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INTERVIEW

The ComSoc Leaders of Tomorrow Start Here: Empowering Young Professionals with ComSoc YP

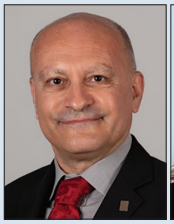
Interview with Virginia Pilloni, IEEE ComSoc YP Chair

by Stefano Bregni, Global Communications Newsletter Editor-in-Chief, IEEE Division III Director, and Virginia Pilloni, IEEE ComSoc Young Professionals Committee Chair

This article continues the series of ten interviews with the Officers of the IEEE ComSoc Member and Global Activities (MGA) Council for the term 2024–2025, which is published every month in the Global Communications Newsletter.

In this series of articles, I introduce the Vice President and the six Directors on the MGA Council (namely: Member Services, Industry Outreach, and AP, NA, LA, and EMEA Regions), as well as the three Chairs of the Women in Communications Engineering (WICE), Young Professionals (YP), and Sister Societies Standing Committees. In each interview, they present their sector activities and plans one by one.

I interview Virginia Pilloni, Chair of the IEEE ComSoc YP Standing Committee, on this issue.



Stefano Bregni

Virginia Pilloni

Virginia is an Associate Professor of Communication Engineering at the University of Cagliari, Italy. Her main research interests are the Internet of Things, particularly in context-aware resource-efficient task allocation among connected devices and user-aware efficient scheduling of appliances in Smart Environment scenarios. Virginia participated in several regional, national, and international research projects. She is a member of the ITU-T SG20 on the Internet of Things, digital twins, and smart, sustainable cities and communities. She is an expert evaluator for European H2020, Belgian Science Policy Office (BELSPO), and Latvian Council of Science (LCS) projects. She was a co-founder of the academic spin-off GreenShare Srl. Virginia is an Editor of Elsevier Computer Networks and Frontiers in Communications and Networks. She has served as organization chair and program committee member of several international conferences, including ICC, GLOBECOM, PIMRC, WCNC, and MeditCom. She also serves as a member of the IEEE ComSoc Strategic Planning Standing Committee, MGA representative for the IEEE Online Content Board, and YP representative for the IEEE ComSoc EMEA region.

Stefano: Hello Virginia. Let's begin by introducing the scope and objectives of the IEEE ComSoc Young Professionals Committee.

Virginia: The main objective of the IEEE ComSoc YP Committee is to promote and support enhancing a dynamic community of early-career professionals within the communications engineering field. Our mission is to create a robust platform for career growth, offering members access to leadership opportunities, continuous training, and valuable development resources. Such commitment has led to significant recognition: in 2024, ComSoc YP received the prestigious IEEE YP Hall of Fame Award, with whom IEEE honors the most dynamic and impactful groups worldwide.

We would like to build a community of mutual support and growth where YPs at various career stages actively support one another in a collaborative environment. For instance, senior YPs can share their expertise with early-stage professionals through valuable guidance, micro-mentoring, and networking opportunities, creating a dynamic exchange that benefits all members. This not only enriches the experience of early-career members but also enables senior YPs to have leadership opportunities and further their career progression.

Who are Young Professionals? Who does your Committee address in particular? Who can participate in your activities?

By definition, YP includes anyone who has graduated from their first professional degree within the past 15 years. However, anyone who supports YP initiatives is welcome to join and support the activities of our Committee, regardless of their career stage or age.

The committee is particularly mindful of diversity and inclusion, striving to enhance gender representation, geographic balance, and career background diversity. With women currently making up 18% of ComSoc YP membership, increasing female participation remains a critical priority. Similarly, efforts are directed toward engaging underrepresented regions, such as Latin America (currently less than ComSoc 5% of YP members), and encouraging greater participation from industry professionals, who presently account for only 11% of ComSoc YP members.

Another important focus is ensuring the retention of Student Members and Graduate Student Members by supporting their seamless transition into the YP community, which is crucial for maintaining their engagement with IEEE ComSoc as they advance in their careers.

What is the current composition of the Young Professionals Committee?

