Episode 20: The Exam Countdown - One Month and Counting!

Lee Burgess: Hello, and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're going to be sharing tips for the exam countdown, these last few weeks before final exams. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Allison 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 Catapult Conference, and the Trebuchet Legal Career Site. Allison 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'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: When they're counting the time to their first exam in weeks rather than months, lots of law students start to panic. While we definitely don't suggest panicking, some concern is warranted. Time is going to go quickly, and you want to make sure you're using it wisely in the last month or so until exams start.

So, Lee, let's talk about some strategies for maximizing these last few weeks before exam. What's most critical, do you think, to keep in mind during the last month or so of classes before the exam period really starts in earnest?

Lee Burgess: Gosh, I think the hardest thing about these last few weeks is really time management.

You know, you made,

Alison Monahan: Definitely.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you made the point that it starts to go by quickly, and I think that's. That's absolutely the case, but people feel like there's just like this train coming towards them in the tunnel, you know, and you, but you can't just you don't want to feel out of control. You need to figure out how you can manage your time and get the most from these last few weeks, cause there's a lot of work to be done, but there's a lot of time to get a lot of stuff done.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think if you're focused and you're efficient, there is a lot of time, but it's also easy to sort of while away. The time that you have available thinking like, Oh, I'll get started on that next week or Oh, yeah, I'm a little behind.

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I'll start my outlining soon. And, you know, that can be deadly because pretty soon, soon becomes never. And then, you know, then you're in this situation of like absolute panic where it's like, Oh my gosh, it's like the day before Thanksgiving. I haven't even started like making sense of any of this material.

My first exam is in a week or two, you know, what am I going to do? And then it's just like complete meltdown mode, which doesn't really help anyone.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. And I think the best thing you can do to kind of avoid this from happening is to immediately create a study calendar for these last few weeks.

So you really have an idea of what you're going to do with your time and what needs to get done. And, shockingly enough, when I recommend to students that they do this, the first thing I ask is to, like, write down when their exams are. And some folks still don't know what days their exams are.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I feel like this vague idea, like, oh, I think they start in, like, the middle of December.

It's like, no.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: You know, or how much time do you have between them? When is the first one? Do you have two days between your two exams, your first two exams? Do you have a week between them? That's a totally different scenario. So yeah, I think absolutely this idea of creating a study calendar for the rest of the semester is absolutely critical.

And you have to back it out from your exams, right? I mean, if you have three or four exams, the first thing you need to do is put those exams on your study calendar. Make sure you know what time of day they are. Are they in the morning? Are they in the afternoon? Triple check this information.

Lee Burgess: Yes.

Alison Monahan: Because what's the easiest way to guarantee you're going to fail your class?

Not to show up for the exam on time.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. And I think going hand in hand with that is you need to double check with yourself that you know what type of exam those are going to be. Because I

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think also at this point if you don't know what the format of that exam is going to be, that's also incredibly problematic.

Your professor should have either put it in the syllabus, talked about it in class. If nobody in your class knows what's on the exam, then it's time to go to office hours and ask.

Alison Monahan: Or time to ask that question in class so everyone gets the same information about, you know, what you're allowed to bring or not bring, what the format is.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And if you don't know that you're having a multiple choice test you should know that by now.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Because that's going to somewhat influence how you study.

Alison Monahan: If you don't know if your test is open book or closed book, or if it's open book, are you allowed to bring anything? Are you only allowed to bring one page?

Like these are really critical pieces of information.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So based on that information is really how I think you identify what the tasks are that needs to be done. And I think for all of your classes, you need to create some sort of outline.

Alison Monahan: Or something.

Lee Burgess: Or something. Flowcharts or some sort of study material.

Alison Monahan: Something to make sense of the material.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. But, you know, depending on the type of exam, those documents or whatever you end up making them they vary. So you definitely want to think about, you know, what you want to create for some of these classes and when you're going to do them. And please don't leave this outlining exercise to the last minute.

It is not productive.

Alison Monahan: No, and when we talk about, you know, making outlines or study aids or something, this is not something you can do in, you know, the 20 minutes between classes. Typically, this is the sort of deep work that we've talked about

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before, where you're going to have to block out three or four hour periods over a consistent period of time.

