

Trends in Academic Business Libraries 2021-2022: Highlights from Annual Reports of the Academic Business Library Directors Group

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Introduction

The Academic Business Library Directors (ABLD) group meets annually in the spring. This is normally a face-to-face meeting, but the meeting for 2022 was again held online during April and May due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. This year's meetings did not have a theme, unlike previous years, although it did feature a "Squirrel of the Day" picture from ABLD Chair Corey Seeman of the University of Michigan. A "Year in Review" session that summarizes members' annual reports has been a feature of the meeting for many years, and one was held online in April 2022. Reports covered issues and events in members' libraries and business schools for the period April 2021 to March 2022.

New and Ongoing Initiatives

Diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives were underway at both the campus and library level. Arizona State and the University of Chicago had consultants working with the library to develop DEI plans (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 5, 27). Northwestern expanded their existing initiatives to include access (DEIA), which includes new initiatives on removing physical barriers and ensuring that online resources can be used by all (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 82). Librarians at William & Mary serve on the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging committee of the School of Business (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 110). Harvard included advancing racial equity as part of its strategic focus (ABLD, [2022](#), p.48). Illinois, Ohio State and Yale hired senior level DEI officers for their libraries (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 56, 84, 117).

Changes in the scholarly publishing environment were reflected by increased work around open access publishing. Many libraries entered into transformative agreements with publishers, where the library pays an ongoing subscription, and the publisher waives article processing charges for affiliated authors. In some cases, this includes expanded access to the publishers' journal portfolio. The University of California, Carnegie Mellon, University of Chicago, and Maryland all reported one or more of these agreements (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 16, 24, 27, 62). HEC Montréal launched a new institutional repository that includes over 3,500 master's theses and 400 Ph.D. theses (ABLD, [2022](#), p.51).

Many libraries highlighted new programs or services they had introduced. The University of Washington developed an asynchronous online workshop, "Introduction to Business Library Research" (ABLD, [2022](#), p.107). This was initially aimed at business undergraduates but has now been customized for students and researchers outside of the business school. Penn State librarians were embedded in a

college of business course designed for non-business students (ABLD, [2022](#), p.87). They participated in five in-class sessions and developed a course guide with database tutorials. Emory launched a series of LibGuides to highlight their expanded ebook and audiobook collections acquired through Overdrive (ABLD, [2022](#), p.43). Michigan State launched Gast Library's Research Badge, a microcredentialing program for business students (ABLD, [2022](#), p.76).

Several libraries had migrated their integrated library systems, and others were in the planning stages. MIT implemented Alma and Primo, and Western University implemented Alma with other Ontario universities (ABLD, [2022](#), pp.65, 108). Western was still working through some issues with the transition. Cornell and Chicago implemented FOLIO (ABLD, [2022](#), pp.34, 27). Michigan State and Alabama were in the planning stages to migrate to FOLIO (ABLD, [2022](#), pp.76, 3).

The University of British Columbia switched to Open Athens for authentication, but had problems with some business database vendors not supporting it (ABLD, [2022](#), pp.12, 14).

Library Organization

New deans or directors had started at Cornell and the University of Washington, while a new dean was just about to begin work at the University of Chicago (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 34,107, 28). The Chicago position had not previously been at the dean level. Emory will have a newly created position of Vice Provost of Libraries and Museum (ABLD, [2022](#), p.44). Directors announced their retirements at Northwestern and the University of Illinois (ABLD, [2022](#), pp.76, 56). MIT hired two associate directors and Ohio State named an Assistant Dean for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and Chief Diversity Officer (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 65, 84).

Hiring increased this year, as freezes were lifted at many universities. Babson, Cornell, Penn State, Purdue, Southern Methodist, Wake Forest and Yale hired new business librarians (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 7, 34, 87-88, 95, 97, 105, 116). At the same time, many libraries reported retirements and resignations which affected overall staffing levels. UC Berkeley continues to struggle with retaining staff and is also under a hiring freeze (ABLD, [2022](#), p.16). This led to plans to close the Anthropology Library, but that was overruled by campus leadership after a student sit-in. It will remain open, but as a study hall with a non-circulating collection.

Carnegie Mellon is undergoing a major reorganization (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 24). There are four director positions, two of which had been filled, with the other two still being recruited at the time of this report. It was not clear which director librarians would report to. Arizona State reorganized librarians from multi-disciplinary teams into subject divisions (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 5). It also added a new E-Learning & Instruction division. Business was previously handled by a three-person team spread across divisions, but now is handled primarily by one librarian in the Social Sciences Division.

Librarians at Michigan and Washington were negotiating their initial union contracts (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 70, 107). Purdue faculty librarians are moving to academic year contracts, so their newly hired business and data librarian will provide reference coverage for the summer months (ABLD, [2022](#), p.95).

