Academic BRASS

Annette Buckley
Research Librarian for Business
University of California, Irvine

**A Business Librarian's Review of the
AACSB International Conference and Annual Meeting (ICAM)**

Because a scheduling conflict would prevent me from attending ALA Annual in 2017, I scouted for other conferences, and found that the AACSB International Conference and Annual Meeting (ICAM) would be in Houston, Texas, from April 23rd -25th 2017. AACSB, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, is a principal accrediting and professional development entity for business schools, and ICAM is one of the AACSB's many annual conferences.

ICAM often takes place outside the continental US, and considering that the 2017 registration fee alone was a staggering $1,295, attendance could easily cost $5,000+ after airfare and hotel expenses. Since ICAM exceeds the professional development budgets of many a librarian, I figured that my reconnaissance could benefit other curious business librarians. Indeed, I could only attend ICAM on my professional development funds because of the Houston locale. I could purchase relatively inexpensive plane tickets and stay with relatives near the single conference hotel, the Hilton Americas.

Here are my observations and thoughts about ICAM, compared to an extent against ALA Annual:

General Insights

- AACSB leaders were very proud of their two-year rebranding efforts, and the new AACSB logo--an ascending arrow--both is forward-looking and represents prosperity for all.

- ICAM is brief. The conference proper, i.e., without auxiliary meetings, was only one full day, plus one half-day, so there's no time for conference fatigue as with ALA Annual.

- I did not worry about meals, a luxurious departure from ALA Annual, where you may need to do much foraging and standing in line. Business leaders know how to impress people with catering. Some meals were sponsored by vendors and/or b-schools, so the percentage of the registration fee going toward food remains a mystery.

- The crowd was mostly in their forties and fifties; early-career attendees were essentially nonexistent, and as an international conference, it drew a global crowd from a multitude of countries. The bulk of attendees were upper-level b-school administrators, e.g., assistant deans, deans, program heads, and recruitment heads. I was not aware of any other librarians.

- Attire is somewhat business professional, particularly on Day One, when people are not about to travel. A suit was not necessary, especially for women, but jeans and a polo would be too casual. If in doubt, wear a blazer.

- Given the nature of ICAM, I was surprised and rather dismayed at the ubiquity of inexperienced networkers. There were multiple networking events, and often people would shyly huddle, anxiously distribute their business cards without solicitation, not invite newcomers to join a circle, ask closed-ended questions, and generally put the onus on others to carry the small-talk conversation. Of course, I encountered excellent exceptions, and the more charismatic the attendee, the more their attention was demanded and their bandwidth limited.

Exhibitors

Only about 60 exhibitors attended, a small fraction compared to ALA Annual. The major multidisciplinary publishers were Emerald, McGraw Hill, and SAGE. This was the lineup of vendors who would be familiar to most business librarians:

> BMI (Business Monitor International) Research
> CRSP (Center for Research in Security Prices)
> Cabell's International
> FactSet Research Systems
> The Financial Times
> Harvard Business Publishing
> Henry Stewart Talks
> S&P Global Market Intelligence
> WRDS

Vendors notably abstained from staging computers, i.e. laptops, monitors, and kiosks, for displaying products and/or unveiling updates. Vendors attended with the goals of getting face time with b-school administrators, distributing print marketing materials, and planting the seeds for follow-up dialogue with a school, and not with the goal of showing the nuts and bolts of a user interface.

Presentations

ICAM dedicated three time blocks to the ritual of small-scale presentations; two blocks on Day One, and one block on Day Two. Unfortunately each block featured four simultaneous presentations, and etiquette precluded changing rooms. The three presentations I saw were:

> Online Education: Challenges and New Business Models
> Business Schools as Hubs of Learning
> Defining and Measuring Impact

Presentation conflicts are expected at a conference as massive as ALA Annual, but it was frustrating for one as brief and intimate as ICAM. Choosing under the circumstance whether to see presentations that may have implications *involving* librarianship, or presentations for perspectives *beyond* librarianship, is a maddening what-if exercise. If you ever face this dilemma, I suggest the latter.

Take, for example, the Online Education presentation, which would arguably have implications *involving* librarianship. This session consisted of two mini-presentations, one of which was a 30-minute segment from a professor who had taught a MOOC and who proceeded to summarize the overall good and bad attributes of MOOCs. MOOCs have already been discussed *ad nauseum* in many ALA forums; in fact, it was almost-- dare I say it--quaint that MOOCs merited any time at ICAM.

The Hubs of Learning presentation largely focused on bringing together alumni and students to tackle industry problems and foster the dynamic of a lifelong learning program, with the b-school as the core. Later, during the Q&A shoptalk, I took to the microphone to remind everyone to also leverage their campus libraries as learning hubs, and the audience response was one of pleasant surprise, like encountering an old hit song on the radio that you forgot existed until the opening jogs your memory. *Oh yeah, the library!*

The Measuring Impact presentation was the only session offered twice, so I attended because AACSB deemed it important. The speakers, who were very good, used an AACSB Research Report called "Impact of Research: A Guide for Business Schools," which is freely available on the AACSB site, as the basis for their presentation. The whole report, but particularly the Appendices, would be very helpful for anyone in library leadership who needs to identify impact metrics and build a narrative about what their institution contributes. The session (and report) both came across as deceptively simple, not unlike a dictionary. It seems obvious and intuitive as you consume the information, but actually you would be hard-pressed to generate said information without a lot of effort.

Key Takeaways

While it was somewhat satisfying to be a novelty--a librarian--at ICAM, to be an ambassador and make a positive impression on everyone I encountered, I would not recommend splurging to attend. Only go if 1) you are interested in none of the multitude of other library-related conferences and 2) if the metaphorical planets align such that it would be cost-neutral for you.

You do not need to attend ICAM to get in the minds of the attendees and identify the issues that most concern them. Instead I recommend the following:

- Visit that year's ICAM site and read the agenda.

- Pay attention to the themes of sessions that are offered repeatedly and check the main AACSB site for correlating Reports or White Papers.

- Last, but definitely not least, are the Plenary Speakers. For 2017, ICAM featured Brené Brown and Margaret Heffernan, and both women were **stupendous**, delivering top-caliber presentations that make you wistful for either a perfect

memory or a smuggled-in recorder. AACSB has great taste in Plenary Speakers, so make it a point to find the Speakers' other output, TED talks, books, research articles, etc.

Reference

AACSB International. (2012). Impact of Research: A Guide for Business Schools.
    Retrieved from: www.aacsb.edu/publications/researchreports