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# The takeover: How we successfully transferred our macroalgal transect survey between graduate students.

## Context

In 2021 following the heat dome in British Columbia, two PhD students (SS and VPS) at UBC started conducting monthly transect surveys at a highly biodiverse intertidal site to capture high-resolution macroalgal biodiversity data. This resulted in a publication in 2025 [Botany 2025]. One concern that was always looming over this project was: what happens when these students graduate? In this article, we detail what happened, the unique circumstances that made the continuation of this project possible, and recommendations for other labs considering this type of long-term monitoring work led by graduate students.

## Study set up

### Brief methods in the field

### Data management

## Handover process

* Exactly what we did
  + Access to online stuff
  + Meetings
  + Continued communication after graduation
* How was it for Evan?
  + Was went well?
  + What was very challenging?

## State of the project and recommendations

We successfully transitioned the project leads for the time being, but it is unclear who, if anyone will be able to continue the project after this year. This is not from lack of support from supervisors or our broader community, but reflects the competing demands of graduate school and the difficulty of obtaining funding for these projects that do not have concrete deliverables. This means that these types of surveys cannot easily be the foundation of a thesis and are not eligible for large grants that would support hiring someone to conduct the surveys.

We believe that the circumstances surrounding this project were unique and we are writing this article specifically to highlight these aspects:

1. This project is relatively cheap in terms of materials and time required per sampling event. This is a major contributor to how often we can sample (monthly) and why this was feasible as a side project without any concrete goals.
2. From day one, data management was a priority. The goal was always to generate publicly available data and we started uploading our data to Borealis (an online data repository) every month after conducting the survey. SS selected Borealis because it is 1) search engine indexed, 2) version controlled, 3) and is managed by libraries, not through a private lab account for which login information can be lost. Making the data publicly available right away meant that we had to maintain good data organization. Since we wanted people to be able to understand the data without a publication, it also meant that we wrote a detailed protocol early in the study process. Data organization and a detailed study protocol were critical in the handover process.
3. Without volunteers, this project would not have happened. We were included volunteers of all skill levels of macroalgal ID, which was possible due to our custom field guide and collection protocol (to ID in the lab) of uncertain macroalgal. The EK (who took over the project) was one of these volunteers. Therefore, one of our major recommendations for these long-term data collection endeavours is to support and include volunteers in the data collection as much as possible. This not only leads to higher-quality data (in our opinion) but is the key to project continuity.
4. Supporting volunteers is the first step the more intensive training that was required to transfer ownership of the project. Once EK was officially slated to take over the project, SS provided edit access (and a detailed list) to all online resources before graduating. VP began intensively mentoring EK throughout the 2025/2026 season until VP graduated. This more intensive training was greatly facilitated by the fact that EK was already very familiar with the survey, so this step focused on understanding the administrative burden and lab-based algal ID rather than needing the learn all aspects of the project at once. Both SS and VPS remained available to answer questions from EK after they graduated. Was this enough for Evan?