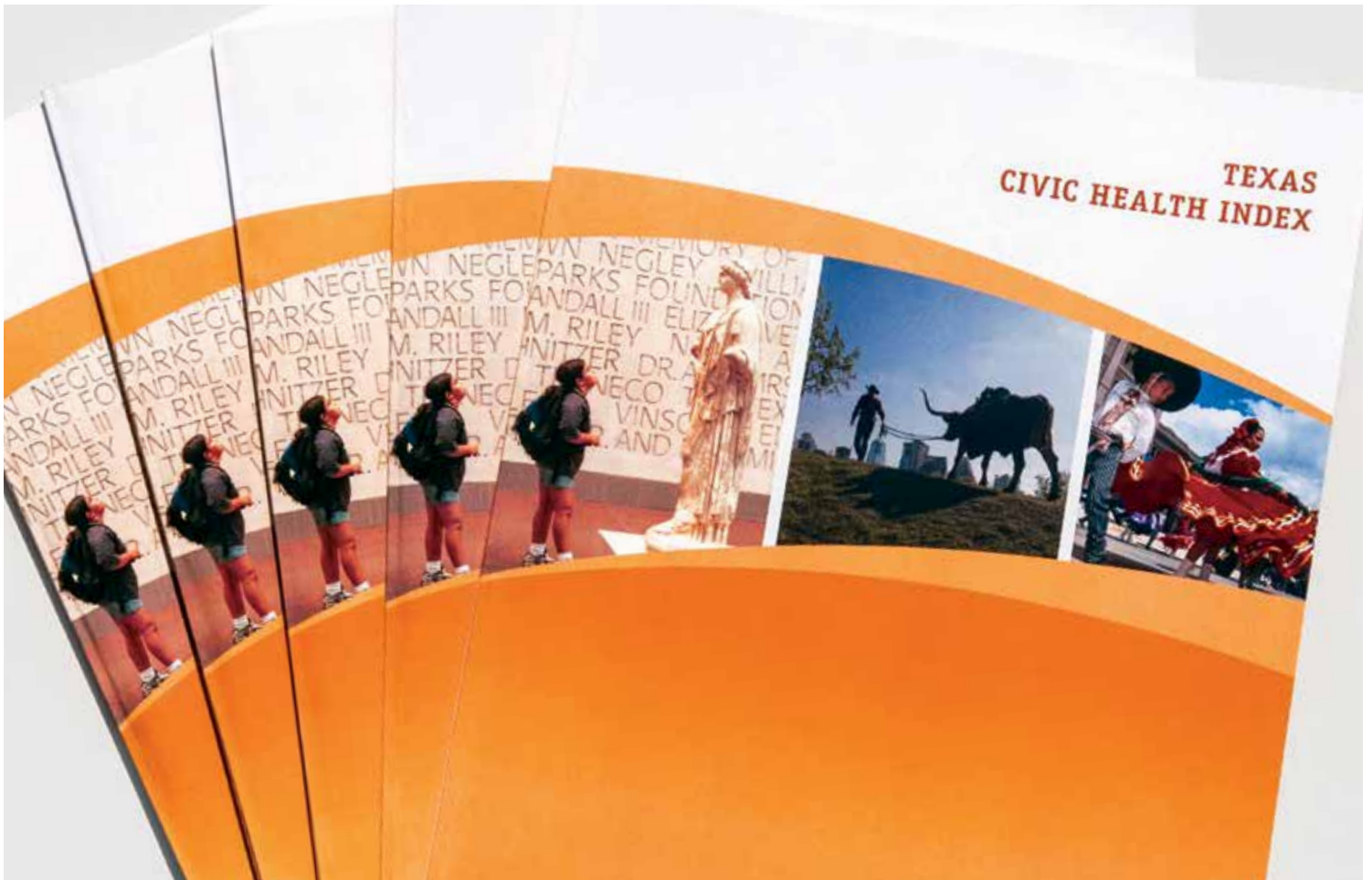




2013

A Year of Growth



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.

A Letter from Our Director

Dear Supporters and Friends,

2013 has been a year of remarkable growth at the Annette Strauss Institute. This past year we significantly increased visibility of the Institute and its mission, strengthened public understanding of civic engagement through our research and outreach, and built new relationships that will help us to move the needle on civic engagement in Texas.

Let me briefly highlight some of our good work. Most notably, the Institute partnered with the National Conference on Citizenship to publish the *Texas Civic Health Index*, the first ever comprehensive, nonpartisan study of political participation and civic involvement across our state. The report was covered in every major media market in Texas and raised visibility of the Institute and our critical mission by illustrating that, unfortunately, civic engagement in Texas lags behind that of most other states in the nation.

