Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're excited to have Sarah Covington, one of the authors of *Digitally Remastered: Modern Law School*, here to talk with us about the book and the online law school experience. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan, and typically, I'm with Lee Burgess. We are 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 Sarah Covington, one of the authors of *Digitally Remastered: Modern Law School*, here with us to talk about the book and the online law school experience. Welcome, Sarah.

Sarah Covington: Thanks, Alison. It's so great to be here with you today.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. Well, to start things off, would you mind just giving our listeners a bit of your background? How did you end up in law school?

Sarah Covington: Yeah, so that's a little bit of a crazy story, so I'm going to give you the condensed version.

Alison Monahan: Alright, sounds good.

Sarah Covington: Yeah, so prior to law school, I was a Chief Operating Officer at a health tech startup during COVID. And through that experience, I realized that it would be helpful to learn a little bit more about law. So I didn't actually intend to practice as an attorney, but I was looking at PhD programs, and an online Juris Doctorate just seemed so much more practical, so I went that route instead.

Alison Monahan: Awesome. Well, as I understand it, you have recently graduated, is that right?

Sarah Covington: I did, yes. It's so exciting.

Alison Monahan: Congratulations! So, I'm kind of curious, how did you end up working on this book – I mean, on top of everything else that you've been doing?

Sarah Covington: So, I started law school during the pandemic and online, and as part of our introductory courses to law school, we were assigned this really awesome book

to read. It had so many great suggestions in it, but it also had some that didn't really apply to my life particularly. At the time, I was working full-time in my executive role, I was homeschooling our daughter because her health conditions didn't allow it to be safe for her to go to school, and I was trying to figure out how to be a law student, and I was adjunct faculty at the time. So, there was a lot going on.

Alison Monahan: Oh wow. Very busy.

Sarah Covington: Yeah. This book had really great suggestions about having study group at the library, and it also had suggestions about attending events on campus when they happen, and it had this schedule laid out about, "Here's how you study and schedule your time." But in a part-time program, working full-time, none of that applied to my life. And I'm also geographically diverse from campus, and so meeting on campus just really wasn't an option for me either. And my cohorts were likewise not central to the campus. And so, it was really born out of like, "Hey, let's give online law students some tools to succeed." So it's really the byproduct of what I wish I had had my first semester of law school.

Alison Monahan: Right. No, I totally get that. That's why I say I started The Girl's Guide to Law School – I was like, "That's all the stuff I wish I had known." That was originally going to be a book, but never actually morphed into a book. It kind of morphed from the start of a book into the website. So I admire that you guys actually finished the book, particularly as law students. Some people might be surprised to learn that you can actually do an accredited law school program online. How does this work? You mentioned you were geographically not on campus – do you go in at all? How does this play out?

Sarah Covington: Yeah, so I'm actually really fortunate that I was even able to go to law school, because I live in rural South Dakota. So the closest law school to me is actually six hours away.

Alison Monahan: Oh wow.

Sarah Covington: And as a mum of two, that just really wasn't going to be an option for me. And so, how it works is we have a learning management system. So we go in and access modules that we complete weekly. We also attend class via Zoom, which is great because we're able to see everybody all at the same time, but it also is a little bit different dynamic than a residential classroom because your instructor sees everyone on Zoom equally. There's not the front row and you can't really hide out in the back row – there isn't a back row in a Zoom class. So, I think the cold calls tend to be a little bit more frequent with that, just kind of comparing experiences that we've had with others. And yeah, we turn in our assignments remotely as well. There's a lot of communication with our professors via email. They meet with us via Zoom and schedule office hours when it works for our

lives. One of the really great things is that we actually, for all of our finals, we are proctored through the same software that I'll be taking the bar exam with. So it felt like riding a bike when I went to do my practice test last week, which was really nice.

Alison Monahan: Right, I guess there're some good parts of that. We always were like, "Oh gosh, that software." Better that you have used it than not used it. So I'm guessing all of your exams are pretty much online.

Sarah Covington: For some of our courses though, of course, we turn in papers and not exams, so of course that's done a little bit differently. And so we upload our submissions anonymously, removing all of our metadata to keep the anonymous features.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. Yeah, I recently did a virtual business program as well, and it was interesting to see how it was structured and how it worked. And the thing I found a little surprising – we had about 40 people in my actual cohort – and I thought it was surprising how close people became, even though we only met in-person for four or five days at the very end of the experience. Do you have any tips – and I think there may be some of this in the book – for building those relationships in this virtual environment, whether you're talking about professors, classmates, employers, anyone?

