



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have law school admissions consultant Anna Ivey back with us to talk about some timely admissions topics, including how to deal with being on a law school waitlist. 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. And with that, let's get started.

Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have law school admissions consultant Anna Ivey back with us to talk about some timely admissions topics, including how to deal with being on a law school waitlist. So welcome, Anna.

Anna Ivey: Hi Alison, it's nice to be back.

Alison Monahan: It's so nice to be back. I cannot believe it's been as long as it has been.

Anna Ivey: Crazy!

Alison Monahan: So yeah, to start us off, can you just give our listeners a little bit of information on your background, so they have some context of where you're coming from?

Anna Ivey: Sure. So I'm Anna Ivey, I'm the founder of [Ivey Consulting](#), an admissions consulting firm, and I'm the former Dean of Admissions at the University of Chicago Law School. I also practiced law for a bit before I went into admissions, so I've seen the process from every angle – as an applicant, as a law student, as a lawyer, and as an admissions officer, and now as an admissions advisor. So, hit me with anything. I want to hear all your questions, whatever is on your mind.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's why I'm really excited to talk to you. And we actually talked pretty early on in a couple of podcasts in the pandemic.

Anna Ivey: We did.

Alison Monahan: One of them in June of 2020, which both seems like yesterday and about 12 years ago. And some of the things we talked about were the changes we might see in law school as a result of COVID, and I don't want to say we were prescient, but well, we were correct about a lot of things that amazingly enough, actually seemed to be in dispute at that point, such as, for example, whether law schools would be in-person or not for Fall of 2020, which



apparently, some people thought they would be. Suffice it to say, they weren't. Do you think it's fair to say that at least that part of law school has pretty much normalized at this point and people can expect to be back on campus full-time for the upcoming fall?

Anna Ivey: I do think so. I think the law school experience has normalized and settled, although I would think and hope that law schools are also now better equipped than they were before the pandemic to deliver a legal education in more accessible ways than the old model. So, lots of people hate it online. We heard from a lot of people who hate it online, and they were pretty miserable with it. And I also am in touch with professors who it was a learning curve for them, how to teach online, or teach in a hybrid model. This was difficult for them too. But what was really interesting to me is that some students found that they did better with the online model, it turns out – for example, people with social anxiety, some neuro-divergent folks. So, there are a lot of haters out there, but I think some people benefited from it too. And so, I think law schools now have more experience and better platforms, and maybe a greater imagination about how to work with different kinds of students. But I think it is mainly going back to in-person, which most people are happy about, I think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we definitely talked to a lot of students who were really struggling with not having access to office hours and things like that, and just staying engaged on an endless Zoom. I definitely have talked to some people right now, in the spring, who are still hybrid, but it seems like we're kind of getting back into... Although I think your point is a good one, about maybe there are things they could learn from this to actually improve going forward, even if it's something as simple as letting people Zoom into the classroom if they can't be there for the day or something – they have a sick kid at home, that kind of thing. So, I guess we'll see.

Anna Ivey: Yeah, we will find out. But yeah, I think this does open up some access doors that perhaps they weren't considering before, and COVID sort of forced their hand, so I'll be very curious to see to what extent they leverage what they learned during the pandemic to access for different kinds of students with different kinds of delivery models. So yeah, I'm paying attention and I'm curious to hear from students and professors. My ear is always to the ground, I'll be curious what they think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's a really interesting question I hadn't actually thought about. Have you seen any major changes in admissions as a result of the pandemic?

Anna Ivey: Well, it certainly got more competitive. A lot more people applied to law school than pre-pandemic. And more specifically, more people applied from the really high LSAT ranges during the pandemic.



Alison Monahan: Interesting.

