

# Organ: The 2021 Law School Transfer Market

By [Jerry Organ](#)

This blog posting updates my blog postings over the last several years regarding what we know about the transfer market ([2014](#), [2015](#), [2016](#), [2017](#), [2018](#), [2019](#), [2020](#)). With the ABA's posting of the [2021 Standard 509 Reports](#), we now have several years of more detailed transfer data from which to glean insights about the transfer market among law schools.

## Numbers of Transfers and Percentage of Transfers Decline

As shown in Table 1 below, the number of transfer students received by law schools in 2021 decreased to 1375 (3.6%). For the last several years, the transfer market has been shrinking, having declined from 5.5% in 2014, to 4.7% in 2016, to 4.0% in 2018, and now 3.6% in 2021. Aside from a slight bump in 2017, and another bump last year, this drop reflects a continuation of a gradual decline in transfers over the last several years – from more than 2100 to less than 1400 (down one-third) and from 5.5% to 3.6% (also down one-third).

**Table 1 – Number of Transfers and Percentage of Transfers from 2014-2021**

|                                            | 2014   | 2015   | 2016   | 2017   | 2018   | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   |
|--------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| <b>Number of Transfers</b>                 | 2187   | 1979   | 1749   | 1797   | 1494   | 1294   | 1612   | 1375   |
| <b>Previous Year First Year Enrollment</b> | 39,800 | 38,000 | 37,100 | 37,100 | 37,300 | 38,400 | 38,500 | 38,200 |
| <b>% of Previous First-Year Total</b>      | 5.5%   | 5.2%   | 4.7%   | 4.8%   | 4.0%   | 3.4%   | 4.2%   | 3.6%   |

After an increase in transfers in 2020, we see a decline again in 2021 to 1375 and 3.6% – slightly above where things were in the summer of 2019 but lower than any of the preceding five years. This may partly be attributable to the larger and stronger first-year applicant pool for fall 2021, which may have enabled some law schools both to grow the size of their first-year class while simultaneously increasing their median LSAT. With a larger group of first-year students anticipated to be joining the law school this fall, some schools may have dialed back their transfer classes a little bit. On the other hand, Georgetown remains right where it has been historically in terms of the number of transfers, while Harvard showed its third increase in transfers in as many years, having gone from 32, to 43, to 65, to 71. This growth may be a function of the smaller first year class Harvard took in 2020 (501 – down from a fairly consistent 560 in the preceding years). Knowing that it would be welcoming a smaller class in 2020, I suspect Harvard made a conscious decision to welcome more transfers in 2020 and in 2021 to counterbalance the loss of revenue from a smaller first-year class.

## 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 2018 (fall 2017 entering class), Summer 2019 (fall 2018 entering class), Summer 2020 (fall 2019 entering class), and Summer 2021 (fall 2020 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**.) Seven of the top 15 for 2021 have been on the list for the largest number of transfers all four years, with two having been on the list for three of the four years (including 2021), and five having been on the list two of the four years (including 2021). The only newcomer to the list in 2021 is Washburn.) Notably, three law school that had been regulars in the three previous years did not make the list of the top 15 for 2021 – NYU, Cal Berkeley, and Loyola Marymount. Table 2 also shows that for 2021, the concentration of transfers in the top 15 law schools for transfers declined, dropping from 50% in 2020 to 43% in 2021.

