Episode 76: Making the Most of Your Law School Winter Break

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking about what to do during your winter break so you can have some fun but still be productive. 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 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. Today, we're talking about what you should do to make the most of your winter break, which you've probably been eagerly awaiting if you've just finished exams.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, counting down the moments.

Alison Monahan: I know. Hopefully, you're listening to this after exams, but if not, just think, soon you'll be finished with exams.

Lee Burgess: Yep.

Alison Monahan: And I think that's really the number one thing, is you've really gotta relax and sort of recuperate, not just from final exams, but from really this entire process, particularly if you're a 1L. Like, this has been a really intense few months.

Lee Burgess: I think that that's 100% true, and I think a lot of people really forget to be kind to themselves and give themselves some space.

You know, it's likely that you're really close to being burned out, or if you–

Alison Monahan: You are burned out.

Lee Burgess: Probably are burned out. And so you need to just decompress, and do whatever it is you do to decompress. I'll be honest, the first thing I always did, like, the day after final exams, and I did this in undergrad, too, was, like, deep clean my apartment and get all of my exam stuff put away, just because I found having piles of paper around or binders or whatever was really anxiety-inducing.

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So, you know, I kinda had to, like, cleanse my space so I could even sit and do mindless things like, you know, binge-watch a TV show or things like that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that makes sense. I would usually, like, you know, sleep for, like, two days, and then kind of get up and be like, "Wow, my house is a mess. There's stuff everywhere."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And you never know. Even crazy stuff could've happened during the exam period that you really haven't gotten to process. I mean, I had computer issues during the exam period one year, and I just kinda had to plow through 'cause I had to finish exams. And I remember finishing all my exams and then really being able to kind of mourn this thing that had happened in my exam-taking world.

And that's really important to kind of be able to sit with and get past, too, your feelings of frustration.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, for me, like, during first semester exams, I wasn't sleeping. So after two or three weeks of sleeping maybe four hours a night, because I had chronic insomnia, like, you know, as you would imagine, I was a mess.

You know? A total mess. And, you know, I think I went back to California, like, a day or two after exams ended, so, you know, it was this kind of like, "Oh, my God, okay, this thing's finished, and now I have to, like, pack up the whole house and clean it. Oh, now I have to get packed for, like, weeks on end."

And like, oh, my God, and then get on a plane, and, you know, it's a lot. And it–

Lee Burgess: It really can be a lot. Or if you're heading home for the holidays, and you need to get gifts and things like that for folks, and you haven't had time to do any shopping, or maybe you go to a... I remember I had a group of friends who would do this annual Christmas party, when we all kind of went home for the holiday, and I never had anything to wear in law school because, you know, I wasn't, like, going to parties or anything like that. So I was always just frantic, like, "I need to go shopping. I have nothing to wear to this party. All I wear is my fleece all day." Like, it's just–

Alison Monahan: Yeah, you have to remember, like, how to interact with other people who are not in law school. You know, whether those are, like, people that you're dating, or significant others, or family, or friends. I mean, and I think, too, there can often be, you know, kind of a disconnect because, say you have a significant other, and you've been working away for exams, and you haven't really been

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seeing them, and they're kind of sitting at home bored and alone, and they're really excited when you come back and you're finished, but you're so tired.

And so, like, you know, burned out and just, like, tired of thinking, and tired of making decisions, that all you wanna do is sit on the couch and veg for, like, two days. Like, that sort of disconnect can be really hard to handle.

'Cause they're like, "Oh, my God, let's go out and do 18 things." You're like, "I can't even move."

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: You know? Like, I literally just need, like, two days of not getting out of my pajamas and not really speaking to anyone. I mean, I don't know what you'd do about that other than just kind of noticing it and being prepared for it and sort of trying to explain it. But it can be difficult.

You know, you're not the only person who suffered here, basically.

Lee Burgess: Right, right. And–

Alison Monahan: Or kids, you know, if you have kids that have been neglected, you know, it's hard.

