



Episode 79: Making the Most of Your Second Semester of Law School

Alison Monahan: Welcome to The Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking about how to make the most out of your second semester of law school. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of The Law School Toolbox, The Bar Exam Toolbox and The Catapult Career Conference. I also run The Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the contact form on lawschooltoolbox.com and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back. Today we're talking about making the most of your second semester of law school. Now by now, you probably have some or all of your grades back. It's a good time to take stock of where you are and make any changes necessary to get the most out of your second semester. Really, what does everybody care about? Grades, so let's just get right to it.

Alison Monahan: Let's talk about grades.

Lee Burgess: Let's talk about grades. They're just the elephant in the room at most schools and no one likes to talk or think about them, really, but you've got to because they're kind of important, unfortunately, right?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think there's this weird culture of secrecy around law school grades that I'm not sure was the case in other schools that I'd gone to. Suddenly it was like ... I don't know, I feel like in undergrad if I took a class with a friend, I would just ask them what they got in the class, but law school's not really like that.

Lee Burgess: I think that's partly because so many people get grades they feel disappointed by.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. I guess we should start ... Talk about first what do these first semester grades mean if you're a 1L. What do these really indicate? What if you did poorly, is your career just totally over? Should you drop out?

Lee Burgess: Dropping out is probably an extreme solution, so I wouldn't necessarily suggest dropping out unless you decided that you're performing so poorly that you can't re-group, i.e. you're failing out. I don't think your career is necessarily over, but I think the end of your first semester is a very interesting time where you have the ability to save this. You can get away with having some disappointing grades your first semester partly because of the curve. The curve is strict, but you have the ability to do an upswing and to be able to say, "Hey, I made some mistakes,

but I did better. I learned from my mistakes and I did better." Where later on, if you've got three or four semesters of disappointing grades, it's a different story to tell, so don't think your career's over, you have to show that you've got some sort of trajectory.

Alison Monahan: Nobody's really going to buy better third year grades, because of course, you're getting good grades hopefully by your third year, because you're picking your classes, you're taking stuff you want to take. You're probably taking writing classes that don't really have a curve, but if somebody has a grade or two first semester that they're not happy with, but then as you said, you turn around and second semester, you do a lot better, that's not a hard story. That's "Oh, yeah, of course," in a job interview or a clerkship interview or whatever. "I got some disappointing results. It really forced me to evaluate how I was doing and what I was doing. I made some changes and as a result, as you can see, I improved my grades a lot." People will buy that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and they did, because I had a bit of that story. My grades weren't terrible first semester, but they definitely went up after that first semester, and that's exactly what I told employers at big firm interviews. Especially, I was doing litigation. Litigators love to call you out on anything that shows weakness on your application. What's interesting is you can tell them that story, but yeah, you've got to have stuff to back it up. I remember somebody saying to me, "Wow, this legal writing score is kind of disappointing. How do you think this really reflects what you can do?" I got to say, "Well, look at my next legal writing score where I high scored the class. Clearly, I learned something. Isn't that exactly who you want working for you?" That's a good story to tell, but if you don't have that story, it can be challenging. I've been talking recently students, later on in their academic careers, who've had four semesters of disappointing grades and they're worried about job prospects. It's a little harder to sell a bad grade when you have had four semesters to try and fix stuff and you haven't really been able to.

Alison Monahan: At that point, you're also looking at some serious problems on the bar exam.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: The reality is bar exam performance, while not perfectly correlated with your grades, is highly correlated with your grades.

Lee Burgess: It is.

Alison Monahan: Occasionally, that person fails that you don't expect to fail, but a lot of the people who fail, if you look at their transcripts and you know they're going through four, six semesters and getting pretty poor marks, that's going to be a sign that you've got a problem.

Lee Burgess: Right. Only because the bar exam is all about essays and multiple choice and shockingly enough, typically that's what your first year classes are, so if you don't know how to execute an essay or a multiple choice exam, those problems don't go away. I think what can happen in law school is you oftentimes start taking paper classes or seminars and you forget that this core exam-taking skills are really what's required for the biggest gate-keeping exam coming up, which is the bar exam.

