

# LAU Honors Day 2025

## Session 1 - Technology & AI

***April 30, 2025, 10:00 am – 11:30 am, Beirut Campus, Gulbenkian Theater***

### ***Meet Our Esteemed Panelists***

#### **Issa Abboud**

***AI and Cybersecurity Expert / IT Manager / Software Engineer***

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Issa Abboud is a seasoned technology expert with over 20 years of experience across academia, government, and industry. He holds a Master's in Computer Science from Lebanese University and Toulouse III University, with research focused on AI classification for images and videos. Currently leading the IT department at Lebanon's Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, Issa also founded the IT division at the ISF Academy. His previous roles include software engineering at Averda and Azadea Group. A passionate educator, he has taught AI, neural networks, Python, and more at LAU and other institutions, and holds certifications in TensorFlow, LangChain, and Microsoft technologies.

#### **Dr. Mohamad Malli**

***CEO & Co-Founder, boxMind.ai / AI Expert***

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Dr. Mohamad Malli is an AI expert with over two decades of experience in research, academia, and entrepreneurship. He holds a PhD in Computer Science from Côte d'Azur University and previously worked at INRIA and as an assistant professor in France. As CEO of boxMind.ai, he leads the development of AI solutions that improve business efficiency and societal wellbeing. He is also a senior lecturer and member of Lebanon's Ministry of Higher Education Curriculum Committee. Dr. Malli has authored numerous scientific papers and holds certifications in strategic and change management.

## Khalil Al Ahmad

*Co-Founder & Executive Director, Incoding*

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Khalil Al Ahmad is a full-stack software engineer and the co-founder of Incoding, a Beirut-based agency building scalable web applications using technologies like .NET, Django, Flutter, and React. He specializes in clean architecture, developer experience, and AI integration. Khalil has led projects across industries and mentored junior developers while advocating for continuous learning and modern tech stacks in development environments.

## Valerie Zakka

*Owner & General Manager, Zakka Technologies | Founder, The Industrial Kingdom*

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Valerie Zakka is a prominent consultant in the manufacturing and packaging industry with over 20 years of experience. As founder of Zakka Technologies, she supplies industrial machinery across the Middle East and advises manufacturers on efficiency and innovation. Valerie is a founding member of the QOOT Cluster, a podcast host, and frequent speaker. She has collaborated with global organizations like USAID, UNIDO, and Wageningen University on food tech and sustainability projects. Her work bridges industrial innovation with strategic AI-driven transformation.

## Prof. Seifedine Kadry

*AI & Data Science Expert | Professor | IET Fellow*

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Dr. Seifedine Kadry is an internationally recognized researcher in AI, data science, and applied mathematics. With a PhD and HDR from French institutions, he is an IET and IETE Fellow and a member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts. He was recently named among the world's top 2% of AI researchers. His current research spans AI in medical imaging, education technologies, and data-driven solutions. With an h-index of 70 and numerous citations, Dr. Kadry has held leading academic and research roles across the region and Europe.

## **Dr. Mohamad Samir Tabsh**

***Vice President of SBT est. / CEO of TNT Energy Ltd. / Project Management***

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Dr. Mohamad Samir Tabsh currently serves as Vice President of SBT est., overseeing strategic and operational planning for multimillion-dollar projects. His contributions span in crisis management, marketing innovation, AI and sustainability. He also holds leadership roles as CEO of TNT Energy Ltd. and GM at STC s.a.l. Consultancy, with expertise in project management, energy production, logistics, and strategic engagement. Dr. Mohamad is passionate about mentorship, innovation, and preparing future leaders for the rapidly evolving business landscape.

## ***Meet Session 1 Moderator***

## **Dr. Mohamed Watfa**

***Associate Professor, Computer Science and Liberal Studies, LAU***

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With over 20 years of experience in academia and industry, Mohamed Watfa has held various leadership roles including Executive Dean, Associate Dean, Program Director, Head of IT and Innovation, Head of Smart Cities, AI and IoT, and Professor in various academic institutions including the American University of Beirut (AUB), University of Wollongong in Dubai (UOWD), and the British University in the UAE. Throughout his academic career, Dr. Watfa has been recognized for his exceptional contributions, receiving prestigious awards such as the Research Excellence Award four times and the Teaching Excellence Award twice. In 2021, he was honored with the Best Professor in the Middle East Award (MEPRA) for his achievements. Dr. Watfa is a prolific author/editor with three published books and an extensive body of research comprising over 20 research grants, five book chapters, and more than 100 peer-reviewed journal and conference publications. His research endeavors have attracted substantial funding from agencies, such as the Emirates Foundation and the National Research Foundation (NRF), totaling over 1.5 million USD as a principal investigator (PI). Dr. Watfa's innovation was further showcased with multiple patented inventions to his credit when he emerged as a runner-up in the MBC TV show "Stars of Science" among thousands of inventors.

