



## Episode 122: How to Transfer Law Schools (with Mihal Ansik)

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're talking with a special guest, Mihal Ansik, to talk about transferring law schools after your 1L year. 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 career-related website, [CareerDicta](#). 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.

Welcome back. Today we are discussing something many law students have considered at one time or another, transferring to a new law school after their 1L year. And joining me today on the podcast is Mihal Ansik, a graduate of Harvard Law School as a transfer student, who currently works to provide legal services and education tools to women working to reunify with their children and families after incarceration. And in her spare time of which she has plenty, of course, she is a tutor for the Law School Toolbox and the Bar Exam Toolbox. So, thanks for joining me on the podcast today.

Mihal Ansik: Thank you, Lee. I'm excited to talk about this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, transferring is something we hear a lot about when we talk to 1L's or even folks who are applying to law school. They kind of think about transferring as something that they can kind of keep in their pocket for the future. I think a lot of people maybe didn't get into the law school of their dreams the first time they applied, or ... So, they're hoping to land there maybe when they're a two L. Sometimes, life happens. Family circumstances change, you need to move geographically. So, people want to transfer for those reasons. Or, sometimes you just are a rock star your first year and you find out you can go to a different school if you want to, which is how most people I know transferred. And you transferred after your 1L year, so is this something that you had been thinking about throughout that year, or something you planned on?

Mihal Ansik: It wasn't, actually. I was definitely in the category of people who got my 1L grades back after the first semester, was shocked. And, then sort of toyed with the idea, but also needed some encouragement from other people, as we'll talk about over the course of the podcast, there's so many pros and cons to it. It's a deeply personal decision. And, I'll just be speaking from the kinds of things that were important to me and that I factored in. But, I think regardless of which

category you fall in, whether you come in thinking, "Okay, I want to crush it this first year so that I can end up somewhere else" or, if you like me are like, "Oh, I can do this, maybe I want to". I would definitely from the outset suggest that wherever you start, try to be somewhere where you could see yourself spending three years. I think that even though transferring is totally attainable, it's not a guarantee and you might change your mind.

I think regardless of whether you're one of those folks who comes in knowing that you want to make a change down the line or if you like me, you just realize at some point that it's something that you could do, I think starting out in a place where you could see yourself for the next three years is really important. Law school is challenging enough without having one foot out the door and so ... Actually, it could really benefit you both academically and in terms of what you offer to your transfer school, if you have shown engagement in the campus community and in your classroom as well obviously. So, I would say even if someone's considering it or if it's something they really, really want that being somewhere where you could also still be happy and feel fulfilled and feel like you're getting the best law school experience possible regardless of where you end up is really an important starting place at least.

Lee Burgess: I think that's an incredibly important piece of advice that I think is downplayed in this discussion, is this idea that if it doesn't work out, transfer, or you get in but financially, it doesn't work out. You don't want to be saddled with this disappointment or heavy feeling about the rest of your law school experience. You're still going to have a lot of opportunities wherever you're in law school, and most folks will find if you do excel and are at the top of your class at any law school, opportunities are going to be available for you if you differentiate yourself through excellence. So, I think it is important to say this is okay, but maybe this alternative is okay too, if it works out.

Mihal Ansik: I absolutely agree.

Lee Burgess: If a listener is considering transferring or has a dream of transferring down the future, I thought we could talk about a few things that they need to consider as part as their 1L year. And, I think you mentioned that you've kind of got to do well academically. It's kind of the first thing.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. And, I really want to be cautious around this conversation, because while doing well academically is a really important ingredient in transferring, putting more pressure on yourself to do well academically can end up defeating that.

Lee Burgess: Fair point.

Mihal Ansik: And, so, I think the way I would frame it is engage earnestly. I think that's what really helped me. When I went into law school, I really saw it as a vocational school. I had been working in the courts for a few years before I actually went to law school. So, I was working with incarcerated kids and doing advocacy for

them, or with them in the juvenile delinquency system. So, I had seen what being a lawyer looks like in practice every day, I would collaborate with the attorneys that were representing these kids. So, I was like, well, I want to do that. So, I'm just going to get this degree and go out and get this job.

When I was going into law school, what I was interested in was how the law actually has an impact on people in the world. So, for me it was a very sort of practical and contextualized experience. So, when I was learning criminal law, I was trying to learn it from the perspective of how will this be useful. Obviously, there are a lot of things that you learn in your 1L, where you're like, "How in the world could this be useful?" And, that connection isn't made. But, I think any way that you can sort of connect it to your interests or to something that you're curious about is really helpful. And-

Lee Burgess: And, it helps you pursue excellence, right? I mean, because to me grades are less about grades. You can't do anything about a curve. All you can do is do your best and then the grades will fall where they may.