In 2024–2025, the YP Committee roster is the following:

- Virginia Pilloni, Chair
- Sami A. Aldalahmeh, Member-at-Large
- Miguel Gutiérrez Gaitàn, Member-at-Large
- Nima Javanbakht, Member-at-Large
- Filippo Malandra, Member-at-Large
- Qurrat Ul Ain Nadeem, Member-at-Large
- Fawzi Behmann, non-YP Member-at-Large
- Esmeralda Asurza, YP Events Coordinator
- Fahad Ahmed Korai, YP Events Coordinator
- Hongliang Zhang, YP Events Coordinator
- Kapal Dev, YP Events Coordinator
- Qingqing Wu, YP Events Coordinator
- Sai Prashanth Mallellu, YP Events Coordinator & Social Media Subcommittee
- Periklis Chatzimisios, YP Advisor

However, ComSoc YP is always open to new volunteers to consolidate and enrich the program.

This is your first time serving as Chair of an IEEE ComSoc Standing Committee. What was your first thought when you were notified of the appointment? And what was your impression of the first days once you started serving in your new position? Incidentally, I wish you to serve in similar or higher positions in the next ComSoc administrations after successfully ending this 2024–2025 term.

Thank you so much for your kind wishes, Stefano! I was incredibly proud to be appointed to this role. I started as a YP team volunteer in 2021 when Shashank Gaur was Chair and continued volunteering under Periklis Chatzimisios' leadership. Knowing their dedication and impact on the committee, I felt pressure to take their baton.

Having served in the team for three years, I was already familiar with how some activities were handled, especially events, as I had organized several of them and awards for which I had been responsible. But stepping into the Chair role was a completely different experience. Organizing and overseeing all aspects of the committee's work brought a new level of responsibility.

That said, the strongest emotion I felt was excitement, especially when structuring the plan for the year ahead. I looked for hints and new ideas to help shape the strategy everywhere I could, but I also knew that everything would naturally fall into place with such an active community.

What was the most challenging difficulty you have faced so far?

The most challenging part has been coordinating a team of volunteers. While I have some experience coordinating students and young researchers, working with volunteers is a completely different story, as you're asking for their most precious resource: their free time.

What I've been trying to do, and still learning, is to motivate volunteers so that they feel their time is being well spent and they can feel proud of how they are using it. Of course, this is strictly related to figuring out how to align the team's activities with the individual's ambitions and expectations, even those they might not be aware of when they first join. What I would like is that, even if they join because of the career advancement opportunities, they stay because they feel like they are part of a family.

Would you please highlight the main items of the YP Program under your leadership?

ComSoc YP is deeply committed to building a strong, engaged community, making in-person and online events an essential component of its program. These events foster global engagement, continuous professional development, and meaningful networking opportunities for YPs. Designed with diverse formats, they address the challenges and needs of YPs in advancing their careers.

Learning-oriented events cover various topics, from in-depth technical discussions to sessions focused on personal growth and soft skills. Starting in 2024, ComSoc YPs were provided with discount vouchers for selected online ComSoc courses.

In-person mentoring sessions are currently organized at the flagship ComSoc conferences in collaboration with Women in Communications Engineering and the Mentoring Subcommittee. These sessions provide career coaching and valuable guidance from experienced professionals aimed at early-to-mid-career YPs to support professional growth and skill development.

In addition, more informal networking social events are organized at conferences to foster relationships that help expand YP networks and open doors to new career opportunities and collaborations.

ComSoc YP selects the most outstanding YP every year with the ComSoc Best YP in Academia and the ComSoc Best YP in Industry Awards to encourage and recognize YP's achievements. Starting in 2024, new special mentions have been introduced to acknowledge the contributions of early-career professionals, practitioners, and volunteers, ensuring that the diverse efforts of the YP community's different souls are admitted.

To conclude, what are your plans for 2025? What activities are you running or just planning for this year?

ComSoc YP continuously seeks new in-person events to support, aiming to enhance visibility, increase engagement, attract new members, and allow volunteers to organize and lead these initiatives. Special attention will be given to mentoring events, which will be held more frequently. Their potential expansion to an online platform is also being explored.

