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Going to Peru was a dream of mine almost since setting foot on Notre Dame's campus. The Latin American history class I took freshman year was largely focused on Peru, and it always stood out as a complex crossroads of indigenous culture and European influence. I wanted to learn more about the history of Peru itself, about life there before the culture was forever altered by colonialism. The archaeology field-school program I participated in this summer through my *Experiencing the World* Fellowship allowed for this opportunity, but it also gave me the unexpected gift of insight into the modern struggles and joys of life in Peru.

Studying the Moche culture through the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú [PUCP] was beyond any expectations I had going in. The program worked in Late Moche layers of the site this season, which at 600-850AD, place them hundreds of years before the Incas and European conquest. PUCP's philosophy is that archaeology should be learned in a hands-on, no training wheels environment. On my first day at the site, we climbed down a rickety 20 foot ladder into the pit and began working with the bones of a 1300 year old skeleton. The greatest strength of PUCP's program is its all-encompassing introduction to archaeology. I learned to clean, draw, map, and then remove bones from human and animal skeletons in the field, worked with cleaning and drawing ceramic pieces in the field, learned to photograph and catalogue bones and ceramics in the lab, and learned to survey and map domestic sites in the mountains surrounding our field site. Even with an hour and a half break built in the daily schedule for siesta, our days were long and jam-packed. While hard work under hot South American sun did take some getting used to, the lively salsa music blasting out of our on-site radio took little time to grow accustomed to.

“Lessons” in the field often came from graduate students who spoke little English, which meant that every day was a combination archaeology/Spanish lesson. In addition, the workers at our site spoke no English, and even though I thought my Spanish skills to be top-notch before spending the summer in Peru, I quickly realized how difficult it would be to follow the quick humor and slang of the Peruvian men who worked with us. As much as I learned from listening to their running stream of jokes and conversation, I took away even more from their admirable work ethic. The workers don’t fit the typical “archaeologist” mold and have had no formal education on excavating, but they are absolute experts in the field and there is no better way to learn how to actually do the hands-on work of an archaeologist than to watch them in action. These men have worked at the site in San José de Moro since they were teenagers, and in fact some of their own teenage sons worked alongside us this summer, preparing to follow in the footsteps of their hard-working fathers. I could also write pages about the prestigious yet gracious Peruvian archaeologists who led our program, but it was in the efforts of the uneducated, unrecognized workers that I learned what this field of study is truly about.

Most of our site’s workers have lived all their lives in Chepén, the larger city surrounding our field site. For the first time this year, the PUCP program introduced an optional community exchange program, which allowed pairs of students to visit with local families. The families we visited had no English speakers, and many students in my program spoke no Spanish. I tried not to be daunted by the fact that I was deemed a “Spanish speaker” who would be paired with a non-Spanish speaker for home visits. The family my partner and I visited was headed by a single mother, María Fernández, with three children, one pig, 14 guinea pigs, and countless chickens. I was worried our conversation would be awkward at best, but María Fernández was desperate for someone to share her worries with. Her three room house has no roof, no electricity, no

bathroom, and little protection from local thieves. She expressed hope that international organizations such as The Red Cross would eventually bring resources like medical supplies, warm clothing, and makeshift roofing to her family and neighbors. Before leaving, we organized a clothing drive through our program and enjoyed watching María Fernández's eyes bulge as my partner and I brought bags full of practically new clothes for her family. To be able to do something so small and make such a great impression, what a gift that was.

The archaeology field school was incredible and I am so fortunate that the Kellogg Institute made studying there possible for me. I never thought I could feel so fulfilled sitting in dirt, cleaning 1300 year old skeletons, the only real noise coming from the faint strains of yet another inviting salsa song. History is interesting to study, but it becomes something incredible when you can actually dig it up for yourself. To be the first person in over a century to set their eyes on a beautifully hand-painted fine line pot is a privilege. The program I did through PUCP taught me a great deal about archaeology, but more importantly, I think, it showed me an untouched, raw perspective on life in Peru. The faces of María Fernández's beautiful children and her hope for a better future are what I found myself thinking about before I went to sleep at night. Going to Peru deepened my love for Latin America and served as a needed reminder of how unstable life can be there. Learning hands on about the history of Peru was amazing, but living the product of that history and seeing the friendly and beautifully alive culture that remains today was even more meaningful.