

## Scholarship

# U.S. Research Libraries Search for Ways to Combat Spiraling Subscription Costs of Scholarly Journals

Prices rose 18.2 per cent in 1986-87, study finds; a few publishers account for most of the increase

By JUDITH AXLER TURNER

Responding to complaints that publishers of scholarly journals are engaging in "price gouging" and "profiteering," the Association of Research Libraries has decided to explore alternative publishing arrangements, including the possibility of having small American publishers begin new journals to compete with the major journal publishers.

At the same time, colleges and universities are cutting back on subscriptions and exploring ways to cut costs by sharing subscriptions among themselves.

The moves come on the heels of a study by the association that found a median rise of 18.2 per cent in journal prices in 1986-87—with the greatest increases coming from a small number of publishers.

Librarians point out that more and more journals—especially those priced over \$200 a year—come from fewer and fewer publishers, most of them overseas. Although the drop in the value of the dollar has hurt libraries, librarians say that subscription prices have risen far more than is warranted by the changing exchange rate.

"If the major scientific and technical journals are published by a limited number of publishers, they have a kind of monopoly," says Jeffrey J. Gardner, director of the association's Office of Management Services. "We need to work with other publishers and university presses to begin

to produce journals in direct competition with some of the ones we think are so overpriced."

The association will look at options this summer as part of a study of journal pricing. The study, to be done by professional economists, will determine the effects on subscription prices of currency fluctuations, inflation, a smaller subscription base, and more pages. Publishers say changes in those areas force prices up.

The holdings and expenditures of major research libraries in the United States and Canada are listed on Page A6.

Many librarians believe, however, that publishers are simply trying to charge as much as the market will bear.

Publishers, they say, realize they have a captive audience. Librarians cite a line from a letter sent by one publisher to his company's stockholders: "Historically, libraries have been concerned with the quality of the contents of journals, with the price being of lesser importance."

Part of the problem, says Michael A. Keller, associate university library for collection development at Yale University, is academe itself, which often rewards faculty members for the number of articles they have published, rather than for the quality of the articles.

Mr. Keller hopes to rouse librarians to urge scholars to reevaluate tenure and promotion policies that depend on the number of articles they publish. "The meaning of 'contribution to knowledge' now has financial implications to the whole community," he says.

Yale is one of the universities interested in supporting electronic publishing—the distribution of scholarly articles over computer networks, Mr. Keller says. "The prices of journals are so high that if we can cut the publishers out, we should do so," he adds.

The Research Libraries Group, a consortium of 37 libraries, has polled its members to find out which ones subscribe to what publications, and whether they intend to continue those subscriptions, as a first step in a cooperative effort to develop their collections.

Libraries will then be able to cancel subscriptions with the knowledge that a journal is available elsewhere through inter-library loans.

Nine universities in the Midwest are also exploring the possibility of sharing their journal collections so each can subscribe to fewer publications.

In Canada, institutions are banding together to try to work out bulk-purchase arrangements with foreign publishers. Libraries there must cope with a devalued

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