

UW-Milwaukee: Jablonski named to lead the statewide Freshwater Collaborative

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MILWAUKEE _ Environmental engineer Marissa Jablonski was named as executive director of the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin, a first-of-its-kind statewide research hub around freshwater topics. Administered by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the collaborative is a UW System initiative that blends the expertise of its 13 four-year campuses.

Jablonski brings experience in water infrastructure engineering, community--centered program design, policy analysis and education to the position that will be responsible for bringing together the private sector and state institutions to address the water challenges of the 21st century and train the next generation of water experts.

“Wisconsin will become the ‘go to’ destination for students, scientists, policymakers and thought leaders in water,” said Val Klump, dean of the UWM School of Freshwater Sciences and chair of the search committee. “When you build upon the combined intellectual firepower and infrastructural assets of the University of Wisconsin System, you will have a platform for addressing challenges in water resources that is unequalled anywhere in the country. We are delighted to bring Marissa on board. Her expertise and enthusiasm to lead this initiative is exactly what we were looking for.”

Jablonski has coordinated sustainable development projects around the world, including water distribution and sanitation in Guatemala, textile wastewater treatment in rural India, and environmental safeguarding of food security activities on the African continent.

An alumna of UW-Milwaukee, where she earned her master's and doctoral degrees in engineering, Jablonski also has worked in the public policy sphere. She recently completed a two-year Science Technology & Policy Fellowship with the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). In that role, she served at the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which implements global humanitarian efforts to strengthen U.S. security.

On one project during her AAAS fellowship, Jablonski worked with a consortium of hotels in Phuket, Thailand, through the U.S. embassy to help them reduce their reliance on single-use plastics. The model she created, including training of employees, resulted in a drop of 4.4 million single-use plastic water bottles and 1.6 million straws in six months.

"When it comes to meeting global freshwater needs, a great place to start is to gather communities, industries, governments and educators – all people who share water, and introduce a framework to communicate across divisions," Jablonski said. "Then, you can collectively arrive at brilliant collaborative solutions. I look forward to implementing this strategy to advance the Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin."

While a graduate student at UW-Milwaukee, Jablonski helped to start the student chapter of Engineers Without Borders and continues to serve as a mentor. She also created and teaches a complementary course that gives students from different disciplines the opportunity to cooperate in designing a water distribution system – including the community outreach plans and evaluation methodology – that are then implemented in Guatemalan villages.

From 2015-17 she was a lecturer in the UWM Masters of Sustainable Peacebuilding degree program, where she instituted courses focusing on community engagement in international development fieldwork.

A native of Elm Grove, Jablonski earned her bachelor's degree in natural resource management and Spanish at UW-Stevens Point. She is a current board member of the Institute for Conservation Leadership and CannedWater4Kids.

The Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin aims to enroll hundreds of new undergraduate and graduate students, attract between \$10 million and \$15 million in new research funding from federal and private agencies, and create 650 jobs.