

Individual Development Plan (IDP) for Professional Readiness

Purpose of the IDP

The Individual Development Plan (IDP) is designed to assist with (1) identifying professional goals and objectives; (2) assessing an individual’s skill set relative to their career goals; and (3) developing a plan to acquire the skills and competencies needed to achieve short- and long-term career objectives. A well-crafted IDP can serve as both a planning and a communications tool, allowing graduate students and postdocs to identify their career goals and to communicate these goals to mentors and advisors.

The IDP is a tool to help graduate students and postdocs clarify their career goals and expectations with their advisors and mentors. The IDP supports better communication, better planning, and more successful outcomes. By defining their career goals early on and developing a plan in consultation with their advisors and mentors for pursuing these goals, graduate students and postdocs are better able to identify and participate in professional development opportunities (such as career exploration in and planning for non-academic careers, training in proposal writing, and project management), that are targeted toward achieving their specific objectives.

Outline of the IDP Process

The development, implementation, and revision of the IDP require that graduate students/postdocs and their mentors/advisors complete a series of steps. These steps are an interactive effort, and so both must participate fully in the process.

	<i>For Graduate Students/Postdocs</i>	<i>For Mentors/Advisors</i>
Step 1	Conduct self-assessment	
Step 2	Assess career opportunities and possible career paths (with mentors/advisors)	Discuss career opportunities and possible career paths with graduate student/postdoc
Step 3	Write an IDP Share IDP with mentors/advisors and revise	Review IDP and help revise
Step 4	Implement the plan Revise IDP as needed	Establish regular review of progress

Steps of the IDP Process

Step 1: Conduct a self-assessment

The self-assessment will help the graduate student/postdoc gauge the skills, strengths and areas that need further development. Some of the skills and strengths that are relevant to career decisions include: technical abilities (breadth and depth of expertise), writing skills, oral communication skills, organizational ability, leadership, self-motivation, decision-making, creativity, work ethic, problem solving abilities, knowledge (depth and breadth), perseverance, and the ability/desire to take risks. Students should take a realistic look at their current abilities. This is a critical part of career planning. The student's mentors/advisors, faculty, colleagues, family and friends should all be involved in the assessment process to help identify both strengths and areas for further development. Outline your long-term career objectives. For example, ask yourself: What type of work would I like to be doing? Where would I like to be in an organization? What is important to me in a career?

Need help with the self-assessment? Resources such as self-assessment worksheets are available here: <https://sites.wp.odu.edu/careerpathways/idp>

Step 2. Assess potential career paths.

- Identify career opportunities and target those that interest you for further exploration.
- With your mentor/advisor, assess how your current skills and abilities match the competencies required of your chosen career(s).
- Identify developmental needs by comparing current skills and strengths with those needed for your career choice.
- Prioritize your developmental areas and discuss with your mentor how these should be addressed.

Career exploration resources are available through ODU's Career Development Services (<https://www.odu.edu/cds>) and on the Career Pathways website: <https://sites.wp.odu.edu/careerpathways/>

Step 3. Write an IDP

The IDP maps out the general path you want to take and helps match skills and strengths to your career choices. It is a changing document, since needs, skill levels and goals will almost certainly evolve over time. The aim is to build upon current strengths and skills by identifying areas for development and providing a way to address these. You should discuss your draft IDP with your mentor/advisor. You and your mentor/advisor should agree on an IDP that will allow you to be productive and adequately prepare you for your chosen career.

The specific objectives of a typical IDP are to:

- Establish effective benchmarks and target dates for the duration of your graduate/postdoc training
- Identify specific skills and strengths that you need to develop (based on discussions with your mentors/advisors). Mentors should provide honest feedback - both positive and negative - to help you set realistic goals.
- Define the approaches to attain the goals you have chosen and obtain the specific skills and strengths you need to acquire and/or build upon.
- Define milestones and anticipated time frames for achieving your goals.

Step 4. Implement the plan

The plan is just the beginning of the career development process and serves as a road map. To attain your goals, you must implement and assess the plan.

- Put your plan into action.
- Revise and modify the plan as necessary. The plan is not cast in concrete; it will need to be modified as circumstances and goals change. The challenge of implementation is to remain flexible and open to change.
- Review the plan with your mentors/advisors regularly to assess progress, expectations and changing goals. Revise the plan on the basis of these discussions.

Individual Development Plan Template

1. Areas to develop
 - Assess your competencies.
 - What do you need to develop?
2. Long-term goals
 - What will you do to improve in the areas you have identified?
3. Short-term goals
 - What could you do this year?
4. Overall strategies for reaching goals
5. Steps and timeline for completion of goals
 - What steps will you take to accomplish your goals?
 - By when?
6. Available resources
7. Outcomes
 - What will you have accomplished to indicate that you have reached your goals?

****Note:** This template is to get you started with your IDP. You are NOT required to use this template.**