To further support professional growth, we are investigating the development of a dedicated platform where YPs can collaborate on research, exchange career advice, and coordinate event planning. This initiative will encourage peer-to-peer mentoring and knowledge sharing, strengthening connections that support career development at various stages.

Beyond event sponsorship, efforts will be paid to enhance engagement within the global ComSoc YP network by creating a system that connects YPs across different IEEE Chapters. This initiative will enhance local activities and facilitate the transition for students moving into YP membership after graduation.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURER

My IEEE ComSoc Distinguished Lecture Tours to Malaysia, Kenya, and UAE in 2023

by Tamer El Batt, IEEE ComSoc Distinguished Lecturer, Egypt

It is a pleasure to give an overview of my distinguished lecture and speaker tours across two continents and three countries in the Summer and Fall of 2023. The tours involved lectures at multiple leading institutions, spanning six cities, which spurred intriguing questions and interesting discussions. They also raised interest in potential collaboration and visiting and learning about historical and cultural sites, which I very much enjoyed.

Summary of the Talks

In these three tours, I delivered six talks, scheduled as follows:

Malaysia (August 2023):

- Talk 1 at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Serdang, Selangor, hosted by Prof. Aduwati Sali, on Aug. 21st, 2023.
- Talk 2 at Universiti Teknikal Melaka (UTeM), Melaka, hosted by Dr. Imran Mohd Ibrahim, on Aug. 22nd, 2023.
- Talk three at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Kuala Lumpur, hosted by Dr. Mohd Azri bin Mohd Izhar, on Aug. 23rd, 2023.

Kenya (Sept. 2023)

In parallel with attending the Afretec (https://engineering.cmu.edu/afretec/index.html) Annual Conference:

- Talk four at the University of Nairobi (UoN) hosted by Prof. Andrew Mwaura Kahonge on Sept. 28th, 2023.

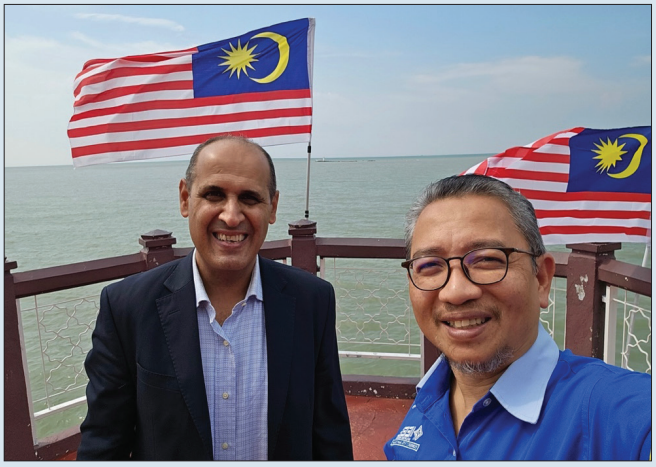
United Arab Emirates (Nov. 2023)

In parallel with attending the Prototypes for Humanity Exhibition, synched with COP28 (https://www.prototypesforhumanity.com/):

- Talk five at the University of Dubai hosted by Dr. Husameldin Mukhtar on November 28th, 2023.
- Talk six at the American University of Sharjah hosted by Prof. Mohamed Hassan on Nov. 29th, 2023.

The focus of my talks revolved around vibrant research areas about 5G and 6G, e.g., machine learning and edge intelligence for wireless and IoT, RF energy harvesting wireless networks, and edge computing and communications, with a focus on wireless edge caching. In each talk, I introduced and motivated the topic, reviewed the state-of-the-art, presented samples of our recent research along those directions, and gave an outlook on future wireless networking research.

Tamer ElBatt and the participants after giving his talk at the University of Nairobi, Kenya



Tamer ElBatt with Mohamad Yusoff Alias, Chair of the IEEE Malaysia ComSoc/VTC Joint Chapter, at the Coast of Melaka overlooking the historical Strait of Melaka, Malaysia.

