The 2010 trip was run both as a 1-credit hour GE 201 class and a 3 hour GE 301 class. Anyone is welcome to go, however qualifying GE sophomore students have most of their costs covered by the GE program.

During the winter semester break, a group of sixteen geological engineering students (eleven undergraduates and five graduates) traveled to Peru, accompanied by Drs. Anderson and Maerz. The geological engineers were also accompanied by Professor Luna and six civil engineering graduate students.

Our flight, via Atlanta, arrived in the Peruvian capital city of Lima in the late evening on Friday, March 26th. Our still-energetic group was bused from the airport to our hotel in the beautiful Miraflores district – an hour-long journey that gave our students a glimpse into Peruvian summer-time weekend nightlife. A short night and a simple buffet-style breakfast were followed by a return trip to the Lima airport and an uphill airplane ride that terminated in the two-mile high city of Cusco, the capital of the Incan Empire.

We spent Friday afternoon sightseeing in the heart of historical Cusco, little more than a stone’s throw away from our delightful, multi-hundred year-old hotel. Everyone was more than impressed by the Koricancha Sun Temple and the Cusco's large indoor market (complete with pig’s heads, coca leaf tea, and literally hundreds of other unusual commodities). Even those of us who suffered from mild altitude sickness were delighted by our introduction to the past and present cultures of the Peruvian Andes.

On Sunday, Neil, Norbert and our undergraduate students trekked, on horseback, through the mountains immediately outside of Cusco. Our horses were spirited, but relatively well-behaved, and we all dismounted some four hours later with smiles on our faces and visions of magnificent scenery forever etched in our minds. The afternoon was spent touring three inspiring archeological ruins near Cusco (Sacsayhuaman, Q’enqo, Pukapukara). We were all impressed by the size of many of the massive multi-ton sculpted limestone blocks that had been transported by a culture that used neither wheels nor pack animals. Amazingly, especially for a culture without metal-chiseling tools, many of the limestone blocks fit together so snuggly that a pencil lead could not have been inserted on any of the seams.

That same Sunday, our graduate students and those from civil engineering (accompanied by Dr. Luna), visited the Tipon Inca archeological site, the Piquillaqta pre-Inca archeological site and Andahuaylllas Catholic Church (aka Peru’s Sistine Chapel). Tipon is a must-see! This site, made famous in geotechnical circles by ASCE author Kenneth Wright in his book “Tipon: Water Engineering Masterpiece of the Inca Empire” is as amazing as the book title suggests. The centerpieces of the site are the agricultural terraces that extend up the valley and the multi-mile hand-constructed cut-rock aqueducts that once irrigated this cultivated land. Piquillaqta was impressive, mostly because of its size, but more primitive than the Inca structures it preceded. The Andahuaylllas Catholic Church was impressive, in part because of its history, as Spanish policy was to erect Churches on the razed ruins of every Incan Temple in an effort to eradicate every trace of the indigenous people's religion.
On Monday, the two groups of students exchanged itineraries!

On Tuesday, both groups of students (with separate tour guides and in separate buses) toured two breathtakingly beautiful archeological sites: Pisac and Ollantaytambo. As spectacular as the archeological sites were, for some students, the highlights of the day were the time spent at the amazing craft market in Pisac and their visit to the small hand-operated alpaca textile weaving factory. It was interesting to see the artists bleach and stain the world’s softest wool using dyes extracted from common plants and minerals. We spent Tuesday night in Ollantaytambo Town. The foundation of our hotel, like most of the buildings in the village, rested on Incan ruins. The distant roar of the somewhat raging river immediately adjacent to our rooms lulled us to sleep, like rain on a rooftop.

A small group of determined (foolhardy?) students trekked up to the mountain-top QachiC’ata granite quarry early Wednesday morning. (The rest of the group enjoyed a leisurely breakfast in our hotel and spent the morning hours touring Ollantaytambo Town and/or the main ruins.) The hikers, in contrast, were treated to an exhausting climb in the dense fog. Their reward was their visit to an ancient quarry, additional insight into the engineering practices of the Inca, and the discovery of a long-abandoned tomb containing the neatly-arranged remains of at least four ancient Incan people. Wednesday afternoon was spent, in tour buses, dodging thunderstorms enroute to the circular terraces of Moray (Inca agricultural experimental site) and the still-operating salt mines of Maras.

On Wednesday evening, after two-bus rides and a near mile-long on-foot trek along a narrow road (necessitated because of traffic congestion), we arrived at the temporary train station that will service those bound for Machu Picchu until the span of track between the temporary station and Cusco is cleared of avalanche debris (the result of unusually heavy January rains). In the chaos that ensued because of traffic congestion, we missed our scheduled train to Machu Picchu. Fortunately, we were permitted to board a later train and arrived at our hotel in the very very late evening.

The diehards amongst us arose before the sun on Thursday morning and boarded a bus that took them from the village at the base of the mountain (that in home to Machu Picchu) upwards to the magnificent structure archeological itself (along multiple switchbacks and around an equal number of sharp corners). This group of early arrivals was permitted access to a mountain-top trail open only to each day’s first four hundred visitors. The rest of us arose later, enjoyed a more leisurely breakfast, and a magnificent day spent touring one of the great “Wonders of the World”. Machu Picchu is truly inspiring. The archeological structures remain much as they were when the city was abandoned by the Ibca (save the effects of five hundred years of wind, rain, earth movement and vegetation), as the site was unknown to the Spanish and therefore never looted nor desicrated. The view from every single location is also absolutely spectacular as the city sits atop a mountain and is encircled by mountains. Spectacular is an understatement!
On Friday, we traveled by train and bus from Machu Picchu to Cusco and boarded a flight bound for Lima. The train trip, in daylight hours this time, was inspiring as we were visually treated to spectacular landslides, the incredible erosional remnants of this past January’s floods, numerous spectacular Inca ruins and majestic mountains.

That afternoon we flew back to Lima, with an air of cultural familiarity one wouldn’t normally acquire in a week’s time. Friday evening was spent sightseeing (in groups of three or more!) and shopping. Saturday morning was spent bus-touring historic Lima and exploring the catacombs, complete with literally tens of thousands of sets of neatly-arranged human remains. Saturday afternoon was free time for all!

Many of us spent Saturday afternoon relaxing on Lima’s glorious (but stone-covered) beaches. The sun was intense, but no one was careless enough to burn. The water was cool – but not cold. The waves were powerful which made wading in slowly and acclimatizing one’s tummy to the less-than-warm ocean-water a physical impossibility. Needless to say, we were all a bit sad to say good-bye to the Pacific.

We left Lima late that same evening with memories and friendships that will last a lifetime!