



Episode 128: Regrouping in January

Alison Monahan: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast and to a whole new year. Today, we're talking about taking stock, regrouping, and a few resolutions you might want to consider for the new school year. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career-related website, [CareerDicta](#). I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#).

If you enjoyed the show, please leave a [review](#) on iTunes. 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 would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Lee Burgess: Welcome back. Today, we're talking about taking stock, regrouping, and a few resolutions you might want to consider for this New Year. January can be a rough time in law school. The weather is terrible in lots of places, the holiday break is over, and of course, grades are coming in. Alison, should we start by talking about grades?

Alison Monahan: Oh, grades.

Lee Burgess: I know. Everybody wants to talk about grades.

Alison Monahan: Let's talk about grades. First off, how important are your law school grades, specifically in your first year?

Lee Burgess: I mean, let's be honest. They don't not matter. I mean, they do matter, but they don't tell you everything, because we talk a lot on this podcast, and we talk a lot in our blog about how law school is a learned skill, so oftentimes, your first semester grades are a starting point and you can learn a lot of valuable lessons to jump off from those to do a lot better in your second semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's right. I think it's a balance. If you get consistently poor grades, you probably want to take that seriously, but at the same time, I think a lot of people, probably most people in law school are likely to be seeing grades they've never seen before in their life just because basically you're on a curve now, and most people, unless you were a hard science major, you really haven't had that experience of a lot of smart people all competing for just a few top grades.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's true. You do have to take a breath and realize there are only a handful of A and A minuses and B pluses in your class, and those are pretty hard to get in the law school situation.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, depending on what the curve is at your school, even a grade of a C plus might be above the curve. I mean, that would be a pretty harsh curve, but it's not unheard of.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Then, there are of course schools who do the high-pass and pass or just pass-fail, then we are seeing more and more schools abandoning first year grades too.

Alison Monahan: They aren't really abandoning them. I mean, there's still a hierarchy there. It's just a more compressed hierarchy.

Lee Burgess: It's true.

Alison Monahan: If you get passed, and you're thinking, "Why didn't I get a high pass?", it's really not that different from getting a B plus, and thinking you should have gotten an A.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: You know what I mean. I think most people are going to be evaluated in some way, and that it can often be demoralizing. Like you said, this doesn't tell you everything, and you can obviously still be a very successful attorney if you are disappointed with your first semester grades. They're not telling you which class you enjoyed. They don't tell you what class you learned the most in.

They don't tell you which professor you liked. I mean, they're a little bit random to be honest.

Lee Burgess: It really can be, and if you got a bad grade in a class and you were planning to practice that type of law for a living, so you were going to be a prosecutor, and you bombed your criminal law final, it would not change your professional plans just because you didn't execute your exam in the way that you had hoped. It's a little more complicated than that. There are a lot of reasons why an exam may not go well, and it doesn't mean that you should abandon all of your plans just because you rocked civil procedure, that you now need to go be a civil litigator.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. I mean, a lot can happen, and there's three to four hours in the exam room. Maybe you didn't sleep well. Maybe you weren't feeling well. Maybe for whatever reason, you were just totally on it, and you were going with the flow, and you happened to write exactly what your professor was looking for, but you can't overestimate the importance of these grades. I mean, yes, they're important. They may have some impact on your future hiring or hire

ability, but one grades is not enough to make you completely change your life course. I think that would just be silly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, if you consistently didn't pass any of your classes, that's like a different discussion.

Alison Monahan: That's a different story.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I knew people in law school who were really unsuccessful after that first semester, and they took some time to reevaluate whether law school was a good fit for them, and I think that that can be of valuable discussion to have with yourself or with trusted advisors, because although you can come back from disappointing grades in law school, and I've seen many, many people do that, if you thought you were excelling and you didn't excel at all, you should at least ask yourself that question.

Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, to a certain extent, these grades are giving you valuable information and you should listen to them. I mean, if that information is basically you are not being successful as a law student, that may be painful, but it's also something to think about because you don't want to struggle through the next two and a half years, and then struggle through the bar exam, and then struggle through the profession. If maybe this is just not the greatest fit for your abilities and your interests and your skills, there's nothing wrong with having that conversation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you've got one bad grade, maybe it's a good idea to just keep that in perspective. It could be the one bad grade because that was just a class that you struggled in or that you and the professors' thought processes don't really jive. Sometimes you'll find different professors you just might have a hard time communicating in the way that they want you to communicate. I mean, that totally happens, or you might find professors that you get exactly how they want you to communicate, and then you high scored their classes, so it's-

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly, and you should take more classes with those professors.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Yes. You should, but don't get completely demoralized if there's just one grade. You still have things to learn from that grade, but just realize that maybe that was an outlier. Learn the lessons you can, and then just regroup and re-plan for your next semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Absolutely. I think learn what you can from these grades. Take them seriously, but not too seriously. How about the opposite? How about if somebody did really well? Can they just slack off and assume that they're a law school genius?

Lee Burgess: I think that's a poor idea because oftentimes, some of those people at the top of the class end up not being at the top of the class anymore after that first

semester because they do get a little too comfortable, and when you think about the curve, everyone who is knocking at the door of those high scores but didn't really get them is going to typically talk to their professors, get more feedback, study a little bit harder, study smarter, work with the tutor or whatever they need to do to all of a sudden be much better law students. You also need to continue to be a better law student if you want to stay ahead of that group that's going to be knocking on the door of those B pluses and As.

Alison Monahan: For sure. I think also, there can just be some reversion to the mean. Maybe you actually did just get lucky on tutor grades out of three or something, and you were right at the borderline between a B plus and A minus, and the professor for whatever reason gave you the A minus. That doesn't mean that you were massive points ahead of the person who got the B plus. It just means on that particular day, when the professor is grading that particular set of exams, you were slightly higher, so I think that's worth keeping in mind. I mean, I certainly do a lot better first semester than I did second semester, and I think that happens a lot.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I did too, because I got better at being a law student, so ... I mean, I was a much better law student second semester than I was a ...

Alison Monahan: I'm saying I was the opposite, so I did really well at first semester.

Lee Burgess: You were the opposite. Right.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and then, basically had a breakdown second semester, and like barely even took my exams, and so shockingly enough, didn't do so well. Yeah. Yeah. I think again, you just got to keep all these things in perspective. Just because you did well doesn't mean that you're going to be at the very top of your class when you graduate as a 3L, unless you continue making some effort.

Lee Burgess: If you did do super well though, Alison, don't you think it's okay to start entertaining things like if you want to transfer, if that's something that you're interested in? I mean, these first semester grades can give you an inkling on whether or not that's going to be a possibility.

Alison Monahan: Sure, but I think if that's also a way to create a lot more pressure for yourself, and then that pressure can become overwhelming, I mean, that was basically what happened to me, is I said, "I did so well first semester. I'm required to keep doing well, which means I have to study even more", and rapidly, basically burned out, and was depressed, and it wasn't a good scene, so yeah. I think you could think about those things and you could think, "Okay. This might be realistic for me", but you also have to put that aside a little bit and say, "I did great. That's awesome."

"This might be realistic for me. It's something that I do want to keep in mind." Then, I'm going to put that off to the side and focus on what I'm doing on a daily basis to ensure that in the second semester, doing as well as I did.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's a good point. We do have a really interesting [podcast on transferring](#) that we'll link to in the show notes if that's something you are chewing on as a possibility. I think there's some good information there that you can collect, and then like Alison said, put it to the side so you can still kick ass for the rest of the semester without distracting yourself.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, yeah, you have to keep doing well basically.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: This does feed into one of the things that we would suggest you do in these first weeks in the semester, which is go talk to your professors, whether you did well, whether you did poorly. Just go talk to them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Remember, professors typically like students. That's why they became law professors, so you should go talk to them.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Right, because if you did well, you might end up wanting a recommendation, so you may as well go and check them up when they're still remembering like, "Oh, Lee was that person who got the A on the exam", and Lee shows up, and says, "Hey, I just want to let you know I really enjoyed the class. Possibly thinking about maybe transferring in the future, so just putting that out there. Do you have any advice?", and they'll probably be happy to talk to you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Also, it can be good to meet with those professors because you oftentimes will take some of these 1L professors again on your 2L, and 3L year, especially if it's an area of the law that's of interest to you, and so keeping on their radar can make those seminar or classes or this upper division classes more enjoyable if they already have a favorable opinion if you're going into another semester.

Alison Monahan: Right. Right, but if you weren't pleased with your exams, we especially recommend that you go talk to your professors, because here, you're trying to get advice on how to do better.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Lee, how can people talk to their professors about their exams and make it productive?

