



Episode 104: Law School Essentials - What to Buy

- Lee Burgess: Welcome to The Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking about shopping for law school essentials, everything from backpacks to highlighters. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. 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 [Law School Toolbox](#), [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the Catapult Conference. Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy this show, please leave a review [on iTunes](#). And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com](#), and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.
- Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today we're talking about law school essentials. Stuff you might want to buy as you kick off your law school experience. So Lee, what is first on your list? What do people definitely need if they're heading to law school soon?
- Lee Burgess: Well it might seem kind of silly, but you really need something to carry all of your stuff. So you need some sort of a backpack or rolling bag, and this is something that is actually really popular to Google. Because we have a post on this, about [the different backpacks and rolling bags you can buy](#). And it always comes up as one of our most popular posts.
- Alison Monahan: It's true.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So what did you use to carry all of your stuff in law school?
- Alison Monahan: Well I remember I actually spent a lot of time and energy thinking about this. I'm not sure I made the absolute best ... I didn't necessarily make the best decision, probably not for my body. But I actually got a custom-made Timbuk2 messenger bag, where you could pick your colors and pick your fabric. I mean I spent really a lot more time than I would like to admit deciding which color I wanted and which fabric. It was a little ridiculous.
- I mean the bag is great. I still have the bag. It lasted three years of law school. It never fell apart. The problem is, you're carrying these really big books around. And I'm not sure that a messenger bag is necessarily the best option. I mean I was lucky in that I lived only half a block from law school. So I would often go back between classes and drop off one book and get another book. Just because I couldn't really carry them.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's funny. I started law school with a Timbuk2 messenger bag as well that I'd already had. If you've never shopped at Timbuk2, I highly recommend it.

Alison Monahan: It's also a San Francisco store.

Lee Burgess: It is a San Francisco store.

Alison Monahan: That's probably why we both had them.

Lee Burgess: Probably. But I also struggled with just the amount of stuff that I ended up carrying. So then I went back to Timbuktu, and I ended up getting a backpack instead, which was a little better ergonomically. But even, I mean you just put too many of those law books in a backpack, you can't carry that without hurting yourself either.

Alison Monahan: Or also without crushing your computer, which is a problem.

Lee Burgess: Right, which is a problem. So I used to drive to school because school was a little far to walk, especially with all the books that I ended up carrying. And I used my car as a locker for a while. Then my school actually had lockers, so I'd just carry in all the books for the day and drop them off in my locker in the morning. It felt a lot like high school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I actually refused to get a locker. I mean we had the option, and lots of people did it. But I was just like, you know what? I can't go back there. I just can't have a locker.

Lee Burgess: Well I didn't really-

Alison Monahan: You might be getting a sense I was more about my law school style than actual practicality.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I know. It definitely was a throwback to a different time, when you start doing your combination lock and all that of stuff. But I was surprised at the amount of junk that I took with me every day, and one of the other things we'll talk about is about food. But I would oftentimes bring food for part of the day or all of the day if I had a night class later in the evening. So I mean I had a lot of stuff that I would bring with me to school. So you do want to think about how you're practically going to manage all of that stuff.

And before you invest a lot of money into some sort of bag, just logistically think about whether or not you want to see how school works out a little bit before you dump money onto a rolling bag. I mean a rolling bag might be great, unless you realize that rolling it up a big hill to get to your classes still means that you can't really pack what you need to in it, or maybe you find that you work at school all the time so you can leave your books in your locker after you've worked in the library. You don't really know before you start.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think it's hard to predict. I mean everybody has this vision of what their life in law school is going to be like, but you've got to be realistic too. I mean

there's always the debate about could you possibly see yourself carrying around a rolling bag, but hey, I mean if that improves your life and makes it easier, go for it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. The other thing, and this is one of my pet peeves of backpacks as a woman especially, is make sure that if you decide you're not going to carry a separate purse, that you have enough compartments for all of your stuff. I made the mistake of buying a backpack that was nice and big, but didn't have enough compartments for things, and then your wallet, and I wear glasses. So like a glasses case and a wallet and keys and all this stuff is like floating in the bottom of the bag. And you again, don't want to put your laptop on top of your glasses case and all that kind of stuff.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: So just think about making sure-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, for sure.