Anna Ivey: That had ripple effects through the whole system, and people with the really high LSAT scores, they come in and out of the pool in cycles, depending on what else is going on in the world, what other options they have, what they want to do with their lives. So when they show up in droves, as they did during the pandemic – that affects the whole system, so that allowed law schools to ratchet up their selectivity. That came as a shock to a lot of applicants who were really normed around admissions data from the era before the pandemic. So, that was a shock to a lot of applicants, but most of them found law school homes that they're happy at. But I would say the competitiveness has dropped off a bit this cycle that we're still in, it's a bit softer, but it is still not back to the pre-pandemic baseline. So, it is still harder than before COVID in terms of the competitiveness, but not quite as Hunger Games like as that first cycle during COVID.

Alison Monahan: Right, because my understanding before the pandemic was they weren't getting those applications necessarily from the stronger applicants, and then that was concerning to the schools.

Anna Ivey: Yeah. As I say, there are cycles that law schools are used to, usually the application volume and profiles of the kinds of applicants they get are countercyclical with the economy, but we had a once-in-a-century pandemic, so boom! that dropped like a bomb. As I say, big ripple effects through the whole system affected every school, it affected every applicant.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's so interesting, because we then see that later on when we, looking at bar passage rates and things and so, you're like, "Well, what happened?" It's like, "Well, five years earlier you started admitting students who had lower LSATs."

Anna Ivey: Yeah, you very often see that direct line and it's one of those things that I think some people don't want to focus on because it's depressing, which is that there is this correlation between LSAT scores and bar passage rates. And I'm not a huge defender of bar exams or that system. I've taken two.

Alison Monahan: I'm not either, to be honest.

Anna Ivey: I've taken California, I've taken Louisiana. God help me!

Alison Monahan: Oh, you did?

Anna Ivey: I did.

Alison Monahan: How interesting. Yeah, that was not what I thought you're going to say for your



second one.

Anna Ivey: Neither of them is particularly easy in the grand scheme of things, I would say. And so, I've been there, done that, but as some sort of test to ensure someone's fitness to practice law, I have my doubts about that system. So, I don't go to great lengths to defend the bar exam, but I do think applicants need to understand that if they are very low scorers on the LSAT, I do have some concerns about their prospects for passing the bar exam. And of course, legal practice is a cartel – it's a legal cartel, it's a legalized cartel, but without bar membership, you cannot practice this profession. And so, that's a huge investment of time and money and heartburn to go to law school, and then not be able to pass the bar exam is really a difficult outcome. It's something to be mindful of for low scorers, there is that correlation and you've brought it up, you've seen it – there's that lag between when schools lower their standards where the LSAT is concerned, and then you see it in the bar passage rates X number of years later. It's a depressing line that connects the two, but I think we need to be mindful of it, especially if we're advising people as they go into this process.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree, I completely agree the bar exam is sort of ridiculous, and to be fair, it is possibly shifting in the not so immediate future, like five to 10 years or less. And I think the schools could be doing a lot more with the students who come in, who they know may struggle. But if someone is in that position, I just say, "Look, from the beginning, you've got to recognize that you've never been great at standardized testing, and there is a big standardized test looming at the end of this experience. So, do what you need to do in school to make sure that you've developed the study skills and the writing skills, that you have a pretty good shot at passing this", because like you said, you cannot practice until you do it. Which is a problem.

Anna Ivey: Right, and it's a standardized test. It is learnable. And so, I think if people know this going in, they have three years to get the help they need to learn how to tackle this thing. Some law schools are very explicitly teaching to the test. The fancier law schools do not teach to the test.

Alison Monahan: They don't even mention it, really.

Anna Ivey: But a lot of law schools say, "You have three years to wrap your arms around this thing." So, take advantage of that and get the outside help that you need, because otherwise that investment just kind of circles the drain and that's the worst of all of problems.

Alison Monahan: It's really sad for someone who just is really struggling and can't do this, and it's like, "Maybe you should have listened in the beginning and thought about this to start with." But it is just a test.



Anna Ivey: Not everyone has the information that they need when they need it, right?

Alison Monahan: No, definitely not. I mean, I went to a fancy school...

Anna Ivey: We all try to meet people where they are, and so if people are listening to this podcast and heading into law school soon, then they still have time to come up with a strategy. That's the important thing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I think it's very doable; it's just very hard to do in two months after you've graduated. It's much easier to develop a lot of these skills and the knowledge over the course of three or four years when you're in law school.

