Episode 67: Mid-Semester Law School To-Do List

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're going over a mid semester checklist of things we suggest you do to ensure you're ready when exams roll around. 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, and the Catapult Conference. Alison also runs the Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review and rating 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: Welcome back to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're going to run through your mid semester to do list to make sure that you're where you need to be to make the most of the second half of the semester. So, let's get started. I mean, mid semester is the time when reality typically starts to set in.

You might have midterms. You might have done well on them. Yay for you. Or you might get some sobering scores, which is probably the more likely outcome. Just given the curve, probably going to see some grades you're not so familiar with. You might have been putting off outlining because you felt like you had plenty of time to get stuff done, or maybe you didn't know where to get started.

In fact, we have a brand new episode on outlining you might want to check out. Or, you know, you might be starting to get the sniffles because everybody seems to get that autumn cold, just move through the library, whatever's happening. I mean, maybe you're just bored with reading all this stuff, you know, you're wondering if law school is even a good idea.

But in the midpoint of the semester, or sometimes we say the midpoint of October for the October freakout, this is where you need to hit the pause button. You want to make sure that you're doing everything you could possibly be doing. in a reasonable way to get ready for exams. All right, so we're going to take a little pause, we're going to take half an hour, your pause button is on. Lee, what's the first thing you need to look at?

Lee Burgess: Alright, well the first thing I think everybody needs to look at is your calendar. So hopefully you have one, and if you do, you should take a moment and just count how many weeks are left in the semester.

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Literally pause this podcast, if you have your computer in front of you, and count. Because I'm going to take a shot in the dark and say that you likely have about seven to eight weeks left until final exams.

Alison Monahan: Which is not very much.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, let's sit with that for a minute. Seven to eight weeks. That is not a very long time.

You know, we don't highlight this reality to induce anxiety, although it might seem that way. But really you have to start thinking about how you're going to spend the next seven to eight weeks to get ready for exams. Because although December sounds really far away when you're in October, my gosh, time is going by so fast, it's going to be here before you know it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, you've got to look really seriously about your study schedule, because this is when you need to be doing that deep work that we talk about of like getting, you know, putting this stuff together. And it might sound like, oh, December, right, or even eight weeks, you might be thinking, oh, that's plenty of time.

If you're taking four classes, and you're going to try to outline like two classes a week, that's not very much time at all, like not at all.

Lee Burgess: No. And so you have to, now that you have had the sobering moment where you've counted the number of weeks, you've got to look at your study calendar for those weeks.

So if you want to go old school, sometimes I like to print out all eight of those weeks until you can kind of mark it up and see it, you know, as one big, you know calendar on your table. If you'd like to do it electronically, that's fine, too. But you've got to make sure that each one of those weeks you have deep work and it's not just that you need to have a few hours, you also have to realize that the deep work has to increase pretty much every single week as you get ready for exams.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like right now maybe you spend, you know one weekend a doing five or six hours of outlining and that's what you're doing, but, you know, when you're a month out from exams, that basically needs to be both days.

And the problem is you've still got to do your reading.

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Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And you've still, we'll talk in a second, but you've still got legal writing assignments and things. Like everything starts to really accelerate as you get closer to exams. And you know, you're probably going to be more stretched out. So the more that you can front load this sort of work and do more of it now when it's a little, I mean, it might not seem relaxed, but your schedule actually, I guarantee you, is a lot more relaxed than it will be even a month from now. You know, so when we talk about deep work, I mean, what do you mean? Well, you know, doing your, outlining your study aids, starting to take some practice tests and the more and more, you know, as you get closer and closer to exams, you wanna be shifting that time so that you're doing more time practicing and getting feedback, really struggling and you're not so much doing like that first pass of outlining. Like that needs to be done well before the reading period, or you're not gonna have time to do these other things.

Lee Burgess: Right. And a lot of times what people get sucked into is this understanding, especially if you have open book exams. It's like, well, I can be outlining up to the last minute because I can be learning this stuff during reading days. I mean, I don't have to memorize anything.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I'll just assign one day reading day to this class, one day to the other, I'll just be good to go.

Lee Burgess: I'll be totally good to go. And, and you will be good to go at the bottom of the curve.

That's exactly where that will send you.

Alison Monahan: That that's where you'll go.

