



The Individual Development Plan

For mapping your academic and professional development

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) helps you:

- assess your skills, interests, and values,
- make a plan for achieving your academic and professional goals,
- and communicate with your mentors about your evolving plan and needs.

There are many different ways to write an IDP, but the central concept is consistent: the IDP is a process through which you reflect, plan, and discuss in order to achieve academic and professional goals. The onus is on you to develop and maintain your IDP. And since it is your IDP, you choose which parts to share with your mentors.

This document is one example of an IDP tool, endorsed by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School. It includes step-by-step instructions, a self-assessment questionnaire, and forms for writing goals. Some departments and programs may use different instructions or templates so it is important to check you are using the right documents before starting this process.

You'll want to revisit your IDP at least annually to update and refine it as your goals change or come into focus, and to record your progress and accomplishments.

The UW-Madison IDP website (grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp) offers a collection of resources to support you in writing your IDP:

- the university's IDP policy and steps to getting started on your IDP;
- advice on writing specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (S.M.A.R.T.) goals;
- tips for discussing your IDP with your mentor;
- links to workshops on creating an IDP;
- and a reporting system to let your mentor, program, and/or grants administrator know that you have an IDP.



DiscoverPD is an innovative online tool developed by the Graduate School Office of Professional Development. If you choose to use it as part of your IDP-writing process, you'll start by reviewing the nine areas, or "facets," of professional development, then complete a self-assessment, and get a customized report and recommendations to help you strengthen your ability within each facet.

This packet contains a simplified version of the DiscoverPD self-assessment. All UW-Madison community members may visit my.grad.wisc.edu/DiscoverPD to use the full, interactive online version.



Basic steps of the IDP

for graduate students or postdoctoral researchers

for mentors



1 Conduct a self-assessment.



2 Write your Individual Development Plan.



3 Discuss all or part of the IDP with your mentor.

Review goals and help mentee revise as needed.

Update your information in the IDP reporting system, which helps PIs and staff verify IDP use.



4 Implement the plan.



5 Revise and update your IDP as needed.

Regularly review and provide support.

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STEP 1: Conduct a self-assessment

Start the IDP process by taking some time to reflect on your skills.

Static self-assessment option (located in this document): On pages 4 through 8, rate your confidence in your ability across nine areas of professional development. These areas, or “facets,” are from the DiscoverPD professional development framework.

Inquiry, discovery, and creation

Disciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary connections

Leadership

Career development

Managing projects and people

Communication

Value for diversity and inclusion

Interpersonal effectiveness

Personal effectiveness



Interactive self-assessment option (my.grad.wisc.edu/DiscoverPD): All UW-Madison community members may use the online DiscoverPD tool. On the homepage, take a moment to read about the nine facets of professional development. Then complete the self-assessment, and view your customized report of areas of strength and weakness. Remember to focus not only on improving weaknesses but also on continuing to grow in areas where you are strong. Within your report, explore the recommended activities and favorite those that seem interesting. These get stored in My Favorites & Development Tracker. Keep these favorited activities close at hand and skip to page 9.

Self-assessment



Optional: Use the interactive self-assessment at my.grad.wisc.edu/DiscoverPD (requires UW-Madison netID).

Rate your confidence in your ability to do the following activities.

1 = very unconfident; 2 = somewhat unconfident; 3 = neither unconfident nor confident; 4 = somewhat confident; 5 = very confident

Inquiry, discovery, and creation

Inquiry, discovery, and creation describe characteristics of higher order thinking embodied by graduate students, including analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Create, invent, or produce new and innovative concepts or products | <input type="radio"/> |
| Evaluate information, critique, and make judgments based on internal or external evidence | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pursue answers to complex questions | <input type="radio"/> |
| Think and act innovatively to create opportunity | <input type="radio"/> |
| Challenge conventional thinking | <input type="radio"/> |

Disciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary connections

Core to graduate education, disciplinary expertise and interdisciplinary connections inform solutions to complex problems and creating new knowledge.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Achieve the learning outcomes of my academic program, as well as those defined for all UW-Madison graduate students | <input type="radio"/> |
| Acquire depth and breadth of knowledge in my subject area | <input type="radio"/> |
| Develop advanced skills in my subject area | <input type="radio"/> |
| Work with peers and colleagues across disciplines | <input type="radio"/> |
| Embrace the values of my profession | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employ critical and analytical thinking and problem solving | <input type="radio"/> |
| Obtain funding for my research or project | <input type="radio"/> |
| Conduct myself ethically and professionally | <input type="radio"/> |
| Seek and utilize information and technology resources appropriate to my discipline | <input type="radio"/> |



Self-assessment



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Leadership

Leadership occurs at all levels of successful organizations, regardless of formal authority or management role.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Guide strategy and vision (e.g., on team projects) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Move ideas into action | <input type="radio"/> |
| Inspire others to new ways of thinking or acting | <input type="radio"/> |
| Foster creativity and innovation in people around me | <input type="radio"/> |
| Understand the dynamics of organizations | <input type="radio"/> |
| Be proactive and take risks | <input type="radio"/> |
| Acquire resources (e.g., get financial support from leadership, or collaborative support from others) | <input type="radio"/> |

Career development

Career development is a lifelong, proactive process of planning and implementation toward evolving, personally-defined career goals.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Assess my skills, values, and interests | <input type="radio"/> |
| Obtain mentorship | <input type="radio"/> |
| Explore careers (e.g., conduct informational interviews) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Market myself (e.g., utilize LinkedIn or other online platforms) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Interview for jobs successfully | <input type="radio"/> |
| Apply for job openings (e.g., writing a cover letter, resume, and/or CV) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Participate in professional service | <input type="radio"/> |
| Build and communicate my transferable skills to potential employers | <input type="radio"/> |
| Take a lifelong approach to managing my career (e.g., utilizing an IDP, implementing both short- and long-term professional goals) | <input type="radio"/> |

Self-assessment



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1 = very unconfident; 2 = somewhat unconfident; 3 = neither unconfident nor confident; 4 = somewhat confident; 5 = very confident

Managing projects and people

Managing projects and developing people's potential requires an understanding of systematic approach methods, evaluation, and effective use of resources.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Manage projects effectively by setting goals and monitoring results | <input type="radio"/> |
| Supervise and/or mentor others | <input type="radio"/> |
| Provide constructive feedback to others | <input type="radio"/> |
| Manage financial resources (e.g., reading financial statements or budgeting) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Employ systems and technology for productivity | <input type="radio"/> |

Communication

Communication is a bidirectional exchange of information, effective through understanding the intersection of media, audience, and message.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Select and utilize optimal media for a particular message (e.g., when to use written, oral, visual, digital, smart media) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Write for experts in my discipline | <input type="radio"/> |
| Write for a lay audience (i.e., those who are not experts in my discipline) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Creatively engage with the public about my scholarship or research | <input type="radio"/> |
| Write effective grant proposals | <input type="radio"/> |
| Utilize effective technical writing skills for my discipline | <input type="radio"/> |
| Navigate the academic publishing landscape in my discipline | <input type="radio"/> |
| Consult and listen well | <input type="radio"/> |

Self-assessment



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Rate your confidence in your ability to do the following activities.

1 = very unconfident; 2 = somewhat unconfident; 3 = neither unconfident nor confident; 4 = somewhat confident; 5 = very confident

Value for diversity and inclusion

True learning calls for free and open debate, requires respect of all individuals and ideas, and prepares students to live and work in a world that speaks with many voices and from many backgrounds and experiences.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Learn from and work effectively with people from cultural backgrounds different from my own (i.e., demonstrate cultural competence) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Learn from and work effectively with people from international backgrounds (i.e., demonstrate global competence) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Demonstrate equitable and inclusive leadership skills | <input type="radio"/> |
| Promote equitable, inclusive, and respectful workplaces and/or classrooms | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cultivate relationships with people from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures | <input type="radio"/> |
| Recognize differences and similarities as they enhance and enrich experiences for all | <input type="radio"/> |