Lee Burgess: ... Whatever you buy has enough compartments for everything.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, one series of bags that I found useful particularly for traveling and things might be an option for some people is called the Baggallini. I mean these are honestly not necessarily the absolute most stylish things you've ever seen in your life, but they're not that bad. And they were designed by flight attendants. So as a result, they have all of these things. They have a key fob so you can attach your keys. They have places to put your cellphone. They have places to put your wallet. They have outside pockets that zip and things like that. So if you have a metro card, and you don't want to be digging through your bag when you're trying to get on the metro. It's like, oh it's right there. You just unzip the outside pocket, take out the card, get onto the subway, put it back in your bag. But I do think you have to be deliberate about thinking about things that are going to make your life easier. Because otherwise you're constantly going to be trying to find your keys, and that is not conducive to happiness.

Lee Burgess: No. And if you're going to be taking a lot of public transit you really need to make sure that you've got your gear going on. Because the last thing you need is stuff falling out in the subway station while you're digging, trying to find your metro card. And it's just not going to go well.

Alison Monahan: Right, if you're going to be on crowded trains, a backpack is probably better than a messenger bag because at least you can take that off and put it by your feet. You know, you've got to think about what your life is actually going to look like. If you're going to commute to school and drive, that's a totally different setup than somebody who's going to be taking the subway in New York City at rush hour back and forth to school.

Lee Burgess: I recently invested in some Bluetooth headphones. And one of the things that I'm finding really fascinating about not having the headphone cords, is how logistically easier it is when you're carrying a lot of stuff to not have headphone cords everywhere. And maybe I'm just a little klutzy, but I always seem to get my phone and my headphone cord wrapped up in my purse or my backpack. I still carry backpacks places. My backpack shoulder straps, or you get in a car, the Uber ... Anyway, things you can do to simplify moving from place to place with lots of stuff, I think can be really helpful.

Alison Monahan: Oh for sure. Yeah, I mean if you have a backpack and a purse type bag, you probably want to be able to combine those for example. So if I'm taking my laptop, and I don't necessarily want to unpack everything into it, I make sure that the bag that I carry as a purse can go inside the backpack. Then when I get to the café and I take everything out, it's a lot easier than if I'm wandering down the street carrying like three different bags.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I also just feel like that just really makes you a target. You know. And if you're carrying a laptop, and you're carrying an expensive cellphone, you want to make sure that you're not to the extent possible, a bigger target than you need to be.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a really good point. What about briefcases. I think a lot of people wonder if they have to have a briefcase to take to business events or to interviews. Do you think that people need to invest in a briefcase?

Alison Monahan: I wouldn't say a briefcase necessarily. I mean maybe if you're a guy. I mean what I had, which I found effective ... I have two ideas on that, particularly for women. So what I actually had was a leather bag that was sort of like a female style. It wasn't a briefcase, but it was like you could carry it at an event, but you could also fit an iPad or a laptop into it or a book or something. So that, I found, was pretty effective. Even then, I'm not necessarily sure I took that like to an interview, because it was kind of big.

But you could also make do with a nice leather folio. You know just the sort of thing that folds, so you can carry around a copy of your resume, your writing sample, whatever it is that you need, a pen, a way you take notes, something like that. I mean you don't want to show up to a law firm interview, or an interview with a judge or something carrying a manila folder.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: It's not the end of the world, but it's not ... You want to be thinking about making a professional impression. So you probably don't need to invest in a briefcase, but I would think about something that you can carry basic things, like your resume, writing sample, notepad, pen, pencil, whatever in an interview type situation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's true. And again, I do think bulkier isn't always better, because you also don't want to be, if you can help it, just like schlepping a bunch of stuff from interview to interview or from room to room if you're moving around. Or even if you're doing on-campus interviewing, depending on where the on-campus interviewing actually happens. My on-campus interviewing happened at school during the day, so I had to show up with my backpack full of stuff and my suit. But I was between classes, and they understood that. But when I went to a callback, I either just had a handbag with me that was big enough that I could put my leather folio in with my resume. But I wouldn't bring all of my large stuff, because it can make you feel awkward, because you're trying to track all of your stuff. It's better to be a little minimalist, and look very like you have it all together. At least present that, even if it's not true.

Alison Monahan: Right I mean think about if you bring a briefcase to an interview, what you're going to like slap it down on their desk and like open it and give them your resume. I mean come on. You're not going to do that.

