Grant Makes Student’s Research Travels Accessible
by Janette Ballard

Kevin Ritt studies the anthropology of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). With an offer to conduct research in the mountainous regions of Haiti for an NGO, Ritt applied for and received an AHSS Student Research Grant, which enabled him to travel and work in Haiti this past summer.

“The NGO runs a health clinic which is located in a remote area of the Haitian mountains,” said Ritt, an anthropology graduate student. “I was asked to perform a needs assessment to evaluate the potential for rainwater harvesting as a daily water source for people in the region.”

Ritt spent three weeks hiking to inaccessible communities. “Geography and poverty make numerous communities in the area inaccessible except by foot.”

He examined how the residents acquire water, explored whether rainwater harvesting would be an appropriate technology for the region and evaluated what other water options might be beneficial to the residents. In addition, he tested two rainwater collection systems for the NGO.

“I’m writing my thesis on how the NGO has carried out this and other similar technology projects,” he said. “I’m especially interested in how the NGO plans for projects like this and the role of local knowledge in that planning process.”

Ritt was one of six graduate students who received an AHSS Student Research Grant, of up to $1,250 each, this spring. The purpose of the grant is to make special projects feasible to AHSS students who would otherwise face cost-prohibitive travel or research expenses.

“The AHSS research grant made this project possible. It allowed me to focus on the project itself instead of how to finance it, which was a huge and welcome relief,” Ritt said.

Following graduation in June, Ritt plans to find a research position working on international development projects.

[photos: headshot is from U.S. Customs upon Ritt’s reentry into the U.S.; panorama of Gran Bois, Haiti, including the market of Latwazon]