Our pod discussed common practices for field work in our research area. As a marine science department, much of our field work is done at sea on a ship with some work including small boats in coastal waters or in some cases on land in wetlands, rivers, etc. We found the “Steps to Minimize Risk at a Field Site” by Demery & Pipkin (2020) very helpful and a checklist of theirs is appended below, although it does focus on field work on land. We additionally provide some guidelines for inclusivity in work at sea. In general, a ship’s crew will cover anti-harassment policies with the science team before leaving port. It is the responsibility of the Chief Scientist to provide opportunities for science party members to self-report issues that may require accommodation, including food restrictions, religious observances, or any disabilities. Just as with work on land, any risks to safety of any involved must be identified prior to the expedition and a plan to address that risk worked out well in advance.

Considerations Specific to Work at Sea

UNOLS has a committee for Maintaining an Environment of Respect at Sea (MERAS committee). While policies at a specific ship operator institution will supersede, this committee has developed guidelines for polices on protecting personal information, a pregnancy and nursing mothers policy, harassment prevention as well as guidance on “milestone ceremonies” held at sea such as equator crossings.

Latest MERAS general guidelines:


Milestones Ceremonies Policy:

https://www.unols.org/document/milestone-ceremonies-policy

Recommendations for compliance with the American Disability Act on ships:

Steps to Minimize Risk at a Field Site (These are reproduced from Demery & Pipkin, 2020; https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/202008.0021/v1)

1. Talk with colleagues and supervisors about the risks, preparations to minimize risk, and reporting mechanisms. Be aware that the conversation will likely be difficult and will require mental and emotional readiness by both parties. If a supervisor is dismissive of this conversation, individuals should be informed that they can and should reach out to additional mentors, institutional or industry advocates (e.g., ombudsman, Equal Employment Opportunity officer, Diversity and Inclusion administrators, Student Disability Services, or other trusted professionals to have this conversation.

2. The scale of risk can be higher at international field sites (e.g., identities may be criminalized). At minimum, be aware of and abide by any international laws and customs in addition to local foreign laws, current political situations, actual degree of law enforcement, and mandate a conversation between researcher and supervisor to establish an emergency contingency plan.

3. Contact others (especially those who share an at-risk identity) that have previously used a field site at a location where there is a history of risk. It is recommended that researchers document all known cases of risk at that location.

4. Take advantage of training opportunities to increase field safety and promote awareness (e.g., self-defense courses, first aid, safety aids, cultural history course about the location of the field site).

5. Know who manages the field site(s) and inform the field managers when/where you will be at those locations.

6. Introduce yourself to the neighbors surrounding the field property, or leave a short note informing neighbors about research being conducted at nearby locations and who will be conducting the research. It is advisable to also include contact information, preferably information that clearly demonstrates affiliation with the research institution to provide additional credibility.

7. Engage in fieldwork with another person, when possible. When this is not possible, have a point of contact (preferably the supervisor) who is aware of your whereabouts and expected schedule on a given day. A written communication plan that gives notice of field plans is another way to maintain communication with a point of contact.

8. Always carry credentials in case someone challenges why you are at the field site. These include photo ID (driver’s license, passports, institution ID), and relevant permits. Any additional form of identification that clearly demonstrates affiliation with the research
Risk Reporting

The simplest method of reporting an instance of racism would be to use the University’s “Ethics Line”. The link to this at the bottom of most USM webpages. A report can be made through this portal on-line, or by phone. The line is monitored 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and requires a response from the University administration.

We note the University has another reporting system which could be an option depending on the situation. This route formally relates to concerns regarding the well-being and academic progress of students. This is called CARES (Campus Action Referral and Evaluation System) reporting and the link can be found at the bottom of most USM webpages under the name ‘Report a Student Concern’. The CARES reporting site also states for immediate concerns regarding possible student self-harm or harm to others, the University Police Department should be contacted (phone number listed on site).

Finally, our University additionally has a website for resources on Diversity and Inclusion (Link).