Episode 9: How To Raise Your Grades as a 2L or 3L

Lee Burgess: Hello and welcome to the Law School Toolbox podcast. Today we're going to be talking about how to raise your grades as a 2L and a 3L. 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. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me.
We're the co creators of the Law School Toolbox, the Bar Exam Toolbox, the Catapult Conference, and the Trebuchet Legal Careers site. Alison also runs the Girl's Guide to Law School. If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on iTunes. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the contact form on LawSchoolToolbox.com, and we'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 be talking about how to raise your grades if you're a 2L or 3L. So, let's get started. Some law students think that their GPA is set in stone after their 1L year. Is this really the case?

Lee Burgess: It isn't actually, because there are still a large number of units of grades left during your law school career.
And I think because of the fact that OCI selection that's on campus interviewing and things like law review are all based on your 1L grades, People forget that plenty of other opportunities are going to focus on a transcript from later in your law school career, such as clerkships or other externships and even some post graduation jobs.
So if your 1L grades aren't what you'd hoped, you do want to continue to work to raise your grades so future employers can see an upward trend in your GPA. Because if there's an upward trend, that is typically looked upon really favorably by hiring committees. Alison, is this what you've seen in your experience?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I mean certainly it's better than the alternative, right? Well, that's true. And one of the things I think people sometimes, don't realize is it's actually, it can be, you know, Easy, not easy. It can be fairly easy to raise your grades in the second and third year because a lot of people will just sort of give up.
You know, the people who didn't do so well their first year, they're not really interested in figuring out why that was and trying to do better. So if you are really dedicated to, say, you know, your grades were not great, not amazing, And you want to do better, you know, you can do things like strategic course selection and that sort of thing, but just I think having that goal of really being

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committed to getting better at this and learning how to be a better law student, I think it's going to actually put you in the minority.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. And believe it or not, some people, even who, We're successful their first year. They get lazy and yeah, they don't work as hard. And so sometimes you can even overtake them in the curve because they just think, oh, I've got this covered. I don't have to focus on it.

Alison Monahan: Right. Just realistically, I mean, if you're one L who did well and you're on law review, you're two L year, suddenly you have a lot of demands on your time.

Lee Burgess: Mm-Hmm.

Alison Monahan: So I know a lot of people who were on the law review. In their second year, their grades dropped just because of the time demands.

Lee Burgess: Not to mention, on campus interviewing, if you're doing that.

Alison Monahan: Right.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, huge time suck.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, so, you know, if you're someone who like, stays middle of the pack and maybe didn't have that opportunity.
You actually can do the stealth move and, you know, overtake them. And then suddenly, you know, two years later at the end of your graduation, everyone's like, Oh, how did that person get to the top of the class?

Lee Burgess: That's very true. Yeah. Let's talk about some practical things that you can do to work on raising your grades.
So I think the first thing that nobody wants to do, but it's incredibly important is to get feedback on your past exams.

Alison Monahan: It's amazing how many law students have literally never looked at their exam answers.

Lee Burgess: Or even gone to a professor and talked to them about them.

Alison Monahan: I mean, honestly, I'm not sure I ever really saw any of my exams.

Lee Burgess: Really?
You know, it's funny. I remember collecting some of them in some classes. I was

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allowed to take them with me. And then at some point during a move, right after law school, I got rid of them all because I was going through a cleansing. I'm not going to take a bunch of paper with me everywhere. And now I'm really sad that they're gone.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think I got a couple of mine maybe, and I thought they would have comments or something, and they just had sort of cryptic marks all over them. And I was like, okay, well, that didn't really help.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Alison Monahan: And I never did anything else with it.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, which is why you have to go talk to the professor.
I mean, my criminal law professor used to write sad faces on the margins of his notes. Exams and what does it I mean? We got to know what a sad face means, but you know, what does that really mean?

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think too, I mean, typically the professor is going to hand out some sort of sample exam Whether it's a model student exam, you know the best the best grade in the class, for example or a model exam that they personally have written that, you know, no student could possibly have written in the time allocated but whatever it is that you get, you know If you do have your own exams, it's important to really look at You What did you do differently?
Because it's not just so you want to like get your exam and be like, oh, it has seven sad faces. Okay, right. So, you know, before you talk to your professor, ideally, and some, I mean, some schools won't actually let you look at your exams outside of the professor's office. But at a minimum, you know, when you show up to office hours to talk about your exam, you ought to have looked at whatever sample materials they gave you.
Because, you know, You want to present the impression that you've made the effort, you've kind of looked through this, you have an idea of what's going on, and then the professor can give you additional information.