Lee Burgess: And what've you go in it? Like a bottle of water.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think if you're a guy listening to this, you want to bring to an interview, you want to be prepared with your nice leather folio. If you're a woman listening to it, you can bring that. But if you feel more comfortable, you could also bring a professional looking handbag that could fit things like your resume into it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. All right, so I think that that's kind of all the advice I have on like stuff to carry other things in. What about you? Do you have any other thoughts on things you should buy?

Alison Monahan: No, I just think I would encourage people to be practical here. That it's one thing ... Take my advice, you can look cool, or you can save your shoulder. And probably ultimately, you're going to save on your lifetime chiropractic bills if you have something that's actually practical to carry your bags in, or if you deign to use your locker. Don't worry, everyone else will be doing it. You will not be the only uncool one who's like trying to remember your locker combination.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, and nobody's going to care if you have a locker. Maybe except Alison, but nobody else.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I might be silently judging you, but I'll also be jealous because you'll only have one book. And I'm carrying like four books.

Lee Burgess: Right exactly. Exactly. All right, so now we've talked about all of the stuff that fits in a bag, one of the things that we've talked about a lot on the podcast, we talk a lot about it on the blog, is [the importance of handwriting](#). Handwriting notes, handwriting briefs, we have other [podcasts on preparing for class](#) and why handwriting notes can be helpful for that. So we actually recommend that

you invest in some nice notebooks. And Alison do you want to talk about our favorite notebooks ever?

Alison Monahan: Sure. Well Lee and I are both obsessed with these [Circa Notebooks](#). They're by a company called Levenger, I think it's called. I never know how to pronounce that. But they make these amazing notebooks that you can actually assemble yourself. So you can take out pages. You can move them around. So I think something like that is a really nice cross between just a yellow notepad where you're taking notes, and then what do you do with them. What if you want to add something? What if you need to look at them all? I mean I like to sort of take things out and look at them, spread them out on the floor and get an overall view. If you're that type of person, these are amazing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also like the fact that you can buy one of the hole punches that fits their little notebooks, so if you're getting handouts from class, or you've printed something out that you want to keep or photocopied something, you can insert it in. So it's like a binder and a notebook combined.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's super cool, and you can buy kind of this intro pack that gives you sort of the idea. A lot of the pages are also already marked up with things like [the Cornell Note-taking Method, which we have some blog posts about](#). Where you take the main part of your notes in the main section, but then you have stuff on the side in a sidebar and at the bottom. And that's where you do your wrap-up for the day and key points and things like that. So if you're somebody who's thinking about taking notes by hand, there are other options besides just a spiral bound notebook that you scribble into. And it can really improve your efficiency, and almost make it more like taking notes on a computer with the benefits of taking them by hand. But then also some of the benefits of the computer where you can move things around and look at them and that kind of stuff. I don't know, I think they're great. There's really no downside to these, other than they're a little pricey.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, a little pricey, but sometimes the things that are lightest and easier to manage can be pricey. That sometimes happens.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and the paper quality is high so you can write with pen on it, and the pen doesn't bleed through. If you're somebody who cares about handwriting, they're actually a really amazing tool.

Lee Burgess: Once you start thinking about all of these things that you have to carry, I think the other nice thing about the Circa notebooks is they're going to end up being lighter than binders for each class. Which one of the reasons why I think students are hesitant to hand write is just dealing with all the paper and the weight of that.

Alison Monahan: Well and the space. Like a binder takes up a lot of space.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I would not want to go back to binder days myself, because let's talk about a throwback to like junior high and high school. But a Trapper Keeper or something like that, do they even still make those?

Alison Monahan: I loved my Trapper Keeper.

Lee Burgess: I'm sure you did.

Alison Monahan: That was like a life highlight, picking out the new Trapper Keeper every year.

Lee Burgess: I know. So I think that a Circa notebook is kind of an updated way that you can still get the benefits of a binder without the bulk and the weight from it. I know Ariel on our team, also really likes to use, I think they're [steno pads](#). Is that how you say it?

Alison Monahan: I think so.

