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Once upon a time in streaming video

A community college's adventure with Kanopy's PDA model

A recent survey found that 51% of Internet users in the United States watch online video content every day.[1] In 2018, adults aged 18 to 34 spent a weekly average of 105 minutes watching video content on their smartphones.[2] For better or worse, streaming video is here to stay and so is the expectation for access to it. Despite shrinking budgets, academic libraries are spending valuable funds on streaming video resources to meet these new demands.

Kanopy, a streaming video provider that features titles from arthouse to Hollywood hits, has recently been a topic of discussion in many academic libraries. Based on discussions on the Electronic Resources in Libraries (ERIL) listserv, librarians are expressing frustration over the ballooning costs of offering a Kanopy PDA model as they try to meet their users' needs. Delaware County Community College's (DCCC) first year subscription to Kanopy provided some interesting insights as to how our community uses the platform and how we can better adapt to usage without breaking our budget.

Online learning at DCCC

DCCC is located in two counties that border Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The college has eight campuses and a growing online program. The FTE is approximately 7,000, with a total enrollment of approximately 11,000 students. Over the past three years, online attendance grew with a 29% increase between 2017 and 2018. With approximately 4,000 students taking at least one online course, coupled with the college's eight locations, it has become increasingly important to provide electronic resources, especially streaming video, to our students and faculty.

In 2009, DCCC began subscribing to Infobase's Films on Demand Master Academic Collection. To date, it continues to be one of the most used electronic resources. Based on this, the librarians decided to expand our streaming video offerings and complement Films on Demand's documentary titles by including a collection that offered more popular, classic, and indie film titles. Kanopy appeared to be a viable contender and we decided to explore it further.

Initial setup

In March 2018 we began a one month trial of Kanopy. Based on strong usage and favorable faculty feedback, as well as an overall satisfaction with their film catalog, we decided to subscribe to the platform for the 2018/2019 academic year. In conversations with Kanopy, the library allocated $4,500 for the year and deposited this amount with them. We arrived at this figure based on the recommendation from Kanopy that considered our type of institution, size, and plan

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to curate the title collection rather than open the entire platform to our users. We took advantage of the ability to develop a curated collection based on DCCC's programs.

Furthermore, by narrowing the available titles, the hope was to limit the risk of the subscription turning into a popular streaming platform rather than one aimed at research and curricular needs. Whether to offer mediated or unmediated (PDA) access was the last component to determine. To mediate meant that when users found a film they wanted to watch, they needed to fill out a request form on Kanopy's platform that was submitted directly to the librarian for an acquisition decision. If the decision was made to provide access to the film, the purchasing funds were drawn from a deposited account to acquire a one-year, unlimited, public performance rights included, license to the film. The yearlong access began on the license purchase date.

PDA, the alternative option, proved to be the best choice for the institution's needs. The librarians believed that to mediate access would frustrate users who often need resources right away. The small size of the librarian staff also warranted the selection of the unmediated/PDA plan. Kanopy's PDA model triggers a film once it has been viewed more than four times for longer than 30 seconds. The trigger results in the purchase of a one-year license to the film.

Out of 100 subject categories, we chose 53 to be active in our PDA offerings that were based on the curricular and research needs of the institution. Classic Cinema, African Studies, Mental Health, Teacher Education Development, Environmental Science, and Technical Expertise are a few examples of the subject categories that were selected. Users could watch any title from those 53 collections, and the usage would count toward the PDA acquisition model. Titles in the remaining 47 collections were discoverable, but full viewing access to them remained mediated.

Lights, camera, action

The subscription launched on July 1, 2018. Since we budgeted a relatively small amount for the entire year, the librarians decided not to overtly advertise the platform. Instead, we modestly highlighted the new subscription on our website and promoted it to DCCC's faculty within our liaison areas. (It is worth noting that Kanopy self-promotes by sending at least two promotional emails a week to users who either downloaded the Kanopy app or created a personal account on their site.)

At first usage was low, but this was to be expected, considering the subscription launched in the summer. Once the fall semester began at the end of August, the platform grew in the number of titles viewed. To our surprise, by the start of October, the library saw its entire annual Kanopy budget spent. Looking at the title analytics, of the 30 titles triggered, 22 titles (73%) were filmed lectures from *The Great Courses* series. We discovered that a couple of faculty assigned these lectures to their students as part of their course requirements. When we subscribed to Kanopy, this was not a foreseeable use.

We did not intend for this product to serve as lecture material, but rather as a resource that would support students in their course assignments and research needs. The faculty librarians decided that the value and potential we initially saw in Kanopy went unfulfilled because *The Great Courses* collection depleted the budget early on in the academic year. Fortunately, the dean approved additional funds to deposit with Kanopy, and we removed *The Great Courses* from our PDA collections.

