On Campus

A Big Scoop, and then a Chill

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Emily Bell, the director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, at left, moderates a discussion between Guardian US editor in chief Janine Gibson, New York Times executive editor Jill Abramson, Guardian outside counsel David Schulz, and Harvard law professor Cass Sunstein. Photo: Eileen Barroso

To many journalists, Edward Snowden's bombshell revelations last year about the National Security Agency's surveillance activities carried troubling implications for their own work. Now knowing that the US government routinely collects data about its citizens' e-mails and phone calls, won't government employees be less likely to disclose newsworthy secrets, for fear that their private communications with reporters will be picked up in a dragnet?

That question framed a conversation among prominent journalists and lawyers at Columbia's journalism school on January 30. The panel, hosted by the school's Tow Center for Digital Journalism and moderated by center director Emily Bell, was part

of a yearlong series of programs organized by the Tow Center under the title Journalism after Snowden, which will feature additional public events as well as original research projects.

One of the panelists, Jill Abramson, the executive editor of the *New York Times*, said that Snowden's revelations about NSA spying, together with the US government's recent aggressiveness in pursuing criminal charges against leakers, has created "a real freeze" in the relationships between government sources and journalists.

David Schulz, an outside counsel for the *Guardian*, said the government's surveillance capabilities are now so advanced that whistleblowers can no longer expect to remain anonymous. "There's an ability to find out who gave out any information," he said. "And we should all be very concerned about that. If we don't have a mechanism that allows for whistleblowers, our whole society is going to suffer."



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