Mihal Ansik: Totally.

Lee Burgess: But, to be the best lawyer you can be, I love the point you made about it being a vocational school. That's how I approached law school, as well. I had been working outside of the court system. I'd been working in a corporate job, but still. I came from that perspective. I had been working kind of in a trade of some sort. I had been a consultant and the law was a new career path, and I wanted to be good at it.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, absolutely. And, I think that ends up coming through then on the sort of unfortunate arbiter of law school grades, which is the final exam. And, I think a really sort of important factor in law school exam is voice and perspective. Even though so much of it feels like regurgitation, at the end of the day you distinguish yourself when at least on some level, you've had some kind of connection to the material in some way. Again, with some subjects more than others, that connection might be forced. But, it can be done. Especially if you're someone who is thinking about how the law plays out in the world for better or worse.

Another sort of tip that I would offer, and this something that is another really important factor in transferring, is that the professors and the relationships that you build with them are extremely important. And if you notice, professors are really going to frame their classes in a way that they want you to repeat back to them on the exam.

Lee Burgess: Right, because their way to interpret the law is the right way.

Mihal Ansik: Exactly. No two contracts classes are the same. And, you'll find that they're like ... They have these themes that they return to and then you're just like, "Oh my god, if I hear the words managerial judging one more time-"

Lee Burgess: Right.

Mihal Ansik: You want to write managerial judging like four times on that final.

Lee Burgess: Or, look at the public policy ramifications of this decision.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. And, that's the thing. That's them serving up an answer to you. That's them dropping hints that they ... Imagine that they love the sound of their own voice, that when they read that in their exam they're just hearing the music of their own voice being repeated back to them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Mihal Ansik: Don't be afraid to plagiarize your professor by using their words in the exam, because for them that really feels like oh, this person has been paying attention, and they're absorbing this in the way that I was hoping to teach them to absorb it. Obviously, that doesn't mean that you should be afraid to challenge your professors or to be critical of what you're learning, and I think that's ... Those are really useful conversations to have, both in class and in office hours.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And again, that adds to the earnest engagement. So, I'm not saying that you need to unquestioningly absorb everything that you learn, or to not be critical of it, or not think wait, doesn't this perpetuate injustice, or I don't like the way that this was taught, or wow I really have a problem with the way this conversation was handled. But those can be opportunities for even deeper engagement in a lot of ways. And yes, of course, on the exam you do want to give your professor what they're looking for. But a deepened understanding, believe it or not, I think is actually ... And it ends up being visible on the exam.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: And I think one thing about what you're saying, which is important for students to note, if you are engaged academically, if you are engaged in class and not messing around on the internet, if you are doing all of your reading, if you're going to office hours and engaging with the material, if you're talking about the material in your study group and you're practicing doing hypotheticals to apply it to fact patterns, all of those activities are likely going to result in pretty good academic performance. Those are the activities that you intend to do. So just by being engaged and laying the foundation for this possibility to transfer, I think

you're really just laying the groundwork for excelling academically. Which is great, there's no downside to that. That is going to open whatever doors it does. And I think the one thing that some law students can think about with their grades for their 1L year if they're considering transferring, maybe to a school that they didn't get into the first time around, is it can be another opportunity to show their excellence in a way that is not a standardized test.

I think ... A whole nother podcast can be on the validity of the LSAT to gauge how well everybody's going to do in law school. We won't dive into that today. But I'll say for me personally, I excel better in a classroom environment than I do on a standardized test. And my grades are going to be a much better representation of my opinion of how I would perform academically in law school than the LSAT would. And I think there are a lot of students who might feel that way. And the idea that you could transfer based on those 1L grades should give you a lot of hope, because it gives you the opportunity to have something else that the schools can evaluate you against, not just the standardized tests with logic games on it.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Yeah. I don't have much to add to that because yeah, I completely agree. I am not a tricky test taker, I was like what does this, the 125th question I'm answering, how can I really be in the moment with this question, as opposed to being like what is just the shortcut that I really should be taking? And I definitely learned to do that eventually for the bar exam, but again that's not how I start out with ... But that did actually end up benefiting me in law school, because I was sort of as I was learning material really asking questions about it, really trying to think about how it applied. I think law school's a great opportunity to figure out how you learn also.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah.

