



Episode 115: Settling into Law School

Lee Burgess: Welcome to The Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking about settling into your first month of law school. 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 the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and The Catapult Conference. Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the 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 chatting about settling into law school after your first month or so of classes. Well, Lee, it seems to me like the first month, maybe four or five weeks of class, can be a really pivotal turning point for a lot of students, especially 1Ls. Why do you think that is?

Lee Burgess: I think after a good four or five weeks, you are probably getting used to the workload. Because I think that's one of the hard things about the beginning of law school is just figuring out how you're going to do all of the work that you have to do, these hours and hours of reading each week. After doing that for a few weeks, you hopefully are getting into some sort of a cadence. Maybe you've figured out the best times to read.

I know, Alison, we've talked about on the podcast before, you like to read at night before classes. I would typically do my reading in between classes during the day. But you're going to start learning a lot about yourself and how you can manage this workload, and that's going to give you the opportunity to really streamline your process and be a better law student. But I think you need a few weeks under your belt before you can even make some of those decisions.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. Nobody really quite knows what they're getting into, despite their best efforts. Two weeks into the semester is probably not the time to be making major life decisions, or even committing to a schedule you're going to commit to for the rest of the semester. You do really need to figure out what's working for you and what's not working for you, particularly around reading. For me, my attention is too fragmented to try to do any reading during class, so I'd use that time for other things or to relax or whatever, run errands.

I think the point is, by this time, hopefully you've tried some things and you've figured out some stuff that doesn't work, and you're a little bit better prepared to feel like ... not necessarily to feel like you're totally on top of things all the

time, but to feel like you're starting to get a handle on what this is going to be like on an ongoing basis.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Law school is a learned skill; you're going to have to keep trying out new things. But hopefully you've tried a few things in those first few weeks, because now is a good time to pick a direction, I think. Because you need to settle in now, because things are going to start shifting. You're going to need to start thinking about outlining and preparing for exams, and we're going to talk about that a little more later in the podcast. But now is the time to settle in and say, I feel pretty good about how I'm doing my class preparation.

Alison Monahan: Right. You should know, for example, how long on average is it taking you to do your reading.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: You know, is it taking you 10 pages per hour, more than that, less than that. If you're still doing five pages of reading per hour, for example, that's something that you need to deal with because that's taking too long, to be frank.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: If you aren't sure if you should be recording your classes and listening to them again because you're not sure you're getting everything, answer is no, don't do that. But-

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: Hopefully at this point, you've done that sort of thing and been like, you know, I'm not sure that was really the most productive use of my time. You might be thinking about your briefing. Is your briefing taking a really long time? Otherwise you could streamline it. Is it really giving you enough return on investment for the time that you're spending on it?

These are the conversations you want to be having with yourself and the analysis you want to be doing about your workload. Because Lee, as you mentioned, it's about to get even crazier.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And one of the things that typically starts happening around this time is legal research and writing kicks in, which can really put some strain on your workload, because I know when I started doing legal writing assignments, I felt like I was writing in a foreign language. It was unlike any writing I had really done before.

Alison Monahan: Right. And probably, you're going to have some sort of research assignments to get you up to speed for your open memos when those come around. And again,

I just remember being in a library and literally having no idea where I was supposed to start.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: You know? I was just like what are they even asking me to do?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So that can definitely cause a lot of turmoil and can also take an enormous amount of time if you're not careful about really focusing your attention on what matters the most.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also think that a lot of students start thinking about, around this point, especially people listening to this podcast, that this is around the time where outlining should start, and often times, people are unsure what that even means. So, there can be a little bit of confusion, because you feel like you should be doing all of these tasks, but you're not really sure how to do them. So, we'll talk a little bit more about how to get things kicked off at this point in this semester. But I think that that can be an additional stressor around this point.

Alison Monahan: For sure, because at this point ... If you've been in class four or five weeks, you've covered material that you're not going back to.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So that should be your signal, okay, I need to start doing something with this material so that I'll understand it and be able to use it by the time the exam comes around. There's no reason that you should be waiting until November to start that process. That would be a serious mistake.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Even if you're hearing from other people that that's what you should do, we recommend you don't.