Lee Burgess: It can be really hard, and I think, you know, if you can somewhat plan ahead to give yourself a little bit of space just for yourself, and then you can kind of dive back in to family and friends and those responsibilities.

But no matter what, just try and take time for yourself. Self-care is so important and should definitely be–

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I eventually started realizing that, like, the day after my exams were over, I would try to schedule a massage or something like that. You know, that was just really indulgent and kind of force you to just, like, let go.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That's very true. Yeah, it can be really, really important. You know, and if you are planning to travel and see family, maybe try and give yourself a day or two. Don't fly out, you know, the day that exams are ending if you can help it so you have a little downtime to get things together.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's a mistake a lot of people make. I definitely made that mistake more than once.

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Lee Burgess: Oh, yeah, me too.

Alison Monahan: I think one year I flew to Italy, like, the day after exams were over to go on a ski vacation. It's just, like, really? Like, what was I thinking? This was not a good idea.

Because you don't want to be packing. You know, you're trying to study and do that last exam, and then you're supposed to be, like, packing for, you know, some crazy trip that you're going on. Yeah, give yourself some breathing room.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, another time I think I was trying to go back to California, but it was, like, the New York transit system was on strike, and, like, ended up somehow sleeping through my flight, 'cause my roommate and I got really, like, hammered one night.

And, like, I was like, "There's no subway." Like, oh, it was just such a mess. Like, such a mess. I think I ended up getting food poisoning on that trip too.

Lee Burgess: Oh my gosh.

Alison Monahan: You know, it just, this always happens. It's just, like, one thing after another, after another.

Lee Burgess: You know, we've been talking about, you know, family or friends or children or other important people in your life feeling somewhat neglected, typically through the end of the semester process.

And one of the things you can do, you know, if you're listening to this and you're not in the midst of finals, or you can think ahead for next semester, is try and plan some stuff, you know, after giving yourself a little breathing room, that family and friends can look forward to. You know, whether or not it's, you know, a dinner with your group of girlfriends or it's a, you know, a getaway with your significant other or it's a special day at the aquarium with your kids, whatever it might be, if you can do a little of that structure, I think it shows effort that, you know, folks may feel like, "Okay, well, I know I'm neglected now, but I have these exciting things to look forward to."

And, you know, I think those can be really powerful, because one of the things I think, that's hard for the folks that aren't in the middle of this, is it can be very

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hard to appreciate how selfish you have to be and how inward you have to be thinking and feeling to get through some of this stuff.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's very difficult for someone who's not gone through the hell that is a law school exam period to really, fully internalize, like, how horrifically awful it can be.

And, you know, like, you're not sleeping. You're probably not eating that well. You're not exercising. Like, you're not gonna be your best self at the end of this, like, several-week exam period.

That's just the reality of it.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: But I completely agree. I think, you know, trying to give yourself, like, a day or two to sort of decompress, sleep in, get some stuff done, and then come up for air with, oh, something that's planned that's fun, you know, that everybody can reconnect on, is a really good idea.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And I think the other thing to think about too is especially given the current political climate that is out there in the world right now, you know, there's a lot of information and things to read, and a lot of stuff maybe to catch up on if you've been having to stick your head in the sand a little bit to get through stuff.

But again, give yourself some space 'cause you also don't wanna come up for air and then spend the entire day on Facebook reading posts that are going to be–

Alison Monahan: Basically like, "The world's ending. Here's how."

Lee Burgess: Right. You know, that's not gonna be good for your mental health either. So just, again, just re-acclimate to what's going on in the world and don't, you know, feel like you have to jump into reality with both feet unless you have to, for some reason, jump into reality.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think the flip side of that too is if you are, like, really stressed out about the way the world is going or something, you know, this is also a good time to sort of do something about that, you know, something productive. So whether it is volunteering with an organization that, you know, supports a cause that you feel passionately about, or whatever it is, you know, you've got a few weeks that you could actually go and do something so then hopefully when you,

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you know, restart classes, you have a different perspective on like, "Okay, you know, the world's probably not ending.