Alison Monahan: I think it's important not to totally blow your first semester grades out of proportion and I think it's also important to understand if we say, "Oh, did you do poorly?" What does that even mean? A lot of people, most law students, basically, are used to getting most of their grades being some variant of an A, so to say that you got like straight B pluses, that doesn't really mean you did poorly. You're above average, most likely at that point, so I think there's a little bit of calibration of expectations that has to happen too. The point is you need to know what the midpoint of the curve is at your school, because it varies widely. At some schools, a B is a terrible grade. At some schools, a B is a very good grade. It's not just about, "Oh my God, I got B's. I'm doing horribly. I'm going to flunk out." It's like if you're above the mean, well, you're doing better than half your class.

Lee Burgess: Right. It's very important to learn that about your school and then sometimes they will also put out class rankings as well, so you can see where you fall in the population of students. Again, depending on the school, that can be really more important than what your actual GPA is. Sometimes, jobs just care what percentage of the class you're in, not as much about what your GPA is, because they just want to know how you performed against your peers.

Alison Monahan: A lot of the top schools, there's no class ranking, you're not allowed to put your GPA on your resume. It really varies a lot by school, but the point is most people are probably going to see at least one grade that they're not happy about. I think there's a difference between that and someone who's really at or near the bottom of the curve and struggling in all of your classes.

Lee Burgess: If you're consistently at the bottom of the curve, then there's systemic problems that you definitely need to fix. If you bombed one class, then it becomes a little bit more about what happened in that class and how can you remedy that and make sure that doesn't happen in more classes next semester.

Alison Monahan: You gotta really look at these and you gotta hear what your transcript is telling you.

Lee Burgess: For sure. It's very true. There's a lot of information that comes out of that. Hey, if you did great and you're listening to this podcast going, "Why I am even listening to this podcast? Because I'm at the top of my class," probably because-

Alison Monahan: You're an over-achiever, which is why you're at the top of the class.

Lee Burgess: Right, but here's some fair warning: it's actually very easy to slip from the top of your class. Only because everybody else has a learning curve too and they're all going to get better at exams. If you don't stay on top of your game and become even a better law student, you're not necessarily going to be able to keep that part on the curve whenever everyone else becomes a bit better at what they're doing.

Alison Monahan: For me, I did very well first semester and it actually the stress and the pressure were ... You think you're good to go, you don't have to worry anymore, but I found out it was actually the opposite and I basically had a total breakdown. I did a lot worse second semester, so it's not the case that just because you did well, that your life is going to be perfect. It's just not really the way things work.

Lee Burgess: Hey, what if your grades are mixed? Should you decide that if you got an A in Criminal Law, but you got a C in Real Property, but you've always wanted to be a real estate attorney that you shouldn't be a real estate attorney? No, because grades do not typically reflect any sort of performance. I know a ton of attorneys who loved to tell stories about the worst grades they got in law school typically being the classes that ended up being the direction they went in with their careers.

Alison Monahan: I think, again, you've got to keep this in perspective. You should not base your entire career for the next 40 plus years of your life around one law school grade. If there's a class-

Lee Burgess: Three hours of an exam.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. You should not base your entire career on three hours. That being said, fine, take what these grades are telling you and maybe you see like, "Oh, I am doing better in certain types of classes or in certain types of exams," and things like that, but yeah, if you've always wanted to be a criminal attorney and for some reason, you bombed criminal law, well, take some advanced classes. Do really well in them. Then when you're at interviews, you can tell a funny story on what happened on that test.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Again, a lot of this is just about how you're going to spin this reality. Do everything you can to make sure that you do better next time and then figure out what your story's going to be so you can explain it to people, because really that's what it's about, as far as the jobs are concerned, is how are you going to spin this story?

Alison Monahan: I'm not going to lie to. If you did really well first semester, you're probably going to have a lot easier time getting a summer job your 1L year.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's the reality ...

Alison Monahan: That's the way it works.

Lee Burgess: ... because the only grades they're going to have are those first semester grades.

Alison Monahan: But you know what? You're in the position you're in and there's nothing you can do about those grades so if you're not in a position where you could just send your resume and people are going to be like, "Oh my god, they got straight A's at Harvard. Oh, I totally want to talk to this person." That means that you're going to have to hustle and it's not the end of the world. We have a whole podcast on that, in fact.

Lee Burgess: Remember, they don't even give A's at Harvard. It's all passes and high pass and all of that nonsense.

Alison Monahan: Oh, do they do that too? I can't even remember.

Lee Burgess: I think so. I think so.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think you're right. Yeah, I think you're right.

