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SME Young Leaders

Class of 2026

Ellen Essien



Ellen Essien is a dedicated mining engineer and Ph.D. student at Missouri University of Science and Technology, specializing in autonomous and intelligent systems in mining trucks. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Mining Engineering from the University of Mines and Technology, Ghana. With experience at Newmont Ghana Gold Limited as a Graduate Mining Engineer, Ellen has expertise in both underground and surface mining, focusing on drill and blast planning, equipment scheduling, short-range and long-range planning. As a

Graduate Research Assistant, she explores advancements in autonomous truck object detection to enhance mining safety and efficiency. Ellen is proficient in Python, Minesight 3D, and Deswik Software. She is an active member of SME and holds certifications in Mine Rescue and Artificial Intelligence. Recognized as the Best Female Mining Engineering Student in 2021, she is passionate about innovation, automation, and advancing the future of mining technology.



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Ana Belén Cueva



Ana Belén Cueva Solá is a postdoctoral researcher at Argonne National Laboratory, specializing in hydrometallurgical recovery of critical materials from lithium-ion batteries and rare earth sources. She holds a Ph.D. in Resources Recycling from the Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources (KIGAM) and has conducted research across Ecuador, South Korea, and the U.S. Her work supports DOE initiatives like the ReCell Center, focusing on sustainable process development for battery recycling. She has authored multiple peer-reviewed publications and is passionate about advancing circular economy strategies and mentoring the next generation of professionals in extractive metallurgy.

FNU Kurniawan



Dr. Kurniawan is a postdoctoral appointee at Materials Recycling R7D, Applied Materials Division (AMD), Argonne National Laboratory, US. He received his PhD degree in Resources Recycling from University of Science and Technology (UST), KIGAM campus, Korea, in 2024, and his bachelor's degree in metallurgical engineering, Bandung Institute of Technology, Indonesia, in 2017. He had an experience working as a metallurgist at PT Kasongan Bumi Kencana (KBK) for 1.5 years, and is also a co-founder of Recycling Materials for Indonesia (REMIND), a startup of e-waste recycling in Indonesia. His research interests are in extractive metallurgy, mostly based on hydrometallurgical processes, separation and purification of precious and energy critical metals/elements from both primary and secondary resources. He is also a regular reviewer for the reputable journal of Hydrometallurgy.



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Samuel Hoffmann



Samuel Hoffmann found his way into the mining industry during his time in college, where he worked on a 1/40th scale longwall project. That early experience sparked a lasting passion for the field. Today, he supports major mining and mineral processing projects and mines across the US as a field engineer for Hilti. A well-rounded Graduate of the Colorado School of Mines, Samuel Brings a blend of technical expertise, Field experience, commitment to safe, innovative solutions. Outside of work, he's an endurance sports enthusiast and actively raises awareness for sustainable mining and manufacturing practices also multiple sclerosis advocacy.



Molina Ansambom Sianto



Molina is a Mining and Civil-Structural engineer with knowledge of rock mechanics, drilling and blasting, surface and underground mining technology, mining machinery and equipment, petroleum production system, workover operations, well completion, wells abandonment, drilling technology, artificial lifting techniques, EOR, well logging, well testing and well stimulation, road construction, project management, mounting of tender documents, structural design, and construction. His personality is characterized by teamwork, open-mindedness, reliability, contact ability, willingness to learn, highly motivated and driven to get the job and task done and project realized with a natural born skill of leadership.



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Jose Pedro Cortez Ordonez



José Pedro Cortez Ordoñez is a Mining Engineer from the National University of Engineering (Peru), currently pursuing a Master's in Mining Management. He has held technical roles in Peru, Argentina, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso, working in both underground and open-pit operations. His experience spans mine planning, fleet optimization, and data-driven operational improvements using Python, Power BI, and MinePlan. A recipient of the WAAIME, PERUMIN HUB, and Santander scholarships, José is passionate about innovation, sustainability, and empowering the next generation of mining professionals across Latin America and West Africa.



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Shale Kennedy



My name is Shale Kennedy; I am a resource geologist at US Strategic Metals. I graduated from Tulane University in 2024 with a BS in Geology and GIS certification. I completed an Honors thesis on the Five Islands Salt Dome chain in Southeast Louisiana, focusing on subsurface mapping and its effect on wetland loss. While at Tulane, I served as president of the Earth and Environmental Science Club and was a teaching assistant for introductory geology labs. I received a New Orleans Geological Society Scholarship, made the Dean's List my junior and senior years, and helped raise funds for St. Jude through my sorority Delta Delta Delta. I'm passionate about geoscience, education, and helping young professionals find community and growth in the mining industry.



