



Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're excited to have ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about some less common documents employers might be requesting from you. 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 ex-BigLaw recruiter Sadie Jones here with us to talk about some less common documents that employers might be requesting from you. So welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Well, we've talked many times about the kind of standard documents – your resume, your cover letter, your writing sample. So today, we want to talk about some less common things you might be asked for when you're applying for a legal job. What type of stuff have you seen here?

Sadie Jones: Well, a diversity statement is something that's fairly common, and anyone can really add one to an application or the employer might request one. They might have a specific position like a 1L fellowship or a pro bono fellow. There might be something where you're applying more than just a summer associate or some kind of summer position, and so it's specific. And so they may ask for some kind of statement that goes with that, for example.

Alison Monahan: Let's kind of talk about both of those. What is the diversity statement? I know particularly now, people have a lot of concerns and questions about what's allowable and not allowable, and what they can say and what the firms can ask for. What is this?

Sadie Jones: So, it's sort of ever-changing, and I find them not very specific. The prompts are usually very general. And for example, there can be a diversity career fair, where you're sort of naming what your diversity is or why you're there. It's not like you need to fit into one of these five categories, or you need to be racially diverse. It usually won't say you're required to be this in order to apply for this.



It's self-selecting. And I think these diversity statements are sort of like that too. Generally, you're sort of saying what category makes you diverse in some way, and how you're going to contribute to diversity at the firm, is really the main point. So, it's not so much about necessarily your personal experience, but how you're going to bring your background to create a more diverse environment at the firm. And it's sort of up to you what you're comfortable with, in terms of whether you think you should be applying for this or you feel like you fit in. They're not going to disqualify you, whoever you are, from applying for it. So that's kind of what you want to get across. Now, some of them may have specific prompts that say, "Here's what we want to learn about you" or, "Here's what we want this statement to be." And you should follow exactly what they're looking for if they give you specifics.

Alison Monahan: Mm-hmm. Let's kind of back up a little bit. What are employers generally looking for overall that I think these documents ideally should be sort of pointing towards?

Sadie Jones: I think that specifically law firms want to increase their diversity, generally, if we're talking about these specific documents. There might be certain groups of students finance that they have not been strong in recruiting before, so maybe they are trying to look in those certain areas. But I would say they want somebody who is going to, again, contribute to the firm in sort of a well-rounded way. They want you to be able to write a statement that explains that in a succinct way, so you need to get that across in this document. And it's not the same as an admissions essay, which might be multiple pages. It might go into your whole background. You kind of want to talk about what this has to do with the firm, and where you're going to be working and the work you're going to do.

Alison Monahan: So, I guess if you have any sort of background, maybe cultural affinity groups or anything like that would probably be worth mentioning.

Sadie Jones: Definitely. That's something you want to have in your resume because that kind of signals that you are in that group, work with that group, care about that group. That's always good, so you want to have those things very clearly listed and you want to say what your involvement's been. I think being involved is just as important as your general background, that you've done things, you've contributed. And also to be clear, I think people sometimes mix up community service work with diversity, which is two different categories. And I think some of these statements I've seen just really focus on pro bono work, and to me, that's different and can miss the point of a lot of these. It's not really necessarily the same thing.



Alison Monahan: I think with the diversity ones, I haven't seen a lot of these, obviously, because I'm not on that side of the table, or hadn't been on that side of the table when I was working at a law firm. But it seems to me, like with most things, you want to be very clear about what story you are telling. What is this background, or characteristic, or whatever it is that you think would positively impact the firm? Why are you the right person? What evidence can you use to support that? And then that's it.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I think that these can go off on a tangent, I've noticed, and sort of miss the point of – if I were reading it from the firm point of view – does this person want to work at a for-profit organization that works for big companies and does that kind of corporate work? Because some of these statements can come across like you want to do public interest work and work here for the summer and make some money. And I think that's not really what you want to get across in these documents. I think people just go off on, they're really excited about the stuff they're writing about. Just remember who your reader is and what the job is.