Anna Ivey: I remember for the bar exam, I had never taken Wills and Estates in law school. I had one day to study it and I just hoped that it wasn't one of the subjects that came up during my bar exam administration. I was like, "If it shows up, I'm in trouble. I'm rolling the dice here. I have one day to cram this stuff." And that's the silliness of this test.

Alison Monahan: Oh, it's ridiculous.

Anna Ivey: That's kind of the stuff you have to do.

Alison Monahan: Well, I would say if you did what you're asked to do on the bar exam in practice, you would definitely be committing malpractice.

Anna Ivey: Exactly. Do not hire me or come to me with your trusts and estates questions, thank you very much.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. I was a patent litigator – that's not on the bar. Literally, everything I did is not on the exam; maybe a little Civ Pro.

Anna Ivey: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: And for somebody to come in and be like, "My friend just got arrested, what should they do?" I'm like, "I don't know, call a criminal defense lawyer. Why are you asking me this?"

Anna Ivey: Well, and it's very focused on, I think, future litigators. So, for future transactional lawyers there's not a whole lot going on. I'm sure that varies from state to state, but anyway. We don't have to belabor the bar exam, but I think you're right to encourage people to be thinking ahead to the bar exam while they are in law school, so that they're not staring this huge exam down at the end of law school when they don't have much time.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, and people just get blindsided sometimes, like, "I've always had extra time." It's like, "Well, then you're probably going to need extra time to study, don't you think?"

Anna Ivey: True, true.

Alison Monahan: Anyway. Well, let's shift gears because it's supposed to be about admissions, not the bar.

Anna Ivey: Yes.

Alison Monahan: I want to talk to you a little bit about a very timely topic for unfortunately a lot of law school applicants right now, which is waitlists. So, how does this work? What is the timeframe for schools making decisions and that kind of thing?

Anna Ivey: Yeah. Let me start with the bigger context, because I think some of that is specific to this era that we're in. I think because of that big jump in application volume in the previous cycle, a lot of law schools are feeling gun-shy about the risk of over-enrolling people, extending too many offers than they have room for when those deposits come back. So, from where I sit, my vantage point, I see them during this cycle keeping even deeper waitlists than pre-COVID. And waitlists were really deep already before COVID. So, I think they're getting even more risk-averse because of that crazy cycle we had before the current one. But I think in some cases, they're keeping these really deep waitlists also because I think at a lot of schools, the admissions offices are just over-extended. They've been understaffed since COVID started, and that's not just law school, that's across the board – that's happening in undergrad, for example, too. So I think the admissions offices are facing real challenges trying to get caught up with the application volumes. Even though that volume has softened a bit, as I say, it's still up compared to pre-COVID, so that is the larger context in which this waitlist cycle is happening right now. To your earlier question, waitlists stay open until orientation, because when people put down their deposits first in April, and then usually there's a second deposit deadline sometime in the summer, there are people who put down deposits who either just don't show up – happens every year – somebody doesn't show up for orientation and they have a seat to fill. Or more likely, there is this game of musical chairs that happens every summer, where a person has put down a deposit, gets off a waitlist somewhere else, decides to go deposit over there at the new school, while that opens up a seat at the first school. So, now that first school has to turn to its waitlist and pull someone off who's deposited yet somewhere else. So, it's just this huge game of musical chairs all summer long until literally orientation.

