

2019 Transfer Data Show Continued Decline In Number And Percentage Of Transfers

By [Jerry Organ](#)

This blog posting updates my blog postings of [December 2014](#), [December 2015](#), [March 2017](#), [December 2017](#) and [December 2018](#) regarding what we know about the transfer market. With the ABA's posting of the [2019 Standard 509 Reports](#), we now have six years (2014-2019) of more detailed transfer data from which to glean insights about the transfer market among law schools.

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF TRANSFERS SHOW CONTINUING DECLINE SINCE 2013

As shown in Table 1 below, the number of transfers decreased to 1294 (3.3%), 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 several years, the transfer market 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, and now down to 3.4% in 2019.

Table 1 – Number of Transfers and Percentage of Transfers from 2011-2019

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Number of Transfers	2495	2438	2501	2187	1979	1749	1797	1494	1294
Previous Year First Year Enrollment	52,000	47,600	43,200	39,800	38,000	37,100	37,100	37,300	38,390
% of Previous First-Year Total	4.8%	5.1%	5.8%	5.5%	5.2%	4.7%	4.8%	4.0%	3.4%

While it is hard to know for sure what might be causing this decline in transfers over the last several years, I believe the most likely explanation for the continuing decline in transfers over the last several years is the corresponding decline in law schools with conditional scholarship programs. As I noted in a blog posting on conditional scholarship programs in [January 2018](#), the number of law schools with conditional scholarship programs declined from 140 to 89 between 2011-12 and 2016-17. As of the 2017-2018 academic year, there were only 77 law schools with conditional scholarships that were reduced or eliminated. This decline in the number of law schools with conditional scholarship programs likely has reduced the number of rising second-year law students considering transferring. In past years, it is likely that a reduced or eliminated conditional scholarship was a catalyst for some law students to consider transferring. If they were going to have to pay more to continue their legal education because of a reduced or

eliminated scholarship, they might as well consider transferring to a more highly ranked law school. With the reduction in the number of law schools with conditional scholarship programs, however, this financial incentive to consider transferring has been diminished.

SOME LAW SCHOOLS CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE TRANSFER MARKET

Table 2 lists the top 15 law schools participating in the transfer market in descending order in Summer 2016 (fall 2015 entering class), Summer 2017 (fall 2016 entering class), Summer 2018 (fall 2017 entering class), and Summer 2019 (fall 2018 entering class).

(Note that in Table 2 and in Table 4, 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**. Ten of the top 15 have been on the list for the largest number of transfers all four years.)

TABLE 2 -- Largest Law Schools by Number of Transfers from 2016-2019

School	Number in 2016	School	Number in 2017	School	Number in 2018	School	Number in 2019
Georgetown	111	Georgetown	105	Georgetown	105	Georgetown	105
George Wash.	106	George Wash.	67	NYU	58	George Wash.	74
Arizona St.	66	Charleston	61	Arizona State	50	NYU	54
Columbia	50	NYU	58	Emory	42	Columbia	44
Emory	49	Arizona St.	56	Cal. Berkeley	36	Harvard	43
UCLA	43	Columbia	46	Columbia	35	Loyola Marymount	41
Loyola Marymount	43	SMU	42	Loyola Marymount	34	Florida	40
NYU	43	Emory	41	Northwestern	33	Northwestern	34
Florida	36	Loyola Marymount	41	Harvard	32	UCLA	34
Houston	36	Harvard	40	UCLA	31	Chicago	27
Harvard	35	UCLA	36	George Wash.	31	Hofstra	26
Cal. Berkeley	33	Cal. Berkeley	33	North Dakota	28	UNLV	24
Miami	31	Lincoln Memorial	33	Florida	27	Cal. Berkeley	24

American	30	Miami	33	Houston	25	Arizona St.	22
Florida St.	30	Florida	31	Hofstra	24	Rutgers	21
Total	741	Total	723	Total	591	Total	613
Percentage	42%	Percentage	40%	Percentage	40%	Percentage	47%

With the overall decline in the number of transfers, there has emerged an even greater concentration of transfers among the ten law schools with the most students transferring in, which now claim 38.3% of the transfer market. As shown in Table 3, this is by far the largest percentage in the last nine years.

