Episode 36: Your Mid-Semester Law School Reality Check

Lee Burgess: Hello and welcome to the law school toolbox podcast. Today we are talking about the mid semester reality check. 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 catapult conference, and the trebuchet legal career site. Allison also runs the Girl 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 always 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: Welcome back. If you're listening to this podcast episode, you're probably just about the midpoint of your semester. And unfortunately, this means it's time for the mid semester reality check. Second semester is an interesting time because for many 1Ls, you feel like you're in a different place than first semester.

You understand more about how to prepare for class and how to outline, but you might also find you have a lot more going on outside of class, like hunting for jobs, moot courts, or other extracurricular activities. In fact, maybe you listened to our extracurriculars podcast last week. This can lead to students having blinders on about where you should be academically mid semester, but have no fear.

We're here to talk you through what you should be thinking about when you're at the midpoint of your semester to ensure that you're ready for exams. Because those are definitely starting to loom on their own.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, they come up quick in the spring, don't they?

Alison Monahan: They really do. I feel like maybe it's because, I don't know, the time changes and like there's more daylight and everyone's like happy and then suddenly you're like, oh my god, I have exams, how did this happen?

Lee Burgess: Maybe you went somewhere warm for spring break, I don't know.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, and you can probably blame George W. for like changing the time shift because, you know, spring comes faster. I don't know. I mean, I actually think that's one of the good things that he did. Maybe, maybe the one.

Lee Burgess: I don't know. We're enjoying some nice spring weather in San Francisco right now.

Alison Monahan: Oh my gosh, amazing, yeah, so it is making us think about law school exams.

Lee Burgess: What does that say about us? I don't know.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I know, right? Well, what should students be doing academically at this point? I mean, say somebody has been, you know, keeping up with their reading, going to class. I mean, if you haven't been doing those things, probably should be doing them.

But you know, life happens. Like you have appellate briefs to work on. So you're not really, like, haven't done a whole lot to really get started getting ready for exams? Like, should I be worried?

Lee Burgess: I mean, I don't know that worried is necessarily the right word, but you should feel a sense of urgency. I think at this point you do want to realize that, you know, preparing for final exams is not something you just wanna do the last few weeks of the semester.

And even though perhaps you're a better law student than you were first semester, because you have done this before, that doesn't mean that you can just decide that you're gonna cram for these exams at the end of the year. These are different subject areas, or it's different materials, and you also have to remember everybody in your class is a better law student.

Alison Monahan: Exactly, that was going to be my point. It's like, there's a curve, you better be better better.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, so you just don't, you, no one should be complacent about where they are in the class. Everybody needs to continue to push themselves to become better, and the best way to do that is to really stay on top of your academic work, so that doesn't just mean being prepared for class, but You know, working on those outlines we've talked about in podcasts before, how we recommend that you should be doing some sort of outlining or studying the substantive law every week for a few hours for all of your classes, kind of rotating through them.

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Every time you finish a subject area or a topic area within the class, it is ripe for the outlining, and outlining is not something you want to do at the end of the semester if you can help it.

Alison Monahan: But what about this argument that, well, I mean, we just haven't learned everything, so how could I possibly outline it?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you've learned enough. I mean,

Alison Monahan: But if I don't know everything, how could I even start outlining?

Lee Burgess: Right. The law, I mean, I can't think of any 1L class where you, by midpoint in the semester, have not learned enough of a topic area to be able to outline it.

Alison Monahan: Right, because the point is, you know, once you've learned something and you're not going to return to it, you can outline it.

You can make some sort of study aid. You can start putting it together for yourself now. You know, it's not like your professor's gonna come back to something they talked about the first week of class and like change, change it up on you. They've already covered it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and then to continue to beat the drum of practice, once these outlines are done, you also want to start doing practice.

And it's not necessarily doing full length practice exams, but using hypos your professors may have given you in class. Maybe you even have midterm exams so you've got to prepare for those, but you want to be doing some sort of practice applying the law that you're outlining so you understand how it is applied. Because I think what happens is you spend all your time outlining, you're like, oh, I'm building this fabulous outline based on this student who callied the class, I know everything, and then you get a practice question and you're like, clearly, I do not understand the rules of Jointure at all because I have no idea what I'm supposed to be doing.