Seeing the talks well-attended by faculty members, peer researchers, and students was rewarding. It was exciting to notice that undergraduate students mostly attended the talk at the University of Nairobi. The talks were typically followed by engaging questions and inspiring discussions about research challenges and wireless technolo-

gy trends. For instance, the growing role of edge intelligence in complementing large-scale cloud analytics and the associated tradeoffs were discussed with audiences at multiple institutions. Also, the future of green wireless networks towards achieving the Net Zero goal was addressed at the Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM) and the University of Dubai. Some of these discussions have inspired future research directions and opened room for collaboration opportunities.

Extra Talk Activities

In addition to the research talks, and despite the tight time, I had the chance to sample the rich culture and history of the countries I visited. The first tour was my very first trip to South East Asia. In Malaysia, the host, Prof. Mohamad Yusoff Alias, kindly drove us to the historical State of Melaka, a major trading port for the entire South East Asia region in the 16th and 17th centuries. On the road to Melaka, I observed major palm oil plantations on both sides and learned that Malaysia is the world's second-largest palm oil producer after Indonesia! We visited the beautiful coast of Melaka to overview the famous Strait of Melaka, known as the main shipping channel between the Indian and Pacific Oceans connecting major Asian economies. We also tried Melaka's famous Coconut Ice Cream! I also enjoyed fresh, exotic, tropical fruits, especially Durian, the king of fruits.

My Afretec/DSP visit to Kenya was also the first. In East Africa, Kenya is famed for its scenic landscapes, vast wildlife preserves, and rich culture and entrepreneurial activities. Despite the short visit and limited time, I had the chance to visit a Giraffe conservation center near Nairobi.

My visit to Dubai was also enriching as I got the chance to learn firsthand about the vibrant innovation ecosystem in Dubai as well as visit the famous "Emirates Towers, The Boulevard," very close to Dubai's prominent landmarks, e.g., Burj Khalifa (world's tallest structure) and the Museum of the Future. In addition, I took an architect-guided boat trip through the Dubai Water Canal, enjoying and learning about Dubai's breathtaking, modern architecture.

My Views on the DL Program

In summary, my DLT and DSP tours in 2023 were notable successes and memorable experiences. They were not only about sharing my research with a broader audience and having a fruitful academic exchange but also an excellent chance for directly connecting with

Museum of the Future, Dubai, UAE.

local researchers, learning about the technical challenges specific to those parts of the world, and, equally important, their rich history and culture. Therefore, I strongly recommend the DL program for researchers interested in expanding their research network. If you wish to serve as an IEEE ComSoc DL, I encourage you to apply, as it will profoundly impact your research career. With the collective efforts of our DL community and the ComSoc community, we can drive technology innovation towards new frontiers to better serve humanity.

Conclusions

The three tours spurred interesting research, technology, education, and, most importantly, culture and history discussions. The networking activities during the visits gave rise to follow-up communications and online meetings, leading to collaboration initiatives on multiple fronts, including joint proposal submission, an invitation to serve on the editorial advisory panel of a journal, serving on PhD defense committees, and participating in the organization of the 6th International Conference on Communications, Signal Processing and their Applications (ICCSPA), Istanbul, Turkey, July 2024, among other activities.

DISTINGUISHED LECTURER

IEEE ComSoc Distinguished Lecture Tour to the United Kingdom

Where Technological Innovation and Cutting-Edge Ideas Meet Academic Tradition and Excellence

by Nicola Marchetti, UK and Ireland ComSoc Chapter

I delivered an IEEE ComSoc Distinguished Lecturer Tour (DLT) in the UK in June. I presented my views and my team's results on 6G, Autonomous Networks, Industry 5.0, AI/ML, and Complex Systems. The lectures occurred at Imperial College London, the University of Essex, and the University of Cambridge. They led to fantastic discussions with amazing audiences of talented researchers and experts that inspired me greatly for the research journey ahead of me. It also allowed me to plan further engagement and collaborations between my home Institution — Trinity College Dublin — and some of the most renowned universities in the UK and worldwide.

