

CCL-EAR COMMITTEE REVIEW
VAST: Academic Video Online
February 2013

INTRODUCTION

VAST: Academic Video Online is Alexander Street's largest subscription streaming video collection. Launched in 2011, VAST's collection includes academic videos from more than 20 academic disciplines. Included in the subscription are over 16,000 videos. VAST's video content derives from well known producers and distributors.

Few videos are closed captioned, although many of the videos contain keyword-transcripts which run alongside the videos. Other features of the VAST database include: options to create and share customized video clips, synchronized transcripts, embedding codes for content management systems and mobile access and viewing options.

All videos are web based and can be accessed by any internet browser, no special software is required

OVERALL RECOMMENDATION for COMMUNITY COLLEGES: 2.5, 2.5, 2.5, 2.5

#1 --- Not recommended

#2 --- Recommended with reservations as noted

#3 --- Recommended

#4 --- Outstanding offer

RATINGS for SPECIFIC ASPECTS of the DATABASE:

The following features were examined and rated on a four point scale (1=Poor; 2= Needs Improvement; 3=Good; 4=Excellent):

DATABASE CONTENT/FORMAT: 3, 3, 3, 3

- **Consider functionality, appropriateness of format, database content, adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.**

Alexander Street Press, L.L.C. was founded in May 2000 with a focus on producing digital collections in the humanities and social sciences. VAST: Academic Video Online was launched in 2011. It is Alexander Street's most comprehensive, multidisciplinary, streaming video collection. According to a recent announcement, VAST will reach 20,000 streaming titles by the end of 2013. Videos selected for VAST have an academic focus to meet departmental needs and include: documentaries, interviews, performances, news programs and reels and field recordings. The database contains videos from a growing number of disciplines including: anthropology, art and architecture, business and economics, counseling and therapy, criminal justice, dance, education, ethnic studies, health, history, humanities, LGBT studies, literature, musical performance, opera, philosophy, political science, psychology, rehabilitation training, sports and exercise therapy training, feature films (including contemporary world cinema and silent films), religion, science, theatre and women's studies.

The videos come from a variety of producers and distributors including BBC, PBS, Arthaus, CBS, Cinema Guild, Documentary Educational Resources, Zeitgeist, Opus Arte, etc. There are thousands of award-winning films, including Emmy and Academy award winners. VAST claims to be the only place for counseling and therapy training videos from Microtraining and Filmmakers Library.

Additional collections that are on the platform but not part of VAST include: Black Studies in Video (Some content is in VAST), Classical Music in Video, Criminal Justice and Public Safety in Video (some content is in VAST), LGBT Studies in Video (Some content is in VAST), Nursing Education in Video, New World Cinema Rehabilitation Therapy in Video, Silent Film, Online Sports Medicine and Exercise Science in Video.

Content runs from 5 minutes to over an hour and a half depending on the video. Most are in the half hour to one hour range. Most videos are fairly current with some historical films in the collection. In a search for "pollution" a good portion of the videos were dated 2000 and older. There was some concern over dates of the science and medicine videos. When searching under Breast Cancer, the first hit was from 1992. The newest video for Breast Cancer was from 2011. In the Science Collection only 24 titles were from the newest date of 2011 out of 508 titles. Most of the topics/videos appear to be suitable to community college needs.

Users can also customize video content by creating playlists. Playlists are themed collections of materials and can be created by any user of the database. Users can create playlists containing various types of documents, images, whole videos, tracks, segments (clips) and/or other items such as links to any URL. Playlists can be annotated, edited, copied, shared, and all playlists contain their own unique permanent embeddable URL. Playlists can be used as lists of personal favorites, class viewing/listening assignments, or as a teaching resource for in-class use.

While viewing a film a "Make Clips" feature can be used to capture a segment of a film. It is a very simple process with directions that are easy to understand (see image). Select "Make a New Clip". Select the duration of the clip by entering the time span information. The creator of the clip can use the drop-down menu to make it viewable only to themselves, to the entire institution or to everyone. There is the option to add notes or comments. When the clip is done click on "save".

