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Book Pricing Update: The Year in Book Pricing and Publishing - 1995

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Book Pricing Update

The Year in Book Pricing and Publishing — 1995

by Celia Scher Wagner (Blackwell) (WAGNER@BNAMF.BLACKWELL.COM)

Each year, in an effort to examine the "size of the literature" in academic publishing, Blackwell reports on the more than 32,000 new monographs — from scholarly, trade, and university presses — treated through its Approval Program. For this report, each title is counted only once, whether it was purchased by one library or by many.

Broad trends in pricing and coverage

In the year ending June 30, 1995, the average price of all academic monographs was \$53.19. This was a modest .3% increase from the 1994 average of \$53.05. Excluding reprints (and most academic libraries purchase reprints sparingly, if at all), the average new academic monograph cost \$54.05, only twenty cents (.4%) more than the 1994 average of \$53.85.

Pricing changes varied by country of origin:

U.S. origin prices rose 2.4%, from \$43.82 to \$44.88;

U.K. origin prices rose 1.1%, from \$57.42 to \$58.05;

Other origin prices fell 7.1%, from \$91.63 to \$85.10.

This marks the second consecutive year of price decreases in the "other origin" category (primarily Dutch and German titles), which reached its pricing peak in 1993, when it averaged \$93.36.

University press prices increased .4% (in step with trade titles), to \$43.43 from last year's \$43.26.

Although overall output of academic titles dropped about 5%, university press output rose markedly — from 7,663 to 8,365 titles, or nearly 26% of all academic monographs.

Broad trends by subject area

In Architecture and the Arts (Fine and Performing), title output rose 2%. Prices were 3% lower, averaging \$44.54, down from the 1994 average of \$45.98.

Titles published in the Humanities dropped 7% overall, although there were increases in the number of History, Philosophy, and Religion books. Prices in the Humanities rose 8%, from \$43.70 to \$47.12.

The number of Social Science titles dropped 4%, for the second consecutive year, with large decreases in Law, Library Science, Sociology, and Psychology. Social Science prices rose 4% overall, averaging \$46.88, up from last year's \$45.13. The only subject areas with significant price decreases were Psychology (-10%) and Criminology (-5%).

1995 saw unusual changes in Science, Technology and Medicine (S/T/M) publishing. Prices dropped 1%, from \$76.82 to \$76.33. Title output fell off as well, by a surprising ten per cent, from last year's 11,451 titles down to 10,251. Botany and Astronomy were the only S/T/M subject areas where output increased. One large publisher informed Blackwell that they had delayed publication on hundreds of Computer Science titles, awaiting the release of *Windows95*. What happened to the rest of the S/T/M monographs? Is this a real decline, or a temporary blip?

More than one third of new academic monographs appeared in Humanities, with just less than a third each in S/T/M and in Social Science. Since prices in the three large categories are so disparate, though, S/T/M publishing still accounted for the largest portion of

all new title dollars. If the total price of all academic monographs is considered:

Humanities and Fine Arts accounted for 26% of all dollars.

Social Science accounted for 28% of all dollars.

S/T/M accounted for 46% of all dollars.

Other highlights of 1995

Titles averaging under \$30 grouped in the traditional subject areas such as Literary Texts, Sports & Recreation, and Gardening. For the first time, Personal Computing titles passed the \$30 mark, at an average of \$34.08.

The highest-priced subject areas were also traditional, with the over \$100 categories including Remote Sensing, Botany, Cytology, Mineralogy, and parts of Chemistry, Physics, and Technology. Experimental Pharmacology titles topped the list, averaging \$172.04 apiece.

In Area Studies, the number of books about Africa and African nations rose more than 15%. More titles focused on Germany, but fewer on the rest of Europe. Titles about Palestinian issues more than doubled, while those about the rest of the Middle East were fewer in number. Nicaragua was down; Bosnia was up. Titles about the United States as a whole, as well as "local interest" titles, fell off slightly.

Nearly one quarter of new academic monographs were paperback originals (not simultaneous cloth-and-paper publications, but new titles available ONLY in paperback). Paperback originals averaged nearly \$30 apiece, a conspicuous 13% price jump from last year.

What about simultaneous paperback editions? For twenty-five years, Blackwell covered hardback editions on Approval, (if a hardback edition existed), and paperbacks only when paper was the sole format available. This reflected the "cloth-preferred" policy of most academic libraries, and the intention of academic publishers to market clothbound books to the library market. Recently, many academic libraries have switched to a "paper-preferred" policy in order to stretch budget dollars. Early in 1995, Blackwell began covering both formats, so that individual libraries could choose "cloth-preferred" or "paper-preferred," for simultaneously published

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**Average book prices —
Percentage increase figured on previous year**

	June 1990	June 1991	June 1992	June 1993	June 1994	June 1995	5-yr Average
All books (%increase)	\$43.64 4.3%	\$45.63 4.6%	\$51.32 12.5%	\$52.26 1.8%	\$53.05 1.5%	\$53.19 0.3%	4.1%
U.S. origin (%increase)	\$36.86 3.5%	\$38.32 4.0%	\$42.25 10.3%	\$42.55 0.7%	\$43.82 3.0%	\$44.88 2.4%	4.1%
U.K. origin (%increase)	\$48.79 1.8%	\$52.76 8.1%	\$58.50 10.9%	\$60.39 3.2%	\$57.42 -4.9%	\$58.05 1.1%	3.7%
Other origin (%increase)	\$71.55 14.0%	\$73.86 3.2%	\$82.20 11.3%	\$93.36 13.6%	\$91.63 -1.9%	\$85.10 -7.1%	3.8%

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titles. We have not yet amassed a year's data about simultaneous paper/cloth editions, but we plan to report on the prevalence, and the pricing, of such formats in the future.

About the future . . .

What do we predict prices will do next year? We try not to, and

no wonder — while prices rise between 4% and 5% a year over the long term, the rise is never steady. Over the past five years, for instance, annual price increases have varied from less than 2% to a high of more than 12% (see chart above). The current five-year average, 4.1% per year, might be a "safe" guess for next year, though not an exact one.

1995 marks the third consecutive year that prices have risen less than 2%. Can this pattern continue? We doubt it. But we shall see . . .

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