



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have John Passmore – a practicing attorney and one of our Law School Toolbox writers – here with us to talk about some ways that law students can get involved in the legal profession. 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're excited to have John Passmore – a practicing attorney and one of our Law School Toolbox writers – here with us to talk about some ways that law students can get involved in the legal profession. Welcome, John.

John Passmore: Hello, thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. Well, to get us started, can you just give our listeners a really quick overview of your professional background, just so they have a bit of context?

John Passmore: Sure. So, I went to law school at the Catholic University of America in D.C. and I then moved back down to Texas and did legal editing for about four years for a publisher. I got focused in on family law, the family law content, and moved on to the Texas Attorney General's office in the child support division, and did that for about four years. And this last June, I joined a nonprofit, family violence nonprofit, doing direct representation for family law matters, for protective orders, custody issues, and any other family law matters that come up.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. Was this an area that you had thought about doing in law school or something you kind of fell into afterwards?

John Passmore: No, really it was all afterwards. Got in doing the legal editing. I worked a lot with the Texas Family Code and so got to know it really well, and then decided that was the path I was going to go down.

Alison Monahan: Nice. Alright, well, you have [written a lot of great stuff for our website](#) – people can go read it, we'll link to it in the show notes. But today I would like to focus on some ways that law students can get involved in the legal profession while they're still in law school, because I think sometimes this is something people



don't focus on all that much when we are so busy focusing on exams and things like that. So, let's talk first about the most obvious option, something like taking an in-school internship or a summer legal job. What advice do you have for students on, a) finding this type of opportunity, and b) making the most of it?

John Passmore: Yeah, so I think finding... The biggest thing I think is just get the first one. Once you get that first foot in the door, then you can kind of see what you're interested in and you start to meet people at that first internship, and then hopefully you can build off that first internship if you really, like you say, make the most of it and be someone that folks want to have around in the office.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think that's so key. I was reading one of your articles, and I have to say I laughed because – I'll let you tell the story – but I have a very similar story about my first job and somebody coming in and doing something that I thought maybe didn't make that much sense. So why don't you tell us about the box of documents?

John Passmore: Oh, right. So, yeah, I was approached by my supervisor and he told me to... It was a foyer request up in D.C., and there was a large stack of documents and I first didn't understand what he wanted me to do, and he clarified that, no, he did want me to go through every single page and review every single one. And by the look on my face, he clarified for me, well, he didn't make me go to law school and he didn't make me take this internship. And that was an eye-opener for me, that that's the world I'd entered.

Alison Monahan: Right. I remember it was my first summer job. It was actually my first week of my first summer job, so I'd been there maybe like three or four days. I was a 1L, I was all excited, and I don't think we'd done much of anything but orientation. It was Friday afternoon, and the senior associate came in with a partner and dropped two boxes of paper documents on my desk and said, "Yeah, so we need you to read through these and you're looking for certain words, and then you need to make a spreadsheet, and wherever those words appear you need to highlight them." And yeah, by the way, we need this done by Monday. And I just kind of looked at them, and at this point I had been a programmer before law school, and I was like, "Have you ever thought about OCRing these and just automating it?" And the partner literally just laughed. He looked at me, he's like, "I'm not sure you understand our business model." So, it was definitely eye-opening for me in multiple ways as well, of just like, "Okay." Luckily they decided, after kind of thinking about it for a few seconds, that maybe I could do it on Monday instead of over the weekend. But it was definitely an eye-opening experience of just like, "What have I signed myself up for here?"

John Passmore: Yeah, yeah. But it's those kinds of things that you can get out of the way in internships, so you're not carrying that when you're trying to really get started in your career. So you can get some of those things out of the way.



Alison Monahan: Right. And I think sometimes people just don't totally understand what they're getting into as a lawyer. I mean, there are expectations around professionalism and those kinds of things. And also just sort of coming in with the right attitude. Do you have any thoughts around that?

John Passmore: Yeah, that's the thing I've seen working with other interns, and now I've seen interns in our office – just really respect the attorneys that you're working for, because nothing's worse than having the law student show up and act like they're more important than the folks that are working there. It's the fastest way to derail your internship and cut off any relationship you have with those attorneys that you're working for.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's so true. And also, I think it applies to people who are not attorneys. I've seen people come into the office and they're not being very nice to the paralegals or the secretary and things like that. And people have to understand those people are there permanently. You might be there for a few months. So, you definitely want to make sure you're being respectful to everybody in the office.

