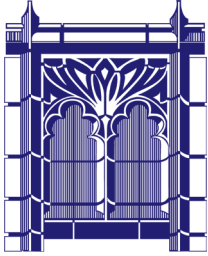


Writing Your Individual Development Plan



THE GRADUATE SCHOOL **mentor memo** AUTUMN QUARTER 2009

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This Mentor Memo, part of a series, responds to graduate students' requests for advice about navigating graduate studies successfully.

The series also addresses topics in career preparation and professional development. For more information and to suggest topics, contact Graduate School Dean Jerry Baldasty at baldasty@u.washington.edu.

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What is an Individual Development Plan (IDP)?

An IDP is not a crystal ball—but it is something that can help as you consider your future. An IDP is a personalized framework that you can use to plan and then position yourself for whatever path you take in graduate school and beyond (and, yes, there is life after grad school).

What are the key elements of an IDP?

The IDP is an inventory of your current skills and strengths, a list of short-term means to improve your existing skill set, an articulated long-term goal or goals, and projected tools or training experiences that you need to be able to achieve a longer term objective.

Who needs an IDP?

Any graduate student would benefit from having an IDP. Whether you're in a master's or a doctoral program, a professional school or arts and sciences, or whether you expect to spend your life in academia or never return after you graduate, you'll be more in charge of your own future if you take the time to craft an IDP.

Where do I start?

Preparing an IDP requires you to catalog your current knowledge, skills, and abilities. You also will think about and summarize what you value and what matters most to you.

- Next, analyze both the requirements to enter the career you seek and opportunities available in that field. If you determine that you lack necessary abilities, identify ways to fill those gaps. But remember—you are not alone in this process!
- This inventory of who you are and what you want to achieve will be committed to writing. Then ask a colleague, family member and/or friend to read it and comment on it.
- The next step: take your plan to your advisor or your degree committee chair or your mentor. Talking with key people informs them about your thinking and the specific kinds of mentoring you need. Ways to modify the plan may arise out of the conversation as well.

there's more... ►

- Beyond the basic conversation about your IDP, set a time-line to specify when you will take a fresh look at your plan, then revise or update it to reflect what you have achieved and to take into account changes in your circumstances.

Do IDPs change?

When you re-visit your IDP six months or a year after you have produced it, it may not need to be changed. However, it's common for your situation to change, your knowledge level and your abilities to change, your personal condition to change, or the overall environment may change. So here's a key point: preparing an IDP is typically not a one-time event, but rather a process. Since the average person changes jobs and even careers many times in a lifetime, the IDP is best viewed as a dynamic document.

What resources can help with an IDP?

- Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology website:
<http://www.rii.com/jobs/post-doc/default.html>
- University workshops on writing an IDP are often offered through a post-doctoral affairs unit, sometimes based in a graduate school.