Lee Burgess: First thing is you take a deep breath and just do it, because I think that getting people to go to these meetings, which can be very challenging to go to is

something that we're very passionate about, but it does take a lot of, I guess, what, self-motivation to go to these kinds of meetings that can be tough because nobody likes-

Alison Monahan: Emotional maturity.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Emotional maturity, because nobody likes getting negative feedback if that's what's coming at you, even if it's constructive, so you take a deep breath and go ahead and just do this. You're going to be happy you did, and when you get there, you want to think about a few things. You really want to ask for specifics on your exam, so it's possible you've been able to get a copy of your exam from the registrar. It's possible that the professor may have a copy that you can review in those office hours.

Professors have all sorts of different rules about how they release exam answers, but likely, you're going to have some sort of exam answer in your lap while you're talking to the professor, and you want to try and get specifics. If the professor says, "You were being too conclusory so you didn't get enough points", try and get them to point out somewhere on the paper where you were too conclusory and walk you through it. Ask for an example of what you could have done better. Try and get the specifics and maybe even take notes while you're in there because since you might be nervous, I think a lot of people are a little anxious in these meetings. It can be hard to even remember a lot of the things that your professor is saying, so if you have a notepad with you, it might make sense to take some of those notes so you can refresh your recollection outside of the meeting, or if you're going to academic support or your tutor and sharing that feedback, you want to be able to say like, "This is what the professor actually said", and listen to what they tell you.

If you go to four different professors, and every professor tells you that you need to work on structure or analysis, or organization, or time management, that's important information. That across the board feedback is going to really help you focus what are the top things you need to work on this time around on other things that professors can be very helpful with. I know professors who have been able to alert students that they may have a learning disability, and then you may need to go get tested for a learning difference. That can be very powerful information. I think it can be again challenging sometimes to get that feedback, but a lot of times, students are diagnosed with things in law school that they weren't diagnosed with before, because law school is kind of this weird pressure cooker that brings out all of our personality traits to the Nth degree I think, and it really challenges you in a way that a lot of folks haven't necessarily been challenged, but professors can suss this out. They have a lot of experience, and if they're offering you resources from your school, you want to be able to access those resources.

Alison Monahan: That's a great point. I mean, every school should have some sort of office of disability services type of position, and if you are getting feedback from your

professors, like, "Hey, it's really ... I was surprised about your grade. It seemed like you were really engaged in class. Do you think there could be something going on here?"

I think that's worth checking out, because these are people who have seen a lot of things before, and they've seen some of these patterns for students particularly that are surprising in the questions, "What's the cause of that surprise?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: "Do you have some sort of learning disability that needs to be accommodated? Were you just not studying correctly? Did you misunderstand what was going to be on the exam? Did something happen in your personal life?" What we're trying to do at this point is really diagnose the problem whatever the problem is, and so if all of your professors are saying the same thing, I think that's a pretty clear sign that that is a direction that you could go towards diagnosing and fixing whatever that issue is.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think some students might worry that talking to your professor about either learning differences or weaknesses on an exam is going to make you seem less impressive or that is going to do bad things to your professional reputation. Professors respect you coming and trying to be better at this craft, so I wouldn't worry about that type of stuff. I think professors respect someone who says, "I want to be my best self. I want to be the best lawyer I can be. How can you help me get there?"

They're not going to look bad on you. I think that's not going to negatively reflect on you because you're trying to be your best self, your best law student.

Alison Monahan: Right. They're going to see that you have a growth mentality, and I think that's the way to approach these meetings is make clear like, "Look. I'm not asking you for a different grade. I'm not challenging my grade. I just want to understand how I can improve in the future", because the other thing to remember, you're going to see a lot of these first-year classes again when you take the bar exam, so you can't just blow them off and be like, "Oh, God, Civ Pro. I never want to think about that again." Guess what? You're going to have to think about it again.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's so true.

Alison Monahan: Particularly, if you had substantive issues of knowing the law, that's something to really take seriously, because you can't just forget about these things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, or struggle with certain different types of an exam, so for instance, if you found that consistently, you struggled with multiple choice questions if you had multiple classes and multiple-choice questions, that's very important

information to have because half of basically everyone's bar exam is multiple choice questions, so great point.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: That means that maybe you need to study multiple choice questions differently or get more practice, or go to academic support, or you start to see the handwriting on the wall in the future. When I do intake calls with folks who have failed the bar exam, one of my first bundle of questions is, "Did you struggle on exams in the beginning of your law school career?", because it really is an indicator-

Alison Monahan: The answer typically is going to be yes.