Lee Burgess: Absolutely, and I think one of the things that people forget when they go talk to the professors is they become obsessed with the sad faces, or whatever, the negative marks, and they forget to try and collect information about what they did right.
Because you likely did something well, you know, maybe it was that your exam looked professional, or you had a good use of headers, or something, you know,

and you want to collect that information. One, because it's nice to get some accolades that not everything went poorly, but also it's to make sure that you don't fix something that's not broken.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, exactly. It's like, you know, if you're doing 80 percent of the stuff right, and then you, 20 percent needs improvement, you don't want to completely ditch it and start from scratch. You know, you're already doing a lot of things right. And I think that's a great point all around is people tend to fixate on, you know, the things that they didn't do well, but think about the things you did do well and how you can do that more often.

Lee Burgess: And so once you get this feedback and you want to try and do it as early in the new year as you possibly can, then you want to spend some time reflecting on your whole entire kind of semester process, starting with preparing for class and when you started outlining and doing practice exams. Because you want to think about what you can do now to make sure that you're better prepared for the semester's exams.
I mean, one of the things that's great about coming back as a 2L is you've done this twice already. You have a lot more information that you used to have, so you know what the end game is, and now it's your job to put together the activities you need to do to get in the best position possible for those exams.

Alison Monahan: Right. I think, you know, really getting serious and really thinking about where were the gaps? What went wrong? You know, something didn't go well if you're not happy with your grades. I mean, in fairness, if you've got like an A minus and you're complaining about your grades, well, that's just because there are other smart people.
But you know, if your grades were not, you know, I mean, let's face it, you're not going to get straight, no one gets straight A's. It's fine. But you know, if your grades are not, you know, if they're below the median, then something has gone wrong. And I think, You know, you have to think about what it was.
Was there information if it was a closed book exam that you didn't have in your head, if it was an open book exam, because your materials have been better organized, you know, did you fail to do the practice tests that you know you need to do? Did you get the feedback you need? You know, there's something that happened and figuring out what that, you know, and a lot of people, maybe you need help with your writing.
You know, just as a general rule.

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Lee Burgess: I think that's true. And I think some folks also forget to even just go back to how you're preparing for class, you know, although preparing for class doesn't necessarily directly relate to what you do on the exam, it does feed into your understanding of the law and your ability to read facts and understand what legally significant facts are.
So, you know, if you find that you're spending all of your time reading cases but you don't really understand them and you can't follow class because you're not retaining information, well, that's a red flag and that's probably going to cause issues on the exam at the end of the semester.

Alison Monahan: Right, and one thing that sometimes people see is that if you have your laptop in class, it's harder to pay attention.
So, you know, maybe something as simple as switching from taking notes on a laptop to taking notes by hand could actually improve your grades.

Lee Burgess: For sure, especially if you are someone who struggles with any sort of attention issues. So, not only students who, You know, may have ADHD or things like that. But if you are one of those people who is easily distracted, please, please, please put the computer away. I see really amazing results from students going back to the old school handwriting, of class notes because it forces them to stay focused and present in class.

Alison Monahan: Yeah and also just parse the information rather than just transcribing it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: If you look back at your class notes from your first year of school, And you have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of pages of class notes that basically are just transcribing the lecture and you're not happy with your grades, well, maybe that's because you shouldn't be writing that much.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I was totally guilty of that. Were you?

Alison Monahan: No, because I'm too lazy to type that much. But there was, there was a girl beside of me. Who literally, it drove me absolutely bonkers. She transcribed every word that was said in class, and all she did was type. And I had, like, unfortunately had the seat next to her in this one class, and it drove me completely insane.

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Lee Burgess: Yeah, I could see how that would drive you insane. I don't think I did every single word, but I definitely, especially my first year, took way too many notes in class. That's a lot of stuff that I didn't need to write down.

Alison Monahan: I should have just not had my laptop at all.

Lee Burgess: Yeah.

