Individual Development Plan for Postdoctoral Scholars

Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for Postdoctoral Scholars provide a written framework for identifying professional development needs as well as career goals. IDPs create an opportunity for the postdoc and faculty mentors to openly discuss the postdoc's career goals and work together to create a plan to help the postdoc reach those goals.

The IDP will aid the postdoc in creating and accomplishing both long term goals and short term goals in order to work towards the desired career goal. For the postdoc to receive the maximum benefit from the IDP process, it is essential that both the postdoc and the faculty mentors participate fully in the process.

Most postdocs work with a primary mentor. For the IDP process, it is recommended that all postdocs identify another faculty member to serve as a secondary mentor to provide additional guidance.

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IDP Process and Responsibilities for Postdocs
1. Self Assessment
Before starting to create the IDP, postdocs should conduct a thorough self-assessment of their skills and interests. Below are two free resources which are recommended to help guide you through the self-assessment process.

myIDP at ScienceCareers (most helpful for postdocs in the sciences)
http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/
myIDP offers users the following:
* Exercises to help you examine your skills, interests, and values
* A list of 20 scientific career paths with a prediction of which ones best fit your skills and interests
* A tool for setting strategic goals for the coming year, with optional reminders to keep you on track
* Articles and resources to guide you through the process

National Postdoctoral Association: 6 Core Competencies and Competency Checklist
http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/competencies#evaluation
The NPA has created a Postdoctoral Core Competencies Toolkit to provide guidance to postdocs seeking to develop a diverse professional skillset. The NPA has determined 6 Core competencies for postdocs to consider for training and development:
1. Discipline-specific conceptual knowledge
2. Research skill development
3. Communication skills
4. Professionalism
5. Leadership and management skills
6. Responsible conduct of research

As a tool to assist postdocs with their self-assessment, the Office of Research encourages postdocs to assess their core competencies through the NPA Core Competencies Self-Assessment Checklist:
http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/images/stories/Documents/ToolkitDocuments/competency-checklist.pdf

2. Discuss Career Opportunities with Mentors

- In addition to seeking guidance from your mentor, ask another faculty member to serve as a secondary mentor.
- Determine what opportunities interest you.
- Compare current skills and strengths with those needed for desired careers.
- Determine which skills areas need to be developed in order to prepare for desired career.
- Work with mentors to determine how to develop the needed skillsets.

3. Create an Individual Development Plan

This document is a roadmap to achieving your career goals. It is a flexible document which may be revised and updated frequently. The goal is to identify current strengths and skillsets, as well as areas to be further developed to help the postdoc work towards their career goals. It is helpful to break larger projects into smaller projects for inclusion in the IDP.

- You should complete the first draft of the IDP on your own after a discussion of career opportunities with your mentors.
- Share your draft IDP document with your mentors and work together to identify your strengths, as well as areas where you need to acquire additional skills or training.
- Update the IDP to reflect the recommendations of your mentors.
- Edit, update and revise your IDP as often as needed and discuss changes with your faculty mentors.

4. Put Your Plan Into Action

In order to for the IDP to be helpful in your career development, you must work to bring the IDP to life through learning new skills and strengthening areas of your background identified in your IDP. The IDP can be revised as circumstances change and should be reviewed with your mentors as needed.

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IDP Process and Responsibilities for Postdoc Mentors

1. Think broadly about traditional and alternative career opportunities in your discipline, as well as current job trends. Discuss career opportunities with postdoc.
2. Review the IDP prepared by the postdoc and provide honest, constructive comments. Help the postdoc design a feasible plan for research progress and professional development. Help the postdoc identify areas in need of further training in order to reach career goal.
3. Create a process for regular review of the IDP. The IDP will need to be revised as circumstances change, and it is most helpful if the mentor and postdoc work together to modify the IDP.

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Resources Available to USC Postdocs

Center for Teaching Excellence

http://www.sc.edu/cte/

The Center for Teaching Excellence offers frequent seminars on current topics in teaching, as well as a monthly Focus on Learning, Innovation and Pedagogy (FLIP) discussion group.

USC Postdoctoral Association

http://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/research/support_for_researchers/postdoc_association/

The USC Postdoctoral Association offers monthly professional development seminars, as well as networking opportunities for postdocs.

National Postdoctoral Association

http://www.nationalpostdoc.org/

USC is a Sustaining Member of the NPA, which means that all USC postdocs are eligible for a free Affiliate membership in the NPA, including access to NPA resources.