So, you could get that call any time between now and orientation. Here's the really important thing to remember: You, the applicant, you drive this bus. You



have agency here, you get to decide when you want to stay on a waitlist and when you want to let it go. So, you have to be really honest with yourself about which schools – compared to whatever offers you already have and where you've put down a deposit – which waitlist schools are you willing to rearrange all your plans for potentially very late in the game? You've probably already signed a lease somewhere, you might have already moved by that point, you might have a significant other who's had to upend their lives to go to that first school location, you'll have to find housing in the new place. So probably, you want to be really picky about what schools you're willing to upend your life for late in the game. And so, keep that agency in mind – that is your decision, you do not have to stay on these waitlists; you get to decide when enough is enough, and you want to just move on with your life and your planning.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I actually saw this from both sides at Columbia. The first year I was there, I had a three-bedroom apartment and they told me, "Oh, this is your third roommate", and this person just never showed up. We never heard from her, nothing. And we're kind of like, "This is weird." Later somebody told me she went to Harvard. And then on the flip side, there was an open space the next year in my apartment, because actually another roommate had transferred to Harvard, and one day...

Anna Ivey: I'm sensing a pattern here.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. One day, literally somebody just opened the door and it was a situation of, "Hi, how do you have a key to my house?" So, it's like three weeks into the semester or something, and she was like, "Well, I'm a 1L and they just found me housing. I had been couch surfing for three weeks with friends in New York, and I'm your new roommate." I'm like, "Welcome. Would you like a cup of tea?"

Anna Ivey: And I'm guessing she got off the Columbia waitlist late in the game, right?

Alison Monahan: She did. Yeah, exactly.

Anna Ivey: She was deposited somewhere else, had already arranged her housing wherever that was, right?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I can't even remember where she was supposed to go, Georgetown or something. So then she got into Columbia and was basically homeless for almost a month, until finally they located that we had an empty room because somebody else had moved out. It was a complete musical chairs, as you said.

Anna Ivey: Exactly. And that's going to go on until orientation starts and they actually do the head count, who actually showed up.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, so crazy. Well, for somebody who is on a waitlist and they want to get off of it, what should they be thinking about or doing at this point in the spring?
- Anna Ivey: Yeah, so once you've decided which waitlists you want to fight for – and you probably shouldn't fight for all your waitlists – really be honest with yourself, which ones would you actually accept over whatever offer you already have and where you're depositing about a month from now? Which ones do you want to fight for? And the ones you want to fight for, you need to be staying on their radar. So, you're going to be checking in with them – and we can talk about the best ways to do that and at what frequency. But the number one thing that is the most effective, as far as improving your odds of getting off of a waitlist that you care about, is to basically pre-commit yourself. You tell them, "If I were to receive an offer, I would accept it immediately." And then here's the real nuance – you have to go a step further, "And I would withdraw everywhere else." Because otherwise, if you don't make that promise to withdraw everywhere else, you're just accepting their offer, you might hightail it out of there again three weeks later when you got off another waitlist.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly. They have no reason to trust you, really.
- Anna Ivey: So, it's a two-part commitment: "Not only would I accept an offer if I were fortunate enough to receive one, but I would also immediately withdraw everywhere else." And the reason that has the most power to affect your odds is because, put yourself in the shoes of an admissions officer – that's always my larger goal, is to teach people how to think like an admissions officer, because that's the audience that matters for your application purposes. From their perspective, if they have a spot that they need to fill, it means they have to fill it quickly in a waitlist scenario, because of that musical chairs situation. They've got very, very deep waitlists, so how do they decide whom to pick? So there are numbers that they have to manage, demographics, all that stuff is out of your control. But all else being equal, they would rather call the person who has already pre-committed herself. It just makes the admissions officer's life easy – or easier, I should say.
- Alison Monahan: Maybe I'm being cynical here, but can the schools actually know that you've withdrawn other places?
- Anna Ivey: I don't know that they would have a way of finding that out, and I don't know that it's any of their business, frankly.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I didn't know if there was sort of a list they could check.
- Anna Ivey: No, law schools used to share a lot more information about applicants until the antitrust authorities came sniffing around and told them to knock it off.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's what I was thinking. I had a vague memory of that.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah, so that has been a changing landscape, so they're not allowed to share information the way they used to do. But as I say, because your goal on a waitlist that you care about, your goal is to make it as easy as possible for that admissions officer to call you instead of many, many, many other people on the waitlist when a spot opens up, when that spot has to be filled quickly. That is the number one thing you can do if you are willing to pre-commit yourself. If you're not willing to pre-commit yourself, obviously don't tell them that.
- Alison Monahan: Right. I mean, you do want to have some integrity; you are going into a legal profession.
- Anna Ivey: And you could get into trouble. If you try to game the system and you fall on your face, they might withdraw the offer. Let alone down the road...
- Alison Monahan: You don't want to make anyone too angry.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah, no, this is definitely... As with all parts of the application, you need to actually honor your word. So if you pre-commit yourself that way, you have to honor that commitment if you do get the call.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, is there any way for people to figure out their odds of getting off a waitlist? It seems like you can also kind of influence them a bit, but how do I figure out if it's realistic for me to say, "Okay, I'm going to totally go and try to get off this waitlist", or if it's just like, "This is probably not really happening"?
- Anna Ivey: You can't. I mean, odds are slim no matter what. As I say, those waitlists are really, really deep. But here's the thing – admissions officers don't even know, because they have no idea what that game of musical chairs is going to look like between now and orientation.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, they don't know if they're going to have 30 people or whatever.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah, they have no idea. Admissions officers don't know, and so you don't know either, because there are just too many unknowns and variables there. So, that's why you have to decide, are you willing to hang in there until orientation for a certain school? And if the answer is "No", you know what? – let it go. You have that decision making power. You don't have to let schools string you along like a bad ex, you don't.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And I think sometimes people do feel that way, like, "There's just nothing I can do. If they come calling, I have to say 'Yes'." It's like, no, you don't actually. You could decide that maybe you could upgrade a little bit in the rankings, but is that worth uprooting your entire life until the very last minute? I don't know. To



