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Book Pricing Update

The Year in Book Pricing and Publishing — 1995

by Celia Scher Wagner (Blackwell)

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Annually, Blackwell reports on the "size of the literature" in monographic publishing for the academic market. This column considers the new monographs — from scholarly, trade, and university presses — that are treated through our Approval Program. Each title is counted only once, whether it was purchased by many libraries, or by none.

Broad trends in pricing and coverage

The number of new academic monographs increased by 12% in 1996, from 32,000 to 36,000. At the same time that there was a big increase in coverage, there was almost no increase in price. The average academic monographs cost \$53.44, a modest .5% increase from the 1995 average of \$53.19. Excluding reprints (and most academic libraries purchase reprints sparingly, if at all), the average price of a new title was \$54.32, only a .5% rise from the 1995 average of \$54.05.

The .5% overall price increase was uneven, varying by country of origin:

U.S. origin prices rose .09%, from \$44.88 to \$44.92

U.K. origin prices fell 1.8%, from \$58.05 to \$57.03

Other origin prices rose 9.3%, from \$85.10 to \$92.99

New titles from university presses increased in price by nearly a dollar apiece, to an average \$45.92, up 2.2% from last year's \$44.93. University press output rose only 6.7% (much more slowly than the 12% output increase for all titles), totaling 8,924 titles, or 25% of all academic monographs.

Broad trends by subject area

In Humanities and the Arts, prices rose 1%, to an average of \$40.27, and title output rose 5%, to a total of 11,269, or just less than a third of all new titles.

In the Social Sciences, the average price fell 1%, from \$46.88 to \$46.31. Output increased 14%, to 11,697 titles, one third of the total.

In Science, Technology and Medicine (S/T/M), prices held remarkably steady, rising only three cents this year (0%), to \$76.36 from \$76.33. Monographic output increased 15%, to 11,815 titles, or about 34% of all titles.

Over the twelve months covered in this study, the total list price of all academic monographs covered through Blackwell North America's New Titles system was \$1,900,587. If that total is considered in light of the broad subject areas:

Humanities and the Arts accounted for 24% of all dollars
Social Science accounted for 29% of all dollars
S/T/M accounted for 47% of the total

This represents a slight shift in dollar percentages: Social Science and S/T/M are both up 1% from last year, and Humanities/Arts is down 2%.

Other highlights of 1996

Within the 12% increase in academic monographs published, some areas grew more than others. Psychology, Political Science, Mathematics, Medicine, and Nursing all experienced a larger than average jump in the number of titles published, while Religion and Folklore/

Mythology saw fewer titles than in 1995. Despite the decline in Religion as a whole, Ethics was a very hot topic, not only in Religion, but also in Biomedicine, Business, Law, and Philosophy. Titles dealing with "Family Values" held about steady, though (perhaps not surprisingly) "Health Care Reform" titles were on the wane.

Bargain subject areas included Contemporary Art, Performance Art, and Television, averaging under \$30, along with most Literature (but not Lit Crit). Also in the under-\$30 category were Sports, Gay & Lesbian Studies, and Allied Health (though not Nursing).

Subject areas averaging over \$100 are now so common that the following list includes only areas where more than ten titles were published: International Law, Cytology, Biochemistry, Virology, both Inorganic and Organic Chemistry, Physical & Theoretical Chemistry, Geophysics, Meteorology, Space Physics, Mechanics and Fluid Mechanics, Light & Optics, Electromagnetism, Radiation Physics, Combinatorics, Hydraulic Engineering, Hydraulic and Pneumatic Machinery, Materials Science, Petroleum and Hydrocarbon Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Biotechnology, Food Technology and Food Products, Dermatology, Surgery, ENT, Pharmacy, Farm Land Management, and Plant Culture. Significant categories where averages above \$150 cropped up were Experimental Pharmacology and Bacteriology.

On the Area Studies front, there were fewer titles about Africa, and more about Asia and the Pacific Rim. Titles about Hong Kong tripled in number. Also big in Area Studies were Latin America and the Indian subcontinent. Titles about particular states, and U.S. regionalia (particularly from university presses) continued to burgeon.

About the future...

Predicting the price and the output of academic monographs is not easy, as the chart below makes clear. The five-year average for price increases is now 3.3% — the lowest it has been in a long time. Does this mean that we are somehow "due" for a big increase, in order to get back into the historically normal range of 4-6%? Or have times changed? Certainly the much-feared increase in the price of paper has not had any visible impact on the cost of books — or at least, not yet.

When libraries ask us to predict price increases, we generally recommend using either the latest five-year average (now 3.3%), or the historical average (4-6%). But those whose crystal balls are well-maintained (and accurate!) may want to use another figure. Tune in next year to find out what happened....

AVERAGE BOOK PRICES							5-yr avg 1995
Percentage increase figured on previous year							
	June 1991	June 1992	June 1993	June 1994	June 1995	June 1996	
All books (% increase)	\$45.63	\$51.32	\$52.26	\$53.05	\$53.19	\$53.44	3.3%
		12.5%	1.8%	1.5%	0.3%	0.5%	
US origin (% increase)	\$38.32	\$42.25	\$42.55	\$43.82	\$44.88	\$44.92	3.3%
		10.3%	0.7%	3.0%	2.4%	0.1%	
UK origin (% increase)	\$52.76	\$58.50	\$60.39	\$57.42	\$58.05	\$57.03	1.7%
		10.9%	3.2%	-4.9%	1.1%	-1.8%	
Other origin (% increase)	\$73.86	\$82.20	\$93.36	\$91.63	\$85.10	\$92.99	5.0%
		11.3%	13.6%	-1.9%	-7.1%	9.3%	