Lee Burgess: Is going to be yes. It is. Oftentimes, the answer is "Yes, my grades went up as I took less of those doctrinal classes", and so you can't ignore them.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: It's going to come back and haunt you in the end.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You maybe be able to get your grades up in later years by just taking paper classes, but you do have to wonder if that's really helping you develop the skills that you need to be able to pass the bar exam, which is of course a requirement for becoming an actual lawyer. That's important.

Lee Burgess: Unless you're in Wisconsin, and then if you go to the University of Wisconsin, you can just go into the bar. Little-known fact.

Alison Monahan: Congratulations to those people. Not too many of our listeners are probably in that situation, but we all do envy them.

Lee Burgess: Yes. All right. What if you find out that you really need more help? You're going to leave these meetings, scratching your head, saying, "Now, I have a list of feedback. Now, what do I do with it?"?

Alison Monahan: I think the first thing people can do is really look to the resources that your school is providing, because oftentimes, they're providing a lot of resources and you're already paying for those things, so you may as well look into them and see if you think they could be useful. For example, a number of schools have peer tutors, where 2Ls or 3Ls who did really well in the class can actually help you. That could be useful. Academic support is another great option. They're trained to help you figure out what's going on and help you improve it, I mean, depending on how poorly you did.

You may be required to interact with them, but a lot of schools, it would be optional, but it's definitely worth going to. Then, I think something that's often

overlooked is a lot of campuses have some sort of writing center. Particularly, there's a big undergraduate university attached, and oftentimes, you can go to that writing center and get help on your writing, which is an issue for a lot of law students. If you're consistently not doing particularly well in your essay exams, it's probably not just because you don't understand the law. There's probably something going on with the structure or the way that you're writing, and these people can really help with that, and it's also, it can be outside of the law school a little bit, so I think some of the school feel a little more comfortable getting a critique of something that you've written and maybe you've already turned in, and just seeing what they have to say about how you could be a better writer.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's a really interesting idea if you had like your legal research in writing final from first semester that you weren't happy with. That would be interesting to take it to a writing center and get some feedback on it before you dive into your second semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and obviously, you probably can't get help on things you haven't gotten a grade on, but if it's something that you've already turned in and you've already been evaluated on, they may have some other ideas or just see things that may be, or legal writing instructor doesn't have time to talk about or won't talk to you about or whatever it is, there's really no harm in just getting a second opinion.

Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah. I think that's a really, really good point. Then of course, tutoring with companies or organizations like ours. That can help you customize a plan of attack for you based on what you struggled with and help you in this diagnosis process, and we are also able to suss out from the professor feedback that you're going to collect what we think is going on. Sometimes professors can be a little cryptic, so one of the things we can do is say, "Okay. If you heard this from three professors, this is probably what it means."

Alison Monahan: Right, or like, "Okay. They didn't actually say this, but we're going to tell you what they really were saying here."

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly. Exactly. Then also, we have something-

Alison Monahan: They were being polite.

Lee Burgess: Right. We have something called the 'Reboot course'. You want to talk a little bit about that?

Alison Monahan: Sure. The reboot course is basically designed to help you figure out what happened in first semester, and then give you the skills or help you develop the skills that you need to turn it around, so you'll work with one of our tutors to really go through this process, which can be a little intimidating I think to do on your own. It can be a little bit emotionally draining. Maybe you have a little fear around some of the stuff, so it's always like having a coach really who can help

you figure out how to approach your professor, what they're telling you, and then you can develop some skills, do some exercises, and hopefully have a more productive and successful second semester.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think another thing students need to do is evaluate the activities they did that they considered studying and make sure that they actually helped. One of these you need to always to start with is your study group, and did it-

Alison Monahan: Right. Your study group.

Lee Burgess: The study group. Did it actually help, or would you rather work with different people? Would you rather work alone? Would you rather change the structure? I think it's just good to really think through about whether or not that was the best use of your time, and if you didn't study with a study group or partner, you might consider wanting to do that or wanting to do that later in the semester to help facilitate, practice exams or things like that, so it's good to just spend some time making pros and cons list, or just thinking through how you studied and what added value and what didn't, because I think one of the things that can be so hard in your early part of your legal education is to really decide what activities added value, because there's tons of work to be done and there's never any shortage of work, but what if that work actually added value? Did reading supplements add value?