Alison Monahan: Yes. We highly, highly recommend you do not try to put together an entire semester worth of classes starting in your reading week.

Lee Burgess: Yup. I think the last thing that I would say makes this a challenging time for 1Ls is more and more professors now are giving midterms, and you're really not that far from the mid-point of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Oh, sure.

Lee Burgess: You know? Most midterms are given early to mid-October, and that is another great reminder, meaning that you better have some idea of what's substantively been happening in your classes so you can sit for those midterms. I think that that is something that we've seen become a shift over maybe the last five years

or so. We see more and more midterms coming up. But that changed the rhythm of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Right. And if you have a midterm in one class but not in other classes, that also can throw off your preparation, because you can't spend a full week preparing for a midterm and drop all of your other classes. You've got to keep all of this in perspective. I think you should take your midterms seriously, I think they're a really good opportunity to get feedback and to practice doing a test and to see how you're doing, but typically in terms of grade-wise, they don't count that much, so you've got to be ... Same with legal writing. You've got to be a little bit cognizant of how you're spending your time.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Exactly. And for 2Ls and 3Ls, some of the concerns can be slightly different. I think academically, you might feel like you're at the same point in the semester where you need to start worrying about outlining and a little more about substantive law, but 2Ls and 3Ls are typically also really finishing up the job hunt, or doing the job hunt in earnest, I guess, if on-campus recruiting is not going well. This including finishing up interviews, doing callbacks, some people are traveling to callbacks. That is a huge stressor on an academic semester.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. I was in school in New York and I had friends who were interviewing in San Francisco. I did a couple of interviews in San Francisco, but one of my friends literally stayed in a hotel in San Francisco for two to three weeks.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: This is in the middle of the semester, so you can imagine coming back and now it's mid or September, late September, and you've suddenly basically haven't been in your classes for the last three or four weeks. You've got a lot to catch up on.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you aren't doing on-campus interviewing and that process, then you might be writing cover letters and doing networking and trying to find other job opportunities, and that can be very time-consuming.

Alison Monahan: Oh, sure.

Lee Burgess: It goes back to this idea of planning your weeks. You probably need to allocate some time either every day or every few days or once a week to try and bundle some of this work together, or the job hunt can really take over your semester.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. And I think it's important to take it seriously. Sometimes we see students who maybe have wishful expectations about how difficult this is going to be. But in my opinion, if you're seriously looking for a job, you probably need to be sending out, say, 10 resumes a day. 50 a week, basically. That may sound

crazy. I don't think that's unreasonable at all. And then it's a question of, if that's the volume of what I need to be doing, how long does it take me to do one? Can I do 10 in an hour? Do I want to do one hour a day, five days a week? Do I want to bundle this on the weekends? You need to have some sort of schedule and plan, or this can just completely take over, or you can ignore it and not have any options.

Lee Burgess: Right. This stress level doesn't go down about jobs throughout the year. It's one of those things every month closer either you get to the summer or for graduation, the stress level goes up if you don't have a job. So, investing in the job hunt outside of the really intense academic times is a good idea. You can hopefully step back a little bit during those intensive academic times and not be distracted from getting the best grades possible, which also helps your job hunt.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You have to be realistic. You don't want to be trying to send out 100 resumes during the reading week because, oh, you have so much extra time.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: That time is for studying.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Again, I think people just have to think about what are their highest priorities and what do they need to be doing to make those things happen, and then try to balance as best you can and use the time that you're working to do your work and get things done, and then take a step back and see your friends or your significant others or whatever in that time. And you do have time for all of it, but you've got to be organized.

Lee Burgess: Yup. And I think one of the things that can happen with time in your 2L and 3L year as well is you're typically involved in extracurricular activities in school. Maybe you're on the law review, on the court, you might be president of a club or an officer of a club, you might be doing a maritime law journal, civil rights law journal. All of this stuff really starts to add up.