Interpersonal effectiveness

Interpersonal effectiveness entails recognizing and assessing the impact of one's behavior on others, as well as understanding and cultivating positive relationships - e.g., with peers, coworkers, and advisors.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Form teams and collaborate | <input type="radio"/> |
| Appreciate, embrace, and/or foster the diverse perspectives of people around me | <input type="radio"/> |
| Network effectively with others in a professional setting | <input type="radio"/> |
| Negotiate (e.g., among people with conflicting ideas, salary negotiation) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Resolve conflict between people or groups of people | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mentor others (e.g., help to train undergraduates in my discipline) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Help create a positive climate (i.e., a classroom or workplace where everyone feels comfortable and appreciated) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Work effectively with my faculty advisor, mentor, and/or supervisor | <input type="radio"/> |

Self-assessment



Optional: Use the interactive self-assessment at my.grad.wisc.edu/DiscoverPD (requires UW-Madison netID).

Rate your confidence in your ability to do the following activities.

1 = very unconfident; 2 = somewhat unconfident; 3 = neither unconfident nor confident; 4 = somewhat confident; 5 = very confident

Personal effectiveness

Personal effectiveness describes a set of attitudes and attributes that are needed for lifelong career success.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Maintain an openness to new ideas and perspectives | <input type="radio"/> |
| Cultivate an attitude of curiosity and joy of discovery | <input type="radio"/> |
| Stay motivated | <input type="radio"/> |
| Demonstrate resilience | <input type="radio"/> |
| Demonstrate integrity | <input type="radio"/> |
| Think introspectively | <input type="radio"/> |
| Engage in activities that improve conditions for others or help shape the future of my community (i.e., civic engagement) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Be healthy physically, emotionally, and financially | <input type="radio"/> |
| Manage my time effectively | <input type="radio"/> |
| Stay organized in my academic, employment, and personal responsibilities | <input type="radio"/> |

Interpreting your responses to the self-assessment

If you chose to complete the static self-assessment in this document, you'll need to now review your responses. Take a moment to consider your responses on pages 4 through 8. Note subareas where you feel most confident (rated 4 or 5) and least confident (rated 1 or 2). Circle any to which you feel committed to developing; these will be used in the goal-setting exercises on pages 11, 12, and 13.

Self-assessment

What are your current responsibilities and requirements?

As part of the self-assessment process, ask yourself some questions related to your current responsibilities and requirements. Doing so will lead you to actions or goals to incorporate into your plan. Your aim is to develop skills that will lead to your success in your current position.

What are the requirements and responsibilities you must meet during the next year? Two years?

Are there particular technical skills or discipline-specific knowledge that you need to develop?

Are there scholarly activities you would like to accomplish or work toward during the next year? Two years? (Examples: join a professional organization, present at a conference, co-author a paper...)

Other?

Comments:

Self-assessment

What are your career aspirations?

In preparation for creating a truly individualized IDP, ask yourself some questions related to your career goals. Consider using various resources to see how your values and interests align with potential career goals. Some of these resources include: myIDP (myidp.sciencecareers.org) for STEM fields, Imagine PhD for arts and humanities (coming soon), and the Graduate School's Alumni Career Paths (grad.wisc.edu/alumnicareers).

What type of work would you like to do? What is important to you in your future career?

What competencies are required for your chosen career?

How well do your current skills match the competencies required for your chosen career?

What are your short-term goals related to career exploration? (Examples: learn about science writing, conduct informational interviews, find out where graduates in my field are working/finding careers...)

How will you develop contacts--a network--related to your career exploration goals?

Other?

Comments:

STEP 2: Write the IDP

The IDP helps you map out the general path you want to take toward achieving your goals. The goals you include in your IDP are based on the strengths and weakness that you identified in step 1, together with the milestone activities that mark successful progress through your program (e.g., preparing for prelims), plus any other specific skills and knowledge needed to prepare for your career.

Use the table on pages 12 and 13 as a starting point. You can expand and modify it to fit your own list of goals and strategies. For example, some mentees have transferred and expanded the table into an Excel spreadsheet to track multiple evolving goals over time.

Be sure to identify specific and achievable objectives or skills, and write these in a way that makes very clear what you are going to do. Use a “S.M.A.R.T. Goals” format: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-bound.