Lee Burgess: But, anyway, the other-

Alison Monahan: Well, anyway, straight A's at Columbia. I think they still give grades.

Lee Burgess: The other thing I would think about-

Alison Monahan: As far as I know, I don't know.

Lee Burgess: The other thing that I would think about with impacting your summer job search is if you did struggle, if you did falter, that doesn't mean that you're not going to get any sort of work, but you may need to think outside the box a little bit. It just makes networking more important. It makes relying on possibly past experience, if you worked before law school, making sure your cover letter and your resume are absolutely 100% perfect, not one typo or extra space anywhere. You have to rely on different ways that you can differentiate yourself because you're not just going to be the person in the pile who has the top GPA.

Alison Monahan: When people are doing on-campus interviewing for their 1L, big law positions, which used to happen back in the day, probably still does a few places. I remember going into an interview and I saw the guy had my transcript on his desk and he had highlighted my grades and clearly that was why they brought me in, but everybody else in the class basically found a job too.

Lee Burgess: The reality is it may not be as simple if your grades aren't what they are, but it's still possible. The other thing, depending on your school and depending on your interests, sometimes if you're having trouble securing a job in the full legal profession, a full-time internship or something like that, sometimes going back to professors in those courses that you either did really well in or that you're really engaged in, sometimes they'll have research positions over the summer,

sometimes there may even be clinics who run programming over the summer. There oftentimes are different opportunities that if you hustle a little bit, something we talk about all the time, then you may even learn that there are going to be more opportunities than you think. Just keep an open mind and get a little creative to make sure that you have something interesting on your resume from that first summer.

Alison Monahan: Right, because law school obviously and definitely is not all about grades. People can get really fixated on this, but a lot of the job stuff, particularly in certain types of law, are really based on who you know, do these people trust, do they like you, do they think you do good work. As I said, we have a whole podcast on summer jobs. I think in addition to figuring out how to improve your academic performance, which we can talk about in a minute, I think you do want to be thinking what are you going to do to advance your career? This needs to be on a weekly and a monthly basis. This is a sort of thing where everyone has great intentions, but those intentions tend to fall by the wayside unless you actually put it on your schedule.

Lee Burgess: You think that's very true and when you are investing that time and energy into it, utilizing your resources, talking to your career services or whoever your advisors are, but also to be realistic about your situation and what you need to do to get a job. If you are at the bottom of your class, clerkship applications are probably not going to go well, so you know-

Alison Monahan: At least not for federal ...

Lee Burgess: For federal-

Alison Monahan: clerkships or whatever.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, so that could be really tough, so you need to say, "Okay, well, I still really think clerking somewhere for a judge is the next step in my career." Let's figure out what those options are going to be. Is it going to be a superior court judge somewhere? Is it going to be ... There's so many different ones, but basically-

Alison Monahan: There's so many options.

Lee Burgess: There's so many options, but I guess my point is, instead of rattling off the options, is to just think about, "Okay, well maybe this path, A, of a federal clerkship is not going to work out for me, but how can I make this my reality? How can I still get an experience that's going to add value and what do I need to do to invest in that?" That's super important, spending all your energy thinking about pipe dreams that really - we don't want to be negative - but that aren't going to work with your path, I think it just makes it even more important that you be realistic and that you still excel in all the possible ways that you can to start your career off right.

Alison Monahan: Well, and also that you're creative about it. Say that you're dead set on working for a federal judge, but I'm not going to tell you after one semester that your grades are not good enough for that, but say you're in your second year and you're looking at your grades and you're like, "Okay, I'm consistently below the mean," whatever. Maybe you could do some sort of externship with the judge and get the same sort of experience without that competitive process, which is highly competitive still, of applying for a federal clerkship. You've got to think creatively. People I think sometimes can get really depressed, feel like, "Oh, this is my dream of doing this. I was dying to be a supreme court clerk and it's just not going to happen." Okay, that was probably never going to happen anyway.

Lee Burgess: There just aren't that many of them.