And if you're looking at your first exam is, you know, less than, say, four or five weeks away, you don't have a lot of time left. You know, you've got a few weekends, and you're going to probably, you should be expecting to work more or less all of those weekends at least part of the day. You know, you probably need to be doing a session of outlining on Saturday and another one on Sunday.

And each of those is probably going to be three or four hours. And this is of course on top of your legal writing assignments that are come due. And also, you know, continuing to be prepared and go to class. So, there's a lot of stuff that people really have to get serious about.

Lee Burgess: And I think one of the things that students do first is they throw the reading and the class preparation out the window.

Alison Monahan: Right, they're like, I'll skip class.

Lee Burgess: I'll skip class. And this is a huge mistake. You may have to put constraints on how much time that you spend preparing for class. Maybe you can't read, you know, three or four supplements before class, which you shouldn't be doing anyway. But Professors often really heavily test what is at the end of the semester to punish people who have stopped studying at the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Right. Well, it also just makes sense because this is the time that your professor is writing your exam. And they're thinking about, like, oh, you know, if I want to include this question, we've got to cover this material.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: And I remember my first semester of law school, my contracts class, we had a double session the last day of class to make up for the fact that we had not had, you know, whatever we missed a class or whatever. And the bulk of the exam was out of that second make up session.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that's so unnerving.

Alison Monahan: And it was because, like, she had written an exam question, and she had to cover that material.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think a lot of students also, in torts classes, which is almost everyone takes first semester professors like to do products liability at the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Oh yeah, we did that. It was our last day.

Lee Burgess: Yep, me too.

Alison Monahan: Totally, absolutely on the exam.

Lee Burgess: Always on the exam, and And products is really pretty complicated.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It's not easy.

Lee Burgess: It's not easy. And so students wait to the last minute to outline it and then they don't understand the material and then they don't want to practice it because they don't understand it.

And it's almost always on the exam because it gets the curve. So-

Alison Monahan: You cannot. And like, my torts professor had written law review articles on product liability. Like everyone knew this was going to be on the test. He covered it the last day. And I remember sitting in the architecture library at Columbia, studying or reading, you know, reading law review article or whatever, and I was just like, oh, my God, I have absolutely no idea what is going on right now, and I'm almost certain this is going to be on the exam, and it was.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So you can't just start ignoring class, and please don't stop going. Even if for some reason you decide to stop doing your reading, still go to class.

Don't stop going to class.

Alison Monahan: Go and take copious notes.

Lee Burgess: Copious notes. You know, I also think you need to keep up with how you're doing each week. I think one of the things that happens when you create these study schedules is they might seem all fine and good. You know, say you've got your printed out calendar, and you've, you know, assigned a couple classes a week that you're going to focus on, and you've set aside your time for outlining, and then the first week goes by and you get sick.

And so you only do half of the things kind of on your list that you were going to accomplish that week. It is not time to throw out the study schedule.

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Alison Monahan: Right. And also, I mean, I think another thing people underestimate drastically is just the amount of time that's required to do these things. So, you know, if you say you haven't done any outlining, you know, in your torts class for the whole semester, and you block out a three hour block to do your outline for the whole semester, and you're, you're in November.

That is not realistic. You know, so you've really got to be tracking, like, okay, I thought I was going to get through these topics, or this much of the class, and actually I got through a quarter of that. What, how does that impact what I'm doing for the rest of this time? It's got to be, It's got to be this moving document, because, you know, you're much better off having an outline that covers every topic, even if it's not, you know, in every single detail, than you are having an outline that's really great for half the class and doesn't exist for the other half.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's 100 percent right. And so this idea of this living, breathing study schedule that you continue to check in on and change, you know, as you go on is very important, whether it's miscalculating, how much time something's going to take, or if you get sick and you have to take a day or two off, you know, there's no getting behind necessarily.

It's just readjusting. Because if you start to get into that mindset of like, well, I'm behind, I should just throw the whole thing out the window, that's not-

Alison Monahan: Right, just give up.

Lee Burgess: I should give up. That is not the way to do it, . So you need need to forging ahead.

Alison Monahan: And the reality is sometimes you just have to force yourself to move on.

You do. So if you find that you're still in the first two weeks of the semester and you've been working on your outline for eight hours. You have to move on. You know, like, there's no other choice.