Lee Burgess: Which are the pads of paper with kind of a line down the middle, and they're usually a spiral on top. She has seen students be successful with kind of briefing on the left side of a sheet of paper, and then taking class notes on the right side. So again, it's a way to kind of keep your class notes organized and contained. You know a sheet for each case, which I think is another good idea. But then you have to figure out how you're going to keep them all organized with additional class notes after class. And that's one of the things that I like about the Circa Notebook, is after class you can reorganize stuff so you clearly know this was the universe of what was covered today. And now I'm done, and I can move to the next thing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think just the flexibility. I think it solves one of the main problems of old school notebooks, which is just it's kind of a stream of consciousness. And once you've done that, unless you take them out, but then what do you do? Because then you've got 18 million pieces of paper flying around your room with no page numbers or anything. Not a recipe for good things happening.

Lee Burgess: The other thing that's kind of nice about using a notebook like the Circa Notebook, you can also use it to keep to-do lists and things like that. So everything is really housed in one place.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they have special paper for your to-do lists and things like that. I mean it's actually a whole system. I mean it's kind of ridiculous. They have entire systems for all kinds of things. So it's worth checking out the website if you're interested. We should totally get a commission, but we don't.

Lee Burgess: We don't. But we just love them, and we just keep buying stuff from them.

Alison Monahan: It's like so exciting when a new set arrives. It's like, oh, because they have all these different ... You get different colors, and so it's just nice.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's good stuff. It is. It's very nice. It's good stuff. All right well another staple of the law school existence are highlighters. And you're probably going to use a lot of them. I think one thing that many people don't think about with highlighters is that you are likely going to need a variety of colors. You may feel a little nerdy or geeky buying a pack of highlighters that has a bunch of colors. But that's a really effective way to organize book briefing. I know Alison, you were big into book briefing. Did you have a highlighting scheme for book briefing?

Alison Monahan: Oh for sure. I mean you want to pick your color scheme up front and stick with that, so that for me I think the facts were always underlined in green. Legal reasoning was yellow. I think the holding was orange or pink, I can't remember. One of those was for dissents, but you don't want to do the facts in green in one case and blue in the next case and yellow in the next case. That's complete insanity. Pick a color scheme and stick to it. The other thing, kind of like with the Circa Notebooks, it's worth it to actually invest, I mean this sounds crazy, but you want to invest in like quality highlighters.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: Anything like that, that's a minimal, minimal difference in cost, but can make a huge difference in your daily experience of ... I mean some of them have like bad fumes, or they dry out. Or you want to be able to ... People have different preferences about the thickness. I mean it sounds crazy, but you actually want to sort of go to the bookshop, go to a nice pen store and sort of evaluate, okay this is the highlighter for me. The same with pens and pencils. I mean these are things you're going to be using. Are you a person who prefers to write in pencil? Do you want a mechanical pencil? Do you want to sharpen your pencils? What kind of pen do you want? Do you want a ballpoint pen? Do you want a ... You know, whatever it is. You probably do actually have preferences on this, which again, sounds kind of crazy but for me, anywhere I go in the world, I have a certain type of pen with me.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I think when you do a lot of handwriting and a lot of highlighting, you do get picky with your pens. Especially in the case books, because the paper that they use in the case books can be somewhat slippery. Sometimes it's like a glossy, and they're all different ones.

Alison Monahan: It can be really thin.

Lee Burgess: It can also be really thin, so the other reason maybe to try out a couple different types of highlighters or ink pens is if you're book briefing, you can't have a blue highlighter bleeding through the page if you're trying to use a highlighting scheme with colors. That's not going to work. And you can't have your ink pen bleeding through. Or smearing, that was a problem I had in one of my case books. It would smear if your hand went across it. So you had to make sure that you were using the right type of pen that wouldn't smear.

So it sounds silly, but for me it was one of these things, if my case book was a total mess, it was anxiety-inducing. That's my slight OCD tendencies. So it was important to me that the highlighters were like clean and didn't bleed through and were very bright. And that my ink pen didn't smudge every time I moved a hand across the page.