Alison Monahan: I think that's always good advice. If nothing else, in addition to whatever diversity you're bringing to the table, they're also looking for some type of reasonable cultural fit at the firm. And I 100% agree if everything you are sending is like, "I love solving the world's problems and I want to save the world. And oh, by the way, I'm also applying for this BigLaw job" – that doesn't really work.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. So, I think if you talk about work you've done to facilitate more people with your background getting into law firm work, that gets that point across. Maybe you've helped organize panels with the law firm for your affinity group or something like that. That all makes sense to me. But if it's just about community service work you've done, I feel like that can kind of miss the point.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think a lot of it's in the framing. It also reads to me a little bit like why people are hiring 1Ls at firms, which is that they want somebody who's going to be a cheerleader – so, you're going to go back to the school and be like, "Oh, I had such a great summer. These people are really great. Definitely, you guys should consider working there." I think it's the same thing in the diversity context. Whoever it is that you can talk to that maybe the average person of the firm can't talk to that they would love to recruit – that's powerful.

Sadie Jones: Absolutely. I totally agree. And you should definitely remember that, let's say that you're writing a statement about applying for a specific 1L position. Again,



make sure that it talks about your involvement on campus or how you plan to be involved in your whole kind of law school career. But if it's just talking about how you've done really well and had really good academic success, that's not really what they're looking for in a 1L. They want somebody who's involved, who's going to talk about the firm on campus and is going to get people excited and is a very outgoing kind of person. And I think it is the same thing with the diversity fellowships too. They want someone who's going to go back and be able to talk about their experience at the firm.

Alison Monahan: Definitely, I agree. Let's talk a little bit about these other fellowships and the documents. If you are applying, say, for a pro bono fellowship, is that a different take?

Sadie Jones: Yeah. So that's an example of where I think you can be open about your interests. And even some firms, beyond summer associates, do have one-year fellowships for somebody who just works on their pro bono work. And so, some of those people do end up being associates, but I think it's completely fine to want to do that for a year. And again, they want someone who's going to be outgoing and talk about this great pro bono work and get them good press about it. So, in that case, obviously it makes sense to highlight the work that you've done that's in the pro bono area, and hopefully, you have that experience. So, in that case, I think it's fine. Just make sure that you understand what the position is and what you're trying to get across to them.

Alison Monahan: I think that's the key here – really understand what you are selling. I know lawyers don't love to sell, but this is definitely a marketing and sales type of thing of, "Alright, what's in my background that I can mine for the pro bono application? What's for this other position?" I don't know, it might be a little weird. Do you think it's weird if you apply for the pro bono fellowship and also to be an associate?

Sadie Jones: No, I don't think so. I've definitely seen it before. I can think of pro bono fellows who ended up just becoming regular associates. They just wanted to do that work for a little while, and they realized the advantage of working at a firm a lot of times. Maybe it wasn't what they were planning, but they realized that there were good resources and training, and they will get to do some pro bono work down the line. Obviously, it's a luxury to get a firm salary and just do pro bono work – that's not something that most people are going to get the chance to do. But I think a lot of this is your political savvy at the firm, and your being able to get to know the right people and find a place for yourself if that's what you're looking for.



Alison Monahan: Alright. Well, let's focus just on these documents before we get into some other things you might be asked for. So, is there anything that you think this stuff should not include or not reference, whether it's for the diversity statements, whether it's for some other type of fellowship or whatnot?

Sadie Jones: So, I think you always want to be positive. If you're talking about diversity, you want to highlight the things you think that they're doing well in relation to diversity, or if you see they have these affinity groups. I don't think you want to reference anything that they're not doing well, or you feel like diversity is a real struggle here, and, "I'm going to help you out" or something. And that's in all areas – I think you just want to be positive. I think you want to talk about, again, positive qualities. I think this is a situation where people sometimes talk about sort of difficult experiences they've had. And I'm not saying across the board, you can't talk about that, or the struggles of being somebody different from, let's say, everybody else at your school, that everyone else was a different race than you, and "Here're the struggles with that." I think it's okay to reference it, but you don't want this document to appear like it's a big sad story about your life, or talk about anything too personal. Keep it professional and make sure you're just hitting on certain points. And again, keeping it short – you shouldn't really get into anything too much.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think shorter is generally better. I'm just thinking of somebody I know in law school who was actually a friend of mine who was a very, very white man, who applied for the Law Review and wrote his diversity statement about being... I think he technically was a libertarian, but whatever, about his political views. And then he got on the Law Review, and then he very concerned that it was only because of his diversity statement. Can people bring in stuff like that? Is that okay?

