



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking about what to wear and possibly what not to wear in law school and at law school related events. 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 that you 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 or rating on your favorite listening app. 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. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we're talking about fashion. What to wear and maybe what not to wear to law school and other law school events. First off, I mean, [does it even matter what we wear?](#)

Lee Burgess: Well, if I had to say it from a feminist perspective, like a very open minded perspective, that it doesn't matter. But I think that in a professional environment in law school, in a way, it's a vocational school, it's a professional school that it can matter how you present yourself and your dress is part of that. I don't think you need to be obsessed with it but I think it's something that you should be a little thoughtful about.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. I mean, I feel like being a lawyer in some sense is playing a role. So like it or not, you sort of have to conform to the constraints of that role. I mean, that's not to say that if you're very uncomfortable in a certain style or dress that you have to wear that. We're not in England, we don't have to wear robes and wigs. But in some way though, I guess that makes it easier. You just put that on and you're ready to go.

Lee Burgess: That's true.

Alison Monahan: But yeah, I mean, I think, and we'll talk about this later, having almost a uniform or something that you feel comfortable in but that also reflects the professional that you're becoming, I think makes sense. I mean, it's funny 'cause my downstairs neighbor at one point when I was actually a lawyer, if she saw me leave the house in a certain pair of shoes, she'd be like, "You're going to a lawyer event, aren't you? Those are your lawyer shoes."

And they really were. I mean, it's not something that I pretty typically would have worn down to the café but basically I was like, "Oh, I need to go dress like a lawyer. Okay, I'm going to put on these patterned leather loafers." So I think it's a question of finding that balance of looking sort of the way that you're



supposed to look on some level. Whether it's as a law student or in a more formal setting, then also finding something that you personally feel comfortable with that doesn't make you feel too much like you're an imposter here.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's a delicate balance. And I think a lot of people think that their wardrobe, especially on the professional side, has to be very complicated or super expensive and really refined. And I don't think that's the case. You actually just want people, maybe not to exactly remember how you were dressed, and you just want to present yourself in a professional way that looks maybe put together. Your outfit is not ... The fashion statement is not really what's important, it's just that you seem appropriately attired for wherever you're going.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think ... I mean, airing on the side of boring is probably usually the safest bet here, I mean, I remember once I was going to court with a partner, actually several partners, it was a pretty big case and we were having a hearing. The female partner, who's a total bad ass, basically wore these really loud very expensive shoes. I think they were the red sole or maybe leopard print or something.

Lee Burgess: Louboutin's. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And the local counsel brought it up later with me and this male partner and they were like, "Look, I think this judge is not really that into what she's wearing and I think this could be a problem." And there's this awkward situation of like "Well, who's going to go and discuss this?" And of course the male partner was like, "I'm going to talk to her." I'm like, "I don't think this is a good idea. I think this is a really terrible idea. Let me talk to her, much better coming from another woman." Of course he wouldn't listen and it was a total disaster.

Point being, these questions don't dissolve when you get out of law school. You're always going to have to be calibrating your personal style against the expectations of what may be a very conservative judge in a conservative area of the country who just really wants to see something pretty boring.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's true. And even juries, I know jury consultants often talk about how lawyers present themselves. And even extreme situations ... I think I was watching the O.J. Simpson, the mini series, last year, when it came out when they were talking about ... Why am I blanking on the woman who was the DA in that? Marcia.

Alison Monahan: I know who you're talking about. Yes.

Lee Burgess: That they had like an image consultant come in and tell her that she needs to straighten her hair, she needed to do all these things and ... Again, it's like you



guys are trying to ... I can't believe somebody came in and told a woman that she needs to straighten her hair for court or dress in a certain way. But on the other hand, I think we do live in a society where judgments can be made based on what you're wearing, and you don't want that to be a function of your practice or have a negative outcome for your client. So it can be challenging I think, to balance your personal feelings about fashion or how you should present yourself and what's required by the profession.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and in this particular case, it was doubly ridiculous because the instructions had gone out to everyone basically like nothing flashy, just keep it conservative, whatever. So the male partner, who was the one who was like, "Oh, I'm going to go talk to her." He was wearing this enormous expensive Rolodex and super flashy cufflinks and like seven other things that were also really flashy, and no one said anything. That was like a really, double standard much.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, like the Louboutin's are really going to ... It's going to be of a distracting part of this?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was like, "Okay, there's probably been a little over the top but look in the mirror. Come on." So it's not fair, let's just put that out there. It is what it is.

