Preparing an Individual Development Plan (IDP)[1]

Setting goals can help you be more intentional about the experiences you have in your graduate education and training, and can provide key steps in the right direction for you. The best goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely.

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is an essential tool to help you:
- Assess your current skills and strengths
- Create a plan for developing and enhancing skills to help you meet your academic and professional goals
- Communicate with your mentor(s) about your evolving goals and related skills

The IDP you create is a document you will want to revisit again and as your goals change and/or come into focus, and to record your progress and accomplishments.

Many examples and templates for IDPs are available. The American Association for the Advancement of Science has available an online tool for self-assessment and development of IDPs that you may choose to use (https://myidp.sciencecareers.org). We encourage graduate students in CAAS to use the templates provided here, designed for USU graduate students.

Steps for creating an Individual Development Plan

Mentee	Mentor(s)
1. Conduct a self-assessment	
2. Prepare a draft IDP	
3. Discuss goals with mentor(s)	3. Review goals and provide feedback
4. Implement your plan	4. Help guide student to implement plan
5. Revise and update the plan (ideally twice/year)	5. Review progress, help update plan and provide support

Step 1. Conduct a self-assessment
- Recommended: the CAAS "Self-Assessment Worksheet" to perform your own self-assessment
- Alternate: AAAS tool (https://myidp.sciencecareers.org), which is science-based but broadly applicable for research

When performing the self-assessment, it is very important to take time to assess your skills and be personally honest in your answers. A new graduate student is certainly not expected to already harbor strengths on most of the assessment areas. To goals that you will include in the IDP will be based on your perceived strengths and areas for improvement that you identify, plus other specific skills and knowledge needed to prepare you for your desired career. The CAAS assessment tool includes areas to add other competencies or skills or to add context that may be helpful as you develop your IDP. You can choose to keep the self-assessment private, or discuss your thoughts with your adviser as you consider the draft IDP.

Step 2. Draft an IDP
Use the CAAS "Individual Development Plan (IDP) Template" to 1) define goals, 2) outline approaches and strategies for meeting those goals, 3) establish a timeframe for accomplishing those goals, and 4) describe expected outcomes.

Important things to keep in mind:
- The IDP is a "living" document that should be revisited periodically (recommended twice/year at minimum) and updated as appropriate for your current training and interests. The IDP should reflect your current career ambitions, which may change over your time as a graduate student.

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[1] This document is adapted from the "Individual Development Plan" by the Florida State University Graduate School (https://gradschool.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu761/files/media/Files/FSU%20Individual%20Development%20Plan_final.pdf)

- You should identify specific and reasonably achievable objectives or skills to be learned. Write these in a way that makes it clear what steps you will take. The goals should be **Specific**, **Measurable**, **Attainable**, **Relevant**, **Time-limited** (S.M.A.R.T.)

S.M.A.R.T. goals[2]

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 can the goal be accomplished?
   How realistic is the goal, when considering other constraints?

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-limited** goal will usually answer the questions:
   When? / What can I do six months from now? / What can I do six weeks from now?
   What can I do today?

Step 3. Discuss/revise the draft IDP with your mentor(s)
The purpose of discussing the results of your self-assessment and your career goals and interests with your mentor(s) is to help you identify areas needing improvement. Your mentor should help you compare your current skills and strengths with those needed to achieve your career objectives. Also, your mentor can help guide you consider setting the appropriate goals and developing robust approaches for meeting those goals to address any weaknesses that could hinder your success.

You may also consider sharing the self-assessment and IDP with your supervisory committee, other faculty, or other professionals outside of the university, as it is advisable to seek feedback from mentors with varied backgrounds. Others may be familiar with resources or training that can help address your needs.

Step 4. Implement your IDP
At this point, put your plan into action. As you are working on your goals, seek support from many resources (your mentor, your home department, the College and the Graduate School) to help you stay on track.

Step 5. Review and revise the IDP
Remember to be flexible and modify the IDP if your goals or circumstances change. Integrate review of the IDP with your regular meetings with your mentor and supervisory committee and your personal deadlines for work and events. The IDP is a useful framework for structuring progress reports to your supervisory committee. We recommend that students review the IDP with their mentor twice per year, with one meeting including the committee.

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[2] Adapted from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm