

NAU Graduate Spotlight

NATIONAL AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

Christopher Nettles, PhD **Project Director at American Psychological Association**



When Dr. Christopher Nettles graduated from high school, a career in psychology did not cross his mind. In fact, he didn't even go to college immediately.

In 1985, Dr. Nettles began working for AT&T right out of high school. His position moved him around the country. During these moves, college courses came in "fits and starts." It was not until 1991 when his position with AT&T stabilized in Denver that he became serious about obtaining his college education. He was at a place in his career when a college degree was necessary for continued advancement.

Dr. Nettles was grateful that NAU (then called National College) accepted the few college credits he had gathered along the way. He also applied for and received credits for some of his work experience with AT&T. In 1995, he received his Bachelor's degree in Applied Management, which he now recognizes had a direct impact on where he is today.

With his Bachelor's degree in hand, Dr. Nettles was quickly promoted by AT&T (which, by then, had become Lucent Technologies). As a Technical Instructor he trained technicians in the field. One year later he was promoted again to Training Development Manager. His promotions continued, even as his employer evolved from AT&T to Lucent Technologies to Avaya.

In 2000, after successfully helping the company navigate the unpredictable Y2K transition, the tech bubble burst, and layoffs were imminent.

Dr. Nettles was at a crossroads. "I had to evaluate where I was and what I wanted to do," he said.

After some serious soul searching, he took a voluntary separation from the company and using a generous separation package went back to college. Using credits from his time at NAU, in 2004 he was able to secure a second Bachelor's degree from the University of Colorado in just 2 years. He went on to get his Master's degree in Clinical Psychology which offered research opportunities that he applied in ultimately securing his Doctorate at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

Although the road from AT&T to NAU to a Ph.D. in Clinical/Community Psychology seems unlikely, Dr. Nettles recognizes that each step of his journey is connected. Today, as Project Director for the American Psychological Association, he is overseeing the Cyber Mentors program designed to prepare psychological, behavioral, and social scientists for successful independent research careers in HIV/AIDS prevention and health disparities research. He and his team are particularly interested in helping ethnic minority psychologists stay in the profession by identifying and mitigating stressors that arise early in their careers.

With regard to NAU, Dr. Nettles says the courses and skills he learned in achieving his Bachelor of Science in Applied Management continue to apply to his work now.

"These skills are relevant today. They are so foundational and positive that I find myself drawing on what I learned at NAU no matter what I'm doing. The NAU degree has served me so well."