Lee Burgess: That is where you'll go because the problem is, is, is that you have to have time to not only outline this material, but use it and work through it and apply it to fact patterns and get feedback on that work and struggle with it. And that is the, the really where the magic happens.

Alison Monahan: Well, and you gotta struggle with it and come to some sort of clarity. Yeah. I mean, that's your goal. Your goal isn't just to struggle endlessly with this stuff and then show up on the exam, still struggling. You know, you would ideally show up and be like, wow, you know, it took me a really long time and a lot of

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effort to get to this point, but I understand the elements of, like, the legal rules of contracts. I can use those.

Lee Burgess: Right. I mean, when people call us second semester because they're unhappy with their grades, one of the first questions I ask is, how many practice exams did you do before these exams?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and then you get none.

Lee Burgess: I outlined one.

Alison Monahan: And then it's like, we're talking to two L's at this point, where that's the first question. Like, okay, so you're not happy with your first year grades. How many practices did you do in the average class?

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I didn't really have time for that.

Lee Burgess: Right. I didn't have time for it.

Alison Monahan: Well, that's a really pretty easy place to start on improving your grades.

Lee Burgess: And the way that you make time for it is by looking at the calendar and allocating time each week. Hey guys, stuff is going to get kind of gnarly here towards the end. Like, it's going to be packed, you're going to have a lot of work to do, like those last few weeks of school, you're not going to have a lot of time to do a lot of extracurricular activities, but it's just final exams, you get winter break, like you just have to kind of suck it up and focus.

Alison Monahan: And you know, I mean, I'm getting calls from people now who are like, oh, I tried to sit down and start outlining. And they're panicking because they didn't know how to start outlining. I'm like, it's September. This is a good time for you to be panicking about this. You know, you're already in October now.

So like, if you haven't panicked about this yet, or you haven't tried to do this, I think you know, the time is now because the reality is. It's easy to be like, oh, you know, I'm keeping up with my reading. I'm going to class. Like, I'm taking notes. I'm doing everything I need to be doing, and I'll just figure out how everything fits together later.

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Like, it'll, it'll make more sense once I have more material to work with. I mean, you're halfway through the semester at this point. You have plenty to work with.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Like, you're on a sinking ship if you're not trying to make sense of it. Yeah.

Lee Burgess: Alright, so make sure that you just block out these large chunks of time for this deep work and make sure that the deep work is increasing each week you get closer to final exams.

Alright, what about those pesky legal research and writing assignments because if those aren't on your calendar yet, you better stick them on your calendar so you know that you also have to allocate time to those assignments as well and still do the deep work and still prepare for class while it's starting to get a little intimidating.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, I think the problem with legal writing is it will expand to fill whatever time is available. So depending on how your class is structured, I mean, if you have, like, two weeks to work on a memo, you can't plan to work on it every waking hour for two weeks, like, that just cannot happen, so, you know, maybe if it's a weekend assignment and you get the packet on Friday and you have to turn it in on Monday, like, you should probably plan to do nothing but legal writing that weekend, and then that means you're gonna have to do this other stuff some other time.

So I think this is why it's like so critical to really get out that calendar and just block out this time because you're going to see where these conflicts are. And, you know, if you, it's better to see them now than to be like, oh, I just didn't get around to like outlining CivPro because that happened to fall on the weekend where I had to spend the whole weekend on my legal writing assignment.

I forgot to put that down.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, whoops.

Alison Monahan: Oopsie.

Lee Burgess: Oopsie. Yeah, but then this is then what happens. As your calendar gets. More and more full of this deep work, assignments, outlining, legal research and writing, then the first thing that everybody drops is taking care of themselves. So, you stop going to the gym, you stop taking walks, you stop cooking, you only

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start eating pizza in the Indian takeout restaurant two doors down from your house.

Which Just what I did in law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, where you call them and they're like, same thing? Yeah, and you're like, yeah same thing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, like, hey, Lee, how's it going?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, how are exams?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, the guy at the deli was like, oh, yes, don't work it away. You look like crap.

Lee Burgess: So it is not that time because I think, especially in the winter season, the illnesses start coming on and you know, getting the flu and the chronic colds.