Alison Monahan: Even at Yale, that's not really even beginning to be a guarantee, so yeah, I think it's easy to get fixated on whatever it is, but I think you're absolutely right. You've got to be realistic about your options and then make the most of your options that are actually available to you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, because I think for most people, there are options. You just gotta go out and hustle to get them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think in terms of things you can put on your schedule that can move your career forward and often can move your career forward in ways that you would never predict. You and I met on Twitter and then had coffee and the second time we went to lunch, decided to start a business. We couldn't have predicted that, so things like networking events. Your school might sponsor them or bar association programs, any sort of school event, but then you can also reach out to individuals, people you're interested in, informational interviews, setting up coffee dates. On the girls' guide site, we have an entire series that literally tells you exactly what to write in an email, if you would like to do an informational interview with someone. You'd be surprised actually at how helpful people are often willing to be.

Lee Burgess: It's very, very true. We've talked a lot about the reality of these grades, so now that you have this information that you have a GPA, you have your grades-

Alison Monahan: We're not all living in Lala Land, we're all going to be in top 10%. Reality is setting in.

Lee Burgess: Reality is setting in. Now, what do you do next?

Alison Monahan: I think people need to get ... Assuming that you're not entirely pleased with your grades, which almost no one will be. You need to get real about your study habits, and how they may have correlated with your grades. I remember last semester talking to potential tutoring students literally weeks before their first exam. I asked them, "What are your goals?" They say, "Well, I really need to be in the top 10%." I'm like, "Have you started outlining?" "No." "Have you taken

any practice exams?" "No." "Have you been doing your reading?" "No." It's like what the hell do you think is going to happen?!? I expect to hear back from a number of those people later, but it's just like, "Well, of course you're not going to be in the top 10%. Someone is out there doing all the work, and it's not you."

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly, and I think especially if you get a mixed bag of grades, then I think it's really important to see if you did one thing for one class and not for the other. Let's say you loved Crim and you spent extra time reading supplements and really struggling with the material and your study group had a lot of fun working on hypos together and then you did really well, but you hated Property, and you just didn't want to sit around and talk about vertical and horizontal privity, which-

Alison Monahan: Oh god, please no.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, hey, I get it, but the thing is those classes have the same value or sometimes Real Property has more, based on GPA and units, and so you have to see if it was because you didn't like the class. That sucks but you're going to have other classes that you didn't like.

Alison Monahan: People tell me that I don't like the professor. It's like well, too bad.

Lee Burgess: You've got to make it work.

Alison Monahan: I'm sorry, I don't get to tell you don't like my boss at the law firm and I'm not going to work for a project with them. You're a grownup.

Lee Burgess: Or I don't like the judge or I don't like whoever it might be.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, like that case got assigned to a bad judge. You're going to go and tell your client you're going to lose because you don't like the judge. I mean, come on.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I think the other mistake that people make is when they think about their study habits, they don't really go back to the beginning of the semester and I think that is really critical. You need to look at how you were preparing for class. You need to look at what point were you starting to use supplements, at what part were you starting to do deep work, at what point were you starting to outline, what point did you start doing practice exams. You really need to think through all of your study habits and not just the last few weeks, because oftentimes, problems can happen very early on, we just don't notice them until we're trying to scramble and do practice exams like two days before the exam.

Alison Monahan: This is the sort of thing I think you need to do a really thorough self-diagnosis, but it's also hard to figure out sometimes what went wrong just sitting in a room by yourself. Ideally, I think you really want to talk to someone, so at minimum, we would strongly encourage you to go talk to each of your professors about

your exams, but you might want to also talk with your TA or someone in academic support services about what happened. We actually are getting ready to release a brand new course called Reboot, where you can talk to a law school tutor and will talk you through the process of figuring out basically what happened. If you didn't do well, and you don't know what happened, how are you going to change that? You're not going to be able to change it. If you just do the same thing, you're going to get the same results. Other people are going to be looking really carefully and really analyzing their problem areas and probably doing deliberate practice to get better. If anything, if you keep doing the same thing, you're probably going to do even worse than you did this semester. That's just the reality. It's harsh, but that's the reality.

Lee Burgess: I think that's very true. No one likes to go talk to your professors. I remember going to talk to my professors about my exams. Nobody likes to do that unless your exam was selected to be the sample answer, but you know what? On of my exams was selected to be the sample answer. I didn't have to go talk to that professor about my exam. I was pretty sure I did pretty well. There wasn't a lot of feedback available from that professor.

Alison Monahan: I'll be honest. I never once went and talked to a professor about an exam. I don't think I ever saw my exams afterwards. I would look at the sample answer and I would look at their analysis but I don't think I ever actually reviewed any of my answers, to be honest.

