

From the Executive Director:

Let's Get Graphic!

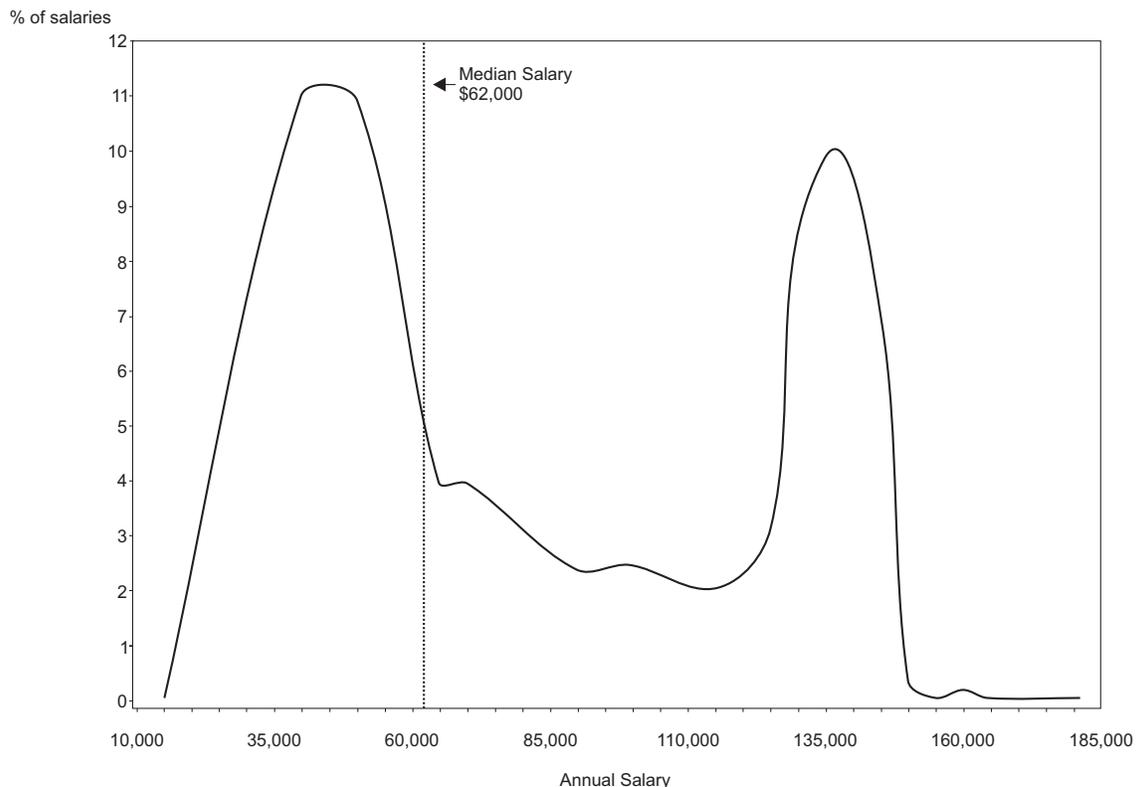
by James G. Leipold

There is no doubt about it. Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. A lot of statistics cross our desks in the course of a year, and it is sometimes hard to hold onto the most important bits. A striking picture or a graph, however, can sometimes cut through the numbers and the words and make the concept stick. In the course of my travels through NALP research and analyses in the last several months, there are two images that stand out in my mind as particularly dramatic and important.

What Do Law School Graduates Really Earn?

The first is a graph that we introduced in the newest *Jobs & JDs* report for the class of 2006. (See Figure 1.) This double bell curve describes the distribution of full-time salaries for the employed graduates who reported their salaries on their survey. Look at those peaks and valleys! We often talk about the median salary for law school gradu-

FIGURE 1. Distribution of Full-Time Salaries — Class of 2006



Note: The graph is based on 22,665 salaries. A few salaries above \$200,000 are excluded for clarity. The first peak in this graph reflects salaries of both \$40,000 and \$50,000 (each about 11% of reported salaries). The second peak reflects salaries of \$135,000 (10% of reported salaries) and \$145,000 (7% of reported salaries).

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ates, particularly when we are marketing a legal education, but perhaps the single most striking thing that this graph reveals is that no one makes the median! Well, almost no one.

The reality is that law school graduates face a job market in which there are two completely different salary ranges. The first bell in this graph describes the 42% of all new law school graduates who were earning starting salaries of \$55,000 or less. Graduates in this tent work in nearly every sector of legal employment, including both public and private sector jobs for which bar passage is required. The second, smaller bell, describes the 17% of all new law school graduates who were earning starting salaries of \$135,000 and \$145,000, predominantly those working at large law firms. This distribution curve makes it painfully clear that far fewer graduates earn the median salary for the class (\$62,000), or the mean salary for the class (\$77,990), than earn either much more or (most frequently) much less.

In terms of consumer information, I think this is the most fair and effective way of explaining the range of salaries that new law school graduates will encounter in the marketplace. We were inspired to add this graphic display of starting salaries to the annual *Jobs & JDs* report after seeing a similar distribution of new lawyer salaries that was prepared by Nancy Coolidge in the office of the president at the University of California to describe the salaries of the recent graduates of all of the UC law schools. Most law schools could in fact graph the starting salaries of their own graduates and end up with a chart that looks very similar to this one.