Mihal Ansik: So, I learn best just in a really dispersive way, so luckily, I found two other very sort of chatty, thinky people. And we study together, and a lot of people were like we hate how you study with each other, just show up for a day and then end up leaving. Because there was a lot of me and this guy screaming at each other. But about what something meant, and whether it was stupid.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And eventually when it's stupid, you write about it and you apply it. But it helped us really get deep into what this law looked like, sort of played out through narrative and played out through argument. And that could be intense for a lot of people, and a lot of people are solitary studiers. But I think, being true to that ... And I'm actually ... I think that the people who left were really good at listening to themselves. And even the third person was in our group, me and this guy, we would exchange practice exam answers.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And she hated doing that, so she just opted out. And so, I think listening to yourself and the way you learn, and not falling into the traps of what other people are doing is incredibly important, because it can be ... Everyone's doing ... It's 1L year, so everyone's figuring out for the first time. And I think a lot of people compensate for that by acting like they do have the manual on what your 1L should look. But at the end of the day, everyone is grasping at straws, in the dark, with a blindfold on in a dark windowless basement.

Lee Burgess: It's so true. I think that's really true. And you know, one of the things I love ... Because you're a little closer to your law school experience than I am, and ... Not to age myself. But one of the things that I'm thinking about as we're talking about this ... Not to totally nerd out, but come on we all work together, helping people through law school and the bar exams. So, we're all objectively a little nerdy.

Mihal Ansik: Nerdy, yeah.

Lee Burgess: Super nerdy. But I get kind of nerdy excited when we talk about this stuff, because I remember some of those pivotal moments, those aha moments in law school when you do figure stuff out with your friends, when the law does start to make sense. And I just think it's so important for law students, transferring or not transferring aside, when you're thinking about things academically and you're struggling academically, to be able to get creative and figure out how you can study so you can engage with this material is like where the magic happens. And the happiest lawyers that I know are practicing some sort of law where they get nerdy and engaged with the material. That's what excites them, that's what they wanted to write about in law school, that's what the classes that they took the seminars in were about. So, you want to engage with as much law as you can, because you're going to find ... If you go to law school and you don't know what you want to do, I think you're going to find it by seeing what you find exciting.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, absolutely. And I don't want to make it sound easy, or just walk in and be chill and have fun-

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's a ton of work.

Mihal Ansik: Like, that's so ... Yeah, exactly. That is not most people's experience. And so, I want to demystify that by also saying that we went to our school resources for help. So, we had someone who is in a position at the school, whose job it was to talk through exams, to talk ... She was basically ... Unfortunately, I can't remember-

Lee Burgess: Do they call it academic support?

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, it was something like that. So-

Lee Burgess: It's like academic success or academic support program, or something like that.

Mihal Ansik: Totally. And we went before our first set of exams. And even after we had done well the first semester, we went after our second set of exams because we'd never done this before, and the help is there. So definitely go out and take it, and that is someone who can help you customize your study experience and ... There were so many things where we were like oh wait, we're allowed to have the answer to that? There were so many questions we had where we thought it was supposed to be all mysterious, and she was like well I can't tell you about how this professor generally writes their exams. But instead she was like oh, here's a file of the past 20 exams that this professor has ever offered, and here is a file of the past 28 answers that were ever given for that. And so-

Lee Burgess: You can put it together.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, we were like wait are we cheating?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Mihal Ansik: Don't say anything. Maybe she doesn't know what she's don't right now. But that help is actually out there, that support is out there. And so, this isn't like we walked in and we just knew how to ace law school, and we had information that other people didn't have. We literally knocked on the door that had the academic support plaque on it, and sat down and asked how do we do this? And then she was like here's how to do it. Obviously, there's a limit to what they can tell you, but it was enough information for where we, in a lot of situations, knew what to expect, and in other situations got a sense of how this professor, like what their jam was, and how they like to ... Some professors like the kitchen sink, and others just wanted a paragraph per issue and move on. So, we were able to get that information, as well as just really good study help.

And on top of that, just emotional support. So, someone who was there to tell us it's okay, based on what I'm hearing you've got this, based on what I'm hearing you might want to spend a little more time on this. So, this ... It wasn't necessarily this magical quality that we possessed, we definitely sought the help when we needed it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you got to ask for help and you got to use all the resources available to you, whether they're at your school like academic support, whether they're your TAs for given classes, whether they're using tutors like our team. If you need guidance, you want to learn, there are people who can guide you through this process. And nobody in the end is going to ask you how you excelled academically, maybe unless I invite you on the podcast and then I will talk to you about it. But later in life, nobody's going to be like how did you get an A? They're just going to be like great, she got an A. You're like thanks.

Mihal Ansik: Totally. And there's no shame in it. Like despite what's sort of the culture of law school can be, I think as many opportunities for collaboration as you can create in your first year, the better. Because actually the practice of law is intensely collaborative.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Mihal Ansik: We don't necessarily learn how to do that in our classes. So, whether it's collaborating with your fellow students or with your professors, or with these also ... These support roles that are on campus, I think that's another really helpful exercise, not just for academic success or for transferring, but also just for the practice of law generally.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You know, back when I was a 1L, one of my first disappointing grades was in legal writing, which really hit me hard.

