

# Making marriage cool

Premiere conference equips college students for marriage and teaches them how to defend it in the public square. *by Jenny Tyree*





**MARRIAGE MINDED** Kailin Gray, left, Katrina Murata and Kendel Christensen share a laugh at the first Ruth Institute conference.

**A** couple dozen years ago, Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse was teaching at Yale University, then George Mason University. Everything was going according to plan — or so she thought.

But when she and her husband decided to start a family, their plan hit a dead-end. Facing infertility, they pursued adoption. The adoption agency offered them a Romanian 2-year-old. Ten days later, Dr. Morse learned she was pregnant.

She soon realized her children needed her at home — Ph.D. and all.

Now, instead of teaching economics, she is educating the next generation about marriage and family — what she calls the foundational pieces of society.

“College students are making decisions for the rest of their lives, and they don’t realize it,” she said. “They have plenty of people telling them how to get into graduate school or how to prepare for law school, but they have no one giving them realistic advice about what to look for in a spouse, how to conduct yourself while dating, what to do and not do about sex, cohabitation and hooking up.

“There are a lot of things young people do that are really sabotaging their chances for lifelong married love, and they don’t realize it.”

So, she founded the Ruth Institute to prepare college students for marriage and to teach them how to defend it in the public square. The group is affiliated with the National Organization for Marriage and focuses on educating, networking and motivating.

The first Ruth Institute marriage conference — titled “It Takes a Family to Raise a Village” — took

place on the University of San Diego campus in August. Thirty-two students from across the United States and Mexico earned scholarships to attend. They came from Grove City College and Brigham Young University, as well as Louisiana State University and the University of North Carolina, among others.

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Klem, a student at the University of Dallas. “They know there’s something better out there. There’s this hunger — especially among kids whose parents have been divorced or were never married — to have something better.

“A lot of people our age are very open to things that will help them to achieve that. But they just aren’t receiving the information or guidance to know what is going to get them there.”

Conference speakers included Bill Duncan, director of the Marriage Law Foundation; Brad Wilcox, sociology professor at the University of Virginia; Dr. Gary Rose, resident emeritus of the Medical Institute for Sexual Health; Cassy Hough, founder of Princeton’s Anscombe Society; Robert A.J. Gagnon, associate professor of New Testament at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary; and Dr. Morse.

They addressed the laws and history of marriage, the theological significance of marriage, human biology, and the importance of launching pro-marriage campus groups.

Wilcox told students that the happiest marriages are formed between the ages of 23 and 27, according to University of Texas research.

“The paradox of contemporary marital happiness,” he said, “is that happiness in marriage is most likely to be found by seeing marriage as an opportunity to make a gift of oneself to one’s spouse and children.”

### **The significance of marriage**

But the students were the highlight of the weekend. They were there because they recognize the significance of marriage in their own lives and to America’s future. Most of them want to get married, as do their peers.

Eighty-two percent of high school girls and 70 percent of high school boys say a good marriage and family life are “extremely important” to them, according to *Monitoring the Future*, an ongoing study of American students funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

A recurring theme among the



**FOCUSED ON MARRIAGE** Thirty-two students from across the United States and Mexico earned scholarships to attend the first conference (above). Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse speaks during the opening session (below).



“hookup” culture acts as a barrier to marriage among the younger generation. “Hooking up” typically refers to a sexual experience outside of a relationship.

Yao Tue, from the University of California, Berkeley, has seen her friends suffer from the loose sexual standards and said she learned a lot at the conference.

“I appreciate the statistics and the scientific data that supported the destructive features of this hookup culture,” she said. “It really increased my confidence in what I believe in.”

Morse called hookups a recipe for failed marriages.

“Sometimes people feel like they don’t have time to have a real relationship,” she said. “They view sex as a sort of recreational activity. They’re also partially anesthetizing themselves toward really feeling very much toward their sex partner. You do that for 10 or 15 years, and you’re not ‘marriage material’ anymore.”

