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MORE VOTERS, BETTER CITIZENS

2011-2012 REPORT
Perhaps it's just me, surrounded as I am by young people, but is it possible that I'm aging? Whatever it is, it has become hard to keep track of everything being done at the Annette Strauss Institute. The past year has seen a blizzard of activity. Two major fundraisers – for Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison in Dallas and another featuring Lt. Governor David Dewhurst in Austin. Both events were wonderfully successful and we are flattered indeed that the Senator and the Lieutenant Governor would give up their time so freely and so enthusiastically for the Institute.

We've done a lot of other things as well and the numbers don't lie: 4 New Politics Forum gatherings, 7 high schools in Dallas participating in our Speak Up! Speak Out! program, 1,000 students recruited to work on the Student Pollworker Grant, 1,103 bills monitored and archived by Project Vote Smart, 250 research summaries prepared for the Institute’s website, 700 students recruited for an in-school evaluation of civics materials, $65,000 for an Office of Survey Research grant from the Texas Department of Transportation. Numbers, numbers, numbers.

And there were more qualitative milestones as well: Two wonderful videos prepared for our Turning Points Project, an imaginative enterprise that brings the Constitution to life in powerful and dramatic ways.

We also inaugurated a Civic Education Endowment to propel our research and outreach projects in the future.

Another list of important numbers includes the faculty members who have become involved in the Institute’s activities over the years. Among these are Sharon Jarvis and Talia Stroud, stalwarts from the Communication Studies Department, as well as Regina Lawrence and Homero Gil de Zuniga from the School of Journalism and Jennifer Brundidge and Paul Stekler from the Radio-Television-Film Department. The Institute also has fast friends in the Department of Government – Daron Shaw, Bat Sparrow, David Leal, and Bob Luskin, to name but a few – as well as Sherri Greenberg and Dan Bartlett from the LBJ School of Public Affairs.

And as we look to the future, we want to work even harder to strengthen these cross-campus networks. We also want to devote more time to spreading the word beyond Texas of what we’re doing. The Institute will turn twelve years-old next April and, like any pre-teen, we’re still young and frisky but also trying to be just as mature as we can possibly be. So please keep track of us. You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!
The Annette Strauss Institute honored two exceptional leaders in 2011 – United States Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and Texas Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst – with awards in recognition of their legacies in public service.

In a ceremony in Dallas on February 22, the Institute presented Senator Hutchison with the Texas Leadership Award. The Texas Leadership Award honors those qualities and individuals who serve as role models for the young people of Texas. Guests at the event included Congressman Michael Burgess, Ambassador Jeanne Johnson Phillips, Ambassador James Oberwetter, UT System Chancellor Francisco G. Cigarroa, Theodore (Ted) and Sue Strauss, and Ross and Margot Perot.

In a ceremony in Austin on March 22, the Institute presented Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst with the Steward of Texas Award, honoring those who could have done almost anything with their lives, but who decided to make the lives of Texans better. Guests at the event included Texas Governor Rick Perry, Speaker of the House Joe Straus, Attorney General Greg Abbott, State Senator Judith Zaffirini, Theodore (Ted) and Sue Strauss, UT System Chancellor Francisco G. Cigarroa, and UT President William Powers, Jr.

Both awards were given in memory of Dallas Mayor Annette Strauss, who served selflessly as a leader and the steward of her city.
Research projects at the Annette Strauss Institute examine political language and attitudes of college and non-college youth, voter turnout, and civic education programs. They include:

- **The Office of Survey Research**
  An expert survey and field research resource for academic, government, non-profit, and business clients with facilities specifically designed for focus groups and telephone interviewing.

- **Project Vote Smart, Key Votes Program**
  An online, non-partisan resource that provides individuals with a one-stop shop for tracking key legislation. Guided by journalists and researchers, undergraduate interns research bills, compile legislators’ voting records, and collect data on interest groups and candidates.

- **Campaign Mapping Project**
  A multi-year attempt to assemble campaign materials produced during presidential elections between 1948 and 2008 as a guide to understanding the direction of American politics.

Outreach projects at the Annette Strauss Institute include ambitious attempts to enliven civics curriculum in the nation’s schools and educate students about our democracy. They include:

- **The American Trustees Project**
  A collection of videos and lesson plans that educate about citizenship and the Constitution. All videos are free, available online, and accompanied by research-based curriculum crafted to engage young people in civic dialogue and our democracy.

- **Speak Up! Speak Out!**
  A collaboration with public high school teachers in which students identify community problems and work together to develop solutions to present to community leaders.

- **The New Politics Forum**
  A series of non-partisan, youth-focused, educational forums taught by active political professionals, including a Post-Election Debriefing, Careers in Politics, and Campaign Bootcamp conferences.

- **UT Votes**
  A student organization that organizes and coordinates Get Out the Vote activities, including registration booths, deputization sessions, and campus competitions and educational forums.
Communication Trainings Supported Public Leaders
The Strauss Institute’s Executive Communication Training welcomed political professionals for a weekend of hands-on media training. Participants included: CenterPoint Energy, The Texas Association of Nurse Anesthetists, United Way Capital Area, Texas Computer Education Association, National Association of Social Workers - Texas, and The Austin Chamber of Commerce.