Lee Burgess: Oh, I was just gonna, I think that students also underestimate the time that some of these legal writing final exams will take, and that usually happens sometime in November, and different schools do it different ways, but not only can it take a lot of time, they can be pretty exhausting, and I think people, you know, need to be realistic that even after you turn in one of these things, you're not going to walk to the library and then do some really high quality studying.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean exactly. And the same thing when you're looking at your exam schedule. You know, if you're like, oh, no problem, I have a day between, you know, one of my exams is on Monday and one's on Tuesday, no problem. I'll just study for the Tuesday one after I take the Monday one. Like, no, that's not productive study time.

Lee Burgess: No, because you're burned out and you have to give yourself time. Yeah, you have to give yourself time to recover. So that's the other thing I think to think about in the study schedule is remember that this is. This is not something that needs to happen where you're studying, you know, till 11 o'clock at night every night.

You absolutely need to sleep and take care of yourself because worse than getting behind is getting really, really sick or burned out and not being able to work productively. So you have to take care of yourself, eat well, you know, continue to exercise, get outside as much as you can to keep things moving and be productive.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and all these things should be on your study calendar as well.

Lee Burgess: Yes, very good point.

Alison Monahan: You know, you're much more likely to make that yoga class or go to that cycling class or take a run if you actually put it on your calendar. And again, like, you know if you didn't do it. If you plan to do three days of exercise a week, because you know that that's what you need so you don't go stir crazy and get sick and go, you know, just be really unhappy, you can tell, like, oh, you know what?

I noticed for the last week I haven't gone to the gym. Huh.

How is that impacting me? Maybe I need to, like, make that a bigger priority.

Lee Burgess: For sure. I think that's 100 percent right. And then I think the other thing people underestimate is possibly trying to travel for the holidays.

Alison Monahan: Oh God, Thanksgiving. It's like, yeah, Thanksgiving, like, you know, it's just the worst.

It's like the worst possible timing for having a guilt ridden, like, family Thanksgiving, or not having, you know, having a non family Thanksgiving that's guilt ridden, like, it's just And it's always right there. It's like, that's when you're like, Oh my God, my exams start in a week and a half.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

So you've got to really think about whether or not it's practical and a good idea to travel and spend time with your family, because you do still need to study. I mean, I think you can take like Thanksgiving day off, but you can't just say, Oh, I'm going to take a four day weekend. I'll be fine. That's five day holiday.

Alison Monahan: I'm going to fly and like possibly bad weather,

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I mean, you know, to each his own, but I think you probably need to have some serious conversations with, you know, the people in your life about what makes sense for you to do this particular year.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I think this year even more than future years because your final exam schedule of your first year is going to be so much more exam heavy likely than, you know, future years, you might have papers or other things that may make things a little bit more flexible.

But if you've got to come back and really knock some exams out of the park, then you just need to make sure that Thanksgiving is not the reason why you don't perform well when you get back.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think it's difficult because, you know, there are typically people have expectations about what they want you to do.

And, you know, we all want to, we all want to honor other people's ideas about what we should do to the extent that we can. However, you also have to advocate for yourself and say, look, you know. I'm in law school. It's my first semester, probably, you know, if you're listening to this. I'm spending a lot of time and a lot of money and a lot of energy and everything is riding on these next few weeks.

Lee Burgess: And I think it just is hard, especially if you don't have lawyers in your family. I mean, my parents were lawyers, so it was never a huge issue. And I could drive home. I didn't go to school very far away from where I was from, so that was also not a huge issue. But for folks who don't have lawyers in their family, who don't really remember what it's like, What it was like you need to really have a thoughtful conversation with loved ones so they can start to understand the kind of pressure you're under.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, I was in school in New York, and, you know, I was like, you've got to be joking.

There's no way I'm getting on a plane to fly anywhere. At the time I was living in California, like, I'm gonna fly across the country 3, 000 miles to have, like, Thanksgiving dinner and fly back. I was just like, this seems crazy. Yeah. So, you know, I ended up going on the train with my roommate who lived in Philadelphia, and we hung out with her parents for a couple of days, and it was actually, like, a pretty nice break, but we did a lot of studying.

