Using An Individual Development Plan For Goal-Setting

Individual Development Plans (or IDPs) have gained prominence in recent years as a tool often used with doctoral students and postdoctoral students in the sciences. However, they can (and should!) be used for any graduate student or professional. An IDP allows you to identify a plan to reach goals related to career and professional interests. Crafting an IDP is a three-part process: 1) assessing your strengths and areas for development; 2) reflecting on other key questions of values, skills, and interests; and 3) writing your plan.

Step 1: Take some time to assess your strengths and areas for improvement in the following areas, all of which have been identified as important skills for doctoral students. You might also consider adding more items to various lists, particularly if there are skills that you know you would like to acquire during your program. The range varies from 1 to 5, where 5 is highly proficient and 1 is an area in which you need improvement

	1	2	3	4	5
General Research Skills					
Expertise in research methods					
Data analysis and interpretation					
Identifying new research areas					
Literature search strategies					
Critical evaluation of the literature					
General knowledge of higher ed literature					
In-depth knowledge of content area					
Grant writing					
Writing for academic publication					
Other:					
Other:					
Teaching					
Facilitating small groups/discussion					
Lecturing					
One-on-one teaching					
Understanding the appropriate role of technology in education					
Deciding on goals of class sessions					
Designing lesson plans					
Assessing student work					
Providing constructive feedback					
Creating inclusive classrooms					
Other:					
Other:					

	1	2	3	4	5
Service					
Involvement in campus organizations					
Involvement in community					
Involvement in professional organizations					
Reviewing conference proposals					
Reviewing journal manuscripts					
Other:					
Other:					
Communication					
Writing for a general audience					
Writing for a higher education audience					
Oral presentation for a general audience					
Oral presentation for a higher education audience					
Social media communication and etiquette					
Email communication and etiquette					
Ability to give constructive feedback					
Ability to receive constructive feedback					
Other:					
Other:					
Interpersonal Effectiveness					
Getting along with others					
Conflict resolution, including difficult conversations					
Networking and meeting new people					
Collegiality					
Understanding others' perspectives					
Working with diverse groups or teams					
Demonstrating cultural competence					
Other:					
Other:					
Leadership					
Leading and motivating others					
Consensus-building skills					

	1	2	3	4	5
Being a change agent					
Coaching and developing others					
Other:					
Other:					
Organizational Skills					
Establishing priorities					
Meeting deadlines					
Managing projects and time					
Setting goals and monitoring results					
Other:					
Other:					
Self-Care					
Setting aside time to pursue own interests					
Spending time with family and friends					
Eating well					
Getting adequate sleep					
Getting exercise					
Other:					
Other:					
Career Development					
Establishing career goals					
Awareness of career opportunities					
Attending career-oriented professional development workshops					
Identifying transferable skills					
Identifying job opportunities					
CV/Résumé building					
Writing cover letters					
Informational interviewing					
Preparing a job talk					
Job interviewing					
Other:					
Other:					

Step 2: As part of the assessment process, in addition to considering your skills, you should also consider the following questions related to requirements of your graduate program and thoughts about your future career. Doing so will allow you to draft a more specific plan with actionable goals.

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

What skills or discipline-specific knowledge do you need to develop?

What coursework is important for you to take?

What scholarly activities would you like to work toward during the next year? Two years? (Examples: Join a professional organization, present at a conference, co-author a paper?)

What teaching activities are important for your career advancement?

What leadership activities do you think are important to engage in for career advancement?

What are some concrete ways that you will engage in self-care over the next year?

Future Position

What type of work would you like to do?

What is important to you in your future career?

What are your short-term (5 years) career goals?

What are your long-term (10-15 years) career goals?

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: conduct informational interviews; learn about working at different institutions…)

Step 3: Writing your IDP[1]

Now that you've engaged in an assessment of your skills and considered your short-term and long-term goals, it is time to draft your IDP. The most important thing to remember about the IDP is that it is a living document; it should be updated and changed on a regular basis.

Your IDP should offer specific goals with measurable outcomes. In drafting your IDP, you should use SMART goals, or goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely.

A **specific** goal identifies the answers to specific criteria. Questions 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 identify criteria for measuring progress. Questions to be answered include: ***How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?***

An **attainable** goal is one that can be reached (e.g., flying to the moon may not be an attainable goal for most of us). An attainable goal will answer the question: ***How can the goal be accomplished?***

A **relevant** goal is one that is worthwhile to you. (In ideal circumstances, if a professional goal, it is also worthwhile to the department or organization.) 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 other efforts/needs?***

A **timely** goal is grounded in a particular time frame. Questions to be answered include: ***When will the goal be accomplished? What can I do six months from now? What can I do six weeks from now? What can I do today?***

Take some time to identify particular goals and associated skills. Use the SMART goal format to be specific, identify the timeframe, and outcomes. Make sure that your outcome statement is clear enough so that anyone can determine if you have met your goal!

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[1] This handout has been adapted from University of Wisconsin-Madison's Individual Development Plan for the Social Sciences and Humanities (https://grad.wisc.edu/pd/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2013/12/The-Individual-Development-Plan-FINAL-11-26-13-1.pdf), Florida State University's Individual Development Plan (http://gradschool.fsu.edu/Professional-Development/Individual-Development-Plan-IDP) , and Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science's Individual Development Plan (http://www.rosalindfranklin.edu/sgps/Home/IndividualDevelopmentPlan.aspx)

Goal (e.g. research, teaching, communication, self-care)	Skill(s) To Be Learned/Developed	How Will You Do This?	When Will You Do this? (Timeframe)	Outcomes (How Will You Know You Have Attained This Goal?)