Speak Up! Speak Out! on the Road
SUSO hosted its first civics fair in Dallas, where over 100 high-school students participated in sharing their solutions to community problems in their neighborhoods.

New Politics Forum Linked Students to Professionals
NPF’s Fall 2010 Post-Election Debriefing included a “Blunt Tell-All” with campaign managers from Rick Perry for Governor and Bill White’s campaign, and ended in a keynote address with former Presidential candidate and DNC Chairman, Governor Howard Dean. The Center for Politics and Governance partnered with us on our Careers in Politics Conference. Former Railroad Commissioner Michael Williams offered insight into the benefits of a career in public service. Campaign Bootcamp welcomed 37 students from 12 universities for our three-day training. 15 Democrats, 11 Republicans, 3 Libertarians, and 7 Independents learned how to create a successful campaign and get voters to the polls.

Turning Points Video Project Launched
The Turning Points project, partnering with the Emmy-award winning Texas Young Lawyers Association, produced two new videos, created educational outreach content, lesson plans, and trained over 60 teachers on how to use the videos in their classrooms.

Students Educated Voters on Campus
UT Votes members worked at the polls on Election Day and partnered with UT Student Government to create a “Hook-the-Vote” event which raised awareness about the election.

MORE VOTERS, BETTER CITIZENS

Jose Antonio Flor
2011 Ted Strauss Internship Award winner

“The work I did was challenging and fulfilling, and the mission and core values of the organization went hand in hand with my commitment to civic service. I understand that the work I do for the people of the Rio Grande Valley is not a gift, but an investment.”
The Annette Strauss Institute has big plans to expand its outreach programs in 2012 and continue to build partnerships for its K-12, high school, and undergraduate initiatives.

- Dr. Talia Stroud, Assistant Director of Research, will use the Institute’s Turning Points curriculum to study how messages travel among teenage peers at Del Valle High School. Turning Points is a collection of short film dramatizations for high school students and teachers that illustrate major Constitutional questions and encourage class discussion. In the process, Dr. Stroud will also study the effectiveness of the Turning Points curriculum.

- In summer 2012, the Institute will launch an Austin summer internship with Project Vote Smart. Participating interns will earn credit hours for attending New Politics Forum conferences and UT Votes educational forums and focus groups.

- The Institute will host the New Politics Forum’s Campaign Debriefing conference in November 2012. The event will give students a chance to speak openly and candidly with scholars, journalists, and political professionals about state and national election results.

- The Institute will launch a Central Texas college and university outreach effort to register voters and compete in our TexElects program. TexElects is a statewide contest that invites middle and high school students to compete for cash and prizes by producing campaign messages that encourage their peers and their parents to participate in electoral politics. In 2012, TexElects will be expanded to include a competition for college students.
Executive Director Dr. Roderick P. Hart finished a manuscript examining political tone. It is the most recent outgrowth of the Institute’s “Campaign Mapping Project,” which began in 1996. The manuscript details the impact of pluralism, partisanship, and institutionalization on modern political discourse. It includes case studies of Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, and Sarah Palin.

*Niche News: The Politics of News Choice*, a book authored by Assistant Director of Research Dr. Natalie (Talia) Stroud, was published by Oxford University Press. Democrats and Republicans tune in to notably different news sources. Stroud explores why partisanship is a driving force behind news selection and the democratic consequences of likeminded news use.

Stroud also received a grant from the Advancing America Foundation to evaluate the effectiveness of two local Spanish-language events. Results showed that attendees learned about education and fitness at the events.

New Politics Forum (NPF) Project Manager Emily Einsohn worked with graduate students Ashley Muddiman and Maegan Stephens on a survey of 2011 NPF participants. Attendees were highly satisfied with their experiences; 93 percent said NPF helped them want to act to improve civic and political life, and the programs increased participants’ self-efficacy, political skills, and intentions to engage in political activity.

The Institute continues to sponsor research by young scholars through its Patricia Witherspoon Awards:

- Graduate student Tiara Naputi interviewed Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. She learned that their involvement in community organizations and participation in cultural events offers opportunities for political education and learning about citizenship processes.

- Graduate student Curt Yowell began a project on the link between perceptions of the news media as relevant to democracy and political participation.

Rafic Bittar
Project Vote Smart volunteer

“My first political internship was with Project Vote Smart. Through that opportunity I successfully landed an internship with Progress Texas, where Matt Glazer (NPF Alumnus) taught me how to influence politics through social media, blog posts, and research.”
We hope you will add your name to our list of supporters. Our gift levels reflect our belief that a society needs all of its members to work for the common good. Our highest level, The Citizen's Level, is inspired by Harry Truman's statement upon leaving the White House: "I'm not leaving the highest office in the land, I'm assuming the highest office—that of citizen."

- **Council Level – Up to $250**
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- **Citizen's Level – $50,000 and up**

The Annette Strauss Institute thanks our major donors for 2010 - 2011:

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- The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation
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- 3001 Lake Austin Boulevard, Suite 2.316
- Austin, Texas 78703
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Thank you also to the many others who have supported our mission.