Alison Monahan: Right, like, I can recite what the rules of Jointure say, but when I'm actually faced with a situation where my professor is like, so, so and so would like to join party A, B, C, D, E, and F in a lawsuit. Can they do that? Totally different.

Lee Burgess: Totally different. So, that's why the practice in doing those hypos is so important.

So, if you have- oh, go ahead.

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Alison Monahan: Honestly, I think the other key thing is when we say practice, we don't mean just sort of reading a hypo and bullet pointing out, like, how you might approach it. I mean, That's a good thing to do as a starting point for actually writing out an answer, like, as if you were going to write it out for your professor in an exam type of condition.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Because it's easy, again, like, you know, there's sort of all these steps. It's, you know, step one is like, do you know the rules of Jointure? Can, if I ask you, you know, which rule of civil procedure covers x, you can tell me. And then, you know, step two is like, oh, I recognize that this rule applies to this situation.

Let me tell you `basically` how I think it might apply in some bullet points. Step three is like actually writing that down coherently.

Lee Burgess: Whole other world. Yeah. I 100 percent agree. So it is. It is really important to practice writing out that legal analysis. It sounds so easy when you think about it in your head, but getting it onto paper is a totally different ballgame.

Alison Monahan: Or even talking about it with people, you know. It's like you might be able to talk through a question with your study group and feel really confident, but can you actually write down by yourself without talking to anyone, you know, what the answer you think would be?

Lee Burgess: And I think that mistakes students often make is they do this writing practice, if they do sit down and do it, and then they don't follow up by going to office hours and talking to their professors about it, asking them questions. I think students often forget that this middle part of the semester, office hours are typically very empty. And law professors, actually most of them like meeting with students and they're pretty helpful when they're bored in their office during office hours.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. You know, if they're sitting there for two hours and they've got two people who come to visit in the entire time, that's a great opportunity for you to get some really targeted advice and if nothing else, like, you know, make yourself stand out as a student, as like a person who's actually like doing the work, trying to get some feedback coming and building that relationship.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

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Alison Monahan: You know, if you do a hypo, like you might even send it to them in advance of office hours and be like, hey, you know, I wrote this question based on what we talked about in the last couple of weeks. Would you mind looking over it and just letting me know your thoughts?

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: You know, typically that's a better approach than kind of like blindsiding them with something they've never seen before in office hours.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: But, you know, I mean, they went into law teaching for a reason.

Lee Burgess: Most of them like students.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and they also, like, you know, they're interested in, like, writing and the law and things like that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. So go visit those professors. They, even if they seem intimidating, oftentimes in the office hours they are not as intimidating as they are in class. So it's worth just visiting. You know, taking a deep breath and going in there, take a friend with you, it'll be okay.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think sometimes students say, well, I don't really know, I want to go talk to them, I don't really know what to talk to them about in office hours.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Do you have any thoughts on that?

Lee Burgess: I mean, that's when I think taking a hypo is a great, great way to facilitate a discussion because, you know, you can talk, you can oftentimes say, you know, Do you like the, you know, format I've written this in, do you like headers to divide out all of these elements, or perhaps, you know, you can ask a bit more about how to do legal analysis.

So I think if you can bring them something to talk about, that can be really helpful. Also, its great if you have been doing outlining, there's typically questions that will come up maybe where you don't understand some of the law in the outline, you're going back through your class notes, and there's something that's fuzzy and going to office hours with like a list of those

questions as well. You know, I was reviewing let's just stay with CIFRO because I always have lots of questions on CIFRO.

I was not a CIFRO TA, but you know it's like okay well I've been trying to outline, you know, Jointure and or I've been trying to outline, Personal Jurisdiction, and I've tried to come up with this attack plan. Am I doing this right? And oftentimes they'll look at your work and say, yes, you're doing this right, but what they won't do is give you the attack plan for you know, personal jurisdiction.