John Passmore: Right, right. Because yeah, those are the folks you're wanting to get jobs with here, or the people they know – that's the legal community you're trying to join. So yeah, respect is a big thing, I think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think people forget how small the legal community is. So everything from classmates to anyone you work with can all come back around. Alright, let's shift gears a little bit. So, beyond just getting a job, which is pretty obvious, what are some more interesting or unique ways that people can start getting involved outside of class in the legal profession?

John Passmore: Yes, I think there's a lot more opportunities than some people might appreciate. A lot of people think you have to get out of law school before you can start getting involved, but that's not true. Starting with the biggest one, the [ABA Law Student Division](#) is an opportunity that folks can get involved before they even get out of law school. It provides a lot of resources to students. And then you can look at your jurisdiction, whether at the state level or local bars, if you know exactly where you're going to be practicing. Most of those have law student opportunities to join and usually they're very cheap, if not free. And they're great opportunities to plug into those networks.

Alison Monahan: That is definitely a plus. I think anything you can get free or very low cost in law school, you should definitely be taking advantage of.

John Passmore: Exactly.



Alison Monahan: So yeah, local bar associations. There may be sort of specific ones if you're interested in certain areas of law. Any of these things, I think, are just such a great opportunity, and so few law students really take advantage of that. But I think people are always open to mentoring and just giving advice and all those kinds of things if you're in those same groups. So I think that is awesome. What else?

John Passmore: Yeah, and that's the thing – at least in the jurisdictions I've practiced in, lawyers are much more friendly and open and willing to help young lawyers or law students than I had imagined. And I think if you reach out and you do get in touch with lawyers, as specific as you can in the practice area you want to go to or the area you want to be in, they really will help you out and spend time with you and really help you along. And you'll have to put up with their war stories and hear all about the things that they want to tell somebody about, but other than that, they're always a great... They're willing to help.

Alison Monahan: That is very true. I think lawyers love oftentimes to hear themselves talk.

John Passmore: That is true.

Alison Monahan: And if you're willing to listen...

John Passmore: But usually they're good stories, though. Usually good stories.

Alison Monahan: Right, exactly. I'm just thinking back to somebody I worked for at a firm and he was one of the leading attorneys, really probably in the world, on this very, very, very specific topic area. And I'm not going to say what it is because people might even know who this was. But it was just so specific, and he was so into it, and if you were willing to go and have lunch with him and let him talk about this topic to you, you didn't have to know anything about it, you just had to sort of express interest, like, "Oh wow, yeah, tell me more. That sounds interesting" – he was like the happiest person alive. So, anyone who wanted to actually be in this area, it would have been a great fit for them.

John Passmore: There you go. Yeah, yeah.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well, tell me a little bit more. I know you recently wrote an [article](#) about some creative ways, other than sort of just joining the bar association – which is always useful. Tell me some more about some of those ideas.

John Passmore: So as far as just getting acclimated, and especially if you don't have much of a legal background before you go to law school – if you don't have lawyers in the family, things like that – just picking up the vocabulary and feeling more confident that you can walk into some sort of networking event or interview and be speaking the same language as the lawyers, is a big help. So, I find that



reading legal publications, like if you have local bar journals that you can get into and read, which comes with also joining those bar associations, you can get a lot of that material. You get the emails, you get the journals that come out occasionally, and really help you develop your kind of walking around knowledge in the area.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember I used to get the ABA journal. I think that was the one where in the back of it, they had little snippets of all the people who had been sanctioned or disbarred. It might have been the California version. But I remember for some reason, I just found those absolutely fascinating and terrifying at the same time. So, that was always a part I turned to, like, "Wow, what creative ways have people found to screw up their legal career?"

John Passmore: Exactly. Yeah, things to avoid, things to avoid.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it was like, what not to do. I mean, most of them were pretty standard – embezzling client funds, trust accounts, things like that. But sometimes people got really creative, and you're just like, "Wow, how did this person ever pass character and fitness to start with?"

John Passmore: To start with, yeah. Yeah, but there're always good things in there – profiles of judges, profiles of attorneys. You can kind of see how people build careers in your area and the different opportunities that are out there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's one of the most interesting things, just even looking at the bios, the people who are writing articles and what was their path? Because I think sometimes students think everybody picks the path and just stays on it. But I think for most people, that's not necessarily the case. You might read something and then get interested in it, and then maybe join a group or do an informational interview. The path is often quite windy.

John Passmore: Yes, I would certainly agree with that.

Alison Monahan: Alright, what else?