Alison Monahan: I hated law review time. I literally resented every second I spent at the law review office, which I was spending hours a day, several times a week, and that really could eat into the rest of your time.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). And I think it can lead to feelings of a little bit of overwhelm.

Alison Monahan: You think?

Lee Burgess: Because you just watch the hours disappear, or one of your jobs is to get speakers to come for your club, and then you're planning these club events, and

then you find yourself going to a lot of events and eating a lot of pizza, and the days slip away. I remember one of the things that happened for me is I used to use my midday break to do a lot of my reading, and the more I got involved on campus, that time just started to disappear because I was going to events at lunch or had meetings, or ... You know, people wanted to do stuff typically during the day when most people were on campus. Then you're like, well, where did all my time go to study?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. That's why I just made all mine after dinner. I was like, nobody's going to bother me then, probably.

Lee Burgess: Yup. Everybody's got similar concerns, but I think the 2L and 3L concerns are just slightly different because you typically have a lot more going on. It's the whole thing, 1L, they scare you to death. 2L, they work you to death.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: And then 3L, they bore you to death. I think the 2L year, you feel the weight of everything you have going on.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and everything seems really important, like if I don't do this pro-bono project, there's no way I'll ever get a job.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: You know? So, you've got to, again, take a step back, evaluate are my expectations reasonable? Is this something I should be spending time on? And really evaluate how things are going.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think this is a great point to pause and talk about how you really take stock and evaluate how things are going. We keep telling people what they should be evaluating. But-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and everyone's probably listening being like, I don't think it's going that well-

Lee Burgess: But I don't know what to do.

Alison Monahan: ... and I don't really know why. I'm doing my best. I'm doing the best I can.

Lee Burgess: Right, and we know you are. That's the thing. We talk to very few law students who say, "I'm really slacking, and I am just putting my feet up and I'm not doing any work, and I'm not getting good results."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, totally bored. Really bored in law school. Not enough to do.

Lee Burgess: Right. That is not the feeling. The feeling is, I'm putting in as much as I can, and I'm still not feeling like my work is up to snuff or I'm getting prepared. So, we wanted to pull together some suggested self-evaluation questions that you can walk through. You can always check out the transcript if you wanted to go back and reference these, a little easier than re-listening to the podcast. But to just sit down, maybe take out a journal or something, and think through different parts of your law school experience. All right, so Alison, where should we start?

Alison Monahan: Well, we've got our coffee.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: We're ready to go.

Lee Burgess: We're ready to go.

Alison Monahan: Taking our midday coffee break, we're going to evaluate our experience. Well, I think the first thing you have to look at, really, because it's foundational for your academics, is how is your class prep going?

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: Are you getting the reading done? How long is it taking you? Do you think that's a reasonable amount of time? Are you retaining the information? If you go to class and it's as if you're a blank slate who's never looked at the cases? That could be an issue. Are your briefs helpful? Are they too long, are they too short, how long are they taking you? Really, is there anything you would change about your class prep experience?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Sometimes I really think folks can get on such a hamster wheel with class prep, and it's like, I'll just read these cases and then I can be done. But if you're not retaining the information, if you are just thanking every possible lord above and around that you didn't get called on, because ...

Alison Monahan: Right. If you're not understanding the information to begin with ...

Lee Burgess: Right, right.

Alison Monahan: You can't retain it if you don't understand it.

Lee Burgess: Right. So, you're just hopeful that you don't get called on because you don't have the retention, that is a problem. Because even though we've talked about before, how important it is to understand the end game, and the end game is not necessarily directly related to class prep. Class prep is how you learn how to read law, learn how to understand it, learn how to make these legal arguments that you need to make on these exams. If you can't follow what is happening in the reading, that's something you want to look at.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think there are various ways you can get help with this. I think part of it is just identifying what the problem is. If the problem is that you literally don't understand the vocabulary in the cases you're reading and you still don't know what sua sponte means, get out your Black law dictionary. Make some flashcards. Do whatever you have to do to get this basic terminology under your belt so that you do start to understand it more readily. Beyond that, I think if you're having really serious problems with the reading, that's something you've got to get outside help on.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. It could possibly be even an undiagnosed learning disability. We see students start to have those concerns, and sometimes the difficulty with the reading can be one of the first things that you notice.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: We've got a great podcast episode on accommodations and what that process is like. But if you are really concerned and struggling, it's worth talking to disability services and trying to see if this is something you should investigate.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think beyond that, if your school has an academic support system, that's something to tap into sooner rather than later. These are people who are trained to help you, to help you pinpoint the problems. Certainly, there are various books you can buy and read in your spare time about how to read cases, but the reality is, there are resources that are going to help. And we have tutors that can help you. This is part of what they do.