Mihal Ansik: Mine too.

Lee Burgess: And I was really ... It was really devastating to me. And when I started interviewing at big firms, and you'd get in with some hiring partner, typically a litigator, they would love to take your transcript and ask you whatever they thought would make you uncomfortable.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: And so, I almost always would get asked about this, first semester legal writing grade. Always to see if I would crack, it was never to really genuinely ask how I felt about it. But it was funny, because my next semester I high scored the class. And that transition for me was all about the discovery you're talking about, learning what the professor wanted, I was not writing in the way that the professor wanted, I was writing the way I thought was better, which was false when it came to grades. And I had to kind of go through a discovery. And I remember sitting in an interview the first time this happened to me, with this litigation hiring partner. And he was just like well, what happened here? Aren't you embarrassed about this? I was like well I was disappointed, but then I took all these steps and I figured out what was going wrong, and then I high scored the class. And I think if you're hiring somebody to work for you, you would like somebody who can acknowledge when they're not doing their best work and figure out how to do their best work and really excel.

And he just like stared at me. And I was like, so there. Because it's like, those disappointing grades and those learning experiences are all part of this process that makes you a better lawyer. That experience, although it was a bummer on my transcript, made me a better law student because it forced me to really evaluate what had gone wrong and fixed it.

Mihal Ansik: Oh my gosh, I'll never forget the moment during my 1L internship, the summer after my 1L year, where I wrote a memo and was like, "Aw man, IRAC actually is kind of better." I just-

Lee Burgess: No.

Mihal Ansik: I hated to admit it, but I was like this is really working for me. No.

Lee Burgess: I know. It's like you start to see it everywhere, I know.

Mihal Ansik: I think that was like the most selling out I felt I was doing my 1L year. I was like fine, I'll do Iraq, but I won't like it.

Lee Burgess: I'm probably sure if you dissect emails to my parents, or something about coordinating pickup of my kid, it'll be like the issue is what time my son should be picked up at preschool. And this is the time at which he should be picked up at preschool, this is how it works. And he might ask you these questions. Therefore, please allow yourself ample time to park and do all this stuff. I'm sure if you really dug into it, it'd be pretty disturbing.

Mihal Ansik: That's so haunting.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. So, something else I think students forget, whether or not you're planning to transfer. But even if your planning to leave a school, I think you mentioned this earlier, was investing in the school community, joining clubs, going to speeches, engaging with your professors. And still kind of being all in with your experience, even if you think you might exit out, because the next school's going to look favorably on that, they want engaged students. But also, it really allows you again, to immerse yourself in the law school experience.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. I think there are so many reasons to do that. I think one is just so you can enjoy your life a little more.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's true. And eat pizza, they always had pizza.

Mihal Ansik: Sorry?

Lee Burgess: They always had pizza at every event, so there's lots of free food when you get engaged in law school, they will always feed you. That is one thing.

Mihal Ansik: Oh my gosh, totally, I thought I was going to do a major swearing off of pizza after law school. It took like a week, I was back on it.

Lee Burgess: You were back on the pizza train.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you can't beat bread and melted cheese.

Lee Burgess: No, you really can't.

Mihal Ansik: But yeah, I ... So, I think yeah, the first thing is you just want to stay grounded, and you want to stay connected, and ... At least I did. And I think with all the challenges that canonized our 1L year, you want to offset that with whatever it is that brings you fulfillment, whether it's just hanging out, or with people. So, finding ... There are some law schools that have wine clubs.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And so ... Or whether it's doing a pro bono project. So even though a lot of law schools don't let 1Ls do clinics, there are other opportunities to engage with the community and remember that there's a world beyond law school.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Mihal Ansik: And so, I think just the maybe primary purpose of that would be so that you're not living your life in terms of this thing that may or may not happen at the end of the year, and letting the moment slip by. So, I think there's just something existential about immersing yourself. But at the end of the day also, it gives you something to let your transferring school know that you've done. So, I was reviewing someone's transfer essay, and they just spent the whole time really badmouthing their last law school. So, they were like here are the reasons that it's inferior, and these are the things that you have, that this place doesn't have. And I think what you really want to do instead is highlight what it is that you got from that law school that gave you a great foundation to then contribute to the next law school, and the contributions that you made to that law school community, while you were there, and how you might offer the same sort of value added to the next institution.