At the same time, our outreach programs have fostered greater public discussion and equipped more young people with the skills of engaged citizenship.

Why Bother?: Engaging Texans in Democracy Today, our innovative

Opposite: Texas Civic Health Index, released June 2013
Graphic this page: Levels of Texas voter registration and turnout, from Texas Civic Health Index

partnership with Austin radio station KUT and public television station KLRU, has created news coverage and public dialogue around the challenges to civic engagement. Topics included the disengagement of young people in the 2012 presidential election and ways in which the Austin City Council's transition to a "10-1" system of geographic representation will change citizen opportunities to get involved. We expanded our **New Politics Forum** this year by partnering with the Tower Center at Southern Methodist University to provide training and inspiration to more Texas college-aged youth who aspire to enter public service. And **Speak Up! Speak Out!**, our successful civic education program for middle and high school students, hosted a civics fair in Dallas this spring at which more than 130 young Texans spoke to adult judges about the problems in their communities and how to solve them. Our judges were deeply impressed and moved by how these young citizens are stepping up to grapple with the challenges they face.

In June, we partnered with the iCivics online civics initiative to host former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor for a conversation about the importance of civic education. The room was packed with many eager young faces.

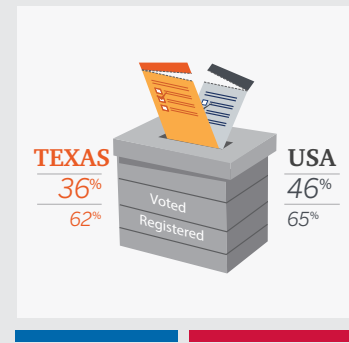
Our November conference was our biggest yet. Using the Texas Civic Health Index as a springboard, the Texas Conference on Civic Life explored the state of civic engagement, political participation, and social connectedness in our state. Young people and civic leaders came together to begin to address how Texas can overcome the obstacles to greater civic engagement and develop a plan for improved participation.

This work would certainly not be possible without the support of people like you, who care about the future of our state and our nation. At just the moment when many indicators suggest citizens are giving up on democracy, you are not. Together we can help Texas to become a leader in active, engaged, responsible citizenship.

Cordially,



Regina G. Lawrence, Ph.D.
Director, Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Life



Raising Awareness of Our Mission: The Texas Civic Health Index

This spring, the Annette Strauss Institute released the first ever Texas Civic Health Index. Produced in partnership with the National Conference on Citizenship, the report displays the critical need for the Institute's work to create more voters and better citizens.

The data show that in 2010, Texas ranked 42nd in voter registration, 44th in discussing politics, 49th in contacting officials, and dead last in self-reported rates of voting. In 2012, Texas turnout was 8% below the national average, with only West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Hawaii ranked lower. And these low numbers are not just a recent problem. Since 1972, Texas has consistently lagged behind national voter turnout in both midterm and presidential elections.

In the 2010 midterm election, which brought about half of the current members of the Texas Legislature into power, only 36.4% of eligible Texans reported that they voted. The Legislature's decisions directly impact our pocketbooks, quality of life, and the future of the nation's second-largest state. Yet few Texans participated in choosing their representatives.

Non-political forms of participation are lagging behind as well. Texas ranks 42nd in the nation for rates of volunteering and 43rd for rates of charitable giving. These lackluster rates of volunteerism and philanthropy can inhibit the future prosperity of the state just as surely as political apathy.

When close to two-thirds of voting age citizens choose to sit on the sidelines, the resulting inaction allows an active minority of citizens to drive decisions that affect the majority. The Annette Strauss Institute is committed to creating a more actively engaged citizenry to take responsibility for the future of our great state.

The full report can be viewed on our website:
www.annettestrauss.org.



ASI partners with KUT and KLRU to present the *Why Bother?* series on civic engagement.

Research

This spring, the Institute released the **Texas Civic Health Index**: the first ever comprehensive, nonpartisan assessment of civic engagement in our state. The results of the study make clear the urgency of the Institute's mission to understand and overcome the obstacles to civic engagement.

The Institute introduced a new grant-funded project this past year, the **Engaging News Project**. Led by Institute Assistant Director Talia Stroud, the project aims to provide research-based techniques for engaging online audiences in commercially viable and democratically beneficial ways. The results of the first four experimental studies provided information to help news organizations incorporate interactive tools and create vibrant comment sections. The project has been featured by *Wired* magazine, the Nieman Journalism Lab, Personal Democracy Forum, and the Poynter Institute's News University.

