



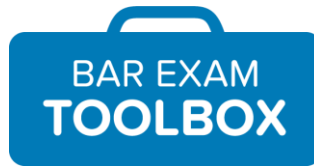
Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today, we are talking about the coronavirus and what that might mean for the bar exam, and how we don't know much, but we'll share what we know. Your Bar Exam Toolbox hosts are Alison Monahan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the bar exam experience so you can study effectively, stay sane, and hopefully pass and move on with your life. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career related website [CareerDicta](#). Alison also runs [The Girl's Guide to Law School](#). If you enjoy the show, please leave a review on your favorite listening app, and check out our sister podcast, the [Law School Toolbox podcast](#). If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form](#) on BarExamToolbox.com, and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Alison Monahan: Welcome back to the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast. Today, we're talking about how the coronavirus might impact your bar study. And let's admit, first up, we really have no idea what the impact might be.

Lee Burgess: Nope.

Alison Monahan: No, we don't know. As of today, which is Wednesday, March 18th, the National Council of Bar Examiners, which is the group that makes parts of the exam, they're saying that they're monitoring the situation, they have no plans to cancel or postpone the July exam, and they don't anticipate that February's results are going to be delayed, at least for the MBE, which is the part they grade. The thing you have to keep in mind here is, each state does this a little bit differently. So, they're saying from the federal perspective, "We don't think that there are any immediate plans to do much, but we don't really know what the states are going to do, and we also just don't know what we're going to do."

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I mean, it's not a great time to be wondering about what's going to happen, because there are so many unknowns. I think that there's a high likelihood that the July exam will be changed in some way. They're going to have to come up with... Unless science magically comes up with a way for us to cope with this, and I am just sending all the love to all the scientists that are working on this problem. The idea that people will be in a room with thousands of people taking an exam does feel unlikely right at this moment. But that doesn't mean that the bar exam won't go forward in some form, whether it's with social distancing recommendations, or more testing sites, or a more online format, or a staggered... I mean, who knows? There are so many different options. The GRE does testing in a totally different way. I would be shocked if it was canceled, because I think that so many people rely on the exam to work and to get jobs, and people are still going to be graduating from law school. But every



day I am shocked at something else that's happening. So, it's not outside the realm of possibility.

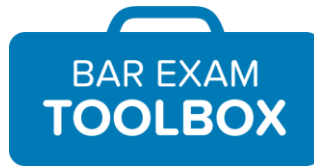
Alison Monahan: I'm pretty shocked to be literally sheltering in place inside of my apartment in San Francisco right now. Yeah, I was thinking about this, like, what do I think the likelihood of this exam going forward in July is as scheduled? I cannot put a number on that. I was thinking, what could you do? Do you basically rent out a hotel and just have five people in a room together? Or do you move it to a school? There are high schools that have thousands of students. They could just put 10 people in a room. There are things that when you really get down to it, you can start thinking about ways that this might be able to go forward. I do not see people sitting in a giant conference room, a conference center or whatever. That seems pretty unlikely. But I think our advice right now is, assume that this is going to happen in some format or another and make your plans accordingly.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think that the mistake that a lot of people might make is assume that this isn't going to happen. And then it does, and they're not prepared for it. Sometimes in a crisis, investing in yourself or a good project can be a coping mechanism.

Alison Monahan: Right. You're going to have some time on your hands.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, it might be nice to be able to continue to chip away at a goal, given the current state of affairs. I think for now, my guess as of today, is that the exam will move forward somehow. I just don't know what that will be. With the fact that it's only offered a couple of times a year, I would be shocked if it wasn't offered at all. But again, I've been shocked by a lot of things in the last week or two. You can take that with a grain of salt, but that's how I feel right now, today. I mean, I've had students be texting me and emailing me and I'm just like, "Keep studying for now because with the information that we have right now, I think that's all you can keep doing."

Alison Monahan: Right. And the National Conference of Bar Examiners actually has a [website page](#) they have set up, where if you want to monitor the situation, they have their most recent updates. And so, we can link to that. We actually have someone on our team who's just going to monitor that every couple of days, so if there are any major announcements we can tell you. Whether you are already preparing because you're working and studying and you needed some extra time, or you're a 3L, I think you are completely right that you have to assume this is happening. Luckily, most bar prep courses now are already virtual. So, you don't have that aspect to really worry about. They've already gone totally online. If not, you probably want to switch to one that is, so that you know that



