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Law grads find less work at firms, lower salaries, NALP says

Premium content from Pittsburgh Business Times by Patty Tascarella, Senior Reporter

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Some 28 percent of the 2011 law school graduates who found jobs in Pittsburgh were hired by corporations, the highest percentage among 20 metro regions, according to a just-released national study.

But the median salary here, \$48,600, was the lowest, according to “Jobs and JDs: Employment and Salaries of New Law School Graduates,” issued Aug. 24 by the **National Association for Law Placement** in Washington, D.C.

NALP measured the employment rate of 2011 graduates as of Feb. 15, 2012, nine months after a typical May graduation, and found 239 were hired in Pittsburgh, the lowest number among the 20 metro areas in the study, which included New York City, Chicago and Washington, D.C.

Nationally, the picture is bleak. The overall employment rate for the class of 2011 was 85.6 percent, the lowest since 1994. Just 49.5 percent of employed graduates obtained jobs at law firms, according to NALP, down from 50.9 percent for the class of 2010 and 55.9 percent the prior year.

The research also revealed the median starting private practice salary fell 18 percent from 2010 and has declined 35 percent since 2009.

NALP did not have year-over-year data for Pittsburgh, Research Director [Judith Collins](#) said, because the city was not represented in last year’s study since the hiring numbers often are too small compared to other regions.

Across the U.S., the percentage of graduates employed by corporations was 18.1 percent, the highest that NALP has ever measured, up from 15.1 percent the previous year. The percentage of jobs in business had been in the 10 percent to 14 percent range for most of

the two decades prior to 2010, except in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when it dipped below 10 percent.

Duquesne University School of Law Dean [Ken Gormley](#) said Marcellus Shale activity likely is a factor in businesses hiring recently minted lawyers.

“This has been a positive shift in job opportunities in western Pennsylvania, and our recent graduates have done well because we have increased our course offerings in the energy law/environmental areas, equipping students to compete for these jobs,” Gormley said via email. “As well, we have seen more recent graduates being hired to do compliance work at banks and financial institutions, further accounting for the growth in jobs associated with private companies and corporations rather than law firms.”

He said salary data in NALP’s study was “generally consistent with information available to us.”

[John Glicksman](#), **Pittsburgh Life Sciences Greenhouse** general counsel and president of the Association for Corporate Counsel’s local chapter, believes the number of new lawyers hired by Pittsburgh businesses is in line with the size of the corporate community.

“I think that the Pittsburgh metro area has more Fortune 500 companies than approximately 35 states,” Glicksman said. “Then, of course, there are significant non-Fortune 500 companies here, too.”

[Lori Carpenter](#), president of downtown-based recruitment firm Carpenter Legal Search, is “definitely seeing an uptick” in hiring by corporate legal departments.

But just “a handful” are hiring new graduates, and these corporations “tend to have large legal departments and the capabilities to do good training,” she said.

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