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 pre-OCI hiring. Your Law School Toolbox host today is Alison Monahan, and typically, I'm with Lee Burgess. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience, so that you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. Together, we're the co-creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, and the career-related website CareerDicta. I also run The Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can always reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolBox.com, and we would love to hear from you. And you can check out the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast if the bar exam is on your radar. And 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 pre-OCI hiring. Welcome, Sadie.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me back.

Alison Monahan: Oh, my pleasure. So, tell me what's going on here.

Sadie Jones: Basically, it seems like things have just moved forward as they have been happening for the past decade, really. But in the past year, things are happening before OCI even starts – that firms are opening up their hiring process, and sometimes almost filling their summer classes before the official process through the school, through OCI has even started. So basically, as early as April, things are open, people are interviewing. So, there're still 1Ls in school potentially studying for exams, and they're already looking at their 2L summer.

Alison Monahan: That sounds crazy to me. I mean, traditionally, just so people are clear, schools have hosted lots and lots of law firms. They've done tons of interviews in a few days and then done callbacks. We have tons of podcasts on all of this. But the idea was, everyone would come to campus and do interviews. You would get callbacks and offers in a fairly quick succession. And then you would have a certain amount of time to accept, that you would have all of your offers. You could kind of weigh them against each other. All of that is shifting, right?

Sadie Jones: It sounds like it is, and I would say, my assessment is that this is sort of an experiment. So, I don't think we know if this is the way it's going to be going forward. Things kind of tend to ebb and flow with hiring. It has moved earlier consistently, but it hasn't always stayed exactly the same, I would say. So this is kind of where law students are right now. I don't know for sure how successful

it's going to be, who it's going to work out for, but you kind of have to go with it because this seems like it's the trend. And what happens is, once a law firm or two, especially a big, high-profile one starts doing it, everybody's going to follow and think, "Okay, if they're doing it, we don't want them to get all the best candidates, so we need to compete and we need to be interviewing them earlier also."

Alison Monahan: And it is the case that schools have been consistently moving up their OCI, from September to August to July to June. This is just kind of a new twist in that it's really outside of the schools, which I would imagine they must not be super happy about.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, it seems like it kind of cuts them off a little bit. It also just overlaps with so many other things, I would think. We already had a situation when things moved from September, October, and August, to like June and July that it was overlapping with people's 1L summer jobs, which I thought was kind of difficult. And then the law firms had their current summers there, so they're dealing with that. It's a lot going on at the same time. This seems even more difficult, because the school is trying to get through exams and they're still in classes, and I think that's a lot going on at the same time. It also kind of takes some of the control away from them, because they really ran the process before.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Like many things in life, it is what it is. And to be clear, a lot of this, I think, is being done remotely. Is that your impression as well?

Sadie Jones: I think it's pretty much all being done remotely. My impression is that maybe once you get an offer, they'll fly you in. But generally, all the interviewing is happening remotely, quickly. It's all going to be virtual interviews.

Alison Monahan: I guess there is an advantage to that. I remember I had to fly from New York to interview in San Francisco, and I'd literally just gotten back to New York and somebody wanted to interview me for my 1L summer. And I had to turn around a few days later and fly back. And I was just like, "This is absurd."

Sadie Jones: I think it all seems fun in theory to students, like it's a free trip to another place, but I think there are a lot of advantages to just doing it remotely, being able to get it done and not spend a ton of time. It's exhausting flying back and forth, and there're lots of reimbursements you have to submit and work that goes along with it. So, I do think there're advantages to just being able to do it from anywhere and get it done quickly.

Alison Monahan: I think so. We'll talk later about some pros and cons of this approach. But before we get there, how can people even find out about these positions and apply for them?

Sadie Jones: So, this is where students are going to be more proactive than they were before. The thing with OCI is, it's sort of a set process that in a lot of ways is done for you and you're just being given the directions, follow them, submit your choices, they set it all up for you. It's kind of easy in a lot of ways. You're going to have to treat this like more of a traditional job search, and lots of people have had other jobs, they know how that goes. But you're going to need to be on LinkedIn, maybe set Google Alerts, look on all the legal publications. And all of these jobs that I've seen, you really apply through the website, so you're just going to the individual law firm and applying. Or they could have a job posting through LinkedIn or through a third party. But I would say have your list of the law firms, know where you want to look, and you're going to have to be on top of it: "Okay, it opened. I'm going to be ready to go."

