years immediately prior.
- The number of jobs taken at the largest firms—those with more than 500 lawyers—increased by about 370, which, in concert with the decrease in the overall number of law firm jobs, pushed their share of law firm jobs up by 2.6 percentage points, from 25.5% of law firm jobs in 2016 to 28.1% in 2017.
- Public service jobs, including military and other government jobs, judicial clerkships, and public interest positions, accounted for 29.9% of jobs taken by employed graduates, compared with 29.5% in 2016.

“All of this suggests that the dramatic falloff in law school enrollment, coupled with a recovering Big Law market, has in some ways provided the correction that was needed, and we are closer than at any time since the recession to having the number of law school graduates more closely match the number and kind of jobs available,” said James Leipold, NALP’s executive director. “While the worst of the underemployment problem has now been remedied, the unemployment rate ten months after graduation still remains much higher than it should be. Despite the strong recovery of the job market for law school graduates since the recession, this elevated unemployment rate remains an important marker of the current job market for new law school graduates.”

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The full text of “*Employment for the Class of 2017 — Selected Findings*” can be found at www.nalp.org/classof2017. The findings of NALP’s *Employment Report and Salary Survey for the Class of 2017* will be provided in much greater detail — including salary detail and analyses of employment and earnings by geographic market — in *Jobs & JDs: Employment and Salaries of New Law School Graduates — Class of 2017* — to be published in October 2018.

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 N. Collins (jcollins@nalp.org), Director of Research or James G. Leipold (jleipold@nalp.org), Executive Director.
