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Number of Part-Time Attorneys Sees Slight Boost

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The percentage of attorneys working part time ticked up slightly in 2009, despite fears that the unstable economy would prompt fewer people to seek reduced-hours schedules.

According to the latest statistics from the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), the percentage of part-time attorneys at law firms grew from 5.6 percent in 2008 to 5.9 percent in 2009.

"That makes perfect sense to me," said Joan Williams, co-director of the [Project for Attorney Retention](#), part of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. "I've heard through the grapevine that while people are reluctant to ask for a new part-time arrangement right now, those who already have those arrangements continued on with them."

The small increase in the percentage of part-time attorneys reflects the fact that some attorneys -- usually women -- have no choice but to go on a part-time schedule or quit their jobs because of family obligations, Williams said. They can't put off that decision simply because of the bad economy.

Although NALP's numbers show that the percentage of attorneys working part time has grown slightly, that increase likely would have been greater had the economy been stronger, Williams said. In 2009, 5 percent of associates worked part time, as did 3.5 percent of partners. Other lawyer categories, such as of counsel and staff attorneys, had the highest percentage of part timers at 21 percent. Women accounted for 73 percent of part-time attorneys, down slightly from 74 percent in 2008.

Williams and Deborah Epstein Henry, president of consulting firm [Flex-Time Lawyers](#), have argued that part-time schedules are ideal in this economy. Lawyers can get the schedule flexibility they want while firms can reduce their salary costs at a time when workloads tend to be lighter. Advocates for reduced-hours schedules say that part-time work is the best way to avoid layoffs.

The percentage of attorneys working part time has grown steadily during the past decade, according to NALP. In 2000, only 3.2 percent of attorneys worked part-time. That figure had risen to 4 percent by 2005.

"It's still a small percentage, but I think it's important to point out that the percentage has nearly doubled," Williams said.

The percentage of part-time attorneys varies greatly among cities. For example, part-time partners are almost twice as common in Washington and Chicago than in New York, where only 1.9 percent of partners work part-time.

Overall, firms in San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis and Portland, Ore., reported the highest percentage of part-time attorneys at 7.9 percent or more. Birmingham, Ala.; Las Vegas; Nashville, Tenn., and New Orleans had the lowest percentage of part-time attorneys at 3 percent or less.