Alison Monahan: And I would have been happier sort of doodling in the margins.
But no, I found myself frankly staring off into space a lot of times instead of typing.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So then some other things that you need to focus on working on are setting aside time for deep thinking tasks. You know, we've talked about this in the past. It's likely that you aren't doing enough, you know, of the hard tasks like reviewing the law, synthesizing it into outlines, and then we'll talk a little bit more about practice in a minute.
But these deep thinking tasks that which take time, which are not easy to do because you're not getting to check a box that's just getting done, they really can make a huge difference when it comes to exam time.

Alison Monahan: Well, and starting them early, right? You know, typically if you are not happy with your exams, Your exam grades and your below the mean.
Odds are you procrastinated and you did not finish certain tasks that you wanted to finish before you got to the test.

Lee Burgess: So Alison, how quickly should a 2L have time blocked out on their schedule for these deep thinking tasks of outlining and doing practice questions?

Alison Monahan: I mean, I would say in the first three to four weeks.
I mean, at that point, you've covered the first set of topics probably in most of the classes that you're taking. I mean, you know what a sort of topic looks like at this point. There's no reason within a month that you can't be. starting to consolidate your knowledge because you know, I mean you've been, like we said, like you've been through this before, you know that you're not going to come back to the material that you worked on in week two.

Lee Burgess: Exactly and you know this leads to you doing more practice which is another key activity to cleaning up your grades. Most 2L's that we talk to who are not happy with what happened for them First year, they didn't do enough practice exams or hypotheticals throughout the semester, and they didn't get any feedback on

those.
So, you know, writing out all the hypos given to you by your professor working through hypos and supplements, especially a supplement like examples and explanations. Using past exams you can parse out individual issues sometimes on a given exam so you can. You know, pull it apart and take different parts of it. Or even making up your own hypos can be a great way to give yourself additional practice.

Alison Monahan: But once, right. One thing too, one thing that can be super helpful is you're not starting from scratch. You know, you have a body of material where I'm guessing if you look at very carefully your own answers, or if you have someone else help you and look at them with you.
You're probably going to be able to identify patterns that you have that are pretty easy to correct. You know, so for example, if you're unhappy with your grades and somebody looks at your test, they're probably going to see your professor might have told you like, oh, you've been too conclusory. And you're probably going to see that if you actually go carefully through your own answers.

But that's something that can be fixed fairly easily because, you know, to draw a conclusion too quickly, well, if you add something like, "because" and then give a reason, you're not conclusory anymore.

Lee Burgess: Right, and actually that word conclusory is always thrown around by law professors, and so you really need to understand what that means.
And that means you don't have enough analysis, you're not arguing the facts, and, and arguing their relationship to the law, and you're not arguing both sides when appropriate. That's what that means. So you're basically saying, you know, x means y, and that's it.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I mean the reality is like there's probably some place on at least one of your exams where you were not conclusory, where you did a good job with the analysis, and if someone can help you or if you can find this on your own and really point it out and say, oh, this is what you need to be doing.

Lee Burgess: Mm hmm.

Alison Monahan: That's an example where looking for the positive can actually really help. Because it's going to help you see that you are able to do this. You just need to do more of it.

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Lee Burgess: Absolutely. And I think once you're doing this practice, you really want to reach out to your professors and try and meet with them to get as much feedback as you can.
But also go reach out and see if your school has an academic support office. Oftentimes they are really helpful for 2Ls and 3Ls because there will be professors or graduates or law students you can meet with to work on your writing. And sometimes they even have other practice hypos or questions from professors that you may not even know exist.
So it's good to go ask for help. If you are truly on academic probation, if you are in the danger zone of either not being invited to come back. or you have academic restrictions, you really need to utilize every single resource you have on campus to make sure that you're getting the feedback you need so your grades get pulled up.
And that means if you are taking a class that you have to take, that you're really going all in for that. If you have resources like academic support, you need to go meet with them and And get as much advice from them as possible and go to your professors because you don't want to go through half of your law school career and then not get the grades to continue on.

Alison Monahan: Right. And I mean also looming at the end of this experience, of course, is the bar exam. Ah, yes. So All of these skills that you are improving when you go and work on them with your academic support office, or your legal writing professors, or whoever it is, these are skills that you're going to need to pass the bar.

Lee Burgess: For sure. I mean, I can't tell you how many people I work with with the bar exam who will say, Oh, if I only had these writing skills when I was in law school, my grades would have been totally different. So do not wait. Don't wait. Do it now.

Alison Monahan: Do it now.

Lee Burgess: Don't wait until you haven't passed the bar to work on your exam writing skills.