Sadie Jones: That doesn't seem like great judgment to me, but it also would depend on the school or the firm, or what they're looking for. Maybe there are places where that would fly. Generally, I would stay away from those areas. And even if you know what you think someone's political affiliation is, I would be careful. I would stay neutral and not really hit on things that you think are going to be controversial, because you don't know who's going to be reading it, and you don't know what they think.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. When he told me that, I was like, "That's an interesting take."

Sadie Jones: There're people who are in certain clubs or on certain law school activities, that clearly say what their feelings are. And so I assume if you're doing that and you



put that on your resume, you want everyone to know. This is what I believe. And you're willing to lose a job over that, because there might be people who immediately see these things and just say, "That's not going to fit in here."

Alison Monahan: I think that's always an interesting thing to think about. When I was applying for clerkships, my writing sample was about asylum law and whether sexual orientation should be covered, which at the time it wasn't. Now it is. I was correct, it should have been. But it was interesting because there were judges where I was submitting this and I'm like, "How are they going to react to this?" But in one case at least, I got an interview with a very conservative judge, which I was shocked by. So, you just never really know.

Sadie Jones: And you went into it knowing, "Okay, this is what I'm doing, and it might be taken in different ways." And you were okay with that. So then I think it's fine. I just think you should think about that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was definitely like, "There will probably be people who look at the title of this and are like 'Oh, that is not my person.'" And that's fine, because they're probably not.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And I think that makes sense. I just feel like with these sort of short little snippets or whatever, there's just no need to get really controversial.

Alison Monahan: I agree. And I think also, like we say with everything, you have to make sure there are no mistakes in this. You cannot have typos. It needs to be just to the point, crisp, easy to read, not going off on a bunch of tangents, not talking about things that are not relevant. Just make your best case. You're applying to be an attorney; you need to be concise. Make your best case, present a little bit of evidence, and then move on.

Sadie Jones: It shouldn't be a long narrative. I think that is where people get stuck, because they take these prompts very personally. But I think what you need to remember is the prompt isn't really your whole personal story. It's like, how does your story fit in with you working at this law firm?

Alison Monahan: Right, like, "What can you do for us?", basically?

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And the thing I always remind people of, who write multiple pages and they just insist that it has to be that long because they could not get it all across – that if it's so long that no one's going to read it, that is completely pointless



and you might as well have not turned it in at all. The most important thing is that they're going to read it, so it needs to be less than a page.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. And compelling, because you need to be a compelling writer if you're going to work as an attorney.

Sadie Jones: And that's the other thing – this is just an example of your writing, another part of it. Yes, you should convey all of these things, but it should be written well and easy to read and to the point.

Alison Monahan: I agree. Alright, well, let's move on and talk some other things that I have seen, I'm sure you've seen, that I've been asked for. Let's talk about references.

Sadie Jones: So, personally, I have not seen a lot of references looked at. I know that students just turn them in sometimes with their documents. And there might be employers who ask for them, and then it completely makes sense that you would turn them in. I usually like adding something that just says "References on request". All the references I have personally ever seen are you give somebody a phone number or an email, and they call the person up. And actually, I think most of the places I've worked, there was a rule that they had to call them up, and that it wasn't supposed to be in writing, and it was supposed to be a conversation that someone took notes on. That's different. You should follow what they're asking for. So if that's how they want it, you should do it that way. But generally, if you're going to get references or they ask you for references, I think you want to tell the person who's writing it there are certain points. Or I know some people have the students write references, and then the person just signs it. So, I think it depends on the person that you're asking.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I never had any firms ask for a letter of recommendation, like you would get for school. I definitely had at least one place ask for references, and frankly I decided it was such a hassle because I was just like, "I don't want to deal with this", that I just withdrew my application.

Sadie Jones: So, you didn't have anybody even ask you for somebody that they needed to call?

Alison Monahan: I had one place ask for it as part of the callback process, and I was just like, "This seems like a real hassle to me." And it became like a whole thing, for various reasons, and I was just like, "This is not worth it."