John Passmore: So, listen to podcasts on different legal issues. It's one that I enjoy, and that even if you're really busy you can always fit in a podcast. They're great to put kids asleep too, if you've got kids. They'll listen to a Supreme Court argument, they'll be out fast, and you just have to stay awake a little bit. But podcasts are a great way to, again, build that vocabulary and get more acclimated.

Alison Monahan: And how do you find podcasts that you might be interested in looking at, or I guess listening to?



John Passmore: Yeah, so [Oyez](#) is one that I get my Supreme Court oral arguments off of. That's one that I listen to a lot. But you can search around. I listen to a Texas Appellate podcast occasionally as well, and they've got interesting folks on. But yeah, just search around and see what you're interested in. And again, if you can get more local, either to your state level or to a more local level, then that's all the better.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's sort of funny because I never listen to podcasts despite having one, but I have friends who are always like, "Oh, you should really listen to this, it's so good." And I do think it's great. A lot of people who listen to this obviously listen in their car or at the gym or driving. So, it is one of those things, I think, you can fit in around other stuff.

John Passmore: [Stitcher](#) is a good one if you need an entry point. Stitcher is the one I use.

Alison Monahan: Oh, okay. Stitcher is the podcast listening app you listen to?

John Passmore: It's the app, yeah. And so you can search through there.

Alison Monahan: Oh, nice. Yeah. One of the other suggestions you had that I thought was really interesting was really to listen in on oral arguments, or to follow a trial. And I was thinking about that, because we're recording this right at the time of the ski trial. Was it Gwyneth Paltrow, I think, was on trial for potentially hitting someone. She just got found – I guess it was not a criminal trial – but not liable. It was a Tort case. But yeah, that was actually, as I understand, it was broadcast, so people could have checked that out. Why do you think that has value?

John Passmore: Yeah, because sometimes you get kind of burnt out on doing the real heavy duty legal work in law school, and so kind of mixing that, if you enjoy the celebrity stuff, then that's a way you can kind of keep working the legal side of your mind, but also have a little bit of a break from just reading cases all day. And also, people are going to expect you to know all the answers about all the laws, so if there's a big trial going on, people are going to ask you, and that way you can at least have an informed answer for them when they ask.

Alison Monahan: Right, no, that's a good point. And also, I clerked for a federal district judge, and I found that that was a super interesting experience, because part of what he encouraged us to do was to spend time in the courtroom. So, whether we were actually having a trial – which happened a few times in that year – or just going to even a calendaring hearing. To me, that was interesting because I was coming out of law school, I had never... I didn't know how any of this worked. I didn't know what a motion hearing was. But just all these sorts of day-to-day things that you actually would do as a lawyer, I think are great to be exposed to in law school.

John Passmore: Exactly, yeah.



- Alison Monahan: And then if you're interested more in appellate work, obviously the oral arguments. And I think the Supreme Court, don't they broadcast live always their arguments?
- John Passmore: Usually they're delayed. They've sped up the release of the audio, I think. But some of them may be live now. It used to be much slower, but now they're getting faster.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, I can't remember with COVID, but I think there are ways now that you can listen in. And I think we broadcast actually – when I'm trying to think back, even when I was clerking – I think a lot of that was actually broadcast. So yeah, there definitely are ways to sort of get access to that. Or if you're in a city that has courthouses, you could literally just show up. I mean, they let anybody come in.
- John Passmore: Exactly. That's right, that's right.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember even as a summer, that was a really interesting part of my job, was on the days that they decided we could come with them. And even though the attorneys were like, "Oh, this is no big deal", but to us, we'd never seen this before, it was super interesting.
- John Passmore: And also, that's another thing for nonprofits and public interest type law – there are a lot of groups that you can plug into that they'll go to hearings, just to support the victims or survivors.
- Alison Monahan: True.
- John Passmore: And those could be another way that you can kind of identify things that you can go to, rather than just showing up. You can really get involved in the case at that level and go see some of those hearings, and temporary orders hearings and motion hearings that you might not otherwise know when they're going on, what might be happening.
- Alison Monahan: Yeah, not everyone grows up like Lee – my business partner – whose parents were both attorneys, and would sometimes have to take her before school because they didn't have anyone to take care of her. She remembers her childhood of, an hour in the morning before school, sitting in on motion hearings, saying to her father at one point, he's like, "Oh, what did you think of that?" She's like, "It seems like they just talk a lot and then reschedule everything." He's like, "Ah, from the mouths of babes."
- John Passmore: Exactly.



