



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we are talking about study groups and how to make the most of them or skip them entirely. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school in early legal career experience, so you'll be the 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 your 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. Today, we're talking about study groups. [Should you have one?](#) And if you do, how to make it work for you. And Lee, as I recall, this was actually a question from a listener, so don't be shy ...

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: ... about writing in with your own questions.

Lee Burgess: That's right. We actually read those emails and we put them on our podcast idea board. Our Trello board.

Alison Monahan: Yes. And when we're out of ideas, we come to that.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, yes. Please write to us because we enjoy hearing from listeners and what listeners are curious about. So, I guess the best place to start is really what is a study group and why does everyone think you need one or have to be in one?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think ... A study group really is just a group of people you study with. I mean, I guess ...

Lee Burgess: Not to be literal.

Alison Monahan: Is there anymore to say? Is there anything more to say about that?

Lee Burgess: I don't know.

Alison Monahan: Usually, it's a fairly small group of people. Maybe like ... I'd say what, four or five, is probably the most standard size? Do you think that's right?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. So, it's a group of people, typically these people are going to be in your section and obviously if you have a section or if your class doesn't do that, then you may have different study groups from different classes. So, for like us, we had ... We didn't really have a section concept the first year, so we had a small section and then we had different people in different classes. So, it might be ... The most traditional one would be you have all of your classes with these people and they're the only one people you study with.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: But, there are also other options, which we'll get into a lot later.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: In terms of why everybody thinks they need one, I think it's just one of those things you hear about all the time.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's part of the [law school mythology](#), I think.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: You go to law school, you've heard about this. When you watch movies about law school, they always have study groups like now-
- Alison Monahan: Right, or books.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, books. So, either alumni often times will oftentimes will talk about how important their study group is. They're still friends with their study group. I think it maybe something more prevalent a few generations of law students ago, but it's kind of become part of this story and people can get really anxious about it. They think that they have to pick these people to build this relationship, who I happen to study with, right from the very beginning and you don't even know them. How do you know that you should all get together and study together? It's really ...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's a great point.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's kind of impossible.
- Alison Monahan: People do get ... People get really cuckoo about it. I remember maybe in orientation, before classes had started in my law school, there was this rumor circulating, which I think is true, based on who told it to me, that someone was putting together their study group, but they would only allow people who'd gone to undergrad at Harvard. And the person who told me this, had been at



Yale and was very upset that he was not going to be allowed to join this study group. And I was just like, "Are you joking?"

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You have like ... A, why would you even be in this? And B, who does that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's a little extreme.

Alison Monahan: It was pretty crazy. But I mean, there is this definite mythology, I remember interviewing with a judge for a clerkship and she showed me the picture of her first year study group, which was hanging in chambers.

Lee Burgess: Wow.

Alison Monahan: And was like, "Oh, you know, half of these people became federal judges." I think they were at Yale or something in the 40's or 50's, a while ago. But it was this thing about, "Oh, this was my study group." But, yeah. You don't have to have it.

Lee Burgess: No and I think again, every time you force relationships, it can be a little awkward in your life. Across your life, you don't want to force yourself to be friends. I think at the beginning of law school, you don't really know that much about people. You may have met one or two people at orientation. I remember going to orientation and trying to meet people and then I recognized somebody from like a scholarship lunch that I'd been too, that ended up going there too. And so, I think I went and sat by her. I was like, "Wow, maybe we have something in common. I don't know." How else do you know if you have similar study styles, similar learning styles, if you're going to take law school seriously, how are you going to approach different parts of law school? All this stuff you don't know in the first days and weeks of school. And to be honest, you don't know enough about yourself to even find the other people who are going to match up with you well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think this is one of those cases where you really have to think about what has worked in the past for you. If you're someone who's always loved group work and you've studied for exams before and you like talking things out and you have high tolerance for people wasting your time, you know what I mean? And just kidding, sort of.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Sort of.