The point is, you don't have to struggle through this alone. If after a month or so, you're really feeling like you're behind the eight ball when you get to class, that's probably not going to end well.

Lee Burgess: One other nice thing about this point in the semester that I forgot to mention was you likely aren't reading the super old cases anymore.

Alison Monahan: Depending, yeah.

Lee Burgess: That are just miserable to read, where you feel like you're looking up every other word. That is a nice part of the semester, is you likely have moved on beyond Pennoyer v. Neff.

Alison Monahan: Right, although your professor might be giving you more reading because they think that you're getting better at it.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that's true. Okay, way to turn that to a downside.

Alison Monahan: Point being, you got to get the reading under control, and the option of not doing it is probably not your greatest option.

Lee Burgess: Yup. Very true. And then you also have to think about how class time is going. We talked about are your briefs helpful, but are your class notes helpful? When you're taking-

Alison Monahan: Right, I should have looked at those.

Lee Burgess: Oh, I know, right? You spend all this time taking these class notes. It's a good idea to look at them not at the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: If you haven't looked at your class notes by now, it's probably a good idea to go back and see if they make any sense to you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That is very important. You also need to make sure that you feel good about how you're following along in class and staying focused. Are you falling into the traps of distraction, like having your computer open and using the internet or chatting with people during class? It's really important to make sure that you're not sabotaging class time, because although there may be the professor out there where you feel like class time is not really worth your time, most professors do a pretty good job, and you're paying a lot of money to sit in that class.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you're literally paying probably \$100 to \$200 a class.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, you should-

Alison Monahan: Which is kind of sobering.

Lee Burgess: It is sobering. So, shut off your phone and your internet, and absorb as much as you can. It's really worth it.

Alison Monahan: Right, and the other thing I think can come into play at this point in the semester, after people have maybe been called on in a couple of classes, is sometimes people start to get really intimidated about the idea of having to speak in class, like maybe it didn't go so well. I think that's something to really try to pay attention to and to get help on if you feel like you need it.

I think there's another book, I'll try to find it, about [becoming more comfortable talking in class](#), because you don't want to just be that person who checks out emotionally because you're either afraid or you're just like, I'm over this, I don't like my professor being mean to people. You need to find a way to stay engaged with the material so that you're getting the most out of it.

Lee Burgess: Yup. I think that's really a good point. What about your overall study schedule? We talk in our time management podcast and a lot on our blog that you need to have a big picture study schedule for your week, where you have class time, reading time, extracurricular activities, and deep work time. So, how's it working? Have you thrown it out the window? Do you find that you don't have

enough time for things like sleep? Do you find that you don't have time to go grocery shopping?

Alison Monahan: Or you find yourself drinking so much that you can't work the next day?

Lee Burgess: Right. It's a really good idea to spend some time looking at that study schedule and realize that if anything, the workload is only going to increase as the semester gets going. If you look at that and say, wow, I don't have an extra even 30 minutes in this week, it's time to evaluate how you're spending your time. Because you need to find some more time going late into the later part of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think this is a time to really pay attention to where your gaps are. If you are devoting 90% of your waking hours to reading for class, but you're not ever doing any sort of work to put the stuff together for yourself, you're not doing any practice hypos, you're not doing any reading of supplements, that's a place where you're like, hm, maybe I need to change that ratio as the semester moves forward, because otherwise I'm just literally not going to be prepared for exams.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Which is the point of the semester. It's hard to remember that, but you might be 10 to 12 weeks out of exams at this point.

