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ASSOCIATES SURVEY 2008: Leaders of the Pack

Posted by **Dimitra Kessenides**

Perspective is everything.

It's not unusual for a non-Am Law firm to best the Am Law 200 participants in our annual midlevel associate satisfaction survey. There's definitely an upside when the firm is small, and we tend to get a clearer picture of those benefits on just such surveys.

To add some additional perspective to our national associate rankings, we've compared apples to apples by grouping this year's participants by size--Am Law 100/Global 100 (very large); Am Law Second Hundred (large); Non Am Law 200 (medium).

The three firms below ranked at the top of their respective size categories. We checked in with each to talk about the high marks their lawyers give them.

Am Law 100/Global 100 – Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner

Go on Finnegan, Henderson, Farabow, Garrett & Dunner's Web site and search for an associate, and you may get frustrated--the IP leader does not list "associate" as a staff title. There are lawyers and staff attorneys and patent specialists, but no associates.

That's not by accident. Though it uses a traditional partner-associate pay structure, the Washington, D.C.-headquartered firm tries its best to de-emphasize rank and foster a feeling of equality.

"We like to refer to people as 'attorneys,'" says Leslie Bookoff, a partner who headed associate recruiting in 2005 and 2006. "We're all attorneys, and we all work together." (Unfortunately, clients like to know who's who, so the firm unveiled a new Web site with traditional attorney titles).

The egalitarian culture is one reason Finnegan scored the highest among Am Law 100 firms in our annual midlevel associates survey. The firm even has an unwritten rule banning lawyers from hanging diplomas in their offices.

"We don't care what law school you came from," Bookoff says. "We recruit from all kinds of law schools."

RESULTS BY SIZE

IT'S ALL RELATIVE

Smaller firms often outscore larger ones on our annual survey of midlevel job satisfaction. It may be because a more intimate atmosphere breeds happiness. Maybe it's because associates have more responsibility. Perhaps it's because they have a better chance of making partner. In these charts, firms are grouped roughly according to size. In the first category are firms whose annual gross revenues are too low to qualify for the Am Law 200. These are the smallest firms that took part in our survey. In the second category are Am Law Second Hundred firms—numbers 101-200 on the most recent Am Law 200 survey (July.) In the final category are firms that appear on our most recent Am Law 100 (May) or Global 100 (October 2008) survey.

AM LAW 100 AND GLOBAL 100 FIRMS

Rank	Firm	Location	Overall Score
1	Finnegan	Washington, D.C.	4.444
2	Faegre & Benson	Minneapolis	4.405
3	Gibson, Dunn	National	4.311
4	Latham & Watkins	National	4.300
5	Cleary, Gottlieb	New York	4.261
6	Arnold & Porter	Washington, D.C.	4.230
7	Ropes & Gray	Boston	4.175
8	Weil, Gotshal	New York	4.137
9	Fish & Richardson	National	4.104
10	Sullivan & Cromwell	New York	4.069
11	Patton Boggs	Washington, D.C.	4.067
12	Covington & Burling	Washington, D.C.	4.063
13	Cooley Godward	Palo Alto	4.056
14	Pepper Hamilton	Philadelphia	4.048
15	Allen & Overy	International	4.046
16	Wachtell	New York	4.045
17	Alston & Bird	Atlanta	4.041
18	Hogan & Hartson	National	4.040
19	Morgan, Lewis	National	4.039
20	Paul, Weiss	New York	4.021
21	Sonnenschein	National	4.014
22	Morrison & Foerster	San Francisco	4.008
23	Howrey	National	3.993
24	Ballard Spahr	Philadelphia	3.988
24	Proskauer Rose	New York	3.988
24	Reed Smith	National	3.988

Please note: Rankings published online and not in the American Lawyer magazine.

ASSOCIATES SURVEY 2008: Leaders of the Pack

For associates, the less hierarchical culture has one major benefit: The partners share the meatiest work.

"Before my second year, I'd already taken depositions, argued in court, and won a trial," says Joyce Craig, an associate who spent 14 years as a computer programmer before deciding to attend law school in 2002. "That definitely exceeded my expectations."

Career-changers like Craig make up an unusually high percentage of Finnegan's associate ranks, something that helps explain their high-level of satisfaction. The scientists and engineers turned associates chose Finnegan so they could use their prior career skills. The firm, in turn, puts them to work quickly.

"The partners actually listen to what I have to say," says Jennifer Johnson, who finished her Ph.D. in plant biology before switching to law school. "I was floored by that."