Lee Burgess: It is what it is. So let's talk through some kind of different law school situations and then were going to get into different suggestions about how to think about fashion in your wardrobe. Let's try the class. Like Alison, do you think it really matters what you wear to class?

Alison Monahan: Well, I don't think most people, particularly care unless what you're wearing is in some way distracting. I went to school at Columbia and in the law school people do dress like normal people. But the undergrads tended to roll out of bed and basically go to class in their pajamas. And this is in the middle of new York City and you've got people walking around several blocks to their dorm in literally their pajamas. Like obviously their pajamas.

And that was one of things where you're like, "Okay, I think you probably could have thrown on like a coat at least or something. This is not a great look for anything and so I don't think it's really safe to be walking down the street in your pajamas. It's winter and it's cold." I mean, I think here you just want to sort of avoid distractions. I don't think anyone really cares that much. I mean, certainly you don't have to dress up for class if that's something you're concerned about. You don't need a fancy wardrobe, you don't really have to put on make-up.

Some of this is also regional. I mean, I think if you're in the South, people have different expectations. I grew up in the South, I went to college in North



Carolina with people who a lot of them would not think of leaving their dorm or their sorority house without full make-up. Was that necessary? No. But a lot of people did it. So I think you can wear whatever you want as long as whatever you're wearing is not hugely distracting.

Lee Burgess: I think that that's just the rule of thumb. I think most people in my law school ... I mean, I went to law school in San Francisco so it's cold most of the time so there are a huge number of our students just like jeans and a zip-up fleece. Like jeans because that's what everyone wears in San Francisco.

Alison Monahan: Or like where's your hoodie?

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. I mean, that's what everybody wears. But I do remember there would be times when it was hot where people would come into class and there could be a woman wearing something that was almost see through or something where you're like, "Okay." I remember that. Like I have a memory of that.

Alison Monahan: I honestly can't say. I'm trying to think. I don't think I remember any single outfit that anyone ever wore to class in law school, ever. I mean, New York is only really hot in the summer. New York dressing professionally in the summer is an absolute nightmare, particularly if you're commuting.

I was commuting downtown to my office and that, figuring out how to manage an incredibly crowded, incredibly hot subway and then look presentable when you get to the office and then it's probably freezing. That's a whole other podcast right there. But for class, I don't remember a single thing anyone ever wore.

Lee Burgess: No, I mean, it's really just one of those things where you just want to be comfortable and appropriate for whatever's going on that day. I think it's not something to worry about. I think if you're meeting ... And the other things to think about is if you are meeting with professors or administrators or even career services, you might want to consider the nature of a meeting. And if it is a meeting where might be, let's say, discussing whether or not to be a TA with a professor or you're meeting with career services to talk about career prospects, or you were going to meet with the deans because you've got a concern about school, it may not hurt to be a little more on the business casual side of things, especially if they are more senior folks.

Often time if they're a little more old school, they might have some old school philosophies on how students should dress, and that might make it easier for them to take you seriously. Again, it's not like that it's the right response but it's a realistic response by a lot of people.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think it's valuable just to have certain outfits that you can wear or certain pieces that you can wear. I mean, it's easier if you're a guy, just throw on a jacket and you probably look okay. A woman, they can do like a sweater-set or something that makes it look like you gave a little bit of effort. I'm remembering now when the senator brought her baby to the floor of the Senate where there's a requirement that women wear jackets and she brought her several week old baby to the senate floor in a cute little sweater-set. I don't know, it's ridiculous really, how worked up people get about these things.

Lee Burgess: Like some people notice and that little bit of extra effort, I think can often times just makes you look more professional. I think the more professional the conversation is that you're going to have with somebody, the more dressed up you want to be. 'Cause it again goes to this idea of you're playing a role. And that if you look like you're ready to play the role, it's easier for folks to accept you as a member of that role.

Alison Monahan: One. I think two it can give you a different level of confidence knowing like, "Okay, I look the part." It just makes you be like, "Okay, I belong here. I look the part. You're going to have to take me seriously. Done."

