

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Travels with Runyon: A Year of Global Business Library Meetings During the COVID-19 Pandemic

COREY SEEMAN

University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

cseeman@umich.edu



Figure 1. Runyon Relaxing in His Dad's Home Office (Ypsilanti, Michigan), October 26, 2021. Photo by Corey Seeman.

In 1960, author John Steinbeck embarked on a road trip across the United States with Charley, his standard poodle. Two years later, he published *Travels with Charley*, a travelog with the subtitle *In Search of America*. While there is question as to whether this is an accurate depiction of his explorations, it is clear that he was joined by his canine companion for the journey. So with this in mind, I have borrowed Steinbeck's title to reflect the travels that I "took" during the last year, always with my canine companion, Runyon.

I have served as the ABLD (Academic Business Library Directors) Chair from April 2021 through April 2022. In a normal year, I would have been invited to attend the meetings of our sister organizations of business library directors to share what was going on in North America. Sadly, during the COVID-19 Pandemic, travel was rare and participation was limited to Zoom meetings, sometimes during odd hours of the day. Still, as ABLD Chair, I was able to participate in the meetings from the European Business School Librarians' Group (EBSLG)

(<http://www.ebslg.org>), Asia-Pacific Business School Librarians' Group (APBSLG)

(<https://www.isb.edu/en/apbslg.html>), and CLADEA, the Latin American Council of Management Schools.

During these meetings, I shared what was happening in the United States and Canada while learning about the dynamics of the global pandemic on education in Europe, Asia and Latin America. And all the while, my trusted companion Runyon was able to attend with me.

In sharing information about what was happening in North America, my presentation (given to both the EBSLG and the APBSLG meetings) was titled "The Secret Lives of Pets (and Plants)." That was the theme that we used for our virtual 2021 meeting. It was a nod to the 2016 animated film called "The Secret Life of Pets" and paid homage to the role that our dogs and cats (and houseplants) played during our new worklife at home during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. This presentation focused on a variety of topics including:

- *Ticker: The Academic Business Librarianship Review* (<https://tickerreview.com>) moving to Michigan Publishing
- ABLD Zoomies - the element that we met repeatedly over the year via Zoom. These were social sessions (happy hours), meetings with vendors (Euromonitor, Refinitiv, EBSCO, etc.), and opportunities to commiserate.
- Retirements among the group, including: Alicia Estes (NYU); Bob Hebert (Wake Forest University); Meg Trauner (Duke); and Deb Wallace (Harvard)
- What worked and did not work during COVID-19
 - General issues - Most classes were either hybrid or entirely online; buildings reopened as early as Summer 2020 and as late as Spring 2021; many members did some work on site, but most remained remote; and reopening plans vary widely
 - What worked? - Online reference; vendor flexibility; and HathiTrust ETAS
 - What didn't? - Terminal Software (Bloomberg); access to print collection; and general uncertainty
- Top five things ABLD members are worried about the most were:
 - Budgets
 - Returning to "normal"
 - Staffing (very common for hiring freezes to be in place)
 - Organizational uncertainty
 - Flexible workforce and remote working

Special thanks to Greg Fleming (Chicago) for the Year in Review Reports that members submitted.

Finally, we shared survey results for what the library directors from ABLD were feeling during June 2021. While there was general concern about the budget, there seemed to be more confidence that the services would start to resemble pre-pandemic levels with the start of the 2021-2022 school year. There was also improvement in confidence in the overall future of the libraries at our institutions. (See Figure 1.)

While there was a joy in sharing the general mood and perceptions of the ABLD members, one of the real benefits was attending the international meetings and learning about current and future trends globally. The downside was naturally needing to wake up for a meeting that started at 3am Eastern Time in Michigan. Here are summaries of the sessions at the AGM2021 (the annual meeting of the EBSLG) and the APBSLG Annual meeting.