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Mirza Ubed Baig



Mirza Ubed Baig is a Master's student in Mining and Mineral Engineering at Michigan Technological University. He completed his Bachelor's degree in Mining Engineering from Ballarpur Institute of Technology in India. Mirza has practical experience working with Coal India Limited and Ideal Explosives, where he gained skills in mine planning, drilling and blasting, and underground mining operations. He is passionate about leadership and safety in mining and is committed to advancing the industry through innovation and teamwork. As an SME Student Member, Mirza looks forward to contributing to the Young Leaders Committee by supporting fellow students and young professionals while developing his leadership skills for a successful career.



Cyrus Addy



Cyrus Addy is currently enrolled at Missouri University of Science and Technology to pursue a Ph.D. in mine engineering. His research focuses on using artificial intelligence to find trapped underground miners. He uses infrared images and convolutional neural networks to make dangerous mining locations safer. Newcastle University awarded Cyrus an M.Sc. in Electrical Power with Distinction; the University of Mines and Technology, Ghana awarded him a B.Sc. in Mechanical Engineering with First Class Honours. Working on a variety of projects including operational engineering and green energy projects, he has been a Graduate Research Assistant, Assistant Lecturer, and Project Engineer. Cyrus is committed via research and leadership to advance mining technology and safety. He belongs to professional organizations including HFES, NSBE, and SME.



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Daniel Harvey

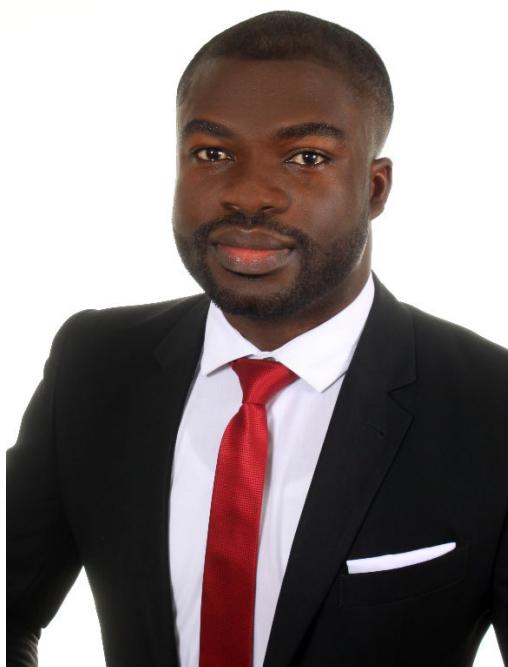


Daniel Harvey is a geotechnical engineer for Knight Piesold & Co. based in Denver Colorado. He has worked at Knight Piesold for three years. Starting in Johannesburg, South Africa and transferring to the USA practice in March of 2024. He also lived in Santiago, Chile as a child. Daniel enjoys training in Brazilian Jiu Jitsu, cycling, and playing guitar. Daniel has a passion of AI and geotechnical engineering and is actively exploring ways to integrate AI into daily workflows efficiently and ethically.



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Philip Duah



Duah Philip is a PhD student at Missouri S&T, where he researches critical minerals development and carbon capture technologies—addressing two of mining's most pressing challenges: supply chain security and environmental sustainability. As Chair of the Kummer College Committee, he led efforts that increased program participation by 150% and secured scholarship funding that significantly improved student retention. With over a decade of strategic leadership across three continents, Duah has expanded Amnesty International's reach in Germany to over 20 nationalities and currently serves on the ACLCA Student/Early Career Committee, where he earned the 2024 Student Leadership Award. He is also a member of SME's Technical Committee on Industrial Minerals & Aggregates, bridging academic research with industry application. Featured in Yahoo! Finance, MINE Magazine, and Power Magazine, Duah is a recognized voice in mining advocacy. His global perspective and proven leadership make him an ideal contributor to YLC's mission and SME's future.



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Alex Javier Ramos Villanueva



Alex Javier Ramos Villanueva is a graduate in Mining Engineering from the National University of Cajamarca, ranking in the top third of his class. He is an active member of the Student Chapter SME UNC, where he served as Marketing Team Leader in 2022–2023 and Vice President in 2023–2024, achieving first and second place, respectively, in the contest for the most outstanding SME student chapter. He is currently working in the Mine Operations Area at Newmont – Yanacocha. Alex has a strong passion for the mining industry, actively participating in educational and social activities to promote responsible and sustainable mining. He is focused on Mine Operations and Cost Management, and stands out for his leadership, creativity, commitment, and initiative in every project.



Gamuchirai Melissa Matambo



Gamuchirai Melissa Matambo is a graduate student in MS Mining Engineering at Missouri University of Science and Technology, originally from Zimbabwe. With a strong foundation in mining systems and a passion for sustainable development, she combines technical skills with leadership and community engagement. She currently serves as the Director of Socials for the International Students Club and was recently elected Event Coordinator for the African Students Association for 2025/2026. Her academic and extracurricular involvement reflects her commitment to inclusivity, innovation, and responsible mining practices. She has worked on simulation-based projects using Arena software and participated in professional development through SME, including attending MINEXCHANGE 2025 in Denver. Gamuchirai aspires to be a forward-thinking leader in the mining industry, one who drives change through collaboration, ethical practices, and global awareness. She is eager to contribute her voice and vision to the SME Young Leaders Committee and help shape a sustainable future for mining.