Sarah Covington: Yeah, absolutely. I think it requires a little bit more intentionality, because you're not passing people in the hallway. You don't have those moments together before and after class, before the professor starts the lecture. The lecture starts and everybody clicks their Zoom camera on, and you're rolling.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Sarah Covington: So, it really does require a little bit more intentionality to reach out to your classmates outside of class and outside of some of those regular environments, but it's absolutely doable. My absolute best friend that is like law school bestie – she's the one of the ones that helped co-author with me – she happens to also be in South Dakota. Crazy story, we didn't know each other before we started law school. Both of our husbands work at the same place. We live about 40 minutes apart from each other. And she reached out to me and she is like, "Hey, I see you're in my area." And I was like, "Hey!" And just that initial message of reaching out then developed to this beautiful friendship, and we'll be in the same bar together for the foreseeable future of our careers. And so, I think looking for people that you're going to have those long-term relationships with so you can kind of look just beyond law school as well, is really helpful.

Alison Monahan: I think so. Well, let's shift gears a little bit. You mentioned you have one of your co-authors who lives near you. So there are three of you. Tell me a little bit more about how you guys work together, what everybody was bringing to the

table, and also what's the goal of the book? What were you guys trying to do here?

Sarah Covington: Yeah, so as I mentioned, it was really born out of just being a little bit lost my first semester and needing a resource. One of the other things I noticed about the materials we were given is that they seemed to be written by people for whom law school was really easy. And I was kind of struggling with all those things in my life. And so, I really wanted to make sure that what we put together sort of reflected the entire law school experience. So, reached out strategically and got the group together because we all have different strengths, but we also all experienced areas of weakness. And so, the idea was to come together and really create a well-rounded book. We strategically aligned each chapter, so that it's written by one of us that that's an area of strength that we had, and also paired with someone for whom that was a challenge. And so that way, we can kind of give that balanced view for law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. One of the things I found really interesting and compelling about the book was, I guess the more personal anecdote side of it. There are plenty of people who can tell you, "Oh, here're some strategies for multiple choice or something." But I thought the way that you put together the book was really interesting. It reminded me of one I used when I was a law student, where I think they had a panel of eight or 10 different people. And so each chapter, they'd kind of be like, "This is this person's view on this, and this is this person's view on it." So I thought that was an interesting way of going about it because the reality is, there's not one way to do this. And so, I just thought bringing those different perspectives in was pretty interesting. Was that something you would try to be intentional about?

Sarah Covington: It really was, because I felt like what I received was more like, "Here's the roadmap", which is great, and when trying to follow it, it just didn't work for me. And so, I felt like it was really valuable to bring in, "Hey, here're some different approaches that have worked for different people", so that as students encounter different struggles, they've got some different ideas for ways that they can approach it, so that it works for their lives.

Alison Monahan: I think that's totally true, and I think there is this kind of dogmatic way that people think, "You have to do law school this way." And I think you and I, based on what I read in the book, are pretty similar learners, and that I'm also a very visual learner. And so for me, this idea of the hundred plus page outline that I was going to sit down and try to do something with, I was like, "This is not working for me. I need to have a flowchart that's color-coded." That's probably a less common style of learning in the law school environment, but I remember a friend of mine came over one time to study with me and I'd drawn all these pictures on flashcards and the different cases, and he was just like, "What are

you doing? You're literally coloring. We're supposed to be studying, you're coloring pictures." I'm like, "No, this is kind of how I think."

Sarah Covington: Yeah. And Bethany is absolutely the one in our group that does all these flowcharts and I'll be like, "Bethany, I have to go write a template before I can even try to read your flowchart, because this is just so overwhelming for me to look at, that my brain is like, 'I can't process that.'" So, I go write my templates first, so I feel like I have a grasp of the material, and then I'll go through and look over her flowcharts, and then we'd give each other suggestions. And Jessica's kind of the opposite – she hates templating, but she's an outliner through and through. And so usually, we all end up sharing our resources, even though we each do it differently, because usually we can pick up something from somebody else's that we might've missed, or the way that they framed it sort of helps us with a gap that we didn't even realize we had.

Alison Monahan: I think that's true. We have some podcast episodes I was going through recently on learning styles, and people think, "Oh, it's just this one style." It's like, no, you can kind of bring in all of this stuff from different places. And yeah, maybe it's not your first primary way that you're learning something, but maybe there's something here that you could pick up on, and something here just a different way, kind of mix it up a little bit. And a lot of the book does cover study tips for different types of exams and things. How much of this advice do you think is specific to online students, or do you think it's more applicable across the board? I was just curious how you see that kind of playing out. What do you think is different about going online and how you need to study for that?