Alison Monahan: Oh, if that.

Lee Burgess: If that, depending on how long your semester is. And that's going to come up pretty quickly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. At this point, I think if you're a month into classes, you have plenty of options for practicing things. For example, if you're taking civ pro and you started with personal jurisdiction, you're not going to go back to that. You're not going to spend any more time on that. You can definitely pull out a supplement or an examples and explanations and start practicing some personal jurisdiction questions. You have to test your knowledge starting now if you're going to be ready to do this on an exam.

Lee Burgess: Let's mention the fact that we can pretty much guarantee your personal jurisdiction's going to be on your civ pro final.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was a civ pro TA. It would be a very, very rare test that does not include personal jurisdiction.

Lee Burgess: Yup. It's one of those slam-dunk issues. You pretty much know it's going to be on there. It would be like going into a criminal law final and being like, I wonder if they're going to test homicide.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I wonder if there's going to be a dead body.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I wonder if somebody's going to die.

Alison Monahan: It's like, yeah, there's going to be a dead body.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, probably a gun. Maybe even a knife.

Alison Monahan: Probably gun. Yeah, and probably going to involve two people.

Lee Burgess: Yup.

Alison Monahan: Maybe not in this one, but at least somewhere in there, you're going to have several people working together.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: It's going to be on there.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Conspiracy, homicide's on there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Civ pro, you're going to have personal jurisdiction, probably going to have subject matter jurisdiction. Beyond that, your professor might do a lot of different things. But those are going to show up.

Lee Burgess: Yup. I think the same thing with a class like torts. Students can feel like if you're-

Alison Monahan: Hm, do you think there's going to be negligence?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think there's probably going to be negligence. But some torts professors spend the majority of the semester breaking down negligence. So, if you're sitting here saying how could I even start studying negligence, because I don't even know the rest of the parts of negligence, we're not going to finish that for another four weeks, well, you probably have finished duty.

Alison Monahan: I'm like, there's going to be a duty question.

Lee Burgess: Right. And there are hypos out there just on duty and all the different types of duty. Duty as a minor child, duty as a landowner occupier. All of that kind of stuff.

Alison Monahan: Rescue, or as the rescuer who's a doctor.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: All these variants. You can test yourself on that.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, don't feel like you have to finish these very, very large concepts to be able to start testing your knowledge. You can take these subtopics and there

are plenty of resources in your law library, likely, that you can pull and find these hypos and not have to invest a lot of money into additional supplements.

Alison Monahan: Right. Any supplement is going to have some sort of ... Usually, a lot of times, they have shorter answer questions, which can be a really good way to make sure that you're getting this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You don't have to sit down and do a three-hour exam at this point, that's not realistic, but you can find hypos that you could do in under an hour, and those are going to be super valuable, because they're going to allow you to test different parts that you're going to then have to put together on the exam.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And the next thing I wanted to say was, if you are part of a study group, it's a good time to evaluate that study group. But one of the activities I think that study groups can be very helpful with is finding practice problems.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: If you have five people in your study group and you decide, okay, everybody bring one hypo to each study session, then you've got five hypos each week or however often you guys meet. I think that is great use of study time with a study group.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Everybody does the hypo on their own time and then you come back and you compare your results.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: That's a very effective way to use study group time.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Now-

Alison Monahan: There are a lot of other, less effective ways to use your study group time that you need to evaluate if you're doing them.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Because study groups can just become places to vent nervous energy. They can really just cause you to feel more anxious, more nervous because you take on everybody else's stuff. You have to make sure that the activities that the study group are doing is moving you forward. If not, you should thoughtfully remove yourself from the study group.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and one thing that becomes tempting I think at this point in the semester in your study group is you're like, well, would it make sense if we just split up our classes and each person outlines only one, and then we can share our outlines?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That's a great idea, right?

Lee Burgess: Isn't that in one of the 1L movies? Paper Chase or something like that?

Alison Monahan: Probably.

Lee Burgess: Not really recommend.