It might be bad, but, you know, at least I went and volunteered, you know, with these," whatever. I don't know. Take your pick. But you did something.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, volunteering, donating time, if you want to engage in the political process or in the environment that's happening right now, I think it's an opportunity to do that, and you may not have that opportunity during the school year again.

So, especially if you have kind of an extended winter break, I think you can get involved with your communities, and I think there's no shortage of ways to help, and that's kind of an opportunity to invest because, you know, you don't want to sabotage your legal career because you're kind of distracted by events.

I'd rather you become a lawyer and then be able to do things from the perspective of being a lawyer later.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. But, you know, you might be able to attend a gala fundraiser or something over the winter break, and, like, that would be fun, and it's good networking. And, you know, why not? It might reinvigorate your passion for law school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

Alison Monahan: But at the same time, I don't think you have to do just things that, you know, are work-oriented or school-oriented. This really is a time for you to recuperate, to regenerate. You know, maybe do some, like, reading for fun. What? You know, I mean, the concept sounds so foreign, but I remember you probably used to like to read.

Lee Burgess: I know. I know. And, you know, it's so hard. I have a pile of books on my desk that I'm totally behind on, which I'm hoping to take on over my holiday breaks and be–

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I have, like, an 800-page book for my book club that apparently is really depressing that I just haven't even been able to start.

Lee Burgess: Oh, interesting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I was like, "Really?" I am, however, reading the new Salman Rushdie, which I find fascinating and oddly prophetic. So it's called, like... It's a takeoff on

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the Thousand and One Nights, so the title is, like, numbers, numbers, numbers, something. Some number of years and weeks and days and nights.

Lee Burgess: That's interesting.

Alison Monahan: I don't know. I can't remember, but it's a very long title. But it's a really good book. It's very interesting.

Lee Burgess: I'm finishing Gloria Steinem's new book, which is also very timely because it's so politically charged, but I think her perspective on the world is really interesting.

And I'm just kind of somebody who likes reading about other people's lives, which you might be able to tell by looking at the rest of the books on my desk, which are Amy Schumer's new book and the new book about Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And then the book, I think it's The Bitch Is Back or something like that, about short stories about women, I think, in menopause or something like that. Which is not, I'm not at that point in life, but I've heard that the stories are really interesting and great. So–

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so, you know, go to the bookstore, like browse around. I mean, those do still exist, I think.

Lee Burgess: They do, and they're fun.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I've heard they still exist some places. But go to Amazon, browse around.

But, you know, you don't have to spend the whole break just trying to be productive. But it is a good time to do certain things. But, you know, I think reading a good book, particularly something escapist is really a good idea at this point.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, and it also gives you something to talk about. So you know, we're gonna talk a little bit about maybe doing some networking and trying to meet people. But sometimes reading books or, you know, doing something fun or taking a great hike or trying something new, it gives you something to talk about when you meet people, which can be great because when you meet someone, you know, it's hard to say, "Well, I've been living in the library for the last three weeks. I'm really disconnected with the world and I don't know what's going on."

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I remember a friend of mine in law school, she had to go to some Christmas party 'cause it was, like, her fiance's work or something, and she was,

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like, right in the middle of the exam period, and she came back, she's like, "I just realized I cannot have a normal conversation right now."

Like, "I have nothing to talk about. And also, like, I just can't even, like, get it together to pretend to be a normal person because I'm so crazed with all these exams."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I know. It's just really bizarre. It's a very bizarre period. But if you do wanna be a little bit productive, I think there are ways you can do it without driving yourself crazy and not allowing yourself to do anything fun.

You know, I think we've got a great podcast episode, if we do say so ourselves, about–

Alison Monahan: Which we do.

Lee Burgess: Which we do, about soft skills. And I think breaks, especially maybe if you live somewhere with really bad weather so you can't get out of the house a lot, could be a really great time to take an online course.