You know, I remember Thanksgiving morning. We were studying while her mother was making her dinner, which is very nice of her, you know, and we're studying on the train, and we're studying on the way back, and, you know, we, you know, we did occasionally, like, we'd go out to dinner with her friends or whatever, but we definitely were not, you know, it was not like a five day Thanksgiving break.

Lee Burgess: Right. And I think finding those time that you can study and setting those expectations with your loved ones. You know, if it's like, okay, well, we have a big family thing the day after Thanksgiving, it's like, okay, well, I can come to that big family thing. But before that, I have to go to the library or somewhere to study.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I remember in architecture school, I was the only person in the architecture building working on Thanksgiving day. And, which was crazy. They didn't even have the heat on it was insane. And my younger sister who was studying at a college nearby came up and she literally was like. You have to at least take time off to go have Thanksgiving dinner.

This is not healthy. And I was like, no, don't come. I'm too busy. And she's like, this is crazy. You know, you can take two hours and go have dinner with me.

Lee Burgess: Well, the thing is they would only, I think it's like only in California would they ever consider turning off the heat though, because if you were back east,

Alison Monahan: Well, it was El Nino. It was freezing. It had been raining for like weeks on end. It was so cold. It was horrible. It was like the worst Thanksgiving. And my sister was vegan, so we like, thank goodness we were in Berkeley because we could get a vegan Thanksgiving.

Lee Burgess: Yum.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, right. Yum. Woo!

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Lee Burgess: Tofurkey or whatever.

What is it called?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it was like Tofurkey.

Lee Burgess: All right. So, outside of the holiday,

Alison Monahan: Last word on Thanksgiving, basically you should manage everyone's expectations, you know, and have these conversations as far in advance as you can and draw boundaries if you have to, you know, look out for you basically.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I didn't, did you have any friends in law school who went home for Thanksgiving and then their significant other broke up with them? This is how I was like talked about at my law school about why people shouldn't go home for Thanksgiving.

Alison Monahan: I mean, I can see it happening. I'm not aware of it happening.

Anyway. But it is that time. I mean, that, well, that's the other thing. It's like, you know, like, the life drama tends to pop up. So you might just want to go ahead and, I've actually heard stories about people sort of telling their significant others, like, you can't break up with me for the next month. Like, it's, if you want to break up with me, like, that's fine.

I'll, like, I'll live with it, but you just can't do it for the next month.

Lee Burgess: I think those conversations are had around the bar exam as well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, it's just like, you know. All like it's all good. We can talk about this later, but I just can't handle it right now.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah

Lee Burgess: Okay, what about trying to figure out what your weaknesses are?

I mean, I think a lot of students probably listening to this podcast may have had midterms I think midterms are one of those things that can really tell you how you need to study for these exams because you're gonna get some feedback on what you're struggling with.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I think, you know, students hate midterms.

A lot of the time they freak out about them, but they're actually a really great study tool, if used correctly, because you have had, you know, you've been through that experience of taking an exam, hopefully you've gotten either personal feedback or, you know, at a bare minimum, you have a sample answer presumably to work from, or your professors at least talked about it. You know, and you can really glean a lot from these materials.

You know, I think it's a question of really critically reviewing it. Your own work, comparing it carefully to the sample answer and, you know, and not letting yourself off the hook, not being like, oh yeah, you know, I basically got that. But really looking at where, where was what I wrote different? What did I miss?

How did, how did they phrase things differently? Was there a structure that their structure, you know, the sample structure is better than what I use? And then talk to your professors and try to get feedback on it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, I think your professors, if they're giving you a midterm, one of their goals is going to be so you can get some feedback.

So, there's no really other reason to give midterms in law school because it creates more work for them. Right. So, they are only doing it, I think, to give you that benchmark. So, utilize their availability. Go to office hours. You know, take your answer or even better, rewrite your answer to try and remedy some of the problems and see if they'll take a look at it because you, it's hard to know if you're fixing the problem.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And you know, we'll make a plug for tutoring here because that's one of the things that we really work with students on is, you know, send me the answer that you wrote for your midterm and we'll talk about how you could have done a better job. I'll actually help you rewrite it. You know, we'll show you this is where you're doing what you need to be doing. This is a good argument. This is not a good argument. You know, this argument, you're not using the facts here is vague, but here's the situation where you did use the facts and do more of that. So, you know, and you can compare notes with your friends, but they don't know what they're doing either, so.

