Panels

August 4, 2026: 2:00 – 3:20 pm

Panel 1: Women Leaders in STEM

A discussion among distinguished leaders on advancing women's participation and leadership in STEM education, while addressing emerging challenges and opportunities for future generations.

Moderator:



Dr. Marcela Paredes de Vásquez
Professor, Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá (UTP) (Panamá)

Dr. Marcela Paredes de Vásquez is a distinguished educator, engineer, and public servant with extensive experience in higher education leadership, public policy, and international cooperation. She holds a Master of Science in Electric Power Engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (USA) as a Fulbright Scholar and a Bachelor of Science in Electromechanical Engineering from the Technological University of Panama (UTP). Dr. Paredes served as Minister of Education of Panama (2014–2018), President of the Technological University of Panama (2008–2013), and Ambassador of Panama to Chile (2018–2019). She is currently a Full Professor of Electric Power Engineering at UTP and serves as an Independent Director of Polaris Renewable Energy Inc., where she chairs the Human Resources and Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) Committee. Her international leadership includes serving as Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Education of the Organization of American States (OAS) and as a member of the Board of UNESCO's International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC). She is also a founding member of the Network of Women Leaders in Higher Education in Latin America (EMULIES).Dr. Paredes has received numerous recognitions for her contributions to education and public service, including the National Order Belisario Porras of Panama and an Honorary Doctorate from Wilkes University in the United States.

Members:

Ing/Mgt Melanie Castillo, Coordinator of Graduate Programs, Quality Leadership University (Panamá)
Dr. Mónica Aurora Puertas, Associate Director, Instituto para la Calidad, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Perú)
Ing/Mgt Eyda Ramos, President, Universidad Interamericana de Panamá (Panamá)
Dr. Alice Smith, US National Academy of Engineering Member, Auburn University (USA)
Ing. Andria Villarreal, Presidenta de la Asociación Panameña de Ingenieros Industriales y Afines (Panama)



Ing/Mgt Melanie Castillo
Coordinator of Graduate Programs
Quality Leadership University (Panamá)

Melanie Castillo de Morales is a recognized expert in Business Agility, Lean Agile transformation, innovation, and project management, with more than 17 years of experience leading strategic initiatives across technology, banking, maritime and port operations, telecommunications, aviation, retail, construction, and other industries. She is the Founder of MelCas, PMOLead, and Conecta-T, where she advises organizations on organizational transformation, innovation, agile project management, and high-performance teams. Ing. Castillo serves as Professor and Academic Advisor at Quality Leadership University, teaching graduate programs in project management and innovation. She holds master's degrees in Project Management and Higher Education, is an engineer in Telecommunications, and is certified as a Project Management Professional (PMP®), PMI Agile Certified Practitioner (PMI-ACP®), Certified ScrumMaster (CSM), and ICAgile Certified Coach (ICP-ACC). She is an internationally recognized speaker and facilitator on business agility, digital transformation, Design Thinking, and innovation leadership.



Dr. Mónica Aurora Puertas
Associate Director
Instituto para la Calidad, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Perú)

Mónica Puertas is Associate Director of Content and Strategic Development and Academic Director at the Institute for Quality of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), where she is also a Professor of Industrial Engineering. She holds a Ph.D. in Healthcare Engineering from the University of South Florida and an M.S. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Puerto Rico–Mayagüez. With more than 24 years of experience in teaching, research, consulting, and auditing, Dr. Puertas is internationally recognized for her expertise in quality management systems, continuous improvement, operations research, healthcare process optimization, and ISO standards. She is a certified Lead Auditor, a former Chair of the American Society for Quality (ASQ) Lima Section, and has advised numerous organizations in quality, organizational excellence, and management systems throughout Latin America.



Ing/Mgt Eyda Ramos
President
Universidad Interamericana de Panamá (Panamá)

Eida Ramos is President of the Universidad Interamericana de Panamá (UIP) and an experienced higher education leader with more than 25 years of service in education. She is a strong advocate for educational innovation and believes that the integration of technology and education is essential to delivering high-quality learning experiences that prepare students for the future. Ing. Ramos holds master's degrees in Educational Management, with an emphasis on Critical and Creative Thinking, and in Systems Management with an emphasis on Information Security. Throughout her career, she has promoted academic excellence, innovation, digital transformation, and student-centered education, contributing significantly to the advancement of higher education in Panama.



Dr. Alice Smith
US National Academy of Engineering Member
Endowed Shelby Distinguished Professor of the Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science, University of Alabama (USA)

Alice Smith is Endowed Shelby Distinguished Professor of the Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of Alabama. Prior to that, she was the Joe W. Forehand, Jr. Distinguished Professor of the Industrial and Systems Engineering Department at Auburn University, where she served as Department Chair from 1999-2011. She also had a joint appointment with the Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering. Previously, she was on the faculty of the Department of Industrial Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh from 1991-99, which she joined after industrial experience with Southwestern Bell Corporation. Dr. Smith has degrees from Rice University (BSCE), Saint Louis University (MBA), and Missouri University of Science and Technology (PhD) along with a recent BA in Spanish from Auburn University.