you are going to be able to prepare on your own. So, that's at least an upside. You're not having to go through the thing that law schools are going through, of trying to make everything virtual. This is already a virtual space.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think what's going to be interesting is for the law schools who provide a lot of resources for their students, supporting them through the bar exam is how they're going to try and switch to more virtual support. So one thing you may not be able to rely on is exactly for your school to be able to support you in the exact same way that they have been supporting classes ahead of you. That is one place where you might start thinking outside the box and really asking yourself what you need, because if you are somebody who needs face time with somebody, or you were planning on meeting with a professor and that may not be possible, that's where I think options like tutoring or getting creative about how you're going to support yourself in that way become more realistic, because maybe that one-on-one connection is one of the things you need to learn and you need to make sure that that's secured for yourself, which can happen still in these very uncertain times. We just have to think ahead and get all those ducks in a row.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And I think people are going to want to think carefully about how and where they can really prepare, particularly if they have children who are now out of school indefinitely. I know, Lee, you've been dealing with this. It's not that easy to get stuff done when your kids are around.

Lee Burgess: No, it's really not. I love my children, but yeah, it's not conducive to focus and work. I'm currently hiding in a bedroom recording this podcast on a bed. That's where I am right now, because it's a challenge.

Alison Monahan: Yeah. And if this is going to be your reality, you might need to think, "Should I start studying earlier? Should I start studying now?" You can. I would argue you probably should if that's going to be your reality. You can do things like the performance tests that don't really require you to memorize law, and get really familiar with that and be really comfortable with that, so that you're not trying to also cram that in on top of everything else. But you want to think really carefully about what your options are and just how are you going to make this work? And it's probably not going to look like what you thought it was going to look like a month ago.

Lee Burgess: No, I think that performance tests are a great option. I think tools like [AdaptiBar](#), who are already giving people access for the July exam, you can start working on multiple choice questions. That's all done remotely. We have our [Writing of the Week programs](#) that we offer, where we explain the law to you. That's another



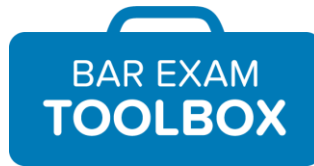
way that you can start studying and getting familiar with things without having to really know all of the law. I think that getting yourself familiar, especially if you find yourself with a lot of time on your hands because you're home alone or with one other person maybe can be great. And looking at these on-demand options if you do have children at home or you're finding yourself needing to study or work in the evenings or at kind of odd times, you really want to kind of collect the most flexible resources you can get, so you can do that on demand.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think looking really at all of the options is probably a good idea here. Even things you might not have considered a few weeks ago might seem like they're making more sense in this world that's basically just kind of in flux.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The other thing that is interesting about considering tutoring options or things that are not necessarily the typical bar program is one-on-one programs. What we do is we can create study schedules for you based on what's going on in your life. We can meet with you at night or on weekends when it may be more plausible, given your childcare situation. There are lots of different things that can happen. So if somebody really is in a panic mode that the way their life is looking for the foreseeable future doesn't allow them or give them space to work on these goals – one, that's totally okay. If you decide that you need to postpone, I think that that's reasonable. I think we'll talk about that in a few minutes. But if you want to try and make this work, there are maybe more options than you've considered to make it work.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that's right. I think this is the time to just sort of, assuming it's going to happen, figure out maybe what might work for you. For people who are already preparing, I think it's basically the same advice, except it's even more heightened because you already had a plan and now that plan is kind of up in the air and you might need to be evaluating like, "Should I even try to prepare for July? Does it make sense for me just to wait until there's more certainty, given my scenario?" I don't know. What are your thoughts around that?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think it's such an individual decision. I really think that this piece for a lot of studiers, especially who are repeat takers – yes, maybe you're working from home, but if your kids are at home and you do not have childcare, this is going to be really hard to do. So many people count on schools as their childcare, and in the state of California, they're saying that schools will likely not go back for the rest of the school year. So, you're looking until September until you may have school options again, and that's going to be rough. So, I think you've got to really talk to your friends and family members that are in your close circle and decide what is reasonable, because it's possible that even if things do get a bit better – they are looking pretty bleak right now – but if they do get a bit better,



life is not going to return to normal and we've got to come up with ways to deal. That may mean on one hand, adjusting the expectations of what you can pull off, but on the other hand, maybe this is a time that you want to buckle down and try and get this done. It's just hard to know. I think you have to really evaluate the situation based on your own individual needs and wants and desires, and things may change. The problem is, we as lawyers are not very nimble creatures. We're complainers, most of us are control freaks.

Alison Monahan: Very risk averse.

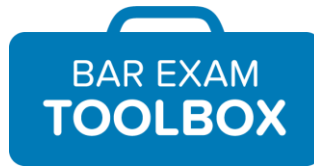
Lee Burgess: We're not nimble as a personality structure. We're very risk averse, and we're worst case scenario people. Even before we did this podcast, Alison and I were checking in with each other. We joked we should not go down the worst case scenario rabbit hole before trying to do these podcasts, because that probably wasn't a good exercise to do. So, this is hard for all of us, but you've got to try and be flexible, and maybe you have people in your life who do think more flexibly. Is flexibly even a word? Who are more flexible than you are.

Alison Monahan: Yes, more flexibly.

Lee Burgess: Flexibly. And get some thoughts on how this could work, because everybody's got to get creative.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, and I think, like you said, it's a very individualized decision. For someone who is young and single and thought they were going to be studying for the bar – hey, this might be just the right time for you. You're going to be stuck at home, you can't go out, you've got nothing to do. But if you're in a more complicated scenario where maybe you have a partner and both of you are trying to work from home, and you've got kids – maybe this is not the right time, and that is totally okay.

Lee Burgess: That is totally okay. Ten years from now, 15 years from now, if you delay the bar exam by one cycle because of these extreme circumstances, nobody is going to question the choices that you made. Nobody's going to question them in two years even. But someday this is not going to come up. It might come up as one of the weirdest times of your life, but it's not going to come up as a blip on your career path. I think something that people need to consider is finances. Everybody's finances are feeling very influx right now. A lot of people are losing horrendous amounts of money. Some people are losing jobs and incomes. So you also might need to decide that maybe you need to go make money right now to help support your family. And again, that's okay. The bar will be there waiting for you. You've got to just evaluate your own situation.

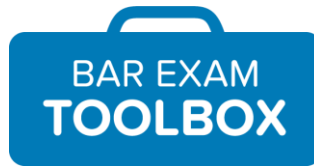


Alison Monahan: I think for people who have already started preparing and did have a plan, I think you have the choice, a) to just say, "Okay, I'm going to try to stick with the plan", b) to say, "Alright, I can see now this is not going to work. I'm just going to decide to postpone and figure that out." Or I think people can also kind of give it a shot, see how it goes. And the plan then really becomes, "At what point am I going to evaluate my progress?" This can be at various specific points. So I don't think anyone in the next week or two should really try to make themselves do that much for their bar prep. It's just not probably that likely. So I don't think you should necessarily make a decision if in two weeks you don't feel like you're making progress. But at some point if you're a month from now and you're still not making any progress, you need to have kind of guidelines and plans for when you're going to decide and what your criteria are, so that you don't end up in that scenario where it's like, "Well, maybe I'll get it together and maybe I won't." You need to make a firm decision at some point and just move on.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. The reality is, right now it's March, and the "typical bar season" starts kind of in mid-May. That's when most people graduate, start studying full-time. I would hope at this point we have solid answers by mid-May. So, really I think we should know is the exam going forward? Is the format changing? Decisions will have to start being made, the individual states are going to have to start making decisions. So, the answers will come and we're going to stay on top of it. We will share the answers as we learn them. But I think that if you are in a situation where you're doing slow burn studying, or your 3L was planning to prep ahead of time, having a little grace and trying to continue to chip away at this problem, but knowing that you can set these deadlines for making decisions, because more information is going to come. We somewhat have to ride it out.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I agree with you. I hope by the time law schools start graduating and 3Ls are going to start studying, there's a much clearer idea of like, is this exam going forward and what format is it going forward? Because people need that information. Obviously, none of us have a crystal ball, but I'd hope two months from now we're going to have a lot clearer idea of like, in two months, is it going to be feasible to do this in person or not? Hopefully that information will be there.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, exactly. I think this is a time also to create community around this. So, let's say you're working and studying and you are just trying to do it on your own and this feels like an insurmountable task, thinking of other people that you may know who might be studying that you can check in with, even sharing study tips with each other or talking about coping mechanisms can be very



helpful. Sometimes extreme cases like this – although this is so unprecedented – but sometimes when life happens, people find it really puts things like the bar in perspective. And sometimes we have all been guilty of giving the bar too much power over us. It made it too anxiety inducing, it would have too much power. And maybe there's something out of this that can put that into perspective, that this is just a test. It is a very important test, but there are bigger issues at play here, like health and safety and caring for each other. So, maybe that is something that you can also focus on. But you also have to just practice self-care. We have a [meditation curriculum](#) that we include as part of our [tutoring programs](#), but this is a great time to practice yoga, to try to meditate. I've been trying to do that because I don't know what else to do. You have to kind of set these coping mechanisms up for yourself to try and hold it together, so you can focus. But if you can't focus, you need to be kind to yourself and just let it go for a little bit while we all adjust to what this new normal is.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think that is absolutely right. We're in the middle of the chaos and this is probably not the time for people to really be making huge decisions and things like that, or to expect too much from themselves. If you're getting through the day at this point, I think you're doing pretty well. So if you're not doing as many MBE practice questions as maybe you wanted to do, that's okay. It will still be there.