We talked about, you know, exposing yourself to accounting or, you know, business communications or even just, you know, a general business class, to be able to function in a firm environment with a bit more wisdom, and I think that that's something great to do. Or if you have an interest in, you know, online companies, even if it's from a legal perspective, like learn about how online companies or online sales works and what sales funnels look like and content marketing, and all of that kind of stuff.

I think adding to your repertoire of expertise and things you can talk about with some sort of air of, I don't know, having authority or just knowing what you're talking about is only gonna serve you well in your job hunt, but it's also just gonna make you better at what you do.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely.

I think, you know, there're tons and tons. I mean, if you want a course on, like, how to sell stuff on the internet or how to market yourself or whatever, those exist. Like, there're millions of them. And you know, you don't have to pay for them. You can if you want to. But, you know, there are lots and lots of blogs out there, and generally these, you know, they're written for a general interest community. It's gonna be a lot more entertaining reading than what you've been doing in law school.

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Lee Burgess: Right, exactly. Except our blogs, of course, which are totally interesting all the time.

Alison Monahan: Well, I was referring more to cases, actually.

Lee Burgess: Oh, yes. Okay, okay, good. Yeah, of course.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. Our blogs are blogs. They're easy to read. But–

Lee Burgess: But no, cases are dense. It's gonna be refreshing to read anything other than cases, which is why I think actually going back and reading books for fun is such a great exercise, 'cause you remember you can actually read quickly and efficiently, which is almost a shock to the system.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, even something like, you know, I mean, this is an old one, but even, like, Tim Ferriss' The 4-Hour Workweek. I think, you know, that is extremely eye-opening when a lot of lawyers read it when they're actually lawyers, and they're so used to selling their time. But, you know, read it now.

You know, there are lots of different perspectives on the way that you can have a business. Or it doesn't have to be, you know, just the standard way that firms and organizations have been run so far.

Lee Burgess: And weren't you just reading a book recently on deep work?

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah, the Cal Newport. I ordered it. I haven't actually read it yet.

Lee Burgess: Oh, you haven't, okay. But Cal Newport, somebody else who's very interesting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I'm in the middle of the Salman Rushdie, and I'm in the middle of one called Essentialism, which is basically figure out what's important and do it. But his is definitely on my list.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So there's a lot of really interesting stuff out there, and worthwhile reading. What about some job stuff? What if you're worried about your job hunt? Can you do some stuff over the winter break?

Alison Monahan: Well, absolutely, because you could start applying for jobs on December 1st.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: So you are actually a month behind already.

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Not to panic, but just FYI. Yeah, I mean, this is something I think even first years need to be thinking about is, what are you gonna do next summer? And that could be, you know, everything from brainstorming to doing some research, but also getting your resume in order, getting your cover letters together.

You know, this is a good opportunity, 'cause it's not like you're gonna have more time once classes start to deal with this. Like, deal with it now.

Lee Burgess: Sounds good. Yeah. And I think, you know, hopefully your resume and cover letter are up to snuff, but you really maybe wanna even take a fresh look at those.

You know, we talk about the importance of having those resumes and cover letters proofed by a lot of people to make sure that they are proofed, I guess, and perfect. And maybe even going home or spending time with family or friends can give you the opportunity to circulate some of that stuff and get some additional feedback.

So even if you think you're done, keeping an open mind and getting some additional perspectives may be really helpful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. I mean, it's never gonna hurt you to have, you know, your uncle who's a lawyer look at your resume.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: I mean, maybe you disagree with him and you don't make the changes he suggests, but at least, you know, having that input of like, "Oh, yeah, well, you know, I would hire someone or not hire someone based on this.

Here's what I think you should do differently." And you're really thinking through, like, what do you want your summer to look like?

I mean, it's only December, January, but that's coming up really quickly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And, you know, you need to be thinking where can you apply. Like, where are you likely to get an offer?

I mean, if you are going to school somewhere outside of where you live, you know, where your family lives. For example, I was in school in New York, and I was really kind of, like, based in San Francisco, I guess you could say. So when I

was in San Francisco, I tried to set up some interviews, because I didn't wanna have to fly back across the country 3,000 miles in a week or three weeks or whatever.