Alison Monahan: Right, I mean, I think this is, none of this is rocket science. It's a process, and sometimes it takes people longer to get into the flow of that process, or they don't understand it, it's never been explained to them, they don't really know what they're doing, and yeah, I mean, you go through three years of law school, you never quite figure it out, you take the bar, you fail the bar, I mean, this is not a good scenario to be in, so it's one of those things that the sooner you get a

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handle on it, Your grades will probably improve, but also everything else will as well.

Lee Burgess: For sure. You know, I the best way to make space for all of this extra work because right now you might be saying like, greatly, Allison, that all sounds great, but I am working like crazy. I do not have time to do stuff like this. It goes back to time management and really, you know, parsing out the time that you have to do.
Both the tasks you need to do to stay afloat like reading and preparing for class But also to do the outlining and practice because without good time management and life management skills You're just not gonna have the opportunity to raise your scores. I mean 2L year is not easy It's often incredibly busy.
The saying is first year they scare you to death second year They bore you to I'm sorry second year they work you to death and third year they bore you to death second year is a lot of work.

Alison Monahan: Definitely It's crazy

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you need to be on top of your game especially if you're trying to raise your grades.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think that means being realistic about the outside commitments you take on. You know, if you're on a journal, being realistic about what your commitment to that can and should look like. I mean, you know, it's sort of like having a boss. The editor of your law journal will certainly take as much time as you're willing to give them, but at some point, you know, you have to be realistic about that and say, look, you know, I can't devote eight hours on a Tuesday to doing site checking.
That's just not realistic.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And be smart about the classes you're going to sign up for. I mean, I think often, I'll hear from 2Ls and 3Ls that have been struggling that they think they need to take an overload of coursework to try and raise their GPA, and typically-

Alison Monahan: Sounds like a horrible idea.

Lee Burgess: It's a terrible idea.
You are much better off to take a few less units and do really well in them than

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to load your semester so much that you don't have time to adequately study for everything.

Alison Monahan: Right. And the other thing to keep in mind, too, is, you know, if you can add in one class or maybe even two classes in a semester that don't have final exams, that have a paper requirement, that can open up a ton of time to study for your finals.
I mean, granted, you have to write the papers, which, once I accidentally signed up for three classes that had papers, that was a bad idea.

Lee Burgess: That's bad.

Alison Monahan: And also one of the papers was twice as long as I thought it was.

Lee Burgess: Oh, ouch.

Alison Monahan: I had somehow miscalculated the page to word ratio and it was like single space instead of double space.
It was a nightmare. I'm like writing and writing and writing and I'm thinking, God, is this paper ever going to be finished? And then I realized it was, the requirement was twice as what I thought it was. Well, I mean. I would still say that was better than taking like another, you know, Fed courts final.

Lee Burgess: Right. And I definitely made the mistake my first semester of my second year of taking con law and evidence together for no good reason. I had no good reason to do this, but constitutional law was a four unit class, evidence was a four unit class, and I was doing on campus interviewing, and I was on the law review, and I just had way too much stuff going on, and one of my grades, In that semester did really suffer because I could not keep up with the workload and I just did it because I thought, well, I'm doing really well like I can take this on.
Bad idea. Like be realistic about how much time you have because taking these large, you know, unit classes that are challenging subjects, evidence, if you haven't heard, it's kind of challenging, you need to be able to dedicate some serious time to it. It's not going to come out well.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, well, anyway, that goes to the, like planning your schedule.
I mean, for me, I took evidence my last semester because it's tested heavily on the bar exam. And I thought, well, you know, I want to be fresh for the bar. So I put evidence off until my third or my third year last semester. I can't even tell you what I took the first semester of my second year. Like, you're just so busy.

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Yeah, flying all over the place for interviews and doing law review stuff and like, I mean, I literally don't even know what classes I took that semester.