Lee Burgess: Done. Yeah. I think at networking events, you probably need to ask around about the formality because different metropolitan areas, different areas of the law, whether the networking event is it a law firm, whether is it a government office, all these different work spaces or even areas of the country, have different standards for what their norms are. If you're back East in New York, things are typically going to be a bit more formal than if you're in San Francisco or Silicon Valley. That's just the reality.

I remember when I was a summer associate, we would do these video conferences with other summer associates around the country and you could almost see the frustration and anger with the East Coast, like New England offices, would have and they would show the San Francisco office. Men were in polo shirts or just button up dress shirts and the women we were in maybe blouses, nobody had a jacket on, nobody had a tie on. And you could tell they were just like, "Aargh." Because that was the norm in California offices.

Alison Monahan: The firm that my law school roommate worked in after our first year was suits every day, full suit every day in New York.

Lee Burgess: That's just a lot.

Alison Monahan: I mean, that's a little extreme but that was just what they had to do in the middle of the summer, I mean, God, can you imagine? What a nightmare. Full suit, New York City, like 100 degrees and then humid.



Lee Burgess: Sounds awful. I worked in Sacramento before law school and one of my jobs is I did lobbying, political PR lobbying,. And I had a lot of friends who worked at the capital and at the capital you had to dress up. Basically, it's suits if you worked at the capital, every day. I worked across the street from the capital at a PR office so I did not have to wear suits every day. And we would have lunch and they were like, "We were on the same conference call meeting." I was like, "Yeah, but I don't work at the capital so ..." I was in like a sundress and a jean jacket because that was totally appropriate.

I did all of my work over the phone. But I do think it's even interesting when you can even be physically next to each other but even doing similar work but the norms of the individual offices can be so different.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think that's the key. Is you want to try to understand before you put yourself in a scenario. What are the expectations here? And sometimes people would just say ... I mean, I was actually going to a networking party recently and I had my whole outfit literally planned and on and I was walking out the door and then I look at the invite and then I saw the dress code was way more formal than I was dressed for. And I was like, "Oh, good thing I noticed that before leaving the house."

I mean, you want to hit the right points. I mean, for example, when we used to go and pitch business in Silicon Valley, it was explicit. No one was to wear a suit because that's not the culture. Like you don't want to be the one with the suits if you're going to a Silicon Valley tech company. But other places you do obviously. If you're going to court or something, you're going to need to wear a suit.

I think the networking, you just want to try to figure out in advance, and some of those can be like, where is it taking place? If it's taking place at a very posh whatever, I don't know, club or something in New York City like the Yale Club or the Harvard club. That's probably a signal that, okay, this is probably going to be a pretty stuff event.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and some places like the Yale Club or the Harvard Club, have dress codes published on their website. You're not supposed to ... I was at an event at the Harvard Club a few months ago and men have to wear ties. They have very strict dress codes even if you're not in the main dining room, just even like enter the building. I don't think they'll kick you out necessarily.

Alison Monahan: I think they have them. They'll make you put one on.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but-



- Alison Monahan: They'll basically store jackets and ties and if you're not appropriately attired ... I mean, I've actually gone to one of these clubs for a summer lunch or something, and one guy didn't follow directions and didn't have a tie and they made him put a bow tie on.
- Lee Burgess: No, you don't want to be that guy.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, you don't want to be the clip-on bow tie guy.
- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Everyone knows that that's a clip-on bow tie.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, they do it on purpose, I think.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think if it's a school sponsored networking event, if you're really lost and you can't figure out what the dress code is, I think asking career services makes a lot of sense. They should be able to guide you with what is appropriate based on where the event is or things like that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I mean, that's information ideally they would just be providing as a matter of course so that you're not wondering. And it's something you could bring up maybe as a group of people like, "Hey, when you send out these invitations, it would be really great to know what the dress code is so we can plan for it."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's really true. Well, let's move on to interviews and OCI. I'm of the camp...
- Alison Monahan: Well, this one's easy.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. You wear a suit, always. Always wear a suit even if you are-
- Alison Monahan: Even if ...
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, even if you're interviewing ... For example, the firm that I worked at in California was very informal, like aggressively informal. And if you wore anything other than jeans to work, people were probably going to think you're looking for another job. But even then, I think was appropriate to interview in a suit.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. But I think if you are interviewing somewhere where ... Let's say you're doing the on-site interview and you know that it's a more casual environment, you can always show up in a suit but make sure you wear something, like if you're a woman, like an appropriate blouse underneath or a man, an appropriate dress shirt. And you know that you can lose the jacket if it feels



appropriate. But very seldom will people look down on you because you have overdressed for an interview, I think.

