



Lee Burgess: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today we are chatting about setting your priorities in law school. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, and Lee Burgess. That's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be.

We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the 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. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on [lawschooltoolbox.com](#), and we'd love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today we're talking about prioritizing in law school when stuff gets real. One of our tutors, interestingly enough, is actually a mother of a new 1L, and she teaches 1Ls. She commented to us recently that a lot of the people that she is interacting with in their first year of law school are making two common mistakes.

Number one, they're prioritizing the urgent over the important. And two, they're [ignoring self-care](#). Today, we wanna talk about those two items, and discuss how to make decisions in law school so that you'll be set up for success on final exams. Lee, let's talk about that first one. What do you think people are doing when they're prioritizing the urgent over the important?

Lee Burgess: In law school, and I remember this from my law school days. I was just talking to a law student today that also made me think of this. Your to-do list is so long, like really, really long. And you-

Alison Monahan: Infinite almost it seems.

Lee Burgess: Infinite, yeah. You feel like there are no extra hours, let alone minutes in every day. I think most law students, especially in their first semester feel this way. When you run through all the tasks that you have in an individual week, it can really make you feel overwhelmed, and you kind of start getting on this hamster wheel of like, I have to do what's due tomorrow, I have to do what's due tomorrow, I have to do what's due tomorrow. That is the urgent, but not necessarily the important as in what's gonna get you to successful exam grades come exam day.

Some of the tasks that you might have on your to-do list in an individual week are reading assignments including making [case briefs](#), outlining your legal writing assignment, [drafting your resume](#) if you're starting to look for jobs, [study group meetings](#), practice writing assignments, going to office hours,



attending a lunchtime lecture, and bar nights. These are things that might be on your law school to-do list.

But of course, everybody's to-do list doesn't just end with law school because you also have life tasks too. These might be going to the grocery store, cooking, cleaning your house, [going to the gym or yoga](#), calling home to talk to family, going out with friends, [sleeping](#), resting, probably messing around on social media, listening to podcasts-

Alison Monahan: Watching some TV.

Lee Burgess: ... watching some TV, trying not to go insane with the political environment. All of these things are on this main to-do list. Depending on your situation, you actually may have more tasks if you have [family responsibilities](#), if you have children, if you have pets, if you take care of other family members, if you have a part-time job. Your list can be very long.

If you're starting to feel overwhelmed, [making a to-do list](#) is a great way to start because you have to kind of control the chaos. Alison and I have talked about this in other podcasts, that we use Trello for tracking our to-do list. Alison, it's been a life saver for you. I know it's been for me too.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh, yeah. Crazy. We literally could not live without our Trello boards. I just returned from a trip, and I had a new one that had all of my hotels, and flights, and car rentals, and everything on it. Just having all of that there was so amazing. And then of course we have our master to-do list that we've really pimped out so that we can send emails to it, or star messages, and Slack, and all these different things.

You don't necessarily have to get that complicated, but I think one thing that can be important is if you actually just sit down and make a matrix of important, not important, urgent, not urgent, and you really figure out where all these things go. Because sometimes you have things that are both urgent and important, so where should that be on your to-do list? Well, probably at the top.

Lee Burgess: Don't you color code on your to-do list too? Of noting what is ... even within the urgent things. Don't you have a red?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I have various coloring schemes depending on which board it is. Sometimes I'll do tasks. Say I have a bunch of things I need to book like hotels or something, I might do green if I've done it, red if I haven't even thought about it, and yellow if say I've asked to make a reservation but I'm still waiting for something. But yeah, you could absolutely color code things as red, most



urgent. You could have a whole scheme for this. Thinking about things like that in Trello can really help because then it's pretty obvious what you need to do.