The screenshot displays the VAST: Academic Video Online interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the VAST logo and menu options like Home, Browse, Advanced Search, Playlists, What's New, and Help. Below this is a search bar and a sign-in prompt. The main content area shows a video player for "Sister Wendy's Grand Tour, Episode 8". The video player includes a progress bar and a "Make new clip" form with fields for clip title, start/end times, and a "Viewable by" dropdown menu. To the right of the video player is a transcript window with a "Sync" button. The transcript text includes a paragraph about bathers, a music cue, a section titled "THE CONVERSATION Matisse", and another paragraph about Matisse's private life.

One major drawback to the database is that there is no citation converter in the database. Individual videos have bibliographic information but it is hidden in a drop down menu under “see more details”

VAST does provide excellent mobile options. You are able to send a link to your mobile phone using texting or a QR code. When using mobile options, you are sent a text that contains a link to the video that can be played without authentication for 24 hours.

:: Send to mobile device

To send a link to Send to mobile device to your mobile device, **use one of the available options:**

OPTION 1 ::

To send this to your device via email or SMS, enter addresses or phone numbers below:

Note: For INTL Numbers, please begin with +(country code)

[Add Field](#)

OPTION 2 ::

Enter this short link directly into your device's web browser:

<http://goasp.it/gntf>

OPTION 3 ::

Scan this QR Code with a compatible device:



[What's This?](#)

If you'd like to know more about using this product in a mobile device, see our [help page](#).
Streaming service is currently available for Apple iPhone/iPad or Android mobile devices on a 3G network or better.

Videos from VAST cannot be downloaded to a computer and there is no e-mail option for videos. Many videos provide embedding codes that can be used to embed videos in content management systems. Unfortunately embedded videos cannot be viewed without patron authentication.

A recent communication from Alexander Street announced that a new VAST platform will be launched in late spring, 2013. The improved platform will include:

- More reliable and faster performance
- Citation export in all formats
- Featured playlists and clips will be cross-searchable with content.
- Improved video players (see below for more details)
- Improvements for even better functionality on the iPhone, iPad, Android.
- Standard Usage Reporting via an admin portal, title-level reporting, and COUNTER4 compliance.
- Translations using Google translate on our content--transcripts and results set.
- And much more!

The improved video player will include:

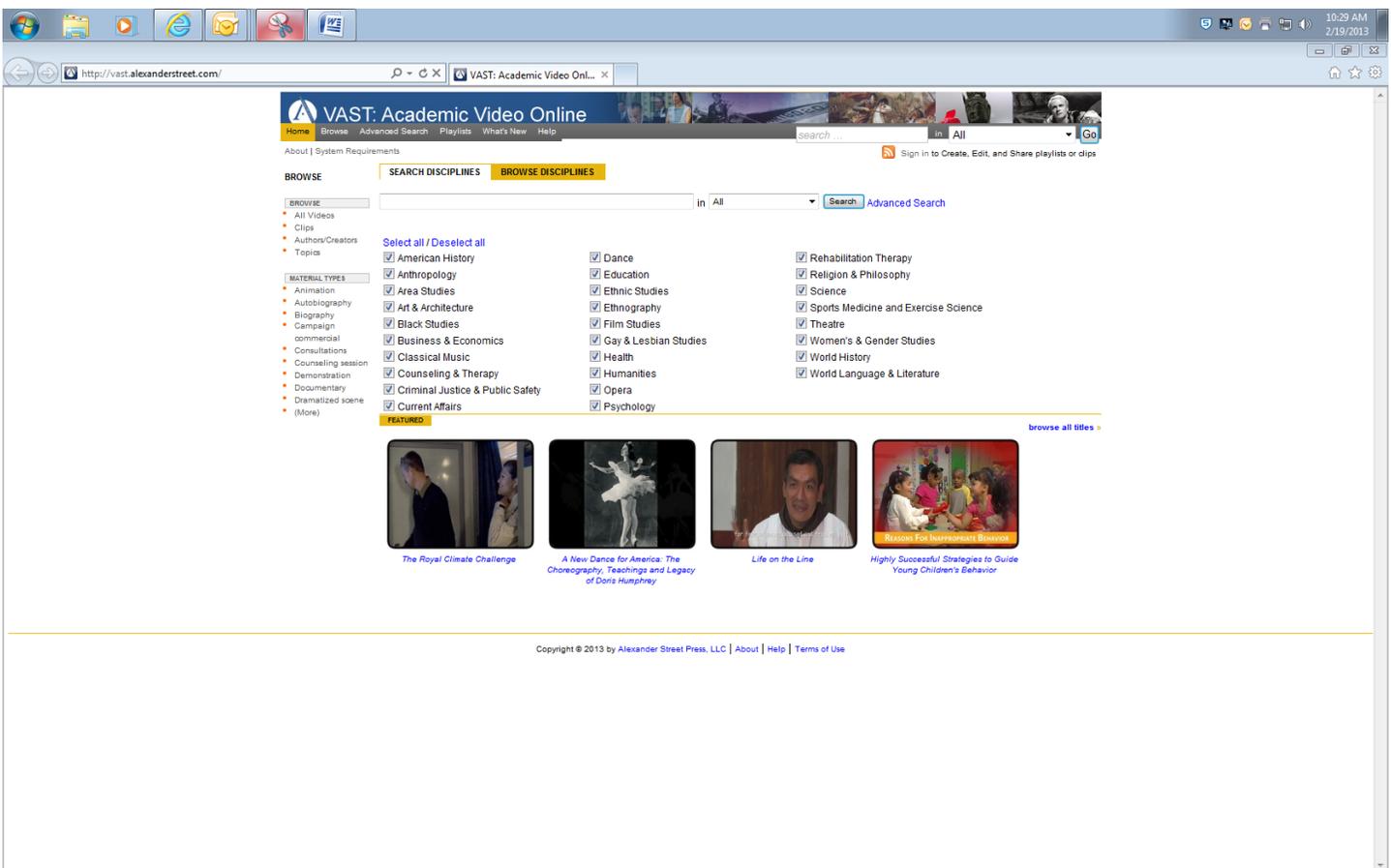
- Ability to expand the video to full screen and navigate from full screen mode
- Player will sense the end-user's bandwidth and adjust the image quality accordingly
- Integrated thumbnail navigation (i.e. you can opt to see the thumbnails and watch the video at the same time)
- Metadata will be more visible (i.e. no need to "see details" as they will be automatically available)
- Improved embedding functionality including the ability to expand the embedded video to full screen
- Maintains your position when you return to a video
- And more...

- Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?

The landing page presents the user with a variety of options for searching the database including: browsing, keyword searching or advanced searching. The site has keyword searching with a search box on all pages located in the top navigation bar. The default search is a keyword search of the following fields: Author/Creator, Title and Series, Subjects, Transcripts and Notes. Boolean searches are supported in the keyword search. A test for "music and therapy not psychology" yielded four pages of results. There is no spell check functionality. Searches with no results bring up a "Refine your search" link which takes the user to the Advanced Search page.

The advanced search has search options ranging from title, author/creator, year released, discipline, language, and subtitle language. Some of the advanced search options have popup windows or expanding lists to show the options. For example, for Publishers the user can click on the "Select Terms" link to get an A to Z list of publishers and retrieve all available materials from Icarus Films.

From the landing page users can also pick a specific collection within the database which opens a new window with the selected collection. It was noted by evaluators that the selecting a collection and selecting a discipline options were confusing since they use similar keywords. Waiting for search results is often slow when using any search option.



The browse page is a list of the videos which can be sorted by: Title, Author/Creator, Discipline, Series, Publisher, or Year Released. Sorting on this page is slow, while the user waits there is a "Please wait....loading" bar animation. At the top of the browse page there is a "Find term" auto-complete search box. There are several limiter options on the sidebar when searching, including:

Format, Video Type, Discipline, Topic, Author/Creator, Language and Year Released. The browse feature is cumbersome and slow due to the number of videos available in VAST, keyword and advance searches are recommended.

A "What's New" link provides a list of new titles to the database.

Search results are displayed with the title, keywords and some bibliographic information. Summaries or annotation of the videos are not available on the results page. Reviewers noted that it was sometimes difficult to understand the content of the video by the information provided on the results page.

USER SUPPORT SERVICES: 3, 3, 3, 3

- **What types of customer and technical support are available for end users and library administrators?**

The top navigation bar of each page has a link to the Help page. The Help page contains six categories: Getting Started, Browsing, Searching, Playlists, Results, Video Player Screen. Each category has linked subtopics. The topics cover a range of materials for both users (e.g. Search Tips, Playing and Navigating Videos, etc.) and administrators (e.g. Proxy Servers, MARC records, etc.). Materials in the Help section are entirely text based.

