

## Chi Chapter

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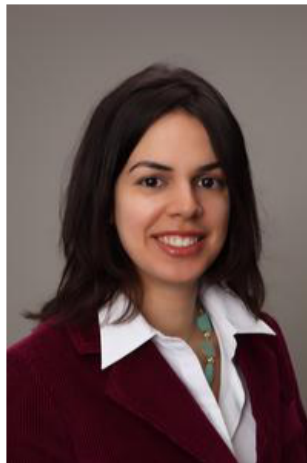
### “Las Mujeres de UChicago: Strong Women Making a Difference” Part 4: Lara Perez Felkner

Posted by [Shayna Coello](#) on March 31, 2012 · [Leave a Comment](#)

Welcome everyone to the final installment of our Women’s Month series “Las Mujeres de UChicago: Strong Women Making a Difference”. Thank you so much for sharing this experience with Chi Chapter and for helping us show our appreciation to the women on campus who work so hard and have an impact on so many people. We hope that their constant dedication and passion for what they do serve as an inspiration to you all.

This week we are featuring Lara Perez Felkner, a Resident Head in South Campus Residence Hall who also does research at NORC at the University of Chicago. Lara shares with us how she balances her role as an RH, her work, and raising a family as well as how her different roles within the University allow her to grow and learn.

**Lara Perez Felkner: Dedicated Researcher, Mentor, and Mother**



Lara Perez Felkner

#### 1. Official Positions in the College

*Resident Head for Keller House in South Campus Residence Hall, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at NORC at the University of Chicago, recent Ph.D. recipient in the Dept. of Comparative Human Development (2009).*

2. What are you involved with at UChicago?

*As a graduate student, I was very involved in my department and continue to participate in social science workshop system. I have also mentored students as a Resident Head, through OMSA, and through my department; I have been a Lecturer and Teaching Intern in the College; and I was a member of the Social Sciences Division Taskforce for Diversity in the Professoriate.*

3. What's your favorite thing about what you do?

*I love my research projects, and I also love working with students. My research addresses racial-ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic differences in young people's pathways to higher education and careers. Being immersed in student life helps me think better about my research questions and how I design methods to answer those questions.*

*I love how each role helps me improve in other aspects of what I do. For example, being a Resident Head allows me to really understand college students' issues and concerns about their classes, choosing their major, and managing more demanding coursework. That is on top of learning how to live away from their family in an environment with new and different norms, expectations, and types of people while also developing their sense of who they are. These are difficult and important tasks that can have a real impact on students' lives, including their success in college.*

4. What is your least favorite thing about what you do?

*In part because I wear different hats at the university, I have to be very systematic and organized to manage my schedule and commitments. I enjoy the administrative aspects of the Resident Head position the least, but thankfully they are concentrated in Winter Quarter.*

5. How do you handle your very busy schedule of being in charge of a large house in the dorms, working, and raising a family? What's the secret to balancing it all for you?

*There is no secret, but organization and knowing what you need to maintain that schedule is key. My husband and I use shared and separate Google calendars with our commitments and trade parenting tasks so that we can each go to the gym, work late if we need to, and get a moderately reasonable amount of sleep.*

*“If we take chances, we may fail.  
The only ones who never fail are  
those who don't try.”*

6. What is your favorite Quote/Personal Philosophy and why:

*Can I have three? The first one that comes to mind – maybe because I was just thinking about work-life balance – is from Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet: "Forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds long to play with your hair." When I have been running statistical models all day, this is a great thought to have in my head.*

*Next, from Confucius: "Our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall." Life is about taking chances – going for things we are not sure if we can attain (a great job, entry to a top university, trying out for a play, pushing yourself in a sport) – otherwise we don't grow and learn. If we take chances, we may fail. The only ones who never fail are those who don't try. When we do fail, we need to take what lessons we can from that failure and move forward. Finally, from Eleanor Roosevelt: "Nobody can make you feel inferior without your permission."*

7. Who do you look to for inspiration?

*Strong and effective women. For example, my mother and grandmother were each single working mothers for quite a while, and were driven to protect and support their family while also doing good and important work. My mom is supposed to be retired but continues to work tirelessly on immigration and language issues with the parents of her former students and continues to teach part-time. My postdoctoral mentor has amazing energy and is consistently productive on issues that really matter in sociology and education.*

8. What are your goals, either professionally or personally, for the future?

*I would like to continue to do interesting work and keep improving as a person and a scholar.*

9. You do a lot for the campus, for your residents, etc. What do you do for yourself? What do you do to unwind or have fun?

*I do different things at different times of day and of the year. I try to take a real lunch every day, away from my computer. And taking lunch with college students is a fun way to get out of the work headspace. Setting aside some quality down time with my husband and family is essential. I love watching my son learn and become more and more interactive and funny. I play sports like rock climbing, squash, and running, and whatever intramural activity the house is playing that quarter.*

10. What's something about you most people wouldn't know?

*I sing. A lot, but not publicly these days. I used to do musical theater, gospel choir, and other ensembles, but I have not joined a group here for some reason. I have been caught singing around campus with my son however, and when I forget that the windows are open.*

*"don't forget to make time to enjoy  
what you are doing and where you  
are right now."*

11. If you had to give one piece of advice to the women of this campus what would it be?

*As an academic – student or otherwise – it can be difficult to let go of the feeling that you should or could always be doing something else to make your paper or research better: working through the weekend, talking about how much you have to do. This is a campus that is reluctant to let go of the reputation that this is where “fun comes to die.” There has been a lot of progress towards ameliorating gender, racial and ethnic, and socioeconomic disparities in education. But I think that women – and women of color especially – can be especially susceptible to forgetting to make time for themselves – to read for fun, to explore neighborhoods, to spend time with family and friends, to go to the gym, or whatever other outlet might make them feel happy and whole outside of their work. It may be an implicit awareness of how hard it was for those who came before us to make the options we now have possible or a sense of (socialized) uncertainty that we have what it takes.*

*My advice then is twofold. First, believe that you can do whatever you set your mind to, and don't hold yourself back out of doubt or fear. Second, don't forget to make time to enjoy what you are doing and where you are **right now**. Every stage of life has new rewards and opportunities, but it is easy to underappreciate the present moment if we are too busy focused on the treadmill to completing the next assignment and pursuing the next opportunity. Feel the wind in your hair, call your family regularly, don't have lunch alone, and take your laptop outside on a nice day. I can't pretend that I always adhere to this advice myself, but I know that I am a happier, better, and more productive person when I do. **Live fully.***



Lara and her beautiful son.

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