Alison Monahan: Sort of. It might be a great fit for you, but if you're someone who really craves efficiency and you know that you study best and learn best when you sit down and really think through the material, then there may be other options that



would work better for you. So, it doesn't have to be an all or nothing type of situation.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And we're going to talk on this podcast about different ways you can kind of take the benefits of a study group and not have some of the downsides, if you decide you don't want to make a full on commitment.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Which is a totally reasonable choice.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. And I think you have to be very realistic about the work that you do together. So, Allison, let's take you and I as an example. I count you as one of my very dear friends. We've built this very successful business together. I love working and collaborating with you. I don't know we would've been very good study partners. We learn different ways.

Alison Monahan: Oh, no. Definitely not. I'm just a person who really needs to go off in the library and make sense of something for myself and it drives me nuts to listen to other people who don't really know what they're taking about.

Lee Burgess: Right. And you're a more [visual learner](#). I'm a bit more [auditory](#). You do flowcharts, that doesn't really work for me. I do more linear outlines, that doesn't mean that it wouldn't be great to sit and kind of have conversations about what we learned in class or even review practice assignments together or things like that, but you and I would not be a great match to sit down and grind through material every week together, that probably would not be the most efficient use of our time.

Alison Monahan: No, because I think the idea of a study group is you really do commit to doing this at least once and maybe more than that per week. So, a lot of people have a standing meeting or they have plans that they're going to meet twice a week. So, this is like a pretty big commitment of time.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So, there's no ... You can have a study group but you just have to make sure that it's going to work for you and it's really going to be the most efficient use of your time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, you and I did not join typical study groups during our law school experience.



Alison Monahan: I'm sure people are shocked when we just talk about this.

Lee Burgess: I'm sure they are. Already, we're already five minutes through the podcast, they're shocked. But, I think ... It isn't that we didn't study with other people. I think for me, I did not have kind of the standing study group where we met on a regular basis, but I did have some class specific groups. So, I think the first time I really studied with other people was when I took property. When we got to future interests, everybody was scratching their heads and I think we all realized it would be helpful and got together and worked through some of the problems together. I would study sometimes with folks at the end of the semester to review our outlines and compare them to see if we were missing anything.

Lee Burgess: But, I also worked a lot by just having one or two friends that I would kind of consistently check in with. We would share notes. We would answer each others questions and we would sometimes study together in the library, but it wasn't formal, we just kind of knew that we were the person that we check in with each other. But, I also walked out of a study group session, I remember, for civil procedure where it was a big group. It was like eight people and there were too many people who had different levels of understanding of the material. We were [getting close to exams](#) and I realized that where I was with the material, was not where the majority of the people were in the room. And there weren't that many hours in the day at that point and I needed to skedaddle so I didn't waste time.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: A lot of these people were my friends and I had that moment where I'm like, "I hope I don't offend anyone or hurt my friendships, but I have to be able to get ready for this exam. I have limited time and this isn't working." And I had to excuse myself and I think you have to evaluate the situations and not be too concerned about the social aspects of it.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. I think that was probably the right call on your part but I can also see how somebody might've been like, "Who does she think she is? She doesn't want to study with us. Is she better than us?"

Lee Burgess: Right. Right.

Alison Monahan: That's on them, it's not on you. And it's all going to come out in the end, by hopefully you doing well in the class. I took a sort of similar approach. I tended to study mostly on my own in the beginning of the semester and then as we got closer to exams and people had materials, outlines, practice exams I wanted to go over with people, that kind of thing. I would have a few people over to my house, like on a class by class basis, and we would go through some stuff, but it was very ad hoc, it wasn't ... One of my roommates, for example, had her study



group. And so, they were at least weekly, maybe more than that at our house for hours, hours, and hours. And it seemed great for them. They had huge things they'd put on the wall.

Alison Monahan: I just remember pages and pages and pages of craft paper on the wall. And they'd have these enormous, making sense of the whole class on one page and they'd all stand back and argue about it. And, I mean, it worked great for them. So, that was an interesting kind of contrast, of like a different way you could do this that also would work.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, what do you think is a good way to use this study group. It seems like you got to see your roommates functional study group that seemed to work for them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, they definitely spent a lot of time gossiping and arguing too, but they did some work.

Lee Burgess: That's good.

