FAQ for Students

Professional Development/Individual Development Plan

Q: Why have Professional Development (PD) and the Individual Development Plan (IDP) become a requirement?

A: In November 2013, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research established the Professional Development Advisory Board, bringing together internal and external stakeholders to examine the issues relevant to careers for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, and to develop a strategic plan for professional development at the University of Alberta. The strategic plan brought to FGSR Council recommended the introduction of a professional development requirement. Supported by two prior GSA presidents and the GSA Executive at the time, the Graduate Student Association was strongly behind this endeavor. On April 29, 2015 a motion was passed at FGSR Council to include a professional development requirement for incoming students, including an Individual Development Plan and eight hours of professional development activities.[1]

Q: Is there evidence to support the need for a PD requirement?

A: The PD requirement is supported by research findings which reveal that a significant portion of graduate students will enter positions outside of academia resulting in global recognition that successful graduate programs must assist graduate students transition into all sectors of work. Research also shows that graduate students find it challenging to transition into the workplace due to underdeveloped professional skills and network, as well as difficulty articulating the skills gained through their graduate programs. These challenges are persistent for all graduate students *regardless* of the discipline.

The PD Requirement is intended to ease your transition into the workplace and to offer you the opportunity to begin thinking about career options early in your graduate program. Your supervisor and departments may already include mentoring and support in their role of advancing students' careers. In addition to the opportunities offered through FGSR students are encouraged to explore PD opportunities within their own departments.

Q: Who has to complete the Professional Development Requirement?

A: As of Fall 2016 all incoming students (Master's and PhD) must complete the Professional Development (PD) Requirement. There are a few of faculties/programs that complete the Professional Development Requirement *within* their programs and are therefore NOT required to complete FGSR's PD requirement.

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[1] The Professional Development Requirement was subsequently reviewed by University Governance (GFC, Board of Governors, Senate).

**Q: What does the Professional Development Requirement include?**

A: There are **two components** included in the Professional Development Requirement:

1. Individual Development Plan (IDP)
2. Eight hours of Professional Development (PD) activities

Completing these of activities is of benefit to all students, and it is strongly recommended that current students also complete PD activities and an IDP.

Q: What is involved in the IDP?

A: FGSR has developed a Workbook and Tip Sheets that guides you through your IDP. The IDP has 4 main components:
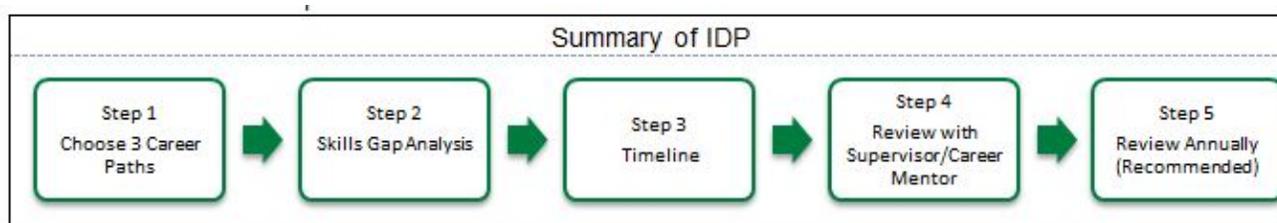
Q: Are other institutions requiring graduate students to complete a PD Requirement?

A: The University of Alberta is the first Canadian institution to make PD a requirement for all graduate students. Other major universities are considering how they can implement a similar requirement and are looking to the University of Alberta as a leader.

Q: Can a student receive an exemption from the PD Requirement?

A: At the heart of the PD Requirement is the notion that professional development is a lifelong pursuit that continues in graduate studies. Although we don't grant exceptions to the requirement, we do acknowledge that students can fulfill the expectations through a different route. Approval for alternate fulfillment of the PD Requirement must be approved in writing by the student's supervisor, graduate coordinator/chair, and the Dean of FGSR.

Q: When does the PD Requirement have to be completed?

