

Our former colleague, Juan Pestana, passed on the night of September 16, 2025 in Lexington, Massachusetts. His friends in the Berkeley Geosystem Engineering Program were informed by his daughter Maria. We are shocked and saddened by his passing.

Juan was full of life and devoted to the ideals, tradition, and excellence of Berkeley. He returned to campus often after retiring from Berkeley to participate in events. While visiting us he shared the joy of his work at Geosyntec Consultants. Juan was a brilliant engineer.

Though happy as a consulting engineer, Juan shared that he missed the talented, eager Berkeley students and the intellectual collaborations he had with the other faculty. He yearned to be in the classroom where he excelled. Professor Pestana was a dedicated teacher who conveyed complex concepts with clarity. He taught, mentored, and inspired a generation of successful researchers and engineers. He earned the coveted UC Berkeley Distinguished Teaching Award, which is the campus's highest honor for teaching excellence, recognizing faculty who inspired students through eliciting intellectual curiosity.

Dr. Pestana earned his doctorate at MIT and joined the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Berkeley in 1994. Juan authored more than 150 research publications in the areas of: constitutive modeling, numerical modeling of earth structures, seismic site response analysis, soil properties characterization, and ground improvement for liquefaction mitigation. He earned the National Science Foundation CAREER award, ASCE Arthur Casagrande Award, ASCE Walter L. Huber Civil Engineering Research Prize, and Shamsheer Prakash Research Prize. He served as Program Manager at the National Science Foundation for the Geoenvironmental Engineering and Geohazards Mitigation Program, and as Director of the UC Berkeley Pavement Research Center. He joined Geosyntec Consultants as a Senior Principal in 2017 and later taught at Tufts University, as he did earlier in his career as a member of the UC Berkeley faculty for more than two decades.

Juan will be sorely missed by everyone who knew him, but especially his three children, Maria, Juan Andres, and Manuel, who were his greatest source of pride and joy. He also leaves behind his lovely wife, Alexandra, his sister, Jannet, and many extended family members, close friends, and colleagues. All will miss his warm smile and genuine concern and kindness that was present every time he greeted someone.