Alison Monahan: But some of the ... Having comrades and people that you can collaborate with and blow off steam actually is helpful. You just have to [be careful that it's 10 minutes out of your study group's two hour session](#), not an hour and a half.

Lee Burgess: Right, right.

Alison Monahan: Everyone likes to gossip.

Lee Burgess: Right. And groupthink, can start to really play into that as well if you're concerned about a professor or an exam. You can get yourselves really whipped up into something.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. Yeah. People can get really worked up about fairly minor things. If you didn't have somebody to talk with about it, you'd probably just be like, "Oh, that's kind of weird. Okay, moving on."

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think reviewing the substance of law is always a good option because you're in class and you're reading all of these cases. And sometimes people can get totally fixated on the cases and what the cases say or don't say or the facts of the cases, all of which is important, but ultimately you need to pull out the law. So, working with people on that process, I mean, the problem is a little bit of the blind leading the blind in the beginning, so no one knows how to do this, but at least to make that a goal of, "Okay." I think having goals for your individual sessions is also helpful.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So, you might go into a session and say, "Okay, our goal today is to do a basic element by element analysis of personal jurisdiction."
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Something like that can be very helpful because you can all kind of collaborate and ... "Oh, I thought it was this and I thought it was that." You probably might maybe still want to take it to your professor afterwards for a check, but it can be a good basic way to get started.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I like that idea, I think having kind of assignments so you all bring something to the table too. So, maybe everybody works on their own outline or elements for personal jurisdiction and then you bring it and compare so you're not skipping the [deep work](#) of struggling with the material yourself, but you're validating or getting questions answered by the group with the caveat that if it's a group of lost students, you guys can be totally wrong.
- Alison Monahan: Right and also sometimes there's social pressure. If you think it's one way and three other people are like, "Oh, no that's not the rule."
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: But just to be, "Oh, well they must be right." When actually they might be totally wrong.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: So, you need to check it against some sort of objective source, whether that is a commercial outline, your TA, your professor, whatever it is, to make sure that, "Okay, this is actually what you need to be studying."
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I also think that a study group can be good for accountability and this is ...
- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Lee Burgess: ... especially is around practice. So, one of the things ... If you are a listener of the podcast or you read our blog or if you've met Alison and I in person, you know that you should be practicing and writing throughout the semester. And I think a study group can really facilitate that. You can use the session to all get together and do the practice assignment next to each other to make sure it gets done. You can do it separately and review the practice assignment together. You could assign out to different people, each week, the requirement that somebody bring a hypo to the study group, so you spread around the work of



getting that practice. But you can create that accountability for you and allow you to carve out time to do some of these tasks that sometimes slip through the cracks when you're just studying on your own. So, I think that is a really quality way to use a study group.

Lee Burgess: And even if you don't have a formal study group, you could just get a study buddy and create this accountability too. It doesn't have to be six people. You can have one other person that you get together on Wednesday afternoons at 2:00 and write a hypo for an hour. That's totally a good idea, if that's the better way that you work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think you've talked before about sometimes even people say, "We're going to find these hypos." And you might be able to find them in your commercial outline or something but you can also write them yourself based on what you're talking about in class. And that can be a great way to really get in your professor's head and think, "Well, how would I test personal jurisdiction? Where are some gray areas that I can create facts around?" And you see my ... A lot of these are pretty obvious. It's like, "Put something on the internet." "Okay, well what state is that in?" These are not ... There are only a limited universe, really of fact patterns that you probably are going to come up with. But those are probably the same ones your professors going to come up with.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So, writing your own question and having other people do it, can be a really great way to use a study group.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a very good point. Another thing that you want to think about with your study group is to [promote active learning](#). So, Allison, we've talked about active learning on the podcast before, but what is active learning for people who might just be listening to this episode?

