**Creation of an Individual Development Plan (IDP)**

**for Heartland Center Trainees**

**I. Definition**

An IDP is a private, dynamic, self-evaluation and career exploration tool for graduate students and postdocs.[[1]](#endnote-1) It is a written list of goals mapped to a timeline that includes goal setting for research projects, skills development, and career planning.

**II. Purpose**

An IDP is a tool to assist you with your career and professional development. The IDP is not to be viewed as a formal assessment method. Its primary purpose is to improve your productivity through your awareness of personal qualities and knowledge needed to effectively pursue your academic goals and desired career path. When implemented, an IDP therefore functions as a self-enhancement tool customized to your specific academic and career objectives.

**III. Process**

The IDP process involves two stages:

1. An iterative process between you and your advisor to develop the IDP, and
2. Implementation of short-term and long-term objectives identified in the IDP.

**A. IDP DEVELOPMENT**

During this development process, you and your advisor are active participants, working together to design a plan that helps your meet the goals identified in the IDP. The development process involves identification of *short-term objectives*, with clear expectations and milestones that address *long-term career goals*. The IDP is changeable and should evolve over time.

The fundamental steps involved in the development of an IDP are to:

1. assess your current academic and personal skills, strengths and weaknesses,
2. identify desired skills and knowledge needed to achieve your professional goals,
3. determine areas needing development, and
4. establish a plan to achieve specific skills to help you meet your academic (short-term) and professional (long-term) goals.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Outline of Instructions Related To Each Development Step:

1. Conduct a self-assessment
   1. Identify and define your time commitment to various components of your graduate experience.
   2. Assess your skills, weaknesses and interests:
      1. Using the attached **Self-Assessment Worksheet** and/or,
      2. Using the following **self-assessment tool** that provides a nice resource for this self-assessment.  
          <http://myidp.sciencecareers.org>
2. Discuss career opportunities with your advisor
   1. Identify career opportunities that interest you
   2. Define differences between your current skills and additional skills needed for your identified career objectives.
   3. Prioritize areas for development and discuss strategies for addressing objectives with your advisor.
3. Identify development needs and future goals
   1. Short-term development needs to enhance your academic performance
   2. Long term development needs to enhance your future career/professional performance
4. Define approaches or strategies to develop and ultimately enhance each skill. Use the “SMART” principle when writing these strategies:
   1. **S**pecific - is the strategy focused and unambiguous?
   2. **M**easureable - define metrics to know whether the objective is achieved.
   3. **A**ction-oriented - identify concrete steps to achieve the objective.
   4. **R**ealistic - is the strategy feasible?
   5. **T**ime bound - define a time frame over which the objective will be accomplished.

**Self-Assessment Worksheets**

**Instructions**

As part of the assessment process, and in preparation for creating a truly individualized IDP, ask yourself some questions related to your current responsibilities/requirements and career goals. Doing so will lead you to actions or goals to incorporate into your plan. Focus on developing skills that will lead to your success in your current position and beyond.[[3]](#endnote-3) The following questions will help guide you as you conduct this self-assessment.

Currently

* What are the technical skills or discipline-specific knowledge that you need to develop?
* What scholarly activities would you 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?)
* What resources or support will most help your transition to graduate school?
* What actions can be taken to make sure these needs are met?
* Are there any factors that you are concerned may negatively affect your progress?
* What is important to you in a mentoring relationship?
* What help can your advisor or other faculty/staff provide regarding professional development and graduate training?

Future Position

* What type of work would you like to do?
* Where do you envision yourself 1 year post-graduation? 5-years post-graduation?
* 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 how to write scientific Papers; 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?
* What guidance would help you with your development and exploration of career options?

As a second step in this process, fill out the following tables. The goal is to identify areas in which you need improvement and will therefore develop a strategy to improve. The tables will also help you identify your strengths that may influence choices you make in your professional career that take advantage of those strengths. The items listed are meant to spur your thoughts in each area. They are not exclusive to each area, others can be added and/or switched between short-term and long-term competencies.

