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The American Institute of Physics Pricing Policy

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NEWSLETTER ON SERIALS PRICING ISSUES
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148.3 THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS PRICING POLICY
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The American Institute of Physics (AIP) is attacking the relentless rise in journal prices. They have heard the cries of pain from librarians who must stock their libraries with journals when budgets have not risen. They are also aware of major cancellations at many formerly well stocked libraries. The bottom line is that in 1995 they have increased the prices for the journals they publish by only 12.5%. For 1996 the average price increase will be only 9%. They also intend to continue reducing this rate of increase for at least one more year.

The AIP has introduced another cost saving feature by extending their range of combination subscription packages. Some libraries are buying a selection of journals that falls a little short of one of the money saving combinations. Many of these libraries can now use one of these new package offers to increase their number of AIP journals while paying less. The subscription renewal forms and journals catalog detail these packages.

How are they going against the trend of ever increasing costs? I am a consultant (unpaid) to one of their publishing advisory committees, where I have observed their deliberations on journal subscription prices. The AIP used to base their journal price increases on three factors: increased production costs, growth in the size of journals, and decreases in the number of subscriptions. Each factor contributed about 5% towards an overall annual increase of about 15%. The AIP accepted this increase because their prices were still lower than many of their competitors.

The executive director of the AIP, Dr. Marc H. Brodsky, realizing that its customers cannot continually meet these price increases, changed the AIP's pricing philosophy. They will no longer base their subscription costs on the traditional factors explained above. To operate under this self-imposed restraint they are implementing economies in their production department by increasing the use of technology, and they are controlling the increase in the number of pages they publish each year.

Despite these restraints the AIP is introducing innovative products such as Applied Physics Letters Online, a hypertext edition that besides faithfully reproducing all the text, figures, diagrams, and tables of the equivalent printed product, also allows searching for related information. The AIP has also introduced a new document delivery service "Articles in Physics."

The AIP is a not-for-profit, public service organization that provides numerous services to the physics community. It is also an umbrella organization to its ten member societies. Some of its services are education and employment surveys, studies of physics history, and provision of information to the public by press, radio and television. The AIP has no individual members and no membership dues. Essentially all of its income comes from sale of its scholarly journals. They also publish English language translations of some Russian physics journals.

This description of the AIP should clear up a few misunderstandings about the AIP which were expressed in a previous issue of this newsletter (article 140.4, May 25, 1995). In that article Andrew Odlyzko points out that even though two journals covering the same field of physics may have the same prestige and reputation, authors may choose to publish in the more expensive journal if they do not have to pay page charges. Obviously library

budgets suffer if most of the key papers in physics are published in expensive journals. Fortunately, this criticism does not apply to the AIP. The AIP requests page charges for only four of its eight journals. For these journals the payment is voluntary; no penalty is assessed against authors who cannot pay the charges. The AIP is gratified that most authors do pay. Clearly, authors have no reason to desert the AIP and publish in more expensive journals.

Odlyzko also quotes a message from Paul Ginsparg who chides physics publishers that use their publishing activities to "subsidize" their other activities. Subsidy is not a word that applies to the AIP. Since the AIP has basically no other source of income besides its journal sales, it needs this income to provide its services which are necessary to the physics community.

Obviously one publisher reducing its prices has only a small effect on library budgets. Price decreases (or lower price increases) are only meaningful and only have an effect if other publishers follow. There does seem to be a ripple effect here. Several member societies of the AIP such as the American Physical Society are also reducing the increase in their subscription costs.

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