Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're going to be talking about something that happens to almost every law student, especially in their first year, the October freakout. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess. That's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be.

We're the co creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, the Catabolic Conference, and the Trebuchet Legal Careers site. Alison also runs the Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us.

You can reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com and we would love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back. Today we're going to be talking about what we have come to call the October freakout. October is the time in law school when reality really sets in. If you had midterms, you may have gotten some not so great feedback on them and your confidence might have been rattled by a mid semester legal writing assignment that perhaps didn't go quite the way you would have planned.

Or maybe you started to outline and realized that you have absolutely no clue what you're doing. Or you might be wise enough to have started some written practice and also have no idea what you're supposed to be doing or how to write an essay. Or you might be exhausted and burned out and you just can't imagine how you're going to get in.

Through the next eight weeks and prepare for exams and make time for finals on top of Thanksgiving. Preparing for class, trying to do all of your outlining, doing your legal writing assignments. It's kind of a lot. So if you're freaking out, know that this is completely normal. We see it every year. This is the point where reality sets in, you're not sure if you're studying the right way, or even if you're going to be successful in law school.

Your stress level is likely skyrocketing, and now is the time to take a deep breath and let us help you get through this freakout. So that you can have a productive rest of the semester. So before we get really started, Lee, did you have an October freakout 1L year?

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I was thinking about this, and unfortunately, I think I was slightly clueless, and I didn't really have an October freakout.

Because I didn't really start outlining until the end of the semester, which was a huge mistake. I did find legal writing fairly overwhelming, and so that was problematic. I was very stressed about legal writing. But I think I was just kind of chugging along. I didn't I didn't really see what was coming until I got closer to Thanksgiving and then kind of had this, oh my gosh, how am I going to get all this stuff done moment?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think there's also like a Thanksgiving freakout.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's true.

Alison Monahan: It's like, it's like the more advanced level of the October freakout.

Lee Burgess: I was a special case and had the Thanksgiving freakout.

Alison Monahan: I think a lot of people, yeah, a lot of people have that one too, because then it's like, oh my gosh, reality is really setting in. You have exams and not a matter of months, but a matter of weeks.

Lee Burgess: Or days even sometimes.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so I don't know, did you have an October freak out?

Alison Monahan: Well, I did, but mine was actually not so much about classes. Well, I guess that was probably the point also, which I found out that I failed my first ungraded exam.

So I probably did freak out about that a little bit, but I think that's understandable. Now my my official freak out was really more about whether I was going to find a job which is not something that you need to be particularly concerned about in early October of your first year. But I went to the Public Interest Law Center because I wasn't allowed to talk to Career Services.

And they were really mean to me, and the woman made me cry, and so I went home in tears, and luckily a 2L friend happened to be over visiting my roommate, and he was just like, oh, oh yeah, you're having the October

Episode 15: The October Freakout

freakout. I was like, what? No, this is like a special case, I'm never gonna find a job. He's like, no, this is what happens.

He's like, I'm gonna tell you what you need to do. You're not doing any more work for the rest of the day. You're going to go take a walk. It's a beautiful fall day in New York City and you are not working anymore today. I was like, no, I have all this stuff to do. I'm like behind in this. And then he's like, no, no, no, no, this is not optional.

You're going to go take a long walk. And that's what I did.

Lee Burgess: That's great. That's great advice.

Alison Monahan: Actually, it was fantastic. I mean, I still remember that day. Like I remember walking. He was right. It was absolutely perfect fall day in New York City. Crisp blue sky leaves are starting to turn. And I think I walked like, you know, basically the entire length of Manhattan and back would took hours.

I might even have gone to the Met, I can't remember. But it was fantastic. But yeah, I think there is, you know, it could, and this is sort of a, you know, the point, it could be over, it doesn't have to be over classes. It doesn't have to be over jobs. It doesn't have to be over whatever. It's just, you know, if you find yourself in this situation where you're like extremely emotionally fraught, it could be something really minor, you know, like your boyfriend doesn't call you back or whatever.