They will-

Alison Monahan: Right. They're much more likely to sort of point out an error or an omission than they are to like tell you how to do the analysis because that's not really their job.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. So, you know, preparing a little bit to go is worth your while, but I think that you'd be hard pressed to not be able to find anything to talk to these professors about.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, you know, you probably, yes, if you've been to class and you've paid attention, there's gonna be something you've got questions about.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly. You know, something else that comes up, I think, for 1Ls or 2Ls or 3Ls at this point is if you're taking a class that has a paper in it. I think a lot of times law students don't think that they can just crank out papers for their classes as fast as maybe they did for some of their undergraduate classes, depending on what experience you had.

And that's usually not the case for a law school paper because it requires quite a bit of research. It may have extensive citations. It may be very lengthy. If you have a paper coming up, you definitely, at the midpoint of the semester, hopefully have started working on it, but if you haven't, it is really time to create a plan about how you're going to get it executed, because it's typically going to take longer than you think it's going to, and sometimes you need to go to those professors and talk through your paper topics with them so, you know, you can make sure you're doing it right, and you don't get some surprise news that they don't like your topic or how you're doing your research when you're partway done with it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, that's definitely something you wanna be in office hours about. If you're not required to talk to the professor about your paper topic, you wanna be sure that you go and talk to them and just basically get their sign off on like, this is what I'm thinking of doing.

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Do you have any thoughts on this? You know, just, just seemed reasonable. I mean, one of my, like most horrible semesters in law school is when I took three paper classes,

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: But that was because one of the papers was actually twice as long as I realized it was. And so I'm like writing these at the end, and this one is just like not getting finished.

I'm like, God, why is it like taking forever? And then I finally went and like did the math on like the word count and was like, oh my God, it's not a 10 page paper, it's a 20 page paper. And I have three 20 page papers to churn out, and one of them was actually not law related. I was taking a class in the architecture school, and right there they're doing an architecture studio project.

I wrote a paper. But you know, if you find yourself, like you should not find yourself in the situation of having three paper classes, hopefully. When you have, when they're that long. I thought it was okay because I thought one was ten and I could like, churn that out in a weekend, but it was ugly. You know, it was pretty brutal.

Sixty pages in like, a few weeks, not what you want to be doing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I took this class, I think I was talking about it in our last podcast about that it was basically to facilitate you writing an article that you could submit for a law review and I don't remember what my original topic was. It was something based about arbitration of some sort.

And it wasn't-

Alison Monahan: That was my law review note too.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, nice. But it wasn't working. The paper wasn't working. And right around the midpoint of the semester, right before spring break, I went to the professor's office hours and I was like, I just don't feel like it's coming together. The outline is really cumbersome.

I don't know. And we ended up tossing the topic mid-semester, which was awful, and I came up with a new one and I was able to execute it, but had I waited much longer, I don't think I would've been able to toss the topic because I couldn't have made up the work. And that would've been bad news for my grade.

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Alison Monahan: Right. I got stuck with a bad law review note because I didn't realize that until too late that my topic was not sufficiently like robust,

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: To do a law review note on. So it turns into this really painful struggle if you've got this question that, you know, you can basically answer pretty completely in five pages, but you're required to produce 20 or 30 pages, like, you end up with having to fill a lot of space.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I've also talked to students, though, who are on the other side of the spectrum. They pick a topic that's way too robust, and then they have a really hard time trying to pare it down, and you have to. And trying to write a really robust paper.

It's not a 30 page paper. It's a 60 page paper. And so you have to narrow your focus. And again, that's something you don't want to be doing at the last minute, because then you're going to have wasted a lot of time doing extra research. But these are all things that your professors are going to help you work through.

So you really just need to engage them and make sure that it's not crunch time at the end of the semester that you're trying to solicit their help for these papers, or you're scrambling trying to get in with the librarians at the law school to try and help you do your research, that's, that's not a great solution.

You really, at this point in the semester, you want to be cranking on these papers.