Alison Monahan: Well, it's also just hard work to like, think this much, you know, it's like, it's actually draining. Yeah. I saw an interesting study, though, because I remember being so hungry, like, when I was studying a lot, and they made this interesting point that, like, you're not actually really burning calories. But the interesting part of the study was, apparently, when you have that feeling of, like, you've been working so hard, and you're really starving, and you want to eat something, if you go to the gym for, like, half an hour, the feeling goes away.

Lee Burgess: Oh, wow.

Alison Monahan: So, like, you get exercise, and you also, like, aren't sitting around.

Lee Burgess: Is it like endorphins or something?

Alison Monahan: No, it's because your body like needs to burn off like the nervous energy or something like it's really weird, but,

Lee Burgess: Cortisol levels or something.

Alison Monahan: Yeah so you might think about ways to structure your day or maybe you do like three or four hours in the library and instead of going for like you know a McDonald's lunch you go to the gym for- it doesn't have to be very long, like half an hour. And then you have lunch after that.

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And apparently that actually makes your brain like eat a lot more healthy food.

Lee Burgess: Interesting.

Alison Monahan: Because you're not like so starving from the lack of sugar.

Lee Burgess: Huh.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I don't know. It's super weird.

Lee Burgess: That is weird.

Alison Monahan: Because I remember that feeling of being like I'm ravenously hungry and just eating, eating like boxes of chocolate, which probably not the best brain food.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah. So, you know, it's not, you still have to carve out time to take care of yourself.

Alison Monahan: And to think that is a valid use of time. But also to start thinking about ways that when it really, the rubber really meets the road, how are you going to cut down on the time you have to spend preparing meals.

Maybe again, like if you want to procrastinate right now, cook some stuff and put it in the freezer.

Lee Burgess: It's true.

Alison Monahan: So that then when you're in the middle of the exam period, when your life is like truly crazy in a way you can't even conceive of, you'll have something to eat. You know, it should be something simple like beans or lasagna or whatever it is.

Just go ahead and cook now. And then you'll be ready later.

Lee Burgess: I think the other thing that you can keep in mind is as final exams get closer, oftentimes family and friends will ask what they can do to help.

Alison Monahan: Yes, let them help.

Lee Burgess: Let them help, but this is a, like, food is a great way to have people help you.

It's like, if you want to cook me a meal and drop it by, you know, my apartment.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, like all my Indian friends, they visit their parents, they come back with, like, really nicely packaged up like tupperware, full of like literally like a month worth of food. I'm like, I'm so jealous right now.

Lee Burgess: But that can be really a really big game changer.

So you, you definitely want to think about that. I actually think we have a great post that we'll link to about slow cooker recipes. The slow cooker is your best friend in law school, but it is a good time to start thinking ahead and thinking about how you're going to take care of your body, because if your body and mind start falling apart because of fatigue and the fact that you're not taking care of yourself, it doesn't matter how many hours you study.

You're just, you're not gonna be able to perform at your best.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean you've got to get serious about sleep and stuff like that, too. And if you're having, already having like insomnia issues, go and talk to someone. Like I had the worst insomnia during first semester exams. I was, like, I could not fall asleep.

I was sleeping, I mean, I had allocated, responsibly, eight hours a night, and I would lay down, and I would just literally be awake until four or five in the morning. And that is not, I mean, it literally made me crazy.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's not it.

Alison Monahan: Every exam period after that, I had Ambien. So I'm not saying that's your solution, but the point is, like, you, if, if this is already something you know is a problem, It is only going to get worse.

And again, like better to go now to the doctor and talk to them about the options than to try to do this in the middle of exams. And you're like, I don't have 45 minutes to go to a doctor's appointment. Like that's just not happening.

Lee Burgess: Another thing you need to make sure that on your, that's included on your calendar is your actual exams.

I love talking to law students at this point in the semester. And I ask when their exams start and they're like in December. I'm like, big month! We're in December! You know, the beginning of December. Really? How close are they? Well, they're a few days apart. Really? Like, you need to know what days, what times what format those exams are on, and you need to know that information now.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, it's not inconceivable that in some cases, like, you've been double booked or something. I mean, a lot of schools have, probably not your first year, because they tend to, like, pay attention, but it's not impossible that you know, you're entitled to, say, like, 24 hours between exams, and you have one in the evening, or one in the afternoon, and one the next morning, and, like, that's not actually, like, if you want to move one of them, you can, but you need to be aware when they are.