Alison Monahan: So, if there's a firm you're interested in, you probably need to be actually monitoring their website. I don't think most of them probably have an email list or anything you can sign up for, but maybe they do and maybe they would announce this here. So maybe sign up for their newsletter and they might announce their hiring, you never know. But yeah, people are going to have to be on top of this.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, you really are. I have seen a lot of the recruiters or the hiring partner or something, sends things out on social media. So maybe you want to follow some of them. I've said before, if you look on the NALP website, you can get contact info for everybody involved in recruiting at all the law firms. But you may need to go through and kind of be on top of people's social media. Business social media.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Interesting, yeah. Totally fascinating times. And it used to be – and this was I think actually a NALP guideline for a while that has changed – that people got offers in this pretty compressed timeframe after callbacks, and then they had 28 days to accept. So, how has that changed?

Sadie Jones: So, this has gone all over the place. That's something that I would also say law students should be on top of – looking at the NALP website and seeing what the guidelines are. I will say that these were all just guidelines, and actually were not set rules in the way that I think law students felt that they were. They just agreed to do it; there's no penalty if you don't. So there were law firms that just didn't follow it. It's the kind of thing where it's sort of the honor system and if this is what they say it is, this is what they say it is. I think ultimately, you're

going to have to make a quicker decision. I actually think in this system, you should just be ready to go. It is not a good idea to wait this out if this is the way it's going to be, because I think there're just not going to be a lot of jobs waiting around. I would say you should really know going into it, "I'll be ready to accept this offer." That's what I would say. I wouldn't be holding it out and trying to get a whole bunch of other offers. There's a lot of pressure in that kind of situation.

Alison Monahan: Right. It starts to feel more like the clerkship process. I mean, not quite as extreme as that, because some people there would literally give exploding offers that you had to accept or decline on the spot. But I definitely have read about firms saying you have a week, you have two weeks. And the thing is, if you're doing this interview in, say, mid-May, you may not be signed up to do OCI until a month or two or three later. So you really need to be clear on what you would accept and not accept, and I think that's absolutely right, because I don't think you're necessarily going to be able to weigh offers against each other.

Sadie Jones: I think some students may. There're going to be superstars that everybody's after – that always happened. And so, in this system, those people will probably still have options all in May. But I would say overall, you should be thinking about it, that, "I will take this." I'm of the opinion that that can be better for the student. I think people overthinking things and taking forever to make a decision, it's not really that helpful. And I think you find that it doesn't become more clear as more time goes on. You might need to meet a couple of more people and make a final decision, but sometimes that 28 days, that's a long time to just be mulling something over. And then let's say you get another offer and you can't figure out why that one would be better. I think there're some good aspects of just, "I need to make a decision. I'm just going to go with this."

Alison Monahan: I can see that. I guess my concern would be if the firm that you would put as a higher priority, you would definitely take first, and they're not interviewing for whatever reason for another month – I think that's a situation that becomes difficult. Do you hold out for that new firm? Do you just take the bird in the hand? That's kind of a high-risk proposition at some point.

Sadie Jones: It definitely is. I would actually ask yourself, "What's my risk tolerance here? What am I willing to wait for?" You can get an idea of how many summers they hire and what you think their odds are. You can probably, doing some kind of behind the scenes work, figure out how many people did they hire last summer before OCI, that kind of thing. Are they a firm that are known now for doing as much as possible early? But that's a risk, because what happens if they fill their summer class early and you didn't get there?

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I guess if there are places you definitely would put ahead of the places you maybe have offers, do you think it's okay to reach out to them and kind of say, "Hey, I've got this other offer, but I'd really prefer to work for you"? I know you can sometimes parlay that in the OCI process where you're waiting for, say, a callback or you're waiting for a decision, but this seems a little different to me.

Sadie Jones: I think you can do it. I think that would be better if you knew someone there and had some kind of relationship, or you'd been to their events, you'd been building this. Because I know a lot of law students do that and they're sort of setting it up as 1Ls early, this is the firm they want. And so they've gone to all their stuff, they know people. Those are the people that kind of do that. So, you can try. You may not get any response, or they may just say, "Sorry, that's our process." And so, you tried.

Alison Monahan: At least you got an answer. They may very well say, "You know what? We are just hiring through the traditional OCI process." And maybe next year they re-evaluate that because they realize that they lost students that they maybe wanted to have, and that's what's driving all of this really to start with.

Sadie Jones: That's why I was saying, I do think this is an experiment, but you're in it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. For better or worse. Alright, let's just kind of run down before we wrap up. What do you see as some of the pros and cons of this for current law students?