Lee Burgess: I did some and it's not fun. You really have to, especially if it's a grade that you're not proud of, you have to really sit with it and go through a kind of a vulnerable process of self-evaluation. I think a lot of people don't like going to talk to professors because they feel like their professors are going to look down on them or not want to help them because they struggled and I think this is a really good time to remember that they know what the curve is, they bubbled in those grades, they know the realities. They also know what grade you got by the time they submitted those class grades to the registrar.

Alison Monahan: Generally they grade blind but then they do their did you participate in class type of adjustments after the fact, so they know what grade you got.

Lee Burgess: They know what grade you got, and if they like you, and you've put in the work and you didn't perform well, most of them want to help you. I've actually hears some positive, of course the negative too, but some positive stories about professors being very, very helpful. I know of professors who, for some students, have been able to flag for them that they likely have a learning disability based on seeing things that came out of their work, or being able to really talk to them about their writing or a willingness to provide them extra counseling or help. Professors generally like students and want to help you succeed, so if you're willing to go in the room, be vulnerable, come at it with a grown mindset and that help, most of them want to help you.

Alison Monahan: I remember my first semester before we took the exam, our professor saying, "Look, I'm not going to judge you based on your grade on this exam. I understand this process." He's like, "If you were someone who enjoyed this class and you participated and you come to my office after the fact and you totally bombed the test, I'm still going to write you a letter of recommendation because I don't base your value on what you did in a three-hour test."

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I think that's really important. You do need to build these relationships with these professors and actually going to them for help is a great way to build those relationships. What you do with a stumbling block and some sort of failure or disappointment shows a lot about your character and a lot about the type of lawyer you're going to be.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. If I put myself in the perspective of the average law professor and I have a student who was really involved in class, they were always clearly on top of the material, they don't do well on the test, and then they come and talk to me about it, I'm going to respect that. I mean that person's looking to learn. They're looking to do better. I'm here to teach them. That's my job. I'm not saying everyone thinks like that, but generally speaking, I think professors will respect you if you go in with the attitude of "I just want to hear how to do better."

Lee Burgess: One interesting point is if you did knock it out of the park and you high scored half of your classes and you are thinking about transferring for some reason, it also may be behoove you to go make appointments with those professors where you did knock it out of the park because you need to start laying the groundwork for the recommendations and things that might be needed in order to transfer, so no matter how you did, you should probably go try and talk to your professor about that.

Alison Monahan: I think the second semester is definitely a time to try to build stronger relationships with at least a few of your professors because you're going to need their help and advice. You're going to need them to write letters, so stay in touch with people. Ask if you can stop by for office hours, even if you're not taking a class. Go for coffee. Go to panels and events where they might be speaking and then you can follow up questions or comments in person or even in email. Who's not going to appreciate an email from a former student that you taught last semester saying, "Hey, I caught that panel you were doing about your pet topic of interest or I read your recent law review article. I thought that was really interesting. I had a question about this. Can I come talk to you about it?" That's impressive.

Lee Burgess: Most professors will be like, "You want to come talk about something that I did that you think was amazing? Absolutely."

Alison Monahan: "Oh, you'd like to come and talk about my pet idea, please." I think students don't realize professors are vulnerable too. They're putting their work out in the

world. I remember I was helping a professor edit a book, and this guy was world famous. He was making thousands of dollars an hour as a consultant. He was a big deal and he sent me his first draft and it was like, "I'm sure it's not very good, so please be gentle. I know I don't really know what I'm talking about here so please don't say anything too rude." I was just like, "Oh, wow. They're actually people."

Lee Burgess: I think that's a really good point. Also, put yourself in your professor's shoes. It's actually kind of disappointing when you read exams from students that didn't get what you were teaching.

Alison Monahan: I have some professors friends at this point who are like, "Wow. I felt really awful reading these because I realized I had done a terrible job."

Lee Burgess: I think there is something to that, and so if you didn't get what they were teaching, a professor often wants to one, make sure it wasn't their fault, but two, to help you get it eventually.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, because a lot of these are bar courses, like we talked about. If you hated one of your first year, first semester classes, it's not like you get to forget about it forever. You're going to see it again.

Lee Burgess: It just comes back to haunt you. Gotta love it. Law school isn't just about grades, right?

