Individual Development Plan for Graduate Students

An Individual Development Plan (IDP) is a personalized, strategic tool used by graduate students to plan and track their academic, professional, and personal development. It helps students:

- Clarify career goals by identifying interests, values, and skills.
- Set short- and long-term objectives for research, teaching, coursework, skill-building, and career preparation.
- Facilitate communication with advisors or mentors about progress and expectations.
- Track progress over time and adjust goals as needed.
- For some students, IDPs may be required by a funding agency.

For graduate students, especially in research-intensive programs, an IDP can be used in collaboration with faculty mentors to ensure alignment between academic milestones and career aspirations.

IDP Timeline

The IDP process is cyclical and can be managed over whatever cadence and timeline works best for you - we suggest starting the IDP cycle on an annual basis - see the sample timeline below.

Set Goals: Set specific and measurable academic, skill, and career development goals at the start of the academic year

Check In: Check in on your goal progress. Schedule a specific IDP review meeting with your advisor/mentor, or other tools for accountability.

End of Year Check In and Debrief: Review how things went at the end of the academic year. What goals were accomplished, what goals weren't and why?

Review and Assess: Review your year, check ins, and debrief - have your ultimate career plans changed, what does your next year look like?

Set Goals (Aug/Sept) · Check in (Dec/Jan) · Check in & Debrief (April/May) · Review & Assess (June/July)
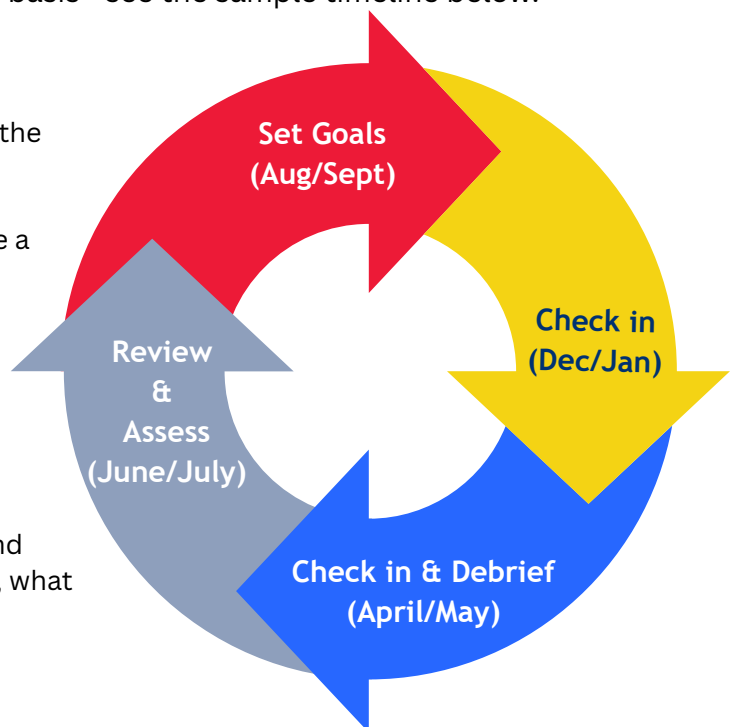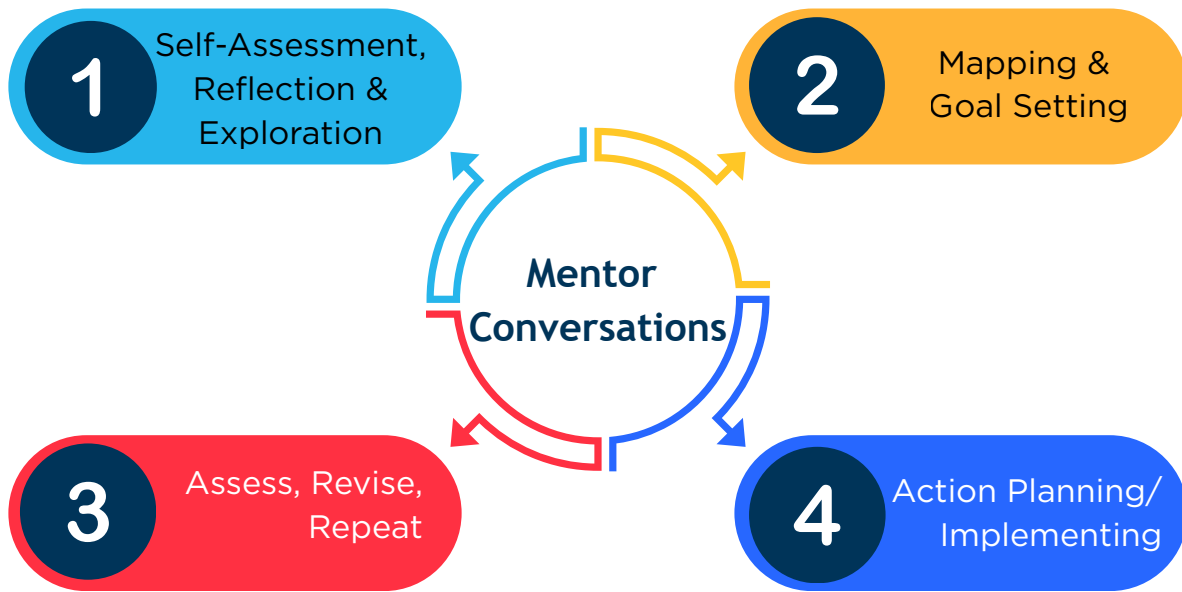
IDP FAQs