Dr. Smith's research focus is analysis, modeling, and optimization of complex systems with emphasis on intelligent computation inspired by natural systems integrated with traditional operations research and statistical approaches. She holds one U.S. patent and several international patents and has authored publications which have garnered over 19,000 citations, an H Index of 54, and an i10 Index of 139 (Google Scholar). Dr. Smith is in the top half of the List of Top 2% of Scientific Researchers worldwide recently compiled by Stanford University based on publishing impact. Her books include Women in Computational Intelligence: Key Advances and Perspectives on Emerging Topics and Women in Industrial and Systems Engineering: Key Advances and Perspectives on Emerging Topics, both published by Springer. Several of her papers are among the most highly cited in their respective journals including the most cited paper of Reliability Engineering & System Safety, the 7th most cited paper of IEEE Transactions on Reliability, and the most cited paper of The Engineering Economist. She won the E. L. Grant Best Paper Awards in 1999 and in 2006, and the William A. J. Golomski Best Paper Award in 2002. Dr. Smith is the outgoing Editor in Chief of INFORMS Journal on Computing and an Area Editor of Computers & Operations Research.

Dr. Smith has been a principal investigator on over $12 million of sponsored research with funding by Department of Homeland Security, NASA, U.S. Department of Defense, Missile Defense Agency, National Security Agency, NIST, U.S. Department of Transportation, Frontier Technologies Inc., Lockheed Martin, Adtranz (now Bombardier Transportation), the Ben Franklin Technology Center of Western Pennsylvania, and U.S. National Science Foundation, from which she has been awarded 18 distinct grants including a CAREER grant and an ADVANCE Leadership grant. Her industrial partners on sponsored research projects have included DaimlerChrysler Electronics, Toyota, Eljer, Frontier Technology Inc., Extrude Hone, Ford Motor, and Crucible Compaction Metals. International research collaborations have been sponsored by Germany, Mexico, Japan, Turkey, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Egypt, South Korea, Iraq, China, Colombia, Chile, Algeria, and the U.S., and by the Institute of International Education. She is a four-time Fulbright Scholar (2013, 2016, 2017, 2020) with residencies in Turkey, Chile, and Colombia.

For accomplishments in research, education, and service she was named Endowed Shelby Distinguished Professor in 2026 at University of Alabama. Previously she was the Joe W. Forehand, Jr. Distinguished Professor, the Joe W. Forehand / Accenture Distinguished Professor, the H. Allen and Martha Reed Professor, and the Philpott WestPoint Stevens Professor, all at Auburn University. Dr. Smith was named a 2020 Yellowhammer Women of Impact (20 women are honored each year in the State of Alabama https://alabamawomen.org/#2020). In 2017, she received the inaugural Auburn University 100 Women Strong Leadership in Diversity Faculty Award. Dr. Smith was awarded the Wellington Award in 2016, the IIE Albert G. Holzman Distinguished Educator Award in 2012, and the INFORMS WORMS Award for the Advancement of Women in OR/MS in 2009. Dr. Smith received the Senior Research Award of the College of Engineering at Auburn University in 2001 and the University of Pittsburgh School of Engineering Board of Visitors Faculty Award for Research and Scholarly Activity in 1996.

Dr. Smith is a member of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE), a Life Fellow of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), a Fellow of the Institute for Operations Research and Management Science (INFORMS), a Fellow of the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers (IISE), a senior member of the Society of Women Engineers, a member of Tau Beta Pi, and a Registered Professional Engineer. She has served as IEEE Distinguished Lecturer and INFORMS Official Speaker and has given frequent keynote/plenary talks at international conferences. She served as Chair of the Council of Industrial Engineering Academic Department Heads and as President of the INFORMS Association of Chairs of Operations Research Departments. She was selected as an INFORMS Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Ambassador in 2021. Her leadership roles in conferences sponsored by INFORMS and IEEE have been numerous.



Ing. Andria Villarreal
Presidenta de la Asociación Panameña de Ingenieros Industriales y Afines (Panama)

Andria Villarreal is an Industrial Engineer and innovation leader with extensive experience in project portfolio management, business strategy, and organizational transformation. She currently serves as PMO Innovation Manager for Panama at Estrella Azul, where she leads a portfolio of more than 40 innovation projects, driving strategic growth, operational excellence, and cross-functional collaboration. In addition to her corporate leadership, Ing. Villarreal serves on the Board of Directors of the Panamanian Association of Industrial Engineers (APII), promoting innovation, engineering leadership, and professional development throughout Panama. Throughout her career, she has held leadership positions in manufacturing, marketing, banking, and process improvement, and is recognized for her expertise in innovation management, strategic execution, and continuous improvement.

August 4, 2026: 3:30 – 4:50 pm

Panel 2: Logistics and Ports

A panel examining the future of ports, logistics, transportation systems, and supply chains, with a focus on competitiveness, resilience, digital transformation, and economic development.