A **specific** goal will usually answer the five “W” questions:

What: What do I want to accomplish?

Why: Specific reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal

Who: Who is involved?

Where: Identify a location

Which: Identify requirements and constraints

A **measurable** goal will usually answer questions such as:

How much? / How many? / How will I know when it is accomplished?

An **attainable** goal will usually answer the question:

How: How can the goal be accomplished?

A **relevant** goal can answer yes to these questions:

Does this seem worthwhile?

Is this the right time?

Am I the right person?

Does this match my/our other efforts/needs?

A **time-bound** goal will usually answer the questions:

When?

What can I do 6 months from now?

What can I do 6 weeks from now?

What can I do today?

And remember, your IDP is a living document that will and should be updated and changed as often as necessary

Meyer, Paul J (2003). "What would you do if you knew you couldn't fail? Creating S.M.A.R.T. Goals". *Attitude Is Everything: If You Want to Succeed Above and Beyond*. Meyer Resource Group, Incorporated.

Self-assessment summary

| Confident (4's and 5's on pages 4-8) | Unconfident (1's and 2's on pages 4-8) |
|---|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |

Goals: current responsibilities

Define **approaches and strategies** below, and include a **timeframe** for beginning and completing these actions. Make sure to have an **outcome** statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you've met your **objective**.

| Objectives or skills to be learned | Approaches and strategies | Timeframe | Outcomes |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|----------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |



Goals: career aspirations

Define **approaches and strategies** below, and include a **timeframe** for beginning and completing these actions. Make sure to have an **outcome** statement that is clear enough to allow someone (including you!) to know if you've met your **objective**.

| Objectives or skills to be learned | Approaches and strategies | Timeframe | Outcomes |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|----------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

Goal prioritization

Near term (within the next 6 months)

Long term (more than 6 months away)

| | | |
|---------------|--|--|
| High priority | | |
| Low priority | | |

STEP 3: Discuss with Mentor

Discussing what you discovered from your skills assessment, and talking about your career goals and interests with your mentor might help you identify developmental needs and areas to work on. By helping you compare current skills and strengths with those needed to achieve your career objectives, your mentor can be an important ally.

Some might feel it's risky to share, for example, their weaknesses or their interest in a career outside academia with their mentor. While it's not necessary to share all results right away, consider how the feedback from your mentor might support your plan, and provide insights and resource ideas.

It is strongly recommended that you discuss your plan with your primary mentor but also be creative about whom you approach for advice. You can get useful feedback from multiple people with a broad range of experiences and perspectives including friends, family, staff and faculty other than your primary mentor.

See the university's IDP website (grad.wisc.edu/pd/idp/menteetips) for other tips on the discussion with your mentor.

The university has created an IDP Reporting System (my.gradsch.wisc.edu/idp/myUWIDP.pl) to let your mentor, grad/training program, and/or grants administrator know that you have an IDP if requested. Visit the university's IDP website for more information on this process.

STEP 4: Implement the Plan



Put your plan into action. Stay organized and seek out the support you need to stay on track. Commit to the plan, but also remember that you will need to be flexible and modify your plan as your goals or circumstances change. Keep your IDP in a convenient place and check it often. Add your IDP deadlines to your calendar to integrate them with deadlines for other work and personal events.

STEP 5: Review and Revise Your IDP



Review the IDP with your mentor on a regular basis (on a schedule decided upon together) and revise/update. At a minimum, you should revisit and discuss your IDP with your mentor annually.

And, importantly, celebrate your achievements!

Your name:

Today's date:

Adapted from:

Federation of American Societies of Experimental Biology (FASEB) IDP for Postdoctoral Fellows: faseb.org/portals/2/pdfs/opa/idp.pdf

myIDP website: myidp.sciencecareers.org

Individual Development Plan for UCSF Faculty

Individual Development Plan for Case Western Reserve University Postdoctoral Trainees postdoc.case.edu/current/careers.html

The National Postdoctoral Association Postdoctoral Core Competencies: www.nationalpostdoc.org/competencies

University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School Office of Professional Development, DiscoverPD: my.grad.wisc.edu/DiscoverPD

