

2018 ABA Data Show Continued Decline In Number And Percentage Of Transfers

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This blog posting updates my blog postings of [December 2014](#), [December 2015](#), [March 2017](#), and [December 2018](#) regarding what we know about the transfer market. With the [release of the 2018 Standard 509 Reports](#), we now have five years of more detailed transfer data from which to glean insights about the transfer market among law schools.

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF TRANSFERS: 2011-2018

The number of transfers decreased to 1494 (4%), continuing a steady decline since a peak of 2,501 (5.8%) in 2013. It is also the lowest number and percentage of transfers we have seen since at least 2011.

For the last five years, the transfer market has not been growing, it has been shrinking, having declined from 5.8% in 2013, to 5.2% in 2015, to 4.8% in 2017, to 4.0% in 2018.

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Number of Transfers	2495	2438	2501	2187	1979	1749	1797	1494
Previous Year First Year Enrollment	52,000	47,600	43,200	39,800	38,000	37,100	37,100	37,300
% of Previous First-Year Total	4.8%	5.1%	5.8%	5.5%	5.2%	4.7%	4.8%	4.0%

SOME LAW SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE TRANSFER MARKET

The following two charts list the top 15 law schools participating in the transfer market in descending order in Summer 2015 (fall 2014 entering class), Summer 2016 (fall 2015 entering class), Summer 2017 (fall 2016 entering class), and Summer 2018 (fall 2017 entering class). One chart is based on “numbers” of transfers and the other chart is based on the number of transfer students as a percentage of the prior year’s first year class.

Note that in these two charts, the “repeat players” are bolded – those schools in the top 15 for all four years are in **black**, those schools in the top 15 for three of the four years are in **blue**. Nine of the top 15 have been on the list for the largest number of transfers all four years. Even though George Washington remains one of these nine law schools, the number of transfers it has accepted has declined from over 100 in 2015 and 2016, to 67 in 2017, to 31 in 2018.

Largest Law Schools by Number of Transfers from 2015-2017

School	Number in 2015	School	Number in 2016	School	Number in 2017	School	Number in 2018
Georgetown	110	Georgetown	111	Georgetown	105	Georgetown	105
George Wash.	109	George Wash.	106	George Wash.	67	NYU	58
Arizona St.	65	Arizona St.	66	Charleston	61	Arizona State	50
Harvard	55	Columbia	50	NYU	58	Emory	42
Emory	51	Emory	49	Arizona St.	56	Cal. Berkeley	36
NYU	51	UCLA	43	Columbia	46	Columbia	35
Cal. Berkeley	49	Loyola Marymount	43	SMU	42	Loyola Marymount	34
Rutgers	45	NYU	43	Emory	41	Northwestern	33
Columbia	44	Florida	36	Loyola Marymount	41	Harvard	32
Miami	44	Houston	36	Harvard	40	UCLA	31
UCLA	43	Harvard	35	UCLA	36	George Wash.	31
Texas	37	Cal. Berkeley	33	Cal. Berkeley	33	North Dakota	28
American	33	Miami	31	Lincoln Memorial	33	Florida	27
Florida St.	32	American	30	Miami	33	Houston	25
Minnesota	31	Florida St.	30	Florida	31	Hofstra	24
Total	799		741		723		591
Percentage	0.40		0.42		0.40		0.40

In terms of law schools with the highest percentage of transfers in as a percentage of their previous year's first-year class, only three law schools have been on the list each of the last four years – Arizona State, Emory, and Georgetown.

Most interestingly, for 2018, the leading law school for percentage of transfers is North Dakota, having absorbed a large numbers of transfers (25) from Arizona Summit, with Arizona State also taking 12 of its 50 transfers from Arizona Summit. Three other schools that had appeared at the top of the percentage transfer list in 2017 are not in the top-15 this year -- Lincoln Memorial, Appalachian and Charleston.

Largest Law Schools by Transfers as a Percentage of Previous First-Year Class - 2015-2017

School	2015%	School	2016%	School	2017%	School	2018%
Arizona State	45.5	Arizona State	30.3	Lincoln Mem.	54.1	North Dakota	39.4
Emory	22.9	George Wash.	21.6	Appalachian	50.0	Arizona State	23.2
George Wash.	20.2	Emory	20.9	Charleston	28.4	Georgetown	18
Miami	19.2	Georgetown	19.3	Arizona State	24.6	Emory	17.7
Georgetown	19	Florida St.	17.1	SMU	19.1	Northwestern	14.5
Cal. Berkeley	17.9	Houston	16.7	Georgetown	18.2	NYU	13.6
Florida St.	17	Loyola Marymount	16	Western St.	17.3	UNLV	13.3
Florida Int'l	16.7	Southern Cal	14.7	Toledo	16.5	Mercer	12.3
Minnesota	16.1	UCLA	14.7	North Dakota	15.7	Cal-Berkeley	11.8
Utah	16	UNLV	14.2	Emory	15.7	Houston	11.0
UNLV	14.3	Columbia	12.9	George Wash.	14.6	UCLA	10.5
UCLA	13.7	SMU	12	NYU	13.5	Loyola Marymount	10.4
Texas	12.3	Northwestern	11.8	Loyola Marymount	13.4	Florida St.	10.1
Chicago	12.1	Florida Int'l	11.8	Houston	12.7	Hofstra	9.6
Rutgers	12.1	Florida	11.6	Northwestern	12.6	Chicago	9.6

