

Student Speaker

Lara Rios '23

Civil Engineering

Newark College of Engineering
Albert Dorman Honors College



Lara Rios is a senior enrolled in the Newark College of Engineering at NJIT studying civil engineering. She was raised in Bloomfield, New Jersey, and currently resides there with her parents, Jairo and Laura, and two brothers, Jared and Liam.

When filling out college applications, Lara's aptitude for math and physics led her to choose civil engineering, a largely white, male-dominated field. However, this path was difficult to visualize being a half-Chilean and half-Puerto Rican woman with very few engineers in her family, let alone women engineers. Her father, an NJIT alum and structural engineer provided a piece of that picture. His influence on Lara's life was the other reason she chose civil engineering. As a first-generation college student, Jairo had to overcome many obstacles like poverty, living in unsafe neighborhoods, and being a child of Puerto Rican immigrants with a large family. Going to his alma mater to follow in his footsteps was her way of honoring him for all the sacrifices and struggles endured while providing for their family. Both of Lara's parents constantly inspire her to be the determined and hard-working student she is today.

Thanks to scholarships from NJIT, Avanade, and the Albert Dorman Honors College, Lara has been able to focus on her studies and work diligently to create a better environment for her peers. As a commuter, she knew the struggles they faced and joined Student Senate in her first year. By spending four semesters on their student organizations committee, she saw that these organizations were the key to engaging students. During her junior year, Lara served as Director of Student Organizations leading this committee in initiatives that revived clubs which had become inactive during the pandemic and created a system to award/encourage student organization activities. Later inspired by a student government conference, she sought to create a Diversity and Inclusion position in the Student Senate.

This year Lara serves in that role, taking a more targeted approach at continuing her efforts to foster a sense of belonging among her peers. With administration at her side, she will use this position to advocate for those under this scope and provide them with any resources they need. Lara is also president of the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE) whose purpose is to empower the Hispanic community to realize its fullest potential. So far she has led her board members in hosting events for Hispanic Heritage Month, their "How To" professional workshop series, and a trip to the SHPE National Conference where they were able to sponsor 30 students to attend. Following graduation, Lara hopes to continue her education by pursuing a Ph.D. in structural engineering and eventually take a full-time role at an engineering firm.