

CANADIAN INDEPENDENT MEDIA IN EDUCATION

SYMPOSIUM REPORT

JUNE 2023

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du Canada

Canada Council
for the Arts

INTRODUCTION

From its inception as a public-facing independent media art streaming platform, VUCAVU.com has received numerous requests for streaming access in educational institutions. However, making VUCAVU's online streaming catalogue available to instructors and librarians is significantly different from the business model it currently works with. Over the last five years, VUCAVU has sought funding and invested time and research into exploring how it can become an educational resource. Within this examination, it became clear that the inclusion of streamable film and video resources from the collections of independent Canadian distributors is greatly lacking at Canadian universities.

In June 2023, VUCAVU organized and hosted two two-day symposiums, one in Toronto in English and one in Montreal in French. We invited instructors, librarians, media arts representatives and content partners to learn more about the subject, share their experiences and discuss ways to address the issues.

BACKGROUND

Shortly before the pandemic, VUCAVU began a serious investigation into how to incorporate an educational business model while utilizing its existing streaming film/video platform infrastructure and shared catalogue. A series of conversations with Danuta Zwierciadlowski, Electronic Resources + Archives Librarian, and Hillary Webb, Systems + Technical Services Librarian from Emily Carr University in the fall of 2019 and winter 2020, led the VUCAVU team to conduct more research into proxy software required for library integration and institutional subscription model options.

In 2020, York University Ph.D. Candidate Emily Collins, with support from a MITACS Accelerate Fellowship and her advisor Mike Zryd, Associate Professor from the Department of Cinema and Media Arts, surveyed and interviewed post-secondary instructors and librarians from across the country to discuss the challenges of educational access to film and video resources. From this research, Collins produced an article for the Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship called, “Digital distribution and online resources for e-Learning: The case of VUCAVU.com”. The investigation revealed a better understanding of the preferences and working methods of libraries and instructors as they pertain to new technologies.

In 2021, Ph.D. Student Marko Djurdjic, also assisted by a MITACS internship, led case studies in three university classrooms to beta test VUCAVU’s Private Pages in academic settings. Private pages are a new function that we built on the platform in late 2020 that is specially designed for use in a classroom. Through the creation of a unique user ID and password, a group of users is granted access to a page that contains streaming video and accompanying classroom materials such as lesson prompts and educational guides. This research offered insight into how instructors can utilize streaming technologies within a classroom setting and further illuminated students’ desire to access educational resources online.

Also in 2021, VUCAVU received a Sector, Innovation and Development (SID) grant from the Canada Council for the Arts to begin the first phase of the VUCAVU.education research. With this project, VUCAVU researched the efforts required to create MARC 21 library records for media artworks on the platform. MARC is a standard set of digital formats for the machine-readable description of items catalogued by libraries, such as books, DVDs, and digital resources. We also worked with Victoria Sigurdson, Media Collections Librarian from York University, to learn about the technical and discoverability needs required by library systems. A small set of test MARC records were created for us by Sarah Butterill, Cataloguing & Metadata Librarian from OCADU, to explore the data already available within VUCAVU’s online catalogue. Lastly, this project supported a two-day meeting of VUCAVU’s team with staff from our 8 long-term content partners in Toronto in June of 2022. This was an occasion to share what we’ve learned, lean on their expertise and collect input for the next steps in VUCAVU’s educational technology development.

BACKGROUND

The aforementioned projects allowed VUCAVU staff to better understand the resource parameters required by educational post-secondary libraries. Namely, the need for accessible media content. In 2020-2021, VUCAVU received a Digital Skills for Youth (DS4Y) internship administered by the Independent Media Arts Alliance (IMAA). Our intern, Stephanie Poruchnyk-Butler, reviewed VUCAVU's current accessibility standards and we worked together to deepen our understanding of incorporating accessibility considerations into our daily work (Read about it here: <https://vucavu.com/en/accessibility>).

In spring 2023, VUCAVU received another SID grant to hold the symposiums for which this document is reporting on. The Canadian Independent Media In Education Symposiums were held on June 22 and 23, 2023 (Toronto) and on June 26 and 27, 2023 (Montreal) and were the next step in our ongoing learning path.

INTENTIONS & GOALS

To maintain a cohesive strategy for these meetings, VUCAVU's team and consultants created a list of goals and intentions. Below are the guiding principles that led to organizational decisions about the presenters we selected and to how the final agenda for the symposiums were determined.

