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## **Salem Radio Vice President of Content Lee Habeeb Teaches Storytelling Class at Hillsdale College**

By Sara Garfinkle

Sitting in the back of the college classroom, Lee Habeeb coaches students as they worked to map their stories on the chalkboard. Plot, character development, and special effects filled the board as student-driven stories came into shape, just a typical day in class for students taking a special storytelling class from Habeeb, talk radio executive and producer.

This fall, Habeeb taught a journalism course titled “Storytelling Across Platforms” at Hillsdale College. Students worked to develop primetime-ready radio features. Once complete, Habeeb’s professional production team at Our American Network will edit the stories and feature a few of the best on a national radio broadcast.

“Lee Habeeb is a hugely successful radio entrepreneur, both behind the scenes and with his own show—and it turns out he’s also a passionate teacher,” said John J. Miller, Director of Hillsdale’s Dow Journalism Program. “The students enjoyed his visit so much last year we decided to ask him back this year, and I hope his courses become a regular feature of our journalism program.”

His students’ first homework assignment was to pitch a great story to the class. After voting for the four best stories, students crafted the stories using Habeeb’s lessons as a guide.

“Go, find the story, there’s no need to invent one,” said Habeeb on the first day of his class. “It’s not all about you. When you write your stories for the show, write about what people care about.”

Drawing from the American playwright David Mamet’s *True and False: Heresy and Common Sense for the Actor*, Habeeb emphasized the importance of humility and curiosity in storytelling. This, he said, is true for actors, storytellers, and journalists alike.

Students came to the class expecting to learn a lot from Habeeb. “I wanted to know more about what kinds of work professional writers can do,” said junior Anne Buzzell. “I also wanted to learn about writing excellent narratives.”

Other students took the class to nourish their love of storytelling. Many also wanted to reconnect with Habeeb, who has hired many Hillsdale College students as interns at his company. Still, others, like senior Tara Ung,

recognized the value of storytelling in multiple disciplines.

“My goal is to go into scientific product marketing, which is all about telling the customer’s own story back to them, describing the problems they’re currently experiencing and why this product will solve those problems,” said Ung. “No matter what discipline you’re in, it pays to tell a compelling story.”

Ung and her team worked on a story about NBA superstar Tim Duncan. “Tim Duncan was a potential Olympic swimmer from the Virgin Islands who became a five-time NBA champion,” said Ung. “It’s a worst-event-of-my-life turned out to be the best-thing-that-could-have-happened kind of story.”

“Real storytelling is the ability to delay essential information and reveal it in the right way at the right time,” said Habeeb. Both a successful businessman and a teacher, he will pitch the students’ stories to his production team for edits and review. Student stories that make it through their review will appear on air.

“A story should be like our lives: a quick beginning, a really long middle, and a very quick end,” said Habeeb.

*Sara Garfinkle is a Hillsdale College sophomore studying politics, journalism, and classical education. As a public relations intern, she often writes on community relations and volunteerism.*

**PHOTOS of Mr. Habeeb in the classroom are [available here](#).**