

Transferring Law Schools

It is not a good idea to attend a law school assuming you will be able to easily transfer to another law school later. There are no guarantees. However, if this is your plan before ever attending law school, speak with an admissions officer at the school that you desire to transfer to and find out how many students transfer into that school each year, use the ABA 509A data to determine the likelihood of transferring and statistics of accepted transfer students, and research the application process and rules for transferring to that school. If you are trying to decide whether or not to apply for a transfer, consider the pros and cons:

Possible Pros

- Better reputation of school
- More desirable geographic location
- Specialty in a field of law
- Greater variety of courses or a better curriculum
- Stronger clinical programs, journals, externships, and/or extracurricular activities
- More opportunities for interviews
- Better environment

Possible Cons

- Cost (giving up scholarships, paying more for the new school)
- Giving up first-year grades and not being eligible for GPA-based graduation honors
- Loss of community and close friendships established in first year
- Going through the application process again
- Giving up study abroad opportunities
- Possibly not being able to use your first year professors for clerkship recommendations
- Possibly giving up the chance for membership of law review, moot court, journals, etc. (Many schools do not permit transfer students to be considered until after a year at the new law school)
- Limited access to second-year courses that are desired or perhaps needed as prerequisites for later advanced offerings (course selection for the fall will already have been completed by the time the transfer application is accepted)

The pros and cons vary considerably from school to school. This list is designed to give you things to think about but none of these pros and cons are definite. We strongly encourage you to examine the school you want to transfer to and determine what matters most for you.

Transfer vs. Visiting: An Important Distinction

Transfer Students: To be considered for transfer, all law schools require that you have earned a bachelor's degree from an approved institution and that you have successfully completed your first year of legal study at an ABA-accredited law school. Law schools will provide you with a JD from their university only if you study for at least two years at their institution. Thus, you can only transfer after your first year.

Visiting Students: If you choose to transfer to a law school after having completed more than one year at your current school, you will not be considered a transfer student but a visiting student. As a visiting student, you are allowed to take classes at the new law school you are attending, but they will only be credited to your original law school. Therefore, your JD will be from your first law school, not the school you visited.

How do I do it?

You will need to submit a law school transfer application. Most transfer applications require the following:

- Application Form
- Application Fee
- Personal Statement (often requiring an explanation as to why you want to transfer)
- Résumé (usually including your upcoming 1L summer experience)
- Letters of Recommendation (make sure to check what format the schools expect them to be submitted in and recognize most law schools will prefer these be from law school professors)
- CAS Report
- First-Year Law School Transcript (with class rank)
- Dean's Certificate or Letter of Good Standing

If you previously applied to the school, use new materials wherever possible. Also pay special attention to application due dates. If you will not receive your first-year grades by the application due date, contact the school you are applying to and request permission to send them in as soon as they are available, but be sure to submit all other materials by the deadline. As with your original application, start early, at least by May.

What are the Chances?

Transferring is largely affected by numbers, just like regular admissions. Your chances are based on the following:

- Current 1L class standing/GPA
- Your current law school (and its prestige)
- Other application materials/factors

Generally speaking, the more prestigious your current school is, the lower your class standing can be and vice versa. The smaller a leap you are trying to make on the prestige ladder, the better your chances.

Advice from admission panel members, career counselors, etc.

- Do not start attending a school assuming that you will be able to transfer.
- Think of what you want to be doing ten years from graduation and map out different paths to get you there. This will help you decide if transferring will best help you achieve your goals.
- Some big law firms prefer applicants from highly prestigious law schools, while others believe it does not matter where you go but what you do and how well you do while you are there.
- Try to speak with an admissions officer of the law school you hope to transfer to in order to find out how many transfer students are typically accepted per year and where you stand as a transfer applicant. Use the ABA 509 information to see statistics.