



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about all of the non-academic aspects of the job hunt. 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. 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 have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about all of the non-academic aspects of the job hunt. In other words, what are employers looking at outside of grades? So welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, sometimes it seems like law students get so fixated on grades that they forget about all of the other things legal employers might be looking for. And I think this is actually good news, because even if your grades are not the best, you probably still have some non-academic things you can highlight. Right?

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I think that a lot of law students get stuck, especially if their grades aren't great, that, "It's sort of hopeless, and what else can I talk about?" And I think there's so many other positives that you can highlight, especially if your grades are sort of borderline. I think that a lot of these positives could maybe put you over the top and sort of make up for it.

Alison Monahan: I think that's right. And what are some of the things that you're thinking about?

Sadie Jones: Well, one, I think diversity is just generally important. But particularly now, I think law firms are trying to really increase their diversity, and that can mean a variety of things. And I think that law students sometimes don't even consider disclosing it or telling them in what way they're diverse or making it kind of front and center. And I think that's one of the first things I would suggest highlighting if you fit into any category that would be considered diverse.

Alison Monahan: No, I think that's right. I think any sort of diversity is great, but what if I'm listening to this and I'm like, "Hey, I'm just a White guy. Is there anything I can do?"



Sadie Jones: There definitely is. I think that Law Review is the best thing that's outside of academics, classes, your grades, that can sort of offset your grades not being great, because it really shows still your writing skills, maybe you wrote on to get on. So I think that's the most solid sort of non-academic activity that you can do. So if there's any chance to get on Law Review, I would try for that over anything else. I just think that stands out to an employer.

Alison Monahan: I think for sure. I remember friends of mine who wrote on to the Law Review were amazed when they found out how many more interviews they got at OCI based on that.

Sadie Jones: I definitely hear that a lot. I think that law students don't realize some of them are deciding between Law Review and other things, and they sort of think, "Oh, it doesn't really matter, I can just pick either." And I always really suggest Law Review, even though it is obviously the most sort of time-intensive. So you need time for it, but I think that's part of the reason that it kind of stands out. And then I would say moot court I think is also great, and probably would rank one below for me, but I think also says a lot to employers, and I think is a solid kind of extracurricular.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think particularly if you're interested in litigation or trial work, it's just something that shows that you're really serious, that you're committed to this, and also that you're going to have some degree of background in it.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think these are activities that sort of take time and effort versus... I think clubs are great, and there are some sort of extracurriculars that still are nice to have, but I think they don't send the same message of, "This took a lot to get into."

Alison Monahan: Right. You can join any club. You can probably even get yourself to be at least like a vice president or a treasurer of pretty much any club that you want to.

Sadie Jones: Definitely, and I would recommend that. Whether or not you put a lot of effort into it, any kind of leadership position kind of stands out at least a little more than just, "I was a member."

Alison Monahan: Right. No, I think I was on the board of like four organizations or something in law school. I'm not sure I did much more than organize a party and maybe an activity here and there. But I think if nothing else, it shows particularly if you're involved in things that are related to what you're claiming you want to do... If you're saying you want to do real estate law, and you're the vice president of the Real Estate Law Society, I think that does at least... It's probably not going to put you over the top, but it at least shows that you have some interest in this area.



- Sadie Jones: That's what I was going to say, is that make sure the clubs or whatever you're in sort of make sense or [tell some kind of story](#). Sometimes it's sort of all over the place and it does feel like what some people do in high school, which is just join a lot of things so they have it on their resume, and doesn't really say anything about you. So, I would say think about what you're spending your time in and what story it tells to the employer.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And you can always join a bunch of places, and then have different resumes. I mean, that's completely fine too.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I think that's probably a good idea, especially if you're applying to different things.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, what else kind of outside particularly of what you can do in law school? I think sometimes people forget that what they've done before can actually be highly relevant.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think we've talked about this before, that some people who have extensive work experience, had a career before this, had different life experience – all of that, I think, is a positive and can tell a great story to an employer. And sometimes students almost don't highlight it or want to hide it because they think, "Oh, it's not going to make sense, or they're going to wonder why I went from this to this." And especially if you had a real career, you had multiple years of job experience, you worked in a professional setting – all of those things I would sort of highlight as positives – that you can sort of hit the ground running, that you're a professional. Let's say you got promotions, you moved up, you have all that experience – I would highlight that, and I think that can be a positive and can sort of offset some issues with grades also.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and I think even beyond that. That's great if you've had this professional career, and I think that's absolutely right, but I think sometimes people get kind of worked up about these non-professional jobs. Maybe you were a barista, or you worked as a waitress, or you worked as a bartender, but a lot of people really like to see that kind of thing because it shows that you can handle your schedule, you can handle dealing with people. We forget that the law is kind of a people profession. And so, I've actually had employers who looked really highly on that type of stuff.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think something to really highlight is particularly if you were, let's say, working full-time or heavy part-time while you were in school, that you put yourself through school. All of that, I think also should be highlighted, just showing what you're able to accomplish and that you're sort of a self-starter. And I agree, those jobs don't have to be sort of the typical professional jobs. I think they can be that you were a waitress or you worked in a store or whatever it was. But I really like that, and I think employers like that when you show that



