



## 2015–16: A Year of Renewal

ASI led a consortium of student groups that registered more than 1,500 students in advance of the 2016 presidential election.



Susan Turner Nold, J.D.

## A Message from the Director

2016 revealed that more than ever, the work of The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life is vital. While the political landscape that surrounds our work presents real challenges, it does not diminish our institutional commitment to activating people to make a positive difference as informed voters and active participants in civic life.

It is difficult to reflect on 2016 without noting the most prevalent refrains heard broadly from scholars and the media: our starkly divided and splintered politics; our gridlocked government; the distrust of insiders, elites and the mainstream news. Those narratives present real threats to our public life and compel action, but they don't tell the whole story. The voices heard and discoveries made through the daily work of the institute's faculty, staff, students and partners over the course of this year, tell a very different story.

This is the story told in the pages of this report.

This is a story of intention, thoughtful planning, hard-work, skill-building, discovery and impact. It's a high school student learning to use her voice for change; a classroom audience witnessing bipartisan speakers convey camaraderie and mutual respect; a student volunteer choosing time away from social engagements to become deputized and trained to register other students to vote. It's a story of faculty leading students to imagine the possible, discover methods for news websites to frame headlines for accuracy and impact, improve engagement with their audiences, and reduce incivility and inaccuracy online. It's the story of the mid-career professional gaining confidence online and on camera. It's the funder who wants to study how to invite younger voters to participate in local politics.

We are proud of who we have impacted and what we have accomplished in 2016, and humbled by the complexity of the challenges ahead. A continued emphasis on research, education and programs designed to teach and develop the skills of civic and political participation is unquestionably important. Thank you for being among those who remain committed to our goals, and together we can make a difference.

Sincerely,

Susan T. Nold  
Director, The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life

### Vision

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life exists to cultivate informed voters and engaged citizens.

### Mission

ASI fulfills its mission through research, education and outreach programs focused on Civic Discovery, Young People and Civil Dialogue.

Sponsored by



# Civil Dialogue



## Great Conversations

The Annette Strauss Institute's third annual Great Conversations Dinner in April centered on the 2016 elections and the issues confronting Texans. Texas comptroller Glenn Hegar and Senator Kirk Watson co-chaired the evening of nonpartisan dialogue. A panel with Wayne Slater, Paul Begala, Kristin Soltis Anderson and Charlie Cook set the tone for the evening. Each dinner table featured one notable conversation leader who facilitated an engaging conversation about the importance of 2016 and the future for all of us who live, work, vote and lead in Texas.

The 2016 event raised \$125,400 from 40 sponsors, individual tickets and gifts, and is the primary vehicle to raise private funds to support the Strauss Institute's research and outreach.

Many thanks to our leadership sponsors: HEB and the Texas Civil Justice League, and all the other generous donors. A full list of event sponsors can be found here on the website.

Great Conversations 2017, "The Lore and Legacy of The Texas Legislature" featuring Co-chairs Senator Judith Zaffirini and Representative Todd Hunter was held on February 28, 2017. A list of generous supporters of the 2017 event is available on our website along with event photos. The 2017 event will be featured in the institute's 2017 Annual Report and published in 2018. See results for Great Conversations 2017 at: [moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/great-conversations-2017](http://moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/great-conversations-2017)

Lebermann Forum in October and November teamed up with Dr. Art Markman and Dr. Bob Duke from KUT's *Two Guys on Your Head* to explore "The Psychology of Voting" (a podcast) and "The Psychology of Civic Engagement" a discussion moderated by KUT's Rebecca McInroy at Views and Brews, a regular feature at The Cactus Cafe. [kut.org/post/psychology-voting](http://kut.org/post/psychology-voting)

Director Susan Nold published two opinion pieces that were picked up by various media outlets, including the *Ft. Worth Star-Telegram*.

[star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/other-voices/article111852972.html](http://star-telegram.com/opinion/opn-columns-blogs/other-voices/article111852972.html)

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Anjali Zutshi



Panelists field questions at the Denius Symposium on News Integrity.

From left: Dr. Sharon Jarvis, former State Senator Wendy Davis, Campaign Consultant Rob Johnson and *Texas Tribune* Editor-in-Chief Emily Ramshaw.

## Civic Discovery

The Annette Strauss Institute strives to improve scholarly and public understanding of media, politics and civic participation. Our affiliated faculty conducts research on topics such as political language, consumer news choice and media coverage of politics and policy. In addition, the institute is home to the Engaging News Project, the Texas office of Project Vote Smart and the Campaign Mapping Project, and annually gives the Patricia Witherspoon Research Award to support graduate student research on public service, civic life and citizenship.