So, things like legal writing, that might be both urgent if you have an assignment that's due this week, and important. But other things, maybe they feel urgent but they may ultimately not be so important. At the risk of causing a little controversy, I would say things like case reading are in that category. Yes it's important, but it's maybe not as important as some other things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that that's why we're releasing this kind of in the latter part of the middle of the first semester. It's really important to start thinking about prioritizing tasks because you're getting close to the end game, which is exams.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So at this point, you're at least halfway through the semester. You've kind of settled in. Hopefully you're feeling that cold wind of the exam time whizzing over your shoulder.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's important to start being realistic about what your priorities are now for this next chunk of time until exams because they might be different than what your priorities were in the beginning of the semester, and that's okay. As kind of a global idea, which we'll talk about a little later in the podcast too, you are kind of constantly reevaluating your priorities based on where you are in the school year and what you have going on. But, I think this last chunk of time before exams, this is a good time to just say, "Okay, now here are my priorities to get to the end of the semester," and kind of go from there. We're gonna walk through what we think for most people these priorities should be to help you manage this crazy list of things you have to do.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's a great point. At the beginning of the semester when you're just figuring all of this out, of course you had to focus a lot of time and effort on preparing for class, maybe really detailed case briefing, that kind of thing. We're not saying you should stop going to class. We're not saying you should stop reading your cases. We're not saying you should stop briefing if that's helpful. But, you do have to think about, where is this time gonna come from to actually make sure that I'm ready for exams, because [you've gotta find that time somewhere](#).

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Alison, what do you think? We've kinda danced around it. What do you think is the top priority for law students from their law school perspective at this point in the semester?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think you've really gotta get a [game plan](#) in place and start executing on it on your exam prep. You've gotta really seriously evaluate, where am I at this point? Have you done any sort of study aides? Have you started making



outlines? Have you looked at an actual exam from your professor ever? Have you taken any practice exams? This kind of thing.

Because, if you've just kinda had your head in the sand, and you've been going to class but you haven't actually looked at how you're gonna be evaluated ... Do you even know how you're gonna be evaluated? Is it a multiple choice exam? Is it open book? Is it closed book? If it's open book, what can you bring? All these things are questions that you need answers to at this point so that you can really start preparing and doing that [deep work](#) that you need to do.

Lee Burgess: What is so hard is this is the challenging work of law school.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: It is easy to just do these urgent tasks like preparing for class. It is hard to do the deep work. Making this your top priority helps force you to do the work that you don't necessarily want to do, but it has to be done.

Alison Monahan: Well and the other thing is it takes a really long time. If you think that, "Oh well, I've blocked off a couple of hours a week to work on my outlines," and then maybe kind of sort of done that throughout the semester, well now you need to be doing triple that time or more instead of just ... It can't just be at this point a three hour block on Saturday. You probably need to be devoting the majority of your weekend time to making these outlines, and doing exam prep, or you're not gonna be prepared. That's just the reality.

Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah. What about graded assignments? I think those would be probably your next priority because they stick on your GPA.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and this can be complicated because often times, this is around the time that your legal writing assignments are gonna be coming due. That's one of those things that is both urgent and important, but you also cannot let it completely take over your life.

Because if you devote a week or even a week and a half, two weeks exclusively to this one legal writing assignment, and you're not going to class, and you're not preparing for class, and you skip the reading, well as soon as you turn that in, you're gonna be weeks behind, and you don't have time to catch up.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's really hard. Again, I think why you can get caught up in a legal writing assignment is it's like tasks. You know?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, something to do.

Lee Burgess: It's something to do.



- Alison Monahan: You check it off.
- Lee Burgess: You can check it off. You're writing a paper, it's very tangible. The tasks that we were talking about that fall into that deep work priority, your first priority, don't feel as good because you're not making the same sort of "progress." You don't have something tangible to show for it.
- That being said, it's a priority, but these graded assignments, they can really run away with your time. You do have to be smart about balancing them and making sure if they're pass/fail, if they are a certain percentage of your grade, you've gotta weigh how important they are against your final exams.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think one thing too that people don't prioritize a lot of the times with legal writing is things that really can cause you to lose a lot of points for reasons that are not that intelligent. For example, did you allocate enough time and energy to doing citations?
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Most people don't, and then they run out of time, and then they do frankly not a very great job on their citations. That's one of the really key ways that you can just lose a ton of points that is totally unnecessary. If you had just prioritized slightly differently, you would've been a lot better off.
- Lee Burgess: My school and our legal writing class even had very strict formatting requirements. You would get points off if your margins weren't correct. People would lose points for stuff like that. Don't give up points.
- Alison Monahan: It's just silly.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Figure out basically, okay there is a format I need to follow. I'm gonna block out my calendar for an hour and actually sit down with my document, and make sure that I have everything set up correctly. If I don't know how to set it up, I'll go talk to my TA or I'll ask someone. You don't wanna be doing that the night before.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly. Okay, then the next priority I would argue is class prep, which most people think should be the first priority, but it is not. It is the-
- Alison Monahan: No, it's not at this point.
- Lee Burgess: ... third priority.



