



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to The Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to be talking with guest Carla Luna, a 2L at Harvard. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan, that's me, and typically I'm with Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be.

Together, we're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career related website [CareerDicta](#). I also run [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the [contact form](#) on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we would love to hear from you. With that, let's get started.

Welcome back to The Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to be talking with guest Carla Luna, a 2L at Harvard. So welcome, Carla.

Carla Luna: Thank you for having me.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Before we jump in, can you just give our listeners a sense of your background and your own path to law school, so they have some context?

Carla Luna: Sure. So, I started here at Harvard in 2018. I took two years in between undergrad and law school. I went to Babson College – it's a small business school here in Massachusetts. And my inspiration for going to law school was actually to be better in the business field. I was doing consulting before I came to Harvard, and I really thought that having a grasp of the law would help me to better advise business clients. But since then my interests have changed and continue to change. I am the first in my family to go to law school. I did work in between the time I graduated from college and started law school, and I took one year to just apply to school.

Alison Monahan: Wow, alright. Well, we'll dig into that a little bit later. Tell us a little bit about the type of activities you're involved in now at Harvard, and how your interests have shifted over time.

Carla Luna: Sure. So, as I mentioned, I'm interested in business. I'm on the Harvard Business Law Review. My biggest involvement is the Harvard Law Entrepreneurship Project, HLEP, here at school. We work with entrepreneurs from the Harvard and MIT community, helping them answer their legal questions, usually around formation. For example, my last project was helping an app developer create a terms of service. And that's really a great experience because, as you know, first year classes tend to be more litigation-heavy than actually doing client-facing work and learning about how to advise. So, that's been a great experience. I'm also involved in Alianza, which is the Latinx group here at school, and the Black Law Students Association.



Alison Monahan: Nice, yeah, the entrepreneurship project, hard to say, does sound really interesting. And I think that is a great point; it can be really frustrating sometimes. The schools that I was at also had a lot of people who were interested in going into corporate stuff, and I feel like they didn't have as many options and the classes just weren't geared toward them. So that's really great that you've managed to find an outside way to get that type of experience that you're looking for.

Carla Luna: Yeah, definitely.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, I'm interested in your summer jobs after your 1L, because a lot of our listeners are probably either hunting for jobs now or they're thinking about it. I noticed that you spent part of your summer working in Chicago, so I was curious about that. Did you face challenges when you were interviewing for that job in a different city? And once you had it, was it logistically challenging, finding housing and all that? I think sometimes this can be really overwhelming. So tell me a little bit about that, if you would.

Carla Luna: I'm originally from New York, and the two cities that I applied to for a summer job were New York and Chicago. I felt comfortable applying to Chicago because I worked there for a year after undergrad, so it wasn't completely foreign to me. I worked at a firm, I worked at DLA Piper. And the firm was actually really accommodating when it came to interviewing. They arranged a Skype interview in their Boston office, so I just went into their Boston office. It was a few interviews with different levels, some partners, some associates.

Alison Monahan: Oh, wow. So you did the whole call-back process basically on video?

Carla Luna: On video, yeah.

Alison Monahan: Interesting.

Carla Luna: And as for finding housing, I actually did what most people do, I went through Facebook and... Well, at first I tried Craigslist but that was a little bit sketchy, so I went through Facebook and I found housing through a college student group online. It was actually pretty affordable, especially compared to New York, which worked out. I ended up finding it pretty last minute. I started May 20th at the firm, which was the Monday right after my last final, which was May 17th. So, a very quick turnaround. And I found housing in mid-April.

Alison Monahan: That sounds a little stressful.

Carla Luna: A little bit.



Alison Monahan: Yeah. What was that job like? What did you do? What did you learn from it? Were you able to explore different options, or were you in one area? What was that like?

Carla Luna: So, I was an LCLD scholar, and for those who don't know what that is, it's the [Leadership Council on Legal Diversity](#). And a lot of firms participate in the program. It's a way to enhance diversity in the legal profession; they usually hire one or two scholars per summer. And it's a really cool network because you go for a summit in early July and you get to meet all the other LCLD scholars. This year it was in Atlanta, and they just teach you tips for success and how to navigate your first summer at the firm. You also get connected to alumni who've done the program previously, which was really helpful. I was actually the only 1L at my summer job, which was interesting and also challenging, because I felt like I was being held to the standard of a 2L, coming out of my first year where I'd only done two memos, my open and close memo.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I had a similar experience, because I worked at a firm as a 1L. I showed up on the first week and they asked me to go research something and I kind of looked to them like, "You realize I've only had one year of law school?" They were like, "Yeah, well, get to work. Go for it."