Sarah Covington: A lot of our study groups are actually done asynchronously, simply because we're all in different time zones and with different family obligations. In addition to having scheduled class time, it doesn't really always work for us to get together for study groups. And for me personally, I don't really get a lot out of study groups. I know all the literature is like, "You have to do a study group to be successful."

Alison Monahan: Dirty little secret – you don't have to have a study group.

Sarah Covington: Right. So that has worked really well. We share a lot through group chat and we have community built that way. We make sure to share Wednesday Wins. So we'll just check in with each other if it's something little like, "Hey guys! This week, I made sure to get the dishwasher loaded." Like, "Hallelujah, we'll celebrate that." And then somebody else is like, "I just landed my dream internship opportunity!" And we're like, "Yes!" So, it's like no matter how big or how small, we make sure to take a little time each week just to kind of focus around that, because in this crazy daunting journey, you've got to celebrate the little things and the big things along the way. But I think that that's a really key difference for us, is just how we study. That's not to say that a residential

student couldn't adopt that approach; it's just that we can't really do study groups on campus. So, roundabout way of answering your book – I actually think there're a lot of universal things that could go for any law students, but very distinctly some things that are only available to hybrids, simply because of our relationships just being a little bit different.

Alison Monahan: For sure. Yeah, I found it interesting that one of your co-authors, I think it was her husband had gone to school in-person, and then a few years later, she was doing this and he was like, "Oh, this is kind of different."

Sarah Covington: Yeah. And I think that was such a helpful experience too for her to have, because then she can kind of share and say, "Hey, wait. This is different than what... " Because they were together when he went to school, and so she got to see the spouse's perspective. And now he's on the other end of the spouse's perspective. And then I also attended two different law schools. I did the online version at two different ones, and so that's also been a unique comparison feature too for us.

Alison Monahan: Interesting. Yeah, when I did this program, I definitely was surprised by just how exhausting so many Zoom calls were. I was just not used... We'd have a two-hour session on a Monday, and like an hour and a half on a Friday. And I was just like, "Oh my gosh, this is a lot." There was just something about it.

Sarah Covington: Yeah, it's a marathon. And getting assigned to group work, there're times where we have to do a little bit of professor education along the way, and they've always been really great. Last semester, we were assigned group work and I was assigned to partners in different time zones. And just with how our work schedules were, it would have been extremely difficult for us to meet in the time allotted. And so, he was awesome. He gave us like 15 minutes at the end of the lecture one night, when we were all still on one of those power Zoom sessions, so we were able to connect and coordinate. And then we were able to do the rest of the project asynchronously with just shared Google Docs.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a really good way of just learning how to work, too. Our business, for example, is completely virtual. And I think there are so many people now working in a more virtual environment that I think there was a lot of benefit to figuring this stuff out in school.

Sarah Covington: Well, exactly. And even court is sometimes on Zoom nowadays.

Alison Monahan: True.

Sarah Covington: So, it's really comfortable.

Alison Monahan: That's very true.

Sarah Covington: That function has been really helpful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you don't want to be like, "Am I on mute? Can people hear me? Am I on mute?" You've got that sorted out.

Sarah Covington: Like the lawyer cat. Nobody wants to be the lawyer cat, right?

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, exactly, totally. One of the things I thought was interesting... So, you talk in the book about extracurricular activities, which a lot of law students would be familiar with – the things like law journal, moot court, working and stuff with the bar association, student government. How does this stuff work in an online program? Because the program you went to, at least the one discussed in the book, is not only a virtual experience; they have in-person as well.

Sarah Covington: Yeah, they do. So with that, I was on Law Review last year. And there was another hybrid student that was in my little Law Review pot. So it was great – we would be on Zoom, and we got to meet some of the residential students that way, which was really awesome. And they were phenomenal about it. They all got their laptops out, so that way we could fully participate and see. And so, it was a really great experience. And then also, I was on the mock trial team last year. I was the only hybrid student on the mock trial team. And they all did a great job of... Sometimes I'd have to be like, "Hey guys, you stepped a little too far away from the mic." And so they would just pop right on back and that way, we could go. So, we prepped for mock trial entirely with them in the mock trial court room and me on Zoom, and then we arrived to the competition and did quite well.

Alison Monahan: Wow, that's impressive. I think those types of things, plus maybe the job hunt – and not just the job hunt, but internships and things like that. Those are what kind of seem challenging to me, at least, as an outsider looking in on this. What is the career stuff like online?