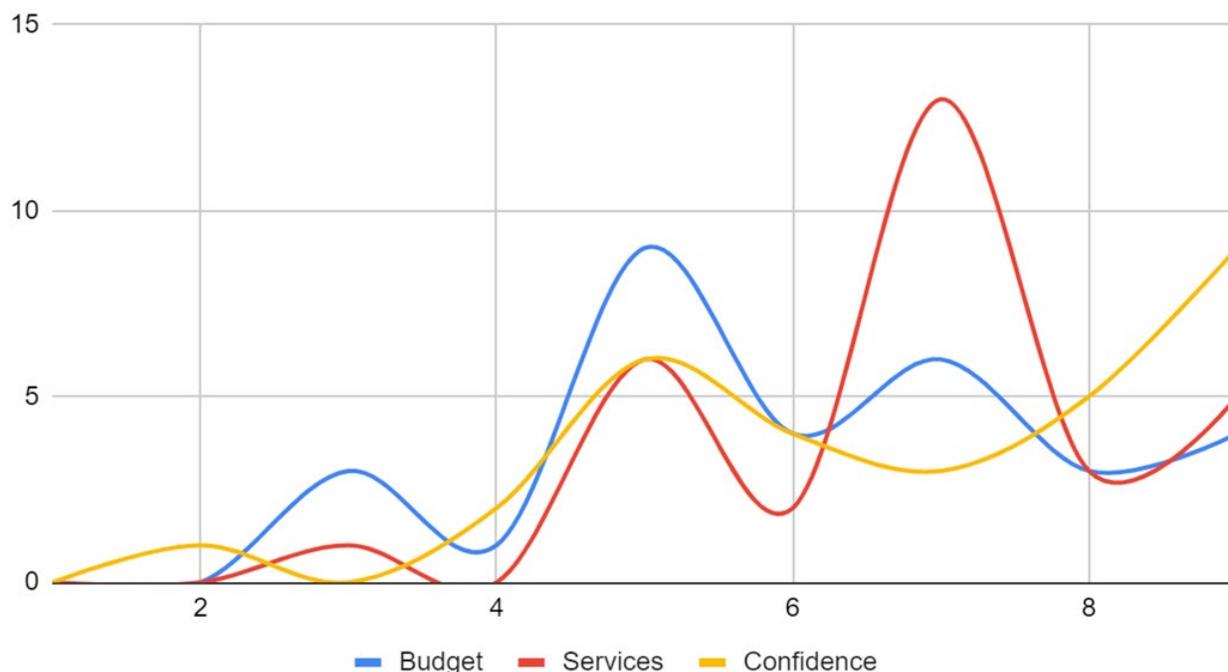


Figure 2. ABLD Directors Survey, June 2021 (n=30)

Notes.

- Questions were answered on a scale from 1 (worse) to 9 (best).
- Budget: How would you assess your budgetary situation for the upcoming fiscal year (FY22) – average 6.3.
- Services: In planning for the upcoming academic year, how close will your services and operations be to where you were in Fall 2019 (pre-pandemic?) – average 6.84.
- Confidence: In the upcoming year, how confident are you for the future of your library unit at your school? – average 6.94.

AGM2021 - EBSLG (June 7-9, 2022)

The European Business School Librarians' Group hosts an annual meeting known as the AGM. The EBSLG Chair was Nikolaus Berger, Director of the Library of the WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business). The AGM2021 host was Václav Šubrta, the director of the Centre of Information and Library Services at the Prague University of Economics and Business. The meeting featured participation and programs from librarians across Europe.

The keynote address was provided by Christian Lauersen, Director of Libraries and Citizen Services in Roskilde Municipality, Denmark. He is proud founder of Library Planet (<https://libraryplanet.net>), a crowdsourced travel guide to libraries of the world. He had moved from a long career in academic libraries to the public library sector four years ago. The focus of his talk was on libraries and communities and the role of place that a library provides. He viewed libraries as a social infrastructure --not only shared resources, but shared spaces. To that end, great spaces are able to meet the needs of people and organizations and are welcoming to everyone. In many regards, be it for a public or academic library, the space will connect individuals to the greater community in ways that people can clearly understand. For both audiences, libraries can combat loneliness and isolation among our populations. In particular, public libraries are places where

citizens experience togetherness--alone or with others--and where they experience that materials and facilities are a common property without financial barriers.

