Hi! My name is Allison Tennant and I am a senior Environmental Studies and French major from northern Illinois. On campus, I play for the women’s Ultimate Frisbee team, run the Food Justice Alliance, am a tour guide, and work for the Office of Environmental Sustainability. Thank you for your generous donation to Environmental Studies students’ research pursuits! Because of the funding I got from FREES, I was able to spend a month in Madagascar studying the implementation of community-based forestry management (CBFM) for my honors thesis. I spent last fall semester abroad in Madagascar and was able to complete an independent study project on the topic then which initially sparked my interest in researching more and writing a thesis. For my first field research project in Madagascar, I spent three weeks in two different villages in the Andapa basin of northeastern Madagascar learning about the co-management of the COMATSA protected area. Through structured and unstructured interviews with community member and nonprofit and government actors, I was able to gain a better understanding of CBFM in practice in this region and gained valuable field research skills. I also fell in love with the beauty and culture of the island and definitely wanted to return.

After deciding to write a thesis, I used FREES funding to return to Madagascar for the month of August to conduct more research and gain a broader picture of the forest management system in the district of Andapa. Working with the same translator as last fall, we traveled the 22 kilometers over a mountain to stay in a more rural commune deeper in the protected area. We spent five days each in two villages, interviewing stakeholders, working the forest, and getting a better picture of daily life. Both villages warmly welcomed us into their homes and taught me so much about a different culture. Coming back over the mountain, we got caught in the rain on the dirt path and ended up covered in mud many more hours later when we finally reached the third village. This was one of the villages I stayed in last year so we only stopped by for two days to visit old friends and catch up on what had changed over the year in the forest. Then, we headed to our last village for another five-day stay of interviews and observation. My research ended with a stay in the city of Andapa to talk to government actors and representatives from the WWF and Madagascar National Parks before braving the 30-hour journey back home.

Through this experience, I have gained insight on the challenges and successes of CBFM in practice in the Andapa basin, but I still have much more to learn. I will spend the next two semesters grounding my findings in theory to better understand what I observed and hopefully make recommendations on improvements. I’m excited to come to more conclusions in the future and very much appreciate the incredible experience I was able to have. In the future, I hope to return and do more research for a graduate degree. I am sincerely grateful for your donation!

Thank you,
Allison Tennant ‘19