And actually, I ended up having to do that anyway. But at least I did one with, like, a government organization while I was there.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's really a good point. And, you know, I think we'll link to it in the podcast notes, but you have a great series on The Girl's Guide about informational interviewing.

Alison Monahan: Oh, yeah.

Lee Burgess: Which is such an under-looked networking tool. Underutilized networking tool. And breaks are great times to either set up these informational interviews, try and do them. You know, it's oftentimes, it's a bit of a downtime. If people are in the office around the holidays, it's often not that busy.

So it can be a nice time to get on somebody's calendar.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, people are more likely to, you know, step out for a coffee if it's two days before Christmas, and they're kind of resentful about being in the office anyway.

Yeah, you could set up kind of an informal informational interview where you try to get together some friends who maybe have friends who are lawyers, and you all go out to a bar or something and have Christmas drinks or, you know, whatever, a holiday. I think even the first day of Hanukkah this year is the 24th.

Lee Burgess: I think so.

Alison Monahan: So everyone can celebrate together.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: But you know, this is like a festive time where people tend to be more open to going out and doing things. And so it is a good time to do informational interviews or, you know, try to meet your friends' friends who work at certain places or whatever it is.

And look for things, you know, like the bar associations maybe having holiday events, end of year events, that kind of thing. You know, it's a time when people are kind of out and about, and it can be an easy way to make some of those

connections that, you know, maybe in like March or April when everyone's ramping up for tax season or whatever, like, you're not gonna be able to do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's really true. So reaching out to people, talking to people. Even if you don't, you're just setting up appointments when people get back from the holiday break, then they're on the calendar. And once something's on the calendar, it's much more likely to happen, even if it gets moved.

Sometimes it's just the challenge of getting on somebody's radar and getting on their calendar.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think it is typically, you know, a downtime.

The other thing you could think about doing, we talked about volunteering, but you could also do more specifically legal pro bono work.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that's a very good point.

Or even some legal pro bono training. They might even offer trainings.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. Yeah, I mean, I think right now there're a lot of people doing, say, for example, immigration pro bono stuff where they need help from law students. They need help from everyone. You know, and if you have language skills or something like that, like, you could very easily probably spend a few days over the winter break doing some work that could benefit someone and also would be good experience for you and something to put on your resume and talk about in your interviews.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that's a really, really good point. Let's talk about grades coming in.

Alison Monahan: Oh, do we have to?

Lee Burgess: 'Cause I do think that this is something that a lot of people like to pretend maybe isn't gonna happen over the break. And depending on your school, they might dribble in one at a time, and you may never know when they'll exactly get released, which is a special kind of torture.

They might get released in bulk. One section might get their grades, one section might not. There're all sorts of different ways that grades will be handed out. My school did the dribble approach, with legal research and writing always coming out first. And so it can be very sobering. It can be very disheartening.

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It can be a way that you don't really wanna celebrate the winter holidays just dealing with some unfortunate grades. But, you know, I think a few things to keep in mind is, especially if you're getting, you know, one grade at a time, that you really need to keep perspective and remember that one grade isn't going to, you know, change the course of your whole law school experience.

I mean, my first grade was fairly disappointing, and I will totally admit I sat on the floor crying at my great aunt's house while everyone else was in bed, because I was so devastated. And it really can shake you, you know, because you've put so much work into it. But on the other hand, you know, once all of my grades came in, it wasn't nearly as bad as I had, you know, thought it was.

It was just this one single grade. So you've gotta just keep perspective and remember that, you know, doing poorly on one thing doesn't mean your legal career is over, and there's a lot of opportunity for doing better. I mean, hey, we have seen so many people, including ourselves, be able to really turn around our GPAs and change your law school experience.

So it's important not to lose hope.

Alison Monahan: Well, I was kind of the opposite.

Lee Burgess: Oh, okay. That's fair.

Alison Monahan: I did really well first semester, and then essentially had a total breakdown because it was too much pressure, and then did poorly second semester.

