



UNIVERSITY of
DENVER

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

April 17th, 2015

Nader Hashemi

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Josef Korbel School of International Studies**

In this edition of our e-newsletter, we're pleased to profile one of our most respected Current Issues instructors. Prof. Nader Hashemi's "mini-course," *Middle East Update*, which begins January 29, provides a candid and up-to-date discussion and examination of the changing politics of the Middle East and North Africa, with particular focus on U.S. policy toward the region during President Obama's second term. The director of DU's Center for Middle East Studies, Nader is the local news media's go-to-expert on topics relating to the Middle East and his media presence also includes "The PBS NewsHour," *Time* magazine and *The Wall Street Journal*, among others.

Please read our short Q&A; with Nader to learn more about his expertise and interests, including why you just may see him on stage at Swallow Hill someday (if not in the swimming pool)!

Nader, tell us a bit about yourself, such as where you grew up and how you landed in Denver.

I was born and raised in Canada (greater Toronto area) where my parents were first generation immigrants from the Middle East. My life as both a child and teenager was deeply shaped by political events in the Middle East and the larger Islamic world, principally the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the longstanding Israel-Palestine conflict. Furthermore, in contrast with the secular Canadian environment where I was living, religion and politics were constant topics of conversation in our home and in the broader ethno-religious community of which our family was a part of. When it came to choosing a major course of study at university, this background led me to the study of political science (although in retrospect I should have majored in history and philosophy). I was particularly interested in studying and understanding the turbulent politics of the non-Western developing societies with a focus on the themes of democracy and human rights along with the relationship and tension between religion and democracy.

I completed my B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in Canada and chose to write a doctoral dissertation on the theoretical and practical relationship between religion, secularism and democracy, with a focus on the politics of the Islamic world. After obtaining my doctorate from the University of Toronto I was awarded an Andrew W. Mellon postdoctoral fellowship at Northwestern University and then a Visiting Professorship at UCLA before coming to the Josef Korbel School of International Studies at DU where I was hired to fill a void in Middle East Studies.

What concerns you most right now about what's happening in the Middle East and/or the world, and why do you think it's important to teach Americans about what's happening so far away?

The Middle East is currently experiencing one of its most important, uncertain and transformative moments of political change. I'm referring to what is widely known in the West as the "Arab Spring." Longstanding dictators have been toppled, others cling to power, and fierce battles are raging (primarily in Syria) while the

rest of the world watches these developments with a combination of optimism, concern and bewilderment. These are important developments to understand and follow given the longstanding U.S. engagement with the region since World War II. I'm hoping that [my lectures](#) can give some historical and political context to these unfolding developments. Two themes will be emphasized: the unfolding relationship between religion and politics, and what policies should the U.S. be pursuing in response to the Arab Spring? Notwithstanding the common view here in the U.S. that the prospects for democracy look bleak, I'm cautiously optimistic about the future of the Middle East and in my lectures I will explain why.

Please share with us any professional achievements or related news.

This year I was appointed as the new Director of the Center for Middle East Studies. We are currently in the process of being formed but the vision of this center is to raise the level and quality of discussion, debate and scholarship on the Middle East here at the University of Denver. We plan to publish occasional papers, a journal, books, and organize a regular lecture series and an annual conference. [Our first conference](#), on the conflict in Syria, will take place on January 11 and the official launch of our center will take place on February 26. In between we have three other lectures planned. Until our official website is set up, you can follow our events and activities, on the internet via our [Facebook page](#).

Why do you teach for the Enrichment Program, and why do you think lifelong learning is important?

I enjoy interacting with the broader Denver community. Most of my time is spent with students and other academics, but I'm also keen to hear and learn from the "average American citizen." Teaching for the Enrichment Program gives me a better sense of what the public mood is with respect to topics that I specialize in. Furthermore, the official mission of our university is that we are a private university that is dedicated to contributing to the "public good." I hope that in my own small way I am making such a contribution.

What's something we might be surprised to know about you?

I've recently taken up swimming and now I have become quite obsessed about the sport. If I don't swim on a regular basis I begin to feel agitated and upset. My love for swimming has now shaped the way I travel and vacation. The hotels I stay at are carefully selected for their availability of a decent-sized swimming pool (preferably at least 25 meters long). I also play the guitar and I have aspirations to join a folk-rock band. If I don't make it in academia, this is my fallback position.