go one place higher in the rankings, for some people, yes, we never know.

Anna Ivey: Yeah, exactly. And I would argue it's better to kind of do that analysis before the call comes, just for your own sake.

Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure.

Anna Ivey: And then be very honest with yourself about whether you want to stay on that waitlist. And that might change over the course of the summer as more time passes and you get closer to starting school. You've already rearranged things in your life, so over the next several months, as more information comes back, you might decide, "Yes, I'm willing to stay on these three over here and I'm going to let all the others go."

Alison Monahan: Right. It's one thing too if it's in a similar city or something – you've got one offer in Boston and now you've got another offer in Boston. It's like, maybe it's not going to be the most convenient housing situation for a year or something, but that's less problematic than...

Anna Ivey: Yeah, it's a logistical challenge.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's like you're in Boston or you're in California. Those are very different.

Anna Ivey: Exactly, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, you mentioned earlier keeping in contact with the school. What is kind of fair game to send them, and how frequently? I'm assuming people should not be annoying, but also want to be doing something. What should they do?

Anna Ivey: So, first of all, read the actual waitlist communication that they send to you. I'm always amazed when people come to me and they say, "Oh, I'm on the waitlist at blah, blah, blah. What should I do?" And I'm like, "Well, read me the language. What are they telling you?" Because they have different rules, some of them are opt-in, others are opt-out, some of them will send stuff right away. I think it's University of Texas says you only get to send three letters and that's it, then you're maxed out. So, read the letters, follow the instructions – that would be my first number one tip for that, because there isn't just some generic process. So, you as future lawyers – yes, read those communications carefully.

Alison Monahan: Read the footnotes, read every part of it. It's good practice.

Anna Ivey: Yeah, what do they say? Some of them invite so-called "expressions" or "letters of continued interest" immediately, in which case, great. Others are vaguer about it. If we're in March now, heading into April, realistically they're not going



to turn to the waitlist to fill spots until the second half of April, because they're going to wait and see what deposits come back for that April 15 deposit deadline. Is there some scenario in which they would go to the waitlist before then? I guess hypothetically, but I think realistically, that's just not how that works. So if you want to send something now to remind them of your strong interest, you can do that; otherwise I would say you could start in mid-April. And then I would touch base with them on a monthly basis thereafter. You really don't need to contact them more than once a month.

Alison Monahan: They haven't forgotten you exist.