Gholamreza Khodadadmahmoudi



Gholamreza Khodadadmahmoudi is a Ph.D. student in Mining Engineering at Missouri University of Science and Technology, with a research focus on mineral processing, extractive metallurgy, and the sustainable recovery of critical metals. He graduated from the University of Tehran in Iran, where he developed a strong interdisciplinary background in hydrometallurgy, bio-hydrometallurgy, and froth flotation. Throughout his academic career, he has led multiple research initiatives centered on the recycling of lithium-ion batteries, electronic waste, and mineral residues. Gholamreza has published six peer-reviewed articles in high-impact Q1 journals and has presented at notable conferences, including SME MINEXCHANGE 2025. His current research focuses on the extraction of Rare Earth Elements (REEs) using synthesized eco-friendly reagents, aimed at supporting green technologies and domestic resource security. In addition to his research, he serves as a teaching assistant for mineral processing courses, contributing to undergraduate education and laboratory instruction. Deeply committed to advancing circular economy solutions in the mining sector, Gholamreza's work bridges scientific innovation and sustainable industrial practice.



Renzo Solis Vega



My passion for mining began at eight, inspired by a visit to an artisanal mine in Peru. This led me to study mining engineering at the National University of San Marcos, where I became active in outreach and education. I served as chair of the SME San Marcos Student Chapter and as national president of "Amautas Mineros," an organization educating high school students about mining. Under my leadership, Amautas Mineros received the MEC Partnership Appreciation Award. Professionally, I have practical experience in mines such as Cerro Lindo, El Porvenir, Atacocha, and Antamina in Peru. Currently, I am pursuing a master's degree in mineral engineering at New Mexico Tech, researching ultrasonic monitoring and machine learning for rock fracture. I recently began an internship at Freeport-McMoRan's main office in Phoenix. My journey reflects a commitment to innovation, sustainability, and community impact—values that align with the YLC's mission.



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Gorkem Gecimli



Gorkem Gecimli is a Metallurgist I at Freeport-McMoRan's Morenci Operation, where he works in the Metcalf Concentrator. His responsibilities include overseeing the crushing plant, mills, and hydrocyclone circuits. Originally from Turkey, he holds a Master's degree in Mining Engineering from West Virginia University with a focus on mineral processing. Gorkem is passionate about leadership, operational excellence, and safety. His experience in large-scale operations and strong communication skills with both technical and operations teams support his commitment to driving continuous improvement and collaboration within the mining industry.



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Emily Jagerhorn



I earned both my BS and MS in Civil Engineering from Colorado State University, completing my master's in Geotechnical Engineering in March 2025. As the oldest of three sisters, I was raised to be strong, driven, and a role model—traits reflected in my leadership roles across academics, athletics, and work. My passion for philanthropy has remained a constant, bridging my academic and professional life. Outside of engineering, I enjoy playing rugby, a sport that fuels my competitive spirit and teamwork skills.



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Mohammad Rezaee



Mohammad Rezaee is a Ph.D. student in Mining and Mineral Process Engineering at Penn State University, specializing in sustainable recycling of electronic and solar panel waste. He holds a Master's in Mineral Processing from the University of Tehran and has published multiple peer-reviewed articles on green extraction technologies. With experience as a research engineer, teaching assistant, and student leader, Mohammad is committed to advancing environmentally responsible innovations in the mining sector. He has served as a reviewer for leading journals and actively contributes to academic and professional communities focused on clean technologies and circular economy solutions.



Ernest Konadu-Yiadom



Ernest Konadu-Yiadom is a Ph.D. Candidate in Extractive Metallurgy, Department of Mining at the Colorado School of Mines, with a focus on the flotation of rare earth minerals. He holds a joint International Master's degree in Sustainable and Innovative Natural Resource Management (SINReM) from Ghent University, Belgium and Technische Universität Freiberg, Germany and has three (3) years of professional experience as a Shift Metallurgist in gold processing operations. His current research integrates mineral processing with spectroscopic and simulation techniques to optimize rare earth recovery. Ernest is passionate about teaching, mentoring, and advancing sustainability in mineral resource development. He served as a Student Representative in the SINReM program from 2021 to 2023 and is an active SME member. With a global academic background spanning four continents, he brings a diverse and inclusive perspective to professional and academic communities. Ernest aspires to a tenure-track faculty role in the U.S., where he hopes to continue contributing to research, education, and leadership in mining and metallurgy.