All the Help pages have a link to an FAQ page. Each page in the Help section also lists the Technical Support email and telephone number with a prompt as to what information to include/have ready when contacting support. Reviewers noted that there were no embedding instructions for instructors in the help section.

MARC records for some items are available and listed at <http://alexanderstreet.com/marc>. Downloading by vendor's own admission on the MARC FAQ page "isn't user friendly for large downloads". That said, it does irritate some new customers who may need to download multiple sets all at once.

- **COST: 3, 3, 3, 3**

Pricing for this subscription database is determined by FTE and the college having a materials budget of \$500,000 or less. The contract term is for a period of 12 months from January 1 - December 31. If a college has a materials budget that is over \$500,000, the college is directed to contact the League for pricing. Consultation with instructors would help a library determine if potential usage warrants cost. The cost seems comparable to similar products and it would be up to an institution to decide which service would serve its population best.

- **AVAILABILITY/ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE: 1.5, 1, 2, 2**
- **Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate? Is product accessible to users with disabilities?**

The video view is basic, containing a play/pause button, a scroll bar, an enlarge/smaller, and full screen buttons. Video in full screen mode is sometimes fuzzy. When transcripts are available they are on the right side of the video. Users can click on text of the transcript and the video will go to that section. Likewise, scrolling through the video and playing at certain point will update the transcripts to be at the same spot as the video. In addition to being synchronized to the video the transcripts are keyword-searchable. As the video plays, the transcript scrolls, and what's being spoken is highlighted.

The screenshot shows a video player interface. On the left, there is a video thumbnail of a woman in a hat. Below the thumbnail, the video title is "Paris was a Woman", the publisher is "Zeitgeist", and it was published in 1996. A copyright message is also visible. The video progress bar shows a time of 02:11:30:17. On the right, there is a transcript sidebar with two tabs: "Transcript" and "Clips". The transcript text includes:

directed by
Greta Schiller

Juliet Stevenson The city of Paris has often been portrayed as a seductive woman, was mistress amused to generations of male poets and artists, but not all those drawn to the city of light have been men. At the dawn of the 20th century, **created women flocked to the left bank responding not only to the beauty of Paris** but even more to its promise of freedom. They created a community, which made it possible for them to follow their passions in to their life filled with art and literature neither mistress were amused. Paris became a heaven for a new kind of women. [music]

PARIS WAS A WOMAN
Professor Shari Benstock is the Author. "Women of the Left Bank"

Shari Benstock It's curious the question of Paris , first of all many of these women were leaving home situations in which if they were going to be an artist or a writer, they were going to have find some way to juggle this against marriage, motherhood and the classic pattern of women's lives. And that they didn't want to do this. They wanted to be professional first and they wanted to live independent lives. Once these women arrived in Paris , especially those women who crossed over in to the French of vanguard culture that was there. They discovered richness in Paris that they had never anticipated would be there before. [music]

GERTRUDE STEIN AND MISS ALICE B. TOKLAS
27, RUE DE FLEURUS

Juliet Stevenson Gertrude Stein came to Paris in 1903 to join her brothers Leo and Michael . As this Stein family built up the world's first collection of modern art, Gertrude began to write in earnest .

Very few videos are closed captioned. This was a major concern for reviewers. Many videos have transcripts available but those transcripts do not contain the details available in closed captioning. Unlike closed captioning which is embedded in the video, the transcripts are on the right sidebar of the video. It is difficult for the viewer to read and watch the video at the same time. The transcripts do follow along with the narrations, although there are some areas of the transcripts that are incomplete in some videos. One major detriment is that if you play the video in full screen mode the transcript disappears.

It is difficult to determine the percentage of videos with available transcripts because there is no search option to filter out available transcripts. According to a recent announcement from Alexander Street, VAST currently has 83% of its videos transcribed. By the end of June 2014 95% of the videos will be transcribed.

All videos are web based and can be accessed by any internet browser, no special software is required.

OTHER REVIEWS OF THIS PRODUCT

The only substantial review available was this review from *Advanced Technology Libraries*.

"Alexander Street Launches New Search Platform." *Advanced Technology Libraries* 40.12 (2011): 7-8. *Library Literature & Information Science Full Text (H.W. Wilson)*. Web. 3 Dec. 2012.