I think it's just, it's good to recognize that this is a time typically where stress goes into overdrive.

Lee Burgess: And I actually, the more I think about it, I remember that my school held some I have lunch workshops on things like outlining and stuff like that. And I do remember going to some of those and leaving going, I am in trouble.

I don't know what they're talking about. And I definitely remember some group panic exercises from my group of friends leaving things like that. So you do have to just be aware that it is a time when panic starts to set in. And upperclassmen oftentimes will fuel that panic by starting to say, well, you haven't done X, Y, and Z.

What's wrong with you?

Alison Monahan: What do you mean you haven't taken any practice exams? You mean you're not writing out full exams right now?

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Like, oh, your outlines are not totally ready?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I think for me too, this was sort of the point where I picked up some book on law school, like how to do law school. I think it was like a law school confidential or something, because there was this moment of like realizing that.

You know, I'm not entirely sure that these things that we're doing every day in class are actually really going to help me in the end, maybe I need to figure out the way to sort of approach this so that I'm ready at the end. Like you, I didn't really start outlining. I mean, I'm not sure I ever really started outlining my first semester, frankly, but I definitely didn't start putting the pieces together until like way too late.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, you know, if you're listening to this and you're nodding your head saying like, yes, I am freaking out. Yes, this all sounds very familiar. It might help if we kind of give our listeners kind of. a bit of an opportunity to take stock of where we think you should be at this point in the semester.

So, you know, you should be about halfway through your classes come October, which is a bit sobering. So just sit with that for a second. Halfway done. Halfway to final exams.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I think the thing too is you've covered certain topics that you're not going to be revisiting.

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah, that's very important.

You can't, like, forget about the first half of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Right, and you can't just sort of put it off either and think like, oh, well, everything's building on each other, so I'll just wait until the end, you know, in most of your first year classes, that's not really true. Like, you have pretty distinct units, essentially, of material.

And once you've finished one of those units, it's pretty much gone forever in terms of class discussion.

Lee Burgess: Yep. I just talked to a student yesterday who was studying homicide and they were just finishing up homicide and it's like, okay, well now it's time to make

Episode 15: The October Freakout

sure you understand homicide because you're probably not going to talk about it again until the final exam.

Alison Monahan: Right. Or you know, someone taking an IP class and it's like, You've got a section on trademarks, copyrights, and patents. It's not like you're going to go back over those once you finish.

Lee Burgess: Very true. And I think at this point, you know, even if you're a 1L, you should feel like you have somewhat of a handle on how much time it takes to prepare for class.

You know, you should have tried a few different ways to brief or, you know, read, have an idea of how many hours it takes to prepare for class, and feel like that that work is somewhat streamlined. I think if you feel like you're preparation for class time is still completely out of control. You want to get some help and some guidance on how to make sure that you're getting, you know, return for the amount of time that you're putting in preparing for class, because you need to free up some time to be able to study for exams.

Alison Monahan: Right, and at this point, you should basically know for each class kind of what your reading rate per hour on average is. You know, you should know that if you have 20 pages of reading, that that's going to take you roughly an hour and a half to two hours.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly. And if you're still completely lost in class, so you feel like you're preparing for class, but you go to class and you cannot follow class discussion, It's also a good time to go try and talk to a professor, talk to academic support, try and talk to a tutor or a TA, and find out what's going on, because if you haven't felt like you're hitting your groove, and this doesn't mean that you know everything that's going on in class.

Alison Monahan: But you basically understand it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, but like, it's like, you're scratching your head going, I can't follow what's going on in class, that's something that you want to remedy now, and don't let this go for the rest of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Right. And if you, you know, if you're never able to extract the legal rule that your professor thinks you should be extracting from a case, for example, that's a pretty serious problem.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

If you are all over the place, you don't understand like the doctrines or where they're coming from or what pieces of the case, you know, are most important. After a couple of months, you really ought to be, typically speaking, I mean, you know, some cases might be an exception, but 80 percent of the time or say.