Lee Burgess: But then you got it back together after that.

Alison Monahan: I did get it back together.

Lee Burgess: So see, that was still... You still came full circle, back good, positive trajectory.

Alison Monahan: Exactly. No, my second year was my best year. It was a really solid year. Basically, that was because I picked the right classes. But we don't talk about that. That's a different podcast.

Lee Burgess: That's a different podcast.

Alison Monahan: But no, I mean, I think the great thing, the reality is most people are gonna see grades they've never seen before.

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And that is not an easy thing to deal with. Particularly, it can be a difficult thing to deal with if you're in a situation where, like, you know, you're staying with your family or something, and your parents are like, "Oh my God, what do you mean you got a B-minus? Like, you're a straight-A student." And they don't get it, you know?

They don't understand the curve. Like, they're just used to you getting straight As, and so that can be an added amount of pressure on top of the fact that you already feel lousy about the fact that you didn't do as well as you wanted to.

Lee Burgess: Yep. I mean, it is really shocking to the system, and I think it's important that you remember the realities of the curve.

You know, if you don't even know what your school's curve is, why don't you go learn about it? Or Xerox the page of that part of the student handbook.

Alison Monahan: I mean, some of them have, you know... I mean, some of them are, like, you know, I've seen curves as low as, like, 2.3 or whatever, you know? It's brutal.

It's... I mean, that's a brutal curve. That's a C+ curve. Like, the average person is gonna get a C+. That's brutal.

Lee Burgess: It's really, really, really brutal.

Alison Monahan: That doesn't happen in most undergrads.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: So, I mean, I agree. I think grades are really difficult. Definitely when they're trickling in over time, like, it's easy to totally catastrophize if you get one bad grade.

On the flip side, if your first grade is great, and you're like, "Yay, I'm a total rock star," and then the next one's not, it's like, "Oh, no."

You know, like, it can be a rollercoaster. I think it can be helpful to sort of reflect at least a little bit on what might have happened.

Particularly if it's, like, one class as an outlier, or if, on the flip side, if all of your grades are bad. You know, that's something that you're gonna have to deal with.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that is really something to keep in mind, and just remember that you do wanna take a little time while you're not fully exhausted to start to have

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some serious, you know, conversations with yourself, I guess, which is a strange way to say it.

But you do need to sit down and think and evaluate about what you did. You know, what resonated with you? What was a good use of your time? What was a bad use of your time? You know, I mean, when students come to us and ask for help figuring out what went wrong, I mean, we start at the very beginning. You know, it's like, we start at how did you prepare for class?

Did you do the reading?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, did you do the reading?

Lee Burgess: Did you brief? Were your briefs worth it? You know, did you use supplements? Why? Why not? Did you read too many supplements? Well, that's a problem. Then it's like, did you outline? Did your outlines work for you? I mean, you know, we're really–

Alison Monahan: Did you take practice tests?

Lee Burgess: Exactly. Like, how were they? Exactly.

Alison Monahan: Did you get feedback? Like, what did your professors tell you?

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: You know.

Lee Burgess: I mean, we're really good at what we do, and we can help you do all that diagnosis, but it's also just an important exercise for you to move, you know, kind of through the semester and think about what were your wins, you know, and then what were your areas for improvement.

Because no matter what your grades are, everybody can improve. And I think one of the things that we talk about with folks who are successful this first semester is they kind of go into break, they get these grades, and they're like, "I am good. I'm good. I don't have to do anything else. I am just like, I'm solid, I'm gonna be at the top of my class."

And the reality is, with the curve, everybody else is gonna do better too. So–

Alison Monahan: Yeah, like you could fall off that perch pretty quickly.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah. In fact, a lot of people actually do lose their perch that first semester, and so you don't want to become complacent with it, and I think that that's really important.

