

IDP Advisor Guide

Purpose of this guide

This guide is intended to help faculty advisors, graduate program directors, and mentors use the Individual Development Plan as a practical framework for developmental conversations with PhD students in engineering. The IDP is not simply a form to complete; it is a tool to support goal setting, progress monitoring, mentoring, and reflection across the academic year.

How advisors can use the IDP

The IDP can help advisors:

- Clarify expectations early in a student’s doctoral experience.
- Guide conversations about research development, academic milestones, and professional growth.
- Help students identify strengths, areas for development, and realistic priorities.
- Encourage students to think intentionally about career direction and support needs.
- Create a structure for revisiting goals and adjusting plans over time.

Suggested timeline for use

Check-in point	Description
Early semester	Use the first conversation to review the student’s initial goals, discuss expectations, and identify immediate priorities for the first term.
Mid-year	Revisit the student’s goals, note progress made, identify areas where plans should be revised, and discuss any emerging challenges or new opportunities.
End of year	Use the reflection section to review accomplishments, identify lessons learned, and help the student begin planning for the next academic year.

Recommended advising approach

Stage of meeting	Suggested discussion prompts
Before the meeting	Ask the student to complete a draft of the IDP in advance. Review the document with attention to both goals and gaps. Note places where the student may need clarification, encouragement, or referral to campus resources.
During the meeting	Begin with the student's own goals and priorities. Ask open-ended questions rather than treating the IDP as a checklist. Help the student distinguish between immediate, medium-term, and long-term goals. Focus on progress and alignment, not perfection. Identify one or two concrete next steps before concluding.
After the meeting	Encourage the student to revise the document based on the conversation. Confirm any follow-up actions, deadlines, or referrals. Return to the IDP at future advising meetings as needed.

Career vision

- What long-term possibilities are you considering right now?
- What experiences or credentials may be important for those paths?
- How certain or uncertain do you feel about your direction at this stage?

Self-assessment

- Which areas feel strongest right now?
- Which skills would be most valuable to strengthen this year?
- What evidence supports your current self-assessment?

Goal setting

- Which goals are most important this semester?
- Are these goals realistic given your current responsibilities and timeline?
- What would meaningful progress look like by the end of the term?

Timeline and pacing

- Does your semester plan seem manageable?
- Where might workload become too heavy?
- What can be shifted, sequenced, or simplified?

Mentoring and support

- Who else should be part of your support network?
- Are there people or resources you have not yet connected with?
- How often would check-ins be most helpful?

Challenges and wellbeing

- What obstacles do you anticipate this semester?
- What strategies have helped you manage similar challenges before?
- What support would make the biggest difference right now?

Advising principles to emphasize

- The IDP should support honest reflection, not performative answers.
- Students do not need to have every long-term goal fully defined.
- Growth in research, teaching, professional development, and wellbeing may happen at different rates.
- A shorter, realistic plan is more useful than an overly ambitious one.
- Revising goals is a normal and healthy part of doctoral development.

When to refer students to additional support

Advisors may want to connect students with additional resources when students indicate needs related to:

- Writing support
- Teaching development
- Career exploration
- Time management and organization
- Professional skills development
- Mental health, stress, or wellbeing concerns

Optional closing language for advisors

You might close the conversation with language such as:

“This plan does not need to be perfect. What matters most is that it helps you identify priorities, make steady progress, and know where to seek support. We can revisit and revise it as your goals evolve.”

One-page advisor checklist

- ✓ Student completed an initial draft.
- ✓ Career interests or longer-term goals were discussed.
- ✓ Priority goals for the semester were identified.
- ✓ Immediate next steps were clarified.
- ✓ Support network and mentoring needs were reviewed.
- ✓ Potential challenges were discussed.
- ✓ Follow-up date or next check-in was identified.

Final note

The most effective use of the IDP is relational, not administrative. When used well, it can help students feel more grounded, supported, and intentional as they begin doctoral journey.