Oh, and then, of course, accommodations. If you're going to get accommodations, you need to be dealing with that well in advance. Like, you do not want to be, I mean, you know, we have people in this scenario, like, a day before the exam, they don't know if they're getting extra time.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm.

Alison Monahan: That's extremely stress inducing, and just not something that you want to be dealing with.

So anything related to exams, like laptops, anything, just deal with this stuff well in advance.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, for sure. You know, sometimes we talk to students around this time, and they say, There's no time left for me to do more deep work. There's no time left for me.

Alison Monahan: I'm already not sleeping.

Lee Burgess: I'm already not sleeping.

Alison Monahan: I already, like, do nothing.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I never leave the house.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So the first thing we always recommend, and we've talked about this in other episodes too, is you've got to track your time. You can use an online tool such as Toggl, which is free, but you've got to really find out if you're studying that much.

And then once you really see where your time is going, then you can carefully evaluate what you can cut out. You know, so if you are reading three

supplements for every class, like, that's probably a place to cut some time out. You might also just find that you're just burning a lot of time being at school.

You're socializing, you're talking with friends, you're taking 90 minute lunches with your friends. Maybe you need to go find another place to study where it can be easier to focus. But it's time to get really serious about how you're using your time so you can maximize it. There are plenty of hours in the week, typically, to get things done.

You just have to be smart to find those hours.

Alison Monahan: Well, the other thing I asked someone who tells me, as someone did recently that they didn't leave their house all weekend because they were studying, and I believe that, but my question is like, well, do you feel like you're being efficient and effective in all those hours?

And the answer, of course, is no, because no one can focus for that long. So, you know, you can, if you feel like you're spending all your time, but you're not being as efficient and effective as you need to be, you know, you probably want to start thinking about like, well, should I be studying in like a 50 minute burst and then have a 10 minute break because that refreshes your brain, but then you have to go back to work.

So, you know, you know yourself best. If you know, you get distracted, you know, those breaks, like take a walk or something like that, but make, you know, be very clear about where you're spending your time. Cause that's, all you've got at this point until, you know, until exams show up.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and I also think it's important to schedule in breaks to see other people and talk to people outside of your bubble.

It's not good for your mental health to sit in your house and not talk to anybody else for a long period of time. And if you're smart about how you're using your time, there's plenty of time to do that. And then you can say, okay, well I'm going to push through because I get to go to a movie tonight with my best friend.

Alison Monahan: That can be very motivating.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and it can be very motivating.

Alison Monahan: It's like you're going to be more focused. more likely to get that outline done if you're like, Oh, okay, I need to finish it by six because I'm having dinner with my

best friend versus like, oh yeah, I really need to be working on this, but I really don't feel like it.

Lee Burgess: Oh, there's a rerun on. I'm just going to watch that.

Alison Monahan: I'm just going to like, you know, do some and oh, it's been an hour. How did that happen? Well, I should really get started, but I need to do my laundry. You know, that's like, that's not helping and it's not making you happy either.

Lee Burgess: Yep. And hopefully. So, you know, you have looked at this from the beginning of the semester but, you know, if you were listening to this episode in the fall, we've got the Holidays coming up.

Thanksgiving is always something you have to decide what to do. Many people choose not to travel for the holiday. Please don't tell your family the week of Thanksgiving you're not coming because that's going to just create drama that you don't need. Like, if you have decided you're changing your holiday plans because of the realities of law school, have those conversations with family. Right now.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and tell them that we said that you could do it.

Lee Burgess: And they can email us.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, they can email us if they're not happy, and we'll explain to them why maybe traveling across the country on Thanksgiving is not the best use of your time, like, a week before exams start. We're not saying you can't.

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: Do what you want. But if you don't want to do it, that is a very legitimate choice.

Lee Burgess: For sure. Or, you know, even if you're driving home, you know, can you just go home for one or two days and not the whole weekend? You know, you just have to really be realistic about those expectations. If you don't think you're going to be able to get any work done at home, it's probably not a good idea to take four or five days off right before exams.

Alison Monahan: No.

Lee Burgess: Terrible idea, actually.

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Alison Monahan: I would say that is pretty universally a bad idea.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, basically.

Alison Monahan: Oh, and then there's one other thing that also comes into play in the fall semester right around the beginning of December, which is summer job hunts.