Anna Ivey: They will not have forgotten that you're still interested, but do it on a monthly basis. The weakest level of that would be, "I remain very interested. Thank you for continuing to consider me." If you want to bump it up and improve your odds, you make that pre-commitment. So you have to decide what you want to put in that letter and what you're willing to live with. If you have updates, certainly you can include those, about a new job or whatever the case may be. If it's anything school related, like "Oh, I have a new transcript because the semester finished" – that's actually a required update. That's not up to you to decide, and so then you have to actually submit an updated transcript to LSAC for processing,. But even if you have no actual updates, that's fine. Just tell them you remain very interested, "Thank you for continuing to consider me." These letters of continued interest end up sounding super repetitive and that feels weird for people, but that's okay. Repetition is not a bad thing here, because you want to let them know that you're still interested: "Keep me under consideration. Call me if a spot opens up." So, repetition is not a bug in this scenario.

Alison Monahan: Is anyone retaking the LSAT at this point, or is that just totally baked in?

Anna Ivey: Some people do, and it's just not going to matter at this point, honestly.

Alison Monahan: Okay. I'd assume they have to report whatever you applied with anyway, which is what they care about.

Anna Ivey: Yeah, some people hedge their bets and think, "Well, if I end up reapplying, I'll just go ahead and take it." When it's a little bit earlier in the cycle, or if their application deadline hasn't passed yet – and it hasn't at some schools – that can actually fowl up the application timeline for the current cycle, because at some schools, as soon as they see that you're even registered for an LSAT, they will put your file on hold, even if you already have an LSAT.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. So, you might end up not even on the waitlist, but on hold.

Anna Ivey: I think it's an incredibly lousy policy. I don't think they should have visibility into



what tests you have registered for; you might never end up taking it. I have a lot of bones to pick with that, but it does happen at some schools. So in the current cycle, if the deadline hasn't passed yet and you're registering for a future LSAT, that can put a hold on your application, which is potentially not what you want.

- Alison Monahan: Right, if nothing else, it might suggest that you plan to reapply later, so maybe you're not really committed to that waitlist you're claiming you'd get off of immediately and go.
- Anna Ivey: It muddles things.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. Well, actually, let's talk about that a little bit. One of the questions that I had for you is when you might want to just reapply. So, if I'm on my waitlist, it's my dream school, doesn't look like I'm getting off of it, does that have anything to say about whether I would be more likely to get admitted the next year if I apply again?
- Anna Ivey: Not really. As I say, those waitlists are so deep.
- Alison Monahan: Not a good sign. Not a great sign.
- Anna Ivey: I actually appreciate the schools that don't just by default kick everyone onto a waitlist and just pull the band-aid off and deny people. I actually have a lot of respect for that. But a lot of times waitlist is the next stage if you don't get admitted, and they're just kicking that can down the road for most people.
- Alison Monahan: That's like you're moving – it's the "Yes", "No", the "Maybe" pile, and then "Maybe" pile is like 80%. It's like, you're probably not taking all that with you.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah. So, I wouldn't read too much into the fact that you got into a waitlist before. I think if you're going to consider reapplying this coming fall, the really important thing to think about is, what are you going to do differently? Because doing basically the same kind of profile, the same kind of application and hoping for a different outcome is, I think not a realistic way to go. And then you just put your whole life on hold for another year for what, you know?
- Alison Monahan: Right, it's just the same application, the same school.
- Anna Ivey: Yeah. So you should really think about, what is it about your profile that you can improve for the next time around? And I would say since it's already March, you know what? If you want to apply nice and early this fall, you have to start getting your ducks in a row now. So it's tough when you're still waiting for decisions and you might not get final decisions until July. I get it. It's a tricky thing with the timelines. But I think whatever school you have offers from by April 15, that is very likely where you would end up going. So, if that is not



where you want to actually go to law school, then you really need to start thinking ahead if you are planning to reapply, because it might involve, for example, retaking the LSAT. And improving your LSAT takes time, that doesn't happen overnight.