Alison Monahan: No, no one's going to.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: I mean, I don't care what they tell you, I would almost always air on the side of wearing a suit.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I don't necessarily think it always has to be like a black suit or a navy suit. I think I can be gray, it could be pinstripe. Again, nothing super wild but you do want it to be clean and professional and remember the role that you're interviewing for and they want to see you in that role. I mean, you're kind of dressing up in costume, show them what you would look like if you were going to a client meeting, what you would look like if they were sending you to court.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. I think this one's easy. Just wear a suit. Frankly, I don't really care if it's a skirt suit or a pant suit. I mean, there are other people that maybe have opinions about that. I feel like when you start going down that path, it's just like, you know what, if somebody insists that you wear a skirt suit, some old partner, and you really don't want to do it and they don't give you an offer because you didn't do it, I would just be like, "Whatever. Like this is not the right fit for me."

Lee Burgess: Right. So I think-

Alison Monahan: You can have your own spin on this. But basically if you put on a dark colored blouse or some other type of shirt ... I know Lee you didn't really like wearing like buttoned-up shirts.

Lee Burgess: I didn't.

Alison Monahan: But you're going to be fine. Conservative shoes, conservative bag, no flashy jewelry. This is actually like probably the easier part.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's true. And I think for women, I don't think you have to wear a buttoned-up blouse especially if your body type doesn't lend that to being comfortable or looking very tailored. But you should explore some different options to make sure that whatever you do end up putting together, looks really good with your suit.

Like I'm a big fan of shells underneath jackets but they're not really necessarily appropriate, 'cause most of them are sleeveless, to take off if you are at an interview. You mostly only would wear that if you were keeping the jacket on.



Might need to have another alternative if you're going to be somewhere where you think you might want to take your jacket off.

But depending on your body type, different things are going to look good. And I think you should find something that is appropriate and looks good on your body type that you feel comfortable with and you're not going to be constantly checking to make sure buttons aren't pulling or various other things, 'cause that is just going to distract you and be frustrating.

Even though I think sometimes career services are like, "You must wear this same button up dress shirt under your suit." It's like, well, that's great for some people but maybe that's not going to be great for everybody. And if you look uncomfortable or you look sappy because that doesn't work on your body type, then that's not going to help you in your presentation.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you've got to find something that fits number one. You don't want the button ... That's the problem with the button down. The buttons puckering and they're always at weird places. One place I will put a plug in, if you want to try on some really nice, very well tailored and actually fitted for a lot of women's bodies is Thomas Pink, which they're expensive but you don't need many of them. And if you take care of it, it will last. And they actually tailor for boobs.

Lee Burgess: Nice.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Unlike a lot of other places. I think going and trying on a bunch of stuff. But if you ... Yeah, exactly. If you come to the point where you're just like, "This is not a look that works for me." Then find something else that you feel comfortable in.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you really are not sure how to dress yourself in these professional clothes, if you'd never worn suits and stuff before, it's a great time to go to Nordstrom and make an appointment and have someone shop with you to help you understand.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, all different kinds of stores.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, all different kinds of stores.