You should basically be able to follow what's going on.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And you need to be starting to set aside time each week for deep thinking tasks, which, you know, we've talked about in this podcast before, too. This is where you work on outlines, you review concepts you're struggling with. You do practice writing, you read your examples and explanations, things like that.

And, you know, four to five hours is a good starting point, but that's going to need to increase, like, each week as you get closer to exams.

Alison Monahan: Wait, where is this time supposed to come from?

Lee Burgess: Oh, good time management skills. Right, we do have a podcast on that. We do, but you know, you have to set aside the time. I mean, I think weekends are great to find these blocks of time, or depending on your class schedule, sometimes Fridays can be good.

Lots of time, but you just have to mark it on your calendar and say on Saturday, I'm just going to do deep thinking tasks. So on Sunday, I'm going to work on my reading. But you want to make sure that you have high quality study time, not middle of the night study time to work on things like this.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think setting goals for each week, being specific about what you're going to do.

So it's not just that, oh, I'm going to set aside four hours to work on my outlines. You know, really define what class am I going to work on, what topics am I going to work on. Where am I going to get the materials? What am I going to bring with me? Where am I going to do it? You know, because you have that whole plan of like, okay, I'm going to the law library, or I'm going to a different library, I'm going at 10 a.m. I'm bringing a commercial outline, I'm bringing a printout of a student outline, and I'm bringing my syllabus, and I'm bringing my casebook, and these are the topics I'm going to try to get through. You're much more likely to be successful.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. And I think you know, another thing you can do is even sit down with a calendar, you know, and say, okay, I have eight weeks until my exams and I'm taking four classes.

Maybe, you know, I'm going to alternate and do two classes a week of more focused work. So half of my deep thinking tasks are going to be updating certain outlines and doing practice exams. You know, if that seems to make more sense to you, but you do want to kind of balance the classwork so nothing gets ignored.

Typically law students don't wanna study the classes. They hate , and then that turns into poor grades in those classes. So you have to make yourself study the classes you hate. In fact, you should probably start with the class you hate the most.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Start with the hardest thing. And I agree with you that, you know, trying to outline and say four classes each week is probably not gonna work that well.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: You know, because. Hey, in a week you haven't necessarily covered enough material in each class, but in two weeks you probably have. So, you know, if you alternate sort of two weeks of contracts and torts, two weeks of civ for own property, then you've got two weeks of material that you need to make sense of, which is typically going to be like a decent amount.

And you can just focus on two things at once. So maybe you do one on Saturday morning, one on Sunday morning, you know, whatever it is.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: Or one in the morning on Saturday, and one in the afternoon, you know, take your pick.

Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly.

Alison Monahan: But getting really specific, and I think blocking it out in advance is good because You know, that can really show you, like, you don't actually have a whole lot of time.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm. Yeah, you have to be really honest about time, and it's not to cause you to have a stress meltdown about how much time is left. It's to be practical so you can utilize that time that you have left.

Alison Monahan: You do have a lot of time at this point, but only if you use it productively.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So if you're going to work on these outlines and do these deep thinking tasks, it's important to know if your outlines are actually working for you.

And the only way that you will know that is to start doing practice questions. So if you have not been doing practice writing throughout the semester, this is the time you need to start right now. Yeah, like today. Like today. You can like finish up this podcast and then go do some practice writing. So, should students be taking full length practice exams at this point in the semester?

Or, you know, where should they be getting some of these questions?

Alison Monahan: Well, I think it's a little hard to say. It depends on the student. I mean, if somebody's not been doing any practice writing, I would not suggest starting with a full exam from your professor necessarily, because it's probably going to be demoralizing.

That being said, you know, there are topics you've covered. If you're in CivPro and you've done personal jurisdiction and there's a one hour question on a sample exam on personal jurisdiction, that might be a good place to start. You know, it really depends on the complexity of the question and how much material you've covered.

I don't think there's any need at this point to be doing full length practice. I think there are other places that you can get these materials and it's probably better to start with those because It's just, you know, you don't want to get too overwhelmed and freak out even more than you're already freaking out.

