

## CNM Student Spotlight, March 2007

Staff from the Office of Professional Education at the UIC Great Cities Institute interviewed current CNM student Lieutenant David T. Clements, Brigade Supply Mentor and Training Brigade Commander Mentor at the Kabul Military Training Center in Afghanistan.

When David isn't working in a combat zone, he is the Director of Business Services at [The Children's Home](#) in Catonsville, Maryland.



**David Clements in a girl's classroom in Afghanistan**

**CNM staff:** *What made you decide to leave the private sector for the nonprofit sector?*

**David Clements:** After graduating from college, I found myself working for a large bank; however, they did not have a management trainee program. I developed a self-styled management training program by pursuing various opportunities within the organization. I realized that if I was successful, these skills could easily transfer to any industry. I was able to acquire management experience in operations, technology, marketing, finance and sales environments. I was very fortunate to have been able to say that I had "been there, done that" within one industry and at various levels. I wanted to do something that truly inspired me.

**CNM:** *How long have you been working for The Children's Home?*

**DC:** I started with The Children's Home in November 2005. My official title is Director of Business Services, where I manage finance and human resources.

**CNM:** *Did you find the transition into the nonprofit sector difficult – or at least surprising? What are some of the major differences you see between the two sectors?*

**DC:** The transition to the nonprofit sector was a little surprising, but in a pleasant way:

- Nonprofit environments are mindful of their limited resources.
- Nonprofit professionals are much more personally dedicated to their organizations; there are daily examples of people going above and beyond the call of duty and wearing many different hats.
- There are far less “perks” in the nonprofit sector, but there is more of a personal connection and feeling of belonging to the organization.
- I am also much more inclined to discuss what my employer “does” in social environments. As a corporate and institutional banker, I dreaded being asked about financial transactions. However, I have found that I proudly discuss my current nonprofit organization and enjoy discussing how the average person can help us execute our mission.

**CNM:** *Does being an army reservist give you a different perspective on both the private and nonprofit sectors?*

**DC:** I’m actually a Navy Reservist, assigned to an Army mission. This experience alone has provided an opportunity to effectively work with a very different organizational and professional culture.

I would say that my military experience and professional careers have equally influenced each other because I started both careers at the same time. I enlisted in the Navy Reserve as a 17 year old high school senior, completed college and later became a commissioned officer. My military experience taught me self-discipline and provided early opportunities for leadership. It also taught me that there are no limits to one’s potential and to effectively work with all types of individuals and personalities to accomplish organizational goals. My professional career influenced my military career by forcing me to think in terms of profit margins, economies of scale and effective uses of resources long before it became part of today’s military culture.

My experience in both private and nonprofit sectors has provided an interesting perspective to my role as a deployed reservist. From the nonprofit world, I have acquired a much greater awareness of how to maximize limited resources and maintain a mission-first focus. Due to my financial background in the private sector, I am financially aware of the cost of operations.

It all comes together for me by helping me to see and understand the value of fighting the Global War on Terrorism efficiently and effectively. I truly understand the importance of providing human services to truly win the loyalty of the local people and to counter the efforts of government insurgents. I don’t believe that one can be done without the other and both elements are necessary for effective Counter Insurgency Operations. Some of my most rewarding moments in Afghanistan have been the community service missions. On several occasions, we handed out toys and clothes to the children of Afghanistan, some of whom were wearing sandals while there was snow on the ground. Seeing them take shoes and socks from our hands and put them on right before us was a life experience I will never forget.

**CNM:** *Why did you decide to take nonprofit management courses?*

**DC:** I decided to take the nonprofit management courses to increase my industry knowledge. I have a personal belief in always continuing my education. However, after completing an MBA, I feel that the most effective way to do so is through specific programs and workshops. I was very fortunate to have secured a director level opportunity in the nonprofit industry based on my private sector experience. I simply wanted to learn more about my new industry and hopefully ensure further career progression.

**CNM:** *Did you know that you were going to be sent to Afghanistan before you enrolled in our program? If so, did that affect your decision to take the courses when you did?*

**DC:** No, I had been mobilized and deployed to Afghanistan for a few months before I decided to seek out opportunities to increase my industry knowledge. As soon as I became settled into the routine and my free time became as predictable as it could be, given the environment, I searched for online programs that would fit my schedule. UIC worked out great! With being away from everything we are comfortable and familiar with, as well as somewhat confined to a small Forward Operating Base, it is important to keep mentally busy. My own personal strategy has been to develop a strong body and strong mind. My personal routine has consisted of physical fitness, increasing my personal growth and fine tuning professional knowledge.

**CNM:** *Could you share something about the experience of the online “community” in respect to being in Afghanistan? For example, many people are surprised by how much we get to know each other in our virtual classrooms – did this have a larger impact on you while you were in Afghanistan?*

**DC:** It did have a very large impact. In our normal civilian work environment we tend to focus on our own local industry peers. However, in the online community, there are countless doors to new possibilities and perspectives, some of which may be from other nonprofit sectors such as the arts or health care, however the concepts may be applicable to human services organizations. I have experienced that peers are much more willing to openly share organizational obstacles and shortcomings with non-threatening industry contacts that are “very distant”, as with online communities.

### **Closing thoughts:**

- I find the [UIC Online Certificate in Nonprofit Management] program to be conducive to any environment. If I can successfully complete a course in a combat zone, it can obviously be done anywhere! By presenting the reading and discussion materials as attachments, I was able to print or save them to a memory stick for reading at a later date. This is a must for anyone with limited Internet access. Additionally, many of the articles have become part of my permanent professional library of resource material.
- The program was extremely efficient. When a student is overseas, it is most often for a work assignment, in which case there may be limited free time. I found that each course was focused and each assignment was very straightforward. I never felt as if there were any busy-work assignments or discussions. I was very impressed with the fact that each assignment and discussion was informative, relevant and engaging. I really enjoyed the fact that the program is discussion-based because it didn't focus on task-based learning, but rather on professional discussions.

- The length of each course was also very appropriate, making it easy to plan other events or obligations around the courses. For example, I was able to plan for two periods in which I would not have adequate access to the Internet by simply delaying registration for two courses. Despite not taking courses during these periods, because of the length of the courses, and the frequent offerings, I do not feel as if I have fallen far behind in my goal of completing the program in a timely manner.
- Internet delivery of such a program is extremely beneficial. It allowed for me to get a feel for the environment of nonprofits in different parts of the country. With my current environment being much different than in the United States, it allowed me to give consideration of various nonprofits aspects within the context of my current location.



**David Clements in a boy's classroom in Afghanistan**



**David Clements with the school principle in Afghanistan**