Did spending time with your study group add value? Did making flash cards add value? Did recopying someone else's outline add value? That's really what you want to start thinking about because the task that didn't actually get you towards your goal should be cut or altered, and it's going to free up more time for you to do the task that actually got you where you needed to be.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Absolutely. One thing that could be interesting if you were in a study group is, "How did you do in comparison to the other members of the group?", and that might be demoralizing because sometimes you found out that, "Actually, I did the worst by far", but I think you have to look at why that is, particularly if you felt like you were doing okay. Maybe it was the case that you're really relying on your group knowledge rather than your individual knowledge, need you to spend a little bit more time by yourself making sure you understand these things, or maybe there's something about the way that you're writing. You've got to figure out like, "Okay. What is it? If we all studied together, and then I got much poorer grades, why did that happen?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, I'll be honest. I had a study group for my property class my second semester, and there was one guy who pretty much taught me all of like future interests and things like that because he just understood it a lot better than I did, but I got an A in the class, and he did not. What was interesting, because we sat down and talked about it because we were good friends, and it was basically because after we all got this global understanding, I went and memorized stuff. I memorized all those formulas, I did all the practice tests, I worked on speed and

precision and things like that, and that wasn't really what he focused on, and so it was a really great example of the study group and the learning and the conceptual understanding of some of these classes is not the same as the execution of the exam.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think that's probably why you did pretty well in law school, is you focused on the exam, and other people may be focused more on having a broader understanding of the law, which frankly might serve them well in practice, but maybe not so well on the actual exam if it's a closed book exam.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right. What about other ways people are struggling, because as you mentioned, you found there were all sorts of new personal struggles in the second semester, so if people just find that they're overwhelmed and they're not doing well, what should they do?

Alison Monahan: I think again, you've got to evaluate what the situation is, and then ask for help. I mean, for me, it became apparent a few months or a few weeks into the semester, like I was basically not really getting out of bed, I wasn't really going to class, I wasn't really eating. At some point, you kind of think, "Maybe this is not something that is really great and not something that I need to struggle through on my own", and that's why I went to the student health services, and basically started therapy, and it was fantastic, and it really did help. I mean, by the end of the semester, basically, my therapist has pulled me together and I have to at least go take my exams even if I didn't ace them, but I think there's no shame and there's no harm in thinking about whether that would be productive for you and your school probably provides a lot of these resources for free or meaning, you're already paying for them, so you might as well at least consider, "Would it be helpful for you to have someone to talk to?" You don't have to be clinically depressed to go to a therapist.

You just might want someone to talk to confidentially about your day-to-day struggles in law school or it's not like what you thought it was going to be and you're not sure what to do with your career path. These are all very valid things you go talk to someone about who's trained to help you.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. I think another thing to consider is if you're struggling with life realities outside of law school, maybe you're in a tumultuous, romantic relationship or-

Alison Monahan: Say I broke up with my boyfriend. Something like that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That can really be something that you need help working through or you've had a family situation or there's an illness in your family that's creating a lot of stress, or you had a loss of a pet or whatever it might be that is weighing on you that will show up in law school, some of these school resources can also be used to help you walk through that because life is hard. I was actually just at brunch yesterday with a friend, and we were talking about how as we get older,

we continue to appreciate that life is just such a mixed bag, like things are never all good or all bad it seems. It's like good and bad things are always constantly happening together, and so you're celebrating one person's success while you're mourning something else really challenging or somebody is suffering while somebody else is celebrating.

Alison Monahan: Right. Yeah.

Lee Burgess: It can be complicated to work through a lot of that stuff, so if you have hard stuff going on in your life, you should go ask for help because it's not going to get easier when crunch time comes and your anxiety gets raised, and maybe you're not sleeping as much for you to be able to process all that stuff.

Alison Monahan: For sure, and I think a lot of the stuff you're going to learn if you reach out to someone like this who is trained to help you with these sort of situations is really coping skills that you can use for the rest of your career, and lawyers in general don't have great coping skills. It tends to be alcohol and drugs, which is why because of just substance abuse problem in the profession, but law school is a great time to start working on these things and developing these healthier ways to deal with the inevitable stresses that come with life, and certainly, that come with life as if you're going to be an attorney, it's a very stressful profession.