**TABLE 2 -- Largest Law Schools by Number of Transfers from 2018-2021**

| School               | # in 2018  | School               | # in 2019  | School               | # in 2020  | School               | # in 2021  |
|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|----------------------|------------|
| <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>105</b> | <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>105</b> | <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>109</b> | <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>104</b> |
| <b>NYU</b>           | <b>58</b>  | <b>GWU</b>           | <b>74</b>  | Idaho                | <b>105</b> | <b>Harvard</b>       | <b>71</b>  |
| <b>Arizona State</b> | <b>50</b>  | <b>NYU</b>           | <b>54</b>  | <b>GWU</b>           | <b>96</b>  | <b>GWU</b>           | <b>64</b>  |
| Emory                | 42         | <b>Columbia</b>      | <b>44</b>  | <b>Harvard</b>       | <b>65</b>  | <b>Arizona State</b> | <b>43</b>  |
| <b>Cal. Berkeley</b> | <b>36</b>  | <b>Harvard</b>       | <b>43</b>  | <b>NYU</b>           | <b>53</b>  | Florida State        | 37         |
| <b>Columbia</b>      | <b>35</b>  | <b>Loyola-LA</b>     | <b>41</b>  | <b>Florida</b>       | <b>51</b>  | <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>34</b>  |
| <b>Loyola-LA</b>     | <b>34</b>  | <b>Florida</b>       | <b>40</b>  | <b>Columbia</b>      | <b>48</b>  | <b>Columbia</b>      | <b>31</b>  |
| <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>33</b>  | <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>34</b>  | <b>Cal. Berkeley</b> | <b>43</b>  | George Mason         | 29         |
| <b>Harvard</b>       | <b>32</b>  | <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>34</b>  | <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>39</b>  | Miami                | 28         |
| <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>31</b>  | <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>27</b>  | Florida State        | 38         | Washburn             | 28         |
| <b>GWU</b>           | <b>31</b>  | Hofstra              | 26         | <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>36</b>  | <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>26</b>  |
| North Dakota         | 28         | UNLV                 | 24         | Miami                | 31         | <b>Florida</b>       | <b>25</b>  |
| <b>Florida</b>       | <b>27</b>  | <b>Cal. Berkeley</b> | <b>24</b>  | George Mason         | 30         | <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>24</b>  |
| Houston              | 25         | <b>Arizona St.</b>   | <b>22</b>  | <b>Loyola-LA</b>     | <b>30</b>  | Rutgers              | 24         |
| Hofstra              | 24         | Rutgers              | 21         | <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>28</b>  | Houston              | 23         |
| Total                | 591        |                      | 613        |                      | 801        |                      | <b>591</b> |
| Percentage           | 40%        |                      | 47%        |                      | 50%        |                      | <b>43%</b> |

As shown in Table 3, if we focus just on the top ten law schools for transfers in, the total is 496 – 36% of all transfers – third highest in the last decade, but down from the last two years when the percentages were 38% and 40%, respectively.

**TABLE 3 – Totals for Top Ten Law Schools for Transfers In as a Percentage of All Transfers for 2012-2021**

|                                                                                | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Total Transfers</b>                                                         | 2438 | 2501 | 2187 | 1979 | 1749 | 1797 | 1494 | 1294 | 1621 | 1375 |
| <b>Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers</b>                         | 587  | 724  | 625  | 623  | 583  | 557  | 456  | 496  | 646  | 496  |
| <b>Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers as % of Total Transfers</b> | 24%  | 29%  | 29%  | 32%  | 33%  | 31%  | 31%  | 38%  | 40%  | 36%  |

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 – Chicago, Georgetown, Northwestern and UNLV. Five law schools have been on the list three times in the last four years – Arizona State, Florida, Florida International, Florida State, and George Washington (including 2021). There also are four law schools that have been on the list in two of the last four years (including 2021) – Emory, George Mason, Harvard, and Houston. The number of law schools welcoming transfers representing 20% or more of their first-year class has fallen from nine in 2013 (not shown), to six in 2014 (not shown), to four in 2017 (two of which were in excess of 50%), two in 2018, none in 2019, four again in 2020 (with Idaho leading the way at 83%) and now two in 2021.

**TABLE 4 -- Largest Law Schools by Transfers as a Percentage of Previous First-Year Class - 2018-2020**

| <b>School</b> | <b>2018%</b> | <b>School</b> | <b>2019%</b> | <b>School</b> | <b>2020%</b> | <b>School</b> | <b>2021%</b> |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| North Dakota  | 39           | Georgetown    | 18           | Idaho         | 83           | Washburn      | 25           |