Founding Director Dr. Roderick P. Hart, along with Strauss Institute alumni Jay Childers, Ph.D., and Colene Lind, Ph.D., published a new book with the University of Chicago Press:

Political Tone: How Leaders Talk and Why. The book uses Dr. Hart's DICTION program and texts from the Campaign Mapping Project to analyze how political leaders phrase political arguments.

Students at The University of Texas at Austin continue to work with **Project Vote Smart** to research bills and compile legislators' voting records.

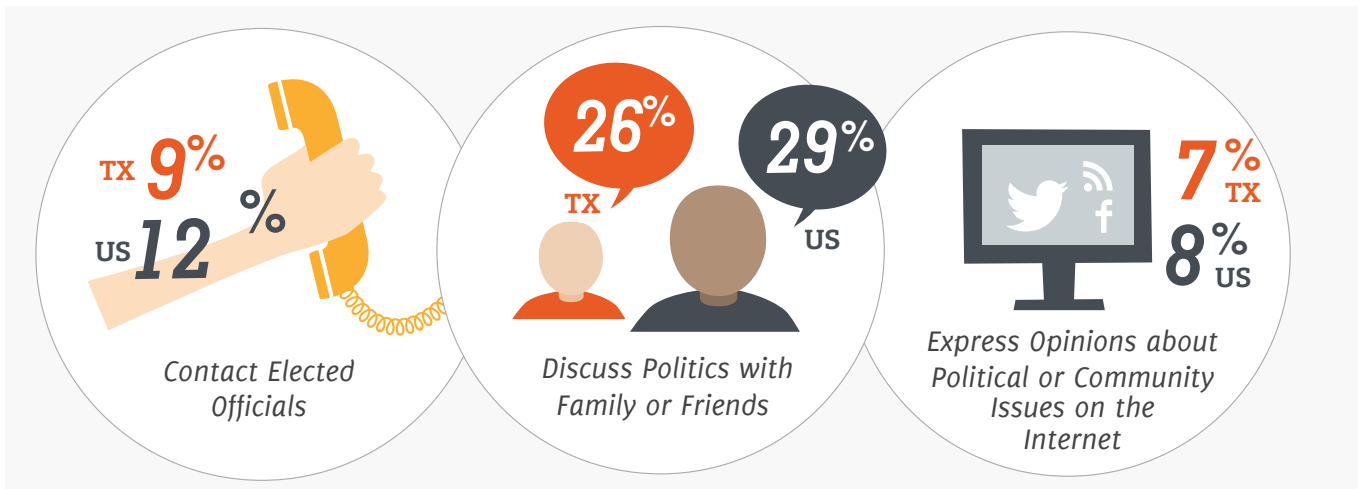
This year, the Institute awarded the Patricia Witherspoon Research Awards to Ashley Muddiman, Ph.D., from the Department of Communication Studies and now assistant professor at the University of Wyoming, and Kyle Endres, graduate student in the Department of Government.

Ashley describes her results as follows: “Incivility is nothing new to politics, but it is not well understood. In a series of studies, I found that incivility involves interpersonal-level conflict, such as name calling, *and* public-level conflict, such as disseminating misinformation. Further, mediated incivility can have negative effects on citizens. Finally, incivility is partisan. Politicians strategically frame behaviors as civil/uncivil, citizens say likeminded politicians are behaving better than those from across the aisle, and incivility prompts citizens to think about arguments in partisan ways.”

Kyle shares this about his research: “My goal is to develop a better understanding of persuadable voters. I examine the characteristics of persuadable voters, their political involvement and engagement, and how these aspects may change as the campaign interacts with them. I make comparisons between the traditional measure for persuadable voters, used in political science, and a more narrow subset that I identified by focusing on the issues that the 2012 presidential campaigns used in their voter targeting.”



Top: Assistant Director Dr. Talia Stroud.
Graphic below: Levels of political participation in Texas, from the Texas Civic Health Index.



Rob Evans

2013 summer intern with Project Vote Smart, student at Hamilton College in New York

“As a Project Vote Smart summer intern, I researched legislation to provide timely nonpartisan political information for voters around the country. The work done by this organization is heroic, and I’m grateful I could participate.”



New Politics Forum Bootcamp participants present their mock campaign plan.