Lee Burgess: And I think people also get really freaked out that they have to take all these bar electives as soon as possible. And I think, Alison makes a really good point, you can push some of these bar electives till the end.
I mean, you're kind of burned out your last semester, so you may not want to save all of your bar electives till the end. But Some classes like evidence, there's no reason why you shouldn't take it right before you study for the bar because it's a heavily tested area of the law in the bar exam and it's going to be fresh in your mind and it's going to be a subject you don't have to go back and relearn come bar exam time.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think pushing like certain, you know, certain topics, certain hard classes to your third year. It'd be a great idea. You know, for me, like I took fed courts, my third year, for example, and was a really tough professor. And I did it on purpose cause like I don't want to be dealing with this my second year.
In my second year, I think I took a clinic which like filled half my schedule. It was awesome. I mean, in terms of raising your grades, things like clinics can be really good because most small classes are not actually graded on a curve. This is something sometimes people don't realize, but almost every school I've ever heard about, there's a certain size of class that is not on a curve. So, you know, if you take a class, a seminar with five other people, it's possible all of you might get an A. Yeah, that's awesome. Yeah, you know, as opposed to sitting through like corporations or something, which is going to be on a really strict curve.

Lee Burgess: Oh, I took court. I took federal courts my last semester too. Boy, was that a challenge. And everyone who took the class was either, except a handful of people, was either on the Law Review Board as a 3L or was like a superstar 2L.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, that's how this class was. Yeah, it was actually quite funny because the professor, for whatever reason, basically hated all the 2Ls who were like sucking up to him.
And it was like the entire like 2L Law Review staff like thought they were gonna get these great recommendations by taking this class. And he just made fun of them the entire time.

Lee Burgess: That's pretty funny. But I think, yeah. The other thing about being a 2L and a 3L is you get to take some classes you might enjoy and if you're struggling in law school and you're feeling a little defeated, taking some electives can be really

great to boost your mood.
I mean, Alison, what were some of your favorite electives you took in law school?

Alison Monahan: I actually took two different family law courses, one of them was like the, you know, intro to family law, which was kind of fun and interesting. It was all about like, you know, can a kid have like three mothers in California?
And you know, it's like, this is not like the hardest class you'd ever take, but it was interesting and I liked it. And then I actually took a seminar called Federalism and the Family in my last semester which I had signed up for, like, Wills and Trust or something practical at the same time, and then I was like, you know, I think I'd rather go to this one, but yeah, it was really interesting.
I actually, it's possible to, I don't know if you get, depending on the school, you might, it might not impact your GPA directly, but it's a good way to have some fun. You can take classes outside of law school a lot of places, so I, I had a previous degree in architecture. And one of the leading architectural theorists in the world teaches at Columbia.
And you know, I'd read this guy's book in architecture school and everyone like worshiped him and he was like, oh, he's so amazing. So I went and took a class from him and it was fantastic.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. Yeah, I had a lot of fun in my electives. My favorite elective was called bioethics and it was pretty much, we called it death, dying and childbirth, but it was, it was a kind of advanced constitutional law seminar all about, you know. The Right to Die, and issues around conception and fertility, and we had all these amazing speakers talk about, you know, really, really timely constitutional issues. And we even had practitioners come. We had a fertility doctor who leads one of the largest fertility clinics here in, San Francisco come and talk about some of the legal issues they struggle with and, you know, things that they think the law hasn't really dealt with yet and that's upcoming.
It was fascinating and it was so much fun to see you know, some of this constitutional theory that we had worked on in our Con Law classes be very current and to have people who are out there You know, practicing medicine, be able to come to our class and say, we don't actually know what we're doing. We are making it up as we go.
So there are a lot of unanswered questions out there and, it was fascinating and it really gave a face to a lot of the legal stuff that you talk about in class. It was. It was a phenomenal professor. It was 9 a. m. on a Friday morning, so you really had to want it bad, but it was, it was a ton of fun.

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And so getting to take classes from amazing professors that really excite you is a great thing to do as a 2L and 3L because it can really reinvigorate you for law school.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and sometimes, too, it's good to look at visiting professors. Like, I took a really fantastic course in refugee law and policy with a woman who had been teaching at Berkeley, and she, I think, I don't know if she'd been a judge or she, like, she, you know, all of her, it was just, like, she, you know, she, she was, like, in it.
She was out there practicing. She was teaching. She was doing all this stuff. A bunch of her former students were immigration judges or, you know, sort of administrative level. So, yeah. And yeah, it was just a very different vibe. It was like a different energy from the people that, you know, you'd sort of had class with and like heard about and whatever.
So bringing in, and sometimes a lot of schools will sort of bring in professors that they're considering hiring as visiting professors. And so you can kind of get, like, the fresh, current, like, hip version of the law and not, like, The guy who's like, you know, one foot in the grave and has been teaching the same con law lecture for 87 years or whatever.