Alison Monahan: It's important.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You still need to go to class.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: I wouldn't recommend skipping class. Skipping class for graded assignments is one of those classic problems that people get into.

Lee Burgess: Professors get so mad when you do that.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh, yes.

Lee Burgess: They get so mad.

Alison Monahan: If you don't show, yeah. If you don't show up the day that a legal writing assignment is due, they know why you're not there. They're not gonna be happy about it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I've even heard of professors doing things like basically revealing an exam question that day or something just to make sure that the people who did not show up are penalized.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. They get really, really frustrated. I think with the class prep, it's really along the lines of what we were just talking about with the legal writing assignments, that you have to cap the amount of time that you can spend on it. Because again, you could spend excessive amounts of time on class prep because you can read the case, you can do the brief, you could read the supplement, you could read the canned brief. Down the rabbit hole you go. That is too much time to be spent preparing for class.

Alison Monahan: Or rereading cases.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: My favorite.

Lee Burgess: Our rule of thumb is what, like an hour of reading per hour of class? If you mark that out in your calendar, that'll kind of give you a parameter of where to start with your class prep. If you're finding that you're doing twice as much class prep



as that or more, I think you need to really evaluate how you're spending that time and if it is giving you the return on the investment that you're doing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. People get really paranoid about, what if I get called on? It's like, well if you get called on, and you've read the case, and you make it a good faith effort to answer the questions, that's sufficient.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Nobody's gonna remember. No one.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they're not gonna remember. Your professor's not gonna yell at you.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And if they do, well you know what? It doesn't really matter because what matters is your grade on the exam.

Lee Burgess: Right. I think that's what you have to remember, is that preparing for class somewhat helps you prepare for exams because it does help you understand the material, but it somewhat doesn't because you're typically not tested on what happens in class that you're preparing for class. I think you're more tested on what the professor talks about in class, so that's why you should not skip class. Even if you haven't done the reading. Go to class. Take notes because that's what's gonna be tested on.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think a key point here is if you bother going to class, it behooves you to pay attention.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Sometimes at the end of the semester, you might be sitting in class but actually you're working on some other assignment or something like that. Okay you're physically there, but you're not getting anything out of it. Even if it's difficult, I think it makes sense to really try to focus on what can I take away from here? Because often times, I find that the things that show up at the end of the semester are actually disproportionately likely to show up on the exam.

Lee Burgess: So true.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Some classes, even the case books are set up that way. Torts is one that always comes to mind. That product liability always seems to be the last thing that's taught in Torts class, and it is the most complicated Tort law in my opinion, and along with things like defamation and ... wait. Is defamation in Tort law? No, that's ...



- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Lee Burgess: Yes it is.
- Alison Monahan: Defamation's in Tort.
- Lee Burgess: That is. See. Then I was gonna go on to Con Law and I was like, "That's not in Con Law." And then-
- Alison Monahan: Well, it shows up there too.
- Lee Burgess: I know, but then I was like, "Wait, no that's the first amendment." These rules that are not so common, like pretty much everybody can understand negligence, but these are much more complicated rules about how you set up these Torts. They're almost always discussed in the final couple weeks of class. Often times the professors are speeding through them as well because they might be behind in their syllabus.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and what you have to realize is the stuff they're trying to pack in is the stuff they wanna test you on.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: Literally.
- Lee Burgess: Con Law, the first amendment is always the last thing, it seems, that is taught in a Con Law class, and it's almost always tested because first amendment law is also very convoluted and difficult to conceptualize. It's not very linear. The case lies a little all over the place. If you don't spend some time learning all of those different tests like the lemon test, and there are all these different tests ... that you can be in really trouble, and they almost always test on the first amendment.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember my contracts class, literally I think half the exam was on something we went over the last day. It was the most complicated thing we had covered.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, it's crazy.
- Alison Monahan: You need to go and pay attention to what's being covered, but you don't necessarily need to spend 18 million years reading your cases.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly. Now, what about this other thing that seems to be on everyone's mind, the job hunt?