After the keynote address, there were a series of breakout sessions that were repeated so that attendees could visit with two of them.

The two sessions I attended were: "Plans for the Nearest Future: Choosing a Project for 2022" and "Making the Library More Visible to Teachers and Scientists." "Plans for the Nearest Future: Choosing a Project for 2022" was facilitated by Julia Muleva, Head of GSOM Library in St. Petersburg, Russia. The session focused on a student case competition that helped chart the future of the library and how they can adjust services to reflect the needs of the community that the library serves. The Future Library project focused on library space, communication with those they serve, open access issues, and innovation. One of the questions they raised regarded the future of the welcome desk at the library. Are people coming to the desk with questions? Who is approaching the desk during normal library hours? In exploring these questions, the library was able to establish a more hybrid service endeavor for their campus.

"Making the Library More Visible to Teachers and Scientists" was facilitated by Václav Šubrta, director of the Centre of Information and Library Services at the Prague University of Economics and Business. The presentation focused on the need to make the library more visible to teachers and scientists. In particular, Václav Šubrta shared the important consideration that the students are more likely to see the library as a valuable spot for study space and the faculty are more likely to only use the library to provide resources that they need for their research. This difference is important given that these are the two most important users of academic libraries.

The international groups then presented at the AGM. In addition to my presentation on the "Secret Lives of Pets (and Plants)," we heard from colleagues in Asia and Latin American. Yuhanis Yusoff, Head, Tanoto Research & Learning Hub for INSEAD, Asia Campus, shared information about the APBSLG. There was a large turnover of members, especially in India, where recent deaths changed the leadership at two of the biggest academic libraries, IIM Ahmedabad and the Indian School of Business. The challenges that they faced were similar to what all libraries were facing. Presenting for CLADEA was Liliana Luchi, Coordinadora Bibliotecas Austral, Universidad Austral. She shared numerous issues that they were facing. One of the biggest challenges was that numerous international publishers do not sell books directly in their region. Complicating matters was that many third parties do not work with libraries. So they were tasked with creatively figuring out how to supply resources on their campus. One element that will be forever changed due to the pandemic is the way that they meet. Given the large geographic range of CLADEA members, they will continue to meet electronically to make the meetings more affordable for member libraries.

The last presentation day featured a discussion of two German libraries and their experience with library management system (LMS) migrations. The first speaker was Bettina Kaldenberg from Mannheim University (Germany) on their experience migrating to the Alma integrated library system from Aleph. The presentation was reflective of all the changes that they experienced as a result of the migration five years earlier. She also addressed the issues associated with the functions of Alma during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the issues raised by the presentation was the poor documentation in German when they implemented in June 2015 and how rigid the process was. They adapted to the new system and the demands that it placed on the staff at the library.

Along the same lines, the next presenter was Uwe Boettcher who spoke about WHU – Otto Beisheim School of Management's (Vallendar, Germany) adoption of FOLIO, an open source library management system LMS. FOLIO received funding from EBSCO and they served as a partner during the initial launch of the product. The

initial code was published on GitHub back in 2016, and the early implementers went live in 2019. In 2021, WHU Library began their FOLIO implementation and migrated from Koha (another open source LMS). Uwe described FOLIO as "Lego style"--enabling you to build only as you need it. Additionally, it was relatively easy to connect with their existing EBSCO discovery layer. Given the strong role that the LMS plays in larger libraries, it was very interesting to see these presentations about how a large corporate product and an open access product would work in an academic setting.

The next program focused on data collection in libraries. The presentation was from Hana Landová, who is the Director of Library, Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague, Czechoslovakia. She also serves as a Chair of AKVS, the Association of Libraries of Czech Universities, and explored how that organization mandated a new system of data collection by member libraries starting in 2014. The AKVS sought to change and modernize the collection of statistics for libraries, first mandated by the Ministry of Education back in 1990. The AKVS shifted the scope of the statistics from one focused on physical items to one that also explored and counted electronic resources. They have built their tools to enable the data to be used for advocacy by the libraries and hope to partner at the international level eventually.

