

BETTER UNDERSTANDING THE TRANSFER MARKET

By [Jerry Organ](#)

What do we know about the transfer student market in legal education?

Not enough. But that will begin to change in the coming weeks.

NUMBER/PERCENTAGE OF TRANSFER STUDENTS HAS INCREASED MODESTLY

Up until this year, the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar only asked law schools to report the number of transfer students “in” and the number of transfer students “out.” This allowed us to understand roughly how many students are transferring and gave us some idea of where they are going, and where they are coming from, but not with any direct “matching” of exit and entrance.

Has the number and percentage of transfer students changed in recent years?

In 2010, Jeff Rensberger published [an article in the Journal of Legal Education](#) in which he analyzed much of the then available data regarding the transfer market and evaluated some of the issues associated with transfer students. He noted that from 2006 to 2009 the number of transfer students had remained within a range that represented roughly 5% of the rising second-year class (after accounting for other attrition) – 2,265 in summer 2006, 2,324 in summer 2007, 2,400 in summer 2008, and 2,333 in summer 2009.)

Using data published in the law school Standard 509 reports, the number of transfers in 2011, 2012 and 2013 has increased only marginally, from 2427 to 2438 to 2501, but, given the declining number of law students, it has increased as a percentage of the preceding year’s first-year “class,” from 4.6% to 5.6%. Thus, there is a sense in which the transfer market is growing, even if not growing dramatically.

Numbers of Transfer Students 2006-2008 and 2011-2013

	2006	2007	2008	2011	2012	2013
Number of Transfers	2265	2324	2400	2427	2438	2501
Previous Year First Year Enrollment	48,100	48,900	49,100	52,500	48,700	44,500
% of Previous First-Year Total	4.7%	4.8%	4.9%	4.6%	5%	5.6%

SOME SCHOOLS DOMINATE THE TRANSFER MARKET

In 2008, [Bill Henderson](#) and [Brian Leiter](#) highlighted issues associated with transfer students. Henderson and Leiter were discussing the data from the summer of 2006. Brian

Leiter posted a list of the top ten law schools for net transfer students as a percentage of the first year class. Bill Henderson noted the distribution of transfer students across tiers of law schools (with the law schools in the top two tiers generally having positive net transfers and the law schools in the bottom two tiers generally having negative net transfers), something Jeff Rensberger also noted in his 2010 article.

Things haven't changed too much since 2006. In 2012, there were 118 law schools with fewer than 10 "transfers in" representing a total of 485 transfers – slightly less than 20% of all transfers. On the other end, there were 21 schools with 30 or more "transfers in" totaling 996 transfers -- nearly 41% of all transfers. Thus, roughly 10% of the law schools occupied 40% of the market (increasing to nearly 44% of the market in 2013).

We also know who the leading transfer schools have been over the last three years. The following two charts list the top 20 transfer schools in Summer 2011 (fall 2010 entering class), Summer 2012 (fall 2011 entering class) and Summer 2013 (fall 2012 entering class) – with one chart based on "numbers" of transfers and the other chart based on the number of transfer students as a percentage of the prior year's first year class.

Largest Law Schools by Number of Transfers in 2012 and 2013

(BOLD indicates presence on list all three year)

School	Number in 2011	School	Number in 2012	School	Number in 2013
George Wash.	104	Florida State	89	Georgetown	122
Georgetown	71	Georgetown	85	George Wash.	93
Florida St.	57	George Wash.	63	Florida St.	90
New York Univ.	56	Columbia	58	Emory	75
American	53	Michigan State	54	Arizona State	73
Michigan State	52	New York Univ.	53	American	68
Columbia	46	American	49	Texas	59
Cardozo	45	Cardozo	48	Columbia	52
Loyola Marymount	44	Loyola Marymount	46	New York Univ.	47
Washington Univ.	42	Rutgers - Camden	42	Minnesota	45
Cal. Los Angeles	40	Minnesota	42	Arizona	44

Michigan	39	Arizona State	42	Northwestern	44
Northwestern	39	Cal. Berkeley	41	Cal. Los Angeles	41
Rutgers - Camden	36	Emory	41	Cardozo	38
San Diego	35	Cal. Los Angeles	39	Southern Cal.	37
Arizona State	34	Northwestern	38	Utah	34
Brooklyn	33	Florida	37	Harvard	34
Cal. Hastings	32	Maryland	34	Florida	33
Minnesota	31	Michigan	33	Cal. Berkeley	32
Lewis & Clark	30	SMU	31	Washington Univ.	31
Harvard	30	Harvard	31		

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

(BOLD indicates presence on list in both years)

School	Percentage 2011 (as a percentage of the 2010 first year class)	School	Percentage 2012 (as a percentage of the 2011 first year class)	School	Percentage 2013 (as a percentage of the 2012 first year class)
Florida St.	28.6	Florida St.	44.5	Florida State	48.1
George Wash.	19.9	Arizona State	24.6	Arizona State	48
Utah	19.7	Michigan State	17.5	Utah	34.7
Arizona State	17.8	Utah	17.5	Emory	29.6
Michigan State	17.4	Minnesota	17.1	Arizona	28.9
Washington and Lee	15.3	Emory	16.5	Minnesota	22
Washington Univ.	15.2	Cal. Berkeley	16.2	George Wash.	21.8