Lee Burgess: Oh, yeah. Just what everyone wants to think about during final exam time.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Everybody wants to be thinking about right before their exams start. But the reality is, NALP guidelines say you can start applying for most summer jobs on December 1st. So, you know, if you think that you might be interested in getting a job at, like, say, a large law firm, which are rare, but they do still exist, you need to be applying for that job December 1st.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Because other people will be.

Lee Burgess: So, I mean, although law students aren't really allowed to interact with their career services, can they still be working on these materials now? I mean, should they be knocking stuff out? Like drafting resumes, getting approved, things like that?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I think if you think that this is something you're going to be applying for in the beginning of December, you want to have those materials knocked out, ready to go, ready to send off.

And I think at this point you probably can talk to Career Services. We just want to be sure what the guidelines are, but you know I mean you do not want to be like trying to figure out what your resume should say on the November 30th.

Lee Burgess: Or proofreading, or you know we have, I think we've done other episodes on this, but like make sure that there are no typos and everything's perfect on your resume.

And that needs to have a lot of eyes on it.

Alison Monahan: Like there's a database you can be looking at now. You know, you. If you want to do this, and like we're not even saying it's necessary or that you should do it, but if you want to, you need to have basically everything ready to like push that button and with minimal effort on the actual first of December because you are

not going to have time to be sitting like two days on this and frankly, it's pretty unlikely to result in anything anyway.

I mean, I'm not saying it can't happen, but I don't think this is something to get too obsessed over.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alright, so now that we have completely packed your calendar between now and December, and everyone's panicking the next thing on your to do list should be to check in with yourself.

Alison Monahan: How are you doing right now?

Lee Burgess: Right now, mentally and physically? You know, are you feeling the stress and anxiety this semester now? Is it becoming a challenge to stay focused? You know, are you having trouble sleeping? Are you having trouble focusing and studying? I mean, if you're starting to see signs of stress and anxiety that you've never seen before and burnout, it is probably a good idea for you to call your friendly neighborhood health center at your law school to try and talk to somebody about it. Because I'll just warn you, if you're struggling now, two months from now, it's gonna be much worse and you're not gonna have the bandwidth and the space to really come up with some solutions.

Alison Monahan: No, and it's definitely better to deal with. In advance, A because things are just, as you said, they're just gonna get worse and worse. But also because, you know, a lot of this stuff is very technique based. You know, if you're like really suffering from stress and you're not sleeping, like they're ways, they're techniques you can learn to like reduce stress or just even to pay attention to it, or just to talk to someone about it, it can be really helpful.

I mean nobody no one in the student health centre like in the psychological services gonna be too surprised to see a law student show up there first year mid semester and say, yeah, I'm feeling really bad about stuff. I'm feeling really down. I'm really stressed out.

Lee Burgess: I'm really overwhelmed.

Alison Monahan: Really overwhelmed.

I feel like I'm not as smart as everybody else. Like, they're gonna be like, oh, welcome to the club.

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Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Come on in.

Alison Monahan: Come on in. Here, we have a whole program for you.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, a lot of students also find that mindfulness or meditation techniques can really help. But again, these have to be practiced.

You know, and so it's like you can't just say, well, I'm gonna try meditation during reading days. If you wanna try meditation and see if it's a way to manage stress and to clear your mind, you want to actually start doing that now so you can develop a practice and see what works for you.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and some of it, you know, is pretty simple.

Like you can do guided meditations, for example, where like literally all you have to do is commit the time and put on your earphones and basically lay down and relax and listen to someone tell you like, oh, everything's gonna be fine.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. I mean,

Alison Monahan: But sometimes that stuff can be stressful. Like, I remember doing it for surgery and they had one that kinda like walk, walked you through the process.

And the first time I did it, like I almost had a panic attack. But then the second and third time I did it was very relaxing. So like you just have to, you don't wanna be experimenting too much,

Lee Burgess: No.

Alison Monahan: Like the day of your exam with like some new technique you've never tried before.

Lee Burgess: No. And you know, you can download apps in your phone.

Another thing that. Some, a friend of mine was trying to help with focus and also to help just physically not to feel the fatigue from sitting was just getting a stop, like a timer that would go off every like 60 minutes to make them get up and walk around and to, you know, because it is also possible you are feeling some physical ramifications of doing all this sitting and reading, whether it be headaches or, you know, maybe your body's not feeling so well, maybe you're getting carpal tunnel, maybe you have back problems, eye strain, like there are also physical things that you need to take care of.