Alison Monahan: Well, active learning is really something that makes you think in more than just doing your reading. So, it's kind of the difference between writing an article and reading an article. So, if you're writing that article, you've got to think about all of these different things, like things you might talk about, structure. It's pretty difficult.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: But, then if you just go read the article, it might be hard to understand, but you're not getting nearly as much out of it as the author did. So, in law school, things that are more passive learning, are things like reading cases. And then you start to get and go up the spectrum of, okay, you can review your class notes, that's a little more active. All right, well, now you need to start pulling



that law out and actually putting it together in some sort of format you can use. That's getting into active learning.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And then obviously doing practice and evaluating that practice objectively, that's very active because it's forcing you to really use this material, not just kind of regurgitate it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a great explanation. And so, in a study group situation passive learning would be you put your feet up and you're just listening passively to somebody, maybe just talk about the work they did. They're just...

Alison Monahan: Explaining something to you.

Lee Burgess: Explaining something to you. If you're not then taking that explanation and maybe hand writing notes about it or then applying it to a fact pattern or doing something to engage in the material, you're probably not internalizing it, even if you're an auditory learner and you learn by listening, it's still probably not enough to engage with the material. Speaking of that auditory learning, just kind of as a side note, I had this experience this last week, that I thought was interesting because I'm a geek and I think about things about we internalize information. But I was out walking around, I spend a lot of time walking because I have a new baby and I've been listening to audio books when I do this because what do you do when you're out walking around for an hour, and hour and a half in the afternoon every day?

Lee Burgess: And I've been listening to this interesting audio book, Alison, we were texting about this the other day. And there were all these interesting kind of details in this book, that I was sharing with you, I was talking to my husband about and I had to listen to it and then explain it to the people that I thought would find it interesting. And I had this moment where I'm like, "Wow, if you just passively listen to something while you're walking, it's really hard to retain it and then regurgitate the facts to somebody else."

Alison Monahan: Right. It's true.

Lee Burgess: It was just kind of funny because I'm not a big audio book listener and often times I don't listen to things, even if I'm listening to an audio book that are kind of detailed oriented and require me to condense the information to explain it to somebody else. So, it was a good reminder how hard that is, if you're not taking notes or have something to process that information and capture it for yourself, it is to retain that information. So, a good tip for everybody to remember that you kind of need to take that next step to put it in your brain and really have it



sink in, unless you have the kind of memory that can just hold on to a lot of auditory information.

Alison Monahan: Right, which I think is fairly rare.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So, if you do decide to split up some work or something, or somebody wants to explain something, then you need to be doing notes or diagram or something that you can then look back at later. Obviously, you can ask questions to this person later too.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: But, you don't want to just be sitting there for hours while someone talks about whatever they're talking about. And then you leave and you're like, "Huh? Well, that was interesting." But I don't really remember anything.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, deep thoughts while walking the streets of San Francisco with a small child. So, I just had to share that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's a great point.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Well, let's shift gears a little bit. We've talked about good ways to use the study group. What are some bad ways to use a study group. I think there are a lot of pit falls around this. There are some ... With the mythology, there's also ... We always get students coming to us who we're working with when we're tutoring or talking about tutoring and they say, "Oh, my study group, for example, we're splitting up the outline. So, we're going to have amazing outlines for all the classes." Is that a good idea, Lee?

Lee Burgess: That is a tough one because you're really skipping out on the deep work and the deep work is this idea that you're going to wrestle with the material and try and make it your own. And the problem with splitting out the outlines if somebody hands you an outline of a section ... Let's use your personal jurisdiction example. If somebody just hands you an outline, a personal jurisdiction and says, "Oh, here you go. It's right." And you read it and you're like, "Cool!" but doesn't mean you understand personal jurisdiction, because you did not evaluate how you put the law together or you didn't wrestle with a concept or an attack plan that didn't quite make sense to you."

Alison Monahan: Yeah.