Lee Burgess: That can be kind of, can end up going down a tough road there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah.

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Lee Burgess: And I think a lot of students kind of ignore even feedback they might get from their legal writing professors as far as how that may relate to your final exams. But I think that's a mistake because in a way, legal writing is legal writing.

If you're struggling with the IRAC formula, if you're struggling with legal analysis. You want to really get, appreciate all the feedback that you're getting even from your legal writing classes, especially, you know, when it comes to your legal writing final. Make sure that you're paying a lot of attention to that feedback as well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. Like, you know, in legal writing, your job is to give your professor what they're looking for, but you can also take their feedback and apply it in other realms. You know, the idea of, like, making a strong argument and supporting it. And that's pretty universal in law school.

Lee Burgess: It is. And it was interesting.

I was just on the phone with one of our tutors who is a former legal writing professor. And we were talking about kind of some of the pitfalls that students have with legal writing. And one of the things we were talking about is that students struggle with how to use cases, you know, to beef up their arguments.

And if you are one of those students who right now is saying, yeah, I don't really know how to do that. You want to go try and speak to your legal writing professor and clear that up because On your final exam for your legal writing class, you'll absolutely need to have that skill. And really for your essay exams, you may need to have that skill as well too.

If you are analyzing a set of fact patterns that's going to call to mind cases that you discussed in your class.

Alison Monahan: I think that's a great point. And like I was talking with a student this morning and, you know, she had actually had a sample midterm that she turned in and then sent to me for feedback, and I was like, well, okay, you know, you're doing a good job identifying the arguments, but you're not actually analyzing them.

Like, how do you think this would come out? This is what we really do when we think like a lawyer. So having someone have that second eye where like, oh, I thought I got everything because I wrote down the arguments. It's like, well, yeah, you wrote down the arguments, but that's actually kind of only the first step.

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Lee Burgess: Yep, exactly. So no matter what, if you had graded midterms or practice questions or You know, whatever is floating around that is an example for you that you can do some practice and get some feedback on it, make the most of that feedback so you don't learn some of these lessons of what you struggle with on your final exam.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think another great thing about midterms is it allows you to really check how your outlining and study aids are working because this is the point where you really need to be triaging about what you are behind on. So, if you haven't started outlining, that's a serious problem. If you're behind on your outlines, that's a problem.

If you outlined for your midterm, and you found out that actually didn't really help you, that's also a problem.

Lee Burgess: Right. If you sit down to take your first practice test and find out that your outline doesn't really help you do that, that's also a problem.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or if you haven't taken any practice tests by now.

Lee Burgess: Ooh, even worse. Yeah, even worse. And again, they don't have to be the full exam that your professor gave, but they need to be some sort of a fact pattern that's like what your professor is likely to give. You need to figure out whether or not you're studying to be able to create that deliverable that they're asking you to do at the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Well, what about this idea that you don't know enough to take practice tests? You're not far enough along on your outlines to take a practice test.

Lee Burgess: That is absolutely untrue, because you know something. You may not be able to take a whole entire practice test, but you at this point have learned something.

You know, at this point in the semester, if you're listening to this podcast, it's likely, you know, late October, November, or if you're listening to it in the future, if unless you are in your first couple weeks of class, you know something. So you can absolutely write an answer to some sort of a hypothetical.

Maybe it's just the first paragraph of a fact pattern from one of their final exams. But that's still enough to trigger some issues and do some writing practice.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think it's interesting, I mean, I was working with a student yesterday on a question, and, you know, the question was like, analyze the situation under

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Statute A and Statute B, and these are like pretty well known statutes, federal statutes in this particular area of law.

And his answer only talked about statute B.

Lee Burgess: Oops.

Alison Monahan: And I was sort of like, huh, do you have anything to say about A? And the student said, oh, well, I don't guess I really understand the difference between them. And it was like, okay, this is a great learning opportunity. Because you've taken a practice test, you have real, realized or not realized is being pointed out to you You only did one half of the question and you realize you don't actually know the difference. So what does that suggest suggested that the materials that you've like made and studied so far are not working.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I think, you know, we understand that forcing yourself to do this practice, especially early on, is really frustrating, hard stuff.