So, you know, things like, I mean, in some states, like the bar questions, depending on the state, might be a good place to start. The sort of multi state bar questions tend to be pretty focused. I probably would not start with that. bar questions from a state like California because that will make you freak out more.

But you know, any commercial outline is typically going to have sort of short question and answers. I mean, if you're doing the examples and explanations, you can actually write out some answers. Although I think those are probably too easy to really count as practice.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: I mean, sometimes professors also will give you discussion questions in class, you know, or-

Alison Monahan: You want to make sure you have an answer to those.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, or if you don't have an answer, you can go talk through your answer with the professors, which also typically seems to work.

Alison Monahan: Which is a good idea, but it's a little, I mean, you definitely want to make sure your first set of, like, practice writing that you have something to compare it to.

Lee Burgess: That's a good point. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Talking to your professors like a slightly more advanced strategy.

Lee Burgess: True. Academic support, if your student has an academic support professor, can be a great place. Sometimes they have banks of practice questions, you know, and they're familiar with your classes, so you should reach out to them, or if you have TAs, so sometimes they have banks of questions.

So there, you have a lot of resources, you just need have to start thinking ahead now, which is why you don't want to wait too long to try and collect practice questions.

Alison Monahan: Or as we sometimes talk about, you know, your study group can write a question and work on it together, again, there you have the problem that you don't have the answer, so you might not actually know what you're doing.

But writing questions can be a great way to kind of get the details of the law because you're really thinking about, well, if I was testing someone on this, what would I play with? Like, what would I, you know?

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: But I would keep it simple for your first set of hypos. Get a short, get a, go to a commercial outline.

Find a topic that you've studied, find a simple question, you know, a paragraph long, two paragraphs long, that has an answer, and just sit down and spend an hour writing it.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Yep, I agree. You know, I know you mentioned that kind of job related stuff really derailed you with the October. freakout. But I think extracurricular activities sometimes can really make people feel overwhelmed.

Alison Monahan: Absolutely.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So, you know, what do you think a student should do if they feel like they just have too many time commitments of these extracurricular activities and they are really conflicting with being able to study effectively?

Alison Monahan: Stop going. I mean, I don't know what else to say.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that that's the reality.

I mean, sometimes you have to say no.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean, I had that situation too because I had taken on this pro bono project and I was like, I had a client who was calling me constantly about things that were utterly unrelated to, like, what I was supposed to be helping her with. And it would take hours of my time.

And it did kind of eventually get to the point where I just had to be like, you know, like, I'm in law school. I've been here a month or two months. I don't actually have any idea how you'd go about solving this problem. But here's a resource that maybe I can refer you to.

And it's hard because, you know, you feel badly for this person.

But at the same time, it's like, you are destroying my life.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Like you have to make yourself a priority. And I think that's the thing. I mean, You know, extracurriculars are important, but if you let them screw up your grades, that's something that's going to haunt you, you know, past your semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or sometimes you hear about 1Ls who join a law journal, like obviously not law review, but some secondary journal because they think it will look good on their resume. And then they get sucked into these like, incessant, time consuming, boring, site checking tasks, and they feel like they can't say no, or they're gonna like, I don't know, get a bad, like., referral from this person who has no actual power over them.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

I think in those situations, again, like you just have to stand up for yourself and say, look, I don't have time for this. Like, I'm going to have to drop it. Sorry.

Lee Burgess: And it's hard because I think law students are go getters, but you do have to put, you know, parameters on what you can do outside of class.

Alison Monahan: I mean, ultimately, frankly, if you've already done the work on the secondary journal for, like, half a semester, you can put it on your resume anyway.

No one's going to call them. And also, like, you know, which is more important, like, doing, doing extra site checking and making the 2L or 3L editor of some stupid journal that no one ever reads, like, feel like you're a great worker or getting a good grade on your exam?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: I think the answer is pretty clear.