So, I think that treating your 1L law school ... If you do plan on leaving it as sort of an afterthought, or as this sort of second choice that you want to get out of as quickly as possible, could end up doing you a disservice first of all because it's really hard to be present when you're thinking about that, and when you're not present, it's really hard to ... Again, as we've sort of been speaking about over and over again, engage in a sort of deep and earnest way with what you're learning ... And also, it just will ... It could end up leaving you with less to offer the next school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Mihal Ansik: And so, I think there is a flip side to investing in the community, which is that it can make it a lot harder to leave. I definitely had these feelings around projects I'd started with people, where it did feel like I was abandoning things that I really grew to care about. Obviously, you're going to be leaving friends that, especially if you're going to a school out of state, you're going to be leaving friends that you've been in the trenches together in 1L, and there's really ...

There are few relationships that ended up being more meaningful to me, even though I went into law school being like well it's cool if I don't make friends, it'll be fine. And I'm still really close to the people that I knew my 1L year, and that I grew close with. So luckily, even though I left it actually didn't end up impacting our relationships, and we're still very close.

But I think that that is a consideration, if you're starting let's say a new group on campus, or some sort of project that you do want to see through. It is a consideration about how it will, first of all, impact a project to leave, and also sort of your own feelings around it. So that ... I mean, that does come up. But I think at the end of the day, the investment is worth it, both for your own well-being and also if transferring is a goal of yours, it definitely is helpful to be able to say look at all the great things I did, and look at all the great things I got. And I definitely want to continue this law school experience, and these are the ways in which it can be even further enriched.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: I think that's a helpful approach.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's a really good point. All right, well let's switch over to a little of the nitty gritty about transferring. So, if they've never looked into transferring, typically a transfer application includes a resume, a personal statement, a couple letter of recommendation from current law school professors, your undergraduate transcript, your law school transcript, and your LSAT report. So, I think some students might question when they should start thinking or working on this transfer application, and I think it depends on your situation. If you know that this an ongoing goal, I don't think starting early ... And early is probably after that first semester, is necessarily a bad thing. Especially because your personal statement you want to be very compelling, that maybe it's something you want to draft and let sit for a while, and come back to. Or perhaps you are really interested in one school, and you want to go visit them, or visit that school during the spring and meet with the admissions department of that school a few times. It might be a good idea to just get your act together as much as you can, so you have all of the pieces that you can get, so when it's time to execute the application there's no delay.

Of course, if you're one of those folks who gets this bug to transfer later on because you've done so well academically, and maybe professors or other mentors have nudged you to try it, you may not have started early but that's okay, it seems like most schools have deadlines to accept transfer applications in the summer, June or July, depending on the school. So, you have a little bit of time, most law school semesters end like the first week in May.

Mihal Ansik: Oh yeah, absolutely. And I mean sure, if it makes you feel better to get things started early, and to be ... To have that be a goal, then by all means do it. Again, I would recommend not thinking about it at all once you start studying for your

second semester finals, because it adds such a level of pressure that you don't need. So, I wouldn't make it necessarily the reason for doing everything that you're doing, just because ... Not to be a naysayer and say because you're bound to be disappointed, but only because it could create another layer of anxiety that could just end up getting in your way. So yeah, I got started pretty late in the process. I don't think I started doing applications until after my two L grades came out, it would've been sometime in May.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: I can't remember if there was any deadline earlier than that, but I highly doubt it. What that means is that you may, like me, end up having basically a two-week period before getting an acceptance, and finding an apartment in a different state. So, it was definitely a major hustle at the end of the summer. But by that point, I think I had heard from a few other schools, and was sort of mentally preparing myself. I was also ... I think I had started having conversations with professors. I certainly had actually, because I got a recommendation from one of my two L ... From a second semester professor. So, it was ... There were noncommittal conversations, but as they got to know me through class and again because I was going to office hours, as the time for finals came around I did let a couple of professors know based on our relationships that if things went as well as the second time around, that I would perhaps think about transferring. And so, I was able to weigh those pros and cons with them as well.

Again, professors are a really great resource for thinking through what the rest of your law school experience can look like there and in different schools. And a lot of them had taught at other schools around the country, and so they were able to weigh in on the culture of those other schools. What I might expect if I were to go in as a transfer. And so, I think I was doing ... More than preparing to apply, I think I was mostly doing a lot of information gathering during my second semester, and just trying to incorporate that into my thinking. But I definitely dropped it as soon as second semester finals were coming, because I knew that for me personally ... And again, everyone handles anxiety and goals differently. For some people, they need to have that as a goal. They need to have their vision board up, and have it ... As pictures of all the schools they want to go to, and they're like this is why I'm doing this. And that is ... If that works for you that is fantastic, and definitely do that.

