When Fatimazahra El Mourabit heard about the M²GATE Program, she immediately seized the opportunity to be a part of it. Studying human resources management at the University of Cadi Ayyad in Morocco, Fatimazahra understood the need for education to extend beyond the classroom and the acquisition of technical skills.

“In a context like ours, people who succeed the most — both socially and professionally — tend to go beyond what is offered in terms of education. They work more on themselves, seeking new ways of learning and challenging themselves despite circumstances. In other words, they acquire soft skills,” she said.

This led Fatimazahra and her teammates to tackle soft skills as their social challenge for the M²GATE program. Calling themselves “The Alters,” the team consists of six members: Fatimazahra, Brahim Eddig, Anas Et-tayea, and Chaima Jahouri from the University of Cadi Ayyad in Marrakesh, Morocco; and Isha Kenkare (BBA 2021) and Avirath Kumar (BBA 2020) from the Ross School of Business. The team also designed Skills On Spot (SOS), a cost-effective venture that teaches such skills as communication and public speaking to students from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

With their disparate backgrounds and locations, students from Morocco and students from Michigan might never have had a chance to meet if it hadn’t been for the William Davidson Institute (WDI). The Institute’s M²GATE: the MENA-Michigan Initiative for Global Action Through Entrepreneurship is a virtual-exchange program that connects students from U-M to peers from partner institutions in the Middle East and North Africa. During the eight-week program, students work together by identifying a pressing social problem in the region, and working toward a creative and collaborative solution through social entrepreneurship.

Over the years, the University of Michigan has developed a robust, multi-disciplinary approach to educating entrepreneurs, while creating a supportive ecosystem to launch their ventures.

— Amy Gillett

The William Davidson Institute— an independent, non-profit research and educational organization dedicated to providing solutions to low- and middle-income countries— was established at the University of Michigan in 1992. In November 2017, WDI was one of 12 organizations selected by the Stevens Initiative to help students from Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia team up with peers from the University of Michigan to practice cross-cultural learning and action. The Stevens Initiative is housed in the Aspen Institute and supported in part by the U.S. State Department and the Bezos Family Foundation. The initiative crafts opportunities for students in the United States, the Middle East, and North Africa to build professional and global competency skills through a variety of virtual exchange programs. To achieve these goals,
WDI designed and launched the M²GATE Program. In continuing the streak of collaborative partnerships, WDI also leveraged the considerable reach of the U-M ecosystem to widely promote this program. Some of their promotional partners across U-M include Innovate Blue, Ross Global Initiatives, the Center for Entrepreneurship at the College of Engineering, optiMize, Opportunity Hub at LSA, and the Center for Middle Eastern & North African Studies (CMENAS), as well as Global Initiatives, Talent Gateway, and College of Business at UM-Dearborn.

“Over the years, the University of Michigan has developed a robust, multidisciplinary approach to educating entrepreneurs, while creating a supportive ecosystem to launch their ventures,” said Amy Gillett, vice president of the William Davidson Institute’s Education Initiative.

Ultimately, WDI’s M²GATE program not only stands as a bellwether for U-M’s long history of global engagement, but it does so in a particularly proactive way by utilizing technology to build bridges across cultures.

Isha Kenkare, a freshman at the Ross School of Business and a member of the Alters team, was especially drawn to M²GATE. “The program really intrigued me,” she said, “especially because of my experiences living in countries on three different continents and interacting with people from all walks of life. Additionally, as a business student, I believed it could be a great avenue to apply my education from paper to actuality.”

To learn more about the program, please visit wdi.umich.edu/m2gate-english

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– Isha Kenkare

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: M²GATE Instructor Rima Hassouneh during a workshop exercise; Nathan Rauh-Bieri, Program Administrator for the Education Initiative at WDI addresses workshop attendees; Workshop attendees Crystal Yu & Kent Lui; Workshop attendee Erin Drabicki (speaking to Deena Berri)