Physical Spaces

Columbia was preparing to move into space on the new Manhattanville Campus of the School of Business (ABLD, [2022](#), p.31). This will serve as a satellite location dedicated to business. The former Business & Economics Library remains open on the main campus. Dartmouth's Feldberg Business &

Engineering Library reopened after two and a half years of renovations (ABLD, [2022](#), p.38). The library lost some space, but gained a modern service desk, an upgraded computer lab and a high-end conference room. Alabama closed its business library for renovation in December 2021 with a planned reopening for Fall 2022 (ABLD, [2022](#), p.3). Southern Methodist is also closing for renovation with a target of Fall 2024 for completion (ABLD, [2022](#), p.97).

HEC Montréal continues to recover from a major flood in the library in 2019 (ABLD, [2022](#), p.52). Thousands of books were removed from the stacks and stored in other locations in the library. They have been boxed while an outside firm begins conservation work but remain available to users within twenty-four hours upon request. Cornell's Management Library will undergo renovation to its staff spaces to allow for expansion of dining and catering facilities in its building. This will involve reconfiguring their service point to make it smaller, as they now only circulate print course reserves and equipment (ABLD, [2022](#), p.35). Chicago and Emory closed their reference desks (ABLD, [2022](#), pp.44, 28). Emory saw this as an opportunity to reevaluate its usage, while Chicago's closure was part of a larger reconfiguration of the first floor of the library. Purdue received an internal grant to upgrade furniture in their LearnLab classroom. The old furniture made collaboration difficult, and the new configuration opens sightlines and has smaller groupings. The grant also allowed Purdue to create a Digital Projects Lab with equipment for data visualization (ABLD, [2022](#), p.95).

Collections

Budgets were again a focus of discussion in this section of reports, with most libraries reporting that their budgets have either plateaued or decreased. In many instances, budgets were cut in 2021 and remained predominantly steady at these reduced levels in 2022 (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 6, 16, 32, 36, 39, 41, 44, 64, 83, 88, 101, 107). Only the University of Chicago mentioned a budget increase, which was "seemingly in response to faculty concerns raised during the director search," though Baker Library at Harvard University also had its budget restored in 2022 with a slight increase to account for inflation (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 27, 49). Unfortunately, at the same time, vendors are re-introducing price increases, and in some cases the increases are steep (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 42, 44). Some libraries were addressing this issue by pursuing more funding partnerships for acquisitions, while others mentioned stricter guidelines for renewals (cost per use, etc.) (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 14, 42). The University of Michigan was the only exception to this general rule, indicating that they had made favorable multi-year goals with a number of vendors and they "even had a few vendors scale back pricing to reflect the current economic climate," though the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill also noted in their report that several vendors agreed to minimal or no increases in price this year (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 72, 81).

Most vendors are rolling back strategies used during the pandemic to make their products more accessible to students (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 100). For example, a number of vendors are moving away from IP authentication and setting up more strict download limits and/or number of concurrent users (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 57). Michigan State has begun adding clauses to contracts in order to reserve the right to cancel and request refunds if a vendor changes access methods after the contract is signed, as they have now had this happen twice (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 77). Libraries also report that vendors are using invasive tactics like repeatedly contacting faculty directly to put pressure on the library to purchase, or to encourage use, presumably to add pressure to future renewal negotiations (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 92). Others are contacting faculty directly to offer additional services; some newcomers are trying to claim they are "free" alternatives to major vendors (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 104). As to the second offense, two vendors

mentioned specifically by Carnegie Mellon University were Tegu, a transcripts database, and Tagnifi, a financials/markets database (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 25).

A number of libraries noted that various vendors had poor communication practices, and more than one noted that the school's acquisition and licensing processes for new databases had grown complicated and unwieldy (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 8, 110). UCLA related that, as regards the current campus purchasing process, "More paperwork is involved, fewer staff are available to manage the process and it can be difficult to get answers at a low-enough level to move acquisitions along with any quickness" (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 22).

A number of libraries mentioned specific issues with migrating to new database platforms. These transitions seem to take a considerable amount of time and can have a bevy of issues: full data is not available in the new products, individual user IDs are required (which results in ongoing challenges related to managing these IDs), some databases require a terminal, or, in one case, a vendor wanted to limit access by IP range in addition to having individual logins (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 14-15, 29, 60, 81, 105). As Babson College described one of their platform transitions, "The communication was poor, setup was confusing, findability on the new platform is poor, and usage statistics provide less useful information" (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 7).

Many libraries are getting creative with shared funding for maintaining access to current resources and/or acquiring new resources. Partners can include the business school, economics department, independent researchers, etc. The University of British Columbia mentioned shared funding for a number of databases but worries that "Demand for unique datasets and databases remains high; funding for these resources is challenging to secure, especially to fund ongoing subscriptions" (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 14).