Alison Monahan: Well, and one thing, too, I think it's important not to just keep changing your topics. You know, we sometimes have students who are like, you'll have a conversation, and then the next day they've totally changed their topic to something completely unrelated, and then two days later they've changed it again.

And it's like, you know, if you've already done some research and kind of picked a topic area. You know, it should be like a worst case scenario that you totally jump ship to something new, like, you know, if you think you've got too much going on, you go to your professor, like, have them help you narrow it down and then take their advice because, you know, it's getting too late to just be like casting around for brand new ideas at this point.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, 100%.

Alison Monahan: And the same thing even with like supplements and things like that in your substantive classes, you know, ideally at this point you should basically have committed to a certain supplement or set of supplements. You shouldn't be reading ten different supplements in like a single class. It's just like you don't have time for that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Speaking of time management,

Lee Burgess: Oh, look at that segue. Well, I think time management is the next focus. You know, yes, you need to be on top of your academics, but you overall need to think about your time management through the rest of the semester. I think that this is something I always encourage our private tutoring students to do at the mid semester point, but it's time to fill in your calendar for the next, you know, however many weeks you have left in the semester, including and at all important dates.

Legal Writing Final Exams, which for some schools take part over a week or a weekend, but it definitely takes significant time, so it is gonna take away your time for other activities you might have a Moot Court Argument, which ours were arguments were always over the weekend. That kind of killed weekends of exam prep.

You might be going to job fairs, you know non profit job fairs. Our public interest, job fairs are often times over the weekends, so you might kill Saturday going to those. You're going to have your final exams, you need to make sure those are on your calendar, cause you don't want to be confused about when those are.

And then, like we were talking about with papers, you've got to put those paper due dates, you know, and sometimes you have to submit drafts and things like that. You want to make sure all of that stuff is on your calendar, So you don't want any surprises to come up that you could've known about, because life will give you surprises.

So do what you can to just make sure that you understand what's coming at you for the next few months.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think it can be a good reality check. If you put all this stuff on your calendar and kind of look at it and realize you've actually only got five or six

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weekends left, and you're planning on doing all of your exam prep on the weekends, it's like, oh, wait, I have four substantive classes.

And five or six weekends, you know, and I don't have, like, I haven't started outlining. That should be a giant red flag.

Lee Burgess: And that's assuming you don't get sick, something doesn't come up with your family. You know, maybe you also, you know, spring is a time where wedding season starts. You might have wedding seasons or, or weddings to attend.

Or I had a good friend of mine from college, her bachelorette party was in the spring. And I was trying to manage at least going to part of that while getting ready for final exams, you know.

Alison Monahan: Right, we've got spring break, you know, the Easter holidays, your family might be wanting you to come for that.

Lee Burgess: Passover, like you name it, it seems to all start happening really fast. So you do want to, you know, take the long view and see realistically how much time you really have because it's probably less than you think.

Alison Monahan: Right, and one of the things you've got to be blocking off is really these deeper tasks, you know.

So things like outlining and writing practice exams. You know, if you're writing a full length practice exam, that might be three hours. And that doesn't even include time to look over it.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. The review time is another hour plus.

Alison Monahan: Right. So that's like basically half of a day on Saturday or Sunday is just one practice exam.

You know, how many of these are you thinking that you're going to do? You can't just do them all on the weekend probably.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: You know, like, oh, I'll just do it in the reading week. Like, the reading week is like five days, you know, like you can do a lot, but you can't do everything.

Lee Burgess: It's very, very true.

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Yeah. And I think there's always the danger of getting sick because you're not taking care of yourself, which I think really does happen the busier you get, and getting sick is definitely a way to get behind. And not be feel well prepared. So you want to make sure that you've blocked off time in your calendar for, you know, making sure you have good food in your house, making sure you're doing something nice for your body, being some kind of, you know, doing some kind of physical activity.

Especially as the days get longer. I think some people find it easier to get outside and, you know, get vitamin D and all of that stuff. But you gotta block out time for that too because the, it is a marathon. You still have a lot of time left before exams.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I got, like, the worst food poisoning in my life second semester of law school.