Alison Monahan: Yeah, well unfortunately this is also the time in the semester when you're probably getting emails from career services about how you can come in and talk to them about your resume. You may be getting notices about when you're allowed to apply for jobs or for funding. Some of these things are really important because if you wanna do public interest work for example, and your school has deadlines about funding, you need to be sure that you meet those deadlines. But it can also become one of those things that people just get really obsessed about. Let's face it, the odds of you finding a 1L firm job are pretty low, so maybe that shouldn't take 12 hours of a week that you could be doing something else. If you wanna do a resume drop or send out resumes on December 1st when you're allowed to, sure. Put your resume together, run a couple of [NALP](#) database searches, do a mail merge, send it out.

But you can't just spin your wheels and spend weeks and weeks on this when frankly the odds of you finding a job that way are pretty low.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that makes a lot of sense. The other thing to consider is, often times it depends on which school you're at, whether or not there's a likelihood that you're gonna get hired out for that 1L year, and just be realistic. If you want a job that's more of an internship that's gonna be unpaid, often times a lot of those don't even meet with you until the spring. Again, it depends on the school, it depends on the opportunities you're looking for. If you think your job opportunities are going to be available in the spring, don't just make up work for yourself in the winter.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. The vast, vast majority of 1Ls interview and apply for their jobs in the spring. There will be public interest fairs. If there's on-campus interviewing for 1Ls, which is frankly pretty rare but does happen, that's gonna be in the spring. This is largely something that you can do over winter break unless there's some specific reason that you need to do it sooner, in which case, do it, get it done, but don't obsess over it.

Lee Burgess: Wouldn't you say Alison, that if you are scrambling to get this done, this is a time when you should reach out and get people to help you to make sure that your resume is clean and doesn't have typos?

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.

Lee Burgess: Cover letter's clean. We get job resumes sent to us. We got one recently that had track changes turned on, which was a new one for me.

Alison Monahan: Oops.

Lee Burgess: That doesn't look particularly professional. If you're emailing something and you haven't turned it into a PDF, that's a risk.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, send your resumes in PDF. Make sure it doesn't have typos.
- Lee Burgess: Right. But I think it's just important that you need to give it a little time, and if you don't have the time to double check everything, then go to your network and make sure that someone else is helping you do that.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, or wait until you do have time, after you've taken your exams because it looks a lot worse to send in a really terrible resume than it does to send in a resume two weeks later.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah, agreed. All right, I would say priority number four for most people should be the job hunt, if not local-
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's just not super relevant to most people. There's very little going on that is not something that you can do in the spring or over winter break.
- Lee Burgess: Okay, so now we have our four priorities for our law school work. We had that list of to-dos that I was talking about earlier in the podcast. So, if this was my to-do list and I was I trying to figure out how I as gonna get all of this work done, the first thing I'm going to do is look at my to-dos and try and decide what relates to priority number one. So, Alison, what do you think are the tasks that directly related to priority number one, which was getting ready for exams?
- Alison Monahan: Right, so here this is all part of our game plan. You've got to look at things like making your outlines or other study aids, whether that's a flow chart or whatever that it is. That is going to take an enormous amount of time. You need to think about how you're gonna get that done.
- Just taking somebody else's outline and pretending you made it is probably not really that useful. As you block that out, you've gotta think about too, you've gotta kind of track, "Okay, am I making enough progress?" Because what we hear a lot is people have an amazing outline for 20% of the course that took them 80% of the time to make.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Then they're totally underwater on the rest of it. You need to think about outlining really as this iterative process where you get the basics down then you go back and fill stuff in. Preparing for exams, you need to do your outlining, study aids, things like study-group meetings, if you find them productive. Practice writing assignments, that is a thing that definitely gets swept under the rug. Things like going to office hours. Will your professor look at your practice exam. Or can you get feedback in some other way from a tutor or from academic support, that kind of thing.



These are the things that go on your calendar. You might even need to break them down more. Just saying outlining on your calendar is not really a to-do list. It needs to be like, "Outlining Negligence in Torts."

Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah, that's true. You really need to get kind of into those granular details about what classes are you taking, how far are you in these outlines. Set goals because you should be counting the weeks that you have until exams-

Alison Monahan: The days.