Business Schools Issues

Many schools saw high level administrators moving on or retiring, and many schools hired new deans in 2021-2022, including the UCI Paul Merage School of Business, Cornell University's SC Johnson College of Business, Duke University's Fuqua School of Business, the Goizueta Business School at Emory University, the Harvard Business School, the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business, the McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 20, 35, 42, 45, 49, 63, 99, 101). Shuffling of other high-level roles was also very common, as well as numerous instances of individuals serving in interim positions. Many schools had overall notable staff turnover (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 8, 78). At Cornell University, a task force was formed "to clarify leadership roles, to simplify decision-making processes, and to create more cross-school programs and collaborations" (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 35).

A significant number of schools have completed building and/or begun using new business school buildings in 2021-2022. These included Arizona State University and HEC Montréal, with the University of Virginia currently in the process of building a new hotel and conference center (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 6, 53, 115). The business school at Columbia University successfully opened an entire new campus in January of 2022 (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 32). Multiple business schools increased their enrollment overall, which is a positive position for the schools, but potentially adds additional stress to libraries with understaffing issues (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 23). Arizona State University's Thunderbird School of Global Management announced their intention to reach 100 million students worldwide by 2030 through the Thunderbird Global Initiative (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 6).

A number of schools are offering new fully online or hybrid online programs, especially for MBA students, or are otherwise expanding their program options. UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business is adding a hybrid online option to their part-time MBA program (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 17). The Tepper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon University is launching both a new part-time accelerated MBA program and a full-time Master of Science in Business Analytics program in Fall 2022 (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 26). Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business is planning to offer online executive education courses for a broad audience via Coursera and ExecOnline (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 38). Georgetown University has new online programs in business analytics, environment and sustainability management, and global real estate (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 47). At Purdue University, the last cohort of their in-person MBA graduated in May with no word on whether the in-person program would be restarted (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 96).

Many schools saw an increased emphasis in DEI support in the business school in various ways, including new strategic directions, establishment or expansion of new DEI offices and committees within the business school, development and acquisition of new collections relevant to DEI initiatives, hiring new DEI support or leadership roles, and developing more welcoming and diverse orientations (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 7, 49, 101-102, 104, 106, 117-118). Libraries are also seeing an increased demand for ESG data due to either faculty research, new programs, or an overall increase in curriculum ESG content in the business school (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 29). At Duke University, the Fuqua School of Business is considering developing a joint degree with the Nicholas School of the Environment, which would focus on "the mutual impacts of climate, business, and the environment." At the time of their report, the library was already seeing an increased demand for climate and business data (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 42). At MIT, researchers in the Sustainability Lab at Sloan had published a series of papers on the noise in ESG data and the lack of consistency across providers in terms of how data are aggregated (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 66). Michigan State University has a new Center for Ethical and Socially Responsible Leadership, which was "created to infuse ethics and social responsibility in the curriculum" (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 78).

Other Issues Affecting Libraries

It is a challenge to maintain service levels with understaffing, hybrid work arrangements, and a high number of role transitions. Almost all libraries mentioned some open positions without immediate likelihood of being filled, and most libraries mentioned challenges with hybrid work both to in-person staffing and culture and communication in the library. Two libraries specifically mentioned being under a hiring freeze at the time of their report (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 17, 109). Understaffing and important positions remaining vacant was mentioned as a particular challenge for the libraries at Boston University, Carnegie Mellon University, Columbia University, Duke University, Indiana University-Bloomington, the University of Maryland, and MIT (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 10, 26, 32, 42, 60, 64, 66).

A number of libraries mentioned that there's a morale issue when some positions allow individuals to work hybrid home/on site, but other positions require individuals to be on campus full time (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 26, 85). One library described this issue as "feelings of inequity on hybrid work" (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 29). Specific hybrid work options vary. At the UCI Libraries, most staff have the option to work three days on campus and two remotely (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 20). Carnegie Mellon University has been following a similar hybrid work schedule temporarily, though they were exploring an official hybrid workplace model at the time of their report (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 26). Most reports indicated the hope that these hybrid work options might continue in the future.

There are a lot of questions and concerns about how, when or if students are going to return to library spaces after high absences during the pandemic. In their report, Michigan State University pointed

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out that when the library reopened in Fall of 2021, nearly half the student population (first- and second-year students) had never been inside before; they posit a general lack of awareness may be a large contributing factor as to why foot traffic has still not returned to pre-pandemic levels at their institution (ABLD, [2022](#), pp. 78-79). It was also noted that sometimes relationships with faculty have faltered after the extended period of distance education and distance working (ABLD, [2022](#), p. 8).

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