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**Micro-Summits concept, created at Sac State, is innovative and international in scope**

Dr. Elisa Garzitto-Michals, a teacher education professor at Sacramento State, has attended her share of massive academic conferences where educators lecture, one after another, about their research findings.

“I soon realized that the good conversations were taking place in the coffee shops, and that’s how this idea was born. I thought we could do something fun, engaging and interactive,” she says.

Two years ago, Garzitto-Michals teamed up with Patrick Blessinger, the New York-based founder of International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association, to create International Micro-Summits, which are small-scale conferences that focus on building global and local partnerships in education, business and government.

“As dean, I am always excited to support faculty projects of this nature,” says Dr. Vanessa Sheared, dean of Sacramento State’s College of Education. “And I am eager to see the next phase of this journey for these international scholars.”

The first Micro-Summit will be held June 19-22 in Sacramento, headquartered at Sacramento State. By the time the 10 participants arrive, they already will have shared their ideas and research with each other online and will use their time together to collaborate on local and global innovation. The theme of the mini-conference is “Merging Education, Business and Government for Innovation.”

The handful of international educators attending the inaugural Micro-Summit will spend much of their time meeting with government leaders (at the state Capitol), educators (at Sacramento State and William Jessup University in Rocklin) and business minds (at Hewlett-Packard in Roseville and Google’s headquarters in Mountain View).

The idea of the Micro-Summit is to find some way, with the help of fellow participants and the mini think-tank of experts they will meet on the field trips, to elevate their ideas from dreams to reality. The hope is that the participants can help to advance their colleagues’ projects.
Dr. Kofi Akwabi-Ameyaw, a professor at California State University, Stanislaus, has two projects planned for his native Ghana but no idea how to move them forward. He would like to open a library in his hometown; he already has a locker full of books. He also has ideas for sustainability training modules in Ghana. Likewise, Dr. Emi Garzitto (Elisa’s sister and a member of the Vancouver, B.C., school board) is working on a sustainability project for their hometown of Vancouver.

“The idea that we can not only affect children in Ghana, who will have a library, but a teenager in Vancouver, who maybe will think twice about buying a Starbucks in a paper (and not a recyclable) cup, is very exciting,” says Garzitto-Michals. “Everything makes a difference. We just found out that North America is at an all-time high for carbon emissions. We’re not very good at zero- or low-emissions living, but the Ghana population is. I feel like we have a lot to learn from each other, and we’ll have fun.

“Micro-Summits afford us the opportunity to get in a van and go to Google and break bread, and go to HP and come back and collaborate. We’re tapping into the private and public, small and large, all in just three and a half days.”

Those who attend an International Micro-Summit are obligated to host one in their native land. They can invite whoever they want, not necessarily the individuals who are coming to Sacramento. The idea is to perpetuate international collaboration and small-scale idea-sharing.

Next year’s Micro-Summit is scheduled for Ghana, and Canada is expected to host the 2015 gathering. Participants also are working to establish international cross-cultural training through MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

“I once saw a Mother Teresa quote in an elevator: ‘You cannot do great things, only small things with great love,’ ” says Garzitto-Michals. “I’ve grappled for years with what my ‘small thing’ is, and marrying those ideas was the beginning of the Micro-Summits concept, where we get 10 delegates from around the world instead of 400. I understand there is value in that (large-scale) process, but my (teacher education) work is around community and play, and there is something to be said for being playful.”

To learn more about the International Micro-Summit, visit www.microsummits.org/. For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Office of Public Affairs at (916) 278-6156.

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