



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking with admissions consultant Anna Ivey about the law school landscape in the time of COVID-19. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan, 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. 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 admissions consultant Anna Ivey about the law school landscape in this crazy time of COVID-19. Just for the record, we're recording this in late May, and we do not have a crystal ball, so we don't know what happens later in the summer. Well, welcome, Anna.

Anna Ivey: Hi Alison!

Alison Monahan: It's really exciting to have you here. To get us started, could you give our listeners a quick overview of your background, just so they have some context for who you are and what you know?

Anna Ivey: Sure, of course. So like many of your listeners, I too once was a law school applicant, and went to law school at the University of Chicago and graduated. I was a practicing lawyer for a hot shining nanosecond, and then I went back to my law school and ended up being Dean of Admissions there. And that was an amazing experience. Oh my gosh, it was so educational. And after that, I jumped to Stanford for a little while and worked in development. So I've seen a lot of sausages getting made behind the scenes.

Alison Monahan: Definitely.

Anna Ivey: It's fascinating. But for over a decade now, I've been running a consulting firm, an admissions consulting firm, and we work one-on-one with people applying to law school or applying to college. We do a few Masters programs as well, but primarily it's law school and college. Yeah, so that's my background. I've basically seen law school admissions from every side of the table.

Alison Monahan: Well, I'm super excited to talk to you because it's definitely a pretty crazy time. Just so people know, if they want to learn more about you, where can they go to do that?



- Anna Ivey: Sure. My website is [annaivey.com](http://annaivey.com) – that's A-N-N-A-I-V-E-Y. A lot of people accuse me on discussion boards of having invented my last name. I did not invent my last name. And the proof of that is that there's an E before the Y, so don't forget the E.
- Alison Monahan: And I guess I should have asked you if you're Ana or Anna. So Anna Ivey, sorry.
- Anna Ivey: Either one is completely, completely fine.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, what a wacky situation we've found ourselves in.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah.
- Alison Monahan: I mean, who would have thought when we were all excited about 2020 and the new decade, this is what we would be talking about a few months later? Well, there are two main things I'd like to talk with you about on this particular podcast. One is, thoughts around ideas and thinking around potentially incoming 1Ls. And then also a bigger picture of how you see this pandemic impacting law school admissions next year and going into the future. Sound good?
- Anna Ivey: Definitely.
- Alison Monahan: Alright, well, let's start with incoming 1Ls. This is a mess. There is a ton of uncertainty here. What are your thoughts around this? How likely do you think it is that schools are going to be having in-person law classes come fall?
- Anna Ivey: So, if I had to place a bet, I think it's highly unlikely that school is going to be back on campus in the fall.
- Alison Monahan: And you think across the board, everywhere?
- Anna Ivey: Across the board. I would plan on being online at least for the first semester.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Lee and I had a talk about this a few weeks ago and it's so hard to say what's going to happen. I agree. I think it's really hard to see people going back to campus, although a lot of places say they're going to.
- Anna Ivey: I think they're talking a good game. I saw someone on Twitter, and I can't remember who it was, but I want to give due credit. Someone described it as this is basically a Fyre Festival in the making.
- Alison Monahan: I saw that.
- Anna Ivey: We're like one dribble away from a Fyre Festival, and I think that's exactly right.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. When do you think schools are really going to start committing to not be... At this point, it's great – a lot of places I've seen are saying, "Oh yeah, definitely full steam ahead." But it's already mid-May.
- Anna Ivey: It's mid-May, and frankly, it's completely reckless...
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think it's crazy.
- Anna Ivey: ...to say you're coming back to campus. So maybe I'm wrong; I would love to be wrong. If it were me or my kid, I'd be very nervous about going back on campus this fall. The fact of the matter is that these are a lot of young people who want to have a social experience, right? That's why you want to be on campus. I just can't see very good compliance happening in terms of social distancing. And then aside from all these wonderful students, you've got plenty of older folk, whether they're teaching, they're administrators, they're janitors. I mean, it's a whole ecosystem of people on any campus. I just don't think it's safe for the wider community to bring everyone back, but who knows? Maybe I'm just being unduly pessimistic, but I would be very surprised if people either go back on campus for school this fall, or for the schools that do go back on campus, I'm having trouble seeing that ending well.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was really shocked the other day when NYU said they were going back live.
- Anna Ivey: Oh my gosh, in New York City of all places?
- Alison Monahan: In the middle of Manhattan. I was just like, "What?"
- Anna Ivey: What are they thinking?
- Alison Monahan: And I have seen those dorms. They're not...
- Anna Ivey: No, I know. It's madness. And Notre Dame said it's going to be back on campus, Boston College said it's going to be back on campus. It's madness, so we'll see.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I guess in terms of timing, what are law schools in particular doing? Typically, they've been pretty flexible around deferrals and that kind of things. Have you seen them deferring places for people to send their deposits, timing on that, are they offering refunds? What are they doing to sort of accommodate all this uncertainty?
- Anna Ivey: Yeah. I haven't seen schools push back the deposit deadlines a lot. And so, people have just had to make that leap of faith. And so, what I've been advising applicants is, move forward on the assumption that it's going to be online this



fall. And if that is not acceptable to you, then maybe a deposit is not the right thing to do. If you want to treat the deposit as an insurance payment – you're saving your spot and then you can decide later – that's fine too, of course. But the fact is, nobody has that crystal ball. Of course, we wish we did, right?

Alison Monahan: We could probably make a lot of money.

Anna Ivey: I like to say that I would be playing the currency markets and I'd be George Soros and retired basically, but since I'm not... Yeah, I think people have to make a decision now about where to commit and put down a deposit without some really important data points. And that's just so hard, but nobody can give you that certainty. I think whatever organizations or people who are out there pretending they know, I don't think that's the case. We just don't.

Alison Monahan: Well, and I think one of the big concerns too is housing. People basically got kicked out of their housing if they were in university housing with very little notice. Do people go and find an apartment, or go in university housing that they might get kicked out of suddenly? It's a really hard call.

Anna Ivey: Maybe they get put in a hotel. I'm right there with you.

Alison Monahan: I don't know. Well, what do you think about law school online? How can people think about whether this makes sense in their particular situation, or if they're willing to accept it? It seems like a difficult one.

Anna Ivey: It is. Not least because everyone has this vision of what it's like to be in school and to be a 1L, and it just doesn't match. The reality might very much not match the movie scene in your head, and that's frustrating. I will say this: I think if you are still online come fall, it's probably just for one semester. You're still going to have plenty of other semesters to bond in-person. So I'm not discounting the importance or the upside of being able to do law school in-person, but I just don't think it's going to be forever. I think that will be a temporary situation. Personally, if it were me, I would go full steam ahead because presumably, there's a reason you're getting a law degree, presumably there are problems out there that you want to solve with the benefit of a law degree. And I would say, then get out there sooner with your law degree rather than later. But this is a very subjective thing, and for some people that's just going to be a deal-breaker. They're just not going to want to do it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it's really tough. I agree with you, I think if someone has a very clear idea of, "I want to be a lawyer because I want to do X, Y, and Z" – go for it. If you're one of those people who is more like, "Well, this seems like an interesting educational experience..." I'm not saying you should go anyway, but...



- Anna Ivey: Yeah, quandary whether they should be going at all, but that's another topic.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. We could talk about that on a different podcast. But these people who are sort of like, "Well, you know, it doesn't seem like my worst idea."
- Anna Ivey: "I'm going to go find myself and kill some time, and have a shiny degree at the end of it."
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, because it lets you do anything, right? I think there people may have more of that vision. I think it's super personal. The Socratic method of teaching makes it a) very hard to do online well, I think, and also b) very hard to do in-person.
- Anna Ivey: Let's talk about that. Well, in-person for sure, because the Socratic method... I shouldn't speak for all law schools, but certainly my experience in the way I think it occurs at many law schools – you're basically sitting in what is effectively a big lecture hall, right?
- Alison Monahan: Right, with a hundred plus people.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah. It's like an introductory Chemistry or Economics class. This isn't like a little seminar. So, in some ways, I think those kinds of classes lend themselves the most easily to being streamed, because you're not nine people sitting around a little table and having that really interesting back and forth. If you're mostly listening to a professor talk to the whole class, that's probably not that different than to be watching it on the screen. When they have you on the hot seat doing the Socratic method, that's probably easier too, than a more freewheeling, sort of liberal artsy conversation in a college classroom. So, it's possible that Socratic is actually an easier way to go online than for some of the smaller classes or the seminars, but I could be wrong. I've never done it before.
- Alison Monahan: No, I can see your point. One of the things that's most maddening about the Zoom cocktail party type of thing is when everyone starts trying to talk at once. So, I can definitely see...
- Anna Ivey: But Alison, when you were a 1L, were there situations during the Socratic classes where everyone was trying to talk at once? Usually you were just like, "Please don't call me, please don't call me."
- Alison Monahan: No, no, that's what I'm saying. What I'm thinking is actually...
- Anna Ivey: Okay, so we're violently agreeing then.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I tend to agree with you actually. Basically, you turn to someone and say, "Miss Monahan, please answer this question." And then suddenly everyone's pinning me instead of pinning the professor.