For the remainder of the academic year, the platform's usage coincided with the original vision for it. The triggered PDA titles aligned more closely with the DCCC's curriculum. Popular film titles were viewed, but not to the detriment of our budget. Rather, most often those titles' usage did not result in a PDA trigger. The rate at which we acquired film licenses drastically declined in the months that followed closing access to

The Great Courses (figure 1). Viewing usage remained high—a strong indication that our students and faculty found value in the plat-

nections to multiple platforms such as Apple TV, Android TV, Chromecast, Roku, and Fire TV, in addition to supporting apps
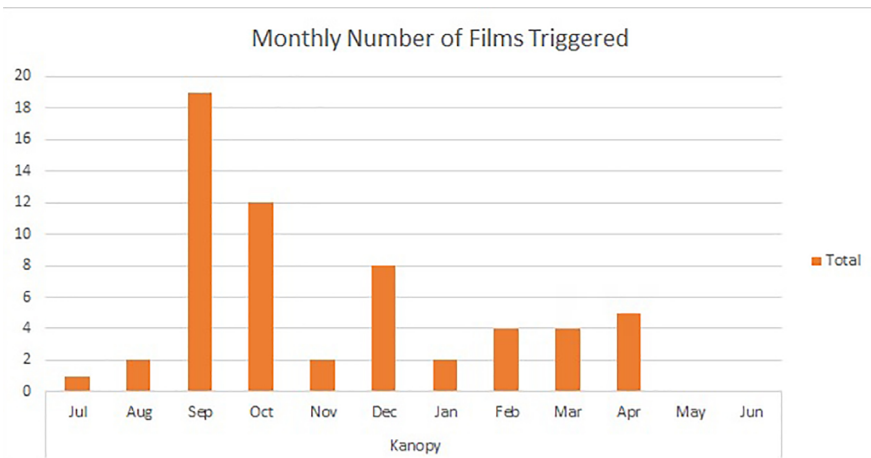
Monthly Number of Films Triggered

Figure 1. Monthly number of films triggered.

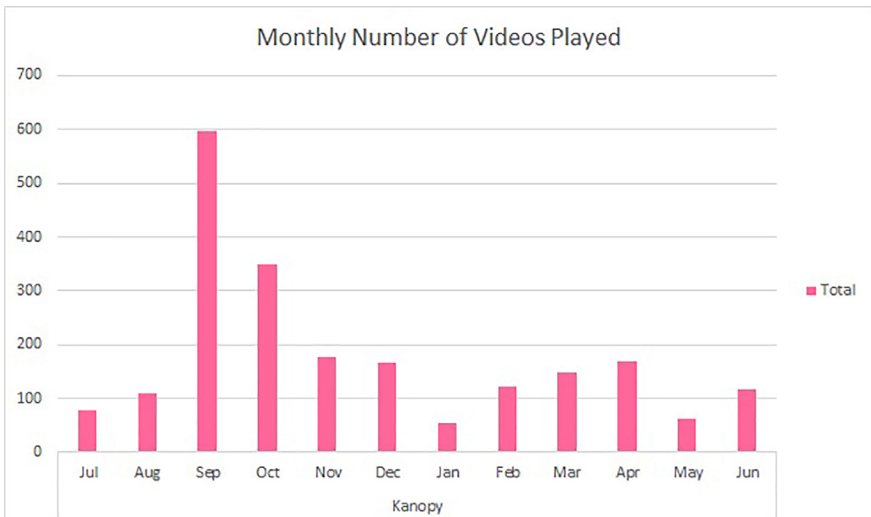**Monthly Number of Videos Played**

Figure 2. Monthly number of videos played.

form and were using it in a manner that was fiscally sustainable for us (figure 2).

Usage

By the end of the academic year, our PDA program had acquired 59 film licenses, a total of 2,153 video plays and 48,762 minutes watched. Kanopy offers viewing con-

for iOS, Android, and Fire Tablet. Sixty-eight percent of films were viewed on a desktop, with television (12.3%) and mobile devices (12.7%) as secondary preferences. Of our total number of video plays, 176 came from embedded content in our Canvas LMS. When considering the number of video plays against the total amount

of deposited funds, it cost the library about $4.41 per play.

Lessons learned and moving forward

Overall, the PDA model worked for us, but not initially. Our total allocated funds remained until May 3, at which time we turned off our PDA program until our new budget went into effect in July. There was certainly a learning curve in this first year. In better identifying which categories and film producers we wanted as part of PDA program, our usage closer aligned with our intended use of the resource. Limiting our promotion of the platform was also an important and beneficial decision. It helped us keep our first year to scale and within our funding.

As we plan for our 2019/20 subscription, we are making adjustments. We budgeted 4% of our electronic resources budget to Kanopy for the upcoming academic year, compared to the 5.8% we used in our first year (this increase was due to the refunding after turning off *The Great Courses*). Kanopy invited our institution to participate in a pilot for their new subscription model for academic institutions—Pay Per Use (PPU). This model is available to Kanopy's public library subscribers. Kanopy is piloting it within the academic setting to a number of community colleges, and we agreed to participate in it rather than continue with the PDA model. Instead of usage triggering a film license, the PPU model charges $2 per play. For comparison purposes, based on our usage data this past year, we would have spent only 40% of our total deposited funds if we had used the PPU model instead of PDA. We also plan to ask Kanopy to turn off their self-promoting emails to our users.