Help bridge the digital gaps between the requests for independent media arts access from academia and the library community while addressing the concerns of distributors and artists.

Encourage information sharing between various stakeholders and create more collaboration.

Keep the artist's needs at the forefront with an emphasis on payment, ownership, accessibility and inclusion.

Discover how we can bring independent media art to students in classrooms and add more value to this work by making it more accessible in an educational context.

SYMPOSIUM: PRESENTATIONS

Below are the presenters and a brief description of what they spoke about. Their expertise was an important part of informing the symposium attendees about current practices and requirements from the perspective of artists, distributors and librarians.

PRESENTATIONS

Mariane Bourcheix-Laporte

PhD Candidate, School of Communication,
Simon Fraser University

In her presentation, Mariane drew from recent projects, research and collaborations to discuss policy issues and contexts relevant to the use of media art in educational settings such as copyright and ideas of fair use. The presentation provided an overview of legislative changes resulting from the coming into force of the Canadian Government's Online Streaming Act (Bill C-11) and how these may impact both independent media arts and academic communities.

Hélène Brousseau

Digital Media and Visual Resources Librarian,
Concordia University Library

Hélène gave a presentation about Concordia University Library's approach to acquiring and making media collections available online. She addressed their successes and ongoing challenges as well as their acquisition policies and processes.

Jennifer Smith

Executive Director of the National Indigenous
Media Arts Coalition (NIMAC)

Jennifer presented on the ideas of Indigenous copyright, cultural ownership, and best practices in engaging with Indigenous content.

PRESENTATIONS

Victoria Sigurdson

(Toronto presentation only)

Library Advisor, Media Collections Librarian
at York University

Victoria's presentation addressed video accessibility including topics such as the benefits of captioning, media accessibility requirements for educational institutions, and common accessibility features in educational streaming media platforms.

Jennie Grimard

(Montreal presentation only)

Professor of Media Communications, Faculty
of Media & Creative Arts at Humber College

Jennie presented the role of accessibility requirements in media programs from a faculty perspective. She delved into the cultural impact of normalizing accessible media and the importance of training our future media makers in inclusive practices.

Toronto Meeting Highlights

Learnings, Challenges and Suggestions

The following encapsulates the expressed challenges and solutions noted from workshops that took place on both days.

DAY 1, TORONTO: JUNE 22, 2023

Optimally, libraries would provide guidelines for independent distributors about how they acquire media. This would allow distributors to know how to approach working with the libraries.

Structural work needs to be done by universities to adapt to the changing landscape. Everyone is struggling with dwindling resources and capacity.

The cost of streaming platforms is ballooning while library acquisition budget allocations have not grown much which is challenging for librarians.

Libraries have limited time, people and finances. Making acquisitions easier for them will make independent sales happen more often.

DAY 1, TORONTO: JUNE 22, 2023

Digital streaming formats and licensing parameters are always changing. It's challenging for all organizations to keep up.

Labour and capacity are huge barriers for independent media distributors. Accessibility, captioning and MARC records are added elements for digital educational distribution that take additional time and resources.

Often the big platforms lack a variety of content and pedagogical tools or resources such as lesson plans and educational guides which are desired by instructors.

New (and sometimes established!) instructors in educational institutions don't understand that they need to access video/content through libraries.

Shared film and video titles between non-exclusive distributors are a challenge. It may be a good idea to collectivize some of that labour.

The cost of setting up and maintaining streaming infrastructure (VUCAVU) is prohibitive without proper funding sources.

DAY 1, TORONTO: JUNE 22, 2023

Understanding what all the different libraries need is difficult. Each library is slightly different and has a different approach and the information is not easy to find.

Artists lose income if distributors can't connect with libraries.

If independent art film/video doesn't reach the students, then important local regional culture doesn't get taught.

Artists sometimes feel like distributors are gatekeeping their relationships with libraries. Questions such as which artists get presented to librarians and/or who decides what is selected often come up.

Distributors want to track viewership through platforms to ensure that artists are getting paid fairly.

There needs to be a balance between the cost of technology used to provide access to the content and services offered while ensuring artists are still paid enough for the use of their work in educational contexts.

DAY 2, TORONTO: JUNE 23, 2023

There is a desire to figure out models that are sustainable for everyone involved.

There is a need to create low-friction digital educational access models that provide ease of use and automation to reduce extra labour.