Lee Burgess: Right. The other thing you can consider is trying to do some stuff outside of law school, which will help your mental health, so exercise is always a big one, but this doesn't mean seven days of monotony at the gym.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: It could be something fun, so sometimes, your school or university might even have classes. Some people could take belly dancing, or boxing, or yoga, or hip-hop dance. I mean, you name it. A lot of school health centers have a lot of different options for stuff like that, and it could be a really nice break. Sometimes, being in a room full of people who aren't in law school like listening to a lot of music and bouncing around can be very therapeutic.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I took lots of great gym classes too. I actually did take belly dancing. It was amazing. I had the greatest abs I've ever had in my life. I also took squash, which unfortunately a lot of people signed up for who were law students, but it's a good New York winter sport, but yeah. I think thinking about ways to make getting exercise and being healthy, particularly during the winter, entertaining and fun, whether it's social, "Do you want to train for something?", maybe you want to do something like team and training where you have a group of people that you go suffer through your runs with, they become your friends.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: It's a social outlet.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: If you don't want to do any of that, even just scheduling exercise can help, because then at least, you've committed to it. You're going to do it, but I think if you can find something you truly enjoy, it can be a great way to relieve stress and just get out of the head space of a pressure-filled cauldron that law school is.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true, and a lot of times, students feel like they can't take advantage of this stuff because of the cost, but if it's something you're really passionate about, it's worth just calling around and asking, because oftentimes, places have student discounts.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: I know we have some friends that who's actually a lawyer who she now has been on a CrossFit gym in Francisco, and they always have student rates because they appreciate how important it is for students to be able to have their physical outlets, and so I think a lot of people wouldn't know that. They would just assume that it's cost prohibitive, but you should just ask questions because a lot of times, people want to help students because we were all students once, and they know how important it's going to be.

Alison Monahan: Right, but even if you're a lawyer, I mean, at some point, you're probably going to have money, so you don't mind giving your break.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. We even did a blog where she went around at all the gyms in New York City and got the two-week free trial and just did that and blogged about it for a year or something. I mean, that costs nothing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's a good point. A lot of yoga studios will do introductory packages. One thing that I know is popular in San Francisco is a lot of like yoga studios or different bar workout places, it seems like there are studios for everything these days, but will do cleaning exchanges, so if you do an hour of work around the gym a week, you can basically get almost like very, very low cost or almost free exercise services, so for one hour a week, it can be worth it if that's something you're passionate about, but you've got to ask if these things exist, so you just have to be willing to go ask these questions because I didn't even know that folks were able to do that and a lot of people I know do that at yoga studios, and then they're able to get yoga for the month for \$30 or something like that because they are able to do self-exchange.

Alison Monahan: Right. Awesome.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I know. That sounds great. I think another thing people are probably going to be thinking about is, "What about your social life?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: "Is it just totally dead?" If so, social isolation is not a great place to be, so it's really important even if it seems hard to make time for friends, whether those are old friends or new friends, your loved ones. You've got to think, "What do you enjoy doing? Who do you enjoy hang out with, and how can you make that happen in a way that doesn't just fall by the wayside as soon as you start going to the library?"

Lee Burgess: It's true, and sometimes, this takes scheduling. I mean, I know we feel like we're just telling everybody to schedule, schedule, schedule, but as we get busier, I mean, I have to schedule. I have these girlfriends, and we do these dinners out as a group a few times a year. We have to schedule them like six weeks ahead of time sometimes to make sure we all get on our calendars because people get really busy and everybody has different jobs and travels for work, and stuff like that, so sometimes, you have to be thinking ahead, but if that's something you really enjoy and you get something out of seeing some of those friends, then it's worth it to just do a little bit of planning and stick it on your calendar, and then build your study schedule around.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: Find activities like that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. For sure, and even people who are introverts who think of themselves as introverts. There are actually a lot of data showing that they're happier when they spend time with other people too, so even if you think, "No. I don't need anyone. I'll just spend all my life in a library", you're probably going to be happier if you go out once a week with your friends and catch up.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: That being said, I think one of the big catch ups in a law school is something like bar review, and you do have to be careful about your drinking.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: As you mentioned earlier, substance abuse. Big issue in the legal profession. I'm not saying you have to stop drinking, although a lot of people take the beginning of the year as maybe a time to try a dry month, just see how that goes, reset. I have a lot of friends who do that, and they find it helpful just to see like, "Okay. How hard is this for me? If it's really hard, maybe this is something I need to