you needed to earn money and you were able to do all of these things at the same time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely. Time management is highly critical. And just being someone who can get things done and is responsible, I think is a lot of what legal employers are really looking for.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Something else that I think can be nice to highlight is if you did sports or some other kind of life activity outside of academics that you really excelled in. So, you have to think about that. It's not just like, "Oh, I like soccer as a hobby." You can put that in your interest section, but there are people who take things really far. Obviously this is unusual, but I've definitely seen resumes where the person went to the Olympics or competed at a high level in something. I know that's not most people here, but you can think about how big of an impact it had on your life, and just the qualities that you can show with that, that you were able to stick with something. I just think sports in particular can show a lot of dedication.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I actually met someone the other day who almost made the Olympics, not for the U.S., but for a different country in an Olympic sport, and I was like, "Oh, that's kind of cool."

Sadie Jones: Definitely, I would highlight that, even if you almost got there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, you were at the Olympic trials. That counts, I think.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Alright. What else?

Sadie Jones: Languages are great. And as we've talked about before, I would only highlight them if you really are fluent and comfortable in a professional setting with them. But whether or not you're going to use the language in this particular job, I think that's a good thing to highlight. I don't know, I think it says you're well-rounded, that kind of thing. So I would highlight that if you do have that knowledge. But again, you need to be pretty proficient.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think also if you grew up speaking a different language, I think that's definitely something to get on to that resume somewhere or another. Because again, that's just sort of a diversity thing, like, "Oh, interesting. You have a different perspective." And I think firms and other employers really are at least pretending to look for that kind of stuff.



Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Maybe your parents were immigrants and you grew up with two cultures here and whatever their culture was. And so, I think all of that is great and I would highlight that. I think people really are sort of interested.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well, let's switch gears a little bit. What are some things that you sometimes see people highlighting that maybe they shouldn't be, that are not really quite as impressive or worthwhile as apparently they think they are?

Sadie Jones: Well, number one is, I think that a lot of people highlight their Greek life from undergrad. And while you may have been really involved, and maybe you did have a leadership position and it meant something to you, I just think that there's a chance that it's sort of going to be a turn-off to the employer, or they're not going to care, or they're going to particularly not like it. I think it's just too risky, so my overall recommendation would be to probably leave that off of your resume. And I know there may be some markets where it's just normal and everyone does it. And so, there might be exceptions, but I would say as a blanket rule, I would leave it off.

Alison Monahan: I think you really have to know your audience on this one. I went to a school, undergrad, with a very big Greek life thing, and people have very polarized reactions to it. People who are in it think, "Oh, this is great. This is going to be my calling card for life." People who are not are just like, "Oh God, not another alpha-whatever-blah-dee-blah." And I think you really have to be careful about this one because certain people are going to react very negatively. And I think it may be different depending on where you're applying. Maybe in the South, people are more receptive to that. But I do think it's something, particularly if you're applying in places like New York or on the West Coast, I really think you need to probably consider taking that off.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. And I guess I just think even if there's a chance that the audience might like it and were involved also, I don't think you're going to lose much from not having it on. I think there's just too big of a risk to leave it on.

Alison Monahan: Well, and also if somebody feels really strongly about it and you know that you have a contact at this place you're applying – you can reach out to them separately. It just doesn't have to be on your actual materials.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I agree.

Alison Monahan: Alright. What else is probably not worth the space?