In this DLT, I delivered three talks, scheduled as follows:

- Talk one at Imperial College London, hosted by Dr. Sundar Aditya and Prof. Bruno Clerckx, on 17 June 2024
- Talk two at the University of Essex, hosted by Prof. Leila Musavian, on 19 June 2024
- Talk three at the University of Cambridge, hosted by Prof. Iman Tavakkolnia, on 20 June 2024

In the first talk, I discussed how the growing complexity of wireless networks has sparked an upsurge in the use of AI within the telecommunication industry in recent years. I remarked that AI has been associated — in the communication engineering community and beyond — mainly with machine learning but more often with deep learning, a subset of machine learning. Based on that, I advocated that the breadth and possibilities offered by the AI field are such that many other aspects, tools, and theories from this rich area can bear fruit in the analysis and design of future networks.

The city of Colchester is near the University of Essex campus.

In the second talk, I emphasized that the prevailing manual and predetermined optimization and configuration are no longer appropriate for future networks. Furthermore, we are increasingly dealing with new kinds of networks—like drone networks, the Internet of Everything, and intelligent transportation systems—which bring several new challenges related to network responsiveness and scalability. I presented research to resolve such issues using theories and tools inspired by complex systems science, focusing on information representation and transfer, network robustness, and self-synchronization capabilities.

In the third talk, I discussed how communication engineering and AI in the context of the Internet of Things (IoT) for Industry 5.0 create a new structure of awareness — a cybernetic one — upon physical processes. I presented research done by my team on technologies and techniques for future industrial automation, including aspects related to millimeter Wave and relative blockage events prediction using machine learning, how generative adversarial networks can help cope with missing sensing data, and how semantic communications and system-level analysis centered on Ultra Reliable Low Latency Communications (URLLC) both contribute to shed light on the functionality and reliability aspects that are key to future networks serving Industry 5.0.

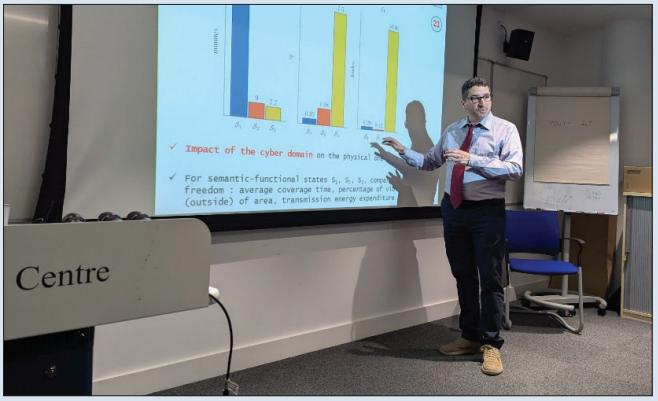
At the beginning of each talk, I promoted IEEE ComSoc to the audience, highlighting the many benefits of being a member, such as being on top of technology breakthroughs, being part of an extensive network of communication technology professionals, and benefiting from world-class education and training (of which the DLTs are a perfect example).

Each talk attracted numerous attendees, including academic staff members, research students, and industry professionals. In detail, there were 15 attendees for Talk 1, 60 for Talk 2 (40 in person and 20 online), and 15 for Talk 3.