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And again, like you want to you know, think, if you need to adjust your workstation and how you're working, it's better to do that now than later in the semester.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think also, like, you know, the boredom factor kind of sets in for a lot of people, and just like the tedium of doing this day after day, like the novelty is worn off.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You're not like, oh my gosh, I'm reading a case, it's so exciting, you're like, oh, I have to read like four hours more of cases. You know, so mix it up in terms of like where you're studying, like don't always go to the law library or sit in your house, like, I used to basically, particularly as I got closer to exams, would make like a tour of different libraries all over campus.

And so I, you know, it was kind of interesting. Even something as simple as changing your physical environment can really like help you focus on what you need to get done if you're feeling like bored and tedious, and like, all this stuff.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Which is totally normal.

Lee Burgess: Totally normal. Alright, so.

Alison Monahan: Also totally normal.

Lee Burgess: Also totally normal. The next thing to check in is how you're doing battling your procrastination demons. So, we just recently did a podcast episode on self sabotage, but I don't know anyone who doesn't struggle with procrastination, even if you're not a procrastinator.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. It just happens.

Lee Burgess: You just have to check in with yourself.

I mean, of course, there are the extreme situations of just spending all weekend watching, you know, Stranger Things on Netflix and not doing any studying whatsoever, but you've got to just watch yourself. If you start seeing yourself developing some negative patterns, crush those patterns now.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, like you really get curious about what's going on. Like why do I suddenly like not even feel like I can't do something, why am I suddenly like not doing my reading? You know, if you were doing something regularly and suddenly it just sort of slips away from you like, you know, you don't have to be like, oh, I'm so horrible, I'm such a terrible student, I'm going to drop out, but just get curious about it. Well, what changed? You know, what am I feeling? Like, am I really bored? Am I just like tired? Am I too tired to be doing it? You know, is my office now cold because it's winter and like, I don't like sitting there, you know, I need to put socks on, like really get curious about what it is that's going on, you know, are you distracted? Is it your phone?

Like, because, yeah, the procrastination stuff, you know, time, time, time. As time slips away, you're not getting it back, so.

Lee Burgess: Do you want to just try this crazy thing on my phone that I read an article about, about turning your iPhone to black and white? Have you read anything about this?

Alison Monahan: I don't even know that's possible.

Lee Burgess: It is possible, you have to Google it, because I can't even tell you how, because it's like really strange how you can do it, but there are these studies that one of the things that make our devices so sparkly and attractive to us are all the colors, yeah, and all of the, just, there's so much I guess there's so much stimulation that comes from the screen and the colors and, you know,

Alison Monahan: It's so fun. Who doesn't want to look at this fun thing?

Lee Burgess: Right, and then if you dumb it down and make it black and white, it becomes more just utilitarian. And, and I have to, I did it for quite a while, and then I ended up turning it back because I needed color for something, and then I had to figure out how to change it back.

Right, and then I had to change it back. But it actually, especially things like that, it makes me happy. Facebook, Instagram, much less exciting to look at because all the pictures are black and white. It even makes text messages and all that stuff. It's just very, it's like cell phones used to be to make us feel old, which was they were gray and you just, you didn't play on your cell phone, you basically just put text with people.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's a good point. If you think even like something like WhatsApp, it's like why is it all like green and like it's clearly designed to like keep you going back to it.

Lee Burgess: Basically, it's like Vegas in your hand.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, pretty much.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so it's an interesting experiment if you're trying to, you know, cut down on usage.

It's, it's interesting. I also found at night It's just less stimulating.

Alison Monahan: Right, well the blue light stuff.

Lee Burgess: The blue light stuff is also bad.

Alison Monahan: Supposed to be bad. Everyone agrees. Everybody agrees. I mean, we all do it anyway.

Lee Burgess: We all do it anyway, but try and not keep your phone in bed and your TV in bed and all that stuff.

Alison Monahan: I've gotten so bad. I, like, first thing in the morning, last thing at night. I'd broken that habit for a while.

Lee Burgess: You did! For a long time it was after breakfast.

Alison Monahan: I know, I put it in a different room, but now I don't. I admit it. I've gone back to first thing in the morning.

