

Organ: The Declining 2022 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, for example [2021](#) and [2020](#). With the ABA's posting of the [2022 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 Continue to Decline to the Lowest Levels in the Last Decade

As shown in Table 1 below, the number of transfer students received by law schools in 2022 decreased to 1231, the smallest number of transfers in the last decade. 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 3.0% in 2022. Aside from a slight bump in 2017, and another bump in 2020, this drop reflects a continuation of a gradual decline in transfers over the last several years — from more than 2100 to less than 1300 (down nearly 40%) and from 5.5% of first-years in the previous fall to 3.0% (down nearly 50%).

Table 1 — Number of Transfers and Percentage of Transfers from 2014-2022

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Transfers	2187	1979	1749	1797	1494	1294	1612	1375	1231
Previous Year First Year Enrollment	39,800	38,000	37,100	37,100	37,300	38400	38500	38200	41700
% of Previous First-Year Total	5.5%	5.2%	4.7%	4.8%	4.0%	3.4%	4.2%	3.6%	3.0%

After an increase in transfers in 2020, we have seen declines in 2021 to 1375 and 3.6% and 2022 to 1231 and 3.0% — the lowest number and percentage in a decade. This may partly be attributable to the larger enrollment among first-years in fall 2021, which enabled some law schools both to grow the size of their first-year class while simultaneously increasing their median LSAT. With this larger group of first-year students in fall 2021, some schools may have dialed back their transfer classes a little bit in the summer of 2022 due to limited capacity.

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 2019 (fall 2018 entering class), Summer 2020 (fall 2019 entering class), and Summer 2021 (fall 2020 entering class), and Summer 2022 (fall 2021 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**.) Six of the top 15 for 2021 have been on the list for the largest number of transfers all four years, with seven having been on the list for three of the four years (including 2022). The only newcomer to the list in 2021 is SMU. Notably, three law schools that had dropped out of the top 15 in 2021 returned in 2022 — NYU, Cal Berkeley, and Loyola Marymount. Table 2 also shows that for 2022, the concentration of transfers in the top 15 law schools for transfers increased back to 47%, from 43% in 2021.

TABLE 2 — Largest Law Schools by Number of Transfers from 2019-2022

School	# in 2019	School	# in 2020	School	# in 2021	School	# in 2022
Georgetown	105	Georgetown	109	Georgetown	104	Georgetown	120
NYU	74	Idaho	105	Harvard	71	George Washington	69
Arizona State	54	George Washington	96	George Washington	64	NYU	51
Emory	44	Harvard	65	Arizona State	43	Harvard	50
Cal. Berkeley	43	NYU	53	Florida State	37	Arizona State	39
Columbia	41	Florida	51	Northwestern	34	Cal. Berkeley	33
Loyola Marymount	40	Columbia	48	Columbia	31	Northwestern	29
Northwestern	34	Cal. Berkeley	43	George Mason	29	Miami	27
Harvard	34	UCLA	39	Miami	28	SMU	27
UCLA	27	Florida State	38	Washburn	28	Florida State	26
George Wash.	26	Northwestern	36	Chicago	26	George Mason	26
North Dakota	24	Miami	31	Florida	25	Florida	22
Florida	24	George Mason	30	UCLA	24	Loyola Marymount	21
Houston	22	Loyola Marymount	30	Rutgers	24	Columbia	19

Hofstra	21	Chicago	28	Houston	23	Rutgers	19
	613		801		591		578
	47%		50%		43%		47%

As shown in Table 3, if we focus just on the top ten law schools for transfers in, the total number of transfers is 471— 38% of all transfers — tied for the second highest percentage in the last decade.

TABLE 3 — Totals for Top Ten Law Schools for Transfers In as a Percentage of All Transfers for 2013-2022

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Transfers	2501	2187	1979	1749	1797	1494	1294	1621	1375	1231
Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers	724	625	623	583	557	456	496	646	496	471
Transfers to 10 Law Schools with Most Transfers as % of Total Transfers	29%	29%	32%	33%	31%	31%	38%	40%	36%	38%

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 five law schools have been on the list each of the last four years — Chicago, Florida State, Georgetown, Northwestern and UNLV. Seven law schools have been on the list three times in the last four years — Arizona State, Cal. Berkeley, Florida, George Mason, George Washington, Houston, and NYU (including 2022). Two of the other three schools have been on the list in two of the last four years (including 2022) — Harvard and Vanderbilt. 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 none in 2019, four in 2020, two in 2021, and only one in 2022.

TABLE 4 — Largest Law Schools by Transfers as a Percentage of Previous First-Year Class — 2019-2022

School	2019%	School	2020 %	School	2021 %	School	2022 %
North Dakota	18	Idaho	83	Washburn	25	Georgetown	22

Arizona State	16	Florida	30	Florida State	22	Florida State	17
Georgetown	15	George Mason	22	George Mason	19	George Washington	14
Emory	14	Florida State	20	Arizona State	18	Arizona State	13
Northwestern	14	Georgetown	19	UNLV	18	SMU	12
NYU	13	George Wash.	19	Georgetown	17	Northwestern	12
UNLV	13	Northwestern	15	Harvard	14	Harvard	10
Mercer	12	Chicago	14	Chicago	14	George Mason	10
Cal-Berkeley	11	UNLV	14	Northwestern	14	Vanderbilt	10
Houston	11	Columbia	13	Florida Int'l	13	Florida	9
UCLA	10	Florida Int'l	13	Vanderbilt	13	NYU	9
Loyola Marymount	10	Cal-Berkeley	13	Florida	12	UNLV	9
Florida St.	9	Western State	13	George Wash.	12	Cal. Berkeley	9
Hofstra	8	UCLA	13	Houston	10	Houston	7
Chicago	8	NYU	12	Emory	9	Chicago	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 six 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. 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 2022 as well as the percentage of transfers that came from that school. Notably, five of these six law schools are on the East Coast (Harvard, Columbia, Georgetown, George Washington and Florida) while one is in the Midwest (Northwestern).

