Abstract:
Over 1.5 billion people in the world have no access to electricity and a billion more suffer from unreliable and intermittent supply. While electric grids are expanding at a gradual pace, a wide array of startups and social enterprises are emerging to address energy poverty in developing countries. While some of these ventures succeed, a large number of them fail. What kinds of technological, economic, environmental, social, and political challenges do they encounter? How can we develop innovative, practical, and sustainable solutions to address global energy challenges? This fast-paced and candid talk will employ a series of mini case-studies to provide practical insights on the myriad of challenges to developing sustainable and scalable businesses in developing countries.

Bio: Khanjan Mehta is the inaugural Vice Provost for Creative Inquiry and Director of the Mountaintop Initiative at Lehigh University. Mehta champions the creation of learning environments and ecosystems where students, faculty, and external partners come together to increase their capacities for independent inquiry, take intellectual risks and learn from failure, recognize problems and opportunities and effect constructive and sustainable change. Mehta has published three books and over 130 journal articles and refereed conference proceedings. Mehta serves as an Associate Editor for the IEEE Technology and Society Magazine and Contributing Editor for the Engineering 4 Change portal. His latest book, Solving Problems that Matter (and Getting Paid for It), takes a deep dive into STEM careers in social innovation and global sustainable development. In a previous avatar, Mehta was the Founding Director of the Humanitarian Engineering and Social Entrepreneurship (HESE) Program, Assistant Professor of Engineering Design, and Affiliate Professor of International Affairs at Penn State.