



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.

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.

This packet 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 that you are using the right documents before starting this process.

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;
- and links to workshops on creating 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 eight 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 goals.



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

Review goals and help mentee revise as needed.



4. Implement the plan.



5. Revise and update your IDP as needed.

Regularly review and provide support.



Step 1: Conduct a self-assessment



Start the IDP process by taking some time to reflect on your skills, interests, or values.

Static skills 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 and personal effectiveness

Interactive skills 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 eight 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.

Other self-assessment options:

- **IDP for Humanities and Social Sciences (www.imaginephd.com)** - ImaginePhD is a free online career exploration and planning tool for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars in the humanities and social sciences.
- **IDP for Biological and Physical Sciences (myidp.sciencecareers.org)** - myIDP is a web-based career-planning tool, hosted by the AAAS, tailored to meet the needs of graduate students and postdocs in the sciences.
- **Additional IDP options** may be available from your graduate program, department, or professional associations. Explore various IDP tools and use the option that works best for you.



Step 1: Conduct a self-assessment



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
Creating, inventing, or producing new and innovative concepts or products					
Evaluating information, critiquing, and making judgments based on internal or external evidence					
Pursuing answers to complex questions					
Thinking and acting innovatively to create opportunity					
Challenging conventional thinking					

Leadership

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

	1	2	3	4	5
Guiding strategy and vision					
Moving ideas into action					
Inspiring and mentoring others					
Fostering creativity and innovation in others					
Understanding organizational dynamics					
Being proactive and taking risks					
Acquiring resources					



Step 1: Conduct a self-assessment



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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
Achieving learning outcomes of the academic program, as well as those defined for all UW-Madison graduate students					
Demonstrating depth and breadth of knowledge in subject area					
Demonstrating skills in subject area					
Working across disciplines					
Embracing values of the profession					
Employing critical and analytical thinking and problem solving					
Obtaining grants, funding, and other resource for research projects					
Conducting oneself ethically, professionally, and with integrity					
Seeking and utilizing information and technology resources appropriate to the discipline					
Participating in professional service and civic engagement					



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Career development

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

	1	2	3	4	5
Assessing skills, values, and interests					
Obtaining mentorship					
Exploring careers					
Developing job search skills, such as self-marketing, applying, and interviewing					
Building and communicating transferable skills					
Taking a lifelong approach to career management					
Networking					

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
Managing projects by setting goals and monitoring results					
Supervising and/or mentoring others					
Providing constructive feedback					
Managing financial resources (e.g., reading financial statements or budgeting)					
Time management					
Employing systems and technology for productivity					



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Communication

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

	1	2	3	4	5
Selecting and utilizing optimal media - written, oral, visual, digital, and smart media					
Tailoring media and message to audience, including the public and peers					
Creatively engaging the public					
Specialized writing skills, such as technical writing, grant writing, and academic publishing					
Consulting and listening					

Inclusion and diversity

Skills in fostering diversity and inclusion are essential, as these factors are a source of strength, creativity, and innovation, and the contributions of all persons enrich the community as a whole.

	1	2	3	4	5
Gaining global and cultural competence					
Developing equitable and inclusive leadership skills					
Promoting equitable, inclusive, and respectful workplaces and/or classrooms					
Cultivating relationships with people from different backgrounds, experiences, and cultures					
Recognizing differences and similarities as they enhance and enrich experiences for all					



Step 1: Conduct a self-assessment



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Personal and interpersonal effectiveness

Personal and interpersonal effectiveness describes a set of skills and attributes needed for lifelong success, which recognize the importance of wellbeing, how to develop positive relationships, and the impact of one's behavior on others.

	1	2	3	4	5
Being well physically, emotionally, and financially					
Cultivating motivation, resilience, and introspection					
Fostering diverse perspectives					
Forming teams and collaborating					
Negotiating					
Resolving conflict					
Working effectively with one's faculty advisor, mentor, or supervisor					

Interpreting your responses to the self-assessment

If you chose to complete the self-assessment in this document, you'll need to now review your responses. Note in the table below subareas where you feel confident and unconfident. Circle any to which you feel committed to developing; these will be used to write your goals.

Confident (4's and 5's)	Unconfident (1's and 2's)



Step 1: Conduct a 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:



Step 1: Conduct a 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, and the Graduate School's Alumni Career Paths (grad.wisc.edu/alumni-careers).

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 your IDP goals



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 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.



Step 2: Write your IDP goals



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



Step 3: Discuss with Your Mentor(s)

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) for other tips on the discussion with your mentor.

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