Lee Burgess: I think it is. I think another place that students lose a ton of time is they let legal writing really take over their lives. You know, and I think it's because working on legal writing assignments in a way can be torturous, but it can also be very validating because you're actually doing something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it can be kind of fun.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and you're right. There's like an end to it. I think what can be so hard about the law school work is that it's so open ended, you know, studying for exams. Wow, that's such a big statement. That can mean so many different things.

Alison Monahan: Right, and there's accountability in legal writing, because you have an assignment as due on a particular day.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, and you know, oftentimes you may even get feedback on that assignment, which is so welcome, whether it's good or bad. But I think people welcome the feedback. So it's important not to let legal writing take over because oftentimes it's not that many units.

Alison Monahan: Or might not even be graded.

Lee Burgess: Or it might not be graded and you don't want that to, you know, really derail you from your other classes.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

So one thing I have to recommend is that students really just set some parameters for how much time they're willing to spend on a given legal writing assignment. You know, is it really worth spending more than 10 hours a week? If you are working on a given assignment probably not unless it's like a final exam type assignment.

And then you decide how to best utilize those hours and track your time. If you find yourself spending 30 40 hours on an assignment for legal writing, It's not a final exam grade exam that's supposed to take 40 hours. Then you really do need to regroup and figure out How you're going to better allocate your time.

Alison Monahan: Right. Because the reality is that's something that will expand to fill all available time if you let it.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And if you feel like you're spinning your wheels, then you need to go talk to your legal writing professor and figure out what you're doing wrong.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: Because you don't need to spend more time than that on these assignments.

Alison Monahan: No, and I think it, yeah, you have to be sort of. Careful about if you're, you know, if you find yourself really banging your head against the wall, and this is more of an issue, typically with open research universe assignments, which probably your first semester, they're closed universe, but not always.

We had both. So, you know, if you find yourself, like you hit a wall, you're finding like the same cases over and over your, you feel like you're just not getting anywhere basically, it's totally fine to go to your legal writing professor and say, these are the steps that I have taken. This is, or to the law librarian, you know, if you're allowed to talk to these people.

These are the steps I've taken. These are the results I'm getting. I'm looking for a case that says this. I don't know where to go next. Do you have any advice?

Lee Burgess: Yep. Ask for help because they shouldn't be taking over your life.

Alison Monahan: Right. And they shouldn't, you know, they may not tell you the answer, but you'll likely leave with some new ideas.

Lee Burgess: For sure. For sure. What was your legal writing final like? Was it over a weekend or how did yours work?

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Alison Monahan: I don't really remember. We only had a semester of legal writing and it was ungraded, so I think, you know, I think it was like, yeah, we had some final open research assignment that took a few days, but I don't really remember the details.

How about you?

Lee Burgess: Our first semester legal writing final took a weekend and you picked it up at like five o'clock on a Friday and it was due Monday at 10 a.m. or something like that. You basically spent the entire weekend on it. And then our spring exam, we actually took a week off of class and just did it.

Yeah, it was very intense.

Alison Monahan: That's crazy. Yeah, we definitely did not do that. It was sort of an afterthought. But I think this is a key thing to think about with time, too. Just one last point on that is that if you are expected to do your legal writing assignment over an entire weekend, that's something you need to know on your calendar so that you haven't, you're not thinking in your head like, oh, I have that weekend to work on torts and contracts.

Like you need to know that that's not happening.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, and by being realistic about that now, looking forward to exams in December, it, that's not a crisis point, you know-

Alison Monahan: But I think It's a crisis if you've, like, decided that's when you're gonna do all of your outlining and then you're like, oh, I can't do any of it, sorry, whoops, oh well.

Lee Burgess: Okay, so we've talked a little bit about, kind of, solutions to the October freakout and setting yourself up for the second half of the semester. But let's talk about some more concrete things that people can do. We've been talking about looking at the calendar for the rest of the semester. I personally still like to print out calendars.