For me, I had to just be in a space of no matter what happens, I'm really proud of myself, I'm proud of what I have accomplished, and I'm going to just sort of make this process as fulfilling and interesting to me as possible. And just do my best, wherever that lands me is terrific.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think that kind of even lends into how many schools you'll apply to and all that stuff. It's a very personal choice based on your own individual circumstances, because if you're able to be happy where you are, then maybe

your pool of schools that you're applying to transfer to are really just the schools that you think you could be even happier, or would give you an opportunity that maybe your current school wouldn't.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, definitely. I did not pick a lot of schools to transfer to. I think I ... I don't ... I applied to fewer than ... I might've only applied to four, to be honest, when I think back on it. And two were on the east coast and two were on the west coast. Because I'm from the west coast but I'd been living on the east coast for over six years. And so yeah, so some of the things that I factored in in terms of thinking about where to apply as a transfer, I mean my entire ... My reason for going to law school and all my work has been social justice focused, so obviously I was concentrating on places that had a lot of clinical opportunities, and yeah, just a lot of opportunities to deepen my practice within social justice and public interest work.

And so that ends up sort of highlighting a few places in particular. I also wanted geographic flexibility, so I was attending a school, 1L, that had and deserved an amazing regional reputation. And the people that come out of there are such brilliant and fantastic lawyers. If I decided that I wanted to stay where I was forever, then that would've been a terrific school to go to for my entire three years. And again, anything is possible, even if you're going to a regional school, of course you can move across the country and something will work out. But I guess, it was a consideration. I think it's disingenuous to have ended up going to HLS and be like yeah, but I didn't really care that it has this reputation-

Lee Burgess: Right, I mean of course. It's one of the reasons why you go there.

Mihal Ansik: Exactly. I mean, I would not blame people for turning off the podcast right now.

Lee Burgess: Well I mean, when you submitted your resume to me, it wasn't like I was like ah, she went to Harvard. Ah, trash can. I mean--

Mihal Ansik: Right, exactly, yeah. Obviously, I had my own calculated decisions that I was making when I decided to go there. And so, one of those was geographic flexibility, because like I said, my family is on the west coast. And so, I knew that I might not want to stay where I was for my entire career, and wanted it to be a little easier to make the transition. So those were a couple of the categories where ... You know, they were deal breakers, they were places that definitely had a lot of public interest opportunities. And even though I think there are a lot of institutions that have more globally a social justice ... There definitely, institutions that have a more social justice oriented mission than Harvard, I wouldn't say it's that kind of place. At the same time, it is so rich in resources, it has a million and one clinics, I could dive in right away into like fourteen different kinds of pro bono projects. So, it's ... And it's a big enough school where it's a really large public interest in social justice community on campus. And so that factored in for me.

And then ... Yeah, and then being able to go somewhere where ... Anywhere that I decided that I wanted to practice, there would be sort of a recognizable institution.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a good point. I think other things folks need to consider, even if you get your transfer acceptances or if you're looking at different schools, you've also got to think about money. Sometimes you might have scholarship opportunities at the school that you're at because you're excelling academically. You might not at new schools, financial aid packages, cost of living at a different metropolitan area, all of those things. They're not the glorious, exciting parts of law school, but they're the grown up, you've got to think about them parts of the law school experience.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, I think that was the biggest debate for me to be honest, because I did have a full scholarship to where I was going. And I think ... I have such a huge privilege having gone to HLS, and having my loans repaid for me. And I think I was really weighing against ... The Scholarship against the loan repayment program. And luckily, I had those options. Obviously if people aren't going into the type of work where they're going to get their loans repaid by the school, then it might be a closer call.

Lee Burgess: It's definitely something you've got to chew on. You've got to really look at ... Play the long game when it comes to money, because life gets complicated and you have to be able to make those decisions.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. And I will say, I got my ... So, Harvard was the last school that I heard from, and I heard from them in August. And even then, I wasn't like okay, I'm definitely transferring. I definitely sat on it for a while, I was pretty unsure and a big part of that was the money. I mean, it is just jaw droppingly expensive, and being able to go to school for almost free is a huge privilege, and really takes off a lot of the angst of going to law school. And so, at the end of the day, I had no ambivalence about ... Or ambiguity about the fact that I would be doing public interest work for my career. And so, I was able to rely on loan repayment as a factor and favor of transferring. But I think it's a harder question when you're not sure that that's going to be available to you.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that's very true. Other things I think ... I think we've talked about it a little bit, I really liked how you talked about you knew that you wanted to do social justice work, and before the end of the podcast we're going to talk about the social justice work that you do because I find it amazingly fascinating and important work that you do. So, we'll give your work a plug too. People are wondering what you do for your other day job. But it's important to think about where you're going to be happy, and where you're going to thrive. I love the comments you made about talking to law professors about how different schools have different cultures, how different schools are set up. Law professors have often been visiting professor's places, they've gone to different schools, they have friends that teach at different schools. And you

need to pick a place where you're going to be happy. I think you perform better if you're happy than when you're depressed.