Alison Monahan: Definitely.

Anna Ivey: Right?

Alison Monahan: No, and also figure out what you're going to do for the next year, and if that can be something that's going to position you to be a better applicant. I think your point about people really sitting with, "Okay, if this is my law school that I'm going to attend, does this make sense for me?" is so important. We see so many people who frankly haven't done that calculus, and then they kind of get into this and it's not working out the way they thought. It's just sad to see. You want to see people who are going someplace that they're excited about and they're happy about, and they're willing to commit and do the work and be successful, because otherwise, this can just be a very expensive waste of time and money and energy.

Anna Ivey: Yeah, and for some people, it ends up being financially catastrophic.

Alison Monahan: Oh, absolutely.

Anna Ivey: Certainly an unintended consequence. Yeah, I think for any school you put on your list to apply to, you have to be really honest with yourself if that were... I would say ask yourself, "If that were the only school I got into, would I actually go?" And that might depend on, "Well, is it a full ride or is it full fare?" So for some of that information, you have to apply and get in to find out what the price tag is, which is a goofy aspect of the American higher education system – you don't even know what the price tag is until after all those steps. But I think for some people who are really disappointed with their outcomes during the Hunger Games year – the first year of the pandemic – they ended up accepting whatever the best offer was at the time, and then were just horribly depressed during orientation when they actually showed up, because they felt like they were sort of above that school. It's like, this is where you have to really think ahead of time, "Would I actually go to that school?" Because if the answer is "No", why are you bothering?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I can see maybe you apply some place thinking you're going to get a scholarship to negotiate with or something, but I do think you have to be pretty clear about, "Would I show up to this? No? Alright."

Anna Ivey: And be honest with yourself about your own school snobbery, and I actually say that in a nonjudgmental way. I think the world is snobby – that is the world we



live in, unfortunately. So if you think a certain school that you're slapping on your list as a safety school is somehow beneath you, and then you find yourself there during orientation having an emotional breakdown because it just violates some aspect of your core identity, then I would say, don't put yourself in that situation.

Alison Monahan: No, because the reality is, if you're that miserable, you're probably not going to be performing well, so now you're not even performing well at this school that you don't want to be in.

Anna Ivey: No, I don't know how succeed in that environment. Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's not a great place to be when you're doing poorly at a place that you think is beneath you.

Anna Ivey: I get it. When you're just starting the process, it's not real yet. When you're showing up for orientation, it's feeling very, very real, and it's just a cognitive disconnect, I think that we're all capable of.

Alison Monahan: One of the other things people find challenging sometimes is that everyone in your class is actually probably pretty competitive with you.

Anna Ivey: That's it. If that was a tough year for everybody – well, the school you're at that you think is beneath you, you're surrounded by people who are not necessarily inferior to you in any way.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. I think the curve can be a harsh reality for everyone, and certainly for people who think that they're going to come in and this is going to be like a cake walk, and they're so above everyone else and so much smarter. But it's like, that's not necessarily how this is going to play out, I'm sorry.

Anna Ivey: No, that's right. I think it's very natural to think, "Oh, I'm going to be the superstar in law school." Well, by definition, axiomatically, most people end up not being the superstar.

Alison Monahan: Right. I'm sure you've seen that study they did many years ago at this point – they asked students going into law school where they thought they were going to be in the class, and I think something like 90% of them thought they'd be in the top half, and 50% of them thought they'd be in the top 10 or something. I'm making this up, but the basic gist of it is, people have unrealistic expectations sometimes.

Anna Ivey: And you know even better than I do, because this is what your practice is. Doing well in law school is not that closely correlated with what allowed you to succeed in undergrad. These are different...