I mean, this really will hit all the stress and anxiety buttons for you. You're gonna feel overwhelmed. I mean, I remember my school actually proctored some practice exams in October for our first year classes. And on a Saturday, you could come in and take it in the classroom. It was kind of like a mock exam.

And I remember sitting down for one, was in civil procedure, and I was like, I was horribly behind. I was not outlining like I should be. And I just read the question and then literally closed my laptop and left. I didn't even, I didn't even try. I was just like, I was like, I don't know what I'm supposed to write, I don't know what the law is. Like I am so screwed. I am just going to walk out. And I did. I walked out, which is not the right thing to do.

Alison Monahan: But It's really out of character to you.

Lee Burgess: Well, you know, the first semester of law school, it brings out all sorts of interesting things for all of us, right? I did go back and eventually struggle with that question, but it was one of those things where I was like, I am not going to do this right now.

I do not know enough. And I think there's, if you've got to sit down and say like, I know this is going to be hard, but I'm going to do it anyway.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think you just have to, you have to force yourself to do it because, I mean, the reality is it gets easier, and it gets easier pretty quickly, typically.

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Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: I mean, you know, even if you look at it, and it doesn't have to be that you're doing this under timed exam conditions, closed book exam in the beginning. You know, it's fine if you let yourself, like, use your outline or whatever. And on the first test you take, because the point is not to exactly replicate conditions at this point.

I mean, you know, the day before your exam, probably you shouldn't be using your outline, but a month before is completely fine because that's how you learn.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. So, you know, realize that it's gonna be hard, it's going to make you nervous, but that's why it's worthwhile , because you need to it.

Alison Monahan: And it's also a lot of people will not do it.

Lee Burgess: Yep. And so if you force yourself to do it and get something out of it, it's going to really help your place in the curve, we'll be honest.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and, you know, I think at this point of triage, it's like it's not about reading the cases. Like, yes, you should read the cases, but it's not about reviewing, you know, reading the cases three or four times.

Like, what you need is not in the case law at this point. Right. What you need is more likely in a supplement, some sort of commercial outline, a horn book, which you combine with your class notes and all these things to make it your own. But you've got to have this overall sense of the law, and if you don't have that right now, you know, it's time to get some commercial outlines, go to the library, read a horn book, you know, maybe look through an old outline, although I don't usually think that's the best way to sort of triage on this because you need almost more of like a narrative.

So it might be, you know, reading a book, like in Examples and Explanations, or like the Charles Dean on contracts, or Chemerinsky on con law. You know, something that's going to give you the basic picture if you don't have that right now.

Lee Burgess: For sure. And this is another place where if you are really struggling triaging, you know, utilize all the resources you have.

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So talking to professors, talk, you know, going to try and get an appointment with their academic support office if your school has something like that. Talking to your TAs about final exams in certain classes if you have TAs. Use your resources, you know, don't feel like you're out there struggling alone and don't feel like that if you ask for help there's something wrong with you.

Struggling on your own without asking for help is the biggest mistake.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, well that's a good, I have a, what do you think about study groups at this point? This is, this can be the point where people really start to turn to their study group for moral support and other support.

Lee Burgess: You know, I think study groups can be good for moral support, and I think it really varies person to person and study group to study group whether or not it's a good use of your time when you have limited time.

So, I have walked out of study groups around final exam time with basically saying like, hey guys, this is not getting me anywhere. I need to like sit down and struggle with this material myself. And I think you have to sometimes make those decisions. Or study groups can also turn into just these panic machines.

Where everybody starts like feeding off of everybody else's anxiety. That's also not a good use of your time. So, or they also start dividing up work. Like, Outlining different parts and things like that.

Alison Monahan: Right, everyone starts to realize like, Oh, I'm not actually going to finish my outlines. Is there a way I can offload some of this?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, no, is the answer to that, is not a good idea. So, I think you have to be really thoughtful about your study group. And one, whether or not you learn from your time spent with them. And is that going to get the best bang for your buck? You know, if it's, if it's, basically your options are, oh, I'm going to spend You know, four more hours with this study group where I might not get anything, or I might get some extra sleep at night, I would probably get more sleep.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think it really varies. I mean, I was never a huge fan of study groups. I didn't have like an ongoing one. I would typically, as it got closer to exams, I would try to find one or two other people in a class. And we actually had different people in different sections. It wasn't like all the same.