Sarah Covington: I think for me, actually, it sort of worked to my advantage, because when I approached the local law firm here with questions about interning, there's no law school nearby. And so, they can only usually get some summer interns, and I'm here year-round. And so, that ended up creating a really phenomenal opportunity. I got to go and participate, and help prep for Supreme Court oral arguments, which I wouldn't have gotten to do otherwise. And then I've also been able to have remote internships, which has been great, up in Seattle. There was also a federal judge out of Ohio that kindly was like, "Hey, let's make this happen." And I was like, "Oh, my stars. Yes, thank you. Sign me up. That is so generous of you." We just met through a networking event, and he reached out and was like, "I think you should do an internship with me."

Alison Monahan: Oh, that's amazing.

Sarah Covington: I know, right? The legal profession, what I've experienced is, they are so open to helping law students if you're intentional about networking and reaching out. And usually when I reach out, I'm super transparent, like, "Hey, I'm in rural South Dakota, trying to learn about the law." And people have been very kind to meet with me. I got to do an IP internship out of New York and fly to their New York office and go to their recording studio. There have just been so many crazy, amazing experiences. And if I was in a traditional classroom...

Alison Monahan: That's fantastic.

Sarah Covington: Yeah, I never would have been able to go to the Supreme Court oral arguments, because I wouldn't have been able to miss class, whereas I was able to attend class in the evening after having been there. I attended class from New York. It just provides flexibility, so you can go and do really interesting things that you wouldn't be able to do otherwise. For example, I worked on getting legislation passed in our state. And so, I was up at the state legislature, I got to work with the drafting committee. It was a phenomenal experience. And again, attended class that night from my hotel room.

Alison Monahan: Wow, that is some serious dedication. Yeah, I think the same thing with a virtual business – I can work anywhere so it doesn't really matter as long as I have Internet. And sometimes it is inconvenient. My business partner happens to be abroad right now, so she's having to work kind of crazy hours, but she also gets to spend her day doing something she wants to do. And I think, as with many things, it seems like a lot of this is just about taking advantage of the opportunities as they present themselves, and also kind of making these opportunities for yourself in a way that maybe you're being more creative about because you do have a different perspective on it.

Sarah Covington: I think that's exactly the case. And I have other… Jessica, she's another co-author. She did her externship this last summer – or sorry, this last spring semester at a local law firm. But other than that, she really hasn't interned, but she also has two tiny children that she gets to spend time with, and so that just isn't what's worked for her life. It's great that you're able to approach this experience and get out of it what you can and what works for your family. So, whether that's working full-time, whether that's kind of jumping in and doing more interning, or whether it's being more in a family caretaking position, this program lets you flex to what you need.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, let's talk a little bit more about that, because I thought that was also interesting in the book. You have a decent amount of material on specifics about taking care of yourself as a law student, but also about these other

important relationships. Do you have any advice for people who are in the thick of things, just trying to balance all of this? How do you make it work?

Sarah Covington: Okay, so this is in the book, but my very first semester of law school, I got the shrimp all thawed out and I told my husband, "Hey, I just need you to make this for dinner, okay? Because I've got to run to class, so I just don't have time to cook tonight." He's great. He apparently made Korean barbecue shrimp, which I was like, "What? That's crazy amazing. Okay, alright." And he didn't really know what else to make, so he made our sweet little daughter's bowls of Cheerios as a side dish with the shrimp.

Alison Monahan: That's really funny.

Sarah Covington: I think that was great.

Alison Monahan: You're like, "Okay, what? Great, they're eating, they're eating, that's great."

Sarah Covington: Okay. And they were both happy. Is it what I would have made for dinner that night? Probably not. We were probably would have had a vegetable mixed in. And so, I think just one of the things is setting some expectations, knowing that if there are things that used to be on your plate that are now being transferred over to somebody else, that it might be done a little bit different than how you might have done it, but being okay with that. Learning to kind of let go has been really helpful for me. But yeah, we really did want to talk about that stress side of things, because so many of us have families, so many of us are working. There's just a lot more in our lives than just going to law school. And so we wanted to be really intentional about providing that backdrop, because personally, that's something I've struggled with. It's something that we all identified as being an area where we could have used a little bit more notice upfront as to what to expect.

Alison Monahan: Right, yeah. And I think we see this a lot with part-time students we work with, whether they're virtual or in-person, it's like your life is complicated. You're not just a 25-year-old who's like, "Oh, great. I can just go to school all the time." That's hard enough in law school, but then you start adding on these other layers of family, kids, pets, jobs, all of this stuff. I think it can pretty quickly become very overwhelming for people. So, I definitely appreciate that you have some pretty practical advice, and also just advice about getting other people on board, which I think it's hard for somebody who hasn't done this experience to really understand what you're going through.