- Lee Burgess: So, that's a problem because you're not going to retain the same amount of information.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, that's really no different from just reading an old outline from the course.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Or reading a commercial outline. Yes, it has a role to play, but it's not going to be as helpful as if you really dug in and got your hands dirty with this material. So, generally speaking, I think it's not a great idea to split up the outlines in your study group.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think they do that in *The Paper Chase*.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: I remember watching that movie. And I remember at the time, "How did you do that? How did you learn, if you just look at the outline?"
- Alison Monahan: Right, basically, if you're taking four classes, you're probably going to do really well in one of them and not so great in the other three.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And my contracts professor wrote the book, *The Paper Chase*. And I would not have split up the outline for his class. It would've been a terrible idea, I would not have done well.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, it's just one of those things. The reality is, there aren't really shortcuts on a lot of this and so if you think you're being clever and efficient and trying to take a shortcut, chances are good, it's probably not going to work out that well.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Which is a hard reality of law school. It does require a lot of heavy lifting, that's just how it works.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. In a year, there may be times where you're like truly in a crisis situation and you've got a health crisis or something, and you've had to miss class, and you know you're going to fail the class if someone in your study group doesn't provide an outline for you.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Okay, fine, take the outline and do your best. But generally speaking, I don't think it's the greatest idea.



- Lee Burgess: No. I think we've already talked about this a bit, but it's important to [watch out for the passive learning activities](#). So, if you're leaving the study group and you check in with yourself and you say, "Wow, could I talk about what I learned in my study group today? And if you can't, then that is a good warning sign that you're not retaining information and that you're being too passive."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, you just think you've got to be constantly checking in with yourself on is this the best use of my time?
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Because this can really be an ineffective way, even if you're getting something out of it, it can still be an ineffective way to study the substance of law if you're not really an auditory learner. So, if you're more of a visual learner and you're sitting there for hours, like, "Yeah. Okay, maybe I got something out of it. But did I get as much out of it as I would have if I had gone to the library and make myself a flowchart or a diagram?" That's the kind of conversation you've got to be having in your head.
- Lee Burgess: And a lot of law students that we talk to feel like there are not enough hours in the day to get everything done. And so what you also have to be evaluating in your example is you gave, Allison, this idea, if you don't have enough hours in the day and you're spending your study hours with this group of people but you're not getting the output that you need, then you need to say, "It would be better for me to not to be with this group of people and be in the library struggling and making flowcharts on my own."
- Alison Monahan: Or going to office hours.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: If you're like, "I'm too busy to go to office hours because I'm going to my study group all the time." Like, okay, maybe that's not the best use of your time. Maybe you need to cut back.
- Lee Burgess: Right, I think that's a good point. Another thing that can happen with study groups is they can give you a bit of a false sense of security because you aren't challenging yourself to evaluate whether you know the law on your own. You're doing it as a group, but law school's not a group activity.
- Alison Monahan: Right, I mean, this is different from business school. So, yeah, we definitely ... I think one of our early intern has posted on the site about this, where she had a study group and she was ... Loved them, it was great. She felt like she knew everything. And then she took the test and realized she knew everything if she could talk to other people about it.



Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And that's not really ultimately what you get to do on an exam. So, it is important to step away and this can be ... You gave the example earlier of maybe you do a practice hypo before and then you bring it to the group to compare your answers. I think that can be effective because that forces you to really get clarity on what you actually know and how you are performing. Versus, a lot of times people are like, "Oh, we'll talk about a hypo in the group." Okay, that's not unhelpful, but if everybody is like, "Oh, gosh, I see this case and I see this issue." And you feel like, "Oh, we did really well on that." But that's not the way exams work.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. [Not a group test.](#)