You can do it from Microsoft Word, it takes a couple seconds and really, like with a pencil, go through and. Allocate time on things and, you know, really map out what you're going to do, add your to dos, what practice exams you're going to take, when and as you go, make sure you update it based on, you know, what's happening in your life.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

If you get the flu and that puts you behind, you don't just say, Oh, now I'm behind. You have to reorganize the calendar to reflect the work that still remains to be done.

Alison Monahan: And I think that's a good point all around. It's like, you know, if you. You need to be clear on what you're doing and not doing. I mean, you need to be clear on what you want to do, but also be clear on what you're not getting done.

Because it might be that just overall your expectations are unrealistic. You know, most people could not outline an entire semester in four hours. Right. But it may also be that, you know, you have good intentions and you've sort of mapped out time reasonably, but you're doing things that are self sabotaging.

Like, Oh, I'm going to work on my outlines on Friday between 10 and 2. And then you go out drinking every Thursday night and you're too hungover.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's probably not the best use of your time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You know, so I mean, look, you're, you know, people are grownups.

They can do what they want. But I think being aware of your own patterns and really saying like, okay, where, like, where am I falling down here? Where is this falling apart can be very valuable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Also don't watch like. Hours and hours of binge tv. That's another way that people can get really sucked in is they say, you know, this would be a great time to start watching Ray Donovan on iTunes.

Alison Monahan: Right. I've been watching Narcos.

Lee Burgess: Oh. Which I've heard is good. Yes, I've heard that. Yeah, it's pretty good.

Alison Monahan: But if you're in law school, I wouldn't start watching it. 'cause you get sucked in

Lee Burgess: Christmas break, holiday break. Yeah. That is what winter break is for.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. You know, but you know, I think this ties into a bigger point was like, it's fine to occasionally like binge watch some TV on a Friday night when your brain is tired.

And you need to build in those times to take time off and that's one of the ways to really deal with the October freakout is giving yourself time to recharge, but

Episode 15: The October Freakout

you just have to be clear and, you know, keep, again, like keep that contained to the time that it's supposed to be in so that you have time to do other things.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you know, I think, Along with taking breaks to do mindless things like go to movies and binge watch quality television, don't forget to stop like about taking care of yourself. I mean, this is something a reoccurring theme that we talk about a lot in this podcast, but this is not a good time when the weather changes to start treating your body like crap.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: Because this is when everybody starts to get sick. Because yes, it get cold. The weather changes. You're stressed out, you're not sleeping. Right, you know, you now turn on the heater, and the air gets drier, and all of that kind of stuff. So, this is really where you need to make healthier food, and, you know, exercise, and, Make sure you're taking whatever vitamins you like to take and, you know, doing things to make sure that you're physically going to be there because getting sick the second half of the semester, really sick, can be really challenging as far as staying on top of your stuff.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, it's time to be boring, right? Like, this is the time to be like, you know, maybe I'll cut back a little bit on my drinking and spend that time and money making myself some soup.

Like you can have a really big party in middle of December when your exams are over.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I think actually you can probably save a lot of money by not drinking and cooking soup.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Soup is, soup is like the best.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: It's really cheap. You can make it, you know, on the weekend. You can eat it all week with some nice bread. Yeah, take it to school. It's very soothing.

Lee Burgess: I love my slow cooker.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I would like roast squash and then you can just basically puree it with a little bit of like broth or something and you've got a squash soup.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Or like leek, potato leek, super easy.

Lee Burgess: I'm making pureed cauliflower tonight.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, or like, you know, a big pot of beans and rice. Like these are things, you know, this is the time to kind of like go inward and start nesting because that's soothing. You know, it really is.

Lee Burgess: It is. It is. Also something to think about is what you're going to do with the holidays, you know, look at your final exam schedule, look at Thanksgiving.

If you have plans to travel around Thanksgiving, think about how that's going to work.

Alison Monahan: The, the 1L Thanksgiving is just like the worst.

Lee Burgess: It can be a really, really challenging if you do decide to travel home for Thanksgiving.

Alison Monahan: Well, or if you don't, like either way, it's either way, it's going to be crappy basically.