- Anna Ivey: Exactly.
- Alison Monahan: I think there's a fair argument to be made there that it might not be the worst type of Zoom class. Frankly, I sat through a lot of pretty boring in-person classes too, where no one was paying any attention.
- Anna Ivey: When I visit law schools from time to time, I like to go to the back of the classroom, and you see what's on everyone's screen.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, and most people are frankly not paying that much attention anyway.
- Anna Ivey: It's a lot of shoe buying on Zappos and... I mean, it's young stuff.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, now you're being in your Slack group with everyone. At the time I think we did Google chat groups. So, maybe the class part isn't a total wash. Frankly, most of the time you're spending just reading anyway, so you can do that kind of wherever you want. What about the social aspects? How important do you think these are?
- Anna Ivey: Well, certainly they matter, no question. I think people want that social experience. I would say people's social lives are not really in their prime during the first year of law school.
- Alison Monahan: True.
- Anna Ivey: To your earlier point, you just have no free time. You've got so much reading to get through. It's just inhuman levels of reading that are hard to really imagine before you're actually doing it. So, in terms of the social aspect... But that being said, there is something about being part of a tribe. For example, I'm a pretty hardcore introvert, but I like sitting in the library and having other people around me kind of doing the same thing and thinking big thoughts and working really hard. Same reason now – in theory, I have no problem working at home, but I miss my coworking space. Same thing. I like having people around me. I don't need to talk to them all day long, but I like that they're there. There's something about that cranial activity right around me that I find energizing. I would certainly miss that in school, no question, if I were a 1L this fall. But again, I think it's temporary. As far as networking goes, as you know, 1L is a time of pretty serious bonding. Those are relationships you make for life, really. Is something lost if you don't do that the first semester? Yeah, possibly. I don't think this is a costless situation, if it's online. But at the same time, this cohort of people, this generation of people, they're all digital natives. There is no better cohort than this one if you're going to have to live your life online and socialize online and have a social life online. Oh my gosh, they're the best in the world at it, compared to other older generations. They're so good at this. So, I have every



hope and expectation that they're going to find a way to make their own tribes and have a social experience, even if it's all through a screen. What do you think, Alison?

Alison Monahan: Well, I agree with you. Obviously, there are downsides – you can't go for drinks with your new best friends. I think there are ways to replicate a lot of this. And in a way, you're really going through the trenches of this particular type of experience together. We have a post we can link to on [setting up a virtual study group](#). All of these things are possible. I think for me, it's just a lot of those logistics. I was living in San Francisco and I moved to law school in New York, and thinking about doing that right now seems really challenging to me.

Anna Ivey: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I'm not saying I wouldn't have done it, but would have had to think really hard about that. On the other hand, I've heard maybe there could be some upsides. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Anna Ivey: To the virtual?

Alison Monahan: Well, just to the whole situation. I would guess, at least – I'm speculating here, you would definitely know more about this – but I'm guessing schools are having to go to their waitlist more than they would.

Anna Ivey: I think this is a good time to be on a waitlist. There's going to be a big game of musical chairs this summer. I mean, there is every summer, much more so for law schools than for undergrad or for MBA programs, for example. I think that's just going to be turbocharged this summer, because certainly some people will want to defer. They're just not going to want to do this for their first year. So, that just works to the benefit of people on the waitlist. I will say that quite a few law schools, including top ones that shall remain nameless, keep very, very deep waitlists to the point where the entire incoming class would have to say, "No, I'm not coming" or get hit by a meteor to justify... They have waitlists that are greater than the size of the incoming class, which just doesn't make that much sense to me. Especially, these are schools that have very high yields. It's just so over cautious and stringing people along. There are emotions involved, but I think this year, certainly, if you're on a waitlist, hang in there. Anything is possible this summer if you are willing to say "Yes" at some point, even if it's online. If you are open that way, if you are willing to do that, I think that's going to make you an attractive person to call up at the last minute, if they have to.