Sarah Covington: Well, and just kind of personally, during my 1L year, my daughter ended up needing to have surgery. And while she was still in physical therapy for her leg, I broke my right hand and I was in a cast, and then these fingers were cast downward, and this one was in a cast, so I had these two little pincher claws. I

couldn't even type with it. And so at that point in my life, I just had to take a step back and figure out what is it that's going to work to get us through this season where I have… We called ourselves Limpy and Gimpy, because she couldn't walk and I couldn't do anything with my dominant hand. But my teachers were awesome. They let me submit some of my responses that I would have normally needed to type out for our weekly modules via little video-recorded Zooms. I was like, "Thank you!" It was good though, because it really forced me to take a step back. And it was sort of after that moment where I was like, "Hey, study groups aren't what worked for me. These are the things that I actually need to do." And it actually led to some really great outcomes for me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I had a similar experience where I stabbed myself in the finger with a butter knife and cut a tendon, so this finger still doesn't actually bend properly. But I also, for two months, was in a cast after getting surgery. Well, not a cast, but a brace. But I couldn't type for two months. And this was kind of early days of the business, and Lee and I had to sit down because she was pregnant and I couldn't type, and we're just like, "Okay, I think we need to bring some people on, because what are we going to do? We can't do anything. You're having a baby, I can't type. How are we going to do this?" But in the end, when you look back, I think it's those sorts of things that do make you realize, "Okay, let's get down to brass tacks here. How are we going to make this work?" And that's kind of what makes the progression happen.

Sarah Covington: And I think one other thing, too, about being remote that has been really helpful is that I have gotten really involved with our state bar.

Alison Monahan: Oh, cool.

Sarah Covington: And volunteered and gotten to do events through that, that I wouldn't have gotten to do through a traditional campus environment. And so, even though I didn't go to law school in this area, I feel really prepared with the local market because I've gotten to meet so many attorneys already through that volunteering. And so, I would encourage any student, even if you can't be there regularly, show up when you can to go to those bar meetings, particularly if you're not attending law school in the jurisdiction which you're going to practice, because it gives you some ways to start building those pathways.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And basically anywhere you are in the U.S., I guarantee you there's a bar association pretty close by. There are lawyers everywhere. So, I think that's a really, really great suggestion about getting involved locally, even if it's not where your school is necessarily located. Well, before we wrap up, let me just ask you, what was your favorite part about writing this book?

Sarah Covington: Okay, so my favorite thing is Bethany had this idea to add in like, "Hey, what was your favorite 1L class?" Because you do so much reading during your first year of law school, that we really wanted to make sure that we wrote in a method that was accessible, so it could kind of be that brain break that you need. And so, in adding in, "What was your favorite class during 1L?", we actually, all three of us had the same class that we loved.

Alison Monahan: I noticed that and it was not a class that I would have liked. I'm like, "Really? They all loved this class? Wow, they must have had very different professors." Because I took that class, we had to take it at 2L. We won't give it away, but I was just like, "Wow, that's unusual."

Sarah Covington: But I think it goes to show how when you have a professor that really goes above and beyond to meet with your students and to make sure that you're teaching in such a way that everybody's learning needs are met, it makes a huge difference. And so, that was kind of my favorite moment, was seeing "Oh, hey, that was your favorite class too, and your favorite class." Because we didn't realize that we all had the same favorite class.

Alison Monahan: That's so funny, yeah. Definitely, I would say not most people's favorite 1L class. You must have had an amazing professor. Well, any final thoughts before we wrap up?

Sarah Covington: No, it's been such a joy to get to connect with you. Thank you so much for inviting me to come and speak with you today.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. Thank you so much for joining us. Oh, and I guess I should ask, how do people get the book if they want to get it?

Sarah Covington: Yeah, so it's available on Carolina Academic Press's website, and it's also available on Amazon for purchase.

Alison Monahan: So yeah, just as a reminder, what is the title of the book?

Sarah Covington: It's *Digitally Remastered: Modern Law School*.

Alison Monahan: Perfect, alright. So, everyone, we'll link to that in the show notes. I've taken a look at it. Great book, super useful resource. Thank you so much for joining us, Sarah.

Sarah Covington: Thank you so much for having me.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If

you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee 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!

RESOURCES:

Digitally Remastered: Modern Law School, by Jessica Carmichael, Bethany Carr, Sarah Covington
Podcast Episode 264: Mid-Semester Check-in in a Virtual Law School Environment
6 Things to Think About When Considering a Study Group
10 Things Every 1L Can Do to Successfully Navigate Their First Virtual Semester of Law School
Thinking Outside the Box: Should You Start a Virtual Study Group?
Tips for Utilizing Virtual Office Hours