

## Partner

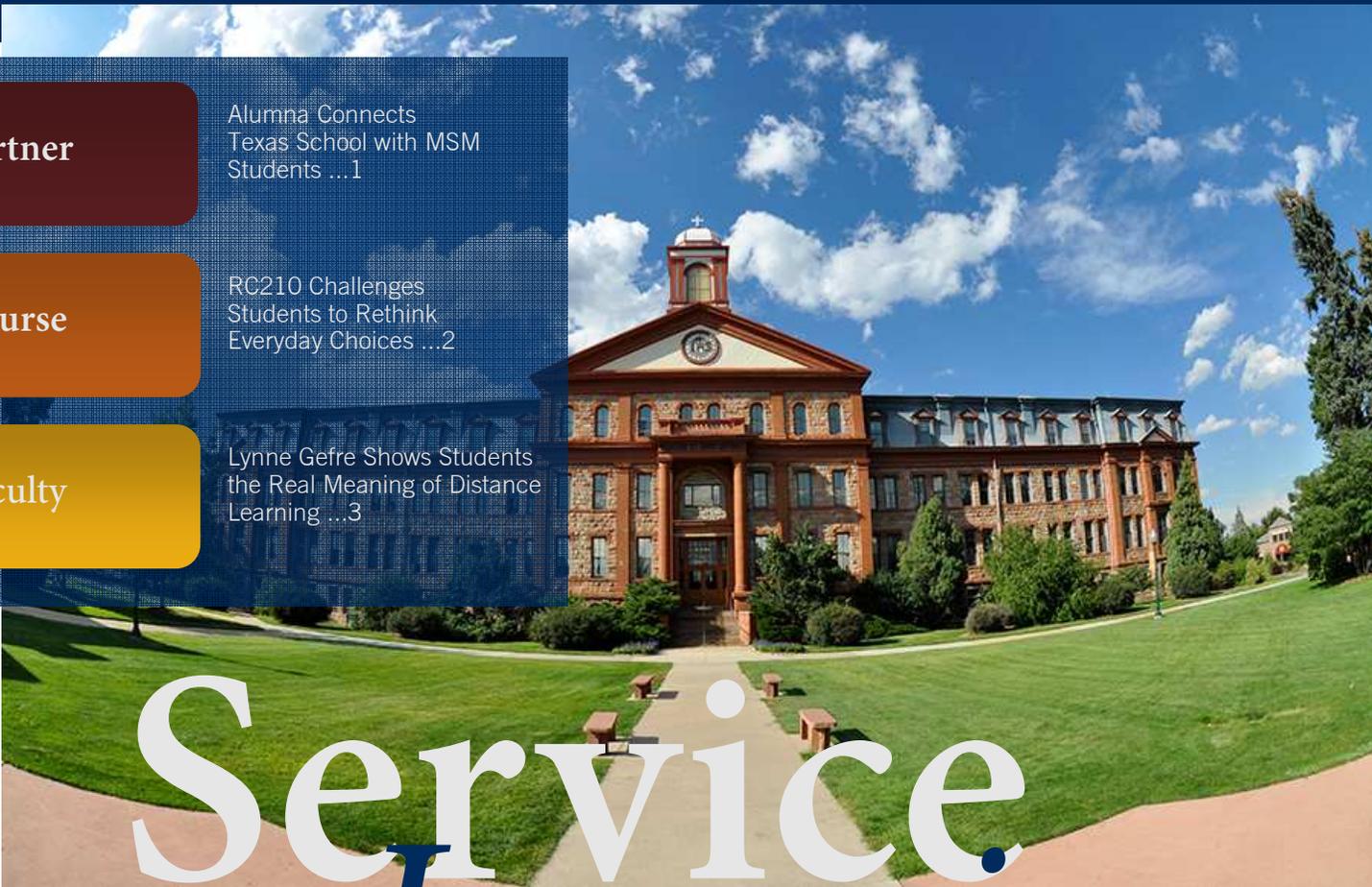
Alumna Connects  
Texas School with MSM  
Students ...1

## Course

RC210 Challenges  
Students to Rethink  
Everyday Choices ...2

## Faculty

Lynne Gefre Shows Students  
the Real Meaning of Distance  
Learning ...3



# Service Learning

## Alumna Connects One Catholic School to Another

A small Catholic school in Sherman, Texas, St. Mary's Catholic School strives to instill a values-based education in all its students. One of the few religious schools in the area, St. Mary's prides itself on providing a quality education to anyone who wants it, regardless of their financial situation.