Alison Monahan: No. There are a lot of activities that are pretty interesting second semester that I think are worth thinking about from the beginning. A lot of people may be doing a moot court and that's a whole other world of it's own. We in fact have a podcast you can listen to on moot court. In fact, I think we may even have two, but also I think it's not too early to start thinking about the journal process.

Lee Burgess: I think that's very true because that comes up typically really, really quickly right after exams and if that's something you're interested in, you want to make sure that you have all your ducks in a row so you have the time to do the write-on. You know when it's going to be. You don't schedule a vacation or something like that.

Alison Monahan: Or as I did. Let me tell you my completely stupid 1L summer thing. I was like, "Oh, I need to start working on my job. I'll give myself like three days to do the write-on after exams. That should be plenty of time." We had like a week [and a 00:27:49] half for it or something. That was incredibly stupid. Don't do that.

Lee Burgess: Don't do that.

Alison Monahan: Do not schedule work, even if they're paying you a lot, during the time that you're given to do the journal write-on because you will just basically make your life absolutely horrible.

Lee Burgess: I think second semester's a great time to start getting more involved in the school, if you have special areas of interest in student organizations or if there's a group that's doing talks on stuff that you're interested in. It's a great time to just spend a little more time doing some extra curriculums, so you can get more involved in the school and build relationships and again, differentiate yourself.

Alison Monahan: For me, first semester, I just joined 20 different groups because I was like, "Oh, this sounds kind of interesting." I think second semester's really a time to start focusing. Maybe you found that five of these were actually things that you found that you want to consistently after you signed up on their mailing list. Start to think about do you want to be an officer for next semester next year. How does that work? Who do you need to butter up to to make that happen? As you go through law school, you're learning more and more about the time of law that you're interested in, that you want to practice and it's important, I think, to focus your interests so that your resume ultimately makes sense.

Lee Burgess: Let's go back to the journal process again, because another thing that you can do as a second semester is sometimes journals who aren't the Law Review will actually hire second semester 1Ls to start doing some minor work for them. That's really great for you to get more comfortable with the Bluebook because typically there's going to be sort of a Bluebook component to your write-on process and if you aren't loving your Bluebook yet, it's time to build a great relationship with it, including tabs, which really just took my Bluebook to a whole new level.

Alison Monahan: I love how people are like, "Oh, do I need to have a paper one?" I'm like, "You probably want to. It's actually a lot easier."

Lee Burgess: It is, and you start to need to learn about the different journals on campus. If you're really into international human rights, if there's an international human rights journal, you want to start figuring out how you can get involved. Maybe you're even starting to think about note topics, something you might want to eventually write about. Maybe you're even going to take a class early in your second year to help facilitate that process. You need to start having ideas that you want to be chewing on.

Alison Monahan: Now, I definitely found for me when I joined the Law Review in first semester of second year, they're like, "Okay, so what are you going to write your note about?" It's just a moment of like, "What are you talking about? I don't know anything." I think if your school is one that front loads the note process, you do want to be thinking about, well, what kind of topics might you want to write about? Who might you want to work with? That kind of thing, because it's going to come up really fast.

Lee Burgess: It is, and then it's time, especially before academics gets too crazy to go out and try and become a member of the legal community. Try and look for speaking events. See what the Bar Association's putting on. See if there are fundraisers

where you can meet different people or whatever it might be. Network with alumni. Sometimes the alumni will take you to things. I was at a fundraiser. The Law School Toolbox sponsored the Bay View Hunters Point Community Legal Fundraiser last fall and I took law students with me so they could go meet other lawyers and then we all started around with a bunch of my law school friends or people that I worked with at the law schools and they got to meet all those people and create networking relationships. That's just because that's what people do. Basically, that's how this works.

Alison Monahan: That's essentially because that you're talking about sent you an email at some point and were like, "Hey, here's my story. I would love to take you for coffee." You're like, "Oh my god, you're story is amazing. I would love to go coffee with you and do whatever I can to help you."

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: That's the type of law student you want to be in your second semester and frankly throughout your entire law school experience is that person who's putting themselves out there in a reasonable way, but really connecting with people, because those are the people who are going to help you regardless of what your first semester grades were.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Well, what about something that people oftentimes never think about when it comes to evaluating your first semester, which is the greater question of how did your life go?

Alison Monahan: Oh, are we allowed to think about that in law school?