Alison Monahan: And do you feel like people who are in that scenario of, "I would do anything to go to this school. I'm willing to start online", whatever it is – do you think they should let schools know that now?



- Anna Ivey: Yeah. I've been telling people, if you're writing a letter of continued interest, let them know if you would definitely accept an offer if you've got one. That's good for them to know. That also implies, it's implicit in that you're going to accept no matter what happens, whether it's online or not. But you can take that extra step and make that very clear, that you'd be very happy to start this fall, even if it's online. Absolutely, let them know, because as an admissions officer, when you have to fill a waitlist spot, you have to do so pretty quickly.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Anna Ivey: And human nature being what it is, you don't want to have to call 100 people to find someone who's willing to do that. You want to call your short list of 10 people who you know, based on the communications they've kept up with you, that they're just really, really, really, really likely to accept an offer. So, it just makes your life easier because you already have pre-vetted, or pre-qualified, I should say, to some degree, because not all waitlist applicants are going to make that pre-commitment.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, absolutely.
- Anna Ivey: Maybe that school isn't worth it to them to make that commitment to, but maybe one of their dream schools or a reach school is. So you can be selective about who you make that promise to. But for a school where you're willing to do that – and I think presumptively, that's going to be a reach school where you're like, "I don't care if you send us to the moon, I'm in because I want that. I want to be at your law school, I want to have that degree, I want to have those opportunities." So, I think it's a case-by-case basis.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Do you think there's any possibility of people who are sort of very highly qualified for these schools asking for more financial aid or anything around those lines?
- Anna Ivey: Look, if you're highly qualified for a school, then you're probably going to have your tuition discounted in some way, even in a non-pandemic year, because ultimately that's what merit scholarships are. In the enrollment world, in the higher ed world, they don't even call them "scholarships". They call them "tuition discounts", and that's what that is. So, they're going to reduce the tuition to a point where they think they can close that deal. And they actually have all kinds of data mining and these data scientists and these third-party companies that have this down to a science. It's like Money Bowl. You as the applicant are at a huge disadvantage. There's such an asymmetry of information and of just horsepower and data, because they can really figure out down to the penny what amount they need to offer you to make it attractive for you. But yeah, look, if you have an offer, there's no downside risk in asking for more money. The worst they can do is say "No".





- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Anna Ivey: So, I'm not too worried about any kind of downside risk there. And certainly, if you have competing offers and there's a peer school that is offering you more money, there's absolutely nothing wrong with very politely saying, "Is this something you could reconsider, because this is making my decision very hard?" Now, mind you, a lot of deadlines have already come and gone, so you have lost that leverage.
- Alison Monahan: Leverage, yeah.
- Anna Ivey: If they already have your deposit, right? So, I would not expect to have a lot of negotiating leverage in the waitlist period. And I define the waitlist period as any application decision that is still pending after the deposit deadline. Some schools will tell you you're on a waitlist. Some schools won't tell you at all. You just haven't heard a final decision yet. Some schools have a waitlist, but they call it something else, like a reserve list, like Columbia Law School. Those are all the same thing. All the same thing. If the deposit deadline has passed, you're effectively in that waitlist season, where their priority is to fill spots that open up quickly. Presumably you've already made a deposit somewhere else, and are you willing to forgo that to make the move? That's the scenario they're operating in once that deposit deadline has passed.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember I showed up, it was supposed to be three people living in my apartment, and one of them I'd already picked and we'd asked for a two-person. We showed up and then this third person just never showed up. And we later heard that she had gotten off the waitlist at Harvard and just never told anyone.
- Anna Ivey: And that happens. It's so crazy, but schools will leave the waitlist. They don't consider the application cycle closed until basically the first day of classes. They leave it open during orientation still, because every year there are people who just don't show up for orientation and they haven't told anyone. Nobody knows why they're not there. They're just basically ghosting you.
- Alison Monahan: That's what happened here. We were calling the housing office and they were like, "We haven't heard anything." We literally never heard from this girl. She just never came.
- Anna Ivey: It happens, and that's what I mean. If you're willing to hang in there and just sort of change your plans very, very, very late in the game, it happens.
- Alison Monahan: And then, do you have any sense – this is obviously speculative – of when these schools are going to be making a final decision about whether they're going online or in-person or anything around this?



Anna Ivey: I don't. And I think, as we were talking about earlier, schools are taking such different stances. Like they sound so confident that they're going to be in-person or...