Sadie Jones: I think that some people – especially if you sort of went straight through and didn't have as much experience – sometimes rely too much on really old internships, maybe even from high school, and sort of play up things that just don't really make sense for where you are right now, just to add stuff. And to



me, there's no way to hide it, and it reads just like that, like, "Oh, I just needed to pad this." So I'd just think carefully about what you're putting on – how long ago it was, how serious it was, that kind of thing.

Alison Monahan: Well, and I think high school is an interesting one too because sometimes you see resumes from people who've graduated from law school and they still have their high school on there. And typically, it's some sort of specialized high school. I went to one of those high schools, but it's also not still on my resume. I think you have to think about, "Okay, is this really that relevant? Is somebody going to hire me because I went to this specialized school?" Probably not.

Sadie Jones: And some of those things could be a turnoff. If it's a prep school that's really prestigious, I think you could be proud of it and think that it sends one message, and somebody else might read it and think the exact opposite. So I would say "No" on the high school.

Alison Monahan: I think, generally speaking, high school should probably not be on your resume if you're applying for a legal job.

Sadie Jones: Definitely.

Alison Monahan: Regardless of where you went.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Alright. What else should people probably leave off?

Sadie Jones: So, I've seen people put activities that are sort of religious and related to a mission trip maybe, or something you did with your church or synagogue or whatever religious affiliation. My concern there is just bringing religion into this at all can be a turnoff for some people. And I think when we talk about the questions you're going to ask at the end, we've mentioned this before – kind of leaving off things when you don't know who your audience is or what they're going to think of it. So, I think it might be safer to not highlight that too much.

Alison Monahan: Well, but what about the case where someone did an actual multi-year mission trip? I think that's kind of a different scenario.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think that is different depending on how long it was exactly, and how much of your life it took up, and what you did there. I think there would be a way then to kind of highlight it and talk more about maybe you did work to help the community, and I would talk more about that kind of work rather than the specific religious angle to it.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think oftentimes, there you have cultural things you can talk about. You often have language things, you learned another language, you were operating in a different culture. I think that's more relevant than just like, "I was proselytizing."
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. Yeah. I would just think about the angle you're taking and the message it sends, and what kind of amount of time it took up in your life.
- Alison Monahan: Right. If it's two weeks that you went to Guatemala and helped build an orphanage, I'm not sure that goes on a legal resume. If it's two years, then yeah, okay, you need to talk about that because otherwise, there's going to be a big blank and people are going to wonder.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, I agree. Something else that I see a lot is that people, again, are trying to fill in the blanks with not real work – like they worked for their parents, let's say. I see that a lot, and I think you should just be cognizant of whether it was real work or you're just kind of making it up, like you were in your parent's office for a couple of days over the six months that you took off when you were applying to law school. So, I think you just need to consider whether it was a real job, whether it has their name on it. Your parents should not be your reference, which is something I see in the past. So you need to use somebody else from the business that could be used as a reference, and hopefully was your supervisor. It just needs to be a real job if it was sort of a family business. It's better to just have the blank, and you can explain that you were applying to school or you had a health issue or whatever it was. That's fine, that happens to lots of people, but I think it sort of looks worse if you're making stuff up.
- Alison Monahan: Right, I think it has to be legit. It's one thing if your parent happened to be a lawyer and you worked for them as a paralegal – that's a completely different scenario. We're talking about some random... They run a franchise restaurant and you were pretending to kind of be a manager, but you were not really. Stuff like that just looks a little odd, like, "What were you actually doing?"
- Sadie Jones: I think anything where you're worried that they're going to see through it, they're going to see through it.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Sadie Jones: So just assume that that's what's going to happen, and maybe take a different route.
- Alison Monahan: That's a great point. These people are lawyers, and so they are trained to be skeptical, they're trained to look at the evidence, they're trained to spot things that look a little strange and follow up on them. So, you don't want to be the



one who's getting berated about what you did one summer in college when really, you were just at the beach.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And I think the thing you're trying to sort of cover up, it would have been better to just have that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it just looks more obvious. I mean, we see resumes. It's always clear when someone's trying to hide something and it just makes you wonder.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely.

Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, it sounds like we've hit on a number of pitfalls here. How can people figure out what about their personal background might be worth highlighting and what is probably going to be a bad idea?

