

After Snowden: An iSchool response to the challenges of (NSA) mass state surveillance (#NSAiSchool)

Andrew Clement, University of Toronto

Abstract

This Session for Interaction and Engagement seeks to facilitate a productive discussion around iConference2015 about the various challenges that the recent revelations of mass suspicionless surveillance by the National Security Agency (NSA) pose for the iSchool community and how we might respond individually and collectively. The session will be conducted in three main phases: an initial brainstorming exercise that will refine a draft *Statement* outlining the possible set of responses; a conversational engagement phase during the conference in which session participants will individually discuss selected aspects of the draft *Statement* with conference attendees; and a wrap up session that will refine the *Statement* in light of the feedback generated during the conference. In preparation for the conference, a provisional draft of the *Statement* will be circulated for comment. Follow-up after the conference will consist of finalizing the *Statement*, publicizing it for wider community endorsement and facilitating concrete actions.

Keywords: surveillance, big data, privacy, information policy, iSchool community

Citation: Clement, A. (2015). After Snowden: An iSchool response to the challenges of (NSA) mass state surveillance. In *iConference 2015 Proceedings*.

Copyright: Copyright is held by the author.

Contact: andrew.clement@utoronto.ca

1 Purpose and Intended Audience

The extraordinary scope and intensity of secret surveillance activities conducted by the National Security Agency and its partners in the Five Eyes countries, revealed in the documents leaked by Edward Snowden, have sparked widespread controversy. Many aspects of NSA activities touch directly on the iSchool community – institutional missions, espoused values, teaching programs and research agendas.

The central purpose of this Session for Interaction and Engagement (SIE) is to engage community members, through the occasion of the 2015 iConference, in a participatory deliberative exercise mainly focused on producing a widely endorsed public statement: *The iSchool response to the challenges of (NSA) mass state surveillance*. Two related desired outcomes are to better inform iSchoolers of the issues at stake in relation to mass state surveillance as well as foster collaborative connections for pursuing specific responsive actions.

The immediate target audience are those with a strong prior interest in some aspect of mass state surveillance. Participation in the Session assumes no prior pro- or con- position in relation to the various legal, technical, political, policy, etc. controversies around the NSA.

The ultimate target audience are those affiliated with the iSchool community more generally concerned with the wider implications of mass state surveillance.

2 Relevance to the Conference/Significance to the Field

NSA surveillance activities touch on many of the research or teaching interests within iSchools, such as: digital curation and preservation; information retrieval; knowledge infrastructures; data, text and knowledge mining; computational social science and information policy, to mention a few of the areas listed in the Submission Call. Research conducted in iSchools is directly relevant to NSA surveillance capabilities and operations. Many iSchool graduates have the skills and training in high demand by the NSA and other security/surveillance agencies for hiring. More generally, iSchools claim to be “Leading and Promoting the Information Field.”¹ With the role of mass state surveillance being among the most hotly contested policy issues of our time, iSchools have called upon themselves the responsibility to offer insight and guidance into the many information related issues at stake.

3 Proposed activities

3.1 Brainstorming – Session 1 - 60 mins at the beginning of the conference

The opening session aims to refine a first rough draft of a short (~2 pp) statement on an iSchool response to mass state surveillance. The organizer will facilitate a brainstorming session modeled on the Future Workshop technique, drawn from the field of Participatory Design. The first Critique phase solicits individual concerns about the current situation regarding mass surveillance and the challenges these pose for the iSchool community. This is followed by a Vision phase that through small group and then plenary discussion, identifies, clarifies and names various alternate actionable responses. These will be captured in an editable wiki that constitutes the draft *Statement on iSchool response ...* to be further refined in the subsequent stages.

To expedite the drafting process, the organizer will offer an initial outline of the *Statement* that can be edited by session participants and others iSchoolers. The first version will be available for comment in February and announced via the Twitter account and hashtag: @/#NSAiSchool. The early draft is simply a starting point that anyone, anonymously or otherwise, is free to disagree with, to comment on and to suggest revisions. Only those clauses that enjoy strong support of session participants will appear in the final public version.

To keep the session manageable, the maximum size will be set at **20 participants**.

All SIE stages will operate under the Chatham House rule.²

3.2 Conversational engagement – throughout the conference

Participants in the opening session will be invited to engage others at the conference in informal face to face conversation about whatever aspects of the draft statement they deem of highest priority. They will be encouraged to take notes of their conversations, while assuring anonymity, and sharing these with other SIE participants.

During the conference, the *Statement* wiki will be advertised as open for comment and revision.

¹ <http://ischools.org/>

² “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the **Chatham House Rule**, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.” - See: <http://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule>

Comments and feedback will also be solicited via Twitter. Session participants, as well as any others so interested, will be encouraged to signal their willingness to discuss the statement by adding a label to their name badge with the hashtag: #NSAiSchool

The session organizer and collaborators will monitor the *Statement* wiki and #NSAiSchool Twitter stream throughout the conference.

3.3 Wrap-up – Session 2 - 60 mins at the end of the conference

The closing session will review and discuss the feedback provided through the face to face conversations, as well as the on-line contributions. With the aim of achieving a rough consensus, this discussion will inform revision of the *Statement*, mainly by clarifying wordings and dropping those points that garner little support. Where there are very strongly supported items that had not come up in the first session, these will be added to the draft, but this will be treated as an exception. To exhibit and promote transparency and accountability in the drafting process, the full editing history will be publicly available.

We will also identify promising post-conference collaborative initiatives among the participants around specific iSchool responses.

3.4 Follow-up – within a week of the conference, and hopefully beyond

Given time limitations in the wrap-up session, the *Statement* will not be ready for immediate public release. The necessary polishing work will be done on-line collectively, with a tight deadline on the order of one week. The finalized *Statement* will then be published, and endorsements actively solicited within the iSchool community. Pursuit of specific iSchool responses will be facilitated through the collaborative initiatives fostered by the SIE.

4 Session organizer

The organizer, Prof. Andrew Clement, has long-standing research, teaching and advocacy interests in the fields of surveillance studies, community informatics and participatory design. While he has taken strong public opposition to contemporary forms of mass state surveillance, his role in the proposed session will be as a facilitator of an inclusive community deliberative process.