On Campus

Guardian Exec Emily Bell to Lead New Digital Journalism Center

By
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Emily Bell (Guardian News and Media)

British journalist Emily Bell, a major figure in the world of online news, has been hired to direct a new digital reporting center at the Graduate School of Journalism.

Over the past decade, Bell has overseen the digital news operations of Britain's *Guardian* newspaper. The left-leaning *Guardian*, despite having a modest print circulation for a British daily, has the second- most-trafficked English-language news Web site in the world, attracting 37 million unique visitors per month. That trails only

the *New York Times*.

At Columbia, Bell becomes the inaugural director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism, which will be launched this fall with $5 million in support from the philanthropic foundation of Leonard Tow ’60GSAS and $10 million in additional gifts. The center will influence the curriculum of the entire school, training even its print journalism students in video, audio, and other multimedia reporting tools. Bell and her colleagues will also teach students to develop new models for delivering information and create business innovations to support those models.

“We’re thrilled to have been able to recruit Emily Bell to come here and to lead the Tow Center,” says Nicholas Lemann, dean of the journalism school. “She has an unparalleled understanding of the toolkit available to digital journalists, and of just how deep and cooperative the relationships between journalists and the public can now become.”

Guardian.co.uk, under Bell’s leadership, was named the best news site by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences in 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2009. It’s known for innovative content: As part of its May 18 coverage of the Thai uprisings, for example, readers could view photos and videos shot in different Bangkok neighborhoods by clicking individual streets on a city map. The same day, readers could learn why inflation rates in Britain have risen in recent years by clicking the dips and peaks of a graph that spanned several years and being linked to relevant stories from the *Guardian*’s archive.

Bell, in addition to directing the Tow Center, will help oversee a new dual-degree program offered jointly by the engineer-ing and journalism schools. The master’s degree program in computer science and journalism will produce tech-savvy news gatherers capable of developing tools to help their co-workers analyze electronic databases — and thus spot news trends amid the oceans of information that exist online — and to augment stories with new types of graphs, charts, and other visual aids. Columbia will begin accepting applications later this year for the five-semester program, which will begin in the fall of 2011.

“One of the biggest problems journalism has at the moment is maintaining its relevance to an audience that is often ahead of traditional newsrooms in its expectations and use of technology,” Bell recently told *Wired* magazine. “Our students will, I hope, have the confidence and skills to bring some of those

newsrooms up to date, and more importantly, create their own organizations and models where they see a vacuum or failure.”

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