|                      |            |                      |           |                      |           |                      |           |
|----------------------|------------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
| <b>Arizona State</b> | <b>23</b>  | <b>Florida</b>       | <b>16</b> | <b>Florida</b>       | <b>30</b> | <b>Florida State</b> | <b>22</b> |
| <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>18</b>  | <b>UNLV</b>          | <b>15</b> | George Mason         | 22        | George Mason         | 19        |
| Emory                | 18         | <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>14</b> | <b>Florida State</b> | <b>20</b> | <b>Arizona State</b> | <b>18</b> |
| <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>15</b>  | <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>14</b> | <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>19</b> | <b>UNLV</b>          | <b>18</b> |
| <b>NYU</b>           | <b>14</b>  | <b>GWU</b>           | <b>13</b> | <b>GWU</b>           | <b>19</b> | <b>Georgetown</b>    | <b>17</b> |
| <b>UNLV</b>          | <b>13</b>  | <b>Loyola-LA</b>     | <b>13</b> | <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>15</b> | Harvard              | 14        |
| Mercer               | 12         | <b>NYU</b>           | <b>12</b> | <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>14</b> | <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>14</b> |
| Cal-Berkeley         | 12         | <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>11</b> | <b>UNLV</b>          | <b>14</b> | <b>Northwestern</b>  | <b>14</b> |
| Houston              | 11         | Columbia             | 11        | Columbia             | 13        | <b>Florida Int'l</b> | <b>13</b> |
| <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>11</b>  | Hofstra              | 10        | <b>Florida Int'l</b> | <b>13</b> | Vanderbilt           | 13        |
| <b>Loyola-LA</b>     | <b>10</b>  | <b>Florida Int'l</b> | <b>10</b> | Cal-Berkeley         | 13        | <b>Florida</b>       | <b>12</b> |
| <b>Florida St.</b>   | <b>10</b>  | Pepperdine           | 9         | Western State        | 13        | <b>GWU</b>           | <b>12</b> |
| Hofstra              | 10         | <b>Arizona State</b> | <b>8</b>  | <b>UCLA</b>          | <b>13</b> | Houston              | 10        |
| <b>Chicago</b>       | <b>9.6</b> | Harvard              | 8         | <b>NYU</b>           | <b>12</b> | Emory                | <b>9</b>  |

#### **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 six of the seven 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. (Columbia is excluded here because its list of transfers by school (76) far exceeds the number of transfers in it welcomed (31).) Table 5 indicates the extent to which these six 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 2021 as well as the percentage of transfers that came from that school. Notably, four of these six law schools are on the East Coast (Harvard, Georgetown, George Washington and Florida)(five of seven including Columbia) while one is in the Midwest (Northwestern) and one is in California (UCLA).

**TABLE 5 -- Percentage of Transfers from Within Geographic Region 2019-2020-2021 and Top Feeder School(s) for 2021 at the Six Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021**

| <b>School</b>       | <b>Total # of Transfers<br/>19/20/21</b> | <b>Reg.</b> | <b>Regional # of Transfers<br/>19/20/21</b> | <b>Regional % of Transfers<br/>19/20/21</b> | <b>School from Which Largest Number of Transfers Came in 2021</b> | <b>#/% of Transfers from Largest School 2021</b> |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Harvard</b>      | 43/65/71                                 | NE          | 11/17/19                                    | 26/26/27                                    | George Mason                                                      | 7/10%                                            |
| <b>Northwestern</b> | 34/36/34                                 | MW          | 23/18/17                                    | 68/50/50                                    | DePaul/UIC John Marshall                                          | 5/15%                                            |
| <b>Georgetown</b>   | 105/109/104                              | Mid-Atl     | 51/37/34                                    | 49/34/33                                    | American                                                          | 10/10%                                           |
| <b>UCLA</b>         | 34/39/24                                 | CA          | 22/25/18                                    | 65/64/75                                    | UC Hastings/UC Irvine                                             | 4/17%                                            |
| <b>GWU</b>          | 74/95/64                                 | Mid-Atl     | 40/48/19                                    | 54/51/30                                    | American/Maryland                                                 | 4/6%                                             |
| <b>Florida</b>      | 40/51/25                                 | SE          | 31/41/19                                    | 78/80/76                                    | Stetson                                                           | 6/24%                                            |

For these six law schools, three (Northwestern, UCLA, and Florida) 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, two law schools (Harvard 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. George Washington had received more than 50% of its transfers from within the Mid-Atlantic region in 2019 and 2020 but dropped to just 30% from the Mid-Atlantic region in 2021.

Moreover, three of the six law schools had a significant percentage (more than 15%) of their transfers in from one or two particular feeder schools. For Florida, 24% of its transfers came from Stetson. For UCLA, 17% of its transfers came from UC Hastings and from UC Irvine. For Northwestern, 15% of its transfers came from DePaul and UIC John Marshall.

#### **VARIED QUALITY OF THE TRANSFER POOL**

Table 6 below shows the tiers of law schools from which these six largest law schools in the transfer market for each of the last four years received their transfer students. Four of the six law schools that consistently have high numbers of transfers in (five of seven including Columbia) are ranked in the top 15 in US News, while the other two are ranked in the top 30. Three of the six law schools had 85% or more of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 100 in the US News rankings – Harvard, Georgetown and UCLA (with Harvard and UCLA having 75% or more from top-50 law schools). Two additional schools, George Washington and Northwestern, had between 60% and 70% of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 100. The remaining law school, Florida, had 76% of its transfer students from law schools ranked 101 or lower.