Are IDPs required?
KU strongly encourages the use of IDPs but does not require that students have IDPs. However, certain fellowships, grants, programs, schools, or faculty may require them.

Should IDPs be the same from year to year?
No. The IDP is flexible and students can change it at any time, however we recommend that students keep a copy of each iteration of an IDP for reflection and comparison during annual updates and mid-year check-ins.

Steps to Creating and Revising Your IDP

1 Self-Assessment, Reflection & Exploration

2 Mapping & Goal Setting

Mentor Conversations

3 Assess, Revise, Repeat

4 Action Planning/ Implementing

Long-Term Plans and Goals

Estimated Graduation Date (Semester and Year)

Intended Career Paths (List at least two and be specific, if possible.)

Need to explore possible career paths? Visit our career exploration resources>>

Regions and/or Countries that I would ideally like to work in post-graduation

Domestic students seeking employment abroad or international students exploring employment in their home country, within the US or abroad, explore the international job search resources>>

If you are an F-1 Visa Student, how many years of OPT will you have based on your degree program?

Review OPT eligibility, duration, application processes, and more at the ISS OPT webpage>>

Step 1: Self-Assessment, Reflection & Exploration

Creating an Individual Development Plan begins with a thoughtful process of self-assessment and reflection. This section invites you to reflect on your values, strengths, and goals. By assessing where you are and where you want to go, you can make intentional choices that align your graduate experience with your personal and professional aspirations. Honest reflection lays the foundation for intentional planning and meaningful development throughout your academic and professional journey.

The Office of Graduate Studies recommends the following IDP exploration tools to begin your reflection and self-assessment on your skills, interests, and values:

- ImaginePhD (Humanities/Social Sciences) (imaginephd.com)
- MyIDP (STEM) (myidp.sciencecareers.org)
- ChemIDP (Chemistry and chemistry related disciplines) (chemidp.acs.org)
- Career Leader (Business) (careerleader.com)
- Beyond the Professoriate (All PhD degrees)
- Beyond Graduate School (All Master's degrees)
- Interstride (International Students and Domestic Students seeking careers outside the US)

Additionally, the following questions can support self-reflection and discussion with peers and mentors in developing your goals. The Office of Graduate Studies houses all of the above resources and additional career exploration resources at the Career and Professional Development Resource Hub>>
You do not need to respond to all of the questions below. Choose the questions that are most relevant to you based on your stage of your academic program and current needs.

Academic Goals

1. What specific knowledge or skills do I need to strengthen or acquire this year to succeed in my academic program? (Check your academic handbook or the academic catalogue to review your program requirements, speak to your advisor and mentors about coursework requirements. What research methods or technical skills should you focus on developing this year?)
2. What milestones do you need to reach this year? (Comprehensive exams, qualifying exams, prospectus development, thesis/dissertation defense) What do you need to do to prepare for these milestones?
3. How can I align my academic goals with my long-term career aspirations?
4. What resources, mentors, or support systems do I need to reach my academic goals?

Career/Professional Development Goals

1. Do you have 2 or 3 career paths or careers of interest identified?
2. What are the next steps for moving towards that career? What experiences or skills would help you be better prepared or qualified? (ex. internships, experience with specific technical or software platforms)
3. Did you reach out to alumni or others working in your fields of interest to build your network?

Skill Development Goals

1. What are the top 3-5 required skills in the jobs/positions you are interested in or have been noted as important skills to have based on your conversations with people working in the field?
2. Have you done an informational interview with alumni or others working in your fields of interest to build your network and learn more about your careers of interest?