Co-Moderator: Dr. Maximiliano Jiménez, Consultant and Professor, Quality Leadership University (Panamá)



Dr. Maximiliano Jiménez is an internationally recognized consultant, educator, and executive leader with extensive experience in quality management, organizational excellence, logistics, international business, and higher education. He is the President of MJ Consulting Inc. and has advised organizations throughout Latin America in areas related to strategic planning, operational excellence, leadership development, quality systems, and organizational transformation.

Dr. Jiménez pursued graduate studies at Pennsylvania State University and has dedicated much of his professional career to strengthening collaboration among academia, industry, and government. He has played an important role in promoting quality, innovation, and professional development initiatives throughout the region.

A strong advocate for international education and leadership development, Dr. Jiménez serves as an Ambassador of the Industrial Engineering and Operations Management (IEOM) Society in Panama and is actively involved in advancing engineering, management, and technology education across Latin America. His professional interests include logistics, ports, supply chain management, quality systems, organizational leadership, and sustainable economic development.



Co-Moderator: Dr. Mansooreh Mollaghasemi, Director of IE Graduate Programs, University of Central Florida (USA)

Dr. Mansooreh Mollaghasemi is an Associate Professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering and Management Systems at the University of Central Florida (UCF). She earned her Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Louisville and has more than three decades of experience in teaching, research, and academic leadership.

Dr. Mollaghasemi is internationally recognized for her contributions to simulation modeling and analysis, operations research, supply chain systems, decision support, and optimization. Throughout her career, she has led and participated in numerous research projects sponsored by organizations including NASA, the National Science Foundation (NSF), the U.S. Department of Transportation, Orlando International Airport, Lucent Technologies, and the U.S. Army. Her work has addressed topics such as logistics systems, emergency evacuation planning, airport operations, supply chain modeling, space operations, and simulation-based decision making.

She is the recipient of numerous honors, including the UCF College of Engineering Distinguished Researcher Award, multiple Researcher of the Year awards, and the State of Florida Teaching Incentive Program Award. Dr. Mollaghasemi has published extensively in leading journals and conferences and has supervised numerous master's and doctoral students who have gone on to successful careers in academia, industry, and government.

Members

- Dr. Jorge Barnett Lawton, Director of Georgia Tech Panama Logistics Innovation & Research Center (Panama)
- Dr. Zoila Castillo, Profesora de la Universidad Tecnologica de Panama (Panama)
- Ing/MBA Hernando Garzon Saenz, Docente en Fundación Universitaria Tecnológico Comfenalco Cartagena (Colombia)
- Dr. Edgar Gutierrez, Director Data Analytics Center, Externado University/University of Central Florida (Colombia, USA)
- Eduardo Tapiero, Economic Advisor – National Planning Institute for Development of Panama (Panama)
- Dr. Ricardo Ungo, Director of the Maritime, Ports and Logistics Management Institute, Old Dominion University (USA)
- Dr. Ying Xie, Director of Logistics Cluster, University of Central Florida (USA)



Dr. Jorge Barnett Lawton
Director of Georgia Tech Panama Logistics Innovation & Research Center (Panama)

Jorge Barnett Lawton is Managing Director of the Georgia Tech Panama Logistics Innovation & Research Center, a joint initiative of the Government of Panama and Georgia Institute of Technology. From that role he leads local and regional projects related to the advancement of logistics and transport, digital transformation, logistics cluster performance, supply chain and distribution network design, and process innovation. He earned a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering from the Technological University of Panama; a masters in industrial engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, USA; and a masters and Ph.D. in logistics and supply chain management from the MIT-Zaragoza International Logistics Program in Zaragoza, Spain. Over two decades he has developed his experience in the private and academic sectors in Panama, Spain, Mexico and Argentina, occupying various roles in the fields of manufacturing, project management, technology, logistics, research and teaching. Every day he's thankful for his beloved wife and daughter, and the opportunity to work for the development of his country with the support of a talented and unrivaled team of professionals.

Dr. Zoila Castillo, Profesora de la Universidad Tecnologica de Panama (Panama)



Zoila Yadira Guerra de Castillo holds a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from Iowa State University (2006) and is a Full Professor and Research Leader at CIILCA at the Technological University of Panama. Her research focuses on supply chains and logistics, stochastic models and simulation, port, canal, and airport systems, and operational uncertainty. She served as National Director of Research at the Technological University of Panama (UTP) (2022–2023) and Director of Knowledge Management and Transfer (2014–2018), a period during which 167 PCT applications ranked Panama first in Latin America per million inhabitants. She coordinated the Ibero-American CYTED-CECIAC network (8 countries, 10 institutions) and served as a visiting professor at the MIT Center for Transportation & Logistics as a Fulbright scholar. She has provided consulting services to ECLAC on the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines in Central America and to the IDB on the PNLog and Panama's National Logistics Strategy. Her work is funded by CYTED, SENACYT, and the German government; she has filed three PCT patent applications and has been published in journals such as the Journal of the Operational Research Society and the International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction. She was recognized as one of the 24 Pioneers of Science in Panama.