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Laura Taboada Nunonca



Laura Taboada Nuñonca is a civil engineer from Peru with over three years of experience in the mining industry, focusing on geotechnical design, tailings management, and water recovery projects. She currently works at Sociedad Minera Cerro Verde, contributing to major infrastructure and sustainability initiatives. Laura has presented her work at national conferences, including PERUMIN, and was recognized as a young mining leader in Peru. Passionate about innovation and inclusion, she aims to represent Latin America in global mining dialogues and foster responsible practices. She is also an alumna of leadership programs for women in mining and engineering.



Triveni Gangadari



I'm a Ph.D. candidate in Energy and Mineral Engineering at Penn State University, where I focus on hydrometallurgy and the selective separation of rare earth elements. My research aims to develop ion exchange and crystallization-based methods to recover critical elements like scandium and other rare earths from challenging secondary sources such as acid mine drainage and industrial residues. I've presented my work at national conferences including SME MINEXCHANGE and received several honors, including the Charles B. Darrow Award and first place in both the SME Mineral Processing Division Poster Contest and the Graduate Research Poster Contest. I've co-authored technical publications and a book on chemical engineering process simulation. My work integrates lab-scale experimentation—solvent extraction, adsorption, and advanced analytical techniques—with sustainability-driven process design. Outside the lab, I actively engage in science outreach and graduate leadership through organizations such as GWIS, AID, and the EME Graduate Council. I'm passionate about advancing cleaner, more efficient solutions for critical mineral recovery.



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Manuel Zacarias Salgado Cabeza



Manuel Zacarías Salgado Cabeza is a Mining and Metallurgical Engineer and a master's student in Mineral Resources at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Medellín. His work and academic interests are centered on humanitarian and socially responsible engineering, with an emphasis on sustainable mining, community-based project development, and the socio-technical dimensions of mineral resource management. He has experience in project formulation, economic evaluation, and participatory approaches that seek to align technical solutions with social equity, territorial context, and environmental responsibility.



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Ashley Davis



Ashley Davis graduated from Missouri University of Science and Technology in Fall of 2024 with a bachelor's degree in Mining Engineering. During her time in college, she completed three consecutive summer internships with U.S. Strategic Metals from 2022 to 2024, gaining hands-on experience in mining operations and crew management. Following graduation, Ashley accepted a full-time role with USSM as a Mine Engineer. She is passionate about fostering collaboration between engineering and field teams and is committed to continuous learning and leadership development within the mining industry.



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Frida Valencia Muthoni



Frida Muthoni is a PhD student at the University of Nevada Reno specializing in the phytoremediation of mines with a focus on sustainable rehabilitation strategies using hyperaccumulator plants. Her research explores the integration of ecological restoration with metallurgical recovery to address the long-term environmental impacts of legacy mining operations. Ms. Frida's industry experience spans mine planning, materials handling, and metallurgical engineering – providing her with interdisciplinary expertise and a comprehensive understanding of the mining life cycle. Passionate about green mining innovations and technologies, she aims to bridge science and industry in the development of resilient and environmentally responsible resource extraction and site closure practices.



Mayumy Dara Zuniga Escobar



Mayumy Dara Zuñiga Escobar is a Mining Engineering bachelor from the National University of Engineering (UNI) in Peru. She currently interns in the Long-Term Planning team at Compañía Minera Antamina. Mayumy has held leadership roles such as President of the National Congress of Mining Engineering Students (CONEIMIN), General Secretary of the SME UNI Student Chapter, and Vice President of the Mario Samamé Boggio Cultural Center. In 2024, she won third place in the technical paper competition by the Peruvian Network of Women in Mining Engineering. She is passionate about responsible mining, leadership, and youth development.



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Jacob Horner



Jacob Horner is a 2025 graduate of the WVU Mining and Civil Engineering program. There, he served as President for the WVU SME Student Chapter from 2023-2025. He helped plan external field trips for SME members, organized fully-funded trips to regional and national SME conference attendance for students, and participated in outreach and recruitment for potential students. During his time at WVU, he gained internship experience in consulting, coal, aggregates, and salt operations. Currently, Jacob is a Mining Engineer for Peabody Energy at their Twentymile Mine.

Toluwalase Ogunsunlade



I am Toluwalase Segun Ogunsunlade, a full-time PhD student in the John and Willie Leone Family Department of Energy and Mineral Engineering at Pennsylvania State University. I earned both my bachelor's and master's degrees in mining engineering from the Federal University of Technology, Akure. Before my PhD, I worked as a graduate mining engineer at Dangote Cement. My research focuses on repurposing coal refuse through sustainable lithium extraction and silica amorphization via high-energy milling. I study how milling impacts the crystallinity of coal refuse and underclay components to enhance lithium leaching kinetics and promote pozzolanic reactivity.