Alison Monahan: Right. That's why I always, in my case books, I always read with a pencil and highlighters. So my case books, unless I wanted to make a special note or something, I never used pen because I found it just made too big a mess.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's interesting. So the nice thing is you can try a few things out, and maybe it's worth having a few, before you buy in bulk like at Costco, have a few that you try out to see what works in your case books. And then one of the things I was going to talk about a little bit later was the beauty of Amazon Subscribe and Save and things like that.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: But if you know that you're burning through highlighters really quickly, you can just make it so highlighters will be delivered to your house on a regular basis, and that might save you trips to office depot or remembering to have to purchase things just when you get busy. So something to think about is pick your preferred things, then make it very easy for you to have a well-stocked home with them.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean you don't want to be running out of certain colors of highlighters in the middle of your reading sessions. So it's one of those things you always want to have a backup supply, and if it's getting low restock in advance so that this does not become a reason that you cannot sit down and do your reading.

Lee Burgess: Right. And it's amazing how it might sound silly if you haven't started law school yet, but if you didn't have the right highlighters and pen that you wouldn't want to do your reading. But really, that moment will come, and you're like, "But if I don't have my stuff, I can't do the reading." It's not that crazy when you think about it.

Alison Monahan: No, you just want to make sure you're prepared, so that that does not become an excuse for why you're falling behind. Is that you do not have your pink highlighter. Yes.

Lee Burgess: All right, so now you know what to write with. One of the other things that I mentioned earlier was that at my school I used to take lunch to school sometimes. I should have taken it all the time, because I ended up spending way too much money on really crummy food that was in this little like café thing they had as part of my law school. Or spending too much money going down and eating burritos all the time, which doesn't do good things for you either.

So one of the things that you want to think about is how you're going to eat. And depending on your school and its location, you might find yourself needing to bring food to school. And if that's true, then you need, spoken like a true mom, you need a lunchbox. You probably need more than one. You need those little ice packs things to keep things cool. You have to find out whether or not you have a microwave that you can access, or if not you have to make sure you bring cold food. I'm a big fan of like little glass or stainless-steel containers. You can go to a great website, that we also don't earn commission for, called Life Without Plastic, I think is what it's called. But they have great lunch containers and food containers if you want to have reusable things.

But you don't want to make it hard to get yourself fed and to school. Because if you don't eat well, you're going to get more fatigued, and it's going to be harder to do what you need to do. So if you know that's your reality, then spend a little bit of time thinking about what you need, and how you're going to feed yourself. And make sure you have all the stuff that you need to feed yourself every day at school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And I think they've developed a lot since the days of the aluminum lunch boxes with the thermos that I used to carry in elementary school. You know, these have become pretty sophisticated these days I think.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So something to think about, something to put on your wish list for family members if they want to know. That's a way to really send your family members for a loop. They're like, "How can I help you get ready for law school?" You're like, "I think a lunchbox and some stainless-steel food containers. That would be really helpful, thanks." And then you're like, "And you can buy some for my kids too. So we can all have matching lunches when we go to school each day." It really does feel like that. It's kind of crazy.

Alison Monahan: Oh well, these are all the things you need to consider.

Lee Burgess: Exactly and it's a great way to save money. And budgeting is a huge part of the law school experience. And if you're feeling like you're running out of money, spending money on food, especially food you might not be enjoying, which a lot of just grabbing food when you're out, isn't like a treat. It's to feed yourself. It may not be the place where you want to spend your disposable income.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think if you pack it yourself, you're probably going to be eating a lot more nutrient dense foods. You know you can make it a habit where you do this twice a week or something. You know you pack three days of lunch on Sunday. Someone I know who's a personal trainer, is always posting these amazing Instagram shots of what she's packing for her lunch that week. And you know it's a lot of stuff where you're like, "I'd like to eat that." I mean do I know where to go buy it? No. But it actually looks pretty delicious.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I actually have a personal trainer friend as well, she will freeze some of her smoothies early in the week. Like she'll make a huge batch of green smoothies and freeze them so she can have green smoothies every morning without having to make them, which I thought was kind of a really ingenious idea. Again, I've never frozen smoothies, but it's a nice idea. But meal prep and planning food is really a big part of getting ready to go to school because those little life annoyances can make a big difference. If you're stressing about food, or you're sick because you're eating crummy food, or you're just eating the free pizza at school, can be a major issue.

Alison Monahan: Right and I think this is also something to think about what are you going to have in your house. If you're a person who makes smoothies, and that's something that you value. You're going to need a way to do that. So again, like the, "What do you need to help start law school?" Could be, "I need a really good blender."