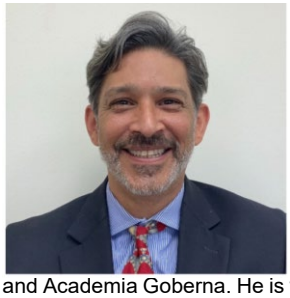
Ing/MBA Hernando Garzon Saenz
Docente en Fundación Universitaria Tecnológico Comfenalco Cartagena (Colombia)

Hernando Garzón Saenz is a professor and industrial engineering educator at Fundación Universitaria Tecnológico Comfenalco Cartagena, where he coordinates classroom-based research projects and teaches courses in operations management, production systems, and plant design. He has more than 20 years of combined experience in academia and industry, with expertise in production planning, quality management, process improvement, and industrial operations. Prior to his academic career, Ing/MBA Garzón held production leadership positions at POSTOBON S.A. and other manufacturing organizations, gaining extensive experience in production planning and control, statistical process control, quality systems, inventory management, and continuous improvement. He holds an MBA with a specialization in Integrated Quality, Safety, and Environmental Management Systems, as well as a specialization in Production and Quality Management, and is actively engaged in applied research in operations and logistics.



Dr. Edgar Gutierrez-Franco
Director Data Analytics Center, Externado University/University of Central Florida (Colombia, USA)

Edgar Gutiérrez-Franco is Director of the Center for Applied Analytics and Technology and Director of the Master's Program in Digital Transformation and Business Analytics at Universidad Externado de Colombia and a Lecturer at the University of Central Florida. He also serves as President of the Latin American and Caribbean Chapter of the Production and Operations Management Society (POMS-LAC) and is a Research Affiliate at the MIT Center for Transportation and Logistics (MIT-CTL). Dr. Gutiérrez-Franco earned his Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Central Florida and completed postdoctoral research at MIT. His expertise includes supply chain analytics, operations research, artificial intelligence, machine learning, optimization, simulation, and digital transformation. His research and industry collaborations focus on applying advanced analytics to improve logistics, retail, manufacturing, agribusiness, and sustainable supply chain systems throughout Latin America and beyond.



Eduardo Tapiero, Economic Advisor – National Planning Institute for Development of Panama (Panama)

Eddie Tapiero is an economist and international strategic advisor specializing in international trade, logistics, maritime economics, economic policy, and competitive intelligence. He currently serves as Economic Advisor to the National Planning Institute for Development of Panama within the Ministry of Economy and Finance and as a Competitive Intelligence Specialist at the Panama Canal Authority. Throughout his career, he has advised the Presidency of Panama, the Ministry of Commerce, and national institutions on logistics strategy, ports, international trade, economic competitiveness, and public policy. Mr. Tapiero holds a Master's degree in Economics from Northeastern University and a Bachelor's degree in Economics from the University of Pittsburgh. He has further specialized in international geopolitics, maritime economics, intelligence and counterintelligence, and LNG maritime business through executive programs at the École de Guerre Économique (France), Lloyd's Maritime Academy, and Academia Goberna. He is widely recognized for his expertise in economic forecasting, maritime strategy, business intelligence, and the evolving relationship among geopolitics, global trade, logistics, and supply chains.



Dr. Ricardo Ungo
Director of the Maritime, Ports and Logistics Management Institute
Old Dominion University (USA)

Ricardo Ungo is a professional with 24+ years of experience in the manufacturing and maritime industry. He worked for more than a decade at the Panama Canal, participating in the Panama Canal Expansion project studies and leading the development of studies for maritime related projects as Business Development Manager. Prior to this, Dr. Ungo worked with Melo Industrial Group managing industrial capacity expansion projects as Production and Sales Manager. Dr. Ungo is now Director of the Maritime, Ports and Logistics Management Institute and Clinical Assistant Professor in the School of Supply Chain, Logistics and Maritime Operations at Old Dominion University. He specializes in the topics related to the maritime industry and global supply chains. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from Vanderbilt University.



Dr. Ying Xie
Director of Logistics Cluster
University of Central Florida (USA)

Ying Xie is currently the Director of the Logistics Cluster at the University of Central Florida. She was a Professor of Supply Chain Analytics at Cranfield University, United Kingdom. She is an internationally recognized leader in supply chain management, operations research, machine learning, big data analytics, and intelligent decision-support systems. She has held numerous senior academic leadership positions, including Director of the Centre for Intelligent Supply Chain and Head of School at Anglia Ruskin University, where she led strategic initiatives in research, education, and international partnerships. A Principal Fellow of Advance HE, Prof. Xie has successfully led and managed research and innovation projects funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), Innovate UK, the European Union, and major industry partners. Her research focuses on digital supply chains, sustainable aviation, logistics, maritime systems, artificial intelligence, and supply chain resilience. She serves on several national strategic advisory boards and is widely recognized for fostering collaboration among academia, industry, and government to develop innovative, data-driven solutions that enhance global supply chain performance and sustainability. Dr. Xie earned her Ph.D. in Supply Chain and Operational Research from Coventry University, United Kingdom, and a Master of Science with Distinction in Intelligence Engineering from the University of Liverpool, specializing in Artificial Intelligence, Control Theory, and Fuzzy Systems.