Yeah, and it was supposed to be the busiest day like, the entire year. I had something going on from 7 in the morning until, like, 10 o'clock at night. And yeah, I spent like 14 hours the night before puking and ended up having to go to Student Health to get an IV, and of course I got called on in like two different classes that day, and it was just like such a nightmare.

Lee Burgess: So if you can avoid that, you know, do.

What about-

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, yeah, in that case, there's nothing I could have done about it, but it does make the point that like all these things I thought were like so critically important that I was going to like die if I didn't get done. I didn't do any of it.

Lee Burgess: Right. And the thing is,

Alison Monahan: I mean, nothing.

Lee Burgess: The tighter you book yourself, the less margin of error you have. And so, you know, you want to build in some padding because stuff is going to happen. Your car's going to break down. You're going to get a flat tire. You're going to, something's going to happen.

Alison Monahan: Your internet's not going to work, you know, whatever it is. Like, you're going to have to wait at home for the internet guy, which happened to me last week.

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Lee Burgess: Yep, stuff happens. So just build in a little padding. That's why taking this long view is so important. All right, what about the job hunt? I'm sure that a lot of 1Ls and even 2Ls are freaking out about, and maybe 3Ls, are freaking out about the job hunt.

And I think that that can be a big time suck second semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, You know, if you're having to go to job fairs, if you're putting together your applications, if you're doing interviews, you know, these things are really important because you want to make sure that you have some sort of legal work over the summer.

But it definitely can be time consuming. I think, again, like you've just got to be disciplined because, you know, this is the sort of thing people can let it take over their entire lives. And the reality is, like, you don't have time to be doing, you know, eight hours of job hunting on a Saturday necessarily every weekend.

You know, you've got to be efficient about it. You've got to be strategic. You know, and you can go talk to, like, your career services and that kind of thing. But, you know, the reality is it's just one more thing kind of thrown into the mix that you've got to balance.

Lee Burgess: Yep. So, I think the point of not letting it kind of run away with all of your time is so important.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and this is like, we have a technique I talk about on the girls guide called the circles that can be really good for this, for time management. Where, you know, you have all this stuff and you really need to be sure that you're being efficient about it. And it can be very helpful to sort of draw out your kind of map for the day where you give yourself a circle and the circle is basically an hour of time and you go ahead and assign that to a certain task over, you know, say a Saturday or Sunday or even in the, you know, during the day, during the week, and basically like go ahead and figure out like, okay, I'm going to spend an hour on job tasks.

And once you've done it, you've done it and you move on. So it can really help you, you know, single task and really focus on putting in quality time about these things instead of just kind of like stewing about like, oh my gosh, I don't have a job, and oh, what am I gonna do?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

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Alison Monahan: And you know, so you really wanna have a plan, like, okay, in this hour I'm going to send emails to these, you know, three people that I want to try to get informational interviews with, and I'm gonna apply to these four jobs.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And if you can do that, like, you should feel good about that, as opposed to just like, oh my god, I still don't have a job, and like, what am I going to do? At the end of an hour or two or a day, you've done nothing.

Lee Burgess: No, that's very true. And anytime you can, like, focus and just do one thing at a time, you're likely to get so much more done.

So, setting aside time to focus and do this, these sort of tasks, even if they're not fun tasks, is going to get you much closer to your goal.

Alison Monahan: Right, and a lot of it's just about being action oriented, you know, even with, like, the academic stuff. It's super easy. It's so much easier to sit around and be like, oh, you know, I'm going to go to the bookstore and, like, browse through three more outlines, commercial outlines, and figure out which one I want to buy, you know, just supplement my one that I already have.

It's like, that's just a waste of time, you know, because it's easy, and it's like, oh, I feel like I'm doing something. But, you know, you really need to have a bias toward productive action, and that's doing the stuff that makes you uncomfortable, you know, and saying, I'm actually going to commit to taking a practice exam this weekend on this topic at this time.