Lee Burgess: I go through these times when I say, you know, I'm only going to read before I go to bed. I'm only going to read before I go to bed. And I could do a really good job for a few weeks, and then, you know, I end up watching a TV show, and then you want to watch the next episode.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, see, I don't watch TV. Like, the TV never grabs me, like, but if I start watching it, then I do, which is why I don't really start.

But no, for me, like, I joined a book club, and so sometimes I can get really into the book, and like, and I was doing that even like a week ago. I was reading for

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like an hour or two every night. And then I just stopped. And now I haven't finished the book, and the book club's coming up, and I'm on my phone all day.

Lee Burgess: I know, I just I just started reading Gloria Steinem's new book, which is quite interesting.

Alison Monahan: Interesting.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But I was doing a really good job of reading it every night before bed, and then I haven't read it in a week.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so basically if you're battling these demons, know that you are not alone.

Lee Burgess: And we're not even in law school exams.

Alison Monahan: We're not, yeah, we're not even examed. The other thing that happens to me is I work at really weird hours, which is like sort of okay, and then it gets out of control. I mean, even like last night, you know, I hadn't gotten much done all day cause I was running around like, you know, going to the dentist or whatever.

And so then I started working at like eight and then it's like one and I'm like really deeply into something. I'm like, it's one in the morning. Why am I, you know, but that's just the way I mean that I've accepted. That's just the way my schedule works. So for me, like, You know, when I'm in exam period, I don't try to fight that.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And I think, to the, you know, to some extent, I think it's fine to go, and probably ideal, to go with, you know, your personal, like, biological rhythms. But you do have to be careful when, you know, you start getting into like, you're studying until two or three in the morning, and then you have to get up for class at nine, and you're not sleeping.

Lee Burgess: Or you have an exam at nine.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. So you just have to be careful. I mean, I think I've learned over time, I can't try to force myself to do like deep work at eight in the morning because in my brain, it doesn't like literally doesn't work.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

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Alison Monahan: But you do have to be careful about not getting totally, I mean, I knew some people that became like literally nocturnal during exams or just fine until they had to take an exam at 9am.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think another thing that people oftentimes don't think about this time of the semester is to really evaluate where resources are available for you to get help. And so this is a great time to talk to your professors. You know, they are going to be much more willing to help you now than later, but you've got to get the most out of the time that you have with them.

So please don't go in and say, Professor so and so, I don't understand promissory estoppel. Can you go ahead and like walk me through that? That's a terrible idea.

Alison Monahan: They're gonna be like, no.

Lee Burgess: They're gonna send you, you know, they are going to send you walking out of the office.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, either they're gonna send you out or they're gonna say, well, why don't you tell me what you know about it?

Lee Burgess: But if you have been studying promissory estoppel and you have been struggling to write your attack plan and you aren't sure if you're doing it right, taking your drafted attack plan to them and saying I've been struggling with this and I'm not sure if this is correct, that's likely going to solicit a more positive response.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, or asking like a really specific question like so I'm not sure like does this replace consideration or is it something different? Like maybe you have a fundamental point of confusion which they will probably be happy to correct for you.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: But you have to go in like having given it some thought.

Lee Burgess: Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Not just like, teach me the law. Yeah,

Lee Burgess: So show them you have done some work. Another thing that some professors will do is they will read small hypo assignments, especially if you write

something that they've handed out in class. Not all of them, but you should definitely try because you never know and then you can be sitting in there and they're like, oh, I actually prefer an exam to be written in this format.

And all of a sudden these nuggets just start like coming out of their mouths about all their preferences.

Alison Monahan: Or like, oh, that's a really interesting question, huh. Which they end up and just show up in a slightly different format on their test.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: This is also the time they're starting to think about like writing their exams.

And so they might let drop, you know, unintentionally, lots of stuff.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Don't forget you also have an academic support office. You might have TAs or tutors on our team that are available, but there are quite a few resources out there for you to get help from. Just don't wait.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. It's too late.

Like you don't want the first time anyone ever looks at, or you write and someone looks at an exam to be like your actual exam.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, there are lots of different options that you have. I mean, you can even do things in your study group and stuff like that. You know, that's a good, that's, that's a good way that you can use external sort of pressure to motivate you is if you agree with your study group, like, okay, we're all going to write this hypo, you're going to be more likely to do it. So that's a great use of a study group. I think at this point, your study groups can also get really out of control in terms of just turning into like insane, like stress, like bitching sessions, basically. So, you know, this is also probably a time to evaluate, like, are you going to use a study group?

