

## **Trip Report**

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South Africa Exchange Program

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Upon arrival in South Africa, I got set up in my apartment and then contacted UWC's Geography Department to get checked in. I met with the chair of Geography, Gordon Pirie, and contacted Ronnie Donaldson via email. Dr. Pirie showed me my office space and introduced me to other members of the Geography Department. We then sat down and went over my research plan. Dr. Pirie's said his goal was to make himself as useful as possible for me to complete my research there. He was extremely helpful. So I told him what I was looking for, and he lent me books, and gave a list of contacts to get started. We remained in contact, throughout the month, for me to update him on my research and to ask him any further questions I might have.

After meeting with Dr. Pirie, I set about getting started on my field research. This entailed contacting academics, activists, and city officials regarding water distribution issues. First, I contacted Patrick Bond, one of the leading scholars in this area, and he sent me a wealth of information to read, to quickly educate myself on recent legal battles over water distribution. He also gave me a list of people to contact in Cape Town. First, I interviewed an activist who described the legal battles over water and the way people are fighting to keep their water on. Then, I met with a city official who described the city's approach to the battle over water, as well as the head of Cosatu in Cape Town. I then decided to travel into the townships, based upon contacts that I had received, to interview people there. I was able to see the actual conditions by which water is distributed—often with one standing pipe for an entire shantytown—and the problems with sewage and trash collection as well. In the townships and shantytowns, I learned that people have devised ways to jerry-rig water equipment in order to keep their water flowing when private corporations try to turn it off. The main problem, in South Africa, is that people cannot afford water, which means they have had to turn to streams—leading to a massive cholera outbreak in 2002. They must also care for HIV/AIDS patients under these conditions.

I met with people in both black and coloured townships, as well as shantytowns, to talk about delivery of services. Overall, I conducted approximately twenty interviews while there. Now I am in the process of transcribing these interviews. After completing this part of my work, I will turn this into an article that will be published in a magazine such as *The Nation*. (That is my target audience.) I have been told, by the people that I interviewed, that my work on this area will help them immensely with their struggles. I hope to raise awareness, in the United States, about the life-threatening conditions that the majority of South Africans still have to live with, largely due to the selling out of water resources to Western interests, such as the Suez Corporation.