There is one more important point that I want to make about this graph, and that is that the second bell is moving to the right. When we look at this graph next year for the class of 2007, the peak of that second curve will be closer to \$160,000, but the peak on the left, the one that describes the preponderance of salaries for law school graduates, will not have moved very far at all. In fact, over time, the distance between these two curves has steadily grown, and that is not a trend that is likely to reverse itself any time soon.

Increasingly, Fall Starts in August

The second graph I want to talk about describes another important trend in our industry, and that is the ever-steady march toward an increased number of early on-campus interview programs. Even a cursory glance at Figure 2 reveals that there is no bell curve here. This graph goes straight up! This is not news to anyone who has labored in the trenches this fall, but I think it is still startling to see the numbers presented graphically like this.

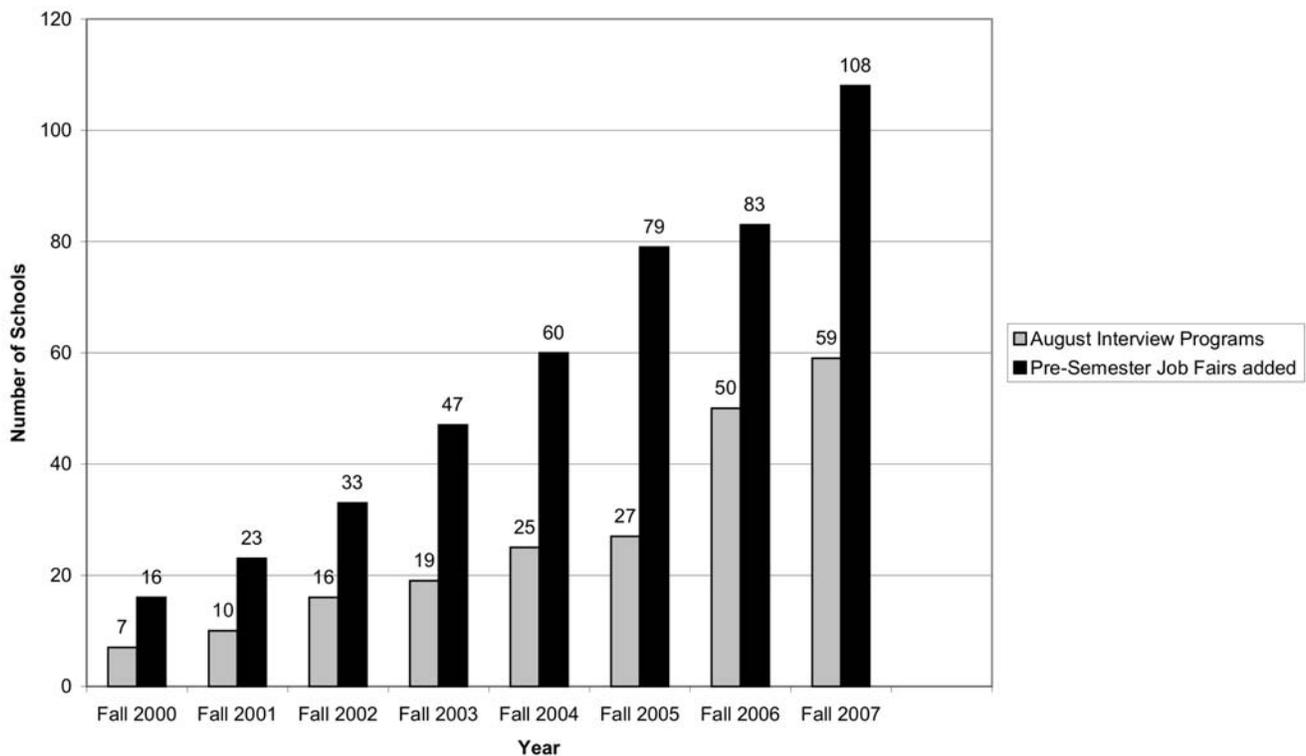
The clarity of this graph notwithstanding, when you get right down to it counting and tracking the number of early interview programs is not a simple matter, and even the definition of what exactly constitutes an early interview program is not clear. For law firms, certainly any time lawyers have to be sent to campus while the summer program is still going on it feels like an early interview program. But does any August on-campus interviewing count, even if it occurs after classes start? Do August off-campus job fairs count? It turns out that no matter how you add them up, the rate of August interviewing continues to rise annually.

The chart shown in Figure 2 was prepared in June for NALP's Part V Task Force, whose members have been charged with evaluating the effectiveness of the timing guidelines in the current market. I think it is a chart that is worth sharing more broadly. The data is based on information that NALP member schools provide annually for the *NALP Directory of Law Schools*. The first set of lighter colored bars that march upward from left to right across the page represent the number of schools that indicate that their fall on-campus interviewing programs begin sometime in August *and* that August start date is before classes start on that campus. What you see as you follow those bars across the graph is that the prevalence of August interview programs has increased more than eight-fold from the fall of 2000 to the fall of 2007. The second, darker set of bars, measures the growth in early fall recruiting activity if you fold in attendance at August job fairs (but exclude the patent bar program and SEMJF), and even that more expansive notion of what early interviewing might mean reveals an increase between 2000 and

2007 that is almost seven-fold. No wonder August often feels like such a miserable month.

Graphs aren't always sexy, but the visual impact of these two graphs — graphs that use strong images to describe important concepts — do somehow seem pretty exciting to me. NALP nerds unite.

**FIGURE 2. Schools That Participate in August OCI Job Fairs
Based on Data from the *NALP Directory of Law Schools***



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