

Streaming Video for Theological Education

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ABSTRACT Recent research reveals significant differences between theological libraries and other academic libraries in the licensing and use of streaming video. State-funded and large research university libraries have reported high adoption and significant expenditure. The comparable trends raise significant questions about support of digital pedagogy in theological education, as well as the potential for new products that meet the curricular priorities and budgetary capacities of theological libraries. This paper reviews recent research and identifies opportunities for licensing of streaming videos among Atla institutions.

Recent trends in technology are dramatically reshaping academic library collections, and while the use of video in higher education isn't new, the move toward streaming brings a new array of benefits and challenges for academic librarians. I recently explored the ways in which libraries are addressing interest in streaming video services.

In April and May 2019, a survey on the topic of "Theological Libraries and Streaming Video" was sent to the ATLANTIS listserv. There were 45 responses, with 20 responses (44%) coming from schools with 500 students or less. A total of 13 responses (29%) came from schools with between 500 and 2500 students. Only 12 (27%) came from schools between 2,500 and 20,000, and no schools had over 20,000 students. The survey group, therefore, represents a profile of primarily smaller schools with almost 85% of participants coming from schools with less than 5000 students.

Of this number, over 71% of the respondents were from theological libraries serving post-graduate education, with the reminder

serving community colleges or two-year academic institutions (2%) or four-year college/universities (27%).

The majority (58%) of these libraries are situated in a stand-alone seminary context, with a significant portion located in a larger college or university library (27%) and a minority located in other types of contexts (15%).

Four respondents are in Canada, while the remainder are in the United States, representing a wide geographical variety from California to Connecticut, Oregon to Georgia. Texas and Ohio had the largest number of respondents.

Forty-four (98%) of the schools are private, while one is public.

The results of this survey might be profitably compared to a 2017 survey conducted by *Library Journal*, which asked a similar set of questions upon which my survey was based with the approval of the editors of *LJ*. The *LJ* survey focused on 221 four-year college and university programs, serving an average of 10,392 students. “Slightly over half of the schools were in public university systems.”¹

In the Atla survey, the schools or their libraries provide a variety of streaming video content, from full-length movies and television shows (31%) to historical archive footage (24%) to faculty and student produced content (35%). The most common type of content is documentaries (44%), followed by content newly produced for the academic market (35%). Twenty percent report providing no streaming video content, and a couple of other libraries specifically reported providing access to Psychotherapy.net.

The Atla libraries use a variety of streaming platforms, including Alexander Street (24%), Films on Demand (22%), Swank Digital Campus (11%), with Kanopy the most often used platform (27%). A significant percentage of libraries don’t use any of these major platforms. The variety is reflected in the other resources utilized, with Psychotherapy.net mentioned five times as a platform. Other platforms include: Wistia, YouTube, FilmPlatform.net, Tugg, and local instances of Omeka.

When it comes to the number of streaming videos licensed, there is significant separation between two groups of Atla libraries. While 39% report not licensing streaming videos at all, 41% report licensing fewer than 500 videos. At the other end of the spectrum, 16% of respondents license 4000 or more videos per year.

When it comes to the methodology for accessing the videos, a significant majority utilizes either remote access through IP address authentication (85%) or single sign-on (30%), with only 7% utilizing multiple logins.

The single greatest challenge associated with providing streaming content is the cost (75%), followed by minimal concern with copyright (4%) and bandwidth (4%). Among other concerns were: staff time for selection and the challenge of streaming videos not hosted by a vendor. Convenience and accessibility were most often cited as the benefits of streaming content over physical video. This is reflected in the key factors when selecting a streaming content vendor. Cost per title is the most important factor (83%), with nature of content (54%) and purchasing model (50%) the other most important considerations.

The selection of streaming video is most often done by faculty request (76%) with librarians of different types also responsible, from collection development personnel (40%) to the library director (28%) and subject librarians (16%). Student requests and vendor-selected titles were most often identified as another method of acquisition.