Alison Monahan: Right. You're like, "What?"

Anna Ivey: There are other schools, university systems, where they've already made a decision they're not going to be on campus. And then there's the vast majority in the middle where they're still waffling. And the favorite quote I saw in, I think it was an article in one of the higher ed publications, and it made the rounds on Twitter – basically quoting a university president saying, "Oh yes, we've had a discussion about whether to discuss that."

Alison Monahan: That's so academic.

Anna Ivey: Right, oh my God. But you're dealing with these large somewhat lumbering non-profit bureaucracies.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's crazy.

Anna Ivey: That's just what you're dealing with.

Alison Monahan: Law schools might be a smaller institution inside of these huge organizations too, and it's like, "Well, maybe we can get it done for our 200 students", but then you're on a huge campus, who knows?

Anna Ivey: That's an interesting question. Actually, I would have to think that through a bit and do some asking around because I don't know how much flexibility individual divisions in a university have to do different things.

Alison Monahan: I would imagine none, but yeah.

Anna Ivey: I would imagine none either, because it really would have to be coordinated if this is really sort of a public safety thing, a public health thing.

Alison Monahan: I'm just thinking the Columbia experience – undergraduates, they all live in these dorms on campus, and then the graduate housing is much more dispersed and that kind of thing. So, you could make an argument that, "Okay, we could run the law school and the business school, but not the undergrad." I'm not sure they would ever do that, but I could see an argument.

Anna Ivey: Yeah, no, I see your point. I'm guessing that would have to be sort of centrally coordinated. I don't think that those graduate schools are going to...



- Alison Monahan: I don't think they're going to. I mean, it's all in. They can sink or swim together on this.
- Anna Ivey: I think that's right, yeah.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. What's your bottom line advice for people who are thinking about entering in the fall, before we move on to the more distant future?
- Anna Ivey: I would say, keep an open mind. If you're going to do it, I think you're going to have a great education no matter what, and you're going to love your classmates – not all of them, but most of them, no matter what. You're going to have fabulous professors no matter what. And there are many great experiences that you'll have later by necessity. But law school, especially first year, is such a formative experience intellectually. And that's going to be true no matter how that education gets delivered this fall. So, I'm feeling pretty good still about law school this fall, regardless of where everyone meets up. How about you? What do you think?
- Alison Monahan: Well, I'd say you're a little bit more on the optimistic side of the spectrum than Lee and I are. We did a whole [podcast](#) about this a few weeks ago you can go listen to. I agree with you on a lot of things. I think it's just a crazy situation and I think it's a super personal decision. And I agree with you that a lot of the intellectual delivery, like what I was saying earlier, basically ends up being you sitting in a room by yourself reading. There are probably fun pieces you would miss out on, but I don't know. Were those really that amazing in the end in retrospect? I don't know.
- Anna Ivey: I don't know either. And I will say, too, that this cohort of people, no matter what stage of education they're in, they're going to remember this for the rest of their lives. They're going to be defined by this for the rest of their lives, just the way older generations will remember exactly how they lived through the 9/11 era, and how there was sort of before 9/11 and there was after 9/11. Same thing here. This is going to define an entire generation, and you will all have that in common.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Anna Ivey: Do I think that's a good thing? No, I think it's a very sad premise. But at the same time, you're in your own trenches just by virtue of that, that you share.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. So we'll see how it goes, I guess. Well, let's shift gears now and talk about the people for whom this is not an immediate concern, but they're thinking about applying either this upcoming admission cycle, which is hard to even conceptualize, or maybe even later. What should these people be thinking about?



Anna Ivey:

Yeah. Well, we're already hearing from people who are planning on applying this fall, and they're just moving forward. They have maybe already taken the LSAT-Flex, or they will be taking the LSAT-Flex, and they're getting their ducks in a row. For me, the big question mark is what's going to happen to the deadlines and the different early admission programs. Are they going to be able to stick with their normal deadlines for early decision or early action? I don't know. I think that might still all be up in the air. I think that might have to get sorted out, because it's not clear to me that everyone will be in a position to even be able to apply by, say, November 1 or November 15 if there are serious problems with the online LSAT. It's possible that you weren't even able to take it in time to have a score for an early deadline. There might be those kinds of equity issues that mean that they can't have an early deadline if there were real problems with the online test. Certainly, that's happening on the undergrad testing side. That's a huge mess. So, maybe the LSAT-Flex ends up being a better test than their undergrad equivalents. I have questions about what's going to happen with those early deadlines. Other than that, I don't think the admissions standards are going to change. For better or worse, that might cut in your favor, or it might not. I think most things are actually going to stay the same, as far as the application process and the way the admissions process rolls out. Interviews had already been happening online before the pandemic, so that doesn't change. I think the big hit that you take is that you perhaps won't be able to visit these schools.

