Create Your Career Roadmap with an Individual Development Plan

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a dynamic, on-going graduate student career management tool to help you:

- Develop mutually-agreed upon academic and career objectives with your mentor(s) and/or adviser(s)
- Stay on track and make progress toward these ever-evolving goals

In short, it is a roadmap tailored to your academic and career goals. Creating an IDP will help you connect career and professional development with your graduate training experience.

Creating an effective IDP requires your self-reflection on the five questions outlined below.

1.

What skills do you have now?

You have developed a diverse array of skills that build upon and expand beyond your research and teaching skills. It is critical to understand where you are now since self-knowledge is a key to your academic and career success. Assessing your strengths and weaknesses helps you identify areas that you need to work on during your graduate journey. Below are some of the major domains of skills that employers value[1].

- Teamwork/Collaboration
- Digital Technology
- Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Communication
- Leadership & Project Management
- Career Management & Personal Wellness
- Professionalism/Work Ethic
- Diversity,Equity and Inclusion

To help you identify your transferable skills, complete this **Ph.D. Transferable Skills Self-Assessment activity.** The following resources can also help you assess your skills:

- **myIDP Science Careers**
- **ChemIDP skills and value assessment**
- **ImaginePhD's skills, value, and interest assessment tools**
- **National Postdoc Association Core Competencies**
- **Career Readiness Competencies by the National Association of Colleges and Employers**
- **Career assessment tools: Clifton Strengths, MBTI, and CareerExplorer**

2.

What are your current career interests and which paths appeal to you?

Answering this question will help you to assess gaps you'll need to fill between your desired career goals and where you are now (Sampson et al., 2004). The following online resources can help you learn about career options:

- **O*Net**
- **ImaginePhD's job family resources**
- **LinkedIn alumni search tool to show you where Princeton Ph.D. alumni work**
- **Princeton Ph.D. long-term career outcomes report**
- **U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Occupational Outlook Handbook**
- **Vault career guide**

Your career interests are likely to shift. Many graduate students often change their career direction throughout their training, especially after their third year (Fuhrmann et al., 2011). It's normal not to have identified a specific career path yet.

[1]Adapted from the **NACE Career Readiness Competencies:** The major domains of skills that employers value.

3.

What skills do you need to develop and how?

Once you recognize your current interests and skills, it is time to identify the skills or knowledge that you want to develop over the next six months based on your desired career goal. Setting SMART goals can help you strategically implement your plan. SMART goals are:

- **Specific & sensible:** Is it focused and clear? Considering difficulty and timeframe, is this goal attainable?
- **Measurable:** How can you quantify progress?
- **Achievable:** Can this goal be realistically attained?
- **Relevant:** Does it align with what you are trying to accomplish?
- **Time-bound:** When should it be completed?

Setting up two to five SMART goals per every six months is ideal. Developing too many goals may indicate that your goals are focused more on tasks than outcomes or that you may not be able to make meaningful progress on any of them.

We recommend using a one-page outline following the template on page 4 as a starting point to develop a customized training plan. You and your adviser can use this as a guide when writing grant applications, letters of recommendation, or any other document that references your training goals.

SMART goal example

Within three months, I will build and launch a personal academic website to broadly communicate my research projects and to increase the online presence of my work.

Specific & Sensible:
The goal of creating and launching a personal academic website is well-defined and specific

Measurable: Success can be measured by whether or not a website is launched

Achievable:
I have the time and ability to accomplish this goal.

Relevant:
Having a personal academic website can help a graduate student to develop their own brand and promote their work more broadly. Also, developing website contents may help enhance communication skills.

Time-bound:
Considering that there are many user-friendly website development software available and that CV will provide a basic content of the website, creating and launching a personal academic website within three months sounds reasonable.

4.

Are there any personal/family situations that may impact your academic progress or career plan?

Your unique personal or family situations will likely inform your worldview, impacting both your daily interactions and your career preference. For example, recent studies found that family-related life events played a crucial role in doctoral students' career shifts, due to their perceived multiple role-conflict (Seo, 2017; Seo et al., 2020). Take time to analyze your current personal situations and how they function in your development plan.

My Current Personal or Family Situation	Potential Impacts

Balancing work and life is not easy, becoming more aware of your multiple identities is a first step toward balancing them.

5.

What skills do you need to develop and how?

Are you familiar with the support and resources available beyond your department? Do you know which learning style (e.g., in-person, online) works better for you? In addition to working with your adviser or principal investigator (PI), identify and create other academic and career development opportunities that enable you to achieve your goals. Below are resources that can help you identify opportunities on campus and beyond.

- The Center for Career Development
- McGraw Center for Teaching and Learning
- Davis International Center
- Graduate School's professional development Initiatives, GradFUTURES
- Access, Diversity and Inclusion, Graduate School
- Graduate career development advice: Inside Higher Ed Carpe Careers and ChronicleVitae
- Professional associations related to your field of study

IDPs can be used as a foundation for career conversations with your mentors and an opportunity to ask for their guidance or feedback. For example, you can schedule a meeting with your adviser or mentor to establish clear expectations and action steps. Update and check on your IDPs every couple of months or every year to ensure your progress.

Individual Development Plan (IDP) Outline: Student/Advisee

Student Name: _____ Adviser/Mentor Name: _____ Date: _____

1.
Skill Assessment: What skills do you have now?

2.
What are your current career interests and which paths appeal to you?

3.
What are your SMART goals for the skills you want to develop?

4.
Are there any personal/family situations that may impact your academic progress or career plan?

5.
Professional Development: What career support can you take full advantage of?

Your primary top 3 goals to achieve until _____

1.

2.

3.

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References

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Sampson, J. P., Jr., Reardon, R. C., Peterson, G. W., & Lenz, J. G. (2004). *Career counseling and services: A cognitive information processing approach.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Seo, G. (2017). *Doctoral students' career decision-making process: comparing faculty and non-faculty careers from socio-cognitive and contextual perspectives* (Doctoral dissertation). Champaign, IL: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

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