TABLE 3 -- Top Ten Law Schools for Transfers In as a Percentage of All Transfers

	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total Transfers	2427	2438	2501	2187	1979	1749	1797	1494	1294
Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers	570	587	724	625	623	583	557	456	496
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%	38.3%

In terms of law schools with the highest percentage of transfers in as a percentage of their previous year's first-year class, as shown below in Table 4, only four law schools have been on the list each of the last four years – Arizona State, Georgetown, Loyola Marymount and Northwestern. Four law schools have been on the list three times in the last four years – George Washington, NYU, UCLA and UNLV. 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%), two in 2018, and now none in 2019. The highest percentages are the lowest they have been in the last four years, at 18.1%, 16.1% and 15.3%

TABLE 4 -- Largest Law Schools by Transfers as a Percentage of Previous First-Year Class - 2016-2019

School	2016%	School	2017%	School	2018%	School	2019%
Arizona State	30.3	Lincoln Mem.	54.1	North Dakota	39.4	Georgetown	18.1
George Wash.	21.6	Appalachian	50.0	Arizona State	23.2	Florida	16.1
Emory	20.9	Charleston	28.4	Georgetown	18	UNLV	15.3

Georgetown	19.3	Arizona State	24.6	Emory	17.7	Chicago	14
Florida St.	17.1	SMU	19.1	Northwestern	14.5	Northwestern	13.9
Houston	16.7	Georgetown	18.2	NYU	13.6	George Wash.	13.1
Loyola Marymount	16	Western St.	17.3	UNLV	13.3	Loyola Marymount	12.9
Southern Cal	14.7	Toledo	16.5	Mercer	12.3	NYU	12
UCLA	14.7	North Dakota	15.7	Cal-Berkeley	11.8	UCLA	10.9
UNLV	14.2	Emory	15.7	Houston	11.0	Columbia	10.7
Columbia	12.9	George Wash.	14.6	UCLA	10.5	Hofstra	10.1
SMU	12	NYU	13.5	Loyola Marymount	10.4	Florida Int'l	9.9
Northwestern	11.8	Loyola Marymount	13.4	Florida St.	10.1	Pepperdine	8.8
Florida Int'l	11.8	Houston	12.7	Hofstra	9.6	Arizona State	8.1
Florida	11.6	Northwestern	12.6	Chicago	9.6	Harvard	7.7

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.

Table 5 focuses on the ten law schools that have been among the top-15 in terms of transfers in for each of the last four years, presented in descending US News 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 2019 as well as the percentage of transfers that came from that school. Notably, six of these ten schools are on the East Coast (Harvard, Columbia, New York, Georgetown, George Washington and Florida) while four are in or near California (UC Berkeley, UCLA, Loyola Marymount and Arizona State).

TABLE 5 -- Percentage of Transfers from Within Geographic Region 2017-2019 and Top Feeder School(s) for 2019 at the Ten Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019

School	# of Transfers 17/18/19	Reg,	Regional # of Transfers 17/18/19	Regional % of Transfers 17/18/19	School from Which Largest Number of Transfers Came in 2019	#/% of Transfers from Largest School 2019
Harvard	40/32/43	NE	10/5/11	25/16/26	Boston College/George Washington	3/7%
Columbia	46/35/44	NE	21/17/18	43/49/41	Brooklyn	5/11%
NYU	58/58/54	NE	20/19/22	34/33/41	Fordham	10/19%
Berkeley	36/36/24	CA	20/26/17	61/72/71	UC Hastings	6/25%
Georgetown	105/105/105	Mid- Atl	31/42/51	30/40/49	American	21/20%
UCLA	36/31/34	CA	23/17/22	64/55/65	UC Irvine	6/18%
GWU	67/31/74	Mid- Atl	45/21/40	67/68/54	American	19/27%
Arizona St.	56/50/22	SW	39/28/6	70/56/27	DePaul	3/14%
Florida	31/27/40	SE	27/16/31	87/59/78	Barry	9/23%
Loyola Marymount	41/34/41	CA	38/29/34	93/85/83	Western State	15/37%

For these ten law schools, five (Berkeley, UCLA, George Washington, Florida and Loyola Marymount) 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 three 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 the law school is located in each of the last three years. Arizona State is the only odd duck, having had more than 50% from its region in 2017 and 2018, but dropping to only 27% from its region in 2019.

Moreover, five of the ten law schools had a significant percentage (more than 20%) of their transfers in from one particular feeder school. For Loyola Marymount, 37% of its transfers came from Western State. For George Washington, 27% of its transfers came from American University. For Berkeley, 25% of its transfers came from UC Hastings. For Florida, 23% of its transfers came from Barry. For Georgetown, 20% of its transfers came from American.

VARIED QUALITY OF THE TRANSFER POOL

Table 6 below shows the tiers of law schools from which these ten largest law schools in the transfer market received their transfer students. Six of the ten law schools that consistently have

high numbers of transfers in are ranked in the top 15 in USNews, while three of the other four are ranked in the top 31. Five of the ten 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 77% and 63%, respectively of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 99. The remaining three law schools, Arizona State, Florida and Loyola Marymount had 55%, 88% and 98%, respectively, of their transfer students from law schools ranked 100 or lower.