Carla Luna: Yeah, But the program was really structured. They wanted us to complete a certain number of memos – for us it was six, which was good and bad for me in a way, because I'd expressed to them that my interest was more in corporate, but they really wanted us to get that writing experience. And a lot of the corporate work doesn't lend itself to more extended assignments so I ended up doing a lot of real estate and litigation related matters. But what was cool about the job is that each summer associate was assigned a reader who would... Every time we submitted a memo, we would go through it with our reader and they'd give us feedback. So, it wasn't like we were blindsided at the final evaluation or the mid-summer evaluation. We were getting continuous feedback throughout.

Alison Monahan: That's really great, because that is not necessarily super common in a lot of law firms. This sounds like a really interesting program. If people want to learn more about it, where can they go look for that, do you think?

Carla Luna: So again, the program is called Leadership Council on Legal Diversity, and you can find out more on [LCLDnet.org](#).

Alison Monahan: Nice. Alright, cool. And then I noticed you also worked for the SEC starting in August. What's that position like? Or how did you find that, and what are you doing there?

Carla Luna: I'm actually still there right now. It's an independent clinical through Harvard. Initially I got the position for my summer job. I interviewed with the SEC in



Washington DC, and then also in Boston, and I got both positions but I really decided that I wanted to have firm experience my first summer. So, something that I would advise listeners is to really maintain relationships, because I reached out to the people who conducted my interview and I told them, "I'm still really interested in this opportunity and I'd love to come back in the fall." And they were able to make it happen. I spoke to my school about it, they said, "If you find a professor who's willing to supervise you, you can set up an independent clinical." And that's what I'm doing, I've been at the SEC in Boston since August, and I'll be there through end of November. It's the Division of Enforcement. So, even though I'm not particularly interested in litigation, I'm interested in eventually doing potentially capital markets work. So, it's been really interesting for me to learn about the security clause, especially since I haven't taken a securities class yet.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I was wondering when I looked at your resume. I was like, "It's interesting that she started that job in August." So now it makes a lot more sense. I was like, "This is a split summer, you're still doing it." I was kind of confused. But I love that you were able to kind of parlay a different opportunity into something that you were able to make work, even though you ended up taking a totally different and probably a more highly paid job, which congratulations! Yeah, if you can get the first year summer firm job, that's always a good one to have in your back pocket. I enjoyed it and it does pay quite well. Alright, well, let's shift gears a little bit because I want to talk to you about your 1L year. How was the adjustment to law school?

Carla Luna: It was interesting. I think the biggest difference for me was the fact that we only have one assessment at the end of the term. Well, in your first year especially. In your second year, there might be papers and some other opportunities for feedback, but the fact that you don't really know how you're doing in a class until you have that final exam, that was a big change for me. And I think that can be intimidating for a lot of 1Ls.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's intimidating for almost everyone. How did you handle that? What resources, if you encountered some road blocks along the way, were you using?

Carla Luna: So, Harvard has this program – it's called Board of Student Advisors, BSAs, and they work together with the Legal Research and Writing program for the 1Ls. And each class usually has about two or three BSAs and each student is assigned to a BSA. And my BSA was super helpful for me. I know that Legal Research and Writing is the class with the least credits, but it's probably the most intensive class of 1L. For me, having that extra support was really helpful and I felt like I could go to my BSA about anything, like summer jobs, course selection. This was like an all-around mentor for me. I know not every school has a program like this, but if you can find that mentor... And sometimes you can find a mentor...



For me I also found mentors through Alianza and through the Black Law Students Association as well. I think tapping into those resources, looking at... Sometimes you have friends who will give you outlines from previous semesters or share their notes. That was also helpful for me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember having a mentor through the Women's Law Society. That was nice, because I had come from California, and they tried to pair us up with people who were similar and so I ended up being really good friends with this person. In fact, we're still friends now. But yeah, I think having that guidance is so, so important, whether it's social, or academic, or jobs. You need someone that you can go to. And how about professors? Did you find it hard or easy to build relationships with your professors?