Despite the promising fiscal advantages, we have identified one drawback of the PPU model—its requirement for personal accounts. The change from PDA to PPU will require our users to create personal accounts on Kanopy's platform. These accounts allow Kanopy's system to track the 72-hour viewing window. Each time a user plays a film, they are enabled to watch that film an unlimited number of times within this 72-hour timeframe. From our institutional perspective, creating personal accounts places an additional barrier between the content and our students and faculty. However, at this time, it is one we are willing to accept, given the financial benefits of the PPU model. Kanopy does offer access through SAML/Shibboleth (single sign-on log-in systems), but users still need to create personal accounts.

Additionally, we are performing an overlap analysis between Kanopy and Infobase's Films on Demand Master Academic Collection. Paying for content on Kanopy's platform that we already subscribe to elsewhere is something we are hoping to limit. Four of the 59 films triggered in Kanopy were titles already available through the Films on Demand subscription. While Kanopy has a duplication policy in place, we did not meet the criteria for it, most notably because we did not have the full PDA collection available to our users. One option is to turn off content producers whose collection heavily overlaps with titles available elsewhere. Unfortunately, Kanopy does not allow for the removal of individual titles from our platform.

We have discussed the advantages and disadvantage of turning off collections with heavily overlapped content, such as California Newsreel, First Run Features, and Davidson Films. Ultimately we decided against this in favor of first evaluating a year's worth of usage using the PPU model before making further content restriction decisions. *The Great Courses,* however, will remain turned off for the duration of our upcoming subscription.

Lastly, we plan to increase awareness about the Kanopy platform to DCCC's faculty—from how we pay for content to how students can use it in their research assignments. Plans are in place to present workshops during our college's professional development days and follow-up with faculty in our liaison areas.

to the MLIS program at Western University, its integration with the Scholarly Communication and Open Access Publishing course gives students real-world experience to inform critical discussions of topics such as anonymous versus open peer review and the political economy of scholarly communication work. Given that academic librarians are often perceived as those who support rather than actively participate in scholarly communication, the necessity of such experiential learning cannot be overstated. Crucially, students also learn firsthand that while open access publications are free to read, they are by no means free to produce.

Through their involvement with *ELIP*, MLIS students gain an appreciation for the work that goes into publishing, and, as a result, will be more effective advocates for more sustainable models as well as the open access movement as a whole. By learning to assess and transparently discuss the shortcomings of existing open access models, including their continued reliance on volunteer labor, students who complete the course will be armed with more than just open access talking points. Ultimately, we hope that *ELIP* and the associated course will empower them to confidently engage with researchers in other fields and collaborate on community-driven solutions for the future of scholarly communication.

Notes

1. NASIG Executive Board, "NASIG Core Competencies for Scholarly Communication Librarians," August 11, 2017, accessed June 24, 2019, https://www.nasig.org/site_page.cfm?pk_association_webpage_menu=310&pk_association_webpage=9435.

2. Christopher Hollister, "Perceptions of Scholarly Communication Among Library and Information Studies Students," *Journal of Librarianship and Scholarly Communication* 5, General Issue (2017): eP2180, accessed June 24, 2019, https://doi.org/10.7710/2162-3309.2180. Maria Bonn, Josh Bolick, and William M. Cross, "Expanding Scholarly Communication Instruction for the Next Generation of LIS Leaders," presented at the Association for Library and Information Science Education Conference, Denver, Colorado, February 6, 2018, accessed June 25, 2019, https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/25735.

3. See *ELIP*'s website at https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/elip/index.

4. For more on the Western MLIS co-op program see https://www.fims.uwo.ca/programs/graduate_programs/master_of_library_and_information_science/coop.html. ✍

As we begin our second year subscribing to Kanopy, we enter into it with a little more trepidation. The pilot PPU model gives us an optimistic outlook toward our upcoming academic year's usage of the platform. We are hopeful that this new model will allow us to provide more resources to more users while remaining within a reasonable budget. If PPU had not been an option, we would have continued with PDA rather than fully adopt a mediated model. Overall, it worked for us. However, Kanopy's subscription models in general are uncharted streaming video territories. We will continue to take a chance on it since it supports our community's research needs, but we will do so with an eye on the quickly changing streaming video landscape and the consequences that come with providing it to our campus.

Notes

1. We Are Social, "Percentage of internet users in selected countries who watch online video content every day as of January 2018," https://www.statista.com/statistics/319688/daily-online-video-usage/ (accessed May 2, 2019).

2. Nielsen, "Weekly time spent by U.S. adults watching video content via smartphone as of 1st quarter 2018, by age group (in minutes)," https://www.statista.com/statistics/323922/us-weekly-minutes-smartphone-video-age/ (accessed May 2, 2019). ✍