Lee Burgess: And if you do travel and you, you probably want to have a frank discussion with your family. about how available you're going to be. You know, I'm all for taking like, Thanksgiving day off, as you should. Eat some good food, you know, watch football, go to the movies, whatever. But, you probably can't take 5 days off around Thanksgiving.

Alison Monahan: Right, and then even that one day needs to be in a basically supportive environment.

Lee Burgess: Mmhm.

Alison Monahan: You know, if you go to your family's house and they're like, giving you crap about how you're not going to be able to hang out at like the after Thanksgiving party and the after after Thanksgiving party. I mean, at some point you may just have to make the call and be like, you know what, I'm going back to school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Alison Monahan: Like I can't deal with this.

Lee Burgess: It's true. It's true. So you have to be, again, think ahead, set expectations, and if you do travel, plan ahead. You know, what are you going to be able to do while you're gone? How much time are you going to take off? I mean, I've definitely heard plenty of stories where students go away with the best of intentions and then family commitments just start to pile up and pile up and they lose three or four days.

For some schools, you can often have finals within days of coming back from Thanksgiving.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so I think, yeah, like really setting those expectations early with your family or whoever it's with, you know, saying, okay, I'm going to take off Thanksgiving Day. But I need, you know, these four hour blocks of time on the other days that I'm going to be there and here's when I'm planning to schedule them.

Does that work with our schedule? Because I could move it. You know, I either need like 10 to 2 or I need 2 to 6. Which of those do you prefer?

Lee Burgess: Right. And where are you going to study?

Alison Monahan: Right, where exactly?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I was lucky that my mom's office was in the walking distance of my parents house, and so I was able to go there, although they turned off the heat over Thanksgiving weekend, so it was a little chilly.

Luckily, it was in California, so it wasn't that cold. But I had a quiet place where I could go work. But, you know, if you're staying in an apartment where all this family is visiting, you know, figure out where you're going to go.

Alison Monahan: Or in a hotel, you know, you're meeting your family someplace in a hotel and you've got all sharing the same room.

I mean, that's just probably not really tenable.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So again, be practical. You're going to get a winter break. It's going to give you an opportunity to see families, catch up with friends. That's really the time that you can do a lot of that fun stuff between semesters.

Alison Monahan: All right, what else? I think this is a time for setting goals, you know?

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Lee Burgess: Oh yeah.

Alison Monahan: You've got to get really clear on like your goals for when you want your outlines to be updated, your goals for how many practice exams you're going to take, and when you're going to take them. Because without that, you know, if you don't have sort of a set expectation, chances are you're not going to do it.

That's just the reality at this point.

Lee Burgess: That's very true. And something I always ask students at this point in the semester, too, is when are your final exams?

Alison Monahan: Right, when are they happening? Do you know what format they're in?

Lee Burgess: Yes, do you know if they're open book and closed book? Are they essays or multiple choice?

And A lot of students will say, hmm, they're in early December, the professor hasn't said, I don't know. And then it's like, well, those aren't acceptable answers.

Alison Monahan: Well, the other question is, have you actually looked at an exam at this point? Have you read your professor's old exam? Do you have any clue what you're going to be tested on?

Lee Burgess: Because you should.

Alison Monahan: Because if the answer to that question is no, I want you to, when you get off of this podcast, immediately find at least one old exam in every class and read it because it can be extremely enlightening in terms of what you're expected to do.

Lee Burgess: And I think some people think if they ask the professor questions about the exam that it reflects badly on them, the professors are going to be impressed that you're thinking about it now.

So you are, it is totally fair game to talk to your professor and say, You know, are you going to start talking about the format of the exam soon? Have you decided if it's going to be open book and closed book? When are you releasing that information? When are you posting practice exams? I mean, all sorts of stuff like that.

Those are fair game questions. The worst thing the professor will say is no.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Alison Monahan: Well, and even if they do get like persnickety about it, it's an anonymously graded test. Who cares?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. So learning as much as you can about final exams, taking steps to, you know, make sure that your life is in order, making sure the holidays don't derail you and putting together a schedule is really the best way to deal with the October freakout and make sure that you can move into a productive space.

