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Book Pricing Update

by **Celia Wagner** (Blackwell North America)

As readers of *Against the Grain* know, Blackwell North America periodically reports on pricing trends in academic and scholarly publishing. In addition to reporting overall trends, we have analyzed price differences according to various criteria: country of origin, subject focus, LC class, etc. An issue which came up at the 1991 Charleston Conference on Acquisitions concerned the pricing differential between titles published by trade presses and those published by university presses.

One assumption was that university press titles would cost more than trade press titles, as university presses do not have the economies of scale enjoyed by trades, and they are committed to publishing worthy (though not necessarily popular) titles, leading necessarily to shorter print runs and higher prices. This assumption brought vigorous rebuttals from some representatives of trade publishing — on the contrary, they argued, university presses can publish books less expensively because of tax breaks and other subsidies; university presses need not make a profit to stay in business; and trade publishers also offer “worthy” if-not-popular titles with short print runs, which they can afford to produce only because of their other, more profitable titles.

Intrigued by these conflicting theories, Blackwell compared university press and trade press pricing over calendar 1991. The average book, that year, had a list price of \$49.11, but because trade title production outweighs university title production by nearly four-to-one, that average is pulled up by more-expensive trade titles: the average university press title cost only \$41.73, while the average trade title cost \$50.79, over \$9.00 more.

These figures, like all averages, bear closer examination. About one quarter (24%) of all new titles appeared only in paperback last year. However, most paperback originals were published by trade presses. Only 14% of university press titles ap-

peared solely in paper. In contrast, over 26% of trade titles appeared in this format.

By format, the differences are as follows: The average price of all paperback originals was \$25.00. Again, this average is weighted heavily toward the trades: paperback originals published by university presses averaged \$20.32, while those published by trade presses averaged \$25.71. The average price of cloth originals was \$56.17, with a spread of \$14.44 between university press titles at \$45.30, and trade titles at \$59.73.

As always, Science/Technology/Medicine titles proved a special case. The gap between trade and university press prices was largest here.

Clothbound trade titles in LC classes Q, R, and T cost over \$20 more than their university press counterparts. Combining both cloth and paper, titles in these three classes cost at least \$17.00 more from university presses (see chart below). In fact, if classes Q, R, S, and T are excluded, the gap between trade and university press prices shrinks considerably, from \$9.06 down to only \$3.48.

The theory that university press titles “naturally” cost more or less than trade titles is clearly false. Yet the chart shows that there are some instances where pricing differentials — in either direction — are substantial. Blackwell does not attempt to explain those differentials here, but simply to report them. ☛

**Average List Price by LC Class — All titles
(Both Paperback and Cloth) Calendar 1991**

LC Class	Subject Division	Avg. Price U Press	Avg. Price Trade Pr	Variance (Tr-Up)
A	General Wks	\$39.73	\$32.08	(\$7.65)
B	Phil/Psy/Relig	\$40.10	\$36.80	(\$3.30)
C	Aux. Hist.	\$45.00	\$36.29	(\$8.71)
D	History	\$42.29	\$38.53	(\$3.76)
E	N. A. Hist.	\$31.06	\$40.99	\$9.93
F	Can/Lat Am His	\$31.41	\$28.57	(\$2.84)
G	Anth/Geol.	\$40.99	\$34.61	(\$6.38)
H	Soc Sciences	\$42.13	\$41.32	(\$0.82)
J	Poli. Sci.	\$42.33	\$48.76	\$6.43
K	Law	\$49.20	\$55.38	\$6.18
L	Education	\$39.71	\$36.63	(\$3.08)
M	Music	\$51.57	\$37.28	(\$14.28)
N	Fine Arts	\$44.45	\$46.50	\$2.05
P	Lang/Lit	\$34.07	\$29.53	(\$4.54)
Q	Nat. Sci.	\$58.00	\$75.00	\$17.00
R	Medicine	\$52.23	\$69.39	\$17.15
S	Agric.	\$54.04	\$64.10	\$10.06
T	Tech.	\$47.29	\$66.82	\$19.53
U	Mil. Sci.	\$41.54	\$40.53	(\$1.02)
V	Nav. Sci.	\$33.29	\$45.91	\$12.63
Z	Lib. Sci.	\$61.75	\$45.68	(\$16.07)
All Classes		\$41.73	\$50.79	\$9.06
Non-Science Classes (Total, less Q,R,S,T):		\$39.95	\$43.43	\$3.48

(Average prices reflect all publishing activity, and are rounded to the nearest cent.)