A: The UA Calendar states that the IDP must submit an individualized professional development plan to the department for their program of studies within 12 months of the program's commencement for master's students and within 18 months of the program's commencement for doctoral students. As part of a student's program requirements, the UA Calendar stipulates that PD activities must be completed within the first 3 years for almost all doctoral students and time of completion for master's students.

Q: What support is available to me as I complete my IDP?

A: FGSR runs a 3-part series that supports the completion of your IDP. This series runs on a regular basis and registration is open to all students. The Professional Development page of the FGSR website also offers several resources that support the completion of your IDP.

Q: Who reviews the IDP with students?

A: Generally speaking, your supervisor will review the IDP with you; however, students are free to seek a career mentor who will review the IDP. For example, you may wish to have your IDP reviewed by an individual who is working in a field in which you are interested. If you are working with a career mentor, it is strongly recommended that you share your IDP timeline for program completion with supervisor. This will support open communication that is part of every healthy working relationship.

Q: How do I know when my IDP is complete?

A: Once you have completed your IDP, you will review it with your supervisor/career mentor. Your supervisor/ mentor will determine whether they think you have spent sufficient time and consideration on the IDP, particularly as it relates to the timeline for program completion. Once your supervisor has indicated that he/she accepts your IDP as complete, you have fulfilled the IDP component of your PD requirement. To make the *best* use of your IDP, FGSR strongly recommends that all students individually review the IDP and PD activities on a quarterly basis as well as on an annual basis with their supervisor/career mentor.

Q: Am I required to show my skills assessment to my supervisor/mentor?

A: In some cases students may wish to share their skills assessment with their supervisor/mentor; however, you are **not required** to show your supervisor/career mentor your skills assessment and are permitted to keep this information private.

Q: Do I have to submit my IDP to my Department?

A: No. You will review your IDP with your supervisor/career mentor; however, the IDP document is not kept in your student records. The IDP is your document to which you should refer and update frequently throughout your program.

Q: Do the PD activities provided on campus cost students money?

A: The vast majority of activities/training outlined in the Professional Development Opportunities Guide are free to students. There are a handful of cost recovery units on campus (e.g. Career Centre and Student Success Centre) that charge a small fee for *some* of the services.

Q: What is considered Professional Development?

A: While FGSR has provided guidelines around what does and does not count towards the professional development requirement, departments have the final say. In some cases, departments will permit students to direct their PD activities as they see fit. In other cases, departments may wish to limit the activities they will count towards the PD requirement. Please

visit your department website or check with your department administrator/coordinator to determine what will be counted as PD activities.

Q: Why are research conferences, paper/poster presentations, and performances/exhibitions not counted as PD hours?

A: While FGSR wholeheartedly acknowledges that research conferences, paper/poster presentations, and performances/exhibitions are PD activities, it considers such activities to be part of your research program. Therefore, they do NOT count towards your 8-hours of PD activities. The PD requirement aims at developing non-disciplinary skills and competencies which will assist you in successfully transitioning into the workplace. It is these non-disciplinary skills that have been identified within research as barriers to successful transition into the workplace.

Q: I attended a research conference that included career development sessions. Can I count these towards my PD activities?

A: Yes! Many conferences include sessions on career management or teaching. These types of sessions can be counted towards the 8-hour PD activities requirement. Since departments have the final say about what does and does not count towards the 8-hours of PD activities, it is recommended that you verify with your department that it will count these types of sessions.

Q: How do I choose my PD activities?

A: Components 1 and 2 of the IDP ask you to determine 3 career paths you wish to pursue and to complete a skills gap analysis. Based on this information, *you* are responsible for selecting PD activities that reflect: 1) the skills and competencies needed in your chosen career paths; and, 2) the skills and competencies requiring development in order to be competitive in your chosen fields. Some departments may choose to prescribe all or a portion of the 8-hour PD activities. Please verify how your department is handling the 8-hour PD activities requirement.

Q: How are PD hours counted?