### Texas Media and Society Survey

The Texas Media and Society Survey is a broad-ranging survey on the topics of journalism, the media, politics, civic engagement, discussion networks and communities. The first wave of the survey was conducted with 1,009 Americans and 1,006 Texans from late May to early June 2016. Two reports, which can be found on our website, present the findings with respect to journalism and the media and political participation. Among many other findings, the survey revealed that 76 percent of Texans and 70 percent of Americans see the news media as focusing too much on

scandals. Additionally, 47 percent of Americans and 53 percent of Texans have not paid for access to news in the past year. A subsequent report will present survey data on discussion networks and communities.

[moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/texas-media-society-survey](http://moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/texas-media-society-survey)

### Engaging News Project

The Engaging News Project (ENP), founded and directed by Dr. Talia Stroud, assistant professor in the Department of Communication Studies and assistant director of The



"I grew up in the Metroplex and have great memories of Mayor Strauss's commitment to public service. The institute embodies those goals and gives those of us who have been fortunate to serve in the public sector the incredible opportunity to give back and contribute to the dialogue of civic engagement."

—Denise Davis, B.A. '89, J.D. '93, Austin

Annette Strauss Institute, researches commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways to improve online news. ENP continues to see its work impact news organizations across the country during the 2015–16 academic year, releasing 10 white papers, offering insights on ways in which comment sections can be enriched, strategies for crafting headlines, best practices for using solutions journalism, and showing the need for additional use of research within newsrooms. ENP also released “Engaging Buttons,” a WordPress plugin that allows users to add different engagement buttons to their websites, including a “Respect” button, which is based on ENP’s research into alternatives to the “Like” button. In addition, ENP hosted its third News Engagement Workshop with 12 digital news leaders, team members spoke at a number of high-profile events including the South by Southwest Interactive Festival, and co-sponsored its first Social Media Summit.

[engagingnewsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2016-Engaging-News-Project-Annual-Report.pdf](http://engagingnewsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/2016-Engaging-News-Project-Annual-Report.pdf)

### Denius Symposium on News Integrity

The Denius Symposium on Oct. 26 featured a panel of prominent speakers—former State Senator Wendy Davis, Republican strategist and new Strauss Institute Advisory Council member Rob Johnson and *Texas Tribune* Editor-in-Chief Emily Ramshaw. Dr. Sharon Jarvis, associate professor in the Department of Communications Studies and associate director of the Annette Strauss Institute, moderated the discussion and presented results from the Texas Media and Society Survey. “The survey results show a public with deep skepticism about the media and politics, and we are challenged to think about how to improve news media in today’s climate,” Jarvis told the packed room in the Belo Center for New Media.

### Campaign Mapping Project

The Campaign Mapping Project, which began in 1995, has been assembling and analyzing speeches, ads and debates; print and broadcast coverage; and letters to the editor produced during U.S. presidential elections between 1948 and 2016.



Shannon McGregor

This rich trove of campaign material has resulted in seven books, including two new this year: *The Inconvenient Voter: How Journalists Sideline Political Participation*, by Sharon E. Jarvis, and *Civic Hope: How Ordinary People Keep Democracy Alive*, by Strauss Institute founder Roderick P. Hart.

### 2016 Patricia Witherspoon Research Award Winner

**Shannon McGregor**, a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Journalism at Moody College of Communication, was the recipient of the 2016 Patricia Witherspoon Research Award. Her research interests center on political communication, social media, gender and public opinion. The Witherspoon Award supported Shannon’s study of media issue ownership, in which partisan media operate somewhat independently from political parties, prioritizing distinct issues that stem from ideological agendas.



“Everything I have ever been part of worked best when everyone involved took an active role. Our community, be it the nation as a whole or just the folks in a neighborhood, is no different. My civic education at UT Austin carried beyond my graduation and has led me to become active with numerous community groups, volunteer with local projects, and even serve in the military. The Annette Strauss Institute teaches those who might not otherwise have had that university-level exposure and works to instill the ethos of civic engagement.”

—Greg Levenson, B.S. '00, Albuquerque



Students attend a session at the 2016 Campaign Bootcamp.

## Youth Education

Educational outreach is central to the mission of The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life, and the 2015–2016 school year and the fall of 2016 featured multiple outstanding events.

### The New Politics Forum

#### *The Hatton W. Sumners Careers in Politics Conference*

Advisory Council members James Aldrete from Message Audience Presentation and Kathy Garcia with CPS Energy joined Dya Campos from HEB, Susan Nold from the Strauss Institute and several others to give students a rare opportunity to connect with and learn from elected officials, political staff and government leaders from across the Lone Star State. Watch the recorded sessions here:

[moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/new-politics-forum/hatton-w-sumners-2016-careers-politics-conference](http://moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss/new-politics-forum/hatton-w-sumners-2016-careers-politics-conference)

### *Campaign Bootcamp*

This three-day nonpartisan training gives young people a practical introduction to what it's like to work on and run a political campaign.