Alison Monahan:

Right. I was going to ask about that.

Anna Ivey:

But that's not a big deal. You know what? What I experience with applicants is that they should be visiting schools that they want to apply to, and many of them don't. And then what happens is that deadlines start approaching for deposits, and then they're freaking out because they're like, "What should I pick? I don't know what to pick." Or they'll say, "I had such an easier time when I was picking colleges, and this seems so hard." And I say, "Well, did you go on the sort of iconic college tour as an applicant?" They go, "Yes, of course." I'm like, "Well, did you do that for law school?" "No, I didn't visit any of them." So, of course it's going to feel different.

And so, that causes a lot of angst when the deposit deadlines come around and they actually have to pick a horse, and that creates a huge amount of anxiety because, of course, if you put your deposit down at one school, you have to let the other offers go. Some people play games with that and they put down multiple deposits – that is frowned upon. And at some point in the summer, LSAC actually does send out to the schools what's called an Overlap Report. And those admissions offices will see where people have put down multiple deposits. So at the latest, at some point in the summer, the jig is up and you'll have to pick one school. It comes up, though, all throughout the waitlist season



too because people say they put down their deposit somewhere to guarantee a spot somewhere while they're waiting for the other applications to play themselves out. Oh my gosh, if you get that waitlist call, you have to make a decision very quickly. So, if you don't have a very clear sense in your head what your hierarchy of schools is, it's a mess. And then you're trying to make a really important decision, basically under time pressure and duress. So, I would say whether you can physically visit a school or not, educate yourself as best as you can, preferably at some point in the fall, so that you're not in that pickle when you actually have to make a decision.

Alison Monahan: Right. I feel like for most people a lot of law school is really just like, "I'm going to apply to these rankings, and then go to the higher one." I'm not saying that's the way you should decide, but...

Anna Ivey: Yeah. I have these conversations all day long, and among other problems with the rankings is that once you get outside the truly national schools... There are 200 or so ABA-approved law schools – most of them are not national law schools. They are regional or they are local, but the rankings mush them all together. So, a school in Pittsburg might be ranked higher than a school in Colorado, but that doesn't actually mean anything in the real world because they have a certain reputation within their own markets, and it doesn't really cross over so much outside their geographic orbit. And so, it creates this false sense of relativity.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Anna Ivey: So, I will say once you're outside this small group of national law schools, look at geography first. Look at the region first, and then figure out how the schools stack up against each other. But don't look to the rankings to try to compare a regional school in one place to a regional school in another place, because it's just not apples to apples to look at rankings that way.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. We should totally do another podcast on that because we say exactly the same thing all the time. Maybe it would be a very boring podcast, we would just agree on everything, but we get some wacky questions where you're just like, "Are you seriously not..." Like, "What? You're telling me you want to work in X location, and you've gotten in school in X location, but school Y, which is 3,000 miles away, is like two points higher in the rankings, and should you go there?" I'm like, "What?"

Anna Ivey: It's mind-blowing. Yeah, exactly. I hear that all year long too, like, "Well, Georgetown went down two points in the rankings. Now I have to rethink everything." I'm like, "No, that has zero significance." The only people who care about that are applicants, who are the least informed about anything. And the only reason schools cater to this nonsense is because you all care about it.



Alison Monahan: Right. Even when I was applying, I don't think I fully understood the sort of hierarchical nature of law schools to the full extent that they really are.

Anna Ivey: Yeah. Well, I think you should have your own rankings. I think that's what it comes down to. You have to do the work to make your own rankings, because maybe in some universe by happenstance, your own preferences happen to line up exactly with the weighted algorithm that the editors of U.S. News & World Report have come up with – and which they change constantly, because otherwise they can't sell the rankings if the results are the same every year.

Alison Monahan: Right, not very interesting. Hey, same thing.

Anna Ivey: Right. So, if your personal weighted algorithm matches up exactly with theirs... And I bet you dollars to donuts, most people don't even know how those factors get weighted.

Alison Monahan: Is the school library size really your primary criteria?