The day concluded with a series of brief talks on "What's New in EBSLG Libraries."

- Josep Soler (ESADE Business School, Barcelona, Spain) shared their work to create two zero-cost and high-impact actions during the pandemic. These include specialized guides for courses and chat with librarians within Microsoft Teams, neither of which were offered before the pandemic. This enabled them to remain visible to their community as they were all connected virtually.
- Zsuzsanna Nagy (Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary) shared work on creating and enhancing library training programs during the pandemic. This work included research support for faculty and academic writing courses for doctoral students.
- Gert Poulsen (Copenhagen Business School Library, Denmark) presented on academic honesty and plagiarism training and services that they have conducted at CBS. Since the librarians are not involved in the grading, they are viewed as a neutral party and can play a great role in preventing plagiarism. Currently, nearly 50% of the faculty suspect plagiarism for assignments that are submitted. They shared a great guide for this topic (<https://libguides.cbs.dk/c.php?g=684990>).
- Hal Kirkwood (Saïd Business School at Oxford, United Kingdom) presented on their Business Libraries Database Benchmarking Project. This ambitious project strives to create a way for libraries to benchmark different resources and different business libraries to see the landscape more clearly. One of the key problems is identifying differentiations among common names (such as ProQuest or EBSCO) that can have a variety of specific offerings. They are hoping to collaborate with international groups to get a global perspective.

The AGM2021 concluded with the Sport Challenge, where members took a selfie during some type of sport and shared it with the members.

CLADEA Annual Meeting of Directors of Information Centers (October 22, 2021)

The CLADEA 2021 meeting took place virtually as well and brought together business librarians from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries across the globe. CLADEA is unique in that the business librarians (Directors of the Information Centers) meet during the full meeting of members, so they are not a separate organization. They have been participating in CLADEA annual meetings since 2003.

The library program took place on October 22nd, 2021 and featured talks from a list of global speakers on this topic: "Gaps and Transcendence of Information in the Decision-Making of Business Schools." The presentation was a panel discussion on the path that libraries have taken to help business schools develop and grow. The presenters were:

- Nikolaus Berger, Library Director, University Library, WU Vienna University of Economics and Business (Vienna)
- Michael J. Hemment, Director, Product Development & Publishing, Knowledge and Library Services, Baker Library of Harvard Business School
- Thorsten Meyer, Chief Librarian, Leibniz Information Centre for Economics (ZBW)
- Beulah Muller, Associate Director: Info Central, Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria (South Africa)
- Rajen Munoo, Head, Learning and Engagement, SMU Libraries Singapore Management University
- Corey Seeman, Director, Kresge Library Services, Ross School of Business, University of Michigan.

While somewhat self-serving, I would like to focus on my presentation at the event: "Providing Clarity: Value of Information Centers in the Sustainability of Business Schools." The main theme of this talk was the role and management of change within an academic library, most notably, a business library. Noting the previous 18 months, it was important to remind everyone that our primary task as directors was to respond and react to the changing conditions that were often less than ideal. And while there might be a desire to return to "normal," the reality is that vibrant schools will demand and expect more changes than stagnant ones. Indeed, it is a dual-edged sword.

Our role as librarians is to ensure that we do not look at these problems and challenges as having one solution (like a crossword or Sudoku puzzle). Instead, the solutions we seek to implement at our libraries must reflect the needs of the school while matching with the resources available and abilities of the team. To that end, our primary job is to provide clarity to our users. Unfortunately, this may be an assessment that the data or information desired is not available in the fashion or format requested. Our reference work really is driven by the appetite of our users and the scope of their research. The more ambitious their work is, the more challenging their information request will be.

One of the most important ways that we support the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan is our action learning support at Kresge Library. This is widely accepted as our biggest contribution to the school. Through this process, we assign a librarian to each student project team working with a real sponsor in the corporate, entrepreneurial, or non-profit/NGO sector. The librarians work with the students to help them find information for their projects. They also help the students manage through the ambiguity and complexity of business problems. In this regard, our key role is to provide clarity to students who are managing through a business case without a prefabricated collection of statistics and data.

