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Book Pricing Update

A Closer Look at the Humanities

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

In the past two issues, this column took a closer look at trends in Architecture and the Arts, and the Social Sciences. This final "Closer Look" column surveys publishing and pricing in the Humanities over the past five years.

Since 1990, the number of new academic monographs in the Humanities has declined about 9%, (more than the 6% drop in the Social Sciences, and less than the 10% drop in the Arts). Within the Humanities, areas with the largest decline in titles published were Literary Criticism, History, Geography, and Philosophy. The only subject area to see a significant increase in titles published was Religion (see chart A).

Trends in academic publishing often reflect current political and social concerns, and Religion offers several examples. For instance, books about the Branch Davidians (not surprisingly) began appearing in 1994. And while most titles within Religion concerned Christianity, titles about Islam, though few in number, also increased — a remarkable 132%. This seems intuitively reasonable, given the current focus on relations between Islam and the West. Consider in particular the case of Salman Rushdie. In the 1980's, he was the occasional subject of

literary criticism. Since Mr. Rushdie's clash with Islamic fundamentalism, he has become something of a subject category of his own, less in Literature than in Politics and Religion: table of contents citations of him have increased eightfold since 1981.

Book prices in the Humanities rose 21%, almost in step with the "average monograph" increase of 22% (see chart B). In 1990, the average Humanities title cost \$30.45. By 1994, that price had risen to \$36.89. During the same time period, the average title across all subject areas went from \$43.64 to \$53.05. Humanities titles as a whole cost about 30% less than "average," throughout the five years.

Within the Humanities category, though, prices and price rises varied a good deal, and only one subject area, Language and Linguistics, showed a steady rise from year to year. In contrast, Geography titles went from an average of \$48 in 1990, up to nearly \$78 in 1992, then back down to about \$56 in 1994. Comparing 1990 to 1994, Geography prices have increased 16% — but that smooth 16% fails to reflect any of the variations from year to year.

It will be interesting to see how publishing and pricing change in the coming year,

but it no doubt will be just as "fluky" as years past. While we can see that prices rise between 4% and 6% per year over the long haul, the short haul is often a surprise.

Ed. Note: See our profile of Celia, page 69, this issue. - KS.

Chart A

Number of Academic Monographs
in Selected Humanities Subjects

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	Percent Change
Archeology	127	181	134	153	131	3%
Geography	95	85	98	91	75	-21%
History	2,006	1,816	1,644	1,411	1,592	-21%
Philosophy	628	610	573	592	559	-11%
Religion	1,326	1,380	1,277	1,459	1,521	15%
Judaism	82	71	67	97	75	-9%
Islam	25	34	41	36	58	132%
Buddhism	49	38	40	49	54	10%
Hinduism	28	18	25	17	15	-46%
Language & Linguistics	419	513	473	444	413	-1%
Literature	3,001	2,732	2,614	2,534	2,716	-9%
Literary Criticism	1,744	1,588	1,604	1,578	1,508	-14%
All Humanities Titles:	9,484	9,047	8,525	8,381	8,639	-9%
All New Titles:	36,271	34,403	33,896	33,630	33,256	-8%

Chart B

Prices of Monographs
in Selected Humanities Subjects.

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	Percent Change
Archeology	\$40.47	\$55.29	\$48.73	\$54.53	\$68.10	68%
Geography	\$48.01	\$49.71	\$77.86	\$60.12	\$55.77	16%
History	\$35.42	\$38.75	\$41.98	\$41.39	\$42.49	20%
Philosophy	\$42.13	\$47.42	\$49.98	\$46.57	\$49.51	18%
Religion	\$28.14	\$31.16	\$35.96	\$37.53	\$36.69	30%
Judaism	\$38.65	\$46.70	\$38.94	\$38.14	\$38.86	1%
Islam	\$31.86	\$50.57	\$41.41	\$50.47	\$43.34	36%
Buddhism	\$23.83	\$33.71	\$28.46	\$32.31	\$29.61	24%
Hinduism	\$30.78	\$43.26	\$41.41	\$44.30	\$31.94	4%
Language & Linguistics	\$45.19	\$47.84	\$56.47	\$58.01	\$63.49	40%
Literary Texts	\$19.65	\$21.41	\$23.19	\$22.45	\$22.68	15%
Literary Criticism	\$34.98	\$40.20	\$41.22	\$40.68	\$42.56	22%
All Humanities Titles:	\$30.45	\$35.23	\$37.05	\$36.64	\$36.89	21%
New Academic Monographs:	\$43.64	\$45.63	\$51.32	\$52.26	\$53.05	22%