

# DARWIN RIVERA-ORTIZ, '04, '07

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## *Promising Young Professional Award*

recognizes Park alumni who show exceptional promise of leadership and contribution to their profession and/or community.

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**T**he route to an education doesn’t always follow a smooth, predictable path. While at the University of Puerto

Rico on a full-ride scholarship, Darwin Rivera-Ortiz, '04, MBA '07, admits he had a little too much fun. He left school and moved to Orlando, Fla., where he juggled odd jobs and endured

a stint of homelessness — sleeping in places with one eye open — until he became a firm believer in education and its power to change his life.

### ***PATIENCE, COURAGE AND HARD CHOICES***

It would take more than 10 determined years to get his education. The long road was trugged while serving in the U.S.

Air Force. While on active duty, Rivera-Ortiz earned both a Bachelor of Science degree and a Master of Business Administration degree from Park University.

Beyond perseverance, getting his education required courage. He completed a majority of MBA courses while deployed in Iraq. "I'll never forget doing statistics homework and getting a call to put on my helmet and bulletproof vest. A rocket landed less than 15 feet from where I was studying." And getting his education demanded discipline. "While working full-time managing computer networks on base, I'd take one or two courses at a time. I had to make hard choices like getting up at 2:30 a.m. to fit in my studies," he said. "But I was lucky to have the opportunities both the military and Park afforded me."

### **GOOD ADVICE IS HARD TO COME BY**

As a senior executive at HID Global, a leader in cyber security and identity protection, Rivera-Ortiz specializes in the health care, financial and government sectors. For his impressive career trajectory, he has been featured as a "rising star" in *NSHMBA* magazine, published by the National Society of Hispanic MBAs.

Yet he thinks the proverbial career ladder often has a missing rung. "Good career advice is hard to come by," Rivera-Ortiz said. "A casual high-five or a simple 'great job' doesn't help address your unknowns." For Rivera-Ortiz, it's not always about what skills to improve, but what skills to amplify.

"In Latin culture, humility is valued; it's frowned upon to boast. I've struggled with this in the business world," he said. "If you do good work but no one knows, it's easy to be overlooked. Success depends on communicating your skills and evolving them. Relentlessly. You can't afford to stagnate. For example, when people tell me they're interested in an IT career, I always ask: Are you willing to learn a new language every 18 months? Seriously. The intense change is like being expected to learn French, then Russian, then Portuguese — a new language every other year. That's the reality of the tech industry. No matter what career path you choose, success requires the discipline to keep pace with constant change."

### **PARK ON PAR WITH WORLD'S BEST**

Heeding his own advice, Rivera-Ortiz is a doctoral candidate at the Instituto de Empresa in Madrid, Spain, which is regarded as one of

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Europe's leading business schools. He's on track to complete his dissertation in 2018. "I study and work with colleagues around the globe, many with MBAs from schools like Wharton, Harvard and Stanford. From my observation, I know the caliber of my Park education is on par with the best in the world."

When he's not leading client projects or running his executive coaching company, Guayama Group, Rivera-Ortiz enjoys writing music. "Since I was a teen, I've played saxophone, clarinet, guitar and piano. I love it." But what he loves most is life in his Alexandria, Va., home with his wife of nine years, Liza, and their 3-year-old daughter, Arianna Isabelle. "I'm a proud father. It's now my most important job."

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