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly, unfortunately.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: For you, if you really like that type of learning.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. I also think something you have to watch out for is the anxiety of the group.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Lee Burgess: We talked to so many law students who are really struggling with stress and anxiety. I think all of us at some point, who've made it through the law school experience, had a period of time it was incredibly stressful where we struggled with being anxious because the pressure of law school was pretty intense. If you are only hanging out with other law students who are equally anxious, it's that delicate balance. On one hand, it can be cathartic, if you are able to talk about your anxiety. But on the other hand, anxiety can be contagious and you can just feed off of each other and become even more anxious and panicked. And you have to really watch that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think this is one of those cases where it might make sense to be deliberate about this in the beginning and know going into a study group that it can be this sort of anxiety producing experience. And you can do things that sound frankly a little hippy, but actually do work, so there are some really simply Chi Gong techniques, for example, where you can start your group with five minutes of doing something like that or if it starts to get stressful, everybody takes a five minute break; and they do a bit of bodywork or something. I mean, I realize this sounds pretty hippy, but these things are popular for a reason and that reason is that they work.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's true. I like the idea of doing a group mindfulness, no sit, or something. In the beginning I hadn't really thought about that, but to really allow people to focus and maybe even decompress a bit from the day.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, just being deliberate about sort of how you start and end the group activities, I think can go a long way towards avoiding not just feeding off of anxiousness. And also, maybe even having someone appointed who's the person who's appointed to point out when this gets out of hand, "Okay, everybody, I think that we've spent enough time talking about how difficult this exam is going to be, maybe we should start to prepare for it."
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: That kind of ... And deputize that person so they don't feel weird about it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's another good suggestion. Okay, I think one of the other things we've mentioned that it's just worth mentioning again, is that remember that everyone in the study group are law students and they don't know more than you do. They aren't TAs, they aren't professors, they aren't tutors, they aren't even law graduates.
- Alison Monahan: They've never taken this class either. They've never taken this exam, they know nothing.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. They know nothing.
- Alison Monahan: Basically.
- Lee Burgess: And so, when all else fails, you need to go to somebody, hopefully your professor or a TA to get clarity. This can be really dangerous and can lead you down a road. You constantly need to evaluate the advice you get from other law students in law school because this can happen inside and outside of study group. I actually had a situation in law school in one of my criminal law classes. Can't remember if it's criminal law or criminal procedure, where the TA, who is just a 2L, gave us a review session and gave us incorrect information.
- Alison Monahan: That totally happens.
- Lee Burgess: Totally happened. This is like a day or two before the final. And I remember sitting there thinking, that doesn't sound right, how is this different. And people really started to panic because they were trying to take this TA's word as gold because he was the TA, but he was giving incorrect information. So, you do need to evaluate it. And it wasn't like if you put down the law that he told us on the exam that the prof would be like, "Oh, well the TA told you that, you get points anyway."



- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: You're going to miss points because you don't have the correct understanding of the law. So, you have to be diligent and realize that it's really the professors rule of law that matters.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think this is a good thing that if you go over something in your group, that you can go to office hours and then say, "Hey, here is an attack plan that I've come up with for this topic, would you mind taking a quick look at it and seeing if it makes sense to you." Your professor may not go over it in excruciating detail, because they might think that's unfair.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: But they're likely to at least glance at it if you took the time to come and talk to them about it.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: All right. There's a major red flag, they're probably going to tell you.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, yeah.
- Alison Monahan: That is their job.
- Lee Burgess: That is their job. Okay, what about other things to consider if you're going to have a study group, how to make the most of it? There are always the logistics, like where you're going to meet? Do you have a good location to be productive? You said that your roommates study group met at your apartment, which could be good or bad.
- Alison Monahan: Right. It was good because they had access to the kitchen and they can get snacks.
- Lee Burgess: True.
- Alison Monahan: But, yeah, oftentimes the law libraries or other libraries will actually let you reserve a room for a group, which can be a great way again, with the accountability if you've reserved the room, you're probably more likely to show up. I think just clarity around people's expectations in the beginning and kind of setting some ground rules. And some of those ground rules can be around basically what gets you kicked out of this group.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: It's almost like having a prenup before you divorce.
- Lee Burgess: True.
- Alison Monahan: Let's talk about what our expectations are and then if somebody's not showing up or they're showing up late or they're not doing the work that you've decided collectively you're going to do. What are you going to do about that?
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I think talking that over in advance and just having some basic rules of whatever they are so that people don't get so frustrated with each other that they can't function.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's really true. You don't need drama, you just need-
- Alison Monahan: No, this is supposed to be making your life easier and better, not worse.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah, very good point. I also think with location, make sure you think about whether or not it makes sense to meet somewhere kind of noisy, like a coffee shop or a student lounge where there's lots of distractions and people are coming in and out. You really do want to have an environment where you can focus, maybe put things on walls. The nice thing about a lot of these study rooms in law libraries is they might have whiteboards. They might even have tools that you can use to help you study. So, just make sure that the environment is going to facilitate the type of work that you're trying to do.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think that's a great point. I think anything you can do to smooth out these logistics and just kind of make it more of a habit, since you're not constantly dealing with like, "Where are we meeting, when are we meeting? What are we doing?" Is really going to help.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And again, it may come down to expectations. You might decide in the beginning, "Okay, we're going to meet twice a week for two hours and these are the days and time we're going to meet." That's probably way more effective than trying to schedule every single week, which is just going to drive everyone crazy. And really thinking about too, how many people is too many people, I think is a key thing to think about.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: And also, how are we going to add people because I think if your group becomes known as a cool or useful study group, people are probably going to be