Personal and Wellness Goals

1. How is your physical and mental health? Are you finding activities to help support your wellness?
2. Have you connected with other students or community members to build a network of support and socialization.
3. Graduate school can be stressful - how are you managing any stress you are experiencing? Are you seeking out resources such as workshops offered by CAPS or the KU Heath Resource Office?

Funding/Money Goals

1. Have you discussed with your advisor fellowships or grants in your discipline that you should explore applying for and what the timeline for a competitive application may be?
2. Have you explored PIVOT to see what other external funding opportunities you may consider applying for?

Step 2: Mapping & Goal Setting

Following your self-assessment and reflection, develop a few short-term and long-term goals for yourself. To help support the successful completion of your goals, make sure they're SMART goals:

S - Specific: make sure you a focused on what you want to achieve and that it is not over ambiguous.
M - Measurable: create definable metrics so you can determine when the goal has been achieved or met
A - Achievable: ensure the goal is not so broad or complex that it isn't achievable
R - Relevant: goals should align with your overall academic, personal, and career objectives
T - Time-bound: each goal should have a clear deadline that is reasonable for the completion of the goal.

You do not need a goal in each category, but consider developing at least 2 short-term (can be completed in a few weeks or a semester) and 2 long-term goals every year (may take the full year). You may consider developing more than 2 short-term goals but spreading them out across the academic year. When possible, give yourself specific deadlines.
See blank template on page 7 where you can build your goal plan!

Academic Goals	Examples: Schedule and complete comprehensive exams in **April 2026** Submit full draft of dissertation prospectus to committee - **Target due date December 13th.**
Career/Professional Development Goals	Examples: **Short-term** - Update LinkedIn profile, get a new headshot at the Career Fair - **Target due date - September 15th.** **Long-term** - Schedule three informational interviews with alumni to get a better understanding of skills and experiences needed to be successful in X career. Deadline - **by end of Fall semester.**
Skill Development Goals	Examples: **Short-term** - Participate in a science communication workshop to learn best practices in translating/communicating my work to a non-specialist audience - **by end of Spring semester.** **Long-term** - Attend the CTE workshop series on "Telling Your Teaching Story" to enhance skills in backwards course design and develop draft documents for my teaching portfolio - **3 sessions for Fall 2026 semester.**
Personal/Wellbeing Goals	Examples: Attend yoga class weekly for the spring semester Attend the "Focus for Success Skills Workshop" - October 29th Sign up for the GAP Cooking class in November to learn about cooking dishes from Zambia
Money/Funding Goals	Examples: Apply for ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship - **Due January 10, 2026** Attend Saving and Investing 101: Virtual Workshop from Jayhawk Finances **in September**

Step 3: Action Planning/Implementing

Now that you've developed goals, let's put this plan into action! Consider the network of mentors, advisors, offices, and resources at and beyond KU that can help support you in accomplishing your goals. One place to start is building a draft of your mentoring team. Think broadly when considering who can be in your network to help you accomplish your goals including:

- Faculty mentors and advisors in your department
- Other faculty at KU or at other institutions
- Alumni from your program working in career paths or at organizations of interest
- Career advisors
- Other graduate peers
- People in your personal network - friends, relatives - you never know!

Build your network and reach out! Do you need support in building your network? We have resources to help page 7.

Goal 1:

People and/or resources that can help me accomplish this goal:

Goal 2:

People and/or resources that can help me accomplish this goal:

Goal 3:

People and/or resources that can help me accomplish this goal:

Step 4: Assess, Revise, Repeat!

Schedule an annual or biannual review of your goals either for yourself or in collaboration with your primary faculty advisor. Consider discussing the following:

Assess
- What goals did you achieve? Which goals were you unable to achieve - what obstacles did you run into?
- What skills and/or competencies did you strengthen or develop?
- What did you learn? - What new things do you know now that you may have not previously?
- Have your career plans changed? Have any key values changed?

Revise
- What goals may need to be carried over to the next iteration of your IDP?
- Reflect and assess where you are now - what skills, experiences, and goals should be a focus for this coming year?
- What are the upcoming academic requirements and milestones for the next year?
- Do you need to adjust or change your long-term goals or ultimate career goals?

Repeat
- Build your updated IDP for the next semester or academic year!

Resources and Further Readings

Building Your Network

- **Webinar**: "Cultivating Your Network of Mentors, Sponsors & Collaborators"
  - KU maintains an institutional subscription for NCFDD - you can use your institutional credentials to create a free account.
- **Article:** Montgomery, B.L. (2017) Mapping a Mentoring Roadmap and Developing a Supportive Network for Strategic Career Advancement. SAGE Open, 7(2). (Original work published 2017) Access here.
- Sample Graduate Student Mentor Map from Rackham Graduate School, University of Michigan's MORE Graduate Student Mentoring Guide (2024). See page 25.

