

Beaufort Gyre Exploration Project: Dispatch 12: The bridge

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Even under the best conditions, navigating any vessel can be tricky at times. Navigating a ship the size of the Louis S. St. Laurent takes a team of trained professionals working round the clock and the LSSL is staffed by the best. Nearly 400 feet long and 80 feet at the beam, the LSSL hosts a full array of computer controlled navigation systems to help the officers and crew guide her safely through the waters of the north.

The helmsman uses the auto pilot unit to keep the ship on course for the most efficient track but also uses the ship's wheel for manual maneuvers; steering around large pieces of ice, positioning for CTD work, or locating moorings, for example. The navigator plots the needed course based on waypoints (like CTD locations), depth soundings and potential hazards, or other navigational needs. The ship also staffs an ice predictor who helps the navigation as well as scientific aspects of the cruise. Using both observational data and computer modeling prediction analyses, the observer assists the navigation team in finding the safest and perhaps fastest way through the ice pack. The senior officer of the watch oversees all of these operations and anything else that may be happening on the ship such as science needs, emergencies, engineering updates, or deck work. Additionally, the captain works with each department to coordinate ship and science missions. The captain supervises the bridge, engineering, science, deck operations, logistics, and more to ensure a successful and safe cruise.

The officers and crew work very closely with the science staff aboard the LSSL and we are certainly grateful for the hard work they do every day. On many vessels the scientists are left to their own work with little or no help but here the crew work hand in hand with the scientists which is one of the many reasons we look forward to this cruise every summer. We couldn't do it without them!

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