Lee Burgess: It's true. I am in love with my Vitamix. I will be honest. When I found out it could clean itself, it just like changed everything.

Alison Monahan: Wow. Yeah, I had some bullet thing that I liked, I can't remember. But I liked that one because it had like a screw-on top where you could just have like a cup size of stuff.

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah, those are pretty cool.

Alison Monahan: Then you didn't have to wash the whole blender. All you had to do was basically rinse off the cup and rinse off the part that turns around and you were done.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, the Vitamix, what was a game-changer for me was that it has like a self-cleaning setting. So you just put water and soap and push this button, and it goes so fast and creates enough, I guess it's friction, I don't know what you would call the speed of the water, to self-clean. And then you just dump it out, rinse it out.

Alison Monahan: Wow.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, amazing. So that really lowers the smoothie stress, because I stopped making smoothies because my old blender would take forever to clean. That was one of the things I didn't like about it. I have other friends who make soups in them and do a lot of bulk meal cooking like that.

Alison Monahan: The immersion blender for soup, the immersion blender is like life-changing. Again, because all you have to do is rinse it. Done. You know if you're going to make soup, if you're going to make any kind of thing like that, definitely the immersion blender is the way to go.

Lee Burgess: Nice. We also have a former tutor on our team wrote about the slow-cooker being life changing for him.

Alison Monahan: The crock pot.

Lee Burgess: The crock pot, but again if you're trying to cook in bulk, slow-cookers or a crock pot, or I know right now it's the insta-pot, which is very hot around food circles on social media that I follow. But the ability to cook a bunch of food, and eat it all week is really a game-changer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I had a Korean roommate in law school, and she was my first exposure to the wonders of a really decent rice cooker. Life-changing. Turns out you can make all kinds of stuff in a rice cooker. And again, you just put your stuff in. You push the button. You go study for a half an hour. You come back and your rice is ready.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, we used to steam vegetables in our rice cooker.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you can do all kinds of things like oatmeal, quinoa, and that's better than standing over a pot.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah. Overnight oats are one of new favorite things. Do you ever do this?

Alison Monahan: No.

Lee Burgess: Where you soak oats overnight in either like coconut milk or almond milk instead of cooking them, and then they are like mushy deliciousness. Totally worth Googling, overnight oats.

Alison Monahan: I actually do my steel-cut oats in the rice cooker.

Lee Burgess: Oh there you go. All right well now I'm totally hungry. I definitely did not eat enough for lunch.

Alison Monahan: All right, let's stop talking about food.

Lee Burgess: Sounds good.

Alison Monahan: One thing that we should definitely touch on that we have not talked about yet on our shopping list is do people need to rush out and get a new laptop.

Lee Burgess: Oh, please don't. I think that a lot of people feel like they need new technology for law school, and I don't think you do. I think in fact, waiting to find out what kind of technology you really need is more important. It's likely now, that everybody has some sort of a working laptop, and that's probably going to get you through at least a good chunk of law school. What I like to have people keep in mind is that you will be probably taking the bar on that laptop as well.

And you may not want a three or four-year-old laptop, depending on when you decide to buy your new laptop for law school, be the one that you're taking to the bar because it may not be as stable as kind of a newer laptop that you might buy midway through law school.

So I think if you could hold off, I don't think it's something that you need to do. Especially if you're not going to take notes on your laptop in class, which we don't recommend that you do.

Alison Monahan: Right I think sometimes, if you do want to buy a new laptop, you definitely want to be clear on what is going to be allowable for you to use on your exams. Because not every type of computer, probably still ... Essentially if you want to take your exams in most law schools in class on a laptop, you have to install special software. And different schools use different software. Sometimes the software does not work very well. Sometimes it does not work on certain types of computers. So before you invest several thousand dollars in your brand new fancy computers, double and triple check with your law school. Like, okay, am I going to be able to use this? And a lot of them, I think, will probably send out some information on this. Just make sure you understand it. But I think your point, that if you have something that's sort of okay that you can continue using for your first year or so, that's going to put you in a better position not to have to rush out and buy a laptop just to take the bar.