Lee Burgess: And figuring out the-

Alison Monahan: Really.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And figuring out the amount of work that needs to be done before that, and then figure out how you're gonna get that work done starting now. That's how you have to do this. If you're taking three doctrinal classes and you haven't started your outlines in all of them, then you need to say, "Okay, well how am I going to break this up?" To do so many hours of outlining everyday starting with this class or am I rotating through classes? Whatever needs to be done, but you need to be realistic about getting that work done.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And realistic about the depth you can go into. It's the same thing as preparing for class. Yeah, you could spend 14 weeks just doing an outline for one class but you don't have that much time.

Lee Burgess: Right. Right.

Alison Monahan: You've got to be smart about how you're spending your time and making sure that you're doing things that are actually gonna help.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The reality is that these types of tasks, these deep work tasks, you just can't ignore them. They are the tasks that are gonna help you reach this exam goal. I think a lot of times students cut these types of tasks to read for class or do something else that is a lower priority, like work on a resume. That is a poor choice.

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Lee Burgess: As is outlining in the middle of the night, unless you're a night owl like Alison is, because that's the only time you have. If you are rum dumb because you are exhausted, it's not even worth it because you're not retaining information. This is the really important stuff even though it doesn't feel as urgent because you might say, "Oh, well I have a month 'til exams." But since your entire semester is evaluated on that exam you need to focus on it.



- Alison Monahan: Right, and you don't really have that much time.
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Let's face it.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Time goes by super fast.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Exactly. All right, well so that's some of the things you might wanna do for your exam priority. Let's talk about graded assignments. Okay great, so we have this graded assignment, say it's a legal writing assignment or something you have to turn in for a class. You've got to actually block out the time in the week to do it and be realistic about the time that you need. We've talked about this. You can't give it the entire week but you need to give it the time necessary.
- If you have ungraded assignments or pass/fail you want to do your best on them but you can't spend all your time on them.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Here again, you can't just necessarily put "Do legal writing assignment" and expect that to work really well. You need to break down what tasks am I gonna do? Am I doing research? Am I doing my citations? Am I writing? Am I editing? You need to have a clear plan or you're just going to kind of spin your wheels and not really end up getting this done.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly. Again, these are priorities but you've got to find space for them and balance them against the other priorities. So don't say, "I can't outline this week because I have a legal writing assignment." That's a poor choice.
- Alison Monahan: That is definitely a poor choice.
- Lee Burgess: You have to find time to do both of them.
- Alison Monahan: Yes.
- Lee Burgess: All right. What about class prep, our priority number three?
- Alison Monahan: Well again, you gotta block this out but be realistic about the amount of time you can spend on it and recognize that might be less time than in an ideal world that you would spend.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.



- Alison Monahan: Ideally you wanna read the cases and be ready to talk about them but maybe you don't do much beyond that at this point.
- Lee Burgess: If you're thinking, "Oh my gosh, are they telling me to set up a Google Calendar where I actually set up a three-hour block of time to prepare for class?" Yes, we are actually.
- Alison Monahan: Yes. Yes.
- Lee Burgess: That's exactly what we're suggesting.
- Alison Monahan: We definitely think you need to have already been doing that.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. It could be color-coded. It could be pretty. It can have happy colors on it. Outlining can be whatever color is happy for you. But it needs to have those blocks of time. If you are feeling like you don't have enough time to do all of this stuff then that means that that calendar is much more important, or tracking your activities is much more important because you actually do have the time. You just have to be smart about how you're using it.
- Alison Monahan: Well, and you have to hold yourself accountable.
- Lee Burgess: True.
- Alison Monahan: You have to really be reasonable or realistic and say, "Well, okay, I've mapped out my schedule and then I decided that instead of doing X I was going to do Y."
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: You have to really look at that and get real and say, "Was that a good choice?"
- Lee Burgess: Yep.
- Alison Monahan: Maybe not. It's not to blame yourself or say that you're a terrible person. It's just to be really realistic about how you're actually spending your time because that's what's going to determine your success or failure when you sit down for those exams.
- Lee Burgess: Yep. All right, so what about the job hunt? Making time to work on your resume and cover letters, only again, if you have to apply for jobs in the winter. If not, save these tasks for winter break.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you can make this almost like a break that you take it to a coffee shop and you spend an hour going over your resume and then you send it off to



someone who might be able to help you with it. This doesn't have to be like a massively time-consuming project, even if for some reason you need to do it.

- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Things on our initial to-do list that didn't make the cut on our priorities are things like attending a lunchtime lecture, so for one of your clubs at school, or attending bar nights. We get it, you want to spend time socializing and getting drunk. It happens. We've all had good times at these types of activities. But that's not likely gonna help you reach your goals. I think it can be hard towards the end of the semester to give up some of the social activities. I don't think you need to go like in a hole and not come out. I think that's kind of a dangerous place to be 'cause we're gonna move on to life tasks and self-care here in a minute. But you also have to make sure that your extra-curricular activities outside of law school are not taking you away from being productive. I think things like bar nights and sometimes school-related social activities can not give you a break from law school that you need.
- Alison Monahan: Right. Sometimes people are using this really almost like self-medicating. Like, "Oh, I'm so anxious and stressed out about everything that I have to do so I'll just go to the bar review night, and get blackout drunk, and then that gives me an excuse not to work the next day."
- Lee Burgess: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Look, it happens. We've all been there. But you need again to kind of get real about this and say, "Okay, maybe there are other things that I can do," that we'll talk about in a minute, to relieve the stress and anxiety in ways that are less damaging and are not gonna be in a cycle that just makes me end up more stressed out.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: And feeling like crap because you're hungover.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Once we've kind of prioritized all of our school tasks then you've got to prioritize all of your life tasks as well because you do have to keep your world up and running. I think most of us frequently, myself included, have to check your priorities around your life tasks too. It's really easy to just ... lose sight of the big picture.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Lee Burgess: I think, and I think Alison you're gonna agree with me on this, that always your own health has to be priority number one.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. It might seem selfish to say, "Well, there are all these other things," or, "My parents really want me to do well." It's like well, okay, you're not gonna be able to do well objectively speaking in law school if you're sick, if you're hurt, if you're an emotional wreck, if you're not sleeping, if you're not [eating](#). You've got to be healthy in order to do any of these other things. That means you need to carve out time to do things like exercise, take a walk, go to therapy, whatever it is that you need to do to stay in a relatively healthy place is absolutely worth doing.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. This was the point ... At the beginning of this podcast we were talking about the observations of one of our tutors, this idea of prioritizing the urgent over the important, which we've been talking about especially with the law school tasks. This is where the acknowledgement of that self-care is incredibly important because if you are not healthy and not able to focus or on the verge of a nervous breakdown you're not gonna be able to perform your best.
- Alison Monahan: No, absolutely. Something like going to the gym or going to yoga, rather than seeing it as, "Oh my gosh, that's an hour I could be studying," you can look at it as, "Oh, this is an hour I'm taking that's going to make me a better studier later."
- Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah. You're really investing in yourself. Super hard to do. Super hard to do.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Maybe you can get creative too. I remember during exams I used to take my outlines to the gym. I would get on the elliptical and I would flip through them. Maybe it wasn't the most productive study time. Maybe I should have been giving my brain a break. But at the same time, I did them both.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: It was better than not doing either one of them.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think you have to get creative to fit this stuff in. If going to the gym takes a long time because you have to drive or park or it's too busy, see if you can go talk a walk outside, or go for a jog, or find a yoga class that's closer to home. I also have friends who've really gotten into doing workouts that you can do online, that are designed to be done at home. A lot of my mom friends have started doing stuff like that because you can just do a 30-minute workout and you never leave your house. That might be easier to squeeze in.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and people who go yoga sessions online so you feel kind of like you went to a class. You're not just like, "Oh, I'm doing sun salutations in my living room."
- Lee Burgess: Right, exactly.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, you don't necessarily have to make this a huge investment of time and energy. Again, maybe in an ideal world you would go to your favorite class at the gym and you would park and you'd have a smoothie afterwards. You might say, "You know what? I don't have time for that. So I'm gonna cut it down. I'm gonna do a short workout. I'm gonna take a quick walk and then I'm gonna get back to whatever I need to do."

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: And that's okay.

Lee Burgess: Yep. You can go spend as much time at the gym as you want over the break. That's what breaks are good for.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: Also, with the power of the internet you don't necessarily need to grocery shop for yourself anymore which is kind of amazing. As long as it isn't cost-prohibitive there are services in most metropolitan areas like Instacart. Amazon, now that they own Whole Foods, has a lot of different delivery options. I know Thrive Market, a lot of my friends use that to buy groceries in kind of bulk and have them shipped, especially if you're into organic, granola-y things like Alison and I are.