At Kresge, we expanded this service model to all the programs at the school during our transformation from a traditional library to an "ethereal library" without a student area, clear physical space, or physical print collection objects. With the changes that took place from 2014 to 2016, we embarked on a mission to reinvent the library to live within the limitations and benefits of the new library model. While the library service unit might not be ideal in regard to services currently available to the campus by many business libraries, we were able to pivot to a virtual library during the COVID-19 Pandemic very quickly. We learned how to live within the restrictions of virtually no collection space by focusing on what we can do, not what we once did.

APBSLG Annual Meeting 2021 (December 8, 2021)

Runyon and I also attended the Asia-Pacific Business School Librarians' Group (APBSLG) meeting on December 8th, 2021. This meeting was during the afternoon in Singapore, meaning, once again, Runyon and I were at the computer at 3:00 in the morning Eastern Time.

The first session featured a great opportunity for sharing what was happening across the Asia-Pacific Region during the COVID-19 pandemic. The session kicked off with a welcome from the current Chair of the APBSLG, Yuhanis Yusoff, Head, Tanoto Research & Learning Hub, INSEAD, Asia Campus (Singapore).

Librarians from Australia started and shared that the universities lost almost AU\$2 billion during the previous year. Additionally, international student enrollment was down, mirroring very tough travel restrictions across the country. Universities were not part of the COVID relief packages, so the section did not do as well as they had hoped. Western Australia had been spared the devastation of the lockdowns at this point, but still suffered because of the lack of visitors.

Librarians from China shared what was happening at the member libraries. All four of the libraries reported some additional resources and capacity for teaching and research support. Their aspirations had been to return to normal in 2022, but it is yet to be clear if that happened. Among the more active members was NYU Shanghai, where they started a business faculty newsletter and enhanced their research data interview with faculty and students.

Nearby in Hong Kong and Macao, the librarians shared information on their return to normalcy. At both the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Hong Kong Polytechnic University, both had higher demand for in-person services at the library than before the pandemic.

India libraries were represented by Dr. Rama Patnaik, IIM Bangalore, who had information on 15 of the 20 IIMs (Indian Institutes of Management) across the country. At the time of the presentation, the libraries and campuses were open, but there were no in-person classes. Additionally, libraries have all implemented occupancy limits.

The Malaysia presentation was from Namita Santra (Monash). This is a branch library for the Monash University in Australia. Malaysia was under lockdown for almost one-and-a-half years and not until the middle of October 2021 were people returning to the library space. They were expecting a return to normalcy in February of 2022. Numbers of international students have dropped; however, students who would have left the country have stayed. This balanced itself out, leaving enrollment close to normal numbers.

Finally, in Singapore, the libraries have been able to reopen as early as Summer 2020. Among the ambitious programs supported by libraries in Singapore, SMU (Singapore Management University) created "bite-sized" library workshops on narrow topics and developed work to support the analysis of financial data with Python or R. Nanyang Technological University in Singapore was focused on navigating staff bonding and well-being during the pandemic. They also were focused on a number of new programs, including the launch of an assessment of user education. The INSEAD campus reopened during the Summer of 2020, and they continue to operate with the confines of budget issues and hiring freezes.

The day concluded with reports from the international partners.

Wrap-Up

Over the course of the year, meeting with international colleagues and discussing academic business library issues with fellow directors was a great opportunity of being the ABLD Chair. What impressed me the most was how we all were trying to manage through the same problems during the pandemic. Closed libraries, remote staff, and resources that were not always available electronically were common issues we all faced. This was true for large libraries and small ones, wealthier and poorer ones, and those with a large staff and those with a small one.

Since the ability to attend presentations remotely is appealing and definitely less expensive than traveling to the conference location, it will likely be an element that is retained in some fashion as we move forward to a world of pre-pandemic normalcy. But meetings will start again in person, because it is a far more dynamic way to interact and see the country or the world. Until that happens, I will be content with the ability to meet colleagues from the comfort of my own home. And while it would have been wonderful to visit Prague and Singapore, I am more than certain that my dog Runyon would prefer that I stay at home.