Lee Burgess: And there's so many startup costs to law school. I mean all this stuff that we're talking about here, including books, and you might be relocating. If you can push off new technology til the next summer, when maybe you can get another part-time job or something like that, that could make a huge difference in how much money you feel like you're kind of bleeding in this first part of law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, particularly if you're moving across the country. You're paying deposits. It can get extremely expensive, and a lot of times you're just not going to have that cash on hand to go buy yourself a several thousand-dollar laptop.

Lee Burgess: Right. I also think that if you don't have an iPad or another type of tablet, again unless you know how you're going to use it, you don't need to invest in something new like that. Oftentimes, students really like having paper books, even with supplements or things like that, because you can mark them up. You can even share them with a friend, maybe you can split costs, which can be kind of nice. So until you know that you're going to need a new iPad for law school, don't go buy a lot of extra technology. Technology's always available now. You can walk into the Apple Store or order a Kindle at any moment. It's like at your fingertips.

Alison Monahan: And it's always getting better. You know if you wait a year, you're going to get something better for the same cost. Or you're going to have the option of getting the second most current generation at a significantly reduced cost. So it's like a used car. If you drive the new car off the lot, it instantly loses value. So

if you can delay buying this new iPad or buying the new computer, you're probably going to end up, in the end, getting a better quality product for less.

Lee Burgess: Yep. That's very true. So riding it out as long as you can is probably a good idea. I think the one situation that some people find themselves in, which is something that I found myself in, was that I didn't have an up-to-date personal computer before I was applying to law school, because I used a company laptop, and I traveled for work all the time. So I actually had to buy a computer to just do all my law school applications, because I felt like I couldn't use my company laptop for that. So I kind of felt forced into doing it. And then I had a four-year-old computer when it came time to sit for the bar.

I think a lot of people may not find themselves in the exact same spot. I think now, just to date myself, I think everybody pretty much has some sort of a laptop. But it is just something to think about. If you are turning in technology that somebody else owns, you might find yourself not having technology you're used to having.

Alison Monahan: Right, you're going to need something. And the other thing to think about is whether it's possible for you to buy some sort of protection plan for this new laptop if you get it. Because the worst thing is when suddenly, you're in the middle of the semester, your hard drive dies. You don't have the money to fix it. You don't know where to go to fix it. Anything you can do in advance, even if it costs you a little bit more money up front, is probably worth doing just to decrease your hassle level.

For me, for example, my laptop decided to die literally the afternoon before I had to fly to San Francisco for a law firm interview. But I'd had the foresight at that point to buy a sort like, "we'll come to you and fix it plan", which of course no one would sell you anymore. And they literally sent a technician to my hotel in San Francisco, fixed it, I think they even had to come back the next day because they didn't have the right part or something. So you know, basically they fixed the entire thing, and then I was up and running again. You know these things always happen at the worst possible time, and the other thing-

Lee Burgess: Oh, it's so true.

Alison Monahan: ... Please, please, please, please, please back up your work.

Lee Burgess: Oh yes, Dropbox, it's free. You don't even have to pay for it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like backup on an external hard drive, that's an excellent investment of a hundred dollars. Backup to Dropbox. Do it automatically. Just have a Dropbox folder on your computer that you save every important document to, and it just automatically syncs. Do that. Please do that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Do that. Do it, because we don't want to hear anyone listening to this podcast tell the story of lost work. Which it doesn't matter how long technology's around, work just gets lost. I even had a friend, who posted to Facebook that she's working on her dissertation, and she'd been using Scrivener, which is a-

Alison Monahan: Oh God, which crashed my computer like 18 million times. I had to stop using it.

Lee Burgess: Right, but it is a great program if you can keep it working. But she'd been writing her dissertation in Scrivener, and then she converted it to Word, and Scrivener automatically saves, Word doesn't to the same extent, and then her computer crashed in Word, and she lost a bunch of changes in her dissertation. Heartbreaking. So, don't do that.