TABLE 5 — Percentage of Transfers from Within Geographic Region 2020-2021-2022 and Top Feeder School(s) for 2022 at the Six Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2020, 2021, and 2022

School	Total # of Transfers 20/21/22	Region	Regional # of Transfers 20/21/22	Regional % of Transfers 20/21/22	School from Which Largest Number of Transfers Came in 2022	#/% of Transfers from Largest School 2022
Harvard	65/71/50	NE	17/19/11	26/27/22	Boston Univ./GWU	4/8%
Columbia	48/31/19	NE	20/10/11	42/31/58	Boston Univ./Brooklyn/GWU	2/10%
Northwestern	36/34/29	MW	18/17/20	50/50/69	Univ. Ill.-Chicago	7/24%
Georgetown	109/104/120	Mid-Atl	37/34/51	34/33/43	American	11/9%
Florida	51/25/22	SE	41/19/18	80/76/82	Miami	5/23%
GWU	96/64/69	Mid-Atl	48/19/30	51/30/43	American	8/12%

For these six law schools, two (Northwestern 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 2020 but dropped below 50% from the Mid-Atlantic region in 2021 and 2022, while Columbia was below 50% from the Northeast until 2022.

Moreover, two of the six law schools had a significant percentage (more than 20%) of their transfers in from one or two particular feeder schools. For Northwestern, 24% of its transfers

came from Univ. of Illinois-Chicago (with 21% from DePaul). For Florida, 23% of its transfers came from Miami.

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 are ranked in the top 15 in USNews, while the other two are ranked in the top 30. Two of the six law schools – Harvard (no lower than 72%) and Columbia (no lower than 55%) -- have consistently had large percentages of their transfers from law schools ranked between 1 and 50 in the USNews rankings. By contrast, in 2022, two of these six law schools – Northwestern and Florida -- had more than half of their transfers from law schools ranked 101 or lower (with Florida having more than half in all three years).

TABLE 6 — Percentage of Transfers from Different Tiers of School(s) for 2020, 2021, and 2022 at the Six Law Schools Among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2020, 2021, and 2022

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

	# of Trans 20/21/22	Top 50 20/21/22 # -- %		51-100 20/21/22 # -- %		101+ 20/21/22 # -- %	
Harvard	65/71/50	56/59/36	86/83/72	9/12/13	14/17/26	0/0/1	0/0/2
Columbia	48/31/19	31/17/13	65/55/68	16/13/6	33/42/32	1/1/0	2/3/0
Northwestern	36/34/29	14/13/6	39/38/21	11/8/8	31/24/28	11/13/15	31/ 38/52
Georgetown	109/104/120	16/51/48	15/ 49/40	46/37/47	42/36/39	47/16/25	43/15/21
Florida	51/25/22	4/1/1	8/4/5	7/5/9	14/20/41	40/19/12	78/76/55
GWU	96/64/69	21/17/14	22/27/20	46/27/31	48/42/45	28/20/24	29/31/35

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 USNEWS top-15, only one — Harvard — has a 50th GPA for transfers in 2022 that is 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. Columbia is a close second, with all three of its metrics at least .05 below those of Harvard.

The other two top-15 law schools – Northwestern and Georgetown – are a step below in terms of the credentials of their transfers, with 50th GPAs of below 3.75 (well below the 25th GPA for Harvard and below the 25th for Columbia) and with 25th GPAs of between 3.66 and 3.58, respectively, in 2022. In 2022, moreover, 60% of Georgetown's transfers were from law schools ranked 51 or lower while 80% of Northwestern's transfers were from law schools ranked 51 or lower (with 52% ranked 101 or lower). 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 — Florida and George Washington — have a 50th GPA that drops below 3.5, and a 25th GPA that drops to 3.41 or below, with 80% or more of these transfers coming from law schools ranked 51 or lower for George Washington and 96% for Florida (of whom 55% are from law schools ranked 101 or lower.). 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.

TABLE 7 — First-Year Law School 75th/50th/25th GPA of Transfers in 2020, 2021, and 2022 at the Six Law Schools among the Top-15 for Transfers in 2020, 2021, and 2022

School	GPA 75th	GPA 50 th	GPA 25 th
	20/21/22	20/21/22	20/21/22
Harvard	4.0/4.0/4.0	3.95/3.97/3.95	3.82/3.88/3.85
Columbia	3.93/3.91/3.95	3.85/3.87/3.89	3.79/3.82/3.77
Northwestern	3.81/3.83/3.83	3.71/3.73/3.74	3.58/3.66/3.66
Georgetown	3.85/3.82/3.83	3.71/3.71/3.69	3.62/3.60/3.58
Florida	3.60/3.69/3.69	3.36/3.49/3.45	3.25/3.27/3.41
GWU	3.47/3.62/3.5	3.33/3.46/3.39	3.18/3.38/3.18

STILL MANY UNKNOWNs

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). But it is interesting that fewer and fewer students appear to be interested in transferring law schools.

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.

Source: [The Declining 2022 Law School Transfer Market](#), January 17, 2023 TaxProf Blog