Leslie Landis, a College for Professional Studies (CPS) alumna, moved to Sherman two years ago and has been overwhelmed by the amount of teamwork and dedication that the community puts into its school. When Landis arrived in town, she sought out the parish priest of St. Mary's Catholic Church and asked how she could be of service. "Having been involved with our parish back in Colorado, we wanted to get connected," said Landis.

The priest suggested she meet with the principal of the school, Phillip Scheibmeir. Scheibmeir had plenty of ideas and when he listed out some of his goals and the needs of the school, Landis kept thinking of Regis. "I recognized that the school was working with bare-bones. They are very much a working parish, more so than I've ever seen," said Landis. "It's a rare year when fundraising and tuition meet or exceed expenses and it would be very rare that they would have an overflow."

Landis, a graduate of the MBA program, reached out to her old connections in CPS' School of Business and she was directed to CPS' Center for Service Learning directors, Carol Ann Kelly and Amy Sheber Howard. After an initial exploratory conversation, they all determined that the project would be a good fit for an upcoming class.

Landis expressed excitement that it would be a win-win situation for both parties. "Regis students were being offered a 'real-life' learning experience and St. Mary's was able to have access to much needed resources," said Landis.

Kelly and Sheber Howard identified which class would be the best fit for the project and landed on MSM 612, Making Decisions in Organizations. St. Mary's was facing a common dilemma for nonprofits of the day - funding their organization in a sustainable way. Since the school prides itself on providing education to all, the issue of fundraising was at the heart of most of the school's struggles. Students in MSM 612 were able to identify four topics to research on behalf of the school. The class split into four groups, each focusing on one of the following issues: tuition structure alternatives, volunteer participation, tuition adjustments and fundraising overall.

## Alumna Connects One Catholic School to Another

(Continued...)

While the school still has a long way to go in making some big decisions about their financial structure and goals, the process helped validate all involved. “The research helped eliminate the subjective viewpoint that the school council or principal might have had. The students applied mathematical principles and left us with the facts,” said Landis. “It makes people stop shooting from their hips.”

And Landis knows the value of relying on the facts rather than perception or emotion. As a retired professional from PepsiCo, she often used business analytics to take the emotion out of a professional decision. “I had bosses who used to say, ‘We’ve always done it this way and it works,’ but business analytics makes you question whether or not that’s true. At an entry level, the Regis students applied business analytics to propose solutions to the school,” said Landis. “That’s something this parish didn’t have the time or knowledge to do.”

With the new school year upon them, St. Mary’s has plenty of work ahead of them. Regis students provided an abundance of information and it will take time for the school to process and implement their suggestions. But what is clear is that connections have been made and validation has been felt. “I tend to be a real believer that



people need to actually talk and communicate. One of the Regis students presented her findings to me via conference call and it turned out she had just been promoted to a new job at the YMCA in California and she knew all about fundraising. It wasn’t in the presentation, but she gave me so much information! It was so valuable,” said Landis.

With the current financial climate, nonprofits are feeling the need for validation and support more than ever, which is why Landis is dedicated to her volunteer work at the school and hopes to use Regis’ resources again in the future.

## Advocacy and Service – The Challenge of Discernment

When contemplating discernment and human development, discussion of ethics and the central Jesuit question of “how ought we to live?” are bound to come up. Celeste Rossmiller’s RC 210 Discernment and Human Development class is designed to ask learners to engage in the world around them and ask that very question, even if the answer is as simple as reducing the amount of water they use when they brush their teeth.

“...All the choices we make have ethical implications to them.”