Carla Luna: So, we had a section leader. He was also our CivPro professor, and we had meetings. I think once a month we had a meeting with our section, and that was one way to get close to our section leader. But as for my other professors, sometimes I would go to their office hours and talk to them about the class. A lot of my professors have super interesting background. Some of them still practice outside of teaching. And I would just go and talk to them about what they do. I found that to be really valuable, not just talking about the class but finding out who are these people who are teaching me.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think some of those people think like, "Oh, professors are so scary and they'd never want to talk to me. I'm just like a law student, whatever." But no, they're people, they have interests, they're always curious about what their students are doing. If you express a real interest in their work, I think most people are pretty happy to talk about that. Well, we talked a bit before we got on this podcast about how neither one of us actually had a formal law school study group, which is one of those things I think sometimes people think there's no way you can survive law school without. But what did you do instead? And did you think it was helpful?

Carla Luna: Yeah, I was actually worried about that. I felt like it was make or break to have a study group. I'd heard so much before going to law school, "If you don't find your study group within the first month of law school..."

Alison Monahan: Hour.

Carla Luna: Yeah. "Everyone buddies up and you're going to be left out." I felt like I was going to be the last person on the dodge ball court or something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like no friends and you're going to fail all your exams.

Carla Luna: But people have different study approaches, like some people do study groups, some people don't. I wasn't big on it. I had one person in my section who was



very much into studying. He actually set up a spreadsheet and he had people sign up to study with him.

Alison Monahan: Wow! That's hard core.

Carla Luna: He would set up time slots throughout the day and he'd say, "Sign up for a slot." I actually went to a few of those with him, but for the most part it was just, I relied really heavily on the supplements, like the [Examples & Explanations](#) books, the E&Es they're called, and just taking previous exams from my own professor, and sometimes looking at exams from other professors as well. But my caution with that is being able to filter, not panicking because you see something you've never seen before. One of my professors told me, "You're taking the professor as much as you're taking the class, so make sure that you're testing for what the professor's testing for."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's absolutely true and is very good advice. So at Harvard, they do a really strict sectioning. You take all of your classes 1L year... Is it every semester with the same people or all year with the same people?

Carla Luna: It was all first year, except for J-term, our winter term. We had some flexibility with that about who we would have our classes with. We were also able to pick an international elective in the spring, and another elective. So, J-term, our winter term, was the first time that I actually had classes with other people. It was actually a nice change to meet different people. I'd met other people but mainly only from my involvement in different clubs and activities at school. So, it was really nice to meet new people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's one of those things that different schools do really differently. And yeah, for me, when I heard that Harvard it was the same the whole year I was like, "Wow, that would be so intense, having the same..." What is it, 80 to 100 people in all of your classes?

Carla Luna: Eighty, yeah. What did they do at your school?

Alison Monahan: Well, at Columbia, at least when I was there, the first semester you were with one group but then you had one of your substantive classes out of three, that was a small group. For me that was Contracts, and then CivPro and Torts were a section. Obviously Legal Writing was different. But then the second semester they totally mixed it up again and it wasn't even really that consistent. My roommate was in one of my classes but not other classes. So it was much more fluid.

Carla Luna: Oh, okay.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think Harvard's the very classic, like, "This is your section. This is your formative crew of people you're doing your first year with."
- Carla Luna: Which is kind of scary because there's no way of telling... I don't even know how they group the sections. And then you don't know if you're going to get along with your section.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I know, and they all seem to have different personalities too. Some of them are the nice section or the less nice section. Yeah, I don't know. That level of intensity of the same 80 people throughout seemed to me like I would probably go crazy. But, you know, whatever. You're at your school, they do what you do, you roll with it. I'm actually curious, how worried are Harvard 1Ls about grades? Because if people don't know this, they grade, if I'm not mistaken, on the pass, high pass, low pass scale, right?
- Carla Luna: Mm-hmm. So, I think it's a little bit misleading for people who don't understand the grade system as much. A lot of people ask me, "So, Harvard doesn't have grades, right?" Well, yes and no. We don't have traditional grades, we don't have the ABCD scale, but we do have pass, high pass, and low pass. There is some differentiation between those, but also it's a little bit nebulous, like, "What's the difference between a pass and a high pass?" Professors have flat-out said sometimes it depends on the time of day when they're grading the exam.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Carla Luna: Like what becomes a pass and what becomes a high pass. So, sometimes it's a matter of chance. But at least in my section, people didn't talk about grades that much, and that's something I really appreciate and informed my decision to go to Harvard. I knew I really didn't want to be at a school where I had to compete to be in the X percent to get a job. And the fact that we don't have traditional GPAs, that really does take a lot of the pressure off. And I think that even having a low pass isn't the end all, be all for your academic career. I think that...
- Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, you're at Harvard. You're probably going to be fine. Yeah. I mean, it's still a grading scale. It's just kind of a more compressed grading scale, and in some ways I think actually probably increases people's angst about it. Because if it's like there's an A minus and a B plus, it's probably basically like a pass or high pass, but you've got more variations. But anyway, again, you're at your school you're at, you can't really do much about it. Do you feel like people are really competing to differentiate themselves in other ways, or are people mostly just kind of playing their own game?
- Carla Luna: I think people have such varied interests. I would say some schools have a reputation for feeding into BigLaw or being more public interest focused.