Food is one of those things that I think a lot of people ignore because you get busy, you just start eating take out from down the street or pizza or if you hang out at the law school all the time it's like the free food at every law school function is so crummy.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, yeah.

Lee Burgess: Eating good food helps you stay healthy and not get sick. Getting sick is-

Alison Monahan: Also you can say, "Oh, well it's too expensive for me to get grocery delivery because they charge me a delivery fee," but how much is it costing you to go out when you don't have time to cook?

Lee Burgess: Is that an outlet?

Alison Monahan: These are kind of trade-offs.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. In fact I just, speaking of immune boosting, I made my own elderberry syrup today.

Alison Monahan: Wow.



- Lee Burgess: I know. Which was surprisingly easy because they come, the elderberries are berry a lot of people think is immune boosting. It comes in these tiny little bottles that you get at Whole Foods that are incredibly expensive, in my opinion, for what it is. You go through them in like a week if you have a household with more than one person taking it. I'm like, "There's got to be a better way," and there was on the internet, teaching me how to make elderberry syrup. It was quite easy.
- Alison Monahan: I'll just note, Lee has a newborn.
- Lee Burgess: I do.
- Alison Monahan: The fact that she can find time to make elderberry syrup off the internet suggests that you can probably find time to occasionally cook yourself a meal.
- Lee Burgess: That's true. Lucky for me, my four year old thought the elderberry syrup making activity was fun so we could kind of do it together, but it is true, you too can find time to make your own elderberry syrup. It didn't take that long.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. So if you're prioritizing your health, things to do on your to-do list would be like cooking, shopping, exercise, sleep. Sleep is so critical. I had a situation first semester during exams where I was studying all day long and then I was just too keyed up to sleep. Even though I had diligently blocked out eight hours, and I had put it in my schedule, and I was like, "Alright, I'm going to sleep," I wasn't sleeping. I was literally laying awake for three to four hours every night spinning my wheels over the details of direct liability. This is terrible. It literally made me crazy.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture. If you know that this is something you've struggled with in the past, now is the time to figure out what you're gonna do. Are you gonna look at like melatonin or something over the counter? Are you gonna talk to someone about getting some sleep aids? Are you gonna work on your sleep hygiene? Whatever it is, now is the time to be thinking about that because when you're in the middle of exams I mean I couldn't make a doctor's appointment. What was I gonna do? I was studying all the time.
- Lee Burgess: Right. Yeah, yeah. As someone who is living the sleep deprivation of new baby life, I can tell you it does really warped things to your short-term memory.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, you just can't retain information. This is one of those where if you're choosing to study all night before an exam versus sleep, that is probably objectively and scientifically speaking, a bad choice.



Lee Burgess: Yeah. Absolutely. Another thing I think that relates to self-care that I think is a priority that sometimes folks do ignore is community. Studies have really come out to show that people are happier, more productive when they have love, support, and connection to people in their lives and in their community.

Alison Monahan: Which is probably not what you're getting during exam time in law school.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: Unless you seek this out.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Seeking this out will likely maybe looking to your community outside of law school. So talking on the phone with friends, seeing family for dinner, spending time with your significant other, spending time with your pets. I recently read an article about how pets help you live longer and they can be really good for your mood and your ability to relax and things like that. If your pets make you happy then like chill out with your dog.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. This is probably not a time to go get a pet.

Lee Burgess: No, I wouldn't go get a pet but if you have a pet.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, if you have one, feel free to pet them.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. No, one thing I remember doing before my very first exam is I made a friend of mine who lived in New York, who was a very old friend of mine, knew me really well, I was basically like, "I need you to go to dinner with me the night before this exam because I want to stop studying in the afternoon so that I can go to sleep and get up and take the exam." So he came up and we talked about nothing related to law school and had a fun time. Then I went home and tried to go to sleep.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's true. I have a very dear friend in San Francisco who I was friends with during law school who's not a lawyer. She and I would try and go do like self-care type activities together while also being able to chat and catch up. In the springtime especially in San Francisco it can get very, very foggy, very oppressively foggy and dark. I was always like, "We have to drive out of the city and go hiking."

Alison Monahan: Oh, nice.