Alison Monahan: No, it's not recommend. That's basically the same as getting an old student outline from your professor and reading it and being like, oh, I outlined the class. Yeah, no, you read somebody else's outline of the class.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Not the same thing.

Lee Burgess: Yup, exactly. Also, really good time in the semester to evaluate how your stress and anxiety levels are, because ...

Alison Monahan: Probably they're not so great.

Lee Burgess: They might not be so great, and we're getting closer to October, and something we typically call the October freakout, which is where you realize you're almost to the mid-point of the semester or you're going into midterms. But it is important to make sure that the anxiety and the stress are not to a level that they're really debilitating. If you can't sleep, if you can't focus, if you are worried that you might be slightly depressed, don't wait until longer in the semester to reach out for resources. You want to do that right now.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's not going to get better.

Lee Burgess: No, it's not going to get better. Talk to your schools. Often times, there are free resources linked to the school. There's probably a counseling center on the undergrad campus, if your law school is an undergrad campus. Typically, those services are free. Talk to whoever you feel like you need to talk to to check in and make sure that this isn't getting debilitating.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think in the bigger picture, the question is really, are you taking care of yourself?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And part of that is your mental health, but it's also your physical health. How's your eating? Are you every day having really crappy pizza at lunch at every law

school event? That might not be the best brain food. It's fine every now and then, but every day you might want to be eating something else.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I think this is just as the days get shorter and darker and everything gets more blah, these are the times to think am I getting exercise? Am I having enough downtime? Do I have ways to relax? Again, just evaluate that and see, are there changes I could make that are going to be put me in a better position to go into what honestly is going to be the tougher part of the semester.

Lee Burgess: Yup. I think that that's true. A shout-out for part-time students, I think that this workload and the balance between your possible work life and school life can be so complicated that I would recommend you check in with yourself with these questions on a consistent basis. Because you're really going to have to find an hour here or there to try and solve some of these problems, because your schedule is even tighter than typically a full-time student.

Alison Monahan: Right, and now just checking in for yourself, but checking in with other people who are impacted by your time in law school.

Lee Burgess: Right. That's very, very true. Now what do you do if you're concerned? Maybe you've now finished your coffee and you've moved on to wine, because you're a little concerned about how this semester is going. It shouldn't surprise our listeners who listen to us quite a bit that we do think you need to go get help. Don't suffer in silence.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. There are tons of resources, and I think the first step is acknowledging, okay, I'm not going to go so far as to say there's a serious problem, but maybe there's some things I'm slightly concerned about that could use some improvement. And it doesn't have to be ... You don't want to wait until the point where you're drinking yourself into a stupor every night because you're so stressed out and you can't sleep. That's not the point you want to be at.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And you take a step back and ask for help, or reevaluate what's going on here. Who are some people that people can reach out to?

Lee Burgess: Your professors can be really great resources. Students often times feel like professors are too intimidating, but some professors are really, really great people in office hours. They really like students. They may want to bond with you, they may want to hear your concerns, and they often have a lot of wisdom, having seen sometimes generations of law students go through this experience.

You don't necessarily want to share all of life's concerns with every professor, but if you feel like you have clicked with a professor, I feel like they can be good people to talk to about questions you might have academically, or questions or concerns you have about effectively preparing for class, or what they're really looking for when it comes to exam answers and things like that. I think those open dialogues with professors can be really important and helpful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I agree, I think a lot of them are less intimidating one-on-one, so if you're really intimidated, we have a whole episode about office hours, but take a friend. Plan what you're going to say. Obviously, you don't want to necessarily dump all of your personal problems on your professors. It's not what most of them are looking for, although some of them are totally open to it. I think on a lot of campuses, there are people who are known as resources you can go to.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: Some of these people, at least, are on Twitter. If you go on Twitter and you search for, I think it's appellate Twitter. There are some really nice people who are professors and they talk about my door's open, you can come and talk to me, this doesn't have to be on the record, you don't have to be my student. I think most schools, there are people like that if you look around.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's true.