- Alison Monahan: Alright, well, anything else? I think one more thing you had on that list was about conferences.
- John Passmore: Yeah, so it's kind of along with along the lines of being free or cheap to get into the organizations. A lot of the law conferences that are put on have student rates that you can get into. So, look around in the fields you're looking to go into, and see if there are those conferences that you can schedule. Those are a good way to really force yourself to spend time, because like you said, law school, everyone's focused on the grades. But it's one way to get out of the law school, put something on your calendar that you're going to go spend some concerted time, learning about life outside of law school.
- Alison Monahan: Right, and I think there're a lot of learning opportunities that happen, and then there're also a lot of networking opportunities that happen, that probably is more valuable than spending one extra day in the library. And I say this as a person who obviously wants people to study. And oftentimes I think schools will pay for that as well. If they don't have a way to get a free student rate, you can often ask your school will they subsidize this, and they typically do have a bucket of money for that.
- John Passmore: Yeah, and just reaching out to the organizers. Again, like we talked about lawyers wanting to help out young lawyers and law students – if you can contact someone that's putting on the conference, I think, again, they would help you with the admission if that was an issue.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's true. They might let you be their intern or volunteer, help out with a couple of things and then give you free admission, I think probably happens quite frequently. Alright, cool. Anything else that you've thought of outside of those that we've already talked about?
- John Passmore: That's probably about what I had in mind. Other thing just, yeah, like I said, once you get that first internship and you have that opportunity, then just keep that network alive and keep looking for opportunities that those attorneys might know of. And they'll usually reach out and let you know if there's something available.
- Alison Monahan: That's very true. Yeah, and just keeping in touch with people, like, "Hey, I saw this article, I thought of you." If you're top of mind when an opportunity comes around, they're going to be thinking, "John, that guy was really great. He's really a go-getter, sent me that article, so helpful. Just really want to help him out."
- John Passmore: Yeah, that's one of the things about internships, is don't disappear at the end of them, because the attorneys... Some of the ones that I interned for, we had an intern that left in the middle of the day, left his desk a mess, and not only did not build relationships, but really, they felt like he had just used them as a



stepping stone and then just disappeared. And so, really keep in touch, and they'll be grateful that you are keeping in touch, because they like to invest in the students, I think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. You've already invested time and energy and potentially money in this person – you want to know how they're doing, and hopefully they're doing well. Alright, well, if I'm a busy law student listening to this – which by definition most of them are – at least I can check, I guess, listening to podcasts off of the list. But do you have any tips on how people can kind of fit all this in? It's like, "Okay, great, I'm supposed to now go to a trial, I'm supposed to listen to a podcast on the way, and then wait, I go to a conference too?" How do I do all this stuff?

John Passmore: Yeah, well, try to find things that don't seem like work to you. Find one on that list that, if you're commuting to law school and you always listen to podcasts anyways, just try to work it in. If you know you have a little bit of gap in your schedule some time in the semester, then try to look for a conference that will fit in neatly with your schedule. You don't have to really burden yourself with these. The idea is to just work them in in life when it'll be convenient.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think this is going to be a great thing to do your third year as well, because the reality is, unless you're on the journal board or something really demanding, you've probably got some extra time that third year. So, maybe this is something that if you're listening to now and you're a 2L, you think, "Oh, let me look at my schedule for next year. I'm going to go ahead and pick out that conference that I'm going to attend and get that on the schedule."

John Passmore: Yeah, that's a good idea.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, we've got to be realistic here.

John Passmore: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: And I do think blocking out time for something like this is really great too, about if you're going to read something, a legal publication – maybe you just make that your coffee break on a certain day, that kind of thing. Again, like you said, it doesn't have to be this massive commitment, but I think just thinking of ways to sort of work this stuff in builds up over time. Alright, well, let's shift gears a little bit before we wrap up. When you look back on your law school experience, what do you think has been most helpful so far in your legal career that you were doing in law school?

John Passmore: My path might have been a little bit non-traditional, because I didn't know I was going to do family law when I was in law school. I thought I was going to go into public international law, and then administrative law I was really, really focused