And you're much more likely to do that, because then it's like, oh, you know, two days before, you're like, oh, I've committed to taking a practice exam on adverse possession, I need to find that question and make sure I have it ready to go, I need to work on my outline on this topic so it's ready to go and I can actually write the question. You know, setting those really specific tasks and really specific goals versus just like, oh, I think I should take a practice question this weekend. Well, that didn't happen this weekend. I guess I'll do it next weekend.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. Anyway, I'm just remembering how busy this time of year gets, and it just makes me shiver a little bit.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we feel your pain. Yeah, we do.

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Lee Burgess: All right, what about the resources people can reach out to, to really help them be more successful. We've already talked about speaking to your professors.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think your professors are a great resource. Your TAs are often an overlooked resource.

We were both TAs. We were happy to talk to students. I mean you know, you have to be reasonable. They have their own classes too, but you know, some people like don't bother going to sections in certain classes or you know, if you're really like looking for specific, you know, topics or hypos or questions to work on.

You know, your TA might have some suggestions, or even just like, what do you think is the best outline to use for this professor in this class? You know, they, they did well, so you can, you can sort of rely upon what they're telling you. And also, I mean, I don't know how it was for you, but we actually had meetings every week with the professor, you know, where he would kind of talk about like, how's the class going?

Like, what do you think people are struggling with? You know, obviously we didn't know what was on the exam, but we probably had a better idea than the people in the class.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And you've at least taken one of his exams.

Alison Monahan: Right. Exactly. And, you know, in the end, like, I had some private or like, you know, sort of extra study group sessions for students who were interested and, you know, I brought out my own study aids for the class and certain people are like, wow, like, these are amazing.

Can I have a copy? And I was like, sure. Here, take them, run to the copy machine, make a copy. You know, basically, like, I was willing to give extra help to people who sort of put in the effort.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. And I think that's, that's the thing, you know, oftentimes if you're putting in that extra effort by talking to your TA's or going to academic support offices, if your school has an academic support office, you can really be rewarded, because some of these professors, you know, academic support professors are paid professors to just help you with your academic problems.

So, they, they are. excellent at, you know, helping remedy issues, but also to, they can give you a lot of insight because unlike a TA who maybe has just seen a

few years of exams, an academic support professor may know about 10 years of certain professors exams, you know, and be able to help guide you.

So I think that academic support is often an underutilized resource because a lot of students think that they can't go there unless they're on academic probation or something like that. In most schools, that's not the case. Of course, if you are on academic probation, you should be at academic support all the time, and even some schools will have tutoring programs that you're allowed to take a part in where you can oftentimes get a free tutor that's an upperclassman to help remedy your academic issues. So, you know reach out and learn about what's available to you because it could really help you out.

And of course if you, you know, you want to look into private tutoring, which is of course what we do, that can also be a great resource to get that extra feedback or get substantive questions answered, especially if your school doesn't have a lot of these resources for you. But I mean, hey, we even run a tutoring company, and I think you're foolish not to utilize all the resources you have at school for free.

You're paying a lot of money to be there.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. You're already paying for these things. So, you know, people should basically take advantage of them if they can. And the same thing I think with the career services, you know, I know people who are in career services at different law schools who are like, no one ever comes to talk to me about their job hunt.

You know, how am I supposed to help them if they don't make an appointment and don't come in? And it's not like, you know, I think sometimes students have unrealistic expectations that they're just going to like snap their fingers and find a job for you, which is not really the way this works. You know, you're going to have to get out there and hustle.

You're going to have to talk to your friends, your mentors, attend events, but you know, at a minimum, make an appointment with someone in Career Services and if you don't like the first person, you know, make an appointment with someone else. You know, like I had a really bad experience my first year with the public interest people at Columbia and I never went back.

Was that a good decision? Probably not. You know, like, okay, so you, they outsourced, like, resume counseling to this woman who was totally crazy and horrible and made me cry, but I probably could have gone back and talked to

someone else who maybe wasn't that horrible. And, of course, you hope that you don't have to do these things, that everyone's going to be supportive and, you know, help you on your way, but that's not always the case.