So, you know, it might be I'd study with these two people for one class and this person for the other class. You know, just kind of mix it up a little bit. Well,

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there's nothing wrong with having a study group if you're using your time effectively. And some people find it very effective. You know, they're really focused.

They are doing the work you know, that needs to be done. And critically, they're making sure that they're individually ready to show up to that exam because I mean, the reality is, you know, your study group might know a lot more than you know on certain topics. That's not going to help you on the test.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Who you're, you know, I've heard people say like, well, you know, somebody who's at the top of my class is in my study group. And I'm like, I don't really care. Yeah. Good for them. That might mean the study group is working great for them, but that doesn't necessarily mean the study group is working great for you.

Alison Monahan: Well, and I think it's easy to, to sort of, not really realize how much assistance you're getting in the moment from the group. I mean, I was thinking about this today in terms of my Spanish class because I have a Spanish tutor. And he's just so used to correcting me and adding words and figuring out what I'm trying to talk about that, like, I can carry on a conversation with him, and it's great.

But if I go out and try to talk to someone who's just like, what the hell are you talking about? It's a whole different story. So, like, you know, in your study group, it can be that someone's there prodding you or reminding you, or you're like, oh, you reach a point where you're like, can't quite remember, and someone immediately jumps in with that case, and you think you remember the case, but you don't.

Lee Burgess: For sure. Now one thing I do think study groups can be good for is some accountability. So one thing that at different times I had groups of friends do is we'd all either agree to come to the library and either get a study room or meet in a certain place in the library and all take a practice exam, a timed practice exam, and then we might get together and kind of like talk through the sample answer and compare answers or something like that, and then everybody's made sure that we sat down and did it.

Alison Monahan: Right. And also you can, and I think that's really useful because you know, someone else might spot an issue that you missed or vice versa. And so then you get the benefit of that collective wisdom because you can make notes on like, oh, I missed this, I don't wanna miss it again.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah. So that I think can be a good, that I think is a good use of time possibly with a study group if you need that additional accountability. You know, I'm, that way you make sure, okay, I do this practice exam this day because we're going to meet and talk about it tonight. Things like that. I think that's a great, can be a better use of time than just sitting around and, and, you know, shooting, you know, just like,

Alison Monahan: Shooting the breeze,

Lee Burgess: Shooting the breeze, thank you.

I was trying to think of the, what non, the PG level, the PG level word would be you can tell. I need to work on that now that my son's getting a little older, but yeah, but it's kind of like, you need to make sure that you're not just talk, talk, talking about whatever that you're actually using that time for something.

Alison Monahan: Well, and also I think one pitfall is that people can get really obsessive about certain things or like someone doesn't understand something. It's fine if someone doesn't understand something, as long as when they explain, like someone else explains it, they're like, oh, okay. But sometimes because it's law school.

You know, people can get super argumentative about these really pedantic points that don't matter, and you just realize, like, I just wasted half an hour on this.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Like, this is not something that I need to be spending time on.

Lee Burgess: No. And especially, I think, for those of you who are going to have closed book exams, make sure that you remember that unless you can memorize while you're in a group of people, that you still need to set aside adequate time, even for open book exams, because you still have to memorize, but you really need to set aside adequate time for your own, you know, study, time so you can memorize and put this stuff in your own head.

That is hard to do in a group of people.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think if even if you are like relying heavily on a study group, you still have to have that alone time to process.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You can't, you can't process a lot of information, you know, in a group of four people. It's just not gonna happen.

Lee Burgess: No. The other thing I think which is hard with study groups is, like we mentioned, the stress can get a little crazy and you can all sort of feed into this anxiety machine.

Actually, this is law school as a whole, the law library as a whole, where you start to just let your own stress level, get off the charts, and you start to feel like you have to study these crazy hours or be in the library until the end of the day, and that's not going to serve you well because you have to be very serious about stress and life management.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think that's one of the things to think about now is where are you going to study? Like, are you going to be in the law library? That might not be the best choice. You know, are you going to study at your house? Are you going to study in a different library? Are you going to study at a coffee shop?