Whereas at Harvard, I feel like it's pretty varied. There's a good number of people who are interested in public interest, a good number of people who are interested in BigLaw. So, people are doing a lot of different activities at school, outside of school. I haven't really felt the competitive vibe. In my experience, I haven't found it to be too competitive. I find it to be really supportive and people feel comfortable doing their own thing.

Alison Monahan: Cool. Yeah, I think each school has its own personality. And definitely if you're listening to this and thinking about applying, it's worth looking into the perceived personality of different schools. Because Columbia certainly felt very competitive to me in a way that I was not expecting. Let's back up a little bit and talk about your application process. So you mentioned that you spent some time doing this. What was that like and how did you decide where you were going to apply? Considerations around money, taking the money, not taking the money, that kind of thing.

Carla Luna: I did receive a full scholarship at another T14 school. It was really hard, actually, to pass up that amount of money, especially considering the fact that both schools probably would have led me to the same place – getting a job in BigLaw, initially outside of law school. But what I was really thinking about was my experience. Where am I going to be the happiest? Partially because of the grading system, which I mentioned, but also when I visited both schools I felt happier here at Harvard. I don't think that any other school that I applied to has quite the widespread network that Harvard has, which was also part of my reason for coming here. And just also to provide some context. So, when I went to Babson, I applied early decision. I actually never had the opportunity to apply to... I applied early decision as part of a scholarship program called Posse. I didn't have the opportunity to apply to any Ivy League schools, and I didn't know what my chances would be. I always lived with that "what if", and I thought, "This is finally my chance to go to the school that I want to go to, and I'm going to take it."

Alison Monahan: Nice. And let's talk a little bit about this year. So, what do you think is more or less challenging about 2L year compared to 1L year?

Carla Luna: Well, you definitely have more time. Someone was reminding me the other day, we were taking 18 credits our first semester, I'm like, "No way."

Alison Monahan: That's a lot.

Carla Luna: That's a lot. I'm taking 12 right now, to put that in context.

Alison Monahan: Wow. And did you get to basically pick all of your classes this time around?



- Carla Luna: Yes. I think something that is more challenging about 2L is that there's a greater expectation to take leadership roles in your various orgs that you're in. I'm on the Board of the Harvard Law Entrepreneurship Project, and that's actually been really pleasant. But since I'm a board member, I took a step back with my involvement in the groups in other ways. So, last year I was a team lead for the projects in fall semester and spring semester. And this year I've just decided to be a board member. I'm the VP of Communications, and I'm just doing that. And I've been fine with that.
- Alison Monahan: Let me just break in for a second. It sounds like you were very involved with this organization as a 1L. Did you find that challenging to fit in around your fairly heavy course load?
- Carla Luna: Yes, because our deadlines for our Legal Research and Writing class overlapped with our internal deadlines for HELP. So, managing completing a memo for this organization while also being on top of my Legal Research and Writing stuff was challenging. The organization does a pretty good job of trying not to have the deadlines overlap too much, but in the spring semester it definitely was more of an issue.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I know. I always encourage people to do some type of pro bono work their first year to just get some of that hands-on experience and feel more connected to the world, and not just be in that law school bubble. But obviously it can be very challenging to fit it in.
- Carla Luna: On the plus side though, I was notified that I completed all my 50 hours of pro bono.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. Just knock that out early. Yes.
- Carla Luna: I knocked it out before I even finished 2L, so that was the plus side.
- Alison Monahan: No, that's great because some people are struggling to get that done the last semester as a 3L and they're really miserable. But yeah, that is definitely an upside. That's a great point. What are you looking forward to having the chance to do the rest of your time in law school? What's on your agenda?
- Carla Luna: I think another thing that's challenging is that there's less guidance or hand-holding. There's a lot of attention given to the 1Ls, instructing them about how they should choose classes or prepare for different things. Whereas as a 2L, you're expected to know more of that stuff and reach out if you don't understand, and that can be more difficult. It's more on you to maintain your relationships with your professors and your friends. There's not these artificial boundaries created by your section and school-sponsored activities. So it's more on you to stay in contact with your friends.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's definitely... I found that to be true too. It was kind of fun because suddenly I was seeing people I had met at orientation and we were friendly for about a week and then I didn't see them for a year. And then suddenly we'd have a class together and I was like, "Oh, right, we actually should hang out. We liked each other." Definitely a lot more flexibility. Do find your journal work to be particularly time-consuming? I know that's an issue for a lot of 2Ls.

