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## *MEET* the future of the Mideast

### ***MEET* program, MIT Sloan students teach technology, business skills in hopes of building understanding among Israeli and Palestinian high school students**

When Michael Fox, MBA '06, considers his time last summer in Jerusalem with Israeli and Palestinian high school students as part of the Middle East Education through Technology (MEET) program, he



recalls fondly how a team of students he was advising won an *Apprentice*-style business competition.

"I think one of the reasons my team won is that they got to the point where they relied on each other — they all helped out," says Fox. "It meant nothing who was a Palestinian student and who was an Israeli student. And as the project evolved they chose to speak English even among themselves, even though at the outset of the program the students needed considerable encouragement to speak in English. It's just something that happened as they worked together."

Israelis and Palestinians working together, finding common ground, learning a common language. These are the core goals of MEET, a three-year program in Jerusalem that teaches technology and business skills to a collection of Israeli and Palestinian students and in the process engenders understanding among otherwise polarized residents of a troubled region.

#### **From startup to a bright future**

Begun in 2003 by siblings Anat and Yaron Binur, then both MIT students, with their friend, Assaf Harlap, the nonprofit program has drawn acclaim for its initial success, and with broad MIT involvement, it has a bright future.

MEET consists of five-week summer sessions focused on developing the students' technology and business skills. To supplement the summer sessions, student teams are charged with yearlong projects aimed at building on what they have learned and reinforcing the need to work together amid the daily realities of Jerusalem.

Says Anat Binur, "MEET puts an emphasis on bringing together the academic and business worlds of the region, with the belief that a positive dialogue in the Middle East will be greatly enhanced by such partnerships."

The program graduated its first class of 18 students last summer. Seventy students in total were enrolled last summer, and 11 MIT students acted as instructors, including Fox and Shahid Rashid, MBA '07.

The program boasts a management team, a board of academics and business representatives, including MIT Sloan Professor Edward Roberts, and corporate and personal financial supporters.

Fox, now an investment banker in New York, is still active in the program. He's focused on how it can move from startup to established venture, and he's buoyed by the involvement of students, faculty, and alumni from MIT and business leaders.

Says Fox: "Anyone who visits the program leaves and says, 'What can I do to help?'"

### **An engine that drives success**

MEET is a prime example of the MIT community driving positive social and economic change across the globe.

Says Fox: "If you were a consultant analyzing this organization, you would see MIT as a huge engine for why this program succeeds. The culture of MIT is so much a part of it. Everyone there lives and breathes MIT. It's an MIT away from home."

The program and Jerusalem were home last summer for Fox and Rashid, who together taught three businesses classes each week and saw firsthand how the program unified students.

"There was definitely a breaking down of barriers between classes," says Rashid. "There were many friendships and cross-cultural connections. Especially on task assignments, the differences were invisible."

Those task assignments were very much influenced by an MIT Sloan perspective on team building and leadership. Last spring, Rashid, Fox, Dina Goldstein, MBA '06, and Yael Tolub, MBA '06, collaborated to develop the business curriculum for the summer. Professor Deborah Ancona, director of the MIT Leadership Center, and Assistant Professor of Organization Studies Katherine Kellogg guided their efforts.

The curriculum they developed consisted of an hour of lecture and an hour of case study for each class. Rashid says the students were especially energized by the case studies.

One case study, the Carson Racing case, which is familiar to MIT Sloan students, poses an ethical dilemma akin to what NASA faced prior to the Challenger disaster: Whether to put off a planned action in light of safety concerns.

"The students loved the case," says Rashid. "Some wanted to race and some didn't, and they used many of the same reasons I heard when we discussed the case in my MIT Sloan class."

### **A good story**

Rashid, who is Muslim, says teaching was personally rewarding, and he sees tremendous value in MEET helping to build understanding, which he considers essential to lasting peace.

"From a philosophical point of view," he says, "I feel the solution must come from people within the region. Neither culture empathizes with the other. They see the situation only from their point of view. MEET is working to increase student outreach — to get them more involved in the community, so there is a network effect."

Fox says he developed a strong bond with the students last summer and, despite his full-time duties in New York, he hopes to spend some time with them next summer.

He was speaking on a day when news of new strife in the Middle East raced across the airwaves, and he noted the significance of discussing MEET against the backdrop of more bad news.

"Finally we have a good story," he says of MEET. "It is so refreshing, and I really hope good stories from the Middle East can have traction as well as bad ones."

#### Related Links

- [Learn more about MEET](#)
- [MIT Leadership Center](#)

*Photo: Shahid Rashid, MBA '07, (bottom left) with members of the first class to graduate from the Middle East Education through Technology (MEET) program.*

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