TABLE 6 -- Percentage of Transfers from Different Tiers of School(s) for 2017, 2018 and 2019 at the Ten Law Schools Among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 (Bolded data indicates the modal percentage response for each law school.)

	# of Trans 17/18/19	Top 50 # 17/18/19	Top 50 % 17/18/19	51-100 # 17/18/19	51-100 % 17/18/19	101-200 # 17/18/19	101-200 % 17/18/19
Harvard	40/32/43	27/22/28	68/69/65	13/10/11	32/31/26	0/0/4	0/0/9
Columbia	46/35/44	36/20/30	78/57/68	9/14/14	20/40/32	1/1/0	2/3/0
NYU	58/58/51	55/48/41	95/83/80	13/10/10	5/17/20	0/0/0	0/0/0
Berkeley	33/36/24	13/13/13	39/36/54	8/17/7	24/ 47 /29	12/6/4	36/17/17
Georgetown	105/105/105	21/27/29	20/26/28	41/45/52	39/ 43 /49	43/33/24	41 /31/23
UCLA	36/31/34	9/11/13	25/35/38	23/19/17	64/61/50	4/1/4	11/3/12
GWU	67/31/74	5/7/9	7/23/12	43/16/38	64/52/51	19/8/27	29/26/37
Arizona St.	56/50/22	5/6/2	9/12/9	8/12/8	14/24/36	43/32/12	77/64/55
Florida	31/27/40	0/0/2	0/0/5	0/6/3	0/22/8	31/21/35	100/78/88
Loyola Marymount	41/34/41	0/0/1	0/0/2	3/5/0	7/15	38/29/40	93/85/98

Table 7 below highlights the reported GPAs of transfers in for these ten law schools. In looking at Table 7, one quickly sees that of the six law schools ranked in the USNEWS top-15, three have a 50th GPA for transfers in 2019 that is a 3.77 or above, and a 25th GPA of 3.71 and above. These three law schools – Harvard, Columbia and Berkeley – which also are accepting most of their transfers in from top-50 law schools, clearly are 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 3.63 and 3.68 (below the 25th GPA for Harvard, Columbia and Berkeley) and with 25th GPA of between 3.56 and 3.61. Of this group, NYU is taking 80% of its transfers from top-50 law schools, so the transfers in it is accepting might be people it would have admitted in the first instance. But for Georgetown and UCLA, with most of their transfers coming from law schools ranked 51-100, many of these transfer students probably would not have had the credentials to be admitted as first-years.

Once you drop out of the top-15, the other four law schools have a 75th GPA that drops below 3.52, a 50th GPA that drops below 3.3, and a 25th GPA that drops below 3.15, with the majority of these transfers coming from law schools ranked 51-100 for George Washington and ranked 101-200 for Arizona State, Florida and Loyola Marymount. These law schools clearly are welcoming transfer students whose entering credentials almost certainly are sufficiently distinct from each of those law schools' entering class credentials that the transfer students they are admitting would not have been admitted as first-year students in the prior year.

TABLE 7 -- First-Year Law School 75th/50th/25th GPA of Transfers in 2017, 2018 and 2019 at the Ten Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019

School	GPA 75th	GPA 50th	GPA 25 th
	17/18/19	17/18/19	17/18/19
Harvard	3.96/4.0/4.02	3.92/3.95/3.95	3.87/3.89/3.89
Columbia	3.86/3.87/3.87	3.76/3.80/3.82	3.68/3.76/3.78
NYU	3.66/3.77/3.76	3.57/3.57/3.68	3.49/3.51/3.61
Berkeley	3.9/3.93/3.97	3.81/3.85/3.77	3.71/3.75/3.71
Georgetown	3.73/3.79/3.77	3.64/3.69/3.67	3.56/3.56/3.56
UCLA	3.71/3.80/3.76	3.58/3.66/3.63	3.42/3.51/3.56
GWU	3.44/3.48/3.41	3.33/3.38/3.23	3.13/3.24/3.11
Arizona St.	3.44/3.53/3.35	3.22/3.25/3.29	3.06/3.11/3.11
Florida	3.57/3.56/3.52	3.40/3.33/3.27	3.17/3.10/3.13
Loyola Marymount	3.23/3.28/3.39	3.20/3.22/3.20	3.06/3.07/3.11

STILL MANY UNKNOWNs

As I have 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).

Source: 2019 Transfer Data Show Continued Decline in Number and Percentage of Transfers, TaxProf Blog, December 16, 2019 (6.7K Shares – Nov. 2020)