Latin American Business Forum highlights opportunities for US firms

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Freeman School Assistant Dean Alex Sleptsov, left, moderated a panel discussion on infrastructure development trends as part of the inaugural Latin American Business Forum.

On May 16, the A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University, in partnership with Berkeley Research Group and CenterPoint Energy, hosted the Latin American Business Forum, a daylong conference highlighting emerging business opportunities for U.S. firms in Latin America.

The event, which took place at CenterPoint Energy Plaza in Houston, featured over a dozen speakers and panelists representing business, academia and government entities. Keynote speakers included Theldon Branch, commissioner of the Port of Houston; Cesar Maldonado, chancellor of the Houston Community College System; and Sylvester Turner, mayor of Houston.

"The Freeman School co-hosted the forum for our alumni and students in Houston as well as our alumni and partner institutions throughout Latin America," said James McFarland, executive director of the Tulane Energy Institute, who assisted in organizing the conference. "The program fit well strategically with our broad initiatives to provide a global perspective with a Latin American focus."

A primary goal of the conference was to explore infrastructure and technology development opportunities in Latin America. Alex Sleptsov, assistant dean for executive education at the Freeman School, moderated a panel discussion on Latin American infrastructure projects that touched on everything from financing and finding local partners to dealing with security concerns and the potential for corruption. Panelists included Juan Sosa, consul general of Panama, as well as experts from Berkeley Research Group, CenterPoint Energy, Denham Capital Management and RTI International.

“Infrastructure projects represent both the biggest challenge and the biggest opportunity for public and private organizations in the U.S. and Latin America,” Sleptsov said. “I think all the panelists agreed that Houston’s business community is uniquely positioned to play a pivotal role in shepherding the crucial Latin American infrastructure projects of the next decade to successful conclusions.”

“We’ve been delivering educational programs in Latin America for over 20 years, so it was a special privilege for us to participate in this insightful conference,” said Freeman School Dean Ira Solomon. “I think everyone came away with useful information and perhaps even some strategies for leveraging new opportunities in the region.”