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Book Pricing Update / The Year in Book Pricing and Publishing

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Blackwell

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Book Pricing Update

The Year in Book Pricing and Publishing — 1993
by Celia Scher Wagner (Blackwell)

Blackwell North America produces an annual report (the Approval Program Coverage and Cost Study) detailing trends in academic monograph pricing and publishing. The study does not measure book popularity — each title is counted once, whether it was purchased by one library or by hundreds. Therefore, it details monographs published, not copies sold. Following are highlights from our 1993 study.

Broad Trends in Pricing and Coverage

In the year ending June 30, 1993, the average price of all academic monographs was $52.24. This was a modest 1.8% increase from the 1992 average of $51.32. Excluding reprints (as most academic libraries do) the average price of a new title was $52.98, a 1.9% jump from the 1992 average of $52.08. Total publishing output of academic monographs held steady at nearly 35,000 titles.

The 1.9% overall price increase varied markedly by country of original publication. Prices of titles originating in:

- the U.S. rose less than ....................1%, from $42.25 to $42.60
- the U.K. rose ..............................2.6%, from $58.50 to $60.05
- other foreign countries rose ......12.8%, from $82.80 to $93.33

University press prices averaged $44.27, a 2.2% rise from last year’s average of $43.32. University press output increased by almost 500 titles, to make up 22.2% of all academic monographs.

Trends by Subject Area

In Architecture, and the Arts (Fine and Performing), prices rose 8%, from an average of $43.09 to an average of $46.57. The Humanities, on the other hand, experienced the only broad subject area price drop: down -1.2%, from $37.05 to $36.63. History, Philosophy, Language, and Literature all had lower prices in 1993 than 1992. Combining Humanities and Arts titles (the former outnumber the latter four to one), the average price rise was only 1%, from $38.33 to $38.82.

In the Social Sciences, average prices rose 5%, from $41.79 to $44.06. Applied Psychology and Sports & Recreation were the only two large areas where average prices fell.

In Science, Technology and Medicine (S/T/M), prices rose only 1.7%, less than the overall average. This was caused not by price moderation in S/T/M subject areas, but by a shifting mix within S/T/M publishing — fewer titles were published in the most expensive subjects, and more in the less expensive. The biggest jump in titles published was in Personal Computing. Unfortunately, while Personal Computing titles cost little, (averaging $27.81 apiece) most are also unwanted by academic libraries.

Of all titles published, about one third fell into Humanities and Fine Arts, one third into the Social Sciences, and one third into S/T/M fields. These proportions were essentially unchanged from 1992. If the total price of all academic monographs is considered, the disproportionate weight of S/T/M is striking:

Humanities and Fine Arts accounted for 23% of all dollars
Social Science accounted for 27% of all dollars
S/T/M accounted for 50% of all dollars

Other highlights

The book price bargain basement contained a limited assortment, like bargain basements everywhere. The 10% of all new academic monographs costing $30 or less fell into very few categories:

- 62% - Literary Texts (Novels, Poems, Plays, etc.)
- 23% - Personal Computing
- 14% - Travel, Sports & Recreation

Only 1% of the under-$30 books fell into other subject areas.

At the other end of the price spectrum, titles averaging over $100 (some over $150) were commonplace, especially in S/T/M and Law. Experimental Pharmacology barely broke the $200 mark, averaging $201.25.

Paperback originals (new titles available ONLY in paperback) constituted about one quarter of all new academic monographs, this year as last. The price of paperback originals held steady this year, at just over $27.

On the Area Studies front, there were fewer titles in both Asian and African Studies this year than last, while titles about the Islamic nations and the Middle East increased. Also on the increase were titles about the European Community, and about the countries of Eastern Europe, in particular Yugoslavia, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The biggest leap was in titles about the United States, where coverage rose 10%, from 6,600 to 7,200 titles per year.

Before and After 1993 — Long Term and Future Trends

It is safe to predict that academic book prices will continue to rise, but at what rate is anyone’s guess. As the chart on the following page demonstrates, over the past five years, annual price increases have varied from this year’s low of less than 2%, to a high of more than 13% — with no slowing or quickening trend in evidence. The five-year average increase is 5.9%.

Publishing output varies too, with some years showing a sudden surge in the number of books in Business or Computer Science, or an unprecedented scarcity in Architecture or Music. Since no library purchases a random sample of titles published, variations on the macro level may not be reflected in an individual library’s experience. A steep rise in the price of S/T/M titles will have little impact on a library which does not collect S/T/M. Similarly, the fact that novels and poetry are still inexpensive is of small comfort to libraries that do not buy literature.

1993’s modest overall price rise was a welcome respite after the past few years. Does it herald modest price rises in the future? Time will tell.
Average book prices --  
Percentage increase figured on previous year

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>All books</td>
<td>$39.30</td>
<td>$41.84</td>
<td>$43.64</td>
<td>$45.63</td>
<td>$51.32</td>
<td>$52.26</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% increase)</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. origin</td>
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<td>$35.61</td>
<td>$36.86</td>
<td>$38.32</td>
<td>$42.25</td>
<td>$42.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% increase)</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.K. origin</td>
<td>$42.41</td>
<td>$47.92</td>
<td>$48.79</td>
<td>$52.76</td>
<td>$58.50</td>
<td>$60.39</td>
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<tr>
<td>(% increase)</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other origin</td>
<td>$60.96</td>
<td>$62.77</td>
<td>$71.55</td>
<td>$73.86</td>
<td>$82.20</td>
<td>$93.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(% increase)</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
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