Lee Burgess: That's what we would do like on a Saturday morning. She's like, "What can I do to help?" I'm like, "You can pick me up and you can drive me to Marin, and show



me some sunshine, and walk with me for a few hours." Then I could come back and focus again. Even going jogging with friends or doing something where you can even do some of these other self-care activities while still making those interpersonal connections, I do think it's very powerful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You could even do like a walking meeting with your study group if you want to talk about a certain hypo. Get out, get some fresh air, get some exercise, get a different perspective. You can be creative. You don't have to just be locked in the library like miserable all the time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. It's true.

Alison Monahan: There's no value in misery.

Lee Burgess: No. From our to-do list earlier in the podcast, things that we would place in this category are things like calling home to talk to family, of course if family is good to talk to for your mental health. If it's not then you have to decide if you want to put limits on that connection. And going out with friends. Again, friends who are not just gonna sit there and spin you into anxiety. These are friends who it's a positive dynamic to spend time with them.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think it's absolutely fair even for law school friends to just say, "Look, let's go have lunch and let's not talk about anything related to class."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Totally. You might even learn something about them you didn't know.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember of a friend of mine. I was like, "Wow." I went to a party with like my boyfriend's friends and I realized how boring I've gotten. I have nothing to say that doesn't relate to like some case I'm working on. Like I used to be an interesting person three months ago.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Parenthood's like that. I know. It's like people will be like, "What have you been up to?" I'm like, "Nothing. I have a new baby. I just like ... I'm at home." I was telling you, I was excited to write podcast scripts last week. I was like, "Look at me, I'm working. I'm using my brain."

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah so then there's kind of all this other stuff that you could be doing that maybe you want to put off for a while, so shopping for non-essential type of items. I mean if that's relaxing to you I guess go for it every now and then. Things like obsessively cleaning your apartment. My apartment was never as clean as when it was exam time.



- Lee Burgess: Yeah I know, right?
- Alison Monahan: Watching tons of TV, even listening to podcasts. These are all things that you can do if you've got time and if it's relaxing to you but if you're really running out of time you've got to decide whether these things that should be on your priority list right now. Like if they're not urgent, they're not getting you to your goals, do you really have to catch the latest episode of your five favorite podcasts or could you just binge listen to those over the winter break when you have nothing else to do?
- Lee Burgess: Right, or when you're driving home or doing whatever.
- Alison Monahan: Or on a flight.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: You'll have time for these things. You'll be able to catch up on your Netflix viewing in a few weeks.
- Lee Burgess: True. It's true. You might find that every week or every day you have to kind of adjust your to-do list and rank things by your priorities, but I think having these parameters of what's the most important for you as far as your law school work and your life tasks allows you to make the decisions a lot more efficiently. It makes things a lot cleaner. That way, you can do your to-do list and color code it or rank things so you know what's in and what's out. It allows you to cut things that you don't have time to do because they're not as important.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think it can be really hard as a type A person, which let's face it, most law students are, to think about leaving tasks on the table.
- Lee Burgess: Oh yeah.
- Alison Monahan: But you've got to be realistic. There are only so many hours in the day. You've only got a set number of hours before your exam starts. You've got to really be thinking about what is gonna get me the most bang for my buck. Although, I hate to say it, you might occasionally have to go to class without having finished the reading and life will still go on.
- Lee Burgess: It's true. I know I had to go to a few classes without finishing the reading.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean it's not pleasant. You're probably going to be paranoid. You'll think, "Oh my gosh, I hope I don't get called on," but you'll probably survive.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. If you do get called on-



- Alison Monahan: As long as you get an A on your exam.
- Lee Burgess: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: It's worth it.
- Lee Burgess: If you do get called on and you are worried that you made yourself look bad, no one will remember. It's okay.
- Alison Monahan: Well and it like literally doesn't matter to your grade.
- Lee Burgess: Yeah. All right. Well with that, we're out of time because you've got to go do your to-do list.
- Alison Monahan: Speaking of time.
- Lee Burgess: Speaking 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. 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.

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- [Save Time by Book Briefing Your Cases](#)
- [Podcast Episode 12: Resume and Cover Letter Basics](#)
- [Podcast Episode 167: Do You Have to Join a Study Group in Law School?](#)
- [Six Ways to Make Time to Exercise in Law School](#)
- [HuffPost: Sacrificing Sleep for Study Time Doesn't Make the Grade](#)
- [Parenting in Law School: Surviving Your 1L Year While Raising a Family](#)
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