

To Transfer or NOT?

– The TestPrepGuy's Quick Guide –

Transferring from one law school to another bears risk, yet provides some opportunity. In most cases, a law student who earns the opportunity to transfer fares best when not transferring. The following advice assumes the typical transfer scenario and provides the general framework for a law student considering a transfer.

Typical Transfer Scenario

The typical potential law school transfer student has two characteristics. (1) the student has earned a high class rank at the student's current law school and (2) the student believes that the transfer to a higher ranked law school will enhance the student's job prospects.

Probability of Earning Transfer Admission. A law student's probability of earning transfer admission depends on the law student's class rank just after the student's 1L year. Prior to 2010, law students who earned transfer admission to a higher ranked law school had almost always earned a class rank in or near the top ten percent of his or her 1L class. More recently however, the precipitous drop in law school applicants nationwide prompted a substantial number of law schools to reach enrollment targets by taking on dramatically more transfer students than prior to the drop. For example, The University of Texas School of Law typically took on four to ten transfer students per year prior to 2010, yet now takes on twenty-five to fifty. Law schools hoping to enroll large numbers of transfer students must admit those outside the top ten percent. Now, students in the top third of their 1L law school classes will likely have the opportunity to transfer to a higher ranked law school. Generally, the higher ranked the law student after the 1L year, the higher up the law school rankings the student can earn a transfer.

The Choice to Transfer

Once a law student gets an offer from a higher ranked law school, the student faces a difficult choice - to *transfer* or to *stay put*.

Transfer. If the law student takes the offer from the higher ranked law school and transfers, the law student has an expiring asset - *a high class rank from the prior law school*. When the transfer law student sends resumés to law firms during the student's first semester at the new, higher ranked law school, the student reports the class rank from the previous law school because he or she has yet to establish a class rank at the new, higher ranked law school. However, once the transfer student completes one semester at the new, higher ranked law school and receives grades at the higher ranked law school, the transfer student will receive a class rank based on *those new grades only*. So, in a sense, the class rank from the previous law school expires as a resumé asset and the resumé will now show the new class rank from the new, higher ranked law school. The new class rank will, almost by definition, be considerably lower than the class rank at the previous law school because the competition will, by definition, be greater at the higher ranked law school. Because law firms evaluate law students' resumés primarily on class rank, the law student tends to be worse off regarding job prospects once the new class rank is on the resumé.

Window of Opportunity. From the moment the transfer student enrolls at the higher ranked law school (usually August) to the moment that the higher ranked law school releases grades for the transfer student's first semester at the new law school (late December or early January), the transfer student should take advantage of the best of both worlds. The transfer student has the high class rank from the previous law school on his or her resumé, yet has greater exposure to law firms offered by the higher ranked law school.

Some transfer students have handled this window of opportunity very well by securing multiple 2L summer associate positions within the window of opportunity described above. These summer associate positions led to post law school job offers. In those cases, the timeline is such that the law firms never saw the lesser class rank from the higher ranked law school.

Some transfer students have handled this window of opportunity poorly by failing to attain 2L summer associate position within the window of opportunity. Earning a 2L summer associate

position is not guaranteed. Every year, for a number of reasons beyond the law students' control, thousands of law students who send out hundreds of resumés somehow fail to attain a 2L summer associate position or they are forced to take unpaid positions that do not lead to post law school jobs. These transfer students then face a job search with a significantly lower class rank and struggle through the remainder of the search for a post law school job.

Scholarship Money. Law schools typically offer very little scholarship money to transfer applicants, so the transfer student should prepare to pay full price at the higher ranked school and acquire more student loan debt.

Stay Put. The potential transfer law student faces the following when turning down the offer to the higher ranked law school to continue study at the current law school.

Scholarship Money. The transfer offer from a higher ranked law school becomes leverage with the potential transfer student's current law school. Because law schools want to keep their most talented students, a law student with an offer from a higher ranked school should make his current law school aware of the offer. Law schools' responses to this situation vary greatly, but many of them will respond to the offer from the higher ranked law school with significant scholarship offers or increases in scholarship offers. The potential transfer student should not expect, yet should not be shocked by very large scholarship offers from the student's existing law school.

Job Prospects. By staying at the potential transfer student's current law school, the student makes the risk-averse choice. First, the student maintains his or her best asset, a high class rank. Second, the pressure to secure the 2L summer associate position before the end of the 2L fall semester is off.

Emotionalism. Emotionalism enters the decision as to whether to transfer in two ways. Obviously, people make the best life decisions when they recognize and avoid emotionalism while making major life choices. The potential transfer law student should honestly assess whether either of the following issues is impacting decision-making and try to avoid influence from either.

Ego. Some law students attend law school and choose law schools to bolster their egos. The ego factor plays a large role in many transfer students' choices, especially when friends or family attend or have attended a higher ranked law school.

Panic. A potential transfer law student has, by definition, completed or is about to complete the first year of law school. Because 1L summer associate positions are far less numerous than 2L summer associate positions, the potential transfer law student may interpret his or her failure to attain a 1L summer associate position as a consequence of his lesser ranked law school and extrapolate that failure to the upcoming 2L recruiting season. This set of thoughts can induce panic, making the student think that the only path to a law job is through another law school. To mitigate this form of panicked decision-making, the potential transfer law student should remember that firms hire many times the number of 2L summer associates as they do 1L summer associates. So, the law student should not draw faulty analogies between the 1L recruiting outcome and the upcoming 2L recruiting outcome.

Geography. Geography represents another legitimate factor that potential transfer law students should consider. The general rule is that the higher ranked the law school, the more geographically mobile the law student is for the student's *first* post law school job. However, almost all law schools have strong geographic job placement tendencies that the potential transfer students should consider.