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Associate Salary Figures in a Holding Pattern, NALP Survey Shows

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09-10-2010

Associate salaries stagnated last year at large law firms, according to [data released on Thursday by the National Association for Law Placement](#) (NALP).

NALP said that while \$160,000 remained the prevailing starting salary at large firms in major cities such as New York and Los Angeles, a higher percentage of associates last year started with salaries of between \$130,000 and \$145,000.

The median salary for first-year associates at law firms of all sizes in 2009 was \$115,000, compared to \$130,000 in 2008, according to NALP. That figure dropped to \$100,000 for associates in Detroit, Indianapolis, New Orleans and St. Louis.

Compared to what many in the legal profession feared during the recession, the news was relatively positive, said NALP Executive Director James Leipold.

"The 2010 associate salary survey makes it clear that associate salaries have come down in a small but measurable way -- more so in some markets than others -- but they have not come down nearly as much as we thought they might at the height of the recession," Leipold said. "The real story on associate salaries is that they have been largely flat during the recession, and that is actually better news than we might have hoped for."

As for public interest and public sector starting salaries, they too largely remained flat between 2008 and 2009. New attorneys at civil legal services organizations could expect a salary of \$42,000, while attorneys with 11 to 15 years' experience earned a median salary of \$62,000. Entry-level public defenders earned a median salary of \$45,700, and of \$76,000 after 10 or more years. New local prosecutors earned a median salary of \$50,000 and moved up to about \$81,500 with between 11 and 15 years' experience.

"Of more importance [than flat associate salaries] is the persistent gap between private sector and public interest lawyer salaries that these two surveys so dramatically document," Leipold said. "Even as some private sector associate salaries have fallen back during the recession, this gap has not diminished and is not likely to diminish in the near future."

NALP collected salary information from 588 law firm offices in 28 U.S. cities during April and from 572 public interest, public sector and civil legal organizations.