The number of law schools welcoming transfers representing more than 20% of their first-year class has fallen from nine in 2013 (not shown), to six in 2014 (not shown), then to only three in 2015 and 2016, four in 2017 (two of which were in excess of 50%), and now only two in 2018.

Largely because of the decline in the number of transfers in at George Washington over the last two years, the concentration in the transfer market continued to decline, as the ten law schools

with the most students transferring in captured a slightly smaller share of the transfer market, 30.5%, down from 33.3% in 2016 (although still well above the 23.5% in 2011).

Top Ten Law Schools for Transfers In as a Percentage of All Transfers

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Total Transfers	2427	2438	2501	2187	1979	1749	1797	1494
Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers	570	587	724	625	623	583	557	456
Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers as % of Total Transfers	23.5%	24.1%	28.9%	28.6%	31.5%	33.3%	31%	30.5%

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL MARKETS

Starting in December 2014, the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar began collecting, and requiring law schools with 12 or more transfers in to report, not only the number of students who have transferred in, but also the law schools from which they came (indicating the number from each law school). In addition, the law schools with 12 or more transfers in had to report the 75%, 50% and 25% first-year, law school GPAs of the students who transferred in. This allows one to look at where students are coming from and are going to and to look at the first-year GPA profile of students transferring in to different law schools. The following chart focuses on the nine law schools that have been among the top-15 in terms of transfers in for each of the last four years, presented in descending USNews rank. It indicates the extent to which these law schools were attracting transfers from their geographic region and also identifies the law school that provided the largest number of transfers to each listed law school in 2018 as well as the percentage of transfers that came from that school.

Percentage of Transfers from Within Geographic Region 2015-2018 and Top Feeder School(s) for 2018 at the Nine Law Schools Among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018

School	# of Transfers 15/16/17/18	Reg,	Regional # of Transfers 15/16/17/18	Regional % of Transfers 15/16/17/18	School from Which Largest Number of Transfers Came in 2018	#/% of Transfers from Largest School 2018
Harvard	55/35/40/32	NE	15/13/10/5	27/37/25/16	Fordham, GWU, Tulane, UCIrvine	3/9%

Columbia	44/50/46/35	NE	19/24/21/17	43/48/43/49	Brooklyn, Cardozo	4/11%
NYU	51/43/58/58	NE	15/16/20/19	29/37/34/33	Fordham	9/16%
Berkeley	49/33/36/36	CA	29/22/20/26	59/67/61/72	UCHastings	8/22%
Georgetown	110/111/105/105	Mid-Atl	43/36/31/42	39/32/30/40	American	15/14%
UCLA	43/43/36/31	CA	26/25/23/17	60/58/64/55	Loyola Marymount	6/19%
Emory	51/49/41/42	SE	31/25/26/21	61/51/63/50	Atlanta's John Marshall	10/24%
Arizona St.	65/66/56/50	SW	48/57/39/28	74/86/70/56	Arizona Sum.	12/24%
GWU	109/106/67/31	Mid-Atl	70/77/45/21	64/73/67/68	American	13/42%

For these nine law schools, five (Berkeley, UCLA, Emory, Arizona State and George Washington) obtained most of their transfers (50% or more) from within the geographic region within which the law school is located during each of the last four years. On the other hand, four law schools (Harvard, Columbia, NYU, and Georgetown) had 49% or fewer of their transfers from within the region in which they are located in each of the last four years.

Moreover, four of the nine law schools had a significant percentage (more than 20%) of their transfers in from one particular feeder school. For George Washington, roughly 42% of its transfers came from American University. For Arizona State, 24% of its transfers came from Arizona Summit. For Emory, roughly 24% of its transfers came from Atlanta's John Marshall. For Cal. Berkeley, roughly 22% of its transfers came from UC Hastings.

VARIED QUALITY OF THE TRANSFER POOL

The chart below shows the tiers of law schools from which these nine law schools in the transfer market received their transfer students. Six of the nine law schools that consistently have high numbers of transfers are ranked in the top 15 in USNews, while the other three are ranked in the top 30. Five of the nine law schools had 83% or more of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 99 in the USNews rankings – Harvard, Columbia, NYU, Cal-Berkeley, and UCLA. Two additional schools, Georgetown, and George Washington, had between 69% and 75% of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 99. The remaining two law schools, Emory and Arizona State, had more than 50% of their transfer students from law schools ranked 100 or lower.