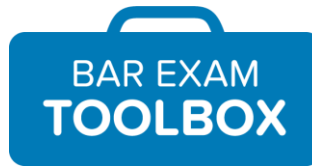
Lee Burgess: Yeah. I think the one thing is as the next few weeks unfold, if you are studying and preparing, be kind to yourself also in limiting distractions and actually try to get some work done if you're going to sit down and do it. So, that means putting the phone away, turning it on silent, turning off news alerts or other alerts. Even if it feels possible right now, turn it on airplane mode so you don't get messages for a little bit. If you are going to sit down and do work, I'd like you to get something from it, because I think that sometimes doing something productive can boost your mental health.

Alison Monahan: Oh, definitely.

Lee Burgess: But don't try and do it in a distracted way.

Alison Monahan: This morning the first thing I did when I got up was I fed my sourdough starter because I was just like, "Wow, I'm probably going to need this in the next few days." And it made me feel really accomplished.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. I think my sourdough starter might die.



Alison Monahan: Well, you know what? I can give you more of mine. Yeah, you can restart it. It'll be fine.

Lee Burgess: I'll just restart it.

Alison Monahan: Yeah, we can recreate that one. It's not a big deal.

Lee Burgess: It's not a big deal. Yeah, I thought about that today. I was like, "I'm pretty sure that one's going to die." So, it is important though to just try and maintain focus. One of the things I know I'm really struggling with is just fatigue – decision fatigue, information fatigue, holding space for other people fatigue. Even doing something like this podcast today is almost refreshing, because this is the only thing that I can be doing right now. I can't be looking at my phone, I can't be getting text messages from people, I can't be reading the news. And there's something very comforting about that. I think that's maybe a lesson we can try to let ourselves do one thing, whether it be something as simple as feeding our sourdough starters or... I watched the Roomba the other night for quite a while, and it was somewhat therapeutic, I don't know why.

Alison Monahan: Wait, that thing that goes around on the floor? The vacuum?

Lee Burgess: Yeah, the place I'm staying right now has a Roomba.

Alison Monahan: Oh wow, okay. Well, that's good. One of our bar tutors sent this thing around to everyone that's just literally like this [shape that just expands over and over](#) with some music for about 10 minutes. We can link to that, it might help. I'll be honest, I didn't have the patience to actually sit and watch that, but I recommend that other people do.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I know. Another tutor sent me a paint dripping or something like that, video. There's some stuff on the Internet to make you feel better. It's a good time for binge watching light shows. I know that that's something that's at least I've been talking to other team members about. It's like, "What's everybody watching on Netflix that's not super serious and will make me think of end of days?" So, I'm trying to watch more comedy and do things that are light. When you can kind of lighten the load and be done with your work, really taking time to connect with people, to embrace some mindless entertainment, to take care of life tasks that make you feel better. Practicing my new technique, which is when I want to check the news, I text a friend to stop me from looking at the news. I found that very helpful because it's made me feel better hearing the people I care about are doing okay. But then also to not read about whatever is the next thing that's come out.



Alison Monahan: Yeah, I think this media diet is probably the best. Like we said, the NCBE has a page where you can look for bar updates, we'll link to it. If anything major comes out, we will also post about it, we'll send an email. You can subscribe to our newsletter because you want to stay informed, but you don't want to obsess about this. Because the reality is, there's just not information right now and there's also nothing you can do about it. So, I think the reality is, I think right now just assume this exam is happening and figure out a way that you're going to prepare for it if you're going to prepare, or make the decision not to. Hopefully we'll have better information soon, and then you will have a better way to make that decision.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. And if questions are coming up for students, we are happy to read emails. We read all the emails that come in off of our contact page. So if you want us to talk about stuff, or this stuff is coming up for you or your friends as you're trying to make decisions or navigate this new landscape, you can send us emails and we'd be happy to answer those questions through the podcast or blog posts. We consider you all part of this community and we're all trying to support our own communities. So, we'll figure out how to get through this together.

Alison Monahan: That is true. Well, thank you guys for listening. If you enjoyed this episode of the Bar Exam Toolbox podcast, you can take a second to leave a review or rating on your favorite listening app. We would really appreciate it. And be sure to subscribe so you don't miss anything. If you have any questions or comments, like Lee said, please don't hesitate to reach out. You can reach us at lee@barexamtoolbox.com or alison@barexamtoolbox.com. Or you can always contact us via our website [contact form](#) at BarExamToolbox.com. Thanks for listening. We'll talk soon and we'll all keep our fingers crossed for information. Alright, bye!

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