Johnson is one of several Finnegan associates who mentioned the firm's scheduling flexibility. She has a 15-month-old daughter, Valerie, who spends most days at a day care center in the firm's office building. She picks Valerie up at 5:30 p.m. and leaves for

home. Nobody protested when, in the months after Valerie's birth, Johnson left for 30 minutes at a time to visit her during the day.

"When she was first born, I said, 'There's just no way I'm going to be able to do this,'" says Johnson, who works in the firm's D.C. office. "I didn't know what to expect. But they've been very understanding."

The firm encourages lawyers to take vacations once they've billed their minimum 2,000 hours, and they stop paying bonus money once an attorney has reached the 2,400-hour mark.

And there are more innovations to come. The D.C. office hosts a yoga class each Monday; the first class is free, and lawyers can pay to enroll full-time after that. The firm upped its maternity leave from 12 to 18 weeks and recently started a program where lawyers can pay for caregivers to go to their homes and watch children or elderly family members on a temporary basis.

"We get good lawyers here," Bookoff says. "And we want to do whatever we can to keep them."

—Zach Lowe

Featured online in *The American Lawyer's AmLaw Daily*

NATIONAL RANKINGS

RANKING THE FIRMS



TO FIND OUT HOW MIDDLELEVEL ASSOCIATES rate their firms as workplaces, our annual midlevel survey examined 12 areas that contribute to job satisfaction. They include relations with partners and other associates, the interest and satisfaction level associates have in their work, training and guidance, policy on billables, management openness about firm strategies and partnership chances, the firm's attitude toward pro bono work, compensation and benefits, and the respondents' inclination to stay at their firm for at least two more years. Respondents graded their firms on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest score. On this chart, firms with ten or more responses are ranked by their averages on those questions. Averages include responses from all participating offices. For definitions of national and international firms, and for other details, see our methodology. Additional results are posted at americanlawyer.com.

2008 Rank	2007 Rank	Firm, Location	Overall Score	Respondents and Response Rate
1	5	Nutter McClennen, <i>Boston</i>	4.607	17 (65%)
2	6	Miles & Stockbridge, <i>Baltimore</i>	4.540	11 (42%)
3	27	Finnegan, <i>Washington, D.C.</i>	4.444	19 (36%)
4	8	Faegre & Benson, <i>Minneapolis</i>	4.405	14 (16%)
5	28	Patterson Belknap, <i>New York</i>	4.349	18 (43%)
6	38	Gibson, Dunn, <i>National</i>	4.311	64 (27%)
7	31	Latham & Watkins, <i>National</i>	4.300	225 (36%)
8	37	Thompson Hine, <i>Cleveland</i>	4.292	12 (18%)
9	11	Benesch, Friedlander, <i>Cleveland</i>	4.287	18 (95%)
10	7	Thompson Coburn, <i>St. Louis</i>	4.280	25 (48%)
11	108	Schnader Harrison, <i>Philadelphia</i>	4.278	16 (73%)
12	72	Cleary Gottlieb, <i>New York</i>	4.261	25 (17%)
13	10	Vedder, Price, <i>Chicago</i>	4.251	20 (59%)
14	12	Chapman and Cutler, <i>Chicago</i>	4.235	17 (74%)
15	2	Susman Godfrey, <i>Houston</i>	4.233	13 (57%)
16	56	Arnold & Porter, <i>Washington, D.C.</i>	4.230	20 (17%)
17	14	McKee Nelson, <i>Washington, D.C.</i>	4.199	23 (59%)
18	-	Lingquist & Vennum, <i>Minneapolis</i>	4.183	16 (100%)
19	77	Ropes & Gray, <i>Boston</i>	4.175	90 (44%)
20	20	Harter Secrest, <i>Rochester, New York</i>	4.173	15 (68%)
21	17	Quarles & Brady, <i>Milwaukee</i>	4.161	27 (52%)
22	43	Weil, Gotshal, <i>New York</i>	4.137	106 (42%)
23	23	Fish & Richardson, <i>National</i>	4.104	72 (66%)
24	-	Brown Rudnick, <i>Boston</i>	4.101	16 (67%)
25	13	Munger, Tolles, <i>Los Angeles</i>	4.088	23 (44%)
26	83	Haynes and Boone, <i>Dallas</i>	4.087	46 (64%)

RESULTS BY CITY

ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

HERE IS A LOOK at participating firms. The scores, ranks, and number of respondents pertain only to the firm's office in the city indicated. For a full listing of all cities and how the firms' offices scored, go to americanlawyer.com, where we rank every office that returned at least five responses.