Percentage of Transfers from Different Tiers of School(s) for 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 at the Nine Law Schools Among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018

(**Bolded data** indicates the modal response for each law school.)

	# of Trans 15/16/17/18	Top 50 # -- % 15/16/17/18		51-99 # -- % 15/16/17/18		100-200 # -- % 15/16/17/18	
Harvard	55/35/40/32	41/28/27/22	75/80/68/69	13/7/13/10	24/20/32/31	1/0/0/0	2/0/0/0
Columbia	44/50/46/35	30/33/36/20	68/67/78/57	10/16/9/14	23/33/20/40	4/1/1/1	9/2/2/3
NYU	51/43/58/58	40/35/55/48	78/81/95/83	10/8/3/10	14/20/5/17	1/0/0/0	2/0/0/0
Berkeley	49/33/33/36	15/11/13/13	31/33/39/36	26/8/8/17	53/24/24/47	8/14/12/6	16/42/36/17
Georgetown	110/111/105/105	30/32/21/27	27/29/20/26	30/41/41/45	27/37/39/43	50/38/43/33	45/34/41/31
UCLA	43/43/36/31	15/18/9/11	35/41/25/35	23/21/23/19	53/49/64/61	5/4/4/1/1	12/10/11/3
Emory	51/49/41/42	5/3/5/10	10/6/12/24	8/17/9/24	16/35/22/29	38/29/27/22	75/59/66/52
Arizona St.	65/66/56/50	0/3/5/6	0/5/9/12	6/7/8/12	9/11/14/24	59/56/43/32	91/85/77/64
GWU	109/106/67/31	21/15/5/7	19/14/7/23	63/68/43/16	58/64/64/52	25/23/19/8	23/22/29/26

If one focuses just on the reported GPAs from these nine law schools, one quickly sees that of the six law schools ranked in the USNEWS top-15, three have a 50th GPA for transfers in 2018 that is a 3.80 or above, and a 25th GPA of 3.75 and above. These three law schools – Harvard, Columbia and Berkeley – are clearly accepting transfers who could have been admitted to those law schools in the first instance.

The other three top-15 law schools – NYU, Georgetown and UCLA – are a step below in terms of the credentials of their transfers, with 50th GPAs of between 3.55 and 3.70 and with 25th GPA of between 3.50 and 3.60. Some of these transfer students might have been admissible at these law schools as first-years, but some probably would not have had the credentials to be admitted as first-years.

Once you drop out of the top-15, however, the other three law schools have a 75th GPA that drops below 3.55, a 50th GPA that drops below 3.4, and a 25th GPA that drops below 3.25. Emory, Arizona State, and George Washington are welcoming as transfers students those whose entering credentials likely are sufficiently distinct from each of those law schools' entering class

credentials that the transfers they are admitting would not have been admitted as first-year students in the prior year.

First-Year Law School 75th/50th/25th GPA of Transfers in 2018 at the Nine Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018

School	GPA 75th	GPA 50th	GPA 25 th
	15/16/17/18	15/16/17/18	15/16/17/18
Harvard	3.98/4.0/3.96/ 4.0	3.92/3.94/3.92/ 3.95	3.85/3.88/3.87/ 3.89
Columbia	3.82/3.84/3.86/ 3.87	3.76/3.71/3.76/ 3.80	3.66/3.6/3.68/ 3.76
NYU	3.76/3.72/3.66/ 3.77	3.68/3.6/3.57/ 3.57	3.52/3.41/3.49/ 3.51
Berkeley	3.87/3.92/3.9/ 3.93	3.81/3.8/3.81/ 3.85	3.69/3.75/3.71/ 3.75
Georgetown	3.77/3.76/3.73/ 3.79	3.66/3.63/3.64/ 3.69	3.59/3.54/3.56/ 3.56
UCLA	3.7/3.67/3.71/ 3.80	3.58/3.56/3.58/ 3.66	3.46/3.52/3.42/ 3.51
Emory	3.45/3.41/3.35/ 3.42	3.3/3.16/3.2/ 3.23	3.06/3.02/2.96/ 3.09
Arizona St.	3.5/3.4/3.44/ 3.53	3.17/3.09/3.22/ 3.25	2.95/2.96/3.06/ 3.11
GWU	3.46/3.45/3.44/ 3.48	3.32/3.26/3.33/ 3.38	3.15/3.14/3.13/ 3.24

STILL MANY UNKNOWN

As I noted for the last few years, this more detailed transfer data should be very helpful to prospective law students and pre-law advisors, and to current law students who are considering transferring. This data gives them a better idea of what transfer opportunities might be available depending upon where they go to law school (or are presently enrolled as a first-year student).

Even with this more granular data now available, however, there still are a significant number of unknowns relating to transfer students, particularly regarding gender and ethnicity of transfer students and regarding performance of transfers students at their new law school (both academically and in terms of bar passage and employment).