Carla Luna: The journal isn't too time consuming. Well, at least the journal I'm on. The Business Review they have one subset in the fall and one subset for the spring. And something unique about Harvard's journals is that, besides the Harvard Law Review, you don't have to write on to any of the journals, so you participate if you want to. Anyone can participate.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I actually didn't know that. That's pretty great.

Carla Luna: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, because that whole process, when you told me you had two days turnaround between finishing your final and starting work, a lot of... I remember I finished classes and then I had three or four days to do the write-on competition for the Law Review stuff, and then had to start working. That can also just turn into a complete mess. It's not how I'd recommend that people organize their time. What are you looking forward to having the chance to do the rest of your time in law school? What's on your agenda?

Carla Luna: So, I'll be taking a clinic next semester. I know I said I'm doing the independent clinical at the SEC, but I'm doing a transaction clinic next semester. I'll be working with a little bit more entrepreneurship and community development work, working with small businesses from the Jamaica Plain area here in Massachusetts. So, I'm looking forward to that. Also looking forward to just deepening my involvement in the different organizations. I'm pretty involved in HELP, but probably looking forward to taking on more responsibility in Alianza and BLSA here at school.

Alison Monahan: Speaking of those, what has been your experience as a minority woman in law school? Do you think that's been any special challenge for you?

Carla Luna: There aren't too many Latina women in law school, especially not a lot of Dominican women. I think that it's been a little bit challenging as an Afro-Latina woman in particular, because I don't feel like the Latino group at Harvard is completely representative of all Latinos. So I have found my home also in the Black Law Students Association as well. I take a little bit from both and I think that's been great for me.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah.
- Carla Luna: It's also challenging because when I first decided to come to law school, a lot of people would say, "So why law school?" Part of me feels like it was coming from a place of curiosity, but then also it was kind of like, "Why not law school?" Or like, "Are you asking me that question because I'm a Latina woman?"
- Alison Monahan: Like, would you say that to a white guy who told you they were going to law school? I don't know.
- Carla Luna: Exactly. Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I'm sure it's definitely an interesting scene. We're actually almost out time here, but before we wrap up, what would you say were your favorite and least favorite aspects of going to law school, specifically at Harvard? Because I know people are always curious about schools that are not their own.
- Carla Luna: You can pretty much find people here who have done everything, like been professional athletes, artists, done it all. One of my professors was talking about the color gray, and it was a very specific type of gray, and he was like, "We're at Harvard. I'm sure one of you has been an interior designer."
- Alison Monahan: That's true.
- Carla Luna: It's pretty true, yeah. You'll find a little bit of everything here. And I really do like the fact that, contrary to what some people might think, Harvard really does choose people for the whole package. It's not just about their LSAT score. You really find people who are well rounded here.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's actually interesting. A friend of mine from Columbia ended up teaching at Harvard and she was like, "Wow, the students here are really different. They're actually so much more interested, it seems, in the material inherently." Which I thought was quite interesting. Alright, well, unfortunately we are out of time. Anything else you'd like to share at this point?
- Carla Luna: That's all for me. Thank you so much for letting me have this conversation with you.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us, I really appreciate it. Well, with that, we are unfortunately out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of The Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee and Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can



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