The current method is not the preferred one, however, with libraries reporting a preference to acquire the majority of their streaming video content through demand-driven acquisition (22%) or title-by-title (26%) rather than through faculty request (13%). A similar difference is seen between the most common duration of license, which is one to two years (72%) and the preferred duration, which is perpetual (45%).

With most of the funding coming from an electronic resources budget (52%) or a media budget (29%), the largest number of library budgets are between \$1000 and \$5000 (38%) with most others being either less than \$500 (19%), \$500-\$999 (14%), or \$5000-\$9,999 (14%). When analyzed by cost per title, librarians report that, on average, their title rate was most often \$0-\$49 (35%) or \$150-\$199 (30%), with \$50-\$99 being the third most common response (20%).

By contrast, in the *Library Journal* survey of academic libraries, the average budget for streaming content was \$19,800 (median \$12,800), with nearly half of libraries reporting budgets in the \$5,000-\$19,999 range. The average amount spent per annual license for one streaming title is \$110.60.²

When it comes to budget, Atla libraries' budget for streaming videos increased (33%) or remained the same (66%), with no decline

reported. The source of any increased funding was most often a new appropriation (29%) or the print monograph budget (10%), and most librarians anticipated that this funding would either increase again next year (33%) or stay the same (43%). Usage metrics (55%) and inclusion in course assignments (45%) were the primary ways that the schools assign value to streaming content and assess its return on investment.

Comments on the reasons for faculty and students not making greater use of streaming collections focused on lack of knowledge of their existence and selection of titles that are not available in streaming format. The challenge of discovering streaming videos is underscored by the report that the most common ways that students discover the library's video content is through "word of mouth" either through a faculty member (57%) or a librarian (52%).

The use of streaming videos is recognized to span most academic disciplines, with usage highest in the social sciences and the pre-professional disciplines, and lowest in the hard sciences and the arts. The specific uses of the videos are seen as highest with specific assignments in coursework (81%) and in demonstration of techniques (43%) and as lowest when used as a primary source (5%).

Looking to the future, 6% of libraries are planning on adding streaming, while 53% will probably add streaming video, but have no immediate plans, and 40% have no plans to add streaming video, primarily because of cost.

When given a list of possible topics that would be a priority in their library's licensing of streaming videos, libraries reported a variety of interests in areas of theology and social ethics, with greatest interest in videos on trauma and healing (59%), economic justice/poverty (45%), inter-religious dialogue (41%), the environment (35%), and mass incarceration/criminal justice (31%).

Respondents were then asked the following question: "If a set of approximately one-hundred high-quality short films and longer documentary films on theological topics were made available for your faculty and students for research and instruction, what would you be willing to pay for this access on an annual basis?" Besides those who generally responded "it depends," most (54%) of the libraries would pay \$500/year for such a resources, while 18% would pay \$1000/year, and 4% would pay \$1500 and \$2000/year, respectively.

As with any change in library collections, streaming video offers its own unique challenges and barriers to use. Overall, however, librarians responding to this survey reported a strong interest in this kind of content, as many students and faculty in their communities find it to be a powerful tool for teaching and learning. For students raised on Netflix and Amazon, streaming video platforms fit with their lives and their expectations for how technology works—and how to work with it.

FIVE CONCLUSIONS:

1. Streaming videos are an increasingly important part of theological education, especially in classroom assignments and clinical (how-to) instruction.
2. Theological librarians have interest and need related to streaming video, but significantly less access to streaming video solutions in comparison to larger universities, primarily due to funding, but also due to availability of relevant content.
3. Funding for steaming video is a priority and is increasingly available in most cases.
4. There is interest in and available funding for a licensable set of theological videos costing \$500-\$1000/year with a focus on questions of social justice, health care, and religious dialogue.
5. This online platform for streaming videos would best be provided through IP authentication/SSO authorization, and it would best be organized and marketed according to the needs of a theological/religious studies curriculum.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Jennifer A. Dixon, “The Academic Mainstream,” *Library Journal* (Sept 1, 2017), 42.
- 2 Dixon, “The Academic Mainstream,” 44.