Loyola Marymount	15.1	Rutgers - Camden	14.9	Georgetown	21.2
Northwestern	14.2	Georgetown	14.7	Rutgers – Camden	20.7
Richmond	13.7	Southern Cal.	14.7	Southern Cal.	19.7
Rutgers - Camden	13.4	Northwestern	14.4	Texas	19.1
Cal. Los Angeles	13	Cincinnati	14.3	Cincinnati	17.5
Cal. Davis	12.8	Columbia	14.3	Northwestern	17.1
Lewis & Clark	12.1	Buffalo	14.2	Washington Univ.	15.4
Georgetown	12	Arizona	14	Univ. Washington	15.3
Minnesota	11.9	Cardozo	13.8	Columbia	14.2
New York Univ.	11.8	SMU	13.4	American	13.8
Cardozo	11.8	Florida	12.7	SMU	13.3
Columbia	11.4	Chicago	12.6	Cal. Los Angeles	13.3
Buffalo	11	George Wash.	12.5	Chicago	13

Note that in these two charts, the “repeat players” are bolded – those schools in the top 20 for all three years – 2011, 2012 and 2013. (Four of the top ten schools Leiter highlighted from the summer of 2006 remain in the top ten as of the summer of 2013, with four others still in the top 20.) In addition, it is worth noting some significant changes between 2011 and 2013. For example, the number of schools with 50 or more transfers increased from six to eight with only two schools with more than 70 transfers in 2011 and 2012, but with five schools with more than 70 transfers in 2013.

Leiter’s top ten law schools took in a total of 482 transfers, representing 21.3% of the 2,265 transfers that summer. The top ten law schools in 2011 totaled 570 transfers, representing 23.5% of the 2427 transfer students that summer. The top ten law schools in 2012 totaled 587 transfers, representing 24.1% of the 2438 transfers that summer. The top ten law schools in 2013, however, totaled 724 students, representing 28.9% of the 2501 transfers in 2013, demonstrating an increasing concentration in the transfer market between 2006 and 2013 and even moreso between 2012 and 2013.

In addition, three of the top four schools with the highest number of transfers were the same all three years, with Georgetown welcoming 71 in the summer of 2011, 85 in the summer of 2012, and 122 in the summer of 2013, George Washington, welcoming 104 in the summer of 2011, 63 in the summer of 2012, and 93 in the summer of 2013, and Florida State welcoming 57 in the summer of 2011, 89 in the summer of 2012 and 90 in the summer of 2013. (Notably, Georgetown and Florida State were the two top schools for transfers in 2006, with 100 and 59 transfers in respectively.)

Similarly, three of the top four schools with the highest “percentage of transfers” were the same all three years, with Utah at 19.7% in 2011, 17.5% in 2012 and 34.7% in 2013, Arizona State at 17.8% in 2011, 24.6% in 2012 and 48% in 2013, and Florida State at 28.6% in 2011, 44.5% in 2012 and 48.1% in 2013. The top five schools on the “percentage of transfers” chart all increased the “percentage” of transfer students they welcomed between 2011 and 2013, some significantly, which also suggests greater concentration in the transfer market between 2011 and 2013.

More specifically, there are several schools that have really “played” the transfer game in the last two years – increasing their engagement by a significant percentage. These eight schools had 10.2% of the transfer market in 2011, but garnered 22.2% of the transfer market in 2013.

Schools with Significant Increases in Transfers 2011-2013

School	2011	2012	2013	Percentage Increase
Texas	6	9	59	883%
Arizona	6	24	44	633%
Emory	19	41	75	295%
Arizona State	34	42	73	115%
Georgetown	71	85	122	70%
Florida State	57	89	90	58%
Southern Cal	24	29	37	54%
Minnesota	31	42	45	45%
Totals	248	371	555	124%

REGIONAL MARKETS

There appear to be “regional” transfer markets. In the Southeast in 2013, for example, three schools -- Florida State, Florida and Emory -- had a combined net inflow of 180 transfer students, while Stetson and Miami were flat (43 transfers in and 42 transfers in, combined) and eight other schools from the region -- Florida Coastal, Charlotte, Charleston, Atlanta’s John Marshall, St. Thomas University, Ave Maria, Florida A&M, Nova Southeastern – had a combined

net outflow of 303. It seems reasonable to assume that many of the transfers out of these schools found their way to Emory, Florida and Florida State (and perhaps to Miami and Stetson to the extent that Miami and Stetson lost students to Emory, Florida and Florida State).

NEW DATA – NEW INSIGHTS

Starting this fall, the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is collecting and requiring schools to report not only the number of students who have transferred in, but also the schools from which they came (indicating the number from each school) along with the 75%, 50% and 25% first-year, law school GPAs of the pool of students who transferred in to a given school (provided that at least five students at the school transferred in). As a result, we will be able to delineate the regional transfer markets (as well as those schools with more of a national transfer market).