**Competency: Communication**

Written, oral and interpersonal communication

1= Needs Improvement 5= Highly proficient

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Short-Term Competencies** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Writing for a discipline-specific audience |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Oral presentation for a discipline-specific audience |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Social media communication & etiquette |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Communicating one-on-one |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Connecting with mentors |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ability to receive constructive feedback |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Networking inside your academic program |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Networking outside your academic program |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Writing a journal manuscript for publication |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Writing a research proposal |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Writing with appropriate grammar and structure |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Long-Term Competencies** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Writing for a general audience |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Oral presentation for a general audience |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Email communication & etiquette |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Ability to give constructive feedback |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Editing your own writing |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Competency: Scholarly Development**

Work with your advisor to identify the technical and knowledge skills needed. These are necessarily **short-term** competencies associated with your academic needs. Add rows as needed

* Technical skill examples: mastery of an analytical instrument, using a statistical software package, writing a journal article
* Knowledge skill examples: Awareness of scientific literature in study area, statistical methods needed to analyze data

1= Needs Improvement 5= Highly proficient

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Technical skills related to my research/creative area (e.g., analytical skills, data analysis)** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| -Specific technical skill: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| -Specific technical skill: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| -Specific technical skill: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Detailed knowledge of my research/creative area** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| -Specific knowledge: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| -Specific knowledge: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| -Specific knowledge: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Other scholarly development skills** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Creativity and innovative thinking |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Identifying and seeking advice |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Research time management |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Enhancing study skills |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Competency: Professionalism**

Leadership, scholarly integrity, transferable skills

1= Needs Improvement 5= Highly proficient

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Short-Term Competencies** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Demonstrating cultural competence |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Working with diverse groups/teams |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Participating in service opportunities |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Demonstrating ethically responsible academic conduct |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Demonstrating ethically responsible research conduct |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Demonstrating skills useful in diverse academic settings |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Setting expectations |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Identifying and seeking advice |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Upholding commitments/deadlines |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Maintaining positive relationships |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Long-Term Competencies** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Respecting contributions of others |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Contributing to a team |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Demonstrating responsible professional conduct |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Demonstrating skills useful in diverse professional settings |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Leading and motivating others |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Avoiding conflicts of interest and dealing with conflict |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Serving as a role model |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Assuming leadership positions |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Providing constructive feedback |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Delegating; providing instruction |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Approaching difficult conversations |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Competency: Career Development**

1= Needs Improvement 5= Highly proficient

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Short-Term Competencies** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| CV/Resume building |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Establishing career goals |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Awareness of career opportunities in your field |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Attending career-oriented professional development workshops |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Use of web-based job search sites |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Establishing processional connections |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Long-Term Competencies** |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Establishing professional networks |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Use of professional social media (Linkedin) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Planning projects |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Breaking down complex tasks |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Managing data and resources |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other: |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Self-Assessment Summary and IDP Form**

Now that you have a good assessment of your skills and strengths, you can see where there are gaps between where you are and where you aspire to be, both in the near term and long term.

Given your self-reflection, list the areas that you want to develop in the short term and long term in the first column of the **Heartland Center IDP Form**. These development needs will then form the basis of your IDP. Add or subtract rows to the form as needed.

The second step in creating your IDP is to consider the means by which you will address your developmental needs. Are there classes, workshops, online tutorials, etc. that can help you grow your skill set in certain areas? Informational interviews, networking, or job shadowing that can help you break in to a career? Allow yourself to think creatively and broadly. Use the SMART Principle described on page 2. Discuss these ideas with your advisor then enter them in the second column of the IDP Form.

The final step is to consider a timeframe for completing your development needs. Short term development needs should be those that can be accomplished during your academic career. Therefore, the timeframe for completing them should be some time prior to your graduation. Likewise, some long term development needs may be addressed while you are a student. However, others may require additional experience and knowledge gained while employed. For those development needs, the completion date can simply be listed as “when employed”.

**B. IDP IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementing the IDP involves doing your best to accomplish the short-term and long-term goals you have established for yourself within the allocated timeframe. When implementing your plan you should:

* Review your plan with your advisor on a regular basis (at least once per semester).
* Revise as necessary.

Prior to each review, you should look it over for any changes you may want to make, such as additional developmental needs you think are important to address, or changing the third column from an estimated completion date to a completed date. The updated IDP should then be discussed with your advisor who may suggest additional needs based on his/her observation of your performance since the last review. In this way, The IDP should be considered a flexible document. Revisions may occur as you become more aware of both academic and professional skills needed to enhance your performance in both areas.

During both the development stage and the implementation stage you should expect your advisor to:

* be familiar with training requirements and opportunities,
* discuss those opportunities with you,
* review your IDP and help your revise it when being developed, and
* establish regular periods for IDP review and revision when it is implemented.

1. University of California Berkeley, Individual Development Plan (IDP) Recommended Practices [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Florida State University, The Graduate School, The Individual Development Plan (IDP) for Mapping Your Progress Toward Degree Completion. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid [↑](#endnote-ref-3)