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Acquiring Minds Want To Know / Cloth/Paper

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Acquiring Minds Want to Know

Cloth/Paper — Still, an Issue

Column Editor: **Joyce Ogburn** (Yale University)

This issue caused considerable voice-raising and passion at the 1993 Charleston Conference. Are there publishers out there who will share statistics with us about actual number of hardcover versus softcover editions which were published in 1980/81 versus 1991/92??? — Yr. Ed.

In the last issue of *Against the Grain*, I presented some ideas about the possible assumptions about obligations that underlie the scholarly paperback market. This article gets a little more practical and presents some figures from Yale for your consideration.

In general at the Yale University libraries, hardcover books are the preferred format for purchase. There are occasional exceptions, but for the most part, hardcover books are purchased when available. Nevertheless, in 1991 and 1992 we had seen an increase in the binding activity in the main library (Sterling). A local study was undertaken to determine the possible reasons for this increase.

We found some interesting results. To determine our primary sources of papercover books, we reviewed the format of materials received for the months of August and September 1992. Our study showed the following percentages of receipts by country:

COUNTRY	HARDCOVER %	PAPERCOVER %
US	75	25
Australia	21	79
Canada	42	58
France	11	89
Germany	35	65
England	76	24
Greece	4	96
India	100	0
Israel	77	23
Italy	19	81
Latin America	3	97
Netherlands	48	52
Scandinavia	50	50
Spain/Portugal	10	90
AVERAGE	41	59

As a large research library, we would expect that a large number of foreign materials would be acquired, and as shown above, a large number of the papercover materials are from foreign countries.

These figures gave us a snapshot of what we were currently receiving. They told us little about what had happened over time. To broaden our time frame, we looked at the binding and preparation statistics for twelve years. From the binding statistics we knew how many paperbacks had been processed every year. We did not know the number of hardcover books nor the relative proportions of paper and hardcover. To determine these figures we subtracted the number of paperbacks bound from the number of books that were labeled and plated. The resulting figures showed that over time we were acquiring an increasing percentage of paperbacks.

YEAR	HARDCOVER %	PAPERCOVER %
1980/81	68	32
1981/82	64	36
1982/83	72	28
1983/84	65	35
1984/85	63	37
1985/86	61	39
1986/87	59	41
1987/88	62	38
1988/89	60	40
1989/90	64	36
1990/91	52	48
1991/92	54	46

Our purpose at the time was to understand simply that the increase in binding seen in 1990/91 and 1991/92 was not a fluke, but part of a trend toward acquiring papercover books. The figures seem to indicate a clear trend in the acquisition and processing of more paperbacks.

The study showed that although our library was intentionally purchasing hardcover books, we were experiencing an increase in the number of paperback receipts. We have not compared these figures with how budgets were allocated or spent per country, nor have we attempted to correlate this increase with changes or additions to approval plans. Two broad conclusions might be drawn from the study — one, that our buying patterns had shifted toward countries that tended to publish in paperback, or two, that our buying patterns had not changed and that in general publishing had been moving from hardcover format to paper format. To date we have not resolved which conclusion is more plausible. Most likely the answer is a combination of the two. Many variables would have to be considered before a definitive conclusion could be reached. ☺