Alison Monahan: I probably wouldn't go to my meanest, scariest professor and be like, "I'm so sad, I can't do anything!" And he's going to be like, oh my god, I'm not emotionally equipped to deal with this. But that's on them, not on you.

Lee Burgess: It's true, and you never know, because the most intimidating professor I had in class was one of the nicest people in office hours.

Alison Monahan: No, same.

Lee Burgess: He had this father persona that he had in office hours, which was really ... made him a great mentor. So, you just don't know until you go and you feel it out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and if you try one professor and you're starting to ask them some academic stuff, and you feel like you're not really getting anywhere, that's okay.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You don't have to click with everyone. Just try someone else. Don't give up.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, agreed.

Alison Monahan: And if your professors aren't working out, try your TAs.

Lee Burgess: Yup. Sometimes your TAs can become really great mentors. They're still students usually, so they might even have some suggestions for managing your time or resources available at the law school. They're not evaluating your work, so maybe you feel a bit safer. But it's also important, when you do talk to these professors, remember it's blind grading. It's not like they're tracking everything you say in that way. But I think your TAs can be really great resources if you click with them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. If nothing else, they're likely to have resources that they have just found out about by being there a year longer.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: It might be like you'd like to go to a yoga class. Here's a good yoga studio that I learned about that has a discounted rate for students, or whatever it is. Or, oh, did you know you get in free to all the museums in New York City? All you have to do is show your ID. If you're really looking for a great break to go on with your significant other, that can be a great option. It doesn't have to be what are the elements of homicide?

Lee Burgess: Right. I know one of the nuggets at my school was that the health center ... not the health center, but the gym, I guess the sports recreation center, would have super inexpensive massages for students.

Alison Monahan: Ooh.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That were a fraction of what it would cost to go get massages at somewhere else. That was one of the best hidden secrets. Whoever told you about the secret massages that you'd get ... People were lining up.

Alison Monahan: That's serious gold.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Nuggets like that, often times, that's the wisdom that's passed down from mentor to mentee and upperclassmen and lowerclassmen.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and they may also have ideas about which professors are supportive or helpful.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alison Monahan: They just have better information than you do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So why not lean on these people?

Lee Burgess: Yup, agreed. And as we mentioned earlier, most schools have some sort of academic support office, and those professors really love helping other students, because they're in academic support. So ...

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's what they do.

Lee Burgess: They are typically warm and inviting and have some good nuggets and have a lot of experience with these different professors, so you should definitely go visit them and share some of your concerns, because they might be a really great resource.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Again, if you're at a larger university, you may have something like a writing center that can help you with your writing. Yeah, I think just keep an eye out, and if you do feel like there's a resource you need, see if you can get it on your campus, because you've already paid for it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think working the resources you have at your school is so important. Even law librarians can be ... They're such an underutilized resource at schools. But if you're struggling with legal writing or research, they are so helpful. That's what they do.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, they're basically ... Typically, they have been trained as lawyers and as librarians.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. They have immense knowledge.

Alison Monahan: They know a lot. And they want to help you, and they're probably bored.

Lee Burgess: Right. Go visit them. You can typically sign up for a meeting with hem. I never had to wait to go talk to one of the law librarians, and I was always shocked at how helpful they were.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And the same thing, they can help you a lot with Lexis and Westlaw, but also your Lexis Westlaw reps can help. You probably have numbers you can call. You don't need to be spending five hours trying to craft a query that's not getting you anywhere. Just pick up the phone and call someone and be like, "Look, I'm trying to do this. This is what I've done. I'm really frustrated. It's not working. Can you help me?" And they'll probably be like, "Yes. Try this."

Lee Burgess: Right. The other reason you want to talk to folks at school is there may be free resources available for you that you don't even know. One of the things we often talk to our tutor students about are CALI exercises, which most schools, you can access for free. They have a lot of multiple choice practice, so they help quiz you on the substantive law. Many students don't even know these exists until somebody mentions them to you, and it's all free. But if you really talk to people and make sure you understand what all the resources are, you might save yourself a lot of money by not buying additional supplements for practice.

