

The 2017 Law School Transfer Market

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

NUMBERS AND PERCENTAGES OF TRANSFERS: 2011-2017

The number of transfers increased slightly to 1797 in 2017 from 1749 in 2016, still down from 1,979 in 2015, and from 2,187 in 2014 and 2,501 in 2013. The percentage of the previous fall's entering class that engaged in the transfer market also increased only slightly to 4.8%, on the low end of where it has been since 2011.

In other words, there is no reason to believe the transfer market is "growing" as a general matter. It has been fairly consistently in the 4.7% to 5.8% range for the last six years. In fact, there might be a reason to believe the general transfer market is declining, given that roughly 200 of the transfers this year, more than 10% of all transfers, are from Charlotte, Whittier and Indiana Tech. Excluding the transfers out from Charlotte, Whittier and Indiana Tech, the number of transfers likely would be below 1600, which would be less than 4.5%, the lowest level in the last several years.

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

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), and Summer 2016 (fall 2015 entering class), and Summer 2017 (fall 2016 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 three years are in **black**, those schools in the top 15 for two of the three years are in [blue](#). Ten of the top 15 have been on the list for the largest number of transfers all three years. All of the top six law schools in 2016 for transfers welcomed a smaller number of transfers in

2017, although George Washington saw the largest drop in its transfer class between 2016 and 2017, with a decline of roughly 40 from where it had been the two previous years. Two of the three law schools that are new to the list, Charleston and Lincoln Memorial, took significant numbers of transfers from Charlotte.

Largest Law Schools by Number of Transfers from 2015-2017

School	Number in 2015		Number in 2016		Number in 2017
Georgetown	110	Georgetown	111	Georgetown	105
George Wash.	109	George Wash	106	George Wash	67
Arizona St.	65	Arizona St.	66	Charleston	61
Harvard	55	Columbia	50	NYU	58
Emory	51	Emory	49	Arizona St.	56
NYU	51	UCLA	43	Columbia	46
Cal. Berkeley	49	Loyola Marymount	43	SMU	42
Rutgers	45	NYU	43	Emory	41
Columbia	44	Florida	36	Loyola Marymount	41
Miami	44	Houston	36	Harvard	40
UCLA	43	Harvard	35	UCLA	36
Texas	37	Cal. Berkeley	33	Cal. Berkeley	33
American	33	Miami	31	Lincoln Memorial	33
Florida St.	32	American	30	Miami	33
Minnesota	31	Florida St.	30	Florida	31
	799		741		723
	0.404		0.423		0.402

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

Most interestingly, for 2017, several of the leading law schools for percentage of transfers are new to the list because they have absorbed large numbers of transfers from Charlotte

(Charleston – 58, Lincoln Memorial – 28, Appalachian – 16, and North Dakota - 11) or Whittier (Western State – 22) or Indiana Tech (Toledo – 8).

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

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

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, and now four in 2017 (two of which are in excess of 50%).

Largely because of the decline in the number of transfers in at George Washington and the other top law schools for transfers, and because several different law schools received transfers from Charlotte, Whittier and Indiana Tech, for the first time in the last several years, the concentration in the transfer market declined, as the ten law schools with the most students transferring in captured a slightly smaller share of the transfer market, 31%, 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
Total Transfers	2427	2438	2501	2187	1979	1749	1797
Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers	570	587	724	625	623	583	557
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%

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 ten law schools that have been among the top-15 in terms of transfers in for each of the last three 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 2017 as well as the percentage of transfers that came from that school.

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

School	# of Transfers 15/16/17	Reg,	Regional # of Transfers 15/16/17	Regional % of Transfers 15/16/17	School from Which Largest Number of Transfers Came in 2016	#/% of Transfers from Largest School 2016
Harvard	55/35/40	NE	15/13/10	27/37/25	American	6/15%
Columbia	44/50/46	NE	19/24/21	43/48/43	GWU	7/15%
NYU	51/43/58	NE	15/16/20	29/37/34	Fordham/GWU	11/19%
Berkeley	49/33/33	CA	29/22/20	59/67/61	Santa Clara	6/18%

Georgetown	110/111/105	Mid-Atl	43/36/31	39/32/30	American	13/12%
UCLA	43/43/36	CA	26/25/23	60/58/64	Loyola, LA/Hastings	5/14%
Emory	51/49/41	SE	31/25/26	61/51/63	Charlotte	6/15%
Arizona St.	65/66/56	SW	48/57/39	74/86/70	Arizona Sum.	24/43%
GWU	109/106/67	Mid-Atl	70/77/45	64/73/67	American	30/45%
Miami	44/31/33	SE	28/24/21	64/77/64	Nova Southeastern	7/21%

For these top-ten law schools for transfer students in 2017, six law schools (Berkeley, UCLA, Emory, Arizona State, George Washington, and Miami) obtained most of their transfers (51% 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 they are located in each of the last three years.

