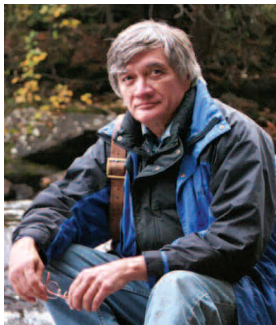


THE FUTURE OF *ELEMENTS*?



Rod Ewing

Peter Heaney has stepped down as the first Triple Point columnist. Peter did an excellent job, bringing unexpected topics and people to our attention. His duties as president of MSA have placed new demands on his time, so, for a few years, we will miss the fine writing that he brought to this column. On behalf of all readers, I extend our thanks to Peter. Although it will be difficult to meet the standard that Peter set for Triple Point, I have agreed to assume his role. In addition to my own thoughts about the issues that confront our science, I will invite leaders in our fields to write guest columns on a wide variety of topics.

I am especially interested in contributions from Europe and Asia, particularly on global issues of science policy, education, and funding for research.

You hold in your hands the first issue of the fourth year of *Elements*. Three years is probably about the right time to reflect on what has been accomplished and set our goals for the next three years. Ian Parsons, outgoing principal editor, has reviewed the first three years of *Elements* in his editorial (page 3). We have passed through the very exciting, and difficult, process of creating an entirely new publication for our community of mineralogists, petrologists, and geochemists. Even though our individual research communities are small and have strong intellectual bonds, it was not an easy sell to get the different “tribes” to join the common effort. In addition to the repulsive forces between the different disciplines, there were national, cultural, historical, and language barriers to overcome. Much to the credit of all, however, the importance of the science pulled us together.

The measure of our success is in the numbers: more than 9000 individual subscriptions sent to the members of 14 different societies, as well as an additional 1,500 library subscriptions. Beyond these numbers, the thematic issues have not only been used to educate our readers about our science, they have also been used to teach our students, as many of the figures and articles are finding their way into lectures. Many topics have attracted new students to our disciplines. Funding agencies have used *Elements* to “make the case” for our research, and *Elements* has become a medium for funding agencies to highlight their support for our science, as was done in the issue “User Research Facilities in the Earth Sciences” (February 2006). People with important views on our field, such as Margaret Leinen, head of the Directorate of Geosciences at the National Science Foundation, and Don Anderson, at Caltech, have written Triple Point columns (February 2006; June 2007). Our editorials and columns are meant to stimulate discussion and bring new perspectives and ideas to our community—see the letter to the editor on climate change and Dan Schrag’s response (December 2007). Also, I must confess that I am surprised at how much I look forward to the summary of activities of the participating societies. I now plan to attend meetings and field trips that would have been unnoticed were they not announced in *Elements*. As is evident in each issue, our disciplines are more vital and alive than might have been imagined during that time B.E. (before *Elements*). Most importantly, the “bundled” articles of each thematic issue have wide appeal. *Elements* is already on the *ISI Journal Citation Reports*, and we have our first impact factor (1.562). This past December, *Elements* became the 35th online geoscience journal on the GeoScienceWorld platform (www.elements.geoscienceworld.org). Look us up!

Elements has been a success during these first three years because it has filled a number of needs and because there are colleagues in our community who are willing to devote considerable time and effort to deliver

Elements to you six times a year. Can we do better? What will be required? Can we continue to operate in the same way?

We certainly want to grow. The original plan for *Elements* was that each issue average some 48 pages in length—already we offer 72 pages per issue. We still want more societies to join the *Elements* family, and we are still being contacted by new societies about joining; however, this also adds to the effort and cost for each issue. Managing our subscription list, currently done by the Mineralogical Society of America, is a huge job. We want each thematic issue to be a concise and lucid summary of important topics in our disciplines, but accomplishing this requires detailed planning and careful review and editing. We want *Elements* to be the major communications medium for our disciplines—the place you go to for news, job announcements, and advertisements for equipment and new books, but each short announcement and advertisement requires preparation, checking, and additional pages. All of these activities are shouldered by a few, very hard working individuals and the contributions in kind from a number of the participating societies.

My concern during the next few years is that *Elements* be put on a solid financial foundation and that we secure the services of the very best people in our fields. I think that we have to look carefully at our business model, originally based on substantial volunteer effort. We have to compare *Elements* with other similar publications, such as the bulletins of the Materials Research Society and the American Ceramic Society. *Elements* should always be the best of these society-based publications.

In order to ensure a successful future for *Elements*, we have to review where we are and set new goals. The mechanism for this review is the Executive Committee of *Elements*—a committee on which each of the participating societies has a representative (their names are listed on the masthead, page 3). Among the important issues to be addressed are number of staff; compensation; pages per issue; mailing charges; advertising rates; subscription cost to individuals.

The issue of the subscription rate is perhaps the most difficult, as there must be a balance between the cost of producing *Elements* at a high standard and its value to readers. *Elements* is now a much greater bargain than we had imagined possible. We originally proposed to publish about 220 pages per year,

and last year we delivered 440 pages. But this “bargain” comes at a price, paid for by contributions in kind by individuals and societies. I suspect that an increase of \$2/year/member would put *Elements* on a firm footing, but we have to do the analysis. Many colleagues tell me that this is too much. How much value do you place on *Elements*? Now is the time to communicate your views to the editors and members of the Executive Committee of *Elements*—as well as to the society through which you obtain your subscription. As the Executive Committee reviews the budget and makes recommendations, our unwavering goal is to deliver to you an exciting and attractive magazine whose content and presentation make you proud to be a member of this scientific community. But this is also a business, increasingly constrained by cost.

There are, however, some noteworthy ways that each of you can help. Encourage colleagues to join one of the participating societies so that they will receive *Elements*. Make sure your departmental library subscribes. Ask your company to buy a corporate subscription. Buy gift subscriptions for prominent policy makers and members of government. Encourage vendors and publishers to advertise in *Elements*. On request, the managing editor can provide our advertising package—with instructions and rates. Advertise job opportunities in *Elements*. To the extent that we have a large subscription base and a steady income from advertising, we can deliver *Elements* at a very reasonable price.

Elements is your magazine. Send us your suggestions for improvement. Recommend topics for thematic issues. Offer your help as a guest editor, reviewer, or author. Help us to secure the future of *Elements*.

Rod Ewing
(rodewing@umich.edu)

“The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time.”

— Abraham Lincoln