Like, what works best for you? And these are things to think about now. You know, what time of day are you going to study best? Because, you know, we're all different. Like, I have, you know, I study in a coffee shop sometimes, but other people, that would drive them crazy, and I hated the law library. So, you know, you can do whatever you want, there's not going to be a checklist of like where did you study on the exam, it's just like is this in your own head and can you get it out on paper when the time comes.

Lee Burgess: Yep, and sometimes being around other law students can just really send you off the end, so make sure that if you are not in a good place about being at school, don't go to school. Like, you don't have to be there. There's no reason.

Alison Monahan: You don't have to. You can do whatever you want. You're a grown up. You're allowed to study where you want.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. I studied at the medical school. It was a very nice, pleasant place to hang out.

Alison Monahan: No, I would study at Teachers College. I would study at the Architecture Building. I would study in the Social Work Library, and I would study at the top of the Undergraduate Library. I did not set foot in the law school, if I could help it.

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Lee Burgess: Sometimes I did, but it was really minimal.

And if I did, I always had headphones, even if I wasn't listening to anything, because I don't actually like to study to music, but I would just put on headphones. So people thought I was listening to something. They wouldn't bother me.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And this is kind of goes on to the bigger point, which is you have to clear the decks here and do what works for you.

You know, if your study group is not working for you, you need to be a grownup and say, look, this is not working for me, or you don't even have to say that. You can just be like, you know what? There are other things I wanna work on. I'm not gonna meet with you today. Yeah, you're allowed to do that.

Lee Burgess: For sure, but it's very, very important to remember that this is a marathon and not a sprint.

You cannot burn yourself out by studying 12, 14 hour days, like-

Alison Monahan: Or staying up all night.

Lee Burgess: Or staying up all night because it is not gonna serve you when it comes to exam time. This is. It's really important. Start working on these skills now when you get to the bar exam. It's even more important because you study for a longer period of time, but this is like a really intense job.

That's it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you've got, you to actually schedule things like sleep and exercise and time off and stress reduction and it's totally fine. Like you should be scheduling time off, you know, you should be seeing the people in your life that you want to see. Within reason you probably should not be planning major social events, you know, weddings.

If you can help it, those are another classic problem. Like, Oh, the day before my exam, I have to go to a wedding. It's like, really? Yeah. You know, and like just, you know, whatever, if it's your sister, like you go, but if it's, you know, some friend you haven't talked to in five years in college, like maybe you send them a nice present.

Lee Burgess: Right. Exactly. Tell them you'll see them over the summer or over winter break or something like that. Yeah. And I think you have to set aside time also to

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optimize your studying. You know, for a lot of people studying all day, stop, you know, starting productive, it's not productive. And so I remember my first semester of law school, I used to go to this yoga class at like, two o'clock in the afternoon and one of the things they did was they go around The circle and everybody would talk about why they made the choice to come to yoga today. This is a very San Francisco thing, In like hate Ashbury, you know We all have to sit around and talk about why we're yoga and I would say like I'm a I'm in law school and I'm In final exams and everyone would be this collective like I'm so sorry.

Yes. I'm glad you came to yoga But you know a very nice kind of therapeutic environment to go to and they would be a lot of compassion

Alison Monahan: When I was studying for the bar exam, I would, I got an unlimited yoga pass and I sometimes go twice a day. And it was the sort of thing where people are like, you were here this morning.

I'm like, I'm studying for the bar. They're like, Oh. Yes, namaste.

Lee Burgess: Totally. Another thing my friends used to do is at our school, there was at our health center where they have the gym and everything, they would have these really discounted student massages. There would be like 35 for an hour or something like that.

And so a lot of the law students would go schedule massages at a discount. So, you know, I mean, really like open your mind to different ways to de stress when you're in the middle of this because final exams lasts a really long time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that you're gonna be in this for weeks. And I think, you know, getting a massage is actually a very good investment of time and money because it relaxes you.

It allows you to focus. And these are the things you need to be doing. So it's not like you're wasting time and money. You're actually, it's an investment. Yeah. Well, unfortunately with that, we are out of time. Our last words to you, don't panic, but don't delude yourself either. You know, it's important to be realistic and have a plan to succeed.

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