asking you to join. So, at what point do you decide you're not taking more people or maybe you do. What's your process? It seems like a lot of work to have these discussions upfront, but it's going to smooth things out later.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, because the semester only gets busier and more stressful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And then I think around individual meetings, we touched on this earlier. Having some sort of goal or agenda, so that you know what the point is. And maybe you rotate every week, where a different person comes up with the agenda. Maybe you put one person in charge of it, whatever it is, but you want to have some clear idea of what you're working on and what your point is.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And before we jumped on to record this podcast, Alison, you made a good point that technology tools, a lot of which we used to collaborate with each other in our own business can make working with a group of people a lot easier.

Alison Monahan: For sure, I think around scheduling, something like using Doodle can be good because it avoids that back and forth of, "I can do Monday at 4:00. Oh, no, I can only do 4:30." Basically someone just picks a bunch of times that they think could work and then you look to see, "Okay, everyone can meet at these three times. Now, let's take a vote."

Alison Monahan: In terms of keeping track of your work, I think this is going to be so critical because you don't want to be looking for what am I supposed to work on, where are we meeting? So, we really highly recommend [Trello](#), which you know if you've ever listened to one of our podcasts about any sort of ...

Lee Burgess: We're obsessed.

Alison Monahan: Any sort of time management or personal productivity. Trello is amazing. It's free. Your group can use it. You can everybody to the board. You can just make sure that everything's consolidated nicely so that when you're not sure what you should be working on, you just go to your Trello board and you're like, "All right, okay. We're going to do this hypo." You can even post them there so that everybody can look at the other options before you meet. You can have people do feedback on the other person's assignment and post the feedback on Trello. Really, the possibilities are endless.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. There are due dates on Trello.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Lee Burgess: You can link to Google Documents or Dropbox.

Alison Monahan: Anything.



Lee Burgess: Folders, you can really make it a dynamic board that you can all collaborate on and I think that is critical and will probably make your study group time, where you're all together, more effective, because you're doing this online collaboration outside of those sessions.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And on that point-

Lee Burgess: On that point...

Alison Monahan: Yeah. On that point-

Lee Burgess: Yeah. You're...

Alison Monahan: Go ahead.

Lee Burgess: Okay, I'm going to stop talking now and let you talk.

Alison Monahan: I was just going to add one more possible tech tool. So, on that point about collaboration in a virtual space, I think looking at Slack can be a really good option. So, rather than a lot of email back and forth, Slack gives you basically a room where you can go into and everybody can talk. And again, you can put documents and things like that. So, it's going to make your life easier than trying to find the file that you're supposed to work on some email that someone sent to you six days ago. Anything you can do to avoid that is just going to really improve your study group experience.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And one thing about Slack, which I really like, is you can search the conversations for things.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: On which you can't really do even in a group text message. I don't know if you can do that in a WhatsApp group?

Alison Monahan: In theory, but I find it never works.