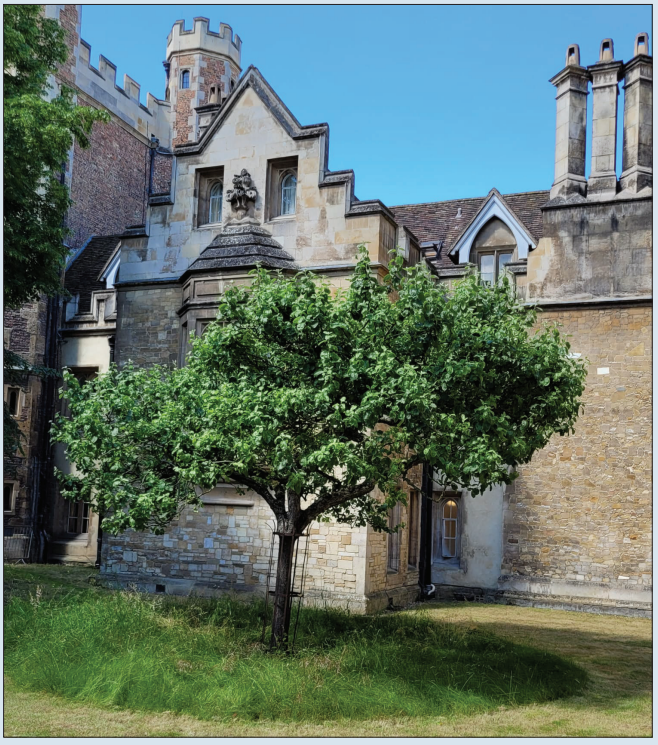
During each talk, I had very fruitful discussions with the audience; for example, (i) at Imperial College, we discussed the promise of Explainable AI in the context of network intrusion detection; (ii) at the University of Essex, we discussed the importance and challenges in experimentally validating distributed resource allocation algorithms in large scale networks, and (iii) at the University of Cambridge we discussed the limitations of AI in the context of future networks when it comes to dataset availability from operational networks. The above are just some examples of very engaging and thought-provoking lectures, both on the audience's side and mine. Overall, my presentations and research ideas were very well received and sparked brainstorms in all three venues, which will help me refine the research problems I will tackle in my lab next. I hope I will inspire the attendees to find promising research directions for their teams.

Besides my lectures, I enjoyed visiting the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in London, the Victoria and Albert Museum, and the Science Museum, which are located near the Imperial College Main campus. A whole section of the Science Museum is dedicated to the history and breakthroughs of communication engineering, which I find very fitting given the purpose of my visit! I also had the chance to walk by the beautiful campus in Essex and visit Colchester's historical city center. Finally, it was my pleasure to visit the fantastic campus of the University of Cambridge by boat with a unique vantage point from the river Cam, plus I had some time to see the famous Sir Isaac Newton's apple tree and where Charles Darwin and Alan Turing stayed!

I would like to encourage all considering becoming an IEEE ComSoc DL to apply for it, as it was one of the most rewarding professional experiences in my career to date. The program allows you to revisit your research and vision and present them in front of qualified audiences. This allows discussing with top professionals attending your talks and brainstorming where our field is going and perhaps where it should go. Your lectures can inspire research students and young professionals to continue pursuing their dreams of excelling in their technical work and becoming rising stars. Ultimately, I believe the IEEE ComSoc DL program is a great tool to share knowledge and move together as a scientific and technical community toward uncharted territories of knowledge and expertise, contributing together (distinguished lecturers and audience alike) to shaping the future of communication technology.



Talk at the University of Cambridge.


Newton's Apple Tree, Cambridge.

CHAPTER REPORT

Edu-Vitality Hackathon at RV College of Engineering, Bangalore

by Gnanapriya Chidambaranathan, Vice Chair, ComSoc Bangalore Chapter, India

The recent Edu-Vitality Hackathon, organized by the IEEE ComSoC Bangalore chapter and sponsored by Intel at RV College of Engineering, brought together 47 teams of four members each to push the boundaries of technology. This event focused on developing innovative solutions for remote patient monitoring using IoT and personalized education using AI.

Held from June 7 to 8, 2024, this hackathon was more than just a competition; it celebrated creativity, collaboration, and the incredible potential of young innovators.

The event was a vibrant mix of energy, ideas, and innovation, divided into two primary tracks:

AI in Education: Teams utilized AI to enhance learning experiences and optimize educational outcomes, aiming to transform the educational landscape.

IoT in Healthcare: Participants developed secure IoT systems using wireless protocols and AI algorithms to remotely monitor vital signs, medication adherence, and disease progression.

Of the 47 participating teams, 11 chose to tackle IoT healthcare challenges, while 36 focused on AI in Education. With no con-

straints on the problem statements, participants could innovate and present unique solutions.

The hackathon kicked off at 4:30 PM on Friday and continued until 9 AM on Saturday. During this time, the space buzzed with activity as participants coded, designed, and debugged through the night, turning their ideas into tangible prototypes.

