



2014–15
A Year of Opportunity



Meet the Institute's New Director: Susan Turner Nold

Susan Turner Nold joined the staff of the Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life as its director in September 2015. "As director, I hope to raise awareness of the Institute, both on the UT campus and beyond," Nold said. "This means explaining why civic engagement matters and what we do to further it. I also want to increase support for the work of the Institute's team of dedicated scholars and staff. It is my hope that the Institute can play a role in countering the current trends of disengagement in political and civic life."

In many ways, Nold's life and work to date have prepared her to take on leadership of the Institute. Before being named director of the Institute, Nold worked as General Counsel to Texas State Senator Kirk Watson and as a Staff Attorney for the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission. Prior to her work in the Texas Capitol, Susan practiced law as a Litigation Associate at Bracewell & Giuliani, volunteered as a Congressional Affairs Liaison for a presidential campaign and worked in development for a political committee in Washington, D.C.

Nold's appreciation for civic engagement is deeply rooted in the experiences of her upbringing in Crockett, Texas, where generations of her family engaged in public and community service, including her father, who served in the Texas House, Texas Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives. "Personally, I believe that Susan will be an extraordinary leader of the Institute," said Roderick P. Hart, professor in the Department of Communication Studies and founding director of the Annette Strauss Institute. "The Institute's mission courses through her blood – she has worked effectively with people of all political persuasions and she profoundly believes in the need to get all Texans involved in civic life of their communities."

Nold earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Southern Methodist University in 1999 and her law degree from The University of Texas School of Law in 2004, where she participated in moot-court and co-founded the UT chapter of Street Law.

"I believe The Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life should be our state's primary forum for the exchange of ideas and research pertaining to civic engagement," Nold said. "Through scholarship, teaching, and events it should prepare students to become engaged citizens and civic leaders. It should partner with public, corporate and non-profit organizations around the state to create opportunities for greater civic involvement."

Vision

The Annette Strauss Institute envisions a democracy where all citizens are informed, vote, and are actively involved in improving their communities.

Mission

Through nonpartisan research, education, and outreach, the Institute seeks to understand and overcome obstacles to civic engagement.



2014–15: Highlights of the Year



Our work has one primary goal: addressing the current crisis in civic participation. This year the Institute increased its reach and impact through exciting new connections, new partnerships and new opportunities to engage more people in civic life.

For example, the Institute partnered with Leadership Austin to produce *Civic Engagement in Austin: Views on 10-1 Geographic Representation*, a report released in November 2015. Members of the Leadership Austin Essential Class of 2015 conducted in-person interviews with 172 residents, candidates and other stakeholders from Austin's new geographic districts. Staff members of the Institute analyzed the data and drafted the report. Expanding the partnership further, the report formed the basis for discussion at the inaugural Lebermann Forum, a civic engagement collaboration between the Institute, KUT public radio and KLRU public television funded by the Lebermann Foundation.

In July 2015, the Institute hosted a national conference, *Breaking Through: Increasing civic engagement before, during and after elections*. The conference was created in collaboration with, and funded by, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. What began as a platform for announcing the winners of the Knight News Challenge on Elections became a remarkable discussion of obstacles to civic participation and innovative ideas to increase civic engagement by 235 experts from the fields of technology, journalism, government and academia. The Institute also partnered with Rock the Vote and the Democracy Fund to host a concert and after-party for conference attendees at KLRU's historic Studio 6A.

The *Engaging News Project*, which researches commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways to improve online news, continues to grow in reach and impact thanks to new partners in the media industry collaborating on research and implementing ENP solutions as well as new funding partners.

But the Institute continues to depend on its long-standing supporters and partners: the teacher participating in our *Speak Up! Speak Out!* civic education program who recruits colleagues to participate, the engaged citizen who brings a neighbor along to one of our programs, the student who retweets a message about an Institute event. To each and every one of you who support our work through your time and your donations, thank you.

Thank you to our funders

September 1, 2014–August 31, 2015

\$25,000 and above

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Opposite: Susan Turner Nold
This page: Dr. Talia Stroud presenting at ASF's *Breaking Through* conference.



ENP News Engagement Workshop, Princeton, NJ

Research

The Engaging News Project (ENP) Continues to Grow

This was an exciting year for the Engaging News Project, as the group saw its research and tools used by more news organizations than ever before. Since 2012, the Engaging News Project, led by Dr. Talia Stroud, has worked to provide research-based techniques to news organizations for engaging digital audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways.

This year, ENP released reports covering issues relevant to today's digital news industry, including comment sections, headlines and page design. For one of these reports, an experiment compared three-column comment sections to the traditional one-column format. We learned that three-column comment sections can increase commenting without increasing polarization. The research also showed that the

rightmost column elicited less engagement, thus requiring more design work to build on the idea.

Another report analyzed what happens when audiences are given the same news content presented in different ways. In this study, ENP compared the difference between a classic, newsprint-style homepage design and

INDEPTH COVERAGE

THE NEWS BEAT

Judge Dismisses Chinese Lawsuit

Beidu, the operator of China's most widely used Internet search engine, has won the dismissal of a United States lawsuit by pro-democracy activists who complained that the company illegally suppressed political speech.