Sadie Jones: I think places that have very set HR rules usually require them, so I think it's just what their policy is. But letters of recommendation might come up more if it is a fellowship or something. I bet if you're applying for some kind of pro bono position, they want to talk to someone you've worked with in the pro bono area, about your skills and things like that. So, I think it would come up more specific to certain jobs and things like that. But I think it's a good idea to have some people that you know you could go to if there's something you really want and they need references.

Alison Monahan: And clerkships, you need references. I definitely had professors call people up and things like that, and vice versa. Some of them got phone calls from judges that were considering hiring me, before they did the interview.

Sadie Jones: Also, along those lines, you should definitely have talked to the person first, because you'd be surprised. I have seen people give not totally positive references for people, which really surprises me. It seems like something that if you're giving a name, they would automatically be saying something nice.

Alison Monahan: Oh, I saw that. Yeah, I saw that on the clerkship side, because the judge would come in and be like, "Wow, this is definitely not a person they should have put down."

Sadie Jones: So, make sure you're comfortable, and also that they're not just like a loose cannon. Sometimes it's not really about you and your relationship; it's just the kind of person who just says whatever's on the top of their mind.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think you definitely want to clarify. Anybody you put down as a reference for anything, you have to make sure that they have said "Yes." You want to make sure they're enthusiastic. You want to make sure, ideally, that they know what this job is and what they should be talking about. All that kind of stuff.

Sadie Jones: They remember you.

Alison Monahan: Exactly.

Sadie Jones: They're not in your family.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Don't put your mother. Maybe if you worked at your father's law firm. But even then, put somebody else at the firm, not your parent.



Sadie Jones: Yeah, exactly. Even if they have a different last name, I know from experience, it will come out.

Alison Monahan: So, just think about these things. It probably is worth thinking if you know you're going into an application process, it probably makes sense to at least think of a couple of people you might ask. And then maybe ask them if you feel like you're going to need them.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. And maybe a couple of people that are in different areas – maybe one is a professor and one is a former employer or something like that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I was remembering this bizarre situation where I reached out to somebody I'd worked with over the summer and he goes, "I can't give you a reference because I want to take you on a date." And I'm like, "Wow, this is really awkward." That was actually one of the main reasons I was like, "I'm not dealing with this."

Sadie Jones: That's a twist.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, no, it was a definite twist. I was like, "Huh. That is not the answer I was expecting."

Sadie Jones: But see, that's why you'd have to talk to the person.

Alison Monahan: And early, because you need to have other options if one doesn't pan out, because they apparently want to date you.

Sadie Jones: Yeah. Imagine if they'd said that to the employer. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Oh my God, no. The whole thing, I was just like, "I can't deal with this." Anyway, what about some other stuff? I don't think I've personally seen this really in the legal context, but I know it's pretty common in other areas – friends who are designers and whatnot. Do you see people having to do some type of work product or project or anything to show that they can do something?

Sadie Jones: I definitely heard that. Yeah, I agree – not as much in law firms. Although, I wouldn't be surprised if it becomes something in law firms, because it seems like they're always 10 or 15 years behind the business world or the startup world, and then decide that they're going to do that. But I know Google and Facebook and all the tech companies definitely make you go through a process



and they may ask you to work on something. I know people that have dropped out of the interview process because this was taking too long. And I think you can have your own boundaries. If you feel like you're actually doing free work for them through the interview process, I get it. But I think if it seems reasonable and a lot of these things can be relevant to the job, then maybe you'll learn something about them through doing the process. I think you just, again, want to make sure you understand what they expect of you, you understand how long it should take, you understand what the turnover time should be, you understand who you need to send it to. It's just like when we talk about getting a work assignment – just make sure you know what you need to do and when.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. I think something reasonable is like, "Okay, fine. I'm willing to do that." But I definitely have friends who are designers or whatnot and then it's like, "Oh, you just designed our new website. Thanks. We're not going to hire you because we don't need you anymore."