Alison Monahan: I would say almost any place that you might go look for a suit probably has at least like pretty trained sales people. I mean, whether it's everything from Banana Republic to Ann Taylor to more specialized places like Brooks Brothers or Thomas Pink or the big department stores, there's going to be somebody who actually is really into doing this and they would be happy to help you put something together.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And they can actually even show you, "Yeah, if we tailor it this way, it solves that problem." And then most of us are like, "Tailoring?" But it can really make a difference.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. But adjusting a button or something, can make a huge difference.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. It really can. And a lot of places are equipped to do that. I think now I almost wish that Rent the Runway and places like that would do professional clothes for law students in a lot of ways. But I think that for now, just trying to figure out how to invest in a couple of professional outfits that can be mixed and matched up a little bit makes the most sense, maybe some day.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, and if you're traveling, often times you can actually get things tailored particularly if you're in South East Asia or something. If you're in Vietnam, Hong Kong, places like. They can do amazing work with really high quality fabric for a lot less money than you're going to pay for a mid-range suit in the U.S.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's a good point. Alright, one thing that I would like to call out, and Alison I don't think you and I have talked about this, is an event like graduation. Which I think is kind of interesting 'cause on one hand, it's your celebration and you should be able to wear whatever you want. But at times I have seen, especially some women, be dressed for graduation in something that I would not want to be presenting myself to the dean of my law school in. Say, like something where my midriff is showing. Or like it would just be like maybe something I would wear to a party or a club or a wedding, not a formal event. I don't know, do you think you have to think about that kind of stuff or am I just making myself sound old and conservative?
- Alison Monahan: You're just a fuddy-duddy.
- Lee Burgess: I am a fuddy-duddy. Not really but ...
- Alison Monahan: As I recall, we had pretty strict instructions about what we could and couldn't wear and then it was all under the robe anyway. So honestly, I don't think anyone even had ... I mean, I have no clue what I wore. I think basically I had to wear a dress or something. And it was like 1,000 degrees and about to rain so the whole thing I just remember being like, "Okay, this is miserable. Can we get this over with?"
- But then you take off the robe and you're running around. So I think you should want to think about it. If you're going to have a graduation event, say a party or something like that, wear whatever you want but if you're going ... I think we had graduation and then I think there was a reception of different sorts of various different organizations. So things had receptions that professors were at



and deans were at. And yeah, there I think you do want to think, "Is this the last impression I want them to have of me? As in some outfit that I would wear out clubbing? Probably not." Yeah, I think it's at least worth thinking about.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, again, it's not going to make or break your legal career but you're still at a professional event. Your graduation is still a professional event, your party that's outside is not. But-

Alison Monahan: A guy showing up in cargo shorts and things like that.

Lee Burgess: Right, yeah exactly. Alright, one thing that I always share whenever I talk about what to wear for women is advice given to me by one of my favorite mentors in undergrad about whether or not women have to wear jackets to things. And her rule of thumb, which I still think I have seen proven true over and over and over again, is if a man is wearing a jacket it is likely that you need to be, as a woman, in a jacket as well. And that sweater-sets are not jackets and are not seen as such.

And although I think that maybe in some situations, this rule of thumb can get somewhat more relaxed, I do have to say that every time I've shown up to an event with a jacket on, I have been glad that I've had the jacket on even if some of my friends didn't show up with a jacket on. Because I feel like it increases the gender differences if the men all show up in a version of a suit and you don't. I don't know.

Alison Monahan: You're wearing like a sleeveless dress or something, which is totally fine. And if you put a jacket over it, you're going to look pretty professional. Yeah, I mean, I think and you generally just want to probably air on the side of being a little bit more formal than maybe you would like to be.

I think it just, like it or not, it goes to credibility, makes you look like you fit in and it decreases the distinctions between men and women, which is probably better in a professional setting.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think it is. And I think it used to be the concern was if you didn't show up in a suit, they wouldn't take you seriously as being in whatever role that the suit required, or at least the jacket required. But I don't know whether that's the same necessarily. But don't always key off of what the highest level woman in the group is doing. 'Cause I've often times been to events or panels where possibly the women who are speaking on the panel are not dressed in jackets, sometimes that happens. But if you're new to the profession, you should be because they've earned that right.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think there are some of those issues about if you look younger than you are or if you're perceived as being someone who's very young ... That's again,



one of the situations like it's not really fair, and this happens for both men and women. I was at a trial where one of the part ... He was actually a partner but he was Asian and he looked quite young, which normally is great. You look much younger than your age.

But we did these mock jury trials and they were like, "I don't know who this kid is. Why should I believe anything he's asking about?" And he was really upset about it. But people were like, "Look, there's nothing you can do about this. That is the perception and give it 10 years, you'll probably be wishing you looked younger."

But I think particularly for students, there are things you can do to ... 'Cause I mean, he was already in a suit. He was already playing up his professional standing. But if you're not, you might just want to go a little bit more formal than someone who's 10 years older who's probably going to be taken more seriously inherently.

Lee Burgess: Right. And the example you used, even of the partner in her leopard print Louboutin's ...

Alison Monahan: I still laugh about that.

Lee Burgess: It's a lot different when a partner makes that fashion decision than if an associate did. She has earned the right to make her own fashion choices by being an accomplished partner. An associate shouldn't show up to the trial in anything that would be considered questionable because your job is not to be noticed.

