Chris Krause

Collection Development Policies:

Northeastern Seminary and Boston University African Studies Library

I chose to review Northeastern Seminary and Boston University African Studies Library (ASL), both of which are special collection libraries specifically suited to a narrow scope. This comparative study will consider a number of key questions in order to examine the contrast and depth of difference amongst library collections.

What is immediately clear upon overviewing the collection development policies of both institutions are strictly focused toward a specific subject area. This is not surprising, considering that the purpose for these collections existing is to service a particular domain of study. For instance, the Northeastern Seminary focused on "theological collections," an action phrase which it uses throughout the document to mean biblical studies, archaeology, languages, homiletics, Christian education and more. The most diverse aspect of the collection is perhaps it's indication of collection strengths for medieval and reformation studies. The ASL's selection criteria is broader, and while the former tends to focus its collection development on textual and liberal arts sources, the ASL welcomes health, earth science and political science relating to African studies in addition to core selections. This might reflect the more diverse patron base of the greater Boston University institution.

Institutional scope varies just as much. For one, the term "scope" is not even used in Northeastern Seminary's policy, although a mission statement for the entire collection and a statement of goals are provided. While ASL's scope refers primarily to topical materials, Northeastern's bastardized "goals" include some mention of appropriate media, topic, theoretical or ideal collection properties and a spectrum of desired and non- desirable acquisitions.

The documents themselves are also quite different in format. While Northeastern Seminary's policy is a succinctly worded, minimalistic and utilitarian work designed perhaps for quick reference and as a framework for daily activity, the ASL policy is much more tailored for a public audience and is furnished with philosophy, public relations filler and pedantic explanations. The latter is better designed, and easier on the eyes, while a quick examination of the former's source code and obvious design motifs reveals that it was exported from Word to HTML, without any real design consideration of it as a web page for public viewing. It is clear that ASL's policy probably wouldn't be very useful for internal work from a librarian's standpoint, it does not mention budget allocation in any regard as the Northeastern's does, but is a more general document for public consideration and higher administration's gaze. Northeastern's policy also has a series of explicit rules on when or when not records should be added or weeded out from the collection, while ASL's policy is completely lacking in this regard. Another key difference is the timeliness of the documents: Northeastern's policy hasn't been updated, at least on their website, since 2001, and searching around the most recent thing a visitor might find is a list of books ordered in 2002-2003. On the contrary ASL's policy appears to be updated annually.

It is interesting to note that the ASL has a section in their policy which specifically addresses the issue of type of materials to be admitted to the collection while Northeastern Seminary does so sporadically and not in any uniform or focused way. There are some mentions of media in Northeastern's area target collection strengths definition (for instance, video tapes, audio cassettes and CDs are mentioned as being acceptable records relating to church administration), but there is a distinct lack of an all-encompassing policy. This may hint at a smaller, less organized and slower to expand collection under Northeastern and a more systematic and quickly expanding collection under ASL.

Both libraries are servicing a narrowly academic audience and make no pretenses of public service. Northeastern Seminary succinctly states that "the students, faculty, administration and staff of

Northeastern Seminary and the Division of Religion and Humanities are the principal constituents served by the theological collections." The policy mentions in several notable places the importance of accommodating special requests of the faculty in developing the collection while ASL only mentions requests twice, and in passing. Both collections are suited for students, faculty and research fellows. ASL in notable in that its policy also speaks to collaboration with other allied institutions including Harvard, MIT, Northeastern, Brandeis, Tufts, and Boston College. This hints at a grander, inter-library system for a greater, more cosmopolitan user base; Northeastern Seminary is a much smaller library.

A final difference between the two policies is that ASL is integrated to allied digital resources in the ultimate section of the document while Northeastern Seminary's policy, likely due to its nature as an export from Microsoft Word, lacks any connection of the sort. This again hints at a smaller user population, or at least a population of patrons less likely to search that section of the website for resources. It might be thought prudent however to fully integrate digital content to policies, else we fail to meet Library 2.0 standards of interactivity which patrons come to fully expect.

Ultimately before one can judge the skillfulness or effectiveness of a policy one must define the standards by which to rule. As a utilitarian work document for a collection manager, Northeastern Seminary's policy is more effective, as a public notice and piece of public relations ASL's is better suited. Ultimately ASL cannot function as a work document because it lacks the specific information needed to develop a collection, most notably an area on budget. Northeastern's policy succeeds in defining the collection, as well as providing practical information for a work environment, although rather ham-fisted.