But also, really help yourself academically because the school has paid for the stuff already. So, you should use it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, there are tons and tons of resources. They can get stuff from other libraries. It's really endless, what the library of the law school can do for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: It's amazing. It's truly amazing.

Lee Burgess: It is amazing.

Alison Monahan: Make these people your friends.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And then of course, we are law school tutors and we have a team of law school tutors who help students all over the country at all tiers of law school with all these issues we've been talking about at each point in the semester. So, if you have concerns and you really want someone to sit down and wade through this with you, you can always reach out to us and talk to us more about our tutoring program.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And recently, we have introduced job help as well.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that's right.

Alison Monahan: We have an ex big law recruiter on our team who is now available to help you if you're struggling in our job search.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Again, if that's something you're interested in, let us know.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And before we wind up, because we are starting to run out of time, I just wanted to give a shout-out to the folks who might be studying for the bar in February. These are 3Ls who may be graduating in December or I even heard recently that one jurisdiction is now allowing 3Ls to start sitting for the exam early, so even sitting before graduation. Which sounds intense, but I could see situations where it would be worth it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think I had class two days a week my 3L year. I perhaps should have studied for the bar.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But I think it is also wise, if you have the bar coming up in February, that you do start thinking about it now. Often times, your last semester year course load is a little light. You might be doing clinics or an externship. You might be taking classes pass fail or just paper classes, and if you have concerns about the

bar, if you have struggled academically in the past, if you struggle with multiple choice, you struggled with the LSAT, I wouldn't wait until bar prep starts, which is typically in December, to really kick it into gear. There are a lot of things you can do. I think the performance test portion, most jurisdictions have some form of a performance test. It's a great thing to start because you don't need to know any law to practice that.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: So, you can get access to those questions or sign up for a course. We have a writing of the week course where you can do some facilitative practice, but the reality is, there is a lot of opportunity to start getting comfortable with parts of the test. The multi-state performance test is half of the writing on the UBE, so if you worked on that, you would have half of the writing section down before you even started studying for the exam. Which is pretty amazing if you start to think about it. I think that's a very good use of time.

The other thing that you may want to consider is if multiple choice has been something that has plagued you in the past, there are resources that you can purchase now and get access to between now and the bar. We like AdaptiBar. We have talked about them on the podcast before. They have given students access. If you buy it now, you get it from not until February. So, when you have some quote unquote "down time", you could be doing multiple choice practice.

Alison Monahan: That sounds so fun!

Lee Burgess: I know it is so fun. But most people want to do thousands of questions of multiple choice practice to get ready for the bar. And if you just do an hour of questions a week, that really starts to add up over the next 10 weeks.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: And that's going to be a huge chunk of the studying that you need to do to get comfortable with this part of the test. Just things you want to consider thinking forward to give yourself the highest likelihood of passing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think it's absolutely even more the case if you're going to be taking the bar in a jurisdiction where you may not have taken the classes.

Lee Burgess: True.

Alison Monahan: When I sat for the bar in California, I had not taken community property, for example. And that's a large subject area to get up to speed on in just a few days.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Which is the normal zero to 60 within a couple of days in a normal bar prep process. If you can do something about that now, you're probably going to be very happy when you're in the future and you're trying to learn this for the bar exam.

Lee Burgess: Yup, exactly. [We also offer bar exam tutoring](#), but there's a lot of great work that can be done on your own, just to feel like you're not getting this shock to your system in December when it's time to learn all of this stuff.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's definitely going to be a shock to the system, so anything you can front load now, exactly. You don't want to read your first PT when you're two weeks into bar prep.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: There's no reason you can't be working on that now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Very, very good point. Unfortunately, with that, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to [leave a review or rating](#) on iTunes. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything.

If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison at Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com, or you can always contact us via our [website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon.

Resources:

- [Molly Bishop Shadel, Finding Your Voice in Law School: Mastering Classroom Cold Calls, Job Interviews, and Other Verbal Challenges](#)
- [Private Tutoring from the Bar Exam Toolbox](#)