Moreover, two of the ten law schools had a significant percentage of their transfers in from one particular feeder school. For George Washington, roughly 45% of its transfers came from American University, while for Arizona State, roughly 43% of its transfers came from Arizona Summit.

VARIED QUALITY OF THE TRANSFER POOL

The chart below shows the tiers of law schools from which these ten law schools in the transfer market received their transfer students. Six of the ten law schools that consistently have high numbers of transfers are ranked in the top 15 in USNews, while all but one are ranked in the top 30. Four of the ten law schools had 89% or more of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 99 in the USNews rankings – Harvard, Columbia, NYU, and UCLA. Three additional schools, Berkeley, Georgetown, and George Washington had between 59% and 71% of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 99. The remaining three law schools (two of which are ranked in the top 25 in USNews (Emory and Arizona State)), had more than 65% of their transfer students from law schools ranked 100 or lower.

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

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

	# of Trans	Top 50	51-99	100-200
	15/16/17	# -- %	# -- %	# -- %
		15/16/17	15/16/17	15/16/17

Harvard	/55/35/40	41/28/27	75/80/68	13/7/13	24/20/32	1/0/0	2/0/0
Columbia	44/50/46	30/33/36	68/67/78	10/16/9	23/33/20	4/1/1	9/2/2
NYU	51/43/58	40/35/55	78/81/95	10/8/3	14/20/5	1/0/0	2/0/0
Berkeley	49/33/33	15/11/13	31/33/39	26/8/8	53/24/24	8/14/12	16/42/36
Georgetown	110/111/105	30/32/21	27/29/20	30/41/41	27/37/39	50/38/43	45/34/41
UCLA	43/43/36	15/18/9	35/41/25	23/21/23	53/49/64	5/4/4	12/10/11
Emory	51/49/41	5/3/5	10/6/12	8/17/9	16/35/22	38/29/27	75/59/66
Arizona St.	65/66/56	0/3/5	0/5/9	6/7/8	9/11/14	59/56/43	91/85/77
GWU	109/106/67	21/15/5	19/14/7	63/68/43	58/64/64	25/23/19	23/22/29
Miami	44/31/33	3/2/2	7/6/6	7/3/3	16/10/9	34/26/28	77/84/85

If one focuses just on the reported GPAs from these ten 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 2017 that is a 3.75 or above, and a 25th GPA of 3.68 and above. These three law schools – Harvard, Columbia and Berkeley – are clearly accepting transfer 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 3.65 and with 25th GPA of between 3.42 and 3.56. 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 four law schools have a 75th GPA that drops below 3.5, a 50th GPA that drops below 3.35, and a 25th GPA that drops below 3.15 (and below 3.0 in 2017 for one of the four law schools). Emory, Arizona State, George Washington and Miami 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 at the Ten Law Schools Among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2015, 2016 and 2017

School	GPA 75 th	GPA 50 th	GPA 25 th
	15/16/17	15/16/17	15/16/17
Harvard	3.98/4.0/ 3.96	3.92/3.94/ 3.92	3.85/3.88/ 3.87
Columbia	3.82/3.84/ 3.86	3.76/3.71/ 3.76	3.66/3.6/ 3.68
NYU	3.76/3.72/ 3.66	3.68/3.6/ 3.57	3.52/3.41/ 3.49

Berkeley	3.87/3.92/ 3.9	3.81/3.8/ 3.81	3.69/3.75/ 3.71
Georgetown	3.77/3.76/ 3.73	3.66/3.63/ 3.64	3.59/3.54/ 3.56
UCLA	3.7/3.67/ 3.71	3.58/3.56/ 3.58	3.46/3.52/ 3.42
Emory	3.45/3.41/ 3.35	3.3/3.16/ 3.2	3.06/3.02/ 2.96
Arizona St.	3.5/3.4/ 3.44	3.17/3.09/ 3.22	2.95/2.96/ 3.06
GWU	3.46/3.45/ 3.44	3.32/3.26/ 3.33	3.15/3.14/ 3.13
Miami	3.26/3.16/ 3.20	3.05/3.01/ 3.08	2.9/2.88/ 3.02

With the addition of law schools like Charleston, Lincoln Memorial, Appalachian, Western State and North Dakota to the top-15 law schools in terms of percentage of transfers enrolled, one can see even more precipitous declines in the GPA profiles of the transfer students. For four of these five law schools the 75th percentile was below a 3.0 and for three of them the 50th was below a 2.5 and the 25th was below a 2.3. These are five law schools that could see significant bar passage problems in 2019 largely because of the number transfers they took in this summer whose first-year grades place them at greater risk of bar failure.

School	Number	75 th	50 th	25 th
Appalachian	19	3.18	2.87	2.51
Western State	26	2.94	2.86	2.74
North Dakota	14	2.91	2.47	2.14
Lincoln Memorial	33	2.74	2.42	2.27
Charleston	61	2.48	2.33	2.17

STILL MANY UNKNOWNNS

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).