Lee Burgess: I know, but it turns out that life could actually have a lot of impact in how you're doing, so things we want students to really make sure you evaluate is were you eating crummy food and therefore sick and feeling bad all the time. That can have a huge effect on how you're able to perform and your ability to focus and things like that, so can not exercising. Endorphins are a nice thing. They help keep your mood stable as well as keeping you healthy. Oh, and then sleep. Sleep is a big one, don't you think?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I had massive issue with sleep at the end of my first semester during exams. I had chronic insomnia. I was allocating eight hours as I should in my schedule and being responsible and then I would lay in bed for four hours and sleep for four hours. I was literally crazy after three weeks of doing this. I had to deal with that, basically. I was like, "All right, I probably need to go to therapy because I'm having a totally breakdown over the pressure of having good grades and I need to go to the student health service and talk to them about what I can do to sleep, because that's not optional."

Lee Burgess: That's really true. I always think that you need to evaluate whether or not your social relationships are positive or negative. Some are elective. Some are not. You can't, of course, necessarily control family relationships, but-

Alison Monahan: But you can compartmentalize. The holidays-

Lee Burgess: You can.

Alison Monahan: The holidays might have been a good time to alert to you some issues that maybe you need to start thinking about how to handle.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but elected relationships, you have control over, so you need to think about surrounding yourself with positive people in your life both within the law school environment and outside the law school environment to help move you in a good direction. Then because we're talking about potential lawyers and law students, we should probably talk about alcohol.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, alcohol and drugs.

Lee Burgess: And drugs.

Alison Monahan: The reality is a lot of lawyers have substance abuse problems and a lot of these problems start in law school.

Lee Burgess: If you're concerned about your drinking habits, if you're concerned about any sort of drug use, I think that's something you want to deal with, sooner rather than later, because it's not going to get any better, and you need to take time off to recharge and were you really able to unplug? I think, Alison, you and I have been reading a lot, right now, about dealing with this digital age, and I think the election and the political climate made our digital lives really stressful, at least yours and mine. I'm sure other people out there agree with us, just because of the amount of information that we find concerning that was spiraling around us, and I think a lot of really smart, high-performing people are trying to figure out how to balance that, but also give ourselves time to be. You sent me an interesting article from someone that we follow who was talking about the importance of taking ... Wasn't it like 30 days of a calendar year off and unplugged. Doesn't have to be consecutive. It just had to be 30 days.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and some of the most successful people at my law school were people who, mostly for religious reasons or one type of another, committed even during the exam period, committed to taking at least an entire day off, and you might think, "Oh my god. They only had six days to work, instead of seven." Most of these people were on the Law Review. A, they were not wasting time going on drinking and partying, because that just wasn't part of what they did, but also I think having that time off really allows you to come back fresh in a way that working burned out, you just aren't getting as much accomplished.

Lee Burgess: If you didn't take any time off during the semester last year and burnout was a real concern, make sure you mark them on your calendar. I think the example you give of folks who, mostly for religious reasons, but some just because of the way that they frame their lives, need that time off, it's like, "I'm going to take time off. I'm not going to feel guilty about it. I'm not going to stress out about needing to do something else. This is just how I'm building my life." That's how you have to-

Alison Monahan: Right, you just plan around it.

Lee Burgess: Right, and that's how you have to do it, so it can't be like, "Oh, I'm just going to blow off work on Saturday and get totally behind." You have to say, "Okay, I'm taking every other Saturday off," or whatever it is for you, "and I'm going to plan my schedule around it."

Alison Monahan: That's the whole point is you have to be deliberate about how you're using your time in every respect. One really key area is are you taking time off and then also are you doing deep work like when are your study periods? Are you really focused in those periods? All this stuff, sorry it sounds really boring, but you're a grown up and this is a very difficult professional program, and the people who have control of their schedule are going to be the people who ultimately are happier and end up probably doing better as well.

Lee Burgess: Let me tell you: going back to the digital stuff, I myself am taking a bit of a Facebook diet and only using it for targeted tasks instead of letting myself scroll through it, but I am shocked just a few days into this about how much mental energy I was expending scrolling through social media. It's just the things I was clicking or reading or even reading about other people's lives or reflecting on my own life or this or that or whatever, a lot my private time. You can also just stand in line at the coffee shop and stare at the ceiling. It's actually quite refreshing, if you do that.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. I think I sent you an article this morning about how all these programs and apps are designed to be addictive and shockingly enough, people are literally addicted to them. I think that's something to be cognizant of. They were talking in this article about how Snapchat, for example, was designed to be more addictive than Instagram. Thank god I've never bothered installing Snapchat ...