Lee Burgess: For sure. I had a couple of those professors. It was pretty painful.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, yeah, I mean at some points, just the point is you get to pick at this point. The other thing too is if you go to a class and you hate the professor on the first day just take a different one.

Lee Burgess: For sure. Or, if things just really aren't working out, if you're overextended, consider dropping a class.
You know, it may be better than not doing well in that class in the end,

Alison Monahan: Right, and you might be able to pick up, you know, like independent study paper or something for a couple of units Or you know if you're gonna be a TA or like a research assistant You can pick up some, it might not help your grade, but you can at least sort of pad your schedule so that you can really focus on the classes that you need to focus on.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, you could even get credit at my school for doing an advocacy competition. I think you got a, an ungraded credit that a lot of people did so they could, you know, maybe take one less classroom unit, got the credits. Sometimes if they did

well, it looks great on your resume, but it didn't, you know, add to their final exam stress.

Alison Monahan: Right, and things like moot court and whatever can be fun if that's something you're into. I mean, if you're not into it, don't do it. It will be very stressful, but if that's something you find enjoyable, then by all means. And the same thing with clinics, you know, a clinic is a great way to, you know, To make some connections, get some experience, but also frankly to pad your GPA.

Lee Burgess: Yep. The thing is, if you're excited about what you're doing in school and you actually enjoy some of your classes because now you have a freedom to pick, you're going to do better. So don't just sign up for being miserable just because you want to raise your GPA. I think if you figure out how to enjoy the law school experience and be engaged with what you're learning, your scores are generally going to go up with that increased engagement.

Alison Monahan: Right, and I think, too, people have to get serious about, you know, sometimes people feel like they have to take a certain class. Like, you know, you have to take corporations, you have to take admin, or you have to take this, you have to take that. And, like, if your approach, I mean, some of these, like, you probably should take, you know, like, evidence, for example.
Like, you probably ought to take evidence. Yeah. But, you know, if you have your entire schedule with these, like, Sort of carrot, broccoli classes. You're not gonna be happy. You know, mix them up with something that actually makes you enthusiastic to go to it.

Lee Burgess: What, is there a class that you wish you had taken in law school that you didn't?

Alison Monahan: You know, I probably would have been useful if I'd taken some basic like IP classes since I ended up being a patent litigator and I had never taken a single IP course. But that just goes to show you, it's really not necessary.

Lee Burgess: That's very true, that's very true.

Alison Monahan: I don't know, how about you?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, sometimes. Now that we own our own business, I wish I had taken some sort of a tax class or an accounting for lawyers or some kind of practical classes like that. Or maybe that I had paid a little more attention in my corporations class.

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Alison Monahan: I mean, corporations frankly didn't teach you how to do anything about, I mean, I could tell you if you want to like sue each other in Delaware, you know, how to do that.
But Yeah, for me, I like some sort of, like, negotiation or, like, trial advocacy might have been interesting. People who took negotiation classes seemed to really like them, and I think that's something that would actually be a useful skill set.

Lee Burgess: That's true. I did take an alternative dispute resolution class, which was interesting.
It kind of gave us an overview of the different types of ADR, which, and it was taught by an adjunct, so it was interesting.

Alison Monahan: I think I'm thinking about something where you like really dig in and do it.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And we did it. It was, they were, it was just, you did kind of the different types of, but yes, we had the role play.
I mean, it was interesting, you know, and different classes dive into it, at different levels. But again, you know, just remember, this is your one shot at school. This is probably the last school you're ever going to go to. So take some stuff that you find actually interesting.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, some friends of mine actually took a class in the business school, which I later, I found out about too late but it was sort of like, what do you want to do with your life?
And, you know, they said, hands down, it was the best thing they did in law school.

Lee Burgess: Oh, that sounds like a great class. Why don't law schools teach more of those classes?

Alison Monahan: Yes. Exactly. Yeah, why not?

Lee Burgess: Hey, law schools, if you're listening, here's a new idea for coursework.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, but it might be worth looking at the business school because they do a lot of interesting stuff on sort of like, you know, managing yourself and becoming a more effective person because that's what they teach that isn't taught in law schools but would be very helpful.

Lee Burgess: For sure.

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Alison Monahan: Probably fun and just like a whole new mix of people.

Lee Burgess: It's true. Like sometimes by the end of your second or third year, you're a little tired of the same folks that you see around campus all the time.