really pay close attention to", but I think it can be tempting to just fall into your whole social outlet being, Thursday night bar review, and you go out, and you get completely hammered, then that gives you the excuse, the hungover all-day Friday, and that's just on a pattern that you necessarily want to be repeating for every week of the next semester.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a good idea. I have another friend who does weekly movie nights with a group of friends, and sometimes, they go out to a movie, sometimes they go to somebody's house and watch a movie, but it's just kind of a standing date, and of course if something comes up, one person might not be there, but I thought that was kind of a fun idea that would work really well in the school context if you just have the standing, like this group of friends will watch a Netflix movie every Tuesday night or whatever night you pick it is, and then you can go or not go.

Alison Monahan: Sure.

Lee Burgess: That's just an easy way to create new habits to be more social.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think something like that that you know you're going to do again, like you can plan or be like, "Oh, every Tuesday night is my movie night, so I'm not going to plan to study late that night", and that's a great opportunity to take a break.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. What about spring break? I know that means a lot more to people who went to school in cold places, so ...

Alison Monahan: Spring break. Oh my gosh. Yeah. My first, my spring break in law school in my first year, we went to Florida because after like the worst winter ever in New York City, we were just dying. I mean, you just had to go.

Even if exams were coming up and whatever, you just had to go to the sun for a few days, and I think that's completely legitimate and totally worth thinking about because by the time March gets there, if you're in a cold, snowy environment, you're probably going to be going crazy.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a really good idea, so think ahead, start saving money now just to try and make something happen.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Yeah. Luckily, it's not quite as bad as Thanksgiving in terms of timing usually, so it's a little bit earlier, but I think thinking about, "Can you give yourself a break?", is going to be helpful.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I mean, basically, these first weeks are really time for you to evaluate what worked and what didn't work, and then predict what's not going to be working a few months, and then figure out a new approach necessary.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. Since it's New Year's resolution time, even though they oftentimes fail, but that's a whole different conversation, there are a few New Year's resolutions that you might consider that I think are reasonable to incorporate into your life. The first one is [go to each professors' office hours](#) twice a month at least, and bring questions, bring hypos, engage with your professors, and then schedule and honor a day off each week so you can do something that doesn't include sitting in the library and looking at your computer. If you are not in a freezing cold place, I think hiking and doing stuff like that is a great thing to do on those days off, but whatever you do, don't do it on the computer.

Alison Monahan: No. If you are in a cold place like New York for example, go to a museum.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: It's like indoor hiking because there's something cool to look at.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: In fact, you often get it free with your student ID, so there's no excuse. I mean, you have amazing cultural resources. Just go and wander through them for a few hours. It can be really fantastic.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's a really good idea. You should try and exercise. I mean, let's take reasonable goals. 45 minutes, three times a week is a great study break.

Alison Monahan: I think that's good. I mean, an hour seems like a lot.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: 45 minutes, that's nothing. You can do 45 minutes.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you do 45 minutes, it's only like an hour and 15 if you consider like getting to the gym, doing 45 minutes, getting cleaned up and leaving. You can find that. That's a long lunch break.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. I've been doing this like 40-minute HIIT workout where it's like intense training for 40 minutes, and it's awesome because I go, and 40 minutes later, I'm like, "Wow. That was a lot of exercise. I am done."

Lee Burgess: Setting up friend dates every week to relax, so our movie night idea is one of them, but just whether it's law school friends or non-law school friends, putting something on your calendar so you can do something fun and connect with people is very important. Then, something we've also talked about a lot on the

podcast is the idea of deep work, so try and schedule and put on your study calendar at least three hours of deep work each week. If we're putting the materials together, practicing, starting to outline and things like that, you got to stick that on your study schedule.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Absolutely. If that's not on your schedule, it's not going to happen, so just go ahead and block out three or four hours on a Saturday, on a Sunday, maybe on a Friday if you don't have class and just put it on there. You're much more likely to do it, and that's really going to help you get ahead this semester and correct these things that may have caused problems for you in the first semester.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Other things I would suggest, I think making a plan for when you're going to go to sleep and actually sticking to it to the extent you can, whether it's 10:00 PM, 11:00 PM, and 12:00 PM, 1:00, it doesn't really matter. If you're thinking about, "When am I going to sleep? How much am I going to sleep? Okay. What do I need to do to make that happen?", absolutely critical.