**TABLE 6 -- Percentage of Transfers from Different Tiers of School(s) for 2019, 2020 and 2021 at the Six Law Schools Among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021**

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

|                     | # of Trans<br>19/20/21 | Top 50<br># -- %<br>19/20/21 |                  | 51-100<br># -- %<br>19/20/21 |                 | 101-200<br># -- %<br>19/20/21 |                   |
|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Harvard</b>      | 43/65/71               | 28/56/59                     | <b>65/86/83</b>  | 11/9/12                      | 26/14/17        | 4/0/0                         | 9/0/0             |
| <b>Northwestern</b> | 34/36/34               | 13/14/13                     | <b>38/39/38</b>  | 13/11/8                      | <b>38/31/24</b> | 8/11/13                       | 24/31/ <b>38</b>  |
| <b>Georgetown</b>   | 105/109/104            | 29/16/51                     | 28/15/ <b>49</b> | 52/46/37                     | <b>49/42/36</b> | 24/47/16                      | 23/ <b>43</b> /15 |
| <b>UCLA</b>         | 34/39/24               | 13/19/18                     | 38/ <b>49/75</b> | 17/19/4                      | <b>50/49/17</b> | 4/1/2                         | 12/2/8            |
| <b>GWU</b>          | 74/95/64               | 9/21/17                      | 12/22/27         | 38/46/27                     | <b>51/48/42</b> | 27/28/20                      | 37/29/31          |
| <b>Florida</b>      | 40/51/25               | 2/4/1                        | 5/8/4            | 3/7/5                        | 8/14/20         | 35/40/19                      | <b>88/78/76</b>   |

Table 7 below highlights the reported GPAs of transfers in for these six law schools. In looking at Table 7, one quickly sees that of the four law schools ranked in the US News top-15, only one – Harvard -- has a 50th GPA for transfers in 2021 that above 3.9, and a 25th GPA of 3.85 and above. Harvard also is accepting most of its transfers in from top-50 law schools, making it clear that it is accepting transfers in who could have been admitted to Harvard in the first instance.

The other three top-15 law schools – Northwestern, Georgetown and UCLA – are a step below in terms of the credentials of their transfers, with 50th GPAs of between 3.71 and 3.81 (below the 25<sup>th</sup> GPA for Harvard) and with 25th GPAs of between 3.60 and 3.67. Of this group, only UCLA (75%) is taking most of its transfers from top-50 law schools, so the transfers it is accepting might be people it would have admitted in the first instance. But for Georgetown and Northwestern, with a majority of their transfers coming from law schools ranked outside the top 50, many of these transfer students may not have had the credentials to be admitted as first-year students.

Once you drop out of the top-15, the other two law schools have a 50th GPA that drops below 3.5, and a 25th GPA that drops below 3.4, with the majority of these transfers coming from law schools ranked 51-100 for George Washington and ranked 101-200 for Florida. These law schools clearly are welcoming a number of transfer students whose entering credentials almost certainly were 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. (That said, the three-year trend generally shows improvement in GPA at all three measures – 75th/50th/25th– for most of these law schools, suggesting that these law schools

might be paying more attention to trying to admit more qualified transfer applicants who are very likely to find success at their new law school.)

**TABLE 7 -- First-Year Law School 75th/50th/25th GPA of Transfers in 2019, 2020 and 2021 at the Six Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021**

| <b>School</b>       | <b>GPA 75th</b> | <b>GPA 50th</b> | <b>GPA 25th</b> |
|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                     | <b>19/20/21</b> | <b>19/20/21</b> | <b>19/20/21</b> |
| <b>Harvard</b>      | 4.02/4.0/4.0    | 3.95/3.95/3.97  | 3.89/3.82/3.88  |
| <b>Northwestern</b> | 3.76/3.81/3.83  | 3.63/3.71/3.73  | 3.48/3.58/3.66  |
| <b>Georgetown</b>   | 3.77/3.85/3.82  | 3.67/3.71/3.71  | 3.56/3.62/3.60  |
| <b>UCLA</b>         | 3.76/3.66/3.97  | 3.63/3.59/3.81  | 3.56/3.47/3.67  |
| <b>GWU</b>          | 3.41/3.47/3.62  | 3.23/3.33/3.46  | 3.11/3.18/3.38  |
| <b>Florida</b>      | 3.52/3.60/3.69  | 3.27/3.36/3.49  | 3.13/3.25/3.27  |

#### **STILL MANY UNKNOWN**

As I have noted for the last few years, these 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. These data give 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). These are questions for which additional research would be warranted.