Sadie Jones: Well, I would start just brainstorming everything from your past. Maybe you just make a list of any job you've ever had, activity, anything you were involved in. Make a big list of all of it, and I would start asking people what they think, what message this sends, what story it tells, to decide what's worth keeping in or taking out. So I think that's the place to start, is sort of making the bigger list and then taking things out of it versus starting small and adding things in. I would just think of anything you've ever done, and you might need to sort of refresh your memory if you're going back a while. And I would get opinions from professionals. I would talk to career services and see what they think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think talking to a variety of different people is great too, because they may have perceptions of you that you haven't really thought about. So, sometimes your friends are better at saying, "Well, what about this? You did grow up as a second generation immigrant speaking a different language." And to you, that's just kind of normal, but to someone who's not you, that's actually pretty impressive. You ended up doing really well in school, even though you didn't learn English until you were five, that kind of stuff.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I don't think you need to just talk to people in the legal field. I think some people get kind of bogged down with, "I don't know anyone who's a lawyer who can look at this." It's just they're people. The lawyers that are going to be interviewing you are people; you just want to know how it looks to different people.

Alison Monahan: And also, what makes you unique. And I think friends are a great place to do that because obviously they like you, they find you interesting. So, talk to them and find out why.

Sadie Jones: That's a really good point.



- Alison Monahan: I think you could also look at bios of people who were kind of successful in the field you're looking in – whether they're lawyers, alumni, people at firms or other organizations – and see what they are listing. Do you have any commonalities? You may find things that you don't expect, and that may be something that you also want to bring forward as a commonality for the people that you kind of aspire to be.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And I think you can see that people list things outside of just their practice and the latest cases they're working on, so you get an idea of what different bios look like and what kind of things they're talking about. I think that's a great place to kind of get some ideas.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I found it interesting that our new vice president in so many of the articles did mention what sorority she was in. And I think that's a little bit different in that context, but that is something worth thinking about. It's always very context-specific what makes sense for applying for a certain job. And like we said, you've got to know your audience.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. And I don't think you need to see somebody who you aspire to be and then try to make yourself fit exactly into that. We want you to highlight your personality, the things you care about. There is a part of this where they want to see who you are.
- Alison Monahan: Right, anything that you are really serious about, I think is worth considering bringing up because it's something that makes you unique as a person.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely. And like we're talking about, if you're trying to offset maybe some borderline grades, think about things that show that you're serious about maybe your academics, following through, all of the kinds of things that grades might say. Maybe you don't have that, so what other things can you show those skills with?
- Alison Monahan: Right, and I think you can also highlight social skills. So, one of your arguments if maybe your grades are not the very top of your class is like, "Okay, I did okay academically, but my real strength is in building relationships with people." And at least in law firms, that's a lot of what they're looking for, because they're actually looking for people who can build business. So, you can tell a different story, that if it's convincing might overcome your B+ average or something.
- Sadie Jones: Absolutely. Every firm that I've been at talks about leadership skills, and so anything that you can do to legitimately highlight your leadership skills, I would.
- Alison Monahan: Right. No, I think that's all right. Well, what is the best way or the best place to bring these things up, because some of them aren't necessarily something you can just throw in a cover letter?



Sadie Jones: Right, and I think the cover letter is a place where you can bring up some of them. Obviously your resume would just fit some of these things. I also think that you should think about where it would logically make sense to bring this up in a conversation, so I would practice your interviewing skills. I think you could come up with some stories that sort of highlight these different experiences. And now with [behavioral interviewing](#) being kind of the trend, there's usually a lot of opportunities to bring up stories that sort of highlight different skills. Either they're going to ask you questions that kind of require that, or you can answer any question in that way, I think. So I just really like the idea of stories that are personal, that talk about these different things, and answering the question with that to back it up.

Alison Monahan: And how about highlighting maybe a less obvious diversity attribute, something like an ethnic background that maybe is not so obvious, or even a disability that's not visible? How can people handle stuff like this?