You know, there's probably somebody who can give you useful advice if you just kind of keep trying.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. So, you know, there's, these people are here to help you, so sometimes it takes a few rounds to find the right fit for you, but it's worth. You know, a couple appointments to try and, you know, make sure that you meet the people who are helpful.

Also in the paper realm, kind of shifting gears, I just wanted to again put in a plug for the amazing law librarians and research librarians that your school likely has.

Alison Monahan: Yes. Massively underutilized.

Lee Burgess: Massively underutilized resource by law students. If you are struggling doing research for a paper and you're allowed to get research help for it, you should absolutely talk to them because they are masters at finding finding resources, but also just helping you organize your thoughts and, you know, come up with a research plan so you don't spiral out of control.

So please, please, please talk to them. These very knowledgeable people in your library.

Alison Monahan: Right, but I think people do have to be a little bit careful because sometimes I hear about students going in and being like, I don't know where to start.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And it's like, well, they can't really help. Like, you have to have done, you have to have made some effort.

And maybe it's fair to be like, I don't really know where to start. Can you give me like a broad overview of some like resources I might look at? But like, they're not going to do the work for you. And again, it's just like going to your professors. You're going to get much better results if it's clear that you've put in the effort, and you've put in the time, and you've tried to, like, come to some sort of resolution, and you've reached a point where you're like, I just can't move

forward because I can't answer these questions, or I don't know, like, how to write this query Lexis and Westlaw.

And, you know, your Lexis and Westlaw reps can also be good resources. And I think, you know, I think they even have numbers you can call where these are people who are trained legal research people, you know, this is what they do is figure out, like, how do you structure this query to get results on, you know, all of the cases in a certain state about this topic or, you know, how do I find old law review articles on this topic, that kind of thing.

So, you know, you want to put in the effort and not waste everyone's time, but they will definitely, you know, they can provide amazing, amazing assistance if you actually make clear that you've done some work on your own.

Lee Burgess: 100%. I think really the biggest takeaway from this mid semester reality check is that the second half of the semester goes by really fast, as we've already mentioned.

You know, there's a lot going on. If you have started to at all think about all the things you have coming up as we've been talking through our list of things to think about, you might be getting a little, like, I'm a little panicked, but it's okay. It's okay. That's why you do this reality check so you can plan ahead and you know and feel like you have a better Grasp on everything and the last thing to consider is you know maybe mark a few points on your calendar that you're going to check in with yourself about how things are going so you can make changes to your study plan as needed or readjust things based on you know, how things have been going, you know, your job hunt, You know, maybe these, all these other activities and things like that.

So, it's not like you want to, like, make a plan for yourself now and then say, great, we're going to execute the plan without any revisions. There are going to be tons of revisions. Remember this is kind of a living and breathing document and process about how you're going to manage the rest of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Right, I think that's super critical when you're thinking about, you know, making your outlines or other study aids. To make sure that you're not getting really bogged down in, you know, extra detail or like excruciating detail on the very first part of the semester or the first topic that you decide to work with, you know, as we've talked about many times, it's much better to have an outline that covers 100 percent of the topics in like 80 percent of the detail versus having one that covers 20 percent of them in 100 percent detail, half of them in sort of like 60 percent and then the rest is just not there at all.

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You know, that is an absolute recipe for disaster, so better to, you know, take the big picture and then work down to the details as you have time, because inevitably, It's going to take you longer to do these outlines than you think, and you want to make sure that you've got at least, like, the big topics and the basic, you know, an understanding of the basic concepts before your exam shows up and you realize, like, you just ran out of time on 20 percent of it.

Lee Burgess: 100%. That was a lot of percents in those.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I know. It's like, I'm getting really, like, I'm getting really, like, caught up in the percentages here. But, you know, basic idea. Make sure you've covered everything, at least sort of.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Exactly. And with that, I think that's a good point to be out of time.

Alison Monahan: Yes, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes. We would really appreciate it. And you can subscribe so you don't miss anything. Typically our new episodes come out on Mondays. If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to us at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com. You can always contact us as well via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon. Good luck on those exams.