Alison Monahan: That's also something ... A lot of times that's a setting that you need to set up in something like Word, is tell it how often to save. And you might assume it's saving, because we're all used to working in the cloud now. If I'm sending an email in MailChimp, it saves it every 20 seconds. Word doesn't do that.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So just think about it. Another thing people on the technology front may be interested in is if you're going to take notes on a laptop, you might want to consider some sort of note-taking software. If you can get Scrivener running, it's fantastic. However, it might crash your computer a lot. People like Microsoft One Note. A lot of people like Evernote. Anything like this that is going to help streamline your note-taking just out of using a Word document is probably a good use of time and energy to figure out what that might be for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And using other technology tools that you might want to learn before the semester starts that can help keep you organized. So Trello of course, we talk about a lot because we love them, and we think that they can be used for a lot of different things, is probably another good one to try out. But you might want to play with some of these tools. I mean the nice thing about Evernote and Trello is they're free. So you can decide if they make sense for your thought process, and how you want to organize notes or other life tasks. Most of these also sync to your phone and have some sort of an app so you can access them from multiple locations. So anyway, worth checking out and playing with, but we still recommend you take notes by hand whenever possible.

Alison Monahan: Right. [Read our blog post.](#)

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: Finally, one last big topic before we wrap up. What about whether people should be getting their supplements right now.

Lee Burgess: You know, supplements are something that I would really hold off on until you're in school, and you can get more information. Sometimes professors will have supplements that they recommend for a class. Sometimes upperclassmen will send down through the chains of communication what supplements are good for certain classes. But investing in a bunch of supplements and filling your bookcases, is not a great place to start.

Alison Monahan: No, and sometimes you'll get to school, and you'll find out ... I think at Columbia they had for example, this amazing day where one of the student organizations would get donations of supplements from upper class people and then sell them for something ridiculous, like a dollar each. So if you happened to know about this, and go at the right time. And you happened to see ... I mean it was amazing what you could get. I'm not sure I ever actually got any, because I was always like, "God, did that happen yesterday?" But if you're on top of it, there's definitely a possibility that you will be able to get drastically reduced-price supplements that there's no reason to go out and spend \$40 dollars on right now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Okay I have two more quick things I want to add to the shopping list though before we go.

Alison Monahan: Okay. Sure.

Lee Burgess: I know we're running ... I will be quick. One is, if you don't have any business appropriate attire in your closet, try and get some because you never know when you're going to get invited to a networking event at your school or an engagement to hear a speaker. And you need to show up not in a fleece and jeans, which is what I wore to law school every day. So make sure you have something in your closet like pressed and cleaned and ready to go kind of at any time. Don't you think?

Alison Monahan: Oh for sure, for sure.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And if you're coming, especially from undergrad, you might feel like you don't really have a lot of that clothing, so just make sure that you've got some good stuff in your closet. And if you're setting up a new home, really think about buying things in bulk, or how to stock up at the beginning of the summer, so you are not constantly running to the store, if you have space. If you don't have a lot of space, really look into Amazon Subscribe and Save. It's kind of life-changing. You can get like paper towels and toilet paper and toothbrush heads and even snack foods delivered to your front door on a regular basis, and then you never run out of anything. This was like recommended to me by a mom friend, and it's kind of life-changing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's just worth thinking of your system for keeping yourself well-stocked, for keeping your home organized, for keeping your life organized. Investing a little bit of time up front and kind of developing a process for how

you're going to make sure your house is well-stocked. And make sure that you can carry your books and things like that, I think really will pay dividends in the end, and you're just going to be happier. You're going to be healthier, and you're going to be a lot more effective.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and you don't have to keep all of those lists of things that you're running out of in your head. It drives you crazy. There's like an exhaustion element from that.

Alison Monahan: For sure.

Lee Burgess: All right, well with that we are out of time. But before we finish up, we just wanted to take a second to let you know that you can check out our Start Law School Right Course at our website at lawschooltoolbox.com/start-law-school-right. This on-demand course, which is going to include feedback from one of our awesome Law School Toolbox tutors, will help you understand how to excel academically from day one, and make sure that you have everything you need to get started in law school. You can check it out online and feel free to contact us if you have any questions about the program.

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Resources:

- [Start Law School Right Course](#)
- [Law School Style Report: The Best Carryalls for the Professional Law Student](#)
- [Tech Correspondent: My Love Affair with Microsoft OneNote](#)
- [Tips for Using the Cornell Note-Taking Method](#)
- [Is Handwriting Notes a Good Thing or a Bad Thing](#)
- [Podcast Episode 60: 5 Tips for Surviving the First Month of Law School](#)
- [Podcast Episode 102: How to Read Cases and Prepare for Class in Law School](#)
- [Circa Notebooks](#)
- [Yellow Steno Pads](#)