



Notes From Legal Academia: On Transfers, LLMS and Letter Grades

Posted By [Dan Slater](#) On June 4, 2008 @ 11:13 am In [Law School](#) | [39 Comments](#)

School's out for summer, but grades are still coming back and writing competitions are still in progress. In the meantime, let's check in on the latest in ivory tower news:

Gaming U.S. News by sneaking students through the back door? Over at [Brian Leiter's Law School Reports blog](#) he takes a look at the schools that take the largest number of transfers as a percentage of their first-year class. Why take transfers? Leiter suggests a reason: Since 22.5% of the U.S. News ranking of a school is based on the median LSAT and GPA of the One L class, it's easier to report better medians by keeping One L classes small. "Of course," writes Leiter, "a school that reduces the size of its 1L class needs to make up the lost revenue, and one way to do that is by taking a large number of transfers. The transfers are 'invisible' as far as 22.5% of the US News ranking is concerned, though their tuition dollars still pay the bills."

Here are the ten schools that take the largest number of transfer students, relative to the size of their first-year class: 1) Florida State University; 2) Rutgers University, Camden; 3) Washington University, St. Louis; 4) University of Illinois; 5) Georgetown; 6) NYU; 7) Emory; 8) UCLA; 9) Northwestern; 10) Columbia.

Is the L.L.M. obsolete? According to this story from [Inside Higher Ed](#), Peking University is opening a new law school that will offer an American-style J.D. degree, will seek ABA accreditation (so its students can take the bar in all U.S. jurisdictions) and will be run by Jeffrey Lehman, the former dean of Michigan law and president of Cornell.

According to Bill Henderson, of the [Legal Profession blog](#), here's what's driving the demand: "Multinational law firms want foreign nationals with U.S. legal training," he writes. "I am told by a well-connected law school administrator that, according to Lehman and his backers, the ubiquitous LLM degree fails to fully socialize Asian students into U.S.-style lawyering. Moreover, the degree is now so common that it carries an increasingly weak signal of ability." Henderson reports that similar plans are underway at the University of Melbourne and at a Korean university.

Losing Letter Grades: Stanford law (pictured) has joined its Bay-area neighbor, Berkeley's Boalt Hall law school, as well as Yale law, in scrapping letter-grades in favor of "four levels of achievement" — honors, pass, restricted credit and no credit, reports [Inside Higher Ed](#) and [Above the Law](#). (Yale's four grades are honors, pass, low pass and fail, while Berkeley uses only three levels: pass, honors and high honors.)

"No grading system is perfect," wrote Stanford Law dean Larry Kramer in an e-mail to students and faculty, "but the consensus is that the reform will have significant pedagogical benefits, including that it encourages greater flexibility and innovation in the classroom and in designing metrics for evaluating student work."

Photo: Stanford Law School's Web Site

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