Anna Ivey: Down with all that kind of stuff. For anyone who's interested in this kind of stuff, you can go and Google, there was an [article by Malcolm Gladwell in The New Yorker](#), last couple of years at some point. It was all about rankings and digging in in this very entertaining way that he's so good at, right? Digging into how the rankings actually work, and it was fascinating. I think it was fascinating even if you're not me, living in all that stuff.

Alison Monahan: Or me, a dork.

Anna Ivey: Exactly. So if that's interesting to you, go see how that sausage gets made because once you dig into it, I hope it really frees you from some of this very purist, orthodox adherence to the rankings. We don't have to belabor the point, but have your own rankings. It's going to be a little harder to do if you can't visit it, but as I was saying before, a lot of people don't visit anyway because they just go down the rankings. And so, I don't know that it's actually some huge change for people if all of a sudden, they don't even have the option.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think too, obviously, people probably have preferences on where to live. For me, I knew I wanted to live in New York, so basically I focused on New York schools. And people were like, "You could have gotten into Harvard." I'm like, "I didn't want to go to Harvard. I didn't want to live in Boston. I wanted to live in New York." Is that the best reason to pick a school? Maybe not, but that's what I wanted.

Anna Ivey: You know what? I think you're an outlier. Well, I think that's great, I think because you knew what you wanted. A lot of people applying to law school have



no idea. They don't know what kind of problems they want to solve with a law degree. They don't know why they're there. And yet they're so focused on the rankings that they say, "I'll just go to the highest ranked law school I can get into." And if that is in, I don't know, Washington State...

Alison Monahan: I don't want to offend anyone.

Anna Ivey: "I'm now going to move to Washington State." And I'm like, "That's crazy. You've never been there."

Alison Monahan: It's like, "Do you want to work there? You grew up in Arkansas."

Anna Ivey: Exactly. Do you want all your alumni networks to be... They just haven't thought it through at all. But that, I think, is the norm. And so, I kind of kick it back to them and I say, "Well, you have to go off and think about this some more." As I said, there are 200 ABA-approved law schools out there. Are you going to apply to all of them and just throw spaghetti at the wall and see what sticks, and that's going to determine much of the rest of your life? I mean, this is such a big investment. Take it seriously. Be thoughtful about it. So I actually think you're better off as an applicant if you have some sense of either of where you want to be geographically, or what kind of legal problems you want to solve, or both. That's the best Venn diagram to have right there.

Alison Monahan: Well, before we finish up, let me ask you one quick question kind of around that point. So, you briefly mentioned essentially jobs. What do you think the job market – and it's frankly tanking right now – what should people be thinking about? Obviously we don't know, but do you think this is a serious concern?

Anna Ivey: Yeah. Well, I think it depends on where you are. If you've just graduated or you're starting 3L – whoo, that's tough. I mean, that's tough any time the economy is struggling, right?

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Anna Ivey: I think if you're an applicant or you're going to be applying this fall – hopefully, things have settled a bit by the time you graduate.

Alison Monahan: Hopefully.

Anna Ivey: Hopefully. I was having some kind of interesting conversations, and by conversations, I mean typed ones, with some folks on LinkedIn about what's going to happen to legal practice in a world where things have moved online. And I've done BigLaw. Remind me, I think you've done BigLaw, too, right?

Alison Monahan: I did. I was a patent litigator.



- Anna Ivey: Yeah, so you've done it too.
- Alison Monahan: Yep. Been there, done that. Checked that box.
- Anna Ivey: Yep, me too.
- Alison Monahan: Couldn't pay me to do it again.
- Anna Ivey: Been there, done that, bought the T-shirt, don't need to do it again. Yeah. You've done it, so you know that a lot of what you do, at a BigLaw firm anyway – I should restrict my opinion to what I've actually done firsthand – but so much of that, you could actually do from home.
- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.
- Anna Ivey: It's a fairly solitary enterprise. They're paying all this overhead so that you could sit in an office all in the same building. But you're sitting there alone, working on stuff alone, often late into the night, and it just doesn't matter where you do it. So in a way, I think with legal practice – at least for that kind of BigLaw paper-pushing legal practice – I don't know that very much has to change in terms of the actual work part. I don't think it's prohibitive that people all of a sudden have to work from home. Now, other kinds of legal practice that involve meeting in-person – I can't really speak to that, although I will say that my mother, bless her, she's still practicing law, and it's very courtroom-based. And for them, it was a huge transition to go online, but they've done it and people get sworn in over... They don't use Zoom, I think they use WebEx. They get sworn in over WebEx and they're just making it work, because what choice do you have?
- Alison Monahan: Right, exactly.
- Anna Ivey: Trials still have to happen, hearings still have to happen. And guess what? The technology exists. It does, it has for over a decade now. I think this has just forced a lot of hands. I'm sure you saw Twitter, Jack Dorsey announced, "Yeah, we can stay working from home forever now, nobody has to come back in." So, I think a lot of businesses have woken up to the fact that we didn't actually all have to sit in the same place and be co-located, and sit in traffic and commute, and blah blah.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, right. I think that's all true. We've been running a virtual business pretty much from the start, just because why would we want to pay for an office? Yeah, I definitely have concerns about just in general. If you think you're going to work in BigLaw, I think you do need to look at kind of what that's looking like right now, but hopefully, it is a quick turnaround. Even in the last recession in