Notably, even though the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is not requiring the gathering and publication of the 75%, 50%, and 25% LSAT and UGPA, one thing we are very likely to learn is that for many schools, the “LSAT/UGPA” profile of transfers in is almost certainly lower than the LSAT/UGPA profile of the first-year matriculants in the prior year, a point that both Henderson and Rensberger highlight in their analyses.

Just look at the schools in the Southeast as an example. Assume Emory, Florida State and Florida (large “transfer in” schools) are, in fact, admitting a significant number of transfer students from other schools in the Southeast region, such as Miami and Stetson, and schools like Florida Coastal, St. Thomas University, Charlotte, Atlanta’s John Marshall and Ave Maria (large “transfer out” schools in the Southeast). Even if they are taking students who only came from the top quarter of the entering classes at those schools, the incoming transfers would have a significantly less robust LSAT/UGPA profile when compared with the entering class profile at Emory, Florida State or Florida in the prior year. Virtually every student who might be transferring in to Emory, Florida or Florida State from one of these transfer out schools (other than Miami and perhaps Stetson) is likely to be in the bottom quarter of the entering class LSAT profile at Emory, Florida, and Florida State.

Comparison of Relative Profiles of Southeast Region Transfer In/Out Schools

TRANSFER IN SCHOOLS	2012 LSAT	2012 UGPA	TRANSFER OUT SCHOOLS	2012 LSAT	2012 UGPA
Emory	166/165/161	3.82/3.70/3.35	Miami	159/156/155	3.57/3.36/3.14
Florida	164/161/160	3.73/3.59/3.33	Stetson	157/157/152	3.52/3.28/3.02
Florida State	162/160/157	3.72/3.54/3.29	St. Thomas (FL)	150/148/146	3.33/3.10/2.83
			Florida Coastal	151/146/143	3.26/3.01/2.71
			Charlotte	150/146/142	3.32/2.97/2.65
			Atlanta’s John Marshall	153/150/148	3.26/2.99/2.60

			Ave Maria	153/148/144	3.48/3.10/2.81
--	--	--	------------------	--------------------	-----------------------

This raises an interesting question about LSAT and UGPA profile data. If we assume that LSAT and UGPA profile data are used not only by law schools as predictors of performance, but that third parties also use this data as evidence of the “strength” of the student body, and ultimately the graduates, of a given law school (for example, USNEWS in its rankings and employers in their assessment of the quality of schools at which to interview), what can we surmise about the impact from significant numbers of transfers? For those law schools with a significant number/percentage of “transfers in” from law schools whose entering class profiles are seemingly much weaker, the entering class profile presently published in the Standard 509 disclosure report for each school arguably fails to accurately reflect the LSAT and UGPA quality of the graduating class. Similarly, if the “transfers out” from a given school happen to come from the top half of the entering class profile, then for these schools as well the entering class profile presently published in the Standard 509 disclosure report for each school arguably fails to accurately reflect the LSAT and UGPA quality of the graduating class.

Using the chart above, if Emory, Florida and Florida State are drawing a significant number of transfers from the regional transfer out schools, and if they had to report the LSAT and UGPA profile of their second-year class rather than their first-year class, their LSAT and UGPA profiles almost certainly would decline. (The same likely would be true for other law schools with large numbers of transfers.)

STILL MANY UNKNOWNNS

Even with more granular data available in the near future to delineate more clearly the transfer pathways between transfer out schools and transfer in schools, there still will be a significant number of unknowns relating to transfer students, regarding employment outcomes, the demographics of transfers, the experience of transfers and the motivation for transfers.

First, with respect to the employment outcomes of transfer students, how do they compare with the employment outcomes for students who started at a law school as first-years? Do the employment outcomes for transfer students track that of students who started at a law school as first-years, or is the employment market for transfer students less robust than it is for students who started at a law school as first-years? Are the employment outcomes nonetheless better than they might have been at the school from which they transferred? These are important questions given the perception that many students transfer “up” in the rankings to improve their employment opportunities.

Second, with respect to demographics, do students of color and women participate proportionately in the transfer market or is the market disproportionately occupied by white males?

Third, with respect to the experience of transfers, the Law School Survey of Student Engagement gathered some data from participating law schools in [2005](#) regarding the experience of transfers but more could be done to better understand how integrated transfer students are in the life of the learning community into which they transfer.

Fourth, with respect to the motivations of transfers, it is generally assumed that transfers are “climbing” the rankings, and Henderson’s data broadly suggests movement from lower-ranked schools to higher-ranked schools, but what percentage of transfers are doing so partly or primarily for geographic reasons – to be near family or a future career location? How many are transferring for financial reasons because they lost a conditional scholarship after their first year of law school? How many truly are transferring to get a JD from a higher ranked law school? How many of those believe their job opportunities will be better at the school to which they are transferring?

We will have answers to some questions soon, but will still have many questions that remain unanswered.

Source: [Better Understanding the Transfer Market](#), Legal Whiteboard, December 10, 2014