How are you going to use it? What's effective? So that you don't end up, like, burning a bunch of time and having a bunch of interpersonal conflicts with your study group, because that, having a study group meltdown, not what you need to be dealing with in, like, the end of November.

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Lee Burgess: Exactly. Speaking of interpersonal conflicts, this is probably also a good time to take some, a few moments and talk and think about your personal relationships.

Alison Monahan: Yes, because there's this, like, weird tendency where it's always, like, the worst day of your life, where suddenly everyone else decides that they're gonna freak out too.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Yes. But, you know, you oftentimes hear of significant others having trauma.

Alison Monahan: It's a great breakup time.

Lee Burgess: It's a great breakup time.

Alison Monahan: Lots of stress, holidays. People are feeling neglected.

Lee Burgess: Yes. Not feeling like priority. You know, your parents might be feeling neglected, especially if you're telling them that you're not coming home for the holidays. So it is really important to set expectations and really figure out, you know, how you can make people feel loved, but also be true to the work that you're doing and making yourself a priority.

Alison Monahan: And I think a lot of that is just like literally setting the expectation. So you're having a conversation like, you know that I'm in my first semester of law school, it's a very, very intense time for me, I just want you to be aware that like, these, you know, this two week period, I'm really gonna be basically unavailable, I would like to go, you know, have dinner with you after this is over, or whatever, and like set up some, you know, fun things, or yeah, we can just, I want to spend the winter break together, but like, I really need this time and space, because otherwise, like, I cannot do what I need to do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, may not be the best time to start internet dating this summer.

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah, I remember once I was like, oh, I'll distract myself by like dating online and like you're just getting all these crazy emails You're just like I remember I responded to one by just being like I'm in the middle of exams of exams, it's like this long and I like never heard back from this person. Understandably why because I was crazy and should not have been seeking out like new distractions because I had plenty of stuff to do.

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Lee Burgess: But you know, you've got winter break coming up and so if you do have a significant other or a friend or family who's feeling a little neglected, which is completely normal, try and plan something that you can look forward to.

Alison Monahan: Well, I think the other thing that which can be a harsh reality for certain people is just People might just be crazy. I mean, you know, it's like we can, we can all do like everything we can to try to be like mature grownups, but you know, anytime like you're interacting with your parents, there's gonna probably going to be drama.

And like some people's parents are just difficult and you might just have to really take a step back and be like, I understand that you're upset and there's nothing I can do about that. And I'm not going to let it like ruin my exam period.

Like somebody might just be upset with you and that's okay.

Lee Burgess: So definitely make sure you have drawn your boundaries with family responsibilities.

Alison Monahan: Including literally like turning off your phone or not responding to text messages of somebody, you know, if you've told, say, a parent that you're not coming for Thanksgiving, they won't stop calling you to talk about it at some point, you know, you're a grown up, you might actually be like, look, mom, I understand you're upset.

I will not answer your calls or texts about this any longer.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Like I'm not changing my mind. This is why it's happening. And I'm not having this conversation.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, life happens. And if there's a family emergency, that's one thing. But if you can plan for it, and if you can set expectations, do so because personal life drama can get way out of control when you're in a high pressure situation.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. So I guess some fun stuff on the calendar, you know, so if you're in the middle of studying and you're like, I can't wait until I get to go skiing in Tahoe, you know, like that's motivating.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. The end will come and you will get your life back. You will get to read the new Gloria Steinem book.

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Alison Monahan: Exactly. Or whatever other book you want to read that is not related to law at all. In only a mere few weeks. It's a short time really to be endured.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: And you just have to get through it as best you can, but planning and starting now and like doing some of this work now will really facilitate things come December.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely. Well, with that, unfortunately, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox podcast, hopefully it wasn't too anxiety inducing.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Take a deep breath.

Lee Burgess: Take a deep breath. Ah, yeah. Please take a second to leave a review and ratings on iTunes. We'd really appreciate it.

And be sure to If you have any questions or comments, please don't hesitate to reach out to myself and Alison at Lee@LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison@LawSchoolToolbox.com or you can always contact us via our website contact form at LawSchoolToolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk soon.