# LAU Honors Day 2025

## Session 2 - Water-Energy-Food-Ecosystems Nexus

*April 30, 2025, 12:00 pm – 1:00 pm, Beirut Campus, Gulbenkian Theater*

### *Meet Our Esteemed Panelists*

#### **Dr. Raymond Ghajar**

*Former Minister of Energy and Water of Lebanon | Professor, LAU | Electrical Engineer*

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Raymond Ghajar is a former Minister of energy and water in Lebanon, responsible for the water, electricity, oil, minerals, mines and quarries sector. He is an Electrical engineer with around 40 years of professional and academic experience in the area of power and energy systems. Raymond Ghajar has worked as a professional consultant and technical expert in Canada, USA, Lebanon, and the Middle East. He acted as interim dean of the faculty of engineering of the Lebanese American University (LAU) and as one of its vice presidents. He holds a BS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Ottawa and a M.Sc. and PhD from the University of Saskatchewan, Canada.

#### **Dr. Nadim Farajalla**

*Chief Sustainability Officer, LAU| Water-Energy-Food Nexus Expert*

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Dr. Nadim Farajalla is the Chief Sustainability Officer at LAU, leading the university's sustainability strategy and promoting long-term environmental and social impact. With a background in environmental engineering, he has held senior roles at Stone Environmental, Dar al-Handasah, and SETS International, and founded the Climate Change and Environment program at AUB's Issam Fares Institute. His research focuses on climate change adaptation, the Water-Energy-Food Nexus, and integrating sustainability into academia. He holds an MS from Utah State and an MS and PhD from the University of Oklahoma.

## Lara El Khoury

*Programme Director, Berytech*

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Lara El Khoury is the Programs Director for the ACT Smart Innovation Hub at Berytech, which she joined in March 2021. With over 18 years of experience in IT, product management, and entrepreneurship, Lara brings deep expertise to support innovation and business growth, particularly in Lebanon's Agri-food and Cleantech sectors. An Agrytech Batch II alumna and entrepreneur herself, she has worked across e-commerce, fintech, agri-tech, and telecom industries. Lara holds a bachelor's degree in Computer Science from AUB and an Executive MBA from ESA Lebanon and ESCP Europe. Passionate about technology, innovation, and the environment, she is committed to empowering startups and people by focusing on their strengths and potential.

## Khaled Alabbas

*Co-Founder and CTO of SmartLand*

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Khaled Alabbas is the Co-Founder and CTO of SmartLand, a Lebanese agri-tech startup developing smart irrigation and fertigation systems. With expertise in IoT and sustainable agriculture, he leads the design of data-driven solutions that improve water efficiency and crop productivity. Khaled has led over 100 system deployments across Lebanon and is a recipient of multiple regional innovation awards and grants.

## Meet Session 2 Moderators

### Dr. Nadine Zeeni

*Associate Professor and Liberal Studies Coordinator, LAU*

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Dr. Nadine Zeeni is an Associate Professor of Nutrition and the Coordinator of Liberal Studies - Sciences at the Lebanese American University (LAU). She joined LAU in 2009 as the program's first faculty member and contributed greatly in its establishment and expansion. She has played a key role in the development and implementation of the recently launched Liberal Arts and Sciences curriculum (LASC). Collaborating closely with faculty from various disciplines, she focuses on developing, coordinating, teaching, and assessing innovative interdisciplinary courses related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Dr. Ali Karnib**

***Associate Professor of Practice: Water-Energy-Food Nexus, LAU***

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Dr. Ali Karnib holds a PhD in Civil Engineering from Artois University, France. He has published over 60 publications which include scientific research and United Nations technical reports. He is a member of the Editorial Board of the Water Resources Management Journal (Springer Editions) and the International Water Utility Journal. His main research interests include sustainable water resources management, assessment of the impact of climate change on water resources, water supply and sanitation, sustainable energy and water-energy-food-ecosystems nexus. He developed “the Q-Nexus Model”, a science-based water-energy-food-ecosystems (WEFE) nexus model, to assess the direct and indirect impacts of the interconnections between water, energy, food and ecosystems systems ([www.q-nexus.net](http://www.q-nexus.net))