Alison Monahan: Even if they hid into the background. And if that means that you buy some really boring thick heeled shoes, that's what you wear. It's like, "I would never wear these anywhere else but court. But okay, they're my court shoes."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's ... You also have to remember where you are in the hierarchy and to how you can stretch the norms.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, on that point about having a court wardrobe, I think in some ways, simplifying your wardrobe. If you're listening to this you're like, "Oh my gosh, I've got have like a thousand different things to wear at every single event." No. You can actually streamline and simplify your wardrobe, which can make you more productive and can be a lot cheaper in the end.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. When I was putting together what were to talk about for this podcast, I remembered reading articles about [Barrack Obama only wearing two kinds of suits](#) or something like that. So I went and looked it up and it is true. He only wears gray and blue suits and all of his shirts went with both and all of his ties.



And so he never had to make decisions about really what he would wear 'cause whatever he would pull out of the closet, would go together.

And this is the same idea behind Steve Jobs wearing the same turtlenecks. Well, I guess he probably had more than one. But wearing the black turtleneck ...

Alison Monahan: Well, it's like my closet. I have I think eight of the same shirt.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Other folks, Zuckerberg wears the same type of T-shirt all the time and he's kind of known for that. But a lot of people argue that simplifying your wardrobe, in this way, can make you more productive because it cuts down on the number of decisions that you make every day. And if you're trying to streamline your life, decision fatigue is a major issue for most people. And so just removing a certain number of decisions can be really powerful.

And I even found a [blog post](#) that I kind of remembered reading a long time ago, about a woman who bought six of the same black dress and wore it basically every day, unless she was going to a special event or the special date night or something like that. And she just accessorized it. She had a couple of belts or necklace or she'd wear a sweater over it. And she's like, "Nobody ever commented. All they would comment on how it was nice I looked." She was like-

Alison Monahan: I feel like honestly you're better off finding a look that works for you and just repeating it and not having to think about it. I mean, really do you want to be thinking about what to wear to class every morning in law school? Or you just want to get up, pull things out of the closet, know you look okay and walk out the door?

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And when I got pregnant for the first time, I learned this lesson of what do you when you don't have so many clothes you can wear? Because you quickly realize you only have a few outfits or a few dresses or a few things. And that it was actually very simple. It's like you go in and you're like, "How cold is it today? Okay, I'll wear that."

Alison Monahan: Right. Do I need a sweater?

Lee Burgess: Do I need a sweater? It's like I have four maternity tank tops. Which one of those do I want to wear today? Which one of the pair of pants do I want? It was freeing. And going back to my normal wardrobe after I'd had my son, I got pretty overwhelmed and at various times I've gone through and done clean outs but I think I always continue to do these clean outs with this idea of getting to what a lot of people call more of a [capsule wardrobe](#), which I think is the technical term for it. Where you really only have ... I've seen like 37 to 40 to 50 pieces of clothes that most-



- Alison Monahan: It sounds like a ton of clothes.
- Lee Burgess: Well, it seems like a ton but apparent ... I guess when you count the T-shirts and ...
- Alison Monahan: I guess we count all my eight shirts that are all exactly the same as eight, I don't know. Do we count as one?
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that if they did. So you have like 40 pieces, 40 to 50 pieces that all can be somewhat mixed and matched. Thus, you can simplify your life by slightly higher quality pieces because you're not constantly buying clothes but make it very easy to dress yourself 'cause everything goes together.
- Alison Monahan: Right. No, I mean, I think it's worth considering. I'm definitely a fan of the all black plus look. That's pretty much ... If you see me wearing something that's not black, it's probably going to be like, "Wow, what's going on? Did you run out of laundry?"
- Lee Burgess: I know.
- Alison Monahan: I don't buy other things, I just never wear them. Because I'm like, "I cannot be bothered."
- Lee Burgess: I know. I also love my black uniform of clothes. I was actually down in San Diego seeing some friends and one of my friends was like, "Do you only wear black?" And I was like, "No, but it's really easy to travel in all black because it's just like ... And everything goes together."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, everything relevant matches, which I feel like just saves you so much time and energy.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. I wear like a black dress. I'd wear a different black dress the next day but same shoes.
- Alison Monahan: I think travel is a great opportunity. I mean, think about if you're traveling with a carry-on, you can live pretty well out of that. It really makes you streamline things. I mean, obviously, sometimes you're going to need other things like rain boots or something, if it suddenly rains. But if you think about what you take when you travel, that's probably a lot of what you would wear just on a day-to-day basis. And you could probably get rid of a lot of other stuff.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I have seen blogs and articles about efficient packing and how you pick your color story or whatever for-
- Alison Monahan: Just go black.