Sadie Jones: Yeah, no, I've heard a lot about people feeling like they're doing free work. But I think if it's something that's going to take an hour of your time, that seems like part of an interview process, and that seems okay to me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think some firms are getting more creative about what they're asking for. And some of that is probably decent HR practice. They were also super late to the game, in terms of behavioral interviewing and stuff like that. It was very commonplace in other industries for a long time before finally lawyers were like, "Oh, maybe we should do more than just like, 'Hey, what's your favorite law school class?'"

Sadie Jones: I was thinking that exactly. So, I think I would expect some of this stuff to become more standard in law firm jobs. So, just be prepared and make sure you're clear on what is expected of you throughout the interview process.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think overall, like I said, I think what employers are really looking for – and this is always the touch point to come back to if you're not sure how you should frame something: Do you understand this job? Is it going to be a reasonable fit for what you're looking for? Are you easy to work with? Can you be trusted in front of clients? And can you learn enough to be competent? You don't have to know everything, but are you a person who likes to learn things and wants to be a competent attorney? I think that is fundamentally what firms are really looking for.



Sadie Jones: I totally agree. And I think an area of this where students can go wrong is, they want to put their best foot forward and talk about all the things they've done that will make them perfect for this and what they're going to contribute. And to me, especially if we're talking about a summer associate position or a first-year associate position, you should know very little, and you should make it clear that you know very little. You are there to learn, you know where you are on this food chain, which is how law firms are – they're very hierarchical. So, you know that you're going to be there on the bottom, to learn, to help, to do whatever they need, because you're coming in as a brand new person who doesn't have experience in this area. So, I think that they don't mean to, but I think some students can come across like a little kind of know-it-all and ahead of themselves by talking about all the things they've done that are relevant. So, I'd just be careful. Make sure they know you're there to learn, like you said, and that you'll be a good colleague. You want to contribute.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I think humble and a good colleague is a way to look at this. Well, before we wrap up, why are they even asking for this extra step for some of these positions? What do you think is in it for them?

Sadie Jones: I think some of it is to see how you're going to answer these kinds of questions, because a lot of these things are unclear. Like I said, a diversity statement is not a set thing that everyone does exactly the same way. And so, I think they want to see who you are, how you choose to answer this. And especially when it's for a specific position, like a fellowship or being a 1L, I think that your resume and your cover letter can be kind of standard and can look like how a lot of people's look. And this is your chance to show them a little bit more of who you are. So I think that is what they're looking for. And the thing to remember is, there isn't one right answer of like, "This is the perfect diversity statement", because there isn't one. I think there are lots of different ones that are great and can show how you're going to contribute to the firm and why. So, it's a lot more about how you answer it than that. It has to check all these certain boxes, because not everyone's going to check the same boxes, and that's okay.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think people should view it as an opportunity. Sometimes people think, "Oh, this is such a hassle that I have to write this other thing." But it's really an opportunity for you to continue explaining why this is a good opportunity for you and why you're a good fit for them and why they should hire you.

Sadie Jones: And that's what I think a cover letter is too. I think all of these things are more opportunity to give them more information about yourself. So, use it wisely and think about it that way, that it's an advantage for you.



- Alison Monahan: Oh, for sure. Well, any final thoughts on this topic?
- Sadie Jones: I'm going to go back to it needs to be less than one page, and it needs to get to the point, because again, I promise you that no one is reading a three-page document, and they're just skipping you. You're not going to even get in. Keep it short, even if you have to cut out things you think are important.
- Alison Monahan: I think that's absolutely right. If you handed someone a three-page diversity statement, they're going to be like, "Are you kidding me?" They're going to throw it in a pile and never look at it.
- Sadie Jones: It's obnoxious.
- Alison Monahan: It's like, people are busy. Do you understand the value of five minutes of someone's time if they're a law firm partner? It's a huge amount of billable time.
- Sadie Jones: Exactly. Keep it short, get to the point – that's my most important piece of advice.
- Alison Monahan: Perfect. Well, thank you so much for joining us.
- Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.
- Alison Monahan: With that, we're out of time. For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, including on all your various statements, you can check out [CareerDicta.com](https://www.careerdicta.com). If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on your favorite listening app. We would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to Lee or Alison at lee@lawschooltoolbox.com or alison@lawschooltoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](https://www.lawschooltoolbox.com/contact) at LawSchoolToolBox.com. Thanks for listening, and we'll talk soon!

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