Morse said the popularity of so-called comprehensive sex educa-

Ruth students was parental divorce. But, rather than give up on marriage, their personal experiences and compassion for their peers compel them to strengthen marriage for the next generation.

Although Shaina Tanguay-Collucci’s parents are divorced, the student from Pontifical John Paul II Institute sees marriage as integral to a compassionate culture.

“I don’t think many people understand that if you want to solve social-justice issues, then you start with the family,” she said. “If a person isn’t experiencing love in his or her own family, they’re never going to be able to embrace these issues like poverty and hunger. If you didn’t receive that love, you won’t have that love to give.”

Students also learned how the



**FINDING HOPE** Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse, (second from left), told students there's nothing inevitable about the redefinition of marriage. "The only way it would become inevitable is if we give up," she said.

tion also is keeping young adults from the marriages and family they say they want.

"The whole sex-ed way of thinking — 'Just use a condom, and everything will be OK' — is a very superficial view of the human condition and human sexuality," she said. "We're connected to that whole set of activity, and it has a big effect on us."

Cassy Hough is one of the founding members of the Anscombe Society at Princeton University, a student organization dedicated to affirming the importance of the family, marriage, and a proper understanding of the role of sex and sexuality. She encouraged the Ruth students to create pro-marriage groups on their campuses. Hough

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also recently launched the national Love and Fidelity Network to educate college students about the effects of the sexual culture and to provide resources that honor the full meaning and integrity of sex and marriage.

table about the redefinition of marriage, according to Morse.

“The only way it would become inevitable is if we give up,” she said. “What the ‘redefiners’ are counting on is us giving up and going home. “We’ve done enough redefining

well, it’s been really important for me to figure out the sociological, legal and even physiological reasons for keeping marriage between a man and a woman,” she said. “I finally have something to stand on besides my religious beliefs. It’s really important to be able to argue outside the biblical principles when speaking to people who don’t believe the Bible.”

Curtis Schube, a law student at the University of Arkansas, said he’s also ready to take action.

“I think [my peers] are more prone to supporting the homosexual movement because they don’t know anything else,” he said. “It’s been a consistent bombardment on our youth. The best way to reverse that is to be outspoken. The Church needs to be heard and visible. We need to not give in.”

Grove City College student Nate Heinen said children need to be taught early on the value of marriage.

“We need to reach people younger,” he said. “By our age, [they’ve] already been taught for decades about homosexuality.”

He said he also thinks his is the generation that must reverse the trend of broken homes.

“We as Christians are called to excellence, to do the best we can, to not be timid,” he said. “The Millennials are going to have to change this. I realize I’m only 19, but I’ll do it.” ●

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit [www.ruthinstitute.org](http://www.ruthinstitute.org) and [loveandfidelity.org](http://loveandfidelity.org).

*Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse is a part-time research fellow at the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty and a regular columnist for the National Catholic Register.*

*Jenny Tyree is the marriage analyst at Focus on the Family Action. Check out her blog at [citizenlinkblog.com/drivethru/](http://citizenlinkblog.com/drivethru/).*

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Dr. Jennifer Roback Morse,  
founder of the Ruth Institute

#### The redefinition of marriage

The Ruth students also take a view of marriage that stands in stark contrast with that of the majority of their peers. They believe marriage is for one man and one woman.

This countercultural perspective among the Millennial generation is the bane of those who want to redefine marriage. Gay activists — as well as extreme feminists and polyamorists — depend on 18- to 29-year-olds to move their agenda forward. But there’s nothing inevi-

and messing with marriage. The question is, what do children need now, and what have they always needed? What is justice for the child? You have a vulnerable party who cannot defend themselves, and we need to do something to defend them.”

Morse’s determination and resolve seemed to resonate with the students.

Sarah Keough from the University of Wisconsin said she was inspired by the conference.

“Having a lot of non-Christian friends, and a lot of gay friends as