Outreach

The release of the Texas Civic Health Index this year has indicated two things: (1) we must learn more about the causes of disengagement in Texas, and (2) we cannot sit on the sidelines and expect the situation to improve. Now, more than ever, the Index recommit us to the important mission of overcoming obstacles to engagement through education and outreach. Enthusiastically, the Institute continues to build partnerships, strengthen programming, and extend our reach. Here are some of the highlights of our work in 2013:

Using Numbers to Build a Movement. Leveraging the Texas Civic Health Index, the educational outreach department has developed curriculum, training, and social media graphics to educate citizens, teachers, and students about the importance of addressing the civic health crisis in Texas. At the Texas Council for the Social Studies and the National Council for the Social Studies, the Institute trained more than 65 teachers on how to use civic health data in the classroom. Further, to share the findings of the report, the Institute created a suite of social media graphics illustrating what it means to be civically engaged. Each graphic can be shared online through any social media platform in what the Institute hopes will be the beginning of a lasting movement.

Hosting Conversations about the Causes and Challenges of Low Levels of Engagement. In partnership with public broadcasters KLRU and KUT, the

Institute co-hosted multimedia news, public dialogue, and an informational series titled “**Why Bother? Engaging Texans in Democracy Today**” to raise awareness and directly engage citizens in addressing the civic participation crisis in Austin and throughout Texas. During the first year of *Why Bother?* the Institute planned and held three public forums, with more than 500 people in attendance and thousands more in the viewing and listening audiences. The team also helped develop and broadcast a series of KUT news stories that explored a range of causes and potential solutions to low civic engagement through interviews with citizens and experts. Perhaps most important, the series brought together a diverse set of leaders, community members, and partners, including Senator Wendy Davis, Brendan Steinhauser of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, the Austin Young Chamber of Commerce, and the Austin Neighborhood Council.

Training the Next Generation of Public Leadership.

The **New Politics Forum** kicked off an exciting new endeavor this year. In partnership with the Texas Politics Project and The University of Texas at Austin's Department of Government, the Institute produced the Texas Legislative Intern Seminar, a day of nonpartisan training sessions for interns working at the Capitol during the 83rd Texas Legislature. Professional practitioners from the Texas Capitol community led sessions on professional protocols, practical guidelines for working the legislative session, the ethics of working with news media and lobbyists, and helpful digital tools to use during the legislative process.

The **New Politics Forum** also continued to offer its outstanding conferences — the Executive Communication Training, Campaign Bootcamp, and Hatton W. Sumners' Careers in Politics Conference — with record attendance and extremely satisfied participants.

Engaging Young People as Partners in Addressing Civic Challenges. As part of the **Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) Peer Education Conference**, the Institute trained 40 high school students from Texas on the state of civic health, the importance of civic engagement, and how to get more involved. After the training, students pledged to serve as “civic ambassadors” and spent the spring semester in the community conducting mock elections, workshops, and presentations about the importance of civic engagement. To date, the “civic ambassadors” have trained more than 2,650 students statewide. In addition, **Speak Up! Speak Out!**, our innovative hands-on civic education program for secondary students, wrapped up its first year working with middle school grades (6-8). In its initial year, the Institute hosted 11 middle schools and more than 180 new student participants. Lastly, **UT Votes** began a new initiative called “Cafe Conversations,” which invites students to discuss politics in a welcoming and open-minded environment.



ASI sponsored student activities at the 2013 Texas Tribune Festival.

Internship Opportunities Expanded. This summer, **Project Vote Smart** launched its inaugural summer internship program, in which 16 part-time interns performed extensive legislative research. With the support of 200 faculty and journalist advisers, the interns identified 215 key legislative votes, wrote 464 vote summaries, and released 194 of those summaries online. The Institute also continued to recognize summer public service interns as a part of the **Theodore H. Strauss Civic Internship Award**. This year's winners worked with Hilltop Public Solutions, R&R Partners, Project Vote Smart (MT), and State Senator Judith Zaffirini.

Inspiring More Civic Involvement. One of the ambitious outreach endeavors of 2013 was the production of the **Texas Conference on Civic Life**. The Institute convened more than 250 key community members, scholars, journalists, and youth leaders to discuss the state of civic engagement, political participation, and social connectedness in Texas. The conference inspired participants and the Institute to seek new forms of engagement and continually look for improved ways to jump-start civic participation in Texas.



Matt Cornelius
LBJ School Fellow

“At the Annette Strauss Institute, I became more aware of the incredible, effective actions citizens can implement when they act together. My time at Strauss left me more hopeful for, and confident in, the future of our democracy.”

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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

There are a number of opportunities available for involvement with the Annette Strauss Institute. From program endowments and scholarships to individual gifts and sponsorships, your support will have a lasting impact. Contributions go toward improving civic life in both Texas and the United States, and no gift is too small. All donors to the Annette Strauss Institute become members in the Friends donor program. For more information on how you can get involved and the Friends donor program, visit www.annettestrauss.org.