On Saturday morning, the focus shifted to evaluation. The panel included ComSoc members, Academia professors, and Intel technologists for both tracks. The projects were meticulously reviewed, and I was impressed by the ingenuity and practical applications presented by the teams. The results were announced after lunch, around 3 PM. Prizes were distributed to the winners and runners-up for each track and a special award for the best overall UX design.

Additionally, the selected 9 outstanding teams were invited to a one-day workshop at Intel India on AI PC on July 5th, 2024, which provided them with an opportunity to refine their projects, integrate the OpenVINO™ toolkit, and gain insights from industry experts.

The workshop included sessions by experts on varied topics.

- "Introduction to Intel Ultra Architectures and OpenVino": Sanjay Aghara, System Software Architect, provided a view of Intel's cutting-edge architectures and the powerful OpenVino toolkit, which facilitates the deployment of AI models.
- "Machine Learning Processes, Overview of Regression, and Deep Learning": Saurabh Tiwari, Senior Principal Engineer, provided a comprehensive overview of machine learning processes and a deep dive into regression techniques and deep learning methodologies.
- "Comprehensive Hands-On Session on OpenVINO": Pooja Baraskar, Developer Advocacy Program, led an engaging hands-on session.

Edu-Vitality Hackathon teams in action.

Participants gained invaluable insights into OpenVino and the pioneering research on Neural Processing Units (NPUs). The knowledge and skills acquired ignited them further towards innovation in AI technology.

This hackathon was more than just a competition; it was a testament to what can be achieved when bright minds come together with a shared purpose. The judges were impressed by the technical skills displayed and inspired by each participant's passion and dedication. The seeds of innovation planted in this hackathon will continue to grow, driving innovation. The future is bright, and events like this light the way.

A special thanks to Kannan Babu Ramia, Senior Principal Engineer, Edge Computing, Intel, and his entire team for driving the Edu-Vitality hackathon along with IEEE ComSoc Bangalore Chapter exec members and orchestrating the fantastic workshop.

CHAPTER REPORT

IEEE Officers Training Day 2024: Empowering Future Leaders

by Harout Topjian, Communication Officer, and Jacques Demerjian, Chair, IEEE ComSoc Lebanon Chapter

The IEEE Lebanon Section, IEEE Young Professionals Lebanon, and IEEE ComSoc Lebanon Chapter organized the "IEEE Officers Training Day 2024" on September 14th at the Lebanese American University (LAU), Byblos Campus. This event gathered five key officers - Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer, Secretary, and Webmaster - from each Student Branch across Lebanon to equip them with the skills necessary for their leadership roles in the upcoming academic year.

The importance of this event extends beyond immediate role preparation. By bringing together officers from universities nationwide, the training day serves as a crucial platform for shaping the leadership pipeline within IEEE. It ensures that young officers are prepared for the logistical aspects of their roles and primed to become influential leaders in their academic communities and beyond. The event program fosters collaboration, innovation, and effective communication, enabling student branches to thrive and contribute to the larger IEEE vision.

Distinguished speakers delivered sessions on communication and public speaking. The sessions provided practical guidance on task management tools, event planning, sponsorship outreach, and fostering collaboration among branches. The event also benefited from the involvement of Human Decoders and IEEE Young Professionals Lebanon, who conducted specialized training for each officer role. Each officer received role-specific training in breakout sessions: Chairs learned leadership strategies, Secretaries gained insights into administrative responsibilities, including VTools reporting, Treasurers focused on budgeting and funding, and Social Media Officers developed effective marketing techniques.

This collaboration highlights the value of intergenerational mentorship, bridging the gap between experienced professionals and emerging leaders and ensuring that student branches are empowered with both the knowledge and the network to succeed. The "IEEE Officers Training Day 2024" thus reinforces IEEE's enduring commitment to nurturing leadership, fostering resilience, and ensuring the growth and sustainability of its vibrant community in Lebanon.

Attendees of the IEEE Officers Training Day 2024, September 14, at the Lebanese American University (LAU), Byblos Campus.

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