2002 Serials Price Index

By Nancy Chaffin and Ajaye Bloomstone

This is the 39th annual survey of U.S. Serial Services, a product of the ALA/ALCTS Library Materials Price Index Committee, working in conjunction with divine/Faxon Library Services.

The selection of titles surveyed and determination of prices were in accordance with the guidelines of the American National Standard for Library and Information Sciences and Related Publishing Practices—Library Materials—Criteria for Price Indexes (ANSI Z39.20-1983). The standard defines a U.S. Serial Service as "a periodical publication that revises, cumulates, abstracts, or indexes information in a specific field on a regular basis by means of new or replacement issues, pages, or cards, intended to provide information otherwise not readily available." In August 1999, a new standard for library material price indexes, Criteria for Price Indexes for Printed Library Materials (ANSI/NISO Z39.20-1999), was published by the National Information Standards Organization. That standard specifically excludes serial services. Lacking inclusion of serial services in the 1999 standard, we have continued to use the 1983 standard.

A total of 1311 titles were included in the data for Tables 1-7. This year, thirty-eight titles were dropped from the index, having been discontinued altogether or having been discontinued in paper. Forty-seven titles were identified as replacements for the dropped titles and were chosen to correspond as closely as possible to the price range, intended audience, and subject content of the dropped titles. In recent years past, many titles were dropped from the index due to their conversion to electronic versions only, usually Web-based. Considerably fewer titles were dropped this year for that reason. Primarily, titles have simply been discontinued. This year was also different from the most recent past year in that print replacements for dropped titles were easier to identify.

Prices for approximately 750 of the sample titles were extracted from the serial subscription database of divine/Faxon Library Services. Nancy Chaffin and Ajaye Bloomstone determined prices for the remaining titles and identified replacement titles by consulting publisher lists (many of which were available on publisher's Web sites), by contacting publishers by telephone and e-mail, and from library subscription records.

The data as computed by divine/Faxon Library Services show that the average 2002 price for U.S. Serial Services titles in the sample is $747.16 (Table 1). This is a 5.1% increase over the 2001 average, and over 2.5 times the average price for 1984.
Tables 2-7 show the average price changes by subject (including "U.S. Documents") and the numbers of titles added and dropped. The greatest average price change was in Table 4 "Law" (+6.8%). In the last four indexes, "Law" titles have experienced the largest percentage price increase for three of those years. In this category, 7 titles were dropped and 8 titles were added.

The next largest increase was seen in "General & Humanities" (+5.6%), in which 3 titles were dropped and 3 were added, and in "Science and Technology" (+5.5%), in which 13 titles were dropped and 14 were added. Titles in Table 6, "Social Sciences", experienced a slightly lower increase (5.1%). In this category, 2 titles were dropped and 3 were added.

Table 2, "Business" showed a less dramatic increase of +3.3%. There were fewer titles dropped/added this year than last. This was the only category in which more titles were dropped due to the title becoming electronic-only than due to the title dying. In "Business", 8 titles were dropped and 13 titles were added.

Table 7 "U.S. Documents" had a comparatively modest increase (+2.7%); 5 titles were dropped and 6 titles were added. In recent years, the "U.S. Documents" category has experienced a trend of fewer U.S. documents being published in paper format in favor of electronic only. Although this continues to be the case, the pace of conversion to electronic-only appears to have slowed down in 2001.

In 1998, the base year for this index was set at 1984 to ease comparison with other price indexes. Since 1984, the average price for a serial service subscription has increased by a factor of over 2.5 times. Over this time period, "Science & Technology" and "Law" titles have more than tripled in price, and "General & Humanities" are just below that threshold. "Social Sciences" and "U.S. Documents" have more than doubled in price. "Business" remains the sole category that has not doubled (or more) since 1984. For the entire Index, no year has experienced increases less than 3.9%, and in the majority of years it has exceeded 5%, including the last four years.

Nancy J. Chaffin is the Metadata Librarian at Colorado State University Libraries, Fort Collins, Colorado. Ajaye Bloomstone is the Acquisitions Librarian at the Paul M. Hebert Law Center Library, Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The authors would like to thank Linda Medeiros and the staff of divine/Faxon Library Services for their assistance in the production of this index.