Self-Assessment & Career Exploration

- **Resource:** O*Net Soft Skills Custom List Tool

- **Resource:** Career Exploration Resources from the Office of Graduate Studies>>

- **Resource:** Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook - Master's level

- **Resource:** Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook - Doctoral or professional degree level

Goal Setting & Planning

- **Webinar**: "Every Semester Needs a Plan" from NCFDD

- **Article:** Montgomery, B.L. (2017) Mapping a Mentoring Roadmap and Developing a Supportive Network for Strategic Career Advancement. SAGE Open, 7(2). (Original work published 2017) Access here.
- ImaginePhD list of suggested goals for IDPs>>

My IDP Goals and Plans

Following your self-assessment and reflection, develop a few short-term and long-term goals for yourself. To help support the successful completion of your goals, make sure they're SMART goals:

S - Specific: make sure you a focused on what you want to achieve and that it is not over ambiguous.
M - Measurable: create definable metrics so you can determine when the goal has been achieved or met
A - Achievable: ensure the goal is not so broad or complex that it isn't achievable
R - Relevant: goals should align with your overall academic, personal, and career objectives
T - Time-bound: each goal should have a clear deadline that is reasonable for the completion of the goal.

Year or Semester
(ex. Fall 2025 or 2025-2026)

Academic Goals	
Career/Professional Development Goals	
Skill Development Goals	
Personal/Wellbeing Goals	
Money/Funding Goals	

My IDP Goals and Plans - Multi-Year Plan

Following your self-assessment and reflection, develop a few short-term and long-term goals for yourself. To help support the successful completion of your goals, make sure they're SMART goals:

S - Specific: make sure you a focused on what you want to achieve and that it is not over ambiguous.
M - Measurable: create definable metrics so you can determine when the goal has been achieved or met
A - Achievable: ensure the goal is not so broad or complex that it isn't achievable
R - Relevant: goals should align with your overall academic, personal, and career objectives
T - Time-bound: each goal should have a clear deadline that is reasonable for the completion of the goal.

Year 1

Academic Goals	
Career/Professional Development Goals	
Skill Development Goals	
Personal/Wellbeing Goals	
Money/Funding Goals	

My IDP Goals and Plans - Multi-Year Plan

Following your self-assessment and reflection, develop a few short-term and long-term goals for yourself. To help support the successful completion of your goals, make sure they're SMART goals:

S - Specific: make sure you a focused on what you want to achieve and that it is not over ambiguous.
M - Measurable: create definable metrics so you can determine when the goal has been achieved or met
A - Achievable: ensure the goal is not so broad or complex that it isn't achievable
R - Relevant: goals should align with your overall academic, personal, and career objectives
T - Time-bound: each goal should have a clear deadline that is reasonable for the completion of the goal.

Year 2

Academic Goals	
Career/Professional Development Goals	
Skill Development Goals	
Personal/Wellbeing Goals	
Money/Funding Goals	

My IDP Goals and Plans - Multi-Year Plan

Following your self-assessment and reflection, develop a few short-term and long-term goals for yourself. To help support the successful completion of your goals, make sure they're SMART goals:

S - Specific: make sure you a focused on what you want to achieve and that it is not over ambiguous.
M - Measurable: create definable metrics so you can determine when the goal has been achieved or met
A - Achievable: ensure the goal is not so broad or complex that it isn't achievable
R - Relevant: goals should align with your overall academic, personal, and career objectives
T - Time-bound: each goal should have a clear deadline that is reasonable for the completion of the goal.

Year 3

Academic Goals	
Career/Professional Development Goals	
Skill Development Goals	
Personal/Wellbeing Goals	
Money/Funding Goals	

My IDP Goals and Plans - Multi-Year Plan

Following your self-assessment and reflection, develop a few short-term and long-term goals for yourself. To help support the successful completion of your goals, make sure they're SMART goals:

S - Specific: make sure you a focused on what you want to achieve and that it is not over ambiguous.
M - Measurable: create definable metrics so you can determine when the goal has been achieved or met
A - Achievable: ensure the goal is not so broad or complex that it isn't achievable
R - Relevant: goals should align with your overall academic, personal, and career objectives
T - Time-bound: each goal should have a clear deadline that is reasonable for the completion of the goal.

Year 4

Academic Goals	
Career/Professional Development Goals	
Skill Development Goals	
Personal/Wellbeing Goals	
Money/Funding Goals	