Airbus Delivers New A350 XWB

The wait is finally over for aviation fanatics wanting to book a flight aboard the Airbus A350 XWB.

Drone Swarm

Here comes the buzzing swarm of super-cheap camera-equipped drones, priced so low that consumers could potentially buy them for \$100 or less.

Stop Scrolling, Stop Searching, START WATCHING!

1 in 25 Patients Gets Infection in Hospital

About 1 in every 25 patients seeking treatment at hospitals acquired an infection there in 2011, according to a new study published Wednesday in a leading medical journal.

Google Seeks Help for Self-Driving Cars

Google is seeking partners to make fully autonomous vehicles a commercial reality within the next five years.

Camcannon Donation Limits on the Rise

The national political parties and some of their biggest donors are embracing a new law that dramatically increases contribution limits.

For Women, Being a Jock May Signal Political Ambition

A study from American University found women who play college sports are 25 percent more likely to have political ambitions than their non-athlete counterparts. For the study, Professor Jennifer Lawless at American University asked 2,100 college students if they would consider a career in politics. "The effect was quite substantial," Lawless says.

E-cigs' Liquid Nicotine Causing Poisonings

As electronic cigarettes increase in popularity, calls to poison control centers about exposure to the liquid nicotine used in

INDEPTH COVERAGE

THE NEWS BEAT

Judge Dismisses Chinese Lawsuit

Drone Swarm

Take a PEEB coffee with a low-fat curd!

LEARN MORE

Google Seeks Help for Self-Driving Cars

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Spending On College Sports

EMERGENCY

1 in 25 Patients Gets Infection in Hospital

a contemporary, image-heavy homepage. The team found that unique page views and recall of details were higher with the contemporary homepage compared to the classic homepage. After the release of this report, we heard from news organizations interested in our findings and exploring possible collaborations with the Engaging News Project.

ENP's quiz tool, which allows users to create quizzes for their websites, was used by more than 20 news organizations this year. Quizzes created with our tool were viewed more than 85,000 times.

Philly.com credited ENP's research on comment sections for why the newsroom began encouraging reporters to get involved in the comments. We are now collaborating with Philly.com on an experiment related to comments.

In October, ENP hosted its second News Engagement Workshop with 11 digital news leaders. The group, representing major television, newspaper, radio, and online-only newsrooms, discussed a wide range of topics including how they connect with their audiences in a digital age.

In addition, ENP team members presented at a variety of conferences and events, including the Online News Association annual conference, the International Symposium on Online Journalism, the Broadcast Education Association annual convention, the NYC Media Lab annual summit, and the news: rewired digital journalism conference in London. The group is already scheduled to present at next year's South by Southwest Interactive Festival, taking place March 2016 in Austin.

This year, ENP's research and tools were covered by a number of news outlets, including Poynter, Nieman Journalism Lab, Columbia Journalism Review, and the BBC's "Future of News" report. The group was supported by funding from the Democracy Fund, Hewlett Foundation, the Rita Allen Foundation, and Google.



Left: Nitya Rao; Right: Eun Yeon Kang

Patricia Witherspoon Research Award Winners — 2015

Nitya Rao

Nitya is a doctoral student in the Department of Government concurrently pursuing a master's degree in statistics through the department of Statistics and Data Science. Nitya's research project allowed her to combine her substantive interest in American politics with her methodological training in statistics.

Eun Yeon Kang

Eun Yeon Kang is a doctoral student in the Department of Government. Her major fields of study are American Politics and Quantitative Methodology. The Witherspoon award allowed Kang to continue to pursue her academic career in research about corporate citizenship in the service industry, especially the hotel area. She collected data during this summer for her study on message-framing effects for hotels' corporate citizenship and suggested applicable strategies for hotels to effectively communicate their philanthropic efforts. Kang hopes that the findings will help hotels to inform service corporations' active communication, and also their engagement to serve as socially responsible members in society.



Project Vote Smart Continues to Inform the Public in a Nonpartisan Way

The Annette Strauss Institute continues to serve as the host site for Project Vote Smart, making a vital contribution to democratic discourse by identifying and summarizing key legislative bills from across the nation. This year, 60 interns from 6 universities participated in the program. They have summarized more than 1,000 bills that are available on the Project Vote Smart website.



December 2014 Civics Fair in Austin. Photo by Erika Rich.

Educational Outreach

Speak Up! Speak Out!

By most measures, civic participation is in decline in the United States, and the problem is particularly acute among young people. Since 1972, when 18-year-olds were first granted the right to vote, turnout among 18–29 year-olds has never surpassed 50 percent. The good news is that, according to a growing body of research, schools play an important role in young people’s civic development, and well designed “action civics” curricula instill pro-civic attitudes and improve young peoples’ participation. The Annette Strauss Institute designed ***Speak Up! Speak Out!*** to address that need.

