

Notes from the Inside

Some five years ago, I spoke with members of the Executive Committee about the possibility of moving to an electronic *Newsletter*. They scotched the idea, stating that they liked to be able to carry the print edition to sundry places, having it with them to peruse on the train or the plane, for those rare free moments when they could flip through its pages. I, too, like the print *Newsletter* - seeing it not only as a tool to reach our membership but as a tangible thing that could be given to potential donors and others interested in the history of science. So we kept the print version.

With the global financial crisis, the print question is now renewed. HSS members may not realize that nearly a third of our operating income (as late as last year) came from our endowment, raised during the heroic days of Gerry Holton. Having lost a prodigious amount of this endowment, we must now scramble to find ways to cut expenses. The printed *Newsletter* seemed to be a good place to begin because its demise would not mean a cut in services, only a change in medium. In fact, an electronic *Newsletter* offers a richer forum for sharing news in the profession, opening up expected and unexpected avenues. For example, in this issue is a poignant remembrance of Chen Meidong, who died this past year. A print *Newsletter* would have limited notice of his death to a few sentences, but in the electronic version, we devote hundreds of words to a life lived in the history of science, revealing a scholar whose work many of you have never encountered but has nonetheless altered the current of our profession. There are other benefits, as well.

Much of the content in the *Newsletter* first passes through the Web site. To create printed versions of these Web items we would edit them to space and spend hours trying to fit the puzzle pieces together to make our page allotment. Now, we face a different kind of editing task in which our measure is not paper, but time. Digital texts have no real boundaries other than the effort that it takes to produce and edit them. We welcome longer pieces but also recognize that a 2,000 word article involves much more labor than a 200-word piece. Fortunately, the e-version of the *Newsletter* provides us more time in that, rather than retrieving and editing information on the Web site for inclusion in the *Newsletter* (the jobs for example), we can now just provide the link to jobs, fellowships and postdocs and use the time saved for expanded content. Articles themselves will take on a different appearance, in which readers can follow links for further information, or click back to an earlier *Newsletter* article for reference. The possibilities stretch to the horizon.

But time is still precious and one shortcoming we have discovered is our inability to prepare an electronic version and a full version suitable for printing. The April *Newsletter* is written in html, which makes it easier to format and to download. A pdf version, which would be printer friendly, would require a separate preparation and enormous amounts of labor but, as a compromise, we do offer a pdf version for separate articles and hope that these printer friendly alternatives will help those who want a more portable document.

Finally, the e-version, as you all know, saves paper (the countless drafts proofed in the office,

the bluelines, the tens of thousands of printed pages) and energy (issues are mailed throughout the world). Best of all, no longer will those in Cambridge, Massachusetts receive their *Newsletter* weeks ahead of members in Cambridge, England - copies will hit the electronic doorstep in both places at the same time. So when you phone an overseas colleague and ask, "Have the seen the latest *Newsletter*?" the answer will be "Yes."

As always, I welcome your feedback and hope that we can provide a Newsletter that all of our members will enjoy.

Jay Malone, Executive Director

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