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THE DREW LAB AT COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

ECOLOGY, EVOLUTION AND CONSERVATION OF CORAL REEFS

 [HOME](#) » [UNCATEGORIZED](#) » PREPPING FOR THE FIELD AS A PI – NO LONGER JUST EQUIPMENT

Prepping for the field as a PI – no longer just equipment

Despite what some people at Forbes may think (and no, I'm not going to link to that particular article), summer time for professors is not all margaritas and six-week vacations*. Rather, for many of us who have primarily teaching appointments summer is the time to get research done. Case in point, the Drew lab (well most of us anyway) are headed to Fiji in just under a month and there is a LOT of work to get done.

Preparing for an expedition has always been one of my favorite parts of the trip. I love buying equipment, packing it up, and perhaps making internal references to that scene from [Commando](#) (except you know, with less automatic weapons). My office is getting crowded with [dive gear](#), [duffle bags](#), [plug adaptors](#), and [label makers](#).

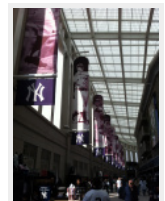
As a grad student this was pretty much all I had to worry about. Now that I'm a PI I'm experiencing a whole new level of paperwork. That being said we now have IAUCAC approval to collect fish from the reefs and IRB approval to conduct interviews with the fishers of the region. The former data will be used to understand coral reef baselines prior to conservation while the latter will be used to understand how reefs have changed over a single human lifespan.

I also have to obtain permits from various ministries in Fiji, and for that I am extremely thankful to the wonderful people at the [Wildlife Conservation Society Fiji Programme](#) with whom we are partnering with. They know the intricacies of local permitting far better than I do, and they have been of incalculable value.

Obtaining these permits is not simply a series of hoops to jump through, and while we may grumble, honestly they are really important. The IAUCAC (animal welfare) ensures that we cause the minimum amount of ecological and physical damage to the fish we collect. The IRB ensures that the questions we ask in our interviews are not offensive and that participating in them will in no way harm the interviewees. Obtaining permits from the Fijian government ensures that we comply with the local rules and regulations and that ultimately we are respectful visitors in their country. Coming to Fiji to do work is a privilege and we must not forget that. On a pragmatic side, I and my university and museum could face very serious legal implications for failure to comply with these rules. I have tried to be open with my students with these procedures so that they can start to learn about the non-science aspects of doing science, and I think it's been a good learning experience for all of us.

The biggest concern for me as a PI is now being in charge of such a large team. I will be in charge of the safety of two Columbia University undergrads and two entering MA students, as well as a science communicator and our Fijian collaborators. This is a lot of people to take care of. I want to make sure we have a productive, fun and above all safe trip. I invite you all to join us online as we blog and tweet the expedition and ask us questions either here or on twitter using the hashtag #CUinFiji.

*I do reserve the right to catch a few day games up at Yankee Stadium however.



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BY LABROIDES IN UNCATEGORIZED ON MAY 23, 2013.

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