Advisory Council member Rob Johnson, founder of Johnson Strategies, and a balanced bi-partisan group of campaign professionals made this special weekend possible for 51 students.

The New Politics Forum launched the *Texas Civic Ambassadors* program in 2016, and with more than 30 applicants, the selection process proved difficult. The **seven ambassadors**



“My mother would be so proud of the work being done at the institute that bears her name. Nothing was more important to her than the civic life of our cities, our state and our country. She knew that our future relies on citizen education and participation. This conviction continues to drive the work the institute does day in and day out.”

—Janie McGarr, B.A. '75, J.D. '78, daughter of Annette Strauss, Dallas

chosen for the 2016–17 academic year will be phenomenal youth leaders.

The 2016 *Executive Communication Training* created new partnerships and helped participants hone their public speaking skills and develop organizational messaging plans.

#### *Post-Election Debriefing with Matthew Dowd*

ABC News political analyst Matthew Dowd reflected on the rhetoric, strategy and surprises of the 2016 presidential election at the NPF 2016 Post-Election Debriefing. More than 130 participants attended, eager to hear Dowd's opinions on the future of partisanship and democracy.

#### *Civic Life in the Cyber Age*

This thought conference connected 110 young adults and students as well as 70 online livestreamers with the nation's top social entrepreneurs and civic innovators. A robust line-up of speakers—prominent leaders in the fields of civic technology, journalism and social innovation including Erica Williams Simon and Henry Timms—discussed various ways technology can increase and enhance civic participation.

#### *Student Lounge and Social Media Ambassadors at TribFest*

NPF sponsored 15 students to attend the 2016 Texas Tribune Festival, and serve as social media ambassadors for the weekend of festivities. They were granted access to meet VIPs, attend panel discussions, and network with policy makers and other influential citizens.

#### *Speak Up! Speak Out!*

*Speak Up! Speak Out!* (SUSO) is a civics education program culminating in a civics fair for junior high and high school students in Texas. The program seeks to develop critical academic and civic skills such as research, writing, public speaking, problem-solving and collaboration. SUSO began in a small number of schools in Austin in 2003 and has grown to include a Dallas civics fair, and served more than 1,000 students in 2016.



Spring *Speak Up! Speak Out!*

The Strauss Institute's goal for SUSO is to reach more students across the state, and to host regional winners at a Texas Civics Fair in Austin, Houston or Dallas.

**“When Americans cast votes,  
that’s not rigged—it is power”**

—Susan Nold in *Other Voices*,  
Ft. Worth Star-Telegram, November 1, 2016

#### UT Votes

In September, UT Votes—a student organization under the auspices of the Strauss Institute—conducted a volunteer deputy registrar training with 82 Longhorns in attendance. The organization leads a consortium of student groups that registered more than 1,500 students in advance of the 2016 presidential election.



“As a participant in ASI's New Politics Forum, I gained insight into aspects of political life that may have taken years to get on my own. And it wasn't just the relationships with peers I formed through ASI, it was access to some of the top players in politics that really began to open doors for me as I started my career. I still maintain a number of those relationships today. For America to continue building and moving forward, we all have to participate in the decisions that will get us there. ASI is working to find innovative ways to increase that participation.”

—Daniel Becka, B.A. '13, Austin

# The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life Advisory Council

September 1, 2015–December 31, 2016

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## The Strauss Legacy

The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life is named for Annette Greenfield Strauss, former Dallas mayor, community leader and philanthropist. Mrs. Strauss was an extraordinary woman whose accomplishments and commitments were legion. By the time she became Dallas' first woman mayor, Mrs. Strauss had spent 40 years as a volunteer, community activist and city council member. As mayor, she brought together the city's diverse communities during a time of great change and challenge. A fervent fundraiser, she raised millions of dollars for education, the homeless, health care and the arts. It is our honor to further her legacy.

## Get Involved

Do you value civic engagement? Partner with the Strauss Institute as we develop a greater understanding of the barriers to better citizenship and the motivations that create civic involvement. Volunteer at one of our Youth Education events or take in one of our panel discussions on campus.

Your active participation in the life of the institute is welcome. Our work depends on a strong core of active volunteers and donors, just as our country depends on engaged citizens and informed voters.

Learn more at:

[moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss](http://moody.utexas.edu/centers/strauss)



FOR CIVIC LIFE



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