“I try to help them get in touch with being aware that in one sense, all the choices we make have ethical implications to them,” said Rossmiller. Her model for service learning is unique in that it challenges busy adults at a level that is very manageable to them. “I ask them to apply their actions to their lives and households, and to consider how all that ties back to discernment. If students want more involvement, they can have it. Some pursue that option, but most have their consciousness raised. It’s a great start.”

RC 210 is a fairly new course and Rossmiller recently taught it for the first time. One of the key objectives of the course is to recognize the role of faith, culture, media, tradition and human desire in the understanding of discernment. “The course explores the option for the poor, community service and spirituality. It was so obviously structured, as far as I was concerned, to include a service component,” said Rossmiller.

The “At-Home” service learning model, as she calls it, allows busy adults to engage in a way that is flexible and appealing to them. “While it can be touching to feed the elderly or go and clean animal cages, it’s also valuable to have a social consciousness. Many students in CPS have families, so very often, we’re raising not just one person’s consciousness, but a whole family’s,” said Rossmiller.

One student was so impacted by the effect of the drought in Colorado that year that he got his entire family involved. He learned about the impact on local communities and his own drought “footprint.” The family ended up switching out their toilet, showerheads and washing machine. “He got really excited about it and changed his habits. He was so excited that his final presentation to the class laid out a plan for how everyone could basically get a low-flow toilet for free with rebates,” said Rossmiller.

Another student, who was a self-described “clotheshorse,” ended up going through his entire wardrobe and determin-

## The Challenge of Discernment (Continued...)

ing where all of his clothing was from. He charted out where his clothing was made and researched the working conditions of clothing factories in those countries. Under the “What We Wear” section in her service learning assignment, Rossmiller asks her students to consider “How many clothes do we really need!? Who made them; what were they paid; what are their working conditions? How many pesticides and chemical dyes went into them? How long will it take them (esp. polyesters, etc.) to decompose when we have cast them off?”

Rossmiller has found that engaging learners in advocacy issues based on their own personal interest is the key to seeing real change in their behavior. “Letting students choose what they’re interested in seems to work best for me. I post lots of opportunities for them to choose from. Probably 40 to

50 percent will choose something that’s on the list. The other half look into something they’re already involved with – things like ‘my mom works at a nursing home, could I go do volunteer work there?’” said Rossmiller.

Some students are looking for an easier way out, but Rossmiller tries to steer them in a direction that will broaden their worldview. “One of my students was already a youth director at his church and asked if he could just count that?” said Rossmiller. Her answer was “no,” he needed to seek out something new that would allow him to be challenged. “He ended up taking that group of youth to a soup kitchen with him,” said Rossmiller.

This course incorporates service in a way that allows students to think about issues through the lens of advocacy, often enlightening them in ways they wouldn’t have thought about. Student reaction is very often a 180 degree turn around from the beginning of the course, where there is hesitation and resistance, to the end. “I have papers due at the end of the term (where students reflect on their experience throughout the semester) and they are a real highlight for me. Whether the student got out in the community or read about simplicity of lifestyle, they’ve learned so much,” said Rossmiller.

Even busy students find a way to meet the course objectives by way of advocacy or direct service. And Rossmiller’s experience has shown that it’s worth it, to her and to her students. “Service learning is such a valuable and important aspect of the course, I wouldn’t consider not including it,” said Rossmiller.

### Faculty Highlight

#### Celeste Rossmiller, Ph.D.

Celeste Rossmiller, Ph.D. is an affiliate faculty member at Regis University and holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Theology and Religious Studies from the Iliff School of Theology and University of Denver. Her professional background is varied with experience in elementary education, lay parish ministry and professional nonprofit management. She loves being outdoors and in nature and is also a trained calligrapher and acupressure therapist.



## Faculty Member Brings New Meaning to Distance Learning

In her online introduction to her students, Lynne Gefre is clear about her philosophy right off the bat. “I believe that adult education is at its best when it is student-centered, experience-based and collaborative – and I hope that you, as students of this course, will challenge yourselves to become constituents rather than recipients of knowledge.”