So, it's a good idea to really ask those questions, and see if you're going to thrive at the place where you're at, but you're worried that the fit is not good at your transfer opportunity, I think that's something that you do really need to sit with. Because happiness is what's happening now, we all have to do hard things for the future, but there's a lot to be said for excelling in the present as well.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah, definitely. And I did go into law school thinking ... And you know, we can only be immune to so much. But I did go in having worked for a while before I ended up going back to law school. I did feel like I had different metrics by which to measure my life, besides how I was doing in law school. And when it got really hard, I did try to hold on to perspective of okay, like this doesn't have to take up this much space in my life, and other things are more important. And obviously, I don't want this to get to a place where it's really dangerous for me to be continuing this experience.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And so, I think both in my 1L school and at HLS, my first order of business was to find my people.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And I think that's really an important anchor throughout law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Mihal Ansik: And I think anywhere you go, that can really be a saving grace. And you can find your people, even if it's two.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Mihal Ansik: That's really all you need. And so that was really the first thing that I focused on, when I transferred. Even more than building relationships with professors, even more than knowing the fastest way to get from my apartment to campus, or where my classrooms were. I kind of went down the roster of groups that I knew that I'd be gravitating towards, or these pro bono opportunities that I was talking about, or just places that I thought that I could find people where we might have common interests or share values. And really the first day that I landed on campus ... And also having people set up introductions. So, the law school network, as many law schools as there are out there, the network can be pretty small. And so, I think ... I met a bunch of people over the summer who were interning with friends of mine from my 1L school. And so, they were really generous about talking to me, and letting me know that I should definitely get in touch once I'm on campus.

And so, a lot of my HLS friends that I made, I'd actually ended up meeting before I even went there. And so, I was able to reach out to them when I got there, and have some sort of social cushion waiting for me once I arrived. And I think that helped a lot, because regardless whether you're transferring or not, having people who can take you out of the law school space and just kind of live your life with you is incredibly important.

Lee Burgess: So true, and I love your comment of community. I was reading a book on health or wellness, since I read books on stuff like that. And more and more, kind of the pillars of health, community is one of them that they talk about, that it's very hard for us to be emotionally and physically healthy if we don't have some people to hold us up. And I think that ... I really liked the fact that you talked about one of the important parts of making that transfer experience work for you was to find that community. You networked and you asked for help, but that that was a priority. And I think that that ... Especially if you are transferring to some place that's very prestigious, and maybe if you're someone who doesn't feel like you're a member of that club yet, or that you don't ... Maybe you didn't go to an Ivy league undergrad or whatever it might be, we would talk about imposter syndrome and how there can be a lot of complicated feelings that go into finding a lot of success.

Yeah, finding the community to hold you in that space, I think is something that should definitely not be overlooked. So, I think that was a really great point.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. And also the transfer community most likely. So, I know at least at Harvard, they did have a special transfer orientation, and tried to set up opportunities for the transfer students to really be treated as a section.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: There's a section that was coming in a year later. I will say because I didn't do the on-campus interviews, they're called VIP at HLS, that was an opportunity where most of the ... I think there were only three of us that didn't do that, and so most of the folds that were transferring in got a chance to connect with each other through that experience. And I did still, throughout the course of my experience, develop really great friendships within the transfer community as well. But I had to do sort of my own rogue friend hunting.

Lee Burgess: I just had this great picture of you, just like prowling around campus.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. Doing some recon.

Lee Burgess: Right. Do you want to be my friend? Do you want to talk? Do you have an interest in social justice?

Mihal Ansik: Can you please fill out this survey?

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly, have a short questionnaire. It's kind of like online dating, but ...

Mihal Ansik: I was open to be friends with anyone at that point, trust me. There was no making the cut to be my friend, I was more like Frankenstein's monster, being like friend and running up to people. But ... So, for those who do want to transfer and also are going to be interviewing with law firms, I think that that is a space where the transfer ... The other transfers really did get a chance to connect and bond, and turn to each other for support. And were also going through this own what I hear is a rigorous experience. So, yet another opportunity to connect.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Well I think that's all really great perspective. We're almost out of time, but I do want to take a few moments to talk about the public interest work that you do, because I think it is very interesting and I think it's a great example of what you can do when you have a passion for something that ... You kept that passion all through law school, and then you are still working in that passion after law school.