Lee Burgess: Me too.

Alison Monahan: ... but-

Lee Burgess: Not even opening that Pandora's Box.

Alison Monahan: It's just like these are not neutral sort of things that are designed for your wellbeing. I think the sooner, the more you get a handle on that and really

reflect on is this adding value to my life? Is this something that I want to be spending my limited time on? I think that's worth giving some thought to.

Lee Burgess: I feel like the amount of social media interaction and even one of my friends was also - we were talking about this - was also talking about the exhaustion around even online dating and the information that comes in ... If you're to balance that while you're in law school too. You're getting emails and notifications and you're trying to ... It's a lot. It's a lot, and you have to be very strategic on how to manage that, because I think we don't give enough credit to how much brain power and energy are spent on all of these teeny tiny little tasks that we do all day.

Alison Monahan: I can easily open up Twitter at midnight when I'm about to go to sleep and I'm setting my alarm on my phone, which I should not be doing, but I'm like, "Oh, I'll just set my alarm and then go right to bed." I find literally it's an hour and a half later and I'm like, "How did this happen? What have I been doing?" Answer: I've been scrolling through Twitter and reading articles for the last hour and a half. That's not a good use of time.

Lee Burgess: They're probably not articles that are calming to your nervous system.

Alison Monahan: No, exactly. It's like you're not reading something on your Twitter feed unless it's like, "Oh my god, I have to know about this immediately. What outrage is going on in the world right now?" You're like, "Okay, it's 1:00 in the morning. I should have just gone to bed. I should just get a battery-operated alarm clock and stop doing this."

Lee Burgess: I know. It's so true. It's so true. It's really worth evaluating and taking some time. I'm trying to make myself read book at night and not even be like watch TV on my laptop or anything, because that's the thing. I crack open my laptop even to watch TV, which we all know is terrible for you because of the blue light, but then it's like unless I turn off my wifi, it's like I can't even stop my finger from checking my work email before bed. Come on, we're responsive to our students but you don't need to hear from me at 11:00 at night.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I think the key thing here is second semester really is this time to hit the reset button, evaluate what worked, evaluate what's not working and try to improve your experience going forward, because there's still plenty of time, but you need to get started now.

Lee Burgess: Yes, and of course, we can help. There are two primary ways we can help, if you're looking for new resources. Alison, why don't you share a bit more about our [Reboot Camp](#) that you were mentioning?

Alison Monahan: Sure. Well, I've been hard at work on this. I'm actually really excited about it, I gotta say. The idea here is not everyone wants or needs full tutoring, which we can also offer you. We get that it's expensive and a lot of people have limited

resources. What we try to do with Reboot is really bring together what we would tell you if we were doing tutoring in a way that you can go through on your own. It's a lot of watching videos and things like that, but you also have two interactive one-on-one sessions with a Law School Toolbox tutor at the beginning of the program and at the end of the program. Basically, it walks you through, "Here's a self-evaluation to help you figure out what's happened. Here's how to talk to your professors." We help you assemble all that information. You'll talk to the tutor, be like, "Okay, here's what I think happened." They're going to review your work and be tell you, "This is what happened. Here are the things you needed to work on." You work on those things and then you come up with a plan. They review that plan with you, because I think that accountability and having someone to talk through like, "Okay, this is what I think I would do with my time. Does this make sense?" Is actually really valuable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, because all the stuff that we've been talking about, about self-evaluation and talking to your professors, sometimes, it can be even hard to know what to ask your professors. We can help you with that, how to do in with a list of questions, how to go in asking questions so you can really get that tangible information, so just having somebody walk you through this process and help you reevaluate your study skills, I think can be really helpful. Well, of course we do. We created the course.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, hopefully it will be helpful. If not, well, we'll give you a refund! All right, with that, unfortunately, we are out of time on this episode. If you enjoyed this episode of The Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review or rating on iTunes or your other favorite listing podcast app. We would really appreciate it. Be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or me at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. You can always contact us via our website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com. Thanks for listening. We'll talk soon, and good luck this semester.