Lee Burgess: 'Cause I mean, like my color story is black or variations of it. But I think it does make sense to show that if you're really thoughtful in how you can put different pieces together, travel's a great opportunity to test out this. How much stuff do you actually need to dress yourself for a week. You might be surprised.

I mean, I remember, back, I think a year after college, I had like one knee length black skirt, one black dress, a couple of different T-shirts and two long sleeve T-shirts. And I made outfits out of that for like five weeks because I didn't want to carry any more than that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think you can definitely think about this idea when you're talking about your formal wardrobe. You don't need a closet full of suits, you need one or two nice suits. And then if you're a woman, you might consider skirt suit, pant suit that can mix it up. A few different shirts, maybe a few different accessories, although even there I think you can definitely wear the same ones. Probably can just wear the same pair of shoes. Nobody's going to notice if you wear the same shoes or even the same outfit.

Do your callbacks that you wore on campus 'cause you're going to talk to the same people. And I guarantee you the HR person either doesn't notice or doesn't care. Everybody understands you're in law school. You're not expected to have a top of the line suit and a different one for every occasion. You just need something that looks appropriate.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's really true. And when it comes time to buy suits, I think you can be a little smart about it, to look at a variety of options. Even stores now like H&M, Nordstrom Rack, The Limited, they all have suits, Banana Republic. So you can definitely explore a lot of different price points to look for suits.

I think the other thing you can do when you know that you're either going into law school or you are going in an interview season is look for those half yearly sales that will come up or stores will offer discounts or friends and family. If you are a bit strategic and you don't make it a fire drill, so you're looking for something in the last minute, you could actually manage to save quite a bit of money while you go shopping for these things.

Or you wait till a holiday, you ask a family member to pitch in to help you buy a suit for a holiday. My grandmother used to buy me suits. That was one of the things we used to do 'cause we would go shopping together. It just started back in college, I think, when I needed my first interview suits. And she would take me shopping, I think it was Ann Taylor or Macy's or somewhere and we would go. She would buy me a complete professional outfit, that was kind of one of her things and that was very kind of her to do. Because then I had like a nice looking interview outfit.



Things like that, you can get a little creative, of how to put all this stuff together. Like you said Alison, it's not like you need to be in some Armani suit to get a job. You just need to look clean and professional.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think this is an area where you also want to think about how much is it going to cost me to clean this and that kind of thing? Is this material going to hold up? I mean, if you buy a suit at H&M, let's face it, you're probably not going to be wearing that for the next 10 years, which may be fine. That may be exactly what you need.

But if you can find a slightly higher quality on sale or something, that might be a suit ... I mean, I bought my first formal work suit outfit interview thing at Ann Taylor. And I think I actually still have the dress. Like it was basically indestructible because that was how they made it at that point, I'm not sure they do at this point. But possibly-

Lee Burgess: Mine was Ann Taylor too so I get it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's just one of those and you're like that was the uniform and it lasted. But if it's a cheaper fabric that you're going to have to be dry cleaning every single time you wear it, in the end, that may end up costing you more than some place that cost you a little bit more to start with, but maybe you can get a couple of wears out of it before it has to be cleaned or that kind of thing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You also want to look at how the fabric wrinkles. That's a big deal too because if you're going to travel, especially for callbacks and you have to travel with your suit, you don't want to be paying to have it pressed or steamed and things like that. Different qualities also will create different headaches so you want to make sure you find-

Alison Monahan: Think about also breathability and depending on where you're interviewing, if you're like a heavy sweater. Those are the things to consider. Like buying the least expensive possible option may not end up paying in the long run.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Now to fill in these professional gaps in your wardrobe, I think you can get a little creative and look for other ways to save money. I know that there's this Lands End dress that's been written about that professional women get pretty obsessed with, called their Pointe Dress. And at times, it can be as low as like \$30 when they're running sales and things like that. And I know a lot of professional women who ... It's simple, it's clean, it doesn't wrinkle and they will just throw a blazer over it and be good to go. And that's a way that you could take a blazer from one suit and throw it over a different kind of a dress and now you kind of almost have another suit for a woman.