August 5, 2026 – 2:00 – 3:20 pm

Panel 3: AI in the Curriculum

An exploration of how universities can integrate Artificial Intelligence into academic programs to better prepare graduates for the rapidly evolving needs of industry, government, and society.



Co-Moderator: Yaravi Cardoze, Past President of PMI Panama

Yaravi specializes in empowering Boards of Directors, business owners, and CEOs to lead strategic transformations and make critical decisions that drive sustainable growth. She provides high-level perspectives and actionable solutions to optimize corporate governance, expand into new markets, and manage risks for organizations operating across the United States, Latin America, Europe, and Brazil. Her focus is on unlocking organizations' strategic potential and guiding leaders toward long-term success. Additionally, she supports organizations in accelerating their organizational, digital, and artificial intelligence transformation journeys. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, an MBA, and a Project Management Professional (PMP) certification. She has also completed executive specializations in: Organizational Transformation – University of California, Berkeley, Haas School of Business, Digital Transformation and Industry 4.0 – University of Virginia and AI and the Future of Work and Organizations – Lund University, Sweden and Boards of Directors within the Governance Process – University at Buffalo, New York.

Her professional career includes leading transformation teams across Latin America and globally in Fortune 500 companies, startups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other organizations. In these leadership roles, she orchestrated strategies and programs focused on cultural transformation, organizational capability disruption, the creation of new business lines, and market expansion. She has also led digital and workforce transformation programs focused on digitalization, automation, artificial intelligence, big data, machine learning, citizen development, and related technologies. As Chief Digital Officer (CDO) of the Panama Canal, she designed and executed the organization's digital and business transformation roadmap. In 2023, she was recognized as Chief Digital Officer of the Year in Latin America and was named one of the Top 50 Most Influential HR Leaders 2025 for her exceptional ability to inspire, connect, and transform organizations.

Yaravi has been an active member of the Project Management Institute (PMI) for more than 15 years. She served as President of the PMI Panama Chapter (2016–2018) and graduated from the PMI Global Master Class. She was PMI's Regional Mentor for Latin America (2021–2024), a candidate for the PMI Board of Directors (2024–2026), and currently serves as a PMI Ambassador and member of the Global Culture and Inclusion Committee. She is the founder of several professional communities, including Agiles Panamá, Women in Agile, Data Science Community, and Heart of Agile Panamá. She also serves as a judge for the PMO (Project, Program, and Portfolio Management Office) Global Awards.

She was recognized as one of the Most Inspiring Women in 2017 and received recognition from the Worldwide Women Association in 2022 for her outstanding professional achievements. She also volunteered as an advisor to the Project Management Office of the Archdiocese of Panama during the planning and execution of World Youth Day (JMJ) Panama 2019. Yaravi has delivered keynote speeches at conferences and events in Brazil, Hong Kong, Kenya, Bangladesh, Uganda, the United Arab Emirates, Mexico, Peru, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, Spain, Canada, the United States, Pakistan, Ghana, Taiwan, South Korea, and India. She is also the co-author of the bestselling book Women's Leadership in Latin America.

Co-Moderator: Ing/MBA Galileo Solís, Science and Technology Lead Specialist at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) (Panamá)



Galileo Solís is a Lead Specialist in the Competitiveness, Technology, and Innovation Division of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). He has more than 25 years of experience in science, technology, and innovation public policy, having worked across the public sector, private sector, and non-profit organizations.
At the IDB, he works closely with decision-makers throughout Central America in the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects aimed at strengthening innovation, productivity, and competitiveness capabilities. Prior to joining the Bank, he served at Panama's National Secretariat for Science, Technology, and Innovation (SENACYT).

Galileo Solís holds a Bachelor's degree in Systems Engineering from Universidad Católica Santa María la Antigua (USMA), an MBA in Banking and Finance from INCAE Business School, and a Master's degree in Project Formulation and Evaluation from Universidad del Istmo. He is also a certified Project Management Professional (PMP) by the Project Management Institute (PMI).

Members

- Dr. Cristian Barria, Universidad Mayor (Chile)
- Dr. Hector Flores, Universidad Distrital, Colombia

- Dr. Alfonso Sarmiento, Chair IE & Civil Engineering, Universidad de La Sabana (Colombia)
- Dr. Javier Sanchez-Galan, Professor of Systems Engineering, Universidad Tecnologica de Panama, (Panama)



Dr. Cristian Barría, Director of the Master's Program in Information Security Engineering at Universidad Mayor and cybersecurity researcher (Chile)

Cristian Barría serves as Director of the Master's Program in Information Security Engineering at Universidad Mayor, where he leads graduate education and research in cybersecurity, cyber resilience, and digital risk management. His career combines academic leadership with extensive experience in information security and digital transformation.

