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Professor quickly becoming leading expert on Middle East

By Christian Toto
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DU Assistant Professor Nader Hashemi

University of Denver Assistant Professor Nader Hashemi jokes that all of four people used to hear his radio program during his stint at a college radio station in Ottawa.

But today, Hashemi's audience extends far beyond his radio days. His growing media presence includes both local news outlets as well as national platforms such "The PBS NewsHour," *Time* magazine and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Hashemi, who teaches Middle East and Islamic politics at DU's Josef Korbel School of International Studies, is a go-to source for everything from the recent tumult in Egypt to the ongoing debate between religion and secularism in the Muslim world.

Though born and raised in Canada, Hashemi's Iranian-immigrant parents followed the 1979 Iranian revolution closely. The family even moved back to Iran briefly in 1980 before returning to Canada a few years later.

"I was old enough to observe a transformative moment not only in the politics of Iran but the broader Middle East," he says. "At a young age, it really inculcated in me an interest in the relationship between religion and politics."

His latest book, *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*, reflects his ongoing fascination with the Middle East's political dynamics. The tome "demystifies a lot of assumptions people make about the politics of the Muslim world," he says.

University of Denver Professor Haider Khan says Hashemi brings both a unique educational background to campus as well as an empathic ear for the Middle Eastern region at large. The latter allows Hashemi to reach out to a broad range of students.

Khan adds that Hashemi understands past cultural connections between the Arab and European cultures as well as the modern college student's mindset.

"He's very sensitive to the need to educate people in a gentle way," Khan says. "Our job is to engage them in a non-confrontational, enlightening way so they feel comfortable presenting their disagreements."

Hashemi's academic career has taken him to the University of Toronto, Northwestern University and UCLA, and in 2008 he accepted a position at the University of Denver over another institution with a strong international component.

"Then [Korbel Dean] Tom Farer really left a positive impression on me," he recalls.

The professor's typical course load includes classes exploring modern Islamic political thought, the region's political context and timeless books on the subject like Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.

Hashemi says he starts each of his classes with a vow to his students, one he does his best to live up to himself.

"I want to get my students to challenge their unexamined assumptions about the world," he says, "positions passed on from both their families and communities."

DU graduate student Clifton Martin recalls reading Bernard Lewis' *What Went Wrong?* in one of Hashemi's classes. His classmates found plenty of fault with Lewis' arguments, but Hashemi prodded them to not simply disagree but to make a better case against them.

"It's that extra step he takes to ask us to think about the material, question it, and come up with our own perspective. Then he challenges that perspective. It's a great method of reinforcing the critical thinking process," Martin says of Hashemi, who serves as his adviser both as a student and with the Middle East Discussion group Martin co-directs.

Covering Middle Eastern issues can make for divisive conversations, but Hashemi says he is delighted when students tell him they aren't sure where he stands on the positions discussed in the classroom.

"My position is not to preach," he says. "It is to get my students to think critically."