But you know, if you're also having an anxiety attack, make sure you do take a walk, go to yoga, or do something.

Alison Monahan: Right, or, you know, or get outside help. You know, we've discussed many times, if you think it would be helpful to talk to a therapist about what you're experiencing, go talk to a therapist.

Your school probably provides it for you. If you have some sort of anxiety issues or you're not sleeping, you know, there are things that you can do, but you have to be proactive about it.

Lee Burgess: And don't wait until December to start dealing with these issues.

Alison Monahan: No, much better to do it now. Because at that point, you know, by the time you're a week or two towards the end of classes, you want to be taking longer practice exams.

You want to make sure you're getting feedback. And that's something we haven't really touched on, but You know, getting feedback is so critical and we work with students, we have tutors who work with students and that's what we do is we provide feedback. You can also talk to your professors, you can talk to people at your school, you can talk to your TA.

I probably would not talk to your law school friends, but you know, the point is you need to figure out, you know, this is the time to really figure out, like, take stock, like, do a realistic analysis of where am I at? Am I freaking out because I'm actually in trouble or am I freaking out just because that's something that people do at this time?

You know, the time to figure that out is now.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And that's a really good point that you made about your law school student friends, is that this can be a time when sometimes venting to your other law school student friends can just feed anxiety instead of actually being productive. So if you're having a tough time, And you go to one of your friends,

Episode 15: The October Freakout

and all they talk about is how stressed out they are, and how they're gonna fail, and you're gonna fail, and everybody's gonna fail, and why did we all go to law school, yadda yadda yadda.

Alison Monahan: We'll never get a job, blah blah blah.

Lee Burgess: Right, we're never gonna get a job, we have all this debt. That, you have to think about who you're spending time with, and make sure that it's productive. Because it, it can be very easy to get pulled into other people's drama, and have that actually feed your own neuroses, and make it harder to be productive and focused.

Alison Monahan: Right, I wondered on that too. If you have a study group, I think this is a good time to evaluate how productive your study group really is for you. And if you find that, you know, you're spending a lot of time with your study group and maybe you enjoy them and they make you feel better, but are you really, you know, are they preparing you to walk in by yourself to that exam and take it?

Because sometimes there's this sort of group thing. It's like, oh, the group understands it. That's not actually what you're being tested on. So, you know, you have to get, again, sort of get real about this. And you might have to have some difficult conversations that say, you know, I think I'm spending, like, we're spending too much time together.

I need more study time on my own. I'm gonna have to cut back.

Lee Burgess: I walked out of a study group. I mean, I was nice about it, but I basically said, Hey guys, you know, you're all my friends, but this is not what I need to be spending my time on right now.

Alison Monahan: Right. It's like, hey, you know, this isn't working for me.

I'd love to, like, meet you for coffee once a week and chat, but, like, I can't spend six hours a week in a study group that is not productive.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. And here's our shameless plug. If you're really, You know, having a tough time and you can't get your resources that you need at school, you know, that's why there are people like us out there who are doing law school tutoring.

So you can always reach out to our team and talk about whether or not we can help you get through the second part of your semester.

Episode 15: The October Freakout

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Get your schedule in order. Get you some feedback. Get you some practice hypos. That's basically what we do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And listen to you when you freak out. Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And tell you, you know what?

This is totally normal. You're going to be okay. Or, you know what, it sounds like this is a really serious problem, and I think, like, here's how you need to deal with it.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly. All right, so, if you, I think that's all the time we have, actually.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think we're out of time.

Lee Burgess: We're out of time. You guys should get to work. It's October.

Alison Monahan: It's October. Get to work. Don't freak out.

Lee Burgess: Don't freak out. Okay.

Alison Monahan: Don't freak out. Just get to work.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, please take a second to leave us a review and ratings on iTunes. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything in the future.

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! We'll talk soon and it's going to be okay. You're going to be okay. Don't freak out. Okay, we'll talk to you guys soon.