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Employment Rate for New Law School Graduates Rises as the Overall Number of Jobs, Class Size, Continue to Shrink

Washington (DC) — The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) today released its *Employment for the Class of 2016 – Selected Findings*, a summary of key findings from the upcoming annual *Jobs & JDs: Employment and Salaries of New Law School Graduates – Class of 2016* report, coming out in October 2017. Despite a drop in the number of jobs and the graduating class size, this year’s *Selected Findings* show a slightly improved employment rate of 87.5% for the Class of 2016 compared to 86.7% measured for the Class of 2015.

“For the third year in a row the employment rate is shaped by a smaller number of jobs and a smaller graduating class size, with graduates benefitting from slightly less competition for the jobs that exist. The employment rate has risen because the falloff in the size of the graduating class has been larger than the falloff in the number of jobs secured,” noted James G. Leipold, NALP’s executive director. “While the percentage of law school graduates who are unemployed and still seeking work ten months after graduation has come down by two and a half percentage points to 8.7% over the last three years, it continues to be more than twice as high as the unemployment rate measured nine months after graduation in the period prior to the recession, and this, more than anything, remains an important marker of the current job market for new law school graduates.”

Selected Findings – Other Highlights:

- For the second year in a row the actual number of jobs obtained went down in every sector except the largest law firms of more than 500 lawyers. 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 1,000 positions compared with the peak hiring measured with the Class of 2008.
- The national median salary for the Class of 2016 was \$65,000, essentially unchanged from the \$64,800 for the Class of 2015. The national mean for the Class of 2016 was \$90,305, compared with \$83,797 for the Class of 2015. The effect of the starting salary increase to \$180,000 was to just shift the distribution of salaries in the upper half of the salary range, with little effect on where the middle falls – therefore, the median starting salary changed little.
- The mean law firm salary, however, approached the highwater mean measured before the recession. At \$113,571, the mean law firm salary for the Class of 2016 was only about \$1,500 less than the mean of just over \$115,000 measured for the Class of 2009 – a result of the fact that there are fewer of the highest paying law firm jobs than there were before the recession but many of those jobs now carry a higher starting salary.
- New law school graduates from the Class of 2015 secured fewer private practice jobs than any class since 1996. Nevertheless, the percentage of graduates who found jobs in private practice increased slightly from

the previous year, and private practice remains the single largest source of jobs for new law school graduates. Over half (52.9%) of employed graduates obtained a job in private practice.

- Full-time, long-term bar passage required positions continue to rise from a post-recessionary low with the Class of 2011, but has not reached the 68% measured with the Class of 2008. JD Advantage jobs, at 14.8% of graduates, matched its 2014 figure, the highest since NALP began tracking these kinds of jobs.
- Government continues to be a remarkably steady source of jobs for law school graduates before, during, and after the recession. Law school funded jobs continue to drop dramatically (down 56% from its peak in 2011). The public interest sector is likely to continue being affected by the decline of law school funded positions. Jobs in education, or as a solo practitioner (after doubling post-recession), are both back down to the much lower levels routinely measured pre-recession.

“All of this suggests a continued tight job market for law school graduates at the ten-month mark, or at least tighter than the pre-recession market,” said James Leipold, NALP’s executive director. “There is some hope that we might be approaching homeostasis with supply and demand, that is, with law school enrollment “right-sizing” itself we might be entering a period of time when the number of law school graduates more closely matches the number of jobs available. But, we also know that most jobs are not in fact earmarked for new law school graduates, and in many instances other than certain clerkship opportunities and many large law firm opportunities, graduates will continue to compete with other junior lawyers for most jobs, and it is still a scrappy and entrepreneurial job market where graduates often create their own job opportunities rather than being hired for a position that is vacant.”

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The full text of “*Employment for the Class of 2016 — Selected Findings*” can be found at www.nalp.org/classof2016. The findings of NALP’s *Employment Report and Salary Survey* for the Class of 2016 will be reported 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 2016* — to be published in October 2017.

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.