Speak Up! Speak Out! (SUSO) is a civics education program in which teams of middle and high school students identify an issue, conduct research, and propose a solution. At the end of the term, students present their work to community leaders at a Civics Fair. Small cash awards help winning teams implement their solutions. The Institute provides a curriculum, teacher training, a modest teacher stipend, funds for materials, online resources and a student mentor from a local university or college. SUSO develops critical academic and civic skills such as research, writing, public speaking, problem-solving and teamwork. For those schools not able to travel to a Civics Fair, remote presentations and judging are available via videoconferencing or teleconferencing systems.

Since it began in 2003, SUSO has grown each year. In 2014–15 the program reached almost 1,200 middle and high school students, holding a Civics Fair in Austin in December 2014 and one in Dallas in May 2015.

Fiscal Year 2014–15 Totals

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1,105 students | 19 schools | 10 districts |
| 331 students at Austin Civics Fair | 367 students at Dallas Civics Fair | 407 participating remotely |

Breaking Through: Before, During, and After Elections

On July 22, 2015, the Annette Strauss Institute brought together 235 people from the fields of technology, journalism, government and academia for a one-day conference to share experiences and discuss trends surrounding civic engagement. Built around the announcement of the winners of the Knight News Challenge on Elections, the purpose of the conference was to bring the

“I think every citizen, and certainly every elected official or potential political candidate, should have to go through something like this. Thanks for lending a hand in the work required to keep our democracy strong, and for providing a venue for civic-recharge.”

— conference participant

Challenge winners, supporters of the Challenge, selected experts, and other participants from the civic engagement and media innovation communities together to improve our understanding of the obstacles to civic participation and to identify the most promising ways to overcome them.

New Politics Forum Attracts Students From Across Texas

New Politics Forum programming brings nonpartisan political training and educational seminars to young adults in Texas. Taught by active political professionals, our forums activate citizenship and allow constituents to practice the skills needed for lifelong, sustained civic engagement. This year, our programs reached across the Lone Star State, bringing together students from diverse political



Campaign Boot Camp 2015.
Photo by Miguel Gutierrez, Jr.

perspectives and cultural backgrounds to improve skills, expand professional networks, and inspire the next generation to stay informed. Kicking off 2015 with the Texas Legislative Intern Seminar, NPF hosted 210

interns for a rare look into the policy process with both the House and Senate parliamentarians. This year's Campaign Bootcamp had the largest cohort in the program's history, training sixty students on how to run political campaigns through professional instruction and hands-on, immersive simulations. At the "Breaking Through" conference, thirty college students attended this invitation-only event where they learned about civic innovations and ways modern technology can help improve civic engagement. Again this year, the Annette Strauss Institute partnered with the Texas Tribune to support a networking event and lounge for students at the Texas Tribune Festival. From across the state, students were invited to take advantage of valuable networking opportunities and meet-and-greets with Festival speakers, sponsors, and the Tribune staff.

Ted Strauss Civic Internship Award Winners

HIRRAH BARLAS is a Journalism major pursuing a Bridging Disciplines Certificate in Human Rights & Social Justice. Hirrah interned this summer at Workers Defense Project as a research & policy intern. Previously, Hirrah enjoyed volunteering at Casa Marianella, an immigrant home that serves individuals who have come to the U.S. seeking political asylum. Hirrah has continued her work with Workers Defense Project and is currently serving as a development intern.

MADISON CASSELL is double majoring in Rhetoric and Writing & Middle Eastern Languages and Cultures with a specialization in Levantine Arabic. She interned this summer with the U.S. Department of State in the Bureau of Legislative Affairs. After graduation Madison hopes to work for the government, either domestically or abroad, and she hopes to combine her talent for writing with her language skills in Arabic to advise and create policies that engender cooperation and understanding between conflicting parties.

LINDSEY PEARLSTEIN is a senior from the Boston area majoring in Education and pursuing a certificate in Public Policy. This summer, Lindsey interned with the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights in Boston, where she worked on the compliance team, a group dedicated to working on the most complex and high profile cases in the Northeast region. Lindsey currently serves as the community service chair of Alpha Delta Pi.

JORDAN SHENHAR is a junior majoring in Government, Economics, and Plan II with minors in Middle East Studies and History. He interned with the Millennial Action Project in DC this past summer as a policy intern. Jordan works as a senior columnist at the Daily Texan, as a research associate in the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, as a peer adviser in the Plan II Honors Program, and is now participating in the Next Generation Scholars program at the Strauss Center for International Security and Law.

Metrics for New Politics Forum

3,300

NPF alumni since 2003

82 in 84th

Our programming supported 82 offices during the 84th Legislative Session

60

college-age youth attended 2015 Campaign Bootcamp (30% increase over previous year)

100%

of Campaign Bootcamp participants would recommend the program to a friend

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September 1, 2014–August 31, 2015

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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

In this time of low voter turnout and apathy, with Texas ranking near the bottom in every measure of civic health, the work of the Institute has never been more important. Your support is critical to our success. Our outreach and education programs depend on private donations and grants for funding. Every dollar you donate helps build communities of engaged, informed, voting citizens. Make a gift today. Attend an event. Join our social media community. Be part of the solution. Visit www.annettestrauss.org to find out how.