Sadie Jones: I think looking at the downsides, we talked about it. You may not get to weigh options against each other in the way that you could before. You may not have as much time to think all of this through. You're also going to be doing this during times where you're doing other things. Like I mentioned, it may be that you're studying for exams and need to focus on this. Or you may say to yourself, "Exams are really important to me right now, so I'm just not really going to participate in the early hiring, and I'm going to take my chances during OCI." I don't think that there won't be jobs during OCI or after OCI. There will; it's just a risk. It's obviously going to be a lot more time-consuming and on the law student to figure out what firms are opening when. And like I said, it's not going to be a process; it's just sort of done for you. I actually think that's also a positive though, because you're taking ownership of your career, you're doing more research, you're figuring all of that stuff out. Those are kind of the downsides. I think that there are a bunch of positives, which is that in theory, you could have this whole thing done before you even start your 1L job. That must be an amazing feeling. You don't even have to worry about this; you're just done. You have it set, you can just do your job, you can start school in the fall. That seems great. So I think there're some advantages to kind of just having it

over. I also think that it kind of gives some opportunity to students who might not do really well during the traditional OCI. Maybe their school doesn't have all the firms coming, or maybe not the firms they want to meet with. So I think it gives you an advantage to actually be proactive, and like I said, take ownership of your career. To me that's a positive.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point, because, say, at a school that doesn't have a whole lot of participation at OCI, but if you did really well first semester, you're top of your class – at this point you don't have a second semester grade, so we don't know if you're going to do worse. All people have to go on is these really strong first semester grades, and you are applying at the same time as everyone else. So, I think there is an argument that could help students who are outside of the super high-level schools actually compete more fairly. The flip side of that is it could put students who have less access to networking and insider information at a disadvantage, because somebody might be reaching out to their classmates saying, "Hey, we just opened the door. You should totally apply." I think it kind of cuts both ways, but I do think if you did really well at a lower-ranked school, it probably could open some doors for you.

Sadie Jones: I totally agree. I'd also say, talk to your career services. They're going to be clued into what the firms are doing, and whether or not this is good for them, they need to know what's going on. So, I would be the kind of student where they knew me early, they knew the kind of firms I was interested in. Maybe they'll let you know, "I heard they're going to start super early" or, "They're going to start later in the process." So, be proactive about that too. Talk to your school.

Alison Monahan: Definitely. And I think this is the sort of thing you could have your spreadsheet, and you could go down that spreadsheet in, say, 20 or 30 minutes once a week and check on even 50 firms. I mean, that's not going to take you very long if you have the URL right there to click on, to see if they posted anything. But it definitely is going to require more time and energy from the student than just putting on a suit, showing up at the places that you picked at OCI a few weeks earlier, going on your interviews. It's just a very different process.

Sadie Jones: Exactly. I mean, it's just not kind of lined up for you. I'll also say if you get these interviews, you need to do them early. If you're going to do this process, you need to be ready to do the interview as soon as possible, because they're going to be hiring quickly, even for the pre-OCI process. So, be ready to go, do not put anything off.

Alison Monahan: Definitely, I agree. You need your outfit ready, you need your camera and your background ready to go for your virtual interview. All of these things –

documents, your resume, your cover letter, your writing sample. All this stuff has to be done now, basically.

Sadie Jones: Yeah, you need to be really on it. And even if you're not going to participate in this part of it, you're like, "I'm still going to wait for OCI" – I would still have all this stuff done as soon as possible to give yourself the most benefit.

Alison Monahan: Definitely. Any final thoughts on this?

Sadie Jones: My final thought is, like we've talked about, I don't know how this is going to work out. This is something that just came up, and I think that it could be an advantage to the students, I think that it could seem intimidating. But I always figure, why not look at the bright side? "Here's what I could get out of it. I'm going to make the best of where I am." There will still be jobs. If the early thing doesn't work out, there will still be jobs, you can always kind of regroup after. So I say, give it your best shot.

Alison Monahan: I agree. And that makes me think too that you can always try it as sort of a practice round. If you know that maybe your interviewing skills are not the best, but you get some interviews and you see how they go. And then if you need help before OCI, you get that help, so that you're not just showing up to OCI and bombing all of your interviews.

Sadie Jones: That is such a good point. I totally agree.

Alison Monahan: Well, thank you for joining us.

Sadie Jones: Thanks for having me.

Alison Monahan: My pleasure. Good luck to everybody out there navigating this new process. With that, we are out of time! For more career help and the opportunity to work one-on-one with us, you can check out CareerDicta.com. 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 and 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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Big Law Skips Ahead of On-Campus Recruiting in Talent Race
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Podcast Episode 348: Getting Ready for On-Campus Interviewing (w/Sadie Jones)
Podcast Episode 399: Brining Your A-Game to OCI (w/Sadie Jones)
Comparing Summer Associate Offers – What to Consider, Who to Talk to and What to Ask
Three Things They Don't Tell You About OCI