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Book Pricing Update: A Closer Look at the Social Sciences

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Blackwell

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Book Pricing Update

A Closer Look at the Social Sciences

by Celia Scher Wagner (Blackwell)

The last "closer look" column surveyed publishing and pricing in Architecture and the Arts over the past five years. This second column in the series takes a closer look at the Social Sciences.

Since 1990, the number of new academic monographs in the Social Sciences has dropped about 6%. Two factors contributed to the decline: the overall number of new academic monographs has shrunk slightly and, at the same time, there has been a proportionate shift in the subject focus of new titles. A growing portion of new monographs fall into the Science, Technology & Medicine (STM) subject areas, and a correspondingly smaller portion fall into the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

The overall decline in Social Science was not evenly spread across the board, however (see chart below). Academic publishers in the Social Sciences are publishing fewer titles in Gerontology, Psychology (especially the less-academic Personal Psychology category), International Relations, Criminology, and Sociology; and more titles in Race Relations, Anthropology, Women's Studies, and Gender Studies. Particular topics have flourished, or faded, in popularity as well: the number of titles about women and minorities in business has grown in recent years, as has the number of titles about "downsizing," "rightsizing," and "corporate reengineering." At the same time, the number of titles about employee benefits seems to be dwindling. Titles about the religious and/or political right in America fell off a bit in 1992, but saw

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<th>Number of Monographic Titles in Selected Social Science Subjects</th>
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<td>Gerontology</td>
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<td>All Social Sciences:</td>
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<th>Average List Prices in Selected Social Science Subjects</th>
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<td>All New Academic Titles:</td>
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a large increase in 1993 and 1994.

Book prices in the Social Sciences rose 26%, from 1990's average of $35.86 to last year's average of $45.13. The rise for all academic monographs was 22% over the same five years, so Social Science went up at a somewhat faster than average rate (see chart previous page bottom). The graph at right plots average prices in Art & Architecture and Social Science against average prices for all new academic monographs. Although the order has remained the same for the past five years, with Social Science at the bottom, Art & Architecture in the middle, and the “average” monograph on top, the high rate of increase for Social Science means that prices in this category are fast approaching those in Art & Architecture.

Within the Social Sciences, the largest price rises occurred in Criminology (41%), Sociology (36%), Gerontology (34%), and Women's Studies & Gender Studies (26%). The price chart also shows that increases in individual categories are quite variable. While the combined Social Sciences increased steadily in price each year, fewer than half of the subcategories inched steadily upward. The majority took at least one dip in price along the way.