Think you can get a little creative and make these simple options of outfits out of the few pieces that you have without breaking the bank. And that's again, the argument for maybe you have a little bit of a nicer suit jacket that can be worn with a few different pieces. You might wear it more but then you're not going to have to buy three of them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think all these things are trade-offs but if you really hate shopping like me ... I usually just, when I needed these things, I would literally just present myself to the first person I encounter at the store and be like, "I'm a total disaster. Can you please dress me?" And they're like, "Yes. How much do you want to spend and what do you need it for?" "I need it for an interview and this is my budget." "Okay, great."

So that is absolutely an option. I mean, there are more modern internet options too. You can try something like Stitch Fix, I think that's how you say it.

Lee Burgess: Stitch Fix.

Alison Monahan: Yes. Or an app that I've actually used, which was actually founded or involved with a lawyer that we know, which is Boon + Gable and they're here in San Francisco and might be smaller places who actually come to your house and basically bring you things to try on and you never have to go to the store. So that's-

Lee Burgess: And you can request like I'm looking for interview suits and they will bring you suits.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. I'm going on vacation or whatever. It's definitely a higher end option but if you really don't want to go out and go shopping, it can be amazing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So the reality is there is a solution for almost everyone. And even things like Stitch Fix, now I think has men's clothing as well so this isn't just about solving-

Alison Monahan: I think there's some also made-to-order men stuff online, that's pretty economical that people are into now.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. With a little creativity you can solve a lot of these problems. But I think one piece of advice, especially when you're looking for more formal wear, is don't leave it till the last minute.

Alison Monahan: Oh God no.



- Lee Burgess: No. You want to ... Like if you know you're going to be interviewing over the summer, make sure that at the beginning of the summer, with plenty of notice, you start to try and solve these clothing problems.
- Alison Monahan: I had a nightmare scenario where I applied for 1L jobs in law firms, like not really thinking I'd get any interviews. And then there were some who wanted to do the interviews and I didn't really have anything appropriate to wear and it's Christmas. And as I recall, I was in Atlanta and I was like, "I have to find something." So I went to the mall in Atlanta and got a personal shopper in Nordstrom's or something and they're bringing out these birthday cake pink outfits and I'm like, "Okay, I'm interviewing for law firm jobs and large firms in New York City. Do you have anything that is black or gray?" And they said like, "No." It was a nightmare, it was an absolute nightmare.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, leaving it for last minute, not a good call. And you never want to be in a situation where you get invited to something and you don't have something appropriate to wear. So make sure that you do at least have a few things in your closet that you can pull out. If you're going to start law school, you want to have a few professional things for these upcoming networking events. If you're going to do any sort of mock court or arguments, you have to have a suit there 'cause stuff is going to come up. So just think about it now so you're not running around at the last minute. Or if you are a body type ... I have friends that are on the shorter side, that they have to tailor all of their pants. Like they just can't buy pants off the rack and wear them and that takes time. You can't-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, all these things take time. I think in a minimum, ideally, you want to go into law school, either with or with a solid plan for having at least one interview outfit which is formal, a suit. And then at least one or two business casual outfits which you could wear in a fairly formal networking setting.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alright, well with that, we are out of time. And I think it is fitting that I am doing this podcast wearing yoga pants and a tank top while we talk about suits. So I was just thinking about that.
- Alison Monahan: I'm wearing all black plus a hoodie sweater.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. It's just ... And flip flops, it's kind of funny.
- Alison Monahan: I think I have my furry slippers on.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, which is the benefit of running your business virtually. So we don't have to-
- Alison Monahan: Exactly.



Lee Burgess:

Worry about this. Alright, and with that, we're out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app, we'd really appreciate it. And be sure to [subscribe](#) so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself or Alison, at Lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or Alison@lawschooltoolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at lawschooltoolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- [A Law Student's 3-Tiered Guide to Dressing the Part](#)
- [Business Insider: Successful People Like Barack Obama and Mark Zuckerberg Wear the Same Thing Everyday and It's Not a Coincidence](#)
- [Medium: I Wore the Same Dress Everyday for a Year](#)
- [The Washington Post: Life is Easier with a Capsule Wardrobe](#)