Alison Monahan: It's just like, it's just a different energy. And I think it points out, you know, that like the way law school is done isn't like beyond and all, which can be good for getting perspective on your law school classes.

Lee Burgess: For sure. Now what about the 3Ls who might be listening to this podcast? You know, I think oftentimes the 3L, if they haven't been happy with their grades or even if they've tried to bring up their grades and they were unsuccessful, they can really just say like, well, I guess this is it. You know, I'm just going to be at the bottom of my class.

Alison Monahan: Someone said to me the other day, I'm just a B law student.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, so that's not a growth mindset. That's not, you know, thinking, you know, how to excel and be your best. But sure, I mean, it's hard to raise your GPA the last year because you just don't have that many units left. But, as we kind of already mentioned, the bar exam is looming.
And whatever is causing those problems with your grades in school is not going to go away. It's going to pop up on the bar exam, especially if you're taking a competitive bar exam like California or New York.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, absolutely. And I think, you know, one of the things that people can really do their third year, and it's not just the bar exam, it's also your legal career. Right. Is to really work on your writing. You know, take an advanced legal writing class so that, you know, you're getting that personal feedback because legal writing classes, you know, tend to be more one on one. Even if, you know, it's good practice, but also getting that feedback because, you know, these are skills that you need in the workplace, too.

Lee Burgess: For sure, and in the end, you do want to have good research and writing skills to be able to go out, practice law, be licensed, and it's your last chance to really learn from your law school environment. You know, not all law professors might be your favorite people, but some of them are very smart and can really be great teachers for you and to really help you feel more confident as you go into practice.

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Alison Monahan: And the other thing you can do as a 3L is really get outside of the law school and do an externship of some type where you're getting on the job experience because A, you're going to make connections that if your grades are not great, you're going to need in order to have a job and B, it's going to give you that confidence and give you those skills to really perform when you do pass the bar and start working as a lawyer.

Lee Burgess: For sure. And, you know, oftentimes I think people feel like that they are. Just really in a bad spot because maybe they don't have a job after graduation and that grades don't really matter and these skills don't matter, but if you don't pass the bar, people will not hire you.

Alison Monahan: And if you don't pass the bar and people don't, I mean, even if you pass the bar, maybe no one hires you, but at least you can like go out and become a lawyer. You can hang a shingle, like you have that option. Until you pass the bar exam, all of this is for naught.

Lee Burgess: Yes, so true. So this all kind of comes back to this idea. about Mindset, which we've talked about in an earlier podcast. If you have not listened to that podcast and you're listening to this one, please go back and listen to it because it is very important as it relates to challenging yourself to really excel academically. Disappointing grades can be so frustrating and if you come at it from this fixed mindset, you can just convince yourself that you aren't smart enough and there is no way that things are ever going to get better. But if you come at it from a growth mindset, you can accept the challenge to your very best.
Just be vulnerable. Really study your hardest and put yourself out there and that's where success happens. So you might have to check in with yourself on your mindset throughout the semester because at times, especially if you're coming back from disappointing grades, it's going to be hard. You're going to find yourself slipping into that fixed mindset and getting kind of down in the dumps about it.
And it's important to remember that mindset is a choice and you can consistently change your mindset. So check in with yourself and say, am I in this fixed place or am I going to choose this This growth mindset and really take on this challenge and that's going to, you know, really help you find success.
So it's such an important concept and it makes such a huge difference doing all of these activities you talked about, you know, doing the practice, changing your study schedules, asking for help your, from your professors, your mindset plays into whether or not that's really going to have an effect on the outcome.

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Alison Monahan: Yeah. Because basically. What happened has happened and now what matters is how are you going to respond to it and you have a choice about how you respond.

Lee Burgess: Exactly, exactly.

Alison Monahan: So we would encourage you to have, yeah, choose the growth mindset, get in there, figure out what the problems were, make the corrections you need, and it's really going to pay dividends in the future.

Lee Burgess: Exactly. But with that, unfortunately, we are out of time. If you enjoyed this episode of the Law School Toolbox, please take a second to leave a review and a ratings 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 or Alison at Lee, L E E, @LawSchoolToolbox.com or Alison, A L I S O N, @LawSchoolToolbox.com. And you can always contact us via our website contact form at lawschooltoolbox.com. Thanks for listening and we'll talk to you soon. Good luck with your 2L and 3L years.