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. I mean, I think it's really what got me through law school. I think if I had gone in not knowing what I wanted to do, or if the law somehow felt untethered to what the world looks like, I would have a really hard time first of all grasping the material.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: But also, just staying. I mean, it ... I don't want to be too much of a downer, but the way it's set up, it can end up being a really toxic experience for people. I think a lot of the inequities we see play out in the world, law school tends to be a bit of a microcosm for those.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And so, what really kept me grounded was first of all, doing work in the community, that reminded me of okay I am really privileged. Like, this class is hard! It's not harder than deciding if you're going to buy a bus pass or by dinner for your kids, you know?

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: So that's important perspective to maintain. But yeah, no ... And also, it honestly made me enjoy my law school experience more, because it did feel like I was getting closer to having the access and the impact and usefulness that I wanted to have.

And it was really great training for what I'm doing now, ultimately. So yeah, I ... Luckily, I had the fortunate experience of going in with purpose, and of having work that I loved before that to kind of get me to that place, and then having work that I love waiting for me on the other side. So, I'm a really lucky person, and I think grounding my law school experience in that always helped me return to why I was there at all.

Lee Burgess: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mihal Ansik: And I think it's so important to have some sort of touch stone that reminds you what it's all about for you. It'll obviously look different for everyone, but for me it was so that I could end up where I am now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And do you mind telling people a little bit about where you are now, and what you're doing?

Mihal Ansik: Yeah. So, I work in Los Angeles, I work in an organization called a new way of life re-entry project. And we support people who are coming out of prison, and work to restore the civil rights of people who are facing barriers to employment, to housing, to education, and to about 48,000 other things as a result of their criminal records. And so, we provide a bunch of supportive services for women in particular. And the work that I'm doing focuses on the ways in which incarceration tears families apart, and keeps them separated even after a parent or a loved one has been released. And so, we're looking for ways to close those gaps and make sure that people can sustain their connections with their children from prison, and reunify them with them once they're out. And so, we're doing that through system advocacy, and movement building, and using the law as a tool to support organizing, so I collaborate with organizers.

What I love about my organization in particular is that it's not run by lawyers, it's run by organizers, it's run by people who themselves have been formally incarcerated, and they just tell the lawyers what to do. And so, we're really ... We're deferring to their goals, and building our practice around that. And then the other work that I do is within that project, when we were talking to parents inside about what was a space in which they needed advocacy and felt that it might have made the difference, a lot of them were talking about the experience of knowing that their children ... While they were inside, knowing that their children would be safe with, say, their sister or their mother. And then being told that because oh well your mom has a criminal record, whether it's from five years ago or 20 years ago or 40 years ago, that's going to be a barrier to them keeping your child out of foster care.

And so, their kids would end up in the system and really be lost to them, when there was a perfectly good and safe and loving home waiting for them. And so, what I do is support these relatives, these loved ones who have records that are a barrier to them providing the loving home that these kids need. And so, it's yet another way in which we see that family unity is a collateral consequence of

incarceration, for many years down the line. And so, we're trying to really chip away at that as a barrier.

Lee Burgess: Well I mean, it's an incredibly important work, and life changing work for such an underserved segment of our population. Yeah, and I think we're really lucky that we have folks like you doing that work. But I hope our listeners can also hear the passion that you speak with, about what you do. Because I think that that is ... Whether you're transferring, or you are a 1L or you're thinking about going to law school, to be able to find something that excites you and allows you to feel like you have a purpose and you're getting to make a difference really is what you're doing at school. So, to find that purpose and to be able to find your place where you can do work that's important to you I think is really special.

Mihal Ansik: Thank you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Well with that, we are out of time. But thank you so much for joining us in the podcast, this was really fun. I feel like we could talk about this for a long time, but maybe we'll just have to do it again sometime soon, talk about some other stuff.

Mihal Ansik: Obviously my information is on the website, so if people want to connect with me and have further one on one conversations, if they're thinking about transferring or have more questions about the process, I'm so happy to make myself available. It can definitely ... It can feel ... It can be full of conflict. And so, just hearing people work through that is something I'd be more than happy to do.

Lee Burgess: Awesome. Well thank you for that. If you enjoyed this episode of the law school toolbox podcast, please take a second to [leave a review or rating](#) on iTunes, because we'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, you can reach out to myself or Allison, [Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com), or you can always contact us or our team via our [website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com](#). Thanks for listening, good luck on your transfer decision, and we'll talk soon.

#### Resources:

- [Ahead of the Curve: So You Want to Transfer Law Schools...](#)
- [Transferring Law Schools: How I Jumped Ship \(Part 1\)](#)
- [Transferring Law Schools: How I Jumped Ship \(Part 2\)](#)
- [Applying to Law School: Personal Statement or Essay \(from LSAC\)](#)
- [Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Fire: Transfer Students in Law School](#)