Sleep is absolutely critical for memory. It's critical for learning. If you're not sleeping, you're probably not going to be doing that well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's a really good point. Food is something you probably want to think about too. Maybe making a weekly meal plan and eating home-cooked food, maybe even on your days off trying to do some cooking ahead, which a lot of meal planners recommend, doing some big cooking on the weekends to get you food for the week.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I'm a huge fan now of the Instant Pot. It might be a great thing to ask for if you have a holiday coming up or a birthday mostly because you can just put stuff in it, push a button, and you walk away, and then you come back, and your food is ready, and you can receive it, and it's amazing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. The Instant Pot, a slow cooker. I'm into like large pots of mashed sweet potatoes. I make mashed cauliflower, things that you can make that really aren't any more work to make a large volume of that you can eat the entire week is pretty great.

Alison Monahan: Right. You can pressure steam, all those in the Instagram, and the Instant Pot.

Lee Burgess: Okay.

Alison Monahan: Apparently, I haven't tried it yet - I have one I'm getting ready to try - but I have a sweet potato, and apparently, you can steam it under pressure for two minutes, and it cooks through, which I don't believe, but this is where-

Lee Burgess: Like a whole sweet potato?

Alison Monahan: Yes. A whole sweet potato.

Lee Burgess: That's really crazy because...

Alison Monahan: I'll let you know how it goes.

Lee Burgess: When I do the mashed sweet potatoes, I cut them up into cubes, and you have to boil them for 30 minutes to get them soft enough.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I'm telling you, the Instant Pot is life-changing.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh. Now you're going to get me on the Instant Pot bandwagon because, and all my mom groups online. Everybody raves about it, that I have so far just been like--

Alison Monahan: It's so fast.

Lee Burgess: Okay. All right.

Alison Monahan: No. It's so fast. It's really ... I mean, I think for law student life, it's actually it's really amazing. I mean, making stuff like grains and things like that, it's just, it makes it so incredibly easy that you have basically no excuse not to do it.

Lee Burgess: You can do rice and all of that stuff in there? I feel like we should get like a kickback from Instant Pot right now.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. We should. You like brown rice. Brown rice, you just push a button, and you come back and it's not even that ... I mean, it's quick, so in 30 minutes or whatever it is, it's finished and it's perfect.

Lee Burgess: Wow. Okay. That's pretty cool. Maybe I need to update my holiday list.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I highly recommend it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: All right. The other thing I think you should do is probably spend a couple of hours a week actually [applying for summer jobs](#) if you don't have a summer job yet.

Lee Burgess: Yes. That is a good point, but controlling that so it doesn't take over your life and keep you from studying for your classes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think exactly like set up a sort of like your deep work. Put two hours a week that you're going to actually apply for jobs on your calendar, and then do it.

Lee Burgess: Perfect. All right. That's a long list of things to do, but we think you can do it. That's good. Just having do goal setting in the New Year is a great time to set these intentions, and just remember that all of this stuff is just going to help you be the best law student you can be, which leads all sorts of good stuff.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, the reality is you control your time, you control where you focus your energy. Even if it seems like school is making you do things, you really have control over your own time, and you want to use that time well so that you set yourself up for a productive, and even that we say enjoyable spring semester.

Lee Burgess: With that, we're out of time, but before you finish up, we wanted to take a second to let you know about our wild Reboot course at our website, LawSchoolToolbox.com. You just [click on the course's link](#). This on-demand course, which includes feedback from one of our awesome Law School Toolbox tutors will help you get productive feedback from your professors and figure out why your grades aren't what you hoped for, and help you position yourself for success in the future, so check it out and feel free to contact us if you have any questions. If you enjoyed this episode-

Alison Monahan: Totally true.

Lee Burgess: Yes. If you enjoyed this episode in the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to [leave a review and 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 Lee 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:

- [Second Semester ReBoot Course](#)
- [Podcast Episode 122: How to Transfer Law Schools \(with Mihal Ansik\)](#)
- [Podcast Episode 120: Preparing for the 1L Job Hunt \(with Ex-BigLaw Recruiter Sadie Jones\)](#)
- [Podcast Episode 106: How to Go to Office Hours and Make It Worth Your Time](#)