- Alison Monahan: No.
- Anna Ivey: It's a whole different can of worms. And so, I think one of the really risky things for people is to think, "Oh, I know how to do school. I did really well undergrad, so I know I'm going to do really well in law school." And it's like, no, this is just a different system.
- Alison Monahan: It's a different game, and it rewards a very specific type of thinking. And if you happen to be good at that type of thinking, then you're probably going to do pretty well. But for a lot of people who have done well in previous educational experiences that reward something different, this can be a real shock to the system.
- Anna Ivey: Correct.
- Alison Monahan: Well, we're running out of time. Before we wrap up, what about this idea people often have – maybe this is also overconfidence – they can just start one place, maybe it's not their ideal school, and just transfer. How realistic do you think that is?
- Anna Ivey: That's the perfect segue, because transfer admissions all comes down to 1L grades.
- Alison Monahan: Exactly.
- Anna Ivey: So, in that sense you do get a do-over, because at that point it's not about undergrad grades, it's not about LSAT; it's about your 1L performance. But because everyone goes to law school thinking they're going to do really, really well, I don't think a transfer play... Assuming you want to transfer in order to "upgrade." For most people, they're not going to be the superstar, so I would never start at a law school that you wouldn't be okay graduating from.
- Alison Monahan: I 100% agree with that, and we tell people that all the time.
- Anna Ivey: And the other challenges, if they do end up applying – for example, say they drop out after their first week. They get there, they're like, "This makes me feel... This is horrible. No." They drop out after the first week. Well, guess what? When you reapply to law school, you have to disclose that as a prior law school enrollment. You can't just pretend it never happened.
- Alison Monahan: Right.
- Anna Ivey: Which freaks a lot of people out. They think they can just kind of sweep that under the rug, and no, you cannot.



- Alison Monahan: Yeah, definitely. We sometimes get people like, "Oh, I did one year and now I just want to reapply." It's like, "Well, you can do that, but you're going to have to tell people. And they're probably going to want to see your transcript."
- Anna Ivey: Yeah. It's all going to be a required part of the process, so the minute you actually start law school somewhere, there are consequences if you decide that you actually want to be somewhere else.
- Alison Monahan: Right. So basically, sort out your waitlist and everything else before you show up for orientation. Well, Anna, unfortunately, we are out of time. Any final thoughts you have on waitlists, or anything else that we've talked about today?
- Anna Ivey: Again, you don't have to be drifting along with the current here, these larger forces at work. Remember that you have the agency, you drag the bus, you get to make decisions about what the next several months are going to look like, and what you're willing to fight for, and when you want to call it a day. I can't emphasize that enough, because I think it's very easy to slip into a more passive frame of mind, just letting your life be dictated by these schools keeping these very deep waitlists. So that's my little pep talk – no, you're in charge here.
- Alison Monahan: Right. And I think that's sort of the through line that we've had this entire conversation, is at some point, people have to make that commitment to this experience. And if they're in a position where they say, "You know what? I'm reasonably happy with where I can go. I'm going to pull myself from the waitlist and focus on making this the best experience it can be" – I think that's a much better scenario to be in than this person who's like, "I'm not really happy with this, but I'm going to see what happens." And then, like you said, you're just losing agency at that point. I don't think that helps the whole experience.
- Anna Ivey: Right, yeah. And this is your future, this is your life, right?
- Alison Monahan: Right. Law school's three years of your life. If you're really going to be miserable some place, do not do it.
- Anna Ivey: Right.
- Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, if people want to find out more about you and your work, how can they do that?
- Anna Ivey: Yeah. So you can come to my website, which is annaivey.com. The only little hitch is, remember that it's I-V-E-Y.com. And there you'll find my blog, you'll find a link to my books, you'll find a sign-up form for my newsletter. There's also a registration link for my upcoming Law School Admissions Bootcamp if some of you are early birds and haven't even started applying to law school yet. That



bootcamp starts on April 19, and you can always just email us at law@annaivey.com.

Alison Monahan: Awesome. Well, thank you so much for joining us. Always a pleasure.

Anna Ivey: Thanks, Alison. It's always fun talking to you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we'll have to do it again soon. In fact, we can do a whole episode on how much we hate the bar exam.

Anna Ivey: I'm always up for that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, me too. Alright, well, with that, unfortunately, we are 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 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 can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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