He holds a Ph.D. in Computer Engineering from the Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso, along with master's degrees in Computer Engineering and Educational Planning and Management. Founder of the SEGDATA Conference, Dr. Barría is an active researcher, author, and international speaker whose work focuses on cybersecurity, cyber defense, and information security education.



Dr. Hector Flores
Professor and Researcher
Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas

Héctor Flórez Dr. Héctor Flórez is a Professor and Researcher at Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, where he leads research initiatives in artificial intelligence, intelligent systems, and applied informatics. He also serves as Editor of the university's Revista Científica, promoting interdisciplinary research and international academic collaboration.

His research focuses on artificial intelligence, machine learning, bio-inspired computing, data science, and intelligent decision-support systems. Dr. Flórez has authored numerous scientific publications, edited international conference proceedings, and contributes to the advancement of AI through research, education, and innovation.

Dr. Tony Prensa
CEO of TP Global Business Consulting LLC
Director for Central America and the Caribbean for the IEOM Society (Republica Dominicana, Puerto Rico, USA)



Tony Prensa is an internationally recognized expert in strategic Project Management Offices (PMOs), digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and executive leadership. He is the Founder and CEO of TP Global Business Consulting LLC and serves as Director for Central America and the Caribbean for the IEOM Society. With more than 38 years of international experience, he advises organizations on AI-enabled PMOs, enterprise governance, portfolio management, and strategic execution.

Dr. Prensa holds a Doctorate in Management and Leadership from the University of Phoenix and a Master's degree in Project Management from The George Washington University. He is an internationally sought-after keynote speaker, author, educator, and creator of the P.R.E.N.S.A. Framework and PMO-BP® methodology. His work focuses on helping organizations transform strategy into measurable business value through innovation, leadership, and decision intelligence.



Dr. Javier Sanchez-Galan
Professor of Systems Engineering
Universidad Tecnologica de Panamá, (Panamá)

Javier Sánchez-Galán is a Professor-Researcher at the Technological University of Panama, where he conducts interdisciplinary research in artificial intelligence, machine learning, bioinformatics, and computational biology. His work integrates advanced computing methods with data-driven solutions for scientific and healthcare applications. He earned his Ph.D. in Experimental Medicine and his M.Sc. in Computer Science (Bioinformatics) from McGill University. An active researcher and international speaker, Dr. Sánchez-Galán focuses on artificial intelligence, computational modeling, and data science to support innovation in healthcare, biology, and scientific research.



Dr. Alfonso Sarmiento
Chair, Industrial & Civil Engineering Departments
Universidad de La Sabana (Colombia)

Alfonso Sarmiento is a recognized expert in industrial engineering, operations research, logistics, and supply chain management, with extensive experience in research, higher education, and industry consulting. He serves as Associate Professor at Universidad de La Sabana, where he conducts research on simulation, mathematical optimization, sustainable supply chains, and transportation systems, while also contributing to industry-focused innovation and decision-support methodologies. Dr. Sarmiento holds a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Central Florida, a Master's degree in Operations Research with a specialization in Logistics, and a Bachelor's degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Lima. An active researcher and international collaborator, his work focuses on sustainable supply chains, logistics, simulation, renewable energy systems, and public policy analysis through advanced analytical and optimization techniques.

August 5, 2026 – 3:30 – 4:50 pm

Panel 4: Sustainability, Energy, and Resilient Infrastructure

A conversation on the future of energy systems, sustainability, climate resilience, and infrastructure development, highlighting strategies to support economic growth, environmental stewardship, and long-term regional prosperity.

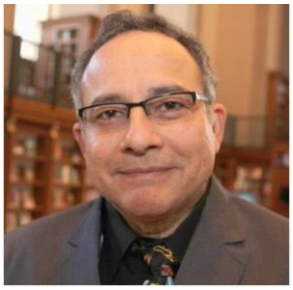
Co-Moderator: Ing/MBA Ivan Barría, CEO Pure New Energy Latam (Panamá)



Iván Barría is a distinguished energy executive and business leader with more than 15 years of experience in the energy sector across Latin America. He currently serves as CEO of Pure New Energy Latam, where he leads the development of renewable energy projects and sustainable energy solutions throughout the region.

Previously, Mr. Barría served as General Manager of ETESA (Empresa de Transmisión Eléctrica, S.A.), Panama's national electricity transmission company. During his tenure, he successfully led the construction of Panama's Third Transmission Line, a strategic infrastructure project valued at approximately $400 million, completed in half the time required for the country's previous transmission expansion. Under his leadership, Panama strengthened its energy security, improved system reliability, and significantly reduced electricity costs relative to neighboring countries.

Mr. Barría holds an MBA from INCAE Business School and a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Villanova University. He is widely recognized as a leading voice in energy policy, renewable energy, infrastructure development, and the future of sustainable energy systems in Latin America.