Having an educational streaming license schedule to start from would speed things up. Consulting with instructors and librarians about the subscription model payment structure will provide more solutions.

Outreach, engagement, marketing and advocacy are all part of making libraries aware of independent film/video.

Tracking viewership on platforms is an important part of deciding what to promote in certain contexts.

It is comforting/discomforting to know that most distributors are facing the same challenges.

Montreal Meeting Highlights

Learnings, Challenges and Suggestions

The following encapsulates the expressed challenges and solutions noted from workshops that took place on both days.

DAY 1, MONTREAL: JUNE 26, 2023

Accessibility and captioning is a major cost that distributors don't have funding to accommodate.

Many organizations share the same issues but work separately.

At the moment, library acquisitions are largely case by case.

Hearing about how library acquisitions work makes it seem less opaque.

DAY 1, MONTREAL: JUNE 26, 2023

There are limited acquisitions by libraries due to the time and fiscal constraints of the distributors.

Making contact with libraries is difficult and time-consuming.

Creating awareness of the titles with instructors needs to be done without direct solicitation.

The chain of emails with institutional contacts for one sale is very time-consuming for independent distributors.

Need a pricing model to work with as a starting point.

There are challenges with in-perpetuity copyrights and availability for independent distributors. This type of distribution model is more flexible with their artists and it allows them to pull titles when they need to; thus providing artists with more control over their own work.

DAY 1, MONTREAL: JUNE 26, 2023

There were questions about the best way to make titles available to instructors and librarians including questions about whether independent distributors should use large platforms or if each organization should have its own platform.

One suggestion was to ask librarians to consider setting acquisition quotas for independent films/ videos in educational libraries.

There was a call for unity among distributors and media art organizations to have future meetings. It is motivating to see that we all have the same challenges. Many of us have the same questions.

DAY 2, MONTREAL: JUNE 27, 2023

There are many different educational resources available to read and understand how to work with Indigenous artworks, communities and intellectual property.

We need common systems to alleviate case-by-case recurring situations.

It is difficult to know what the balance is between defending copyright while also understanding the importance of classroom dissemination and the impact that inclusion in the institutional canon can have on validating an artist's work.

There is a need for more funding from funders for accessibility supports.

The corporate film industry is taken more seriously than the independent media arts, therefore the money goes to them.

It is important to discuss the best way to incorporate the broadcasting rights of independent film/video with educational institutions.

DAY 2, MONTREAL: JUNE 27, 2023

There is a desire to learn more about positive outcomes from acquisition processes by libraries. It's challenging to know what will work if distributors only know a few ways of approaching libraries.

More collaboration is required between all these groups. How about another symposium?

Important Notes About Educational Library Acquisitions

Libraries are not able to intake video catalogues without MARC records. MARC reports are required to make any title searchable within a library system.

Many libraries are not able to accept films/videos into their collections without closed captioning.

Accessibility requirements are different from one province to another.

Library acquisition budgets vary dramatically. Some are as low as \$5,000 per year.

Instructors do not want distributors to contact them directly.

Educational libraries use a handful of different SAMLs (Security Assertion Markup Language) and SSOs (Single Sign ONs) to allow students and instructors access to platforms and resources through their library system.

Predetermined standard library licensing costs for film/videos may help ease the labour required to facilitate acquisitions.

FUTURE

FUTURE

VUCAVU's team is thankful for everyone's attendance and participation in both symposiums. We are excited to move forward on multiple fronts and to facilitate access to more Canadian independent films/videos for remote learning. VUCAVU is currently researching digital tools that can make this happen. Stay tuned!

There have been requests to continue the conversation. If you are interested in this topic, please let us know. Maybe we can hold another symposium with enough support and sponsorship.

FIND OUT MORE

If your organization wants to partner with us or you want to know more about our vision for VUCAVU.education please email VUCAVU's Managing Director, Jacquelyn Hébert at jacquelyn@vucavu.com.

THANK

YOU!

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Professor Mary-Elizabeth (ME) Luka

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CDMI
(Critical Digital
Methods Institute)

**Faculty of
Information**

at the University of Toronto
for sponsoring the Toronto
Symposium meeting room.

**Aline Zara and
Cate Alexander**

for coordination assistance
in Toronto.

VUCAVU acknowledges the generous support of
the Canadian Council for the Arts for this project.



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