Lee Burgess: Okay. So, that's kind of another nice feature, is if you are having a conversation and somebody says something or links to something and you want to go back to it later, you can easily search where I can't search my text messages for anything.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly.
- Lee Burgess: I guess a WhatsApp group could work as well but you're not going to necessarily have the search functionality and the history functionality.
- Alison Monahan: Well, in WhatsApp too, I think is not as multi-platform. So, on Slack, you can be on your computer, you can be on your phone. You can be on your iPad. You're going to find it everywhere.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's true. The other thing you could do, would be to use a shared Google Calendar. You could have a Google Calendar that has the meetings that you could share with everybody, so everyone can then put it on their Google Calendar, so there's no confusion about when the meeting times are. You could even assign out whose in charge of bringing snacks every week, as I do with my preschoolers class after sign out, who to bring snack to the class every week.
- Alison Monahan: Very important.
- Lee Burgess: It is very important. Hey, if you don't feed those kids, it's like ... Bad things happen. So, snack is very critical.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: But, those little things all can be done using tech tools and then you don't spend a lot of time talking about who's going to bring the cookies next week.
- Alison Monahan: Right and we do recommend that you bring some sort of snacks for sure.
- Lee Burgess: Yes. Because snacks make everything better.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. What's the point of studying together, unless you can eat, right?
- Lee Burgess: It's so true. It's so true. And besides, if you're hungry, it's hard to focus. Low blood sugar, it's not a good thing. You've got to have snacks.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Lee Burgess: So, just a little thought and a little organization can really make this more effective. I think the other thing about thinking about some of these technology tools is if you're someone who doesn't want to meet with someone on a consistent basis and with this formality of the study group, I can see some of these technology tools, many of which were not around when you and I were in law school, being a way that you can create almost a virtual study group. I think if you don't like necessarily working with people but you still want to collaborate, I think you could have a Slack channel where you're able to kind of



chat and share information. You can have a Trello board where you are maybe posting sections of outlines so you could each review them and give feedback. You can use that to submit hypos to each other and each give each other feedback, I think there'd be a lot of ways that you can collaborate with another person without having to be physically in the room.

- Lee Burgess: And this could work really well too for part-time law students who aren't on campus a lot, I think it can be very hard for them to have a formal study group because often times they have a full-time job or a family at home, so they aren't on campus very often. Or, at schools where people are commuting more. Some of my good friends lived 45 minutes away from our law school, so they weren't on campus because they were also trying to get home before rush hour and things like that. But, technology allows you to work in a virtual space or even have group Slack ... I'm sorry, group Skype meetings. Because you can have=
- Alison Monahan: Right, that's what I was just thinking. You can just do a virtual meeting, why not? It doesn't have to be like you're all sitting in the same room. You can have a video chat.
- Lee Burgess: Yep. So, getting a little creative can allow you to make this work for whatever situation that you're in. And I think that can allow you to collaborate in the way that you want to collaborate, that's going to work for you.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think just letting go of this concept, that there's some perfect study group that's going to completely determine the outcome of your law school experience. If you just let that idea go and sort of think about what might work for you and what options you have, I think maybe cobble together something that's less traditional but actually would end up working better in the end.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I'm actually really excited with all these technology ways you can virtually create a study group. I'm like totally geeking out right now in my mind, about all the ways that you can do it.
- Alison Monahan: I know, I feel like we should have a package. Like, "Set up your virtual study group here."
- Lee Burgess: I know. I know. I'm like, "Wow, so many options." If anyone does do a virtual study group, please write to us and tell us how it goes.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Share your experience.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. We'd love it. You can do a guest blog post on the blog.
- Alison Monahan: Totally.



Lee Burgess: Well, with that, we are out of time.

Lee Burgess: If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Tool Box 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. Send us your ideas for podcast episodes because we love getting them and we love talking about stuff we know you guys are thinking about. So, thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.

RESOURCES:

- [The Girl's Guide to Law School: Surviving 1L: Should You Join a Study Group?](#)
- [Five Myths About the Law School Study Group](#)
- [5 Study Tips for Visual Learners](#)
- [5 Study Tips for Auditory Learners](#)
- [Meeting with Your Study Group Before Exams](#)
- [The Girl's Guide to Law School: How to Get Your Law School Study Group to Actually Study?](#)
- [Five Techniques for Using Deep Work to Excel in Law School](#)
- [How to be the Star of Your Study Group](#)
- [Active Vs. Passive Learning in Law School](#)
- [Lessons From My 1L Year: Be Careful with Study Groups](#)
- [Trello](#)