Co-Moderator: Ing/Mgt Julio Rovi, Professor, Universidad Tecnológica de Panamá (Panamá)

Julio Rovi, M.S. is an engineer, educator, entrepreneur, and energy consultant with more than 35 years of international experience in energy, sustainability, climate policy, and infrastructure development across 18 countries in the Americas. He currently serves as Professor of Mechanical Engineering at the Technological University of Panama and advises organizations throughout the region on energy efficiency, renewable energy, sustainable development, and climate resilience. Throughout his distinguished career, Mr. Rovi has held leadership positions in consulting, industry, academia, and government initiatives, contributing to national energy plans, sustainability programs, green building policies, and energy transition strategies. He has worked extensively on energy efficiency, renewable energy integration, smart cities, climate adaptation, and sustainable infrastructure projects in both North and Latin America. Mr. Rovi holds a Master of Science in Energy Management and Policy from the University of Pennsylvania and graduate studies in Social Systems Sciences from The Wharton School. He is widely recognized for his ability to integrate engineering, economics, public policy, and systems thinking to address complex energy and sustainability challenges.

Members

- **Ing/MBA Harmodio Araúz,** Asesor Regulatorio en Unidad Ejecutora Proyecto SIEPAC / Consejo Director MER (Panamá)
- **Melina Balderrama**, National Coordinator, Bolivia WATCH Program for Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) (Bolivia)
- **Ing. Gustavo Bernal**, CEO in LK Panama (Panamá)
- **Dr. Charles Davis**, Associate Professor, Embry-Riddle University (USA)
- **Dr. Marwen Elkamel,** Department of Industrial Engineering & Management Systems, University of Central Florida (USA)
- **Rosilena Lindo Riggs,** Energy and climate professional, former energy secretary of Panamá, gender equality specialist (Panamá)
- **Carlos A. Vargas,** Distinguished Panamanian Water Resources Expert, Hydrologist, and Environmental Strategist (Panama)



Ing/MBA Harmodio Araúz, Asesor Regulatorio en Unidad Ejecutora Proyecto SIEPAC / Consejo Director MER (Panamá)

Harmodio Araúz is a distinguished Panamanian energy executive with more than 45 years of experience in electric power systems, energy markets, hydroelectric generation, and regional energy integration. He currently serves as Regulatory Advisor to the SIEPAC Project Executive Unit and the Regional Electricity Market (MER) Governing Council, while also acting as for ABCO Energy, where he supports hydroelectric, solar, and electricity market development projects. Throughout his career, Ing. Araúz has held senior leadership positions with the Panama Canal Authority (ACP), the National Dispatch Center (CND–ETESA), and regional energy organizations, leading initiatives in power system operations, energy dispatch, transmission planning, and electricity market regulation. He is widely recognized throughout Central America for his expertise in energy policy, power system operations, renewable energy, and regional electricity market integration.



Dr. Melina Balderrama, National Coordinator, Bolivia WATCH Program for Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) (Bolivia)

Melina Balderrama is an Industrial Engineer with a PhD in Chemistry and Chemical Engineering (Industrial Engineering Program) from Universitat Ramon Llull, Barcelona, Spain. With more than 20 years of international experience, she specializes in the intersection of industrial systems, water governance, climate resilience, energy transition, and sustainable development. She currently serves as National Coordinator of the Bolivia WATCH Program at the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), where she co-leads WATCH Lithium, an initiative advancing hydrological modelling, water governance, and climate-informed planning for lithium-producing basins and other strategic critical mineral regions in South America. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the School of Engineering of the Universidad Privada Boliviana (UPB), following nearly a decade in academic leadership positions at the Universidad Católica Boliviana. Throughout her career, she has worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), national and subnational governments, universities, and international cooperation agencies, coordinating development initiatives financed by multilateral development banks and bilateral donors. Her work bridges scientific research, public

policy, strategic planning, and institutional strengthening to support resilient infrastructure, sustainable resource governance, and climate-informed development.



Ing Gustavo Bernal, CEO in LK Panama (Panamá)

Ing. Gustavo A. Bernal G. is a distinguished Panamanian engineer, business executive, and energy sector leader with more than 40 years of experience in electrical infrastructure, power transmission, energy markets, project development, and engineering management. He currently serves as General Manager and CEO of LK Panama, advising organizations on energy investments, infrastructure projects, and business development. He has held senior leadership positions in both the public and private sectors, including serving as Deputy General Manager of ETESA (Empresa de Transmisión Eléctrica, S.A.), Panama's national electricity transmission company. A respected leader within the engineering profession, he also served as President of the Panamanian Society of Engineers and Architects (SPIA). Ing. Bernal holds a degree in Electromechanical Engineering from the Technological University of Panama and an MBA with specialization in Project Formulation and Administration. He is widely recognized for his expertise in energy systems, electric markets, infrastructure development, and engineering leadership.



Dr. Charles Davis
Associate Professor
Embry-Riddle University (USA)

Charles W. Davis, Jr. is an Associate Professor of Engineering at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a recognized leader in engineering education, leadership development, and systems engineering. He holds B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Central Florida and brings more than 25 years of industry experience and over 20 years in higher education. Dr. Davis is a Past President and Fellow of the Florida Engineering Society (FES) and has received numerous recognitions for his contributions to engineering education and professional leadership, including the 2025 Florida Engineering Society Engineering Faculty Member of the Year Award. His research focuses on leadership, systems engineering, virtual reality, digital twins, quality engineering, and engineering education, and he is the author of A Systematic Guide to Leadership Selection Using Total Quality.