2008, there were firms that were doing pretty well and firms that weren't, and I think you want to be aware of which ones you might be signing up for. But that is definitely a different podcast. Well, we are way over our time, so thank you so much for joining us. Any final thoughts you'd like to share with people about any of this?

Anna Ivey: I feel for you. This is such a bizarre time, it is full of so much uncertainty, and uncertainty is hard, it is psychically hard. So, what you're feeling, there's just nothing weird about it. That is completely normal and okay. If it makes you feel any better – probably not – but if it makes you feel any better, it is across the board. Schools are freaking out, professors are freaking out, administrators are freaking out, admissions offices are freaking out. Nobody is spared this weirdness and the freaking out part. So in that sense, I don't know that anyone really has an advantage either. In some ways, there's a leveling thing happening, which is, oh my gosh, everyone is in this very, very strange boat. But you know what? You will get past this. It's okay. One way or another, you're going to have a fantastic legal education and you're going to have a wonderful experience, you're going to have wonderful classmates, you'll have a wonderful alumni network. And you are in this together, and that's so important. You're not alone in any of this, and that can make all the difference.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think this is definitely just a time for flexibility and being as patient as possible, which is not that easy sometimes when we're all under a lot of stress. And just kind of trying to roll with it because, like you said, everybody is struggling in a way to figure out what is the best option and how to move forward in a way that is optimal, but also safe for people. And I think if you do decide to sign up to this this year, you're just going to have to roll with a lot of things. And that's not the worst thing, you know?

Anna Ivey: No, it's not.

Alison Monahan: Maybe they'll turn out better.

Anna Ivey: Well, and let's be honest, there'll be other times in life where you have to roll with things.

Alison Monahan: Right. The legal profession is kind of all about that.

Anna Ivey: Yeah. that's a life skill, right?

Alison Monahan: Absolutely.

Anna Ivey: So, it starts now.

Alison Monahan: Yes, I agree with you. This is good training for the rest of your life.



Anna Ivey: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Well, thank you so much for joining us. How, as a reminder again, can people find out more about you, your work, your website, that kind of thing?

Anna Ivey: Yeah, just come to [annaivey.com](http://annaivey.com) – that's just my first and last name mashed together – A-N-N-A-I-V-E-Y. You can sign up for my newsletter, you can look at my blog posts. There're a number of ways you can come see what's going on in our world – Facebook, Twitter, you name it. You can come find me, I'm always excited to hear from people.

Alison Monahan: And I will say your blog posts are consistently informative and useful, so I always appreciate them.

Anna Ivey: Thank you!

Alison Monahan: Yes.

Anna Ivey: Thank you, I love that feedback. Thank you so much.

Alison Monahan: I don't always say that. Alright, 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 or rating on your favorite listening app. We would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at [lee@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:lee@lawschooltoolbox.com) or [alison@lawschooltoolbox.com](mailto:alison@lawschooltoolbox.com). Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

## **RESOURCES:**

[Anna Ivey Consulting](#)

[Thinking Outside the Box: Should You Start a Virtual Study Group?](#)

[The Order of Things: What College Rankings Really Tell Us, by Malcolm Gladwell](#)

[Above the Law](#)

[Podcast Episode 239: Looking to History to Assess the Impact of COVID-19 on the Legal Job Market](#)

[Podcast Episode 242: COVID-19 Considerations for \(Potentially\) Incoming 1Ls](#)

[Podcast Episode 249: Changes to the LSAT Due to COVID-19 \(with Steve Schwartz\)](#)