on. We ended up coming back to Texas because my wife and I are both from Texas, and we just couldn't live in D.C. when we were about to start having kids. So we did come back to Texas. So there's going to be different things that come up, but really, the foundation, the concepts, the ways of analysis are the things that have stuck with me. And you'll be surprised what law school classes will come back. Even though I didn't think I was going to be doing trial, being in the courtroom, my Trial Skills class always keeps coming back in mind now that I really am in the courtroom every day. Those concepts will stick with you, and the approaches that they teach you, they do come back to mind.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think it is funny. I ended up being a patent litigator after I graduated, and I hadn't taken a single IP class in law school, which is a little funny because I did actually work as a programmer before law school. So, I'm not really sure how I kind of missed the memo that maybe this was an area I would've actually been interested in, but it wasn't until I was clerking and we had a patent case and it was a software case, and I was just like, "Oh, this is pretty cool." And my judge was like, "Well, you can read the code, you understand what this is. This is actually a really big benefit, maybe you should look at doing this." And at that point I kind of wished maybe I should have at least taken like an introduction to IP or intro to patent law or something. But I think the reality is, if you've been through law school, you have the ability to learn the specific areas of law that you need when you're practicing. So, I think people don't have to get so hung up on like, "Oh, I didn't take that course, I can't possibly practice." Weirdly enough, I took several Family Law courses in law school, including one called Federalism in the Family.

John Passmore: Interesting.

Alison Monahan: Sounds like one of those... It was super interesting and I thought it was a great class, but it sounds like one of those things you'd never use. But when Eliot Spitzer was arrested and I was on an email chain with the people in that class, and we were like, "That is the Mann Act. We know what that is." And I'm like, "Eliot Spitzer, how do you not know what the Mann Act is? You were a prosecutor." So it's always these weird things that come back that you don't expect to be using that show up and you're like, "Oh, I know exactly why he's in big trouble right now, and this is a federal offense."

John Passmore: Yeah. And that's always, sometimes the knock against law school is that it's too abstract and doesn't really focus people in enough. But sometimes it is helpful if you end up moving in a different direction. You've taken some things that apply, even if you didn't exactly take the course in law school.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think so much of it is just about learning how to think, and also learning how to learn things. And once you have that skill set down, it doesn't really



matter. I'm sure being a practicing attorney, you could go and pick up a new area of law fairly quickly if you needed to, because you've just sort of done that.

John Passmore: Right.

Alison Monahan: Well, any advice you might've given your law school self, sort of looking back on it?

John Passmore: Yeah. So, because I didn't think I was going to do it, the Trial Skills class, and Evidence. Should have taken some more notes on Evidence and kept that outline, because...

Alison Monahan: Oh, I was going to say I hope you took Evidence.

John Passmore: Yeah, I certainly took Evidence. I certainly took it.

Alison Monahan: Anyone listening to this, highly recommend you take Evidence. It is on the multiple choice section of the bar exam. It is a difficult thing to learn on your own to the level that you need it for the bar. So we always say, please take Evidence.

John Passmore: Yes, Evidence is very important, but yeah, I would've paid more attention on the practical applications of it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, no, the judge I was working for... I took Evidence my last semester because I wanted it to be fresh for the bar, and I'd sort of asked him, "What classes do you think I should take my third year? Is there anything you think would be really useful?" And basically he was like, "You just have to take Evidence. That's the one that I need to be able to turn to you and pass you a note that says, 'Is this admissible?' And I need you to pass it back and say 'Yes' or 'No, because of X, Y, and Z.' That's the only thing you're ever going to be put on the spot about that I need you to actually know."

John Passmore: Yeah, when you stand up and say "Objection", the judge is going to want to know why.

Alison Monahan: Right. Basically, we would sit in the courtroom – my co-clerk and I – and someone would object, and he would kind of look at us and we would sort of nod or not nod. It was definitely the one thing where you really had to know, was this coming in or not in that moment.

John Passmore: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Alison Monahan: Alright, well, any final thoughts you'd like to share on this topic?



John Passmore: Yeah, I think just get involved. Know that even though it may sound intimidating, that you can do it as a law student. I'm an introvert by nature, and so networking always seemed very intimidating. But if you start getting involved in these groups, then you'll be on the email chain, you can read the things, you can start building that confidence that you do belong in the legal world. And the earlier you can do that, the better.

Alison Monahan: I think that's great advice and a really great point, that sometimes people have an allergy, basically, to the idea of networking, and they think it just means showing up and holding a glass of wine and trying to have some crackers and chat with people. But so much of that now really happens not in-person. So, it is these LISTSERVs and Slack channels, and I guess people are in Discord and things now. But that is where a lot of the networking really happens. And I think it's actually a great opportunity for people who may not be so extroverted to get involved in a way that feels more comfortable to them. So, I definitely think that is worth considering. Are there ways that maybe you go to an event and then you get on the list afterwards, and now you're in that community without having to put yourself so out there that most people, or a lot of people, don't really want to do.

John Passmore: Yes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Alright, well, thank you so much for joining us.

John Passmore: Of course. Thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: Definitely appreciate it. We will link to all of your writing, because I think it's all really solid. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listing 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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