Dr. Marwen Elkamel
Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Industrial Engineering & Management Systems
University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida

Dr. Marwen Elkamel is a Post Doctoral Fellow at the Department of Industrial Engineering & Management Systems at the University of Central Florida. He obtained a Bachelor degree with distinction in Economics with a minor in Management Studies from the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada and a Master of Science degree in Management (Business Analytics track) from the University of Central Florida. He received his Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering from the University of Central Florida in 2023. Before starting his PhD, he worked as a data analyst for WeCare tlc. During his undergraduate studies, he served as a Research Assistant at the Waterloo Institute for Sustainable Energy (WISE). He was involved in two different projects that encompassed the acquisition and summary of data and preparation of computer programs to simulate processes and to make appropriate conclusions. During his PhD studies, he has been preparing machine learning models for electricity consumption with the consideration of socio-economic factors. He was also involved in a project that dealt with power resources scheduling and planning. He is currently focusing on modeling and optimizing the Urban Food-Energy-Water Nexus in order to find more efficient ways to supply water, energy and food and manage natural resources that can aid in sustainable energy development and improved water and food security. He is a member of IEOM, IFORMS, and the Institute of Industrial & Systems Engineering. He has published several journal and conference papers in the areas of modeling, simulation, optimization, and big data analytics.



Ing/Mgt Rosilena Lindo Riggs, Energy and climate professional
Former energy secretary of Panamá, gender equality specialist (Panamá)

Eng. Rosilena Lindo is a distinguished global energy and climate advisor and a REN21 Senior Fellow. Currently serving on the GWNET International Advisory Board and as President of the Panamanian Chapter of the "Colectiva 50+1," she is a prominent advocate for gender equality in the energy sector.

As Panama's former National Secretary of Energy and former Undersecretary, Rosilena authored and edited over 15 national public policy instruments including Panama's Green Hydrogen Strategy and its first NDC under the Paris Agreement. Her landmark contributions include the National Green Hydrogen Strategy and the Universal Access to Energy plan, all developed through interdisciplinary processes with a rigorous gender lens. Previously, she served as the Executive Adviser to the Minister of Environment and National Climate Change Director, where she spearheaded Panama's first NDC under the Paris Agreement. Her technical foundations are equally robust, having served as a Quality Assurance Engineer for the Panama Canal Expansion.

She is an expert in Sustainable Energy Policy and Wholesale Electricity Markets with over two decades of leadership at the intersection of climate and energy. Her career is marked by the design of viable financial instruments for Panama's National Carbon Market and her role as a Senior Regional Expert for the UN Environment Programme, where she developed the solar water heating market in LAC.

Her academic background includes a Civil Engineering degree from Panama's Technological University and two M.Sc. degrees from UASLP (Mexico) and the Cologne University of Applied Sciences (Germany). She has received prestigious scholarships from CONACYT and DAAD and completed advanced coursework in Energy Transition at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. A Civil Engineer A REN21 Senior Fellow and President of the Colectiva 50+1 (Panama Chapter), she is a renowned speaker and advocate for gender-inclusive energy transitions. In 2024, she was named Green Hydrogen Industry Regional Leader for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Beyond policy, Rosilena is an expert in ISO 14001 and OSHAS 18001 certifications. Her leadership has been recognized internationally; in 2022, she received the Mexican Energy Debate award for "Breaking Glass Ceilings," and in 2024, she was honored by the Panamanian Chinese community

for her dedication to energy education. She is a prolific communicator; she has spoken at over 450 international conferences and was recognized in 2024 as a Green Hydrogen Industry Regional Leader for LAC. Rosilena is fluent in Spanish, English, and German.



Carlos A. Vargas, Distinguished Panamanian Water Resources Expert, Hydrologist, and Environmental Strategist

Carlos A. Vargas is a distinguished Panamanian water resources expert, hydrologist, and environmental strategist with more than 30 years of experience in sustainable water management, environmental stewardship, infrastructure resilience, and national strategic planning. He currently serves as Water Resources and Environmental Systems Planning Analyst at the National Planning Directorate of Panama's Ministry of Economy and Finance and is an international consultant specializing in water resources and hydrology.

Previously, Ing/MBA Vargas served as Executive Vice President for Water, Environment, and Energy at the Panama Canal Authority, where he led the strategic management of water resources, environmental conservation, and energy systems supporting one of the world's most critical maritime infrastructures. He holds a Master of Science in Water Resources Systems and Hydrology from Cornell University as a Fulbright Scholar, an MBA from INCAE Business School, and a Bachelor of Science in Engineering from the Technological University of Panama. He is internationally recognized for his leadership in water governance, watershed management, climate resilience, and sustainable infrastructure, and has been an invited speaker at technical forums throughout the Americas, Europe, and Asia.