Rocky Mountain INFORMS: October 14, 2026

The Rocky Mountain INFORMS Chapter is pleased to host Russell D. Meller, Ph.D., a distinguished leader in industrial and systems engineering, having been recognized as a member of the National Academy of Engineering and a Fellow of the Institute of Industrial and Systems Engineers. He is the Founder of Distribution Science, LLC where he advises distribution leaders on the design, evaluation, and improvement of complex distribution operations. He previously served as the Chief Scientist at FORTNA where he developed a scalable design methodology and integrated advanced modeling and algorithms into FORTNA's proprietary systems. Prior to joining industry, Dr. Meller held academic positions at the University of Arkansas, Graz University of Technology (Austria), Virginia Tech, and Auburn University. He is a three-time graduate of the University of Michigan.



Title: From Analysis to Design and then back to Research: Lessons from Distribution and an Open Problem in Dynamic Control

Abstract: My career in operations research has taken me from academia to more than a decade of applying OR to the design and operation of distribution systems in industry. Along the way, I discovered that industry often asks questions that are subtly different from the questions we tend to focus on as researchers. In this talk, I will use examples from distribution to discuss the shift from analyzing systems to designing them, and how that experience has changed the way I think about the relationship between OR research and practice.

My current passion is encouraging a stronger flow of problems from practice to academia. Industry is a rich source of interesting and consequential research problems that have not yet received adequate attention from the OR community. As an example, I will introduce the problem of dynamically controlling the release of orders into a distribution center. I will describe the problem, explain why common operating rules and traditional optimization approaches have limitations in this setting, and present some of the open research questions that result.