Sadie Jones: I think this can be awkward, and I think if someone is just trying to get it in, that's when it comes out awkward. You can't just throw it into a spot where it doesn't fit. So a lot of people highlight diversity by being in a club that kind of says, "This is who I am." And I know that doesn't necessarily say it, but that's kind of the first place that I would say employers look to kind of say that you've been involved in a few activities that make it clear that that's your background, that kind of thing. I think actually a cover letter is a place you can bring up some of those non-obvious traits, and you can talk about a personal experience growing up led you to law school, and maybe that personal experience makes sense or fits in with some kind of diversity attribute, or like you said, a disability, or maybe you're a veteran, is another category that law firms are really interested in. So I think any of that stuff can be in there. And again, I think you can bring it up in an interview, you just need to make sure that it's in a logical place – that you're answering a question where fitting that in makes sense for the answer.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely. It can't be too forced. Yeah.

Sadie Jones: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Why do you think legal employers are even looking at all these things? And sometimes people think it's kind of cheating if they're relying on anything other than grades. Do you think that's accurate?

Sadie Jones: I don't think that it's cheating, and I know that some people feel like maybe they're highlighting something that hasn't been a huge part of their life, let's say, or they weren't raised where it was front and center. But I still think that if it's legitimately your background, it's completely fair game to bring it up and to



talk about it. I think that law firms are interested in having a more diverse population, and some of it is genuine and some of it may be to check a box. But whether or not that's the reason they're doing it, if the end result is that they get more diversity in law firms, which is what we need, then I think that's okay. And if you're contributing to that in any way, I think that's great. And so, I don't think that you're getting a spot unfairly or anything by talking about it. I think you should highlight it, whatever it is, that makes you diverse.

- Alison Monahan: I'm laughing because I remember a story from law school, where a friend of mine who was quite conservative, wrote a diversity statement to apply to Law Review about how being a conservative was his diversity. And then he got on and then he was really paranoid that the only reason he had gotten on was because of his diversity statement.
- Sadie Jones: That's a real roundabout thought process.
- Alison Monahan: I think it was his grades that got him on, but the whole time, he was paranoid that maybe he only got on for this.
- Sadie Jones: That's pretty funny.
- Alison Monahan: It was funny. It's proof positive you can write a diversity statement about pretty much anything.
- Sadie Jones: And the truth is that some of these... I know a diversity career fair, they ask you, are you diverse, that you're trying to participate? They don't actually ask you in what way. So there are people who consider themselves diverse in a way that they're not, but if you feel like you're being genuine, then I think that's okay. There are other examples where you actually do have to check a box that says which category you're in. I wouldn't do it if you don't feel like you actually fit into that category; you need to be honest. But if you do, then I think it's totally fine.
- Alison Monahan: Sure. And before we wrap up, what if there are people who are listening to this and they're thinking, "I just don't have anything in any of these categories. There's just nothing interesting about me." What can they do?
- Sadie Jones: I just can't believe anyone will not be able to find any of these things about them. I would go back to what we talked about, about talking to your friends or your family, what kind of things from your background, your work experience. I do think there's something. And like I talked about also, they are looking for just your personality, what you can contribute outside of just whatever your GPA is. So, I think you can play up some of that too.



- Alison Monahan: Right. I think this is a good time to start shaping your own law school experience and at least minimum, join some clubs, pick an activity or two to focus on, do some pro bono work. You have to do something.
- Sadie Jones: Think about what matters to you, what's interesting to you, what things – if you don't have them on already – what things you think, "Oh, it would be nice to have that on because I would want to do that."
- Alison Monahan: Right, like, "I would like to do that clinic", or whatever. And if you really can't come up with anything, I think it's probably time to go talk to a career coach and/or do therapy to figure out why you're even in law school.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly, I agree.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, we're running out of time here. Any final thoughts on this topic?
- Sadie Jones: Yeah, I think my final thought is just that I think that some people are so focused on grades and just kind of the basics of all of this that they forget that an employer is looking to hire a colleague. And so, I would sort of think of yourself as a whole well-rounded person, and make sure that you're getting across who you are to the employer, because I really do think it matters, especially when you get to the interview stage. So just remember that you're not just writing a resume, writing a cover letter. A person is going to read that, and you want them to see who you are.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's right. We often look at resumes and things and we're like, "Oh, this person seems interesting. Okay, maybe they don't have the exact check the box things that we might think we're looking for, but I'm curious to talk to this person. Why don't we set up a screening interview with them?" Because like you said, people are looking for colleagues. They're looking for people they want to work with, and that goes beyond just what your transcript says.
- Sadie Jones: Definitely.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, thanks so much for joining us.
- Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.
- Alison Monahan: My pleasure. With that, we are out of time. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com). 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 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 or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you



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