A lifelong student herself, Gefre started working at Regis when the adult college was called the School for Professional Studies. While working as an administrative assistant, she pursued and completed a Master of Nonprofit Management. She moved on after that, but always had in her mind that she’d like to return to the Regis community in some fashion. In 2010, she began teaching as an affiliate faculty member.

Perhaps what makes Gefre such a unique addition to Regis’ College for Professional Studies faculty is her current location. Residing in London, England, Gefre teaches all of her classes from a distance, literally. “I’m not a night owl, so it works very well that I’m seven hours ahead of Denver time. One o’clock in the morning in Denver and I’m up conversing with students! It works with my personal time clock,” said Gefre.

In her experience, students view her geographic location as a fun and exciting asset. “I hear lots of stories about their visits to London and they think it’s very cool that I live here,” said Gefre.

### Faculty Highlight

#### Lynne Gefre

Lynne Gefre is an affiliate faculty member and holds a Master of Nonprofit Management from Regis University and a Master of Philosophy in Migration Studies from Oxford University. Currently, Gefre is working toward a Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology with a concentration in the social dynamics of human migration at Oxford University.

Her professional experience is varied and includes university administration and development as well as private and public sector accounting. Additionally, she was the owner of a wholesale/retail business in Denver for 10 years. Gefre is an avid traveler and resides in London with her husband.



## New Meaning to Distance Learning (Continued...)

With two different continents, a seven hour time difference and a lot of content to cover in 8 weeks, there can be challenges to being so far away from the students, but Gefre tries very hard to make the distance a non-issue.

“I put a blurb in the intro, so they know they can’t phone me off the cuff. I’m very conscientious about making sure it’s not a problem and religiously check my email, more than I would if I were in Denver,” said Gefre.

Gefre participated in a Service Oriented Field Experience while at Regis University, so her understanding of service learning is two-fold; as a student and a facilitator. “I have always been a proponent of service learning. As far as teaching, when I look at students’ final evaluations, there’s always a comment about how fulfilling they found the work and about their appreciation for their newly acquired skills. They like the feeling of giving back,” said Gefre.



“Service learning brings a fresh look to my course every term.”

Gefre knows that service learning projects can sometimes seem intimidating to her students, but she feels it is well worth the effort. “Students often log in and see the words ‘team project’ and immediately think the worst. It’s not even the service learning part; it’s the ‘team’ part that puts the fear of God in them. My mantra is to get everyone relaxed and involved. Once they realize how it’s going to work, the light bulb goes on and it’s a win-win for everyone,” said Gefre.

And Gefre has had some incredible “wins” for her students and community partners alike. One project in particular demonstrated to her the wonder of distance learning. “We did a service learning project with the Mother Child Rehabilitation Center (MCRC) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The woman who started the organization, Jutta De Muynck, lives in Adis Ababa. Students were amazed that they were talking with Jutta in Ethiopia, me in London and they were all over the United States,” said Gefre.

The MCRC works to empower women and families to be successful. With the help of experienced professionals and teachers, the organization provides tutoring, art and dance therapy and counseling for children in the area. A group of mothers attend classes in basic numeracy and literacy three times a week. Another group attends a more advanced class that aims to enable the women to complete their external school certificates. “MCRC was probably the one project that students were most engaged in. There was such an obvious need in that community, and students formed a strong connection,” said Gefre.

Communicating cross-continently is not without challenges, however. De Muynck didn’t have access to immediate and fast broadband, so logistics were tough. “But students were learning that you aren’t always going to get an immediate response from a client,” said Gefre. They had to navigate communication challenges and figure out how to carry out their project as the information flowed in.

Gefre recognizes that may sound counterproductive to some people. “I would say it’s more challenging than a case study, but well worth the effort. I’m blessed to teach a course with a service learning component. From an altruistic standpoint, I get to give back to students and learn about our clients’ work. From a selfish standpoint as a teacher, it never gets boring or repetitive. Service learning brings a fresh look to my course every term,” said Gefre.

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Interested in learning more about Service Learning in CPS? Visit us at [www.regis.edu/cpservicelearning](http://www.regis.edu/cpservicelearning)