So no matter what, how well you did, I think it's still worth evaluating what you did that you liked and what you did that you didn't like, and start making some changes. You know, if you weren't organized enough, like, buy a new planner or figure out how you're gonna organize your life. Learn about bullet journaling, whatever it needs to, you know, whatever you need to do to keep all your ducks in a row.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think this is also a good opportunity to start to lay the groundwork for getting some feedback from your professors. So of course, if you get a disappointing grade, the temptation is often to, like, put it in a box and never think about it again.

But I think you're gonna be a lot better served if you force yourself to send your professor an email that's like, "Hey, you know, I'd like to come and talk to you after we get back in January.

Can I set up an appointment? Like, I'm not disputing my grade or anything, I just wanna hear from you about what maybe I could improve on." And typically, they're gonna be pretty receptive. I think if you can get copies of any of your exams, that's definitely worth doing. You know, and have someone look at them with you.

Take them to your TA, take them to a professor, take them to a tutor or whatever it is, because if you're consistently not doing well, there's probably some sort of pattern.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And if something crazy happened, like you wanna know what happened there too so it doesn't happen again.

Lee Burgess: Right, exactly.

So, you know, best not to just be out of mind, out of sight. Out of sight, out of mind, I guess, is what I meant to say. Out of sight, out of mind on all this stuff. Like, this is the time where you can actually evaluate how the semester went because you have time.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah, for the first time in three or four months, you actually have a little bit of time.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly.

Alison Monahan: I mean, do you think people should do anything to sort of get a leg up on their next classes?

Lee Burgess: You know, I think, to be honest, being rested and organized and get your life in order, I think are some of the best things they can do to get your leg up. You know, let's say you had some rough financial realities first semester.

Do what you can to figure out your finances or rework your budget. You know, if you can set up bills to auto-pay so you don't have to remember to pay bills, you know, if you can, you know, do things to make your life easier throughout the semester, the second semester, I think that that's a great way to invest time.

I mean, I don't know that pre-reading and things like that are really worth it. I think the other thing is about the job stuff. You know, job stuff becomes a huge distraction from school, and anything you can do to get your ducks in a row in that department is gonna save you a lot of time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree. The other thing that sounds a little off the wall, but if you're gonna break up with someone, do it during the break. Speaking from experience, like, I pretty much had, like, the worst of all possible worlds as I came back and had, like, two horrible weeks with, like, my then boyfriend, and we were fighting all the time, and then I went back to school, and then, like, a week later, decided to break up with him.

So then in the middle of the start of the semester, I was dealing with breaking up. It's just, like, I wish I'd have just done that right after Christmas.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. But maybe it's a good time to evaluate your personal relationships, because you have time, you know, and you can have hard conversations, and if you can do those outside of the school period, I think it's wise to do that.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean, if it's going nowhere fast, just end it. I mean, it sounds harsh, but the reality is you don't have time to deal with this when it's, like, the middle of February or the end of January and you're two weeks into classes, and you know, then you decide you have to have the big breakup conversation from 3,000 miles away.

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Like, ugh, it's just horrible.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. That is pretty horrible.

Alison Monahan: Should do it, do it in person. All right. I think your goal here really is to set yourself up for the next semester. And you know, ideally, you wanna go into that semester with your personal relationships in order, your finances in order, you're well-rested, you're hyped, you're ready to go, you know, you've thought about–

I mean, another thing we haven't touched on is if you decide or if you realize that you probably need some sort of accommodations or something like that. Like, this can be a good time to deal with that. We have a podcast that just came out on that, but you know, if you need to be evaluated or something, this is the time to do this sort of thing.

Lee Burgess: Very true. That's a really good point. I hadn't thought about that.

Alison Monahan: Well, you know, just think about our podcast, and there you go.

Lee Burgess: All right. Well, I feel like that's a pretty good to-do list for the break. But make sure you put your feet up and watch some good movies or TV shows, or read some good books, because that's really super high importance.

Alison Monahan: It should be restorative, ideally.

Lee Burgess: It should. It should. And with that, we're out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox Podcast, please take a second to leave a review and rating on iTunes. We'd really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything.

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