	Rank in city	Score for office/city	Respondents
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA WASHINGTON, D.C.			
CITY AVERAGE		3.804	
Latham & Watkins	1	4.448	24
Finnegan	2	4.418	13
Cleary Gottlieb	3	4.375	6
Gibson, Dunn	4	4.367	8
Morrison & Foerster	5	4.358	7
Clifford Chance	6	4.267	5
Sullivan & Cromwell	7	4.229	5
Arnold & Porter	8	4.198	17
McKee Nelson	9	4.184	9
McDermott Will	10	4.174	23
Wilson Sonsini	11	4.167	5
Cooley Godward	12	4.126	6
Bingham McCutchen	13	4.121	9
Reed Smith	14	4.120	7
Hogan & Hartson	15	4.111	25
Weil, Gotshal	16	4.098	7
Morgan, Lewis	17	4.038	26
Dickstein Shapiro	18	4.018	25
Sonnenschein	19	4.017	5
Covington & Burling	20	4.006	41
DLA Piper US	21	4.003	13
Kirkland & Ellis	22	3.946	17
Sidley Austin	23	3.908	39
Howrey	24	3.890	12
King & Spalding	25	3.858	27
Step toe & Johnson	26	3.847	13
Fish & Richardson	27	3.846	8

	Rank in city	Score for office/city	Respondents
Arent Fox	28	3.835	24
Orrick	29	3.825	10
Wilmer	30	3.818	40
Willkie Farr	31	3.812	7
Crowell & Moring	32	3.782	9
Hunton & Williams	33	3.778	9
Katten Muchin	34	3.773	8
Sutherland Asbill	35	3.772	12
Dow, Lohnes	36	3.768	9
Kaye Scholer	37	3.750	5
Wiley Rein	38	3.737	13
Skadden	39	3.728	23
Goodwin Procter	40	3.709	13
Pillsbury Winthrop	41	3.702	7
K&L Gates	42	3.613	19
Troutman Sanders	43	3.570	6
Paul, Hastings	44	3.568	19
Mayer Brown	45	3.560	19
Milbank, Tweed	46	3.558	5
Kelley Drye	47	3.555	6
Cadwalader	48	3.446	14
Dewey & LeBoeuf	49	3.443	16
White & Case	49	3.443	21
Dechert	51	3.420	13
Akin Gump	52	3.380	29
Fried, Frank	53	3.374	6
Blank Rome	54	3.306	6
Baker Botts	55	3.273	11
Greenberg Traurig	56	3.243	8
Holland & Knight	57	3.230	17
Jones Day	58	2.889	6
Fulbright & Jaworski	59	2.638	8

Please note: All City Rankings did not publish in the American Lawyer. All rankings can be found on americanlawyer.com.

METHODOLOGY

MORE THAN 7,200 MIDLEVELS RESPONDED TO THIS YEAR'S SURVEY.
HERE'S HOW WE COLLECTED AND CRUNCHED THE DATA.

By **TOM BROUCKSOU**



OUR ANNUAL MIDLEVEL Associates Survey is based on responses from 7,259 third-, fourth-, and fifth-year associates (classes of 2003, 2004, and 2005) from law firm offices around the globe. Any firm may participate in the survey, which is distributed during the spring.

We received responses from 42 percent of the 17,456 associates invited to take part. An individual firm's response rate is based on the number of returns out of the surveys distributed. A firm can choose which branch offices take part, so the number of eligible midlevels does not always reflect the size of midlevel classes firmwide.

All of the responses are used to calculate the overall averages. We did not include part-time associates for the average hours billed, hours worked, base salary, or bonus.

For a firm to be included in the National Rankings chart, we must receive ten or more completed surveys from associates with the firm. This year, associates from 180 firms participated, and 157 of the firms returned the minimum ten responses. A firm's national score is the average of 12 questions on the survey that summarize the firm's qualities, including the interest and satisfaction levels of work; benefits and

compensation; relations between associates and partners; training and guidance; openness about finances and strategies; billable hours policy; the firm's attitude toward pro bono work; and the likelihood of the associate being at the firm in two years.

Firms designated as national, rather than anchored to a specific headquarters, have no more than 45 percent of their lawyers in any single region. Firms with an international designation have at least 40 percent of their lawyers working outside their home country. All others list the firm's headquarters as their location.

For a branch office to be included in the Results by City chart, we must receive five or more completed responses from associates in that office. The same 12 questions are calculated for individual cities or markets to determine branch scores and rankings. Additional firmwide results as well as city rankings for additional markets will appear on our Web site, americanlawyer.com. Requests to be included next year, and other questions, may be directed to associates@alm.com.

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