A: Generally speaking the Professional Development hours earned is equivalent to the length of the session. Most of FGSR's sessions are 1 to 1.5 hours each. If you complete courses on MyGradSkills you will receive 1 hour of PD credit for each course completed. You may **not receive more than 4 hours credit** from any single category of PD outlined in the FGSR PD guidelines. Please plan your activities accordingly.

Q: Where do I find out about Professional Development sessions?

A: The Professional Development eBulletin (to which all students are automatically subscribed) posts over 500 professional development opportunities each year. In addition to sessions offered throughout the year, FGSR offers a host of workshops during Professional Development weeks. Such topics include resume writing, conflict management, transitioning into the workplace, and professional etiquette. Students can also access professional development opportunities through FGSR's Graduate Teaching and Learning Program. UofA students likewise have access to MyGradSkills.ca, which offers 18 online sessions related to professional development topics. There are also a number of units on campus that offer programming that

fulfills the PD requirement. These are outlined in our professional development guide. Students are also encouraged to seek out PD opportunities within their Departments and through their discipline's professional associations.

Q: How do I provide evidence that I have attended a PD session?

A: You are expected to conduct your professional development activities with the same integrity you apply to all other areas of your graduate program. You can demonstrate that you have attended sessions through a variety of ways. Your Department determines what they consider acceptable evidence. ***You are responsible for keeping track of the sessions you have attended. Please keep a list of your activities and safeguard your proof of attendance.*** Please check with your Department to verify what they expect. Options include:

- Google sign-in is available at all FGSR events. Students receive a confirmation of their sign-in through email, which they retain as evidence of their attendance.
- Students can sign a Declaration of Attendance. (The presenter at the session/workshop also signs the form to verify attendance.)
- Many online courses provide students with a certificate of completion/participation.
- Departments may choose to develop and use a PD record book. Students verify their attendance by having session presenters sign the document. (Some departments are already doing this with the Ethics and Academic Integrity Requirement.)

Q: Who should I ask if I have questions about the PD requirement?

A: If you have questions about the PD requirement that are not outlined here, please speak with your Graduate Administrator/Coordinator/Chair.

Q: Once it has been determined that I have completed my IDP and PD activities, what happens next?

A: Once it has been determined that you have completed both your IDP and PD activities, you will fill out the Individual Development Plan and Professional Development Form and have your supervisor/career mentor sign it.

Q: Where do I take the Individual Development Plan and Professional Development Form?

A: Once you and your supervisor/career mentor have signed Individual Development Plan and Professional Development Form, you should submit the form to your Graduate Coordinator/Administrator. He/she will sign the form and file it in your department student record. This form **does not** get submitted to FGSR.

Q: How were the 7 skills and competencies outlined in the IDP determined?

A: In 2013 the University struck a committee that proposed the 7 skills and competencies that now appear in the IDP. Headed by Steven Dew (current Provost), and in consultation with student leaders (GSA and SU presidents), the committee looked at skills outlined in the graduate programs of other major universities. The 7 skills and competencies proposed attempted to capture the attributes that define University of Alberta graduates. The 7 skills and competencies then went to the Professional Development Advisory Board, which was comprised of stakeholders from academia, industry, not-for-profit, and government. In addition

to the 7 skills and competencies proposed by the University committee, the PD Advisory Board consulted the skills considered to be important by the TRI-Council and CAGS (Canadian Association of Graduate Studies). The PD Advisory Board determined that there is no *single* list of non-disciplinary skills that can be pointed to and determined to use the 7 skills and competencies originally proposed by the initial University committee. The University of Alberta Graduate Student and Postdoctoral Fellow Professional and Career Development Plan outlining these skills and competencies was presented to FGSR council, Deans Council, and various levels of governance, including the Board of Governors, between January and March of 2015. The motion was presented to FGSR council in April 2015 and voted on in May 2015.

Questions about the Professional Development Requirement can be directed towards:

Deanna Davis, PhD
Professional Development Instructional Design Specialist
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
deanna.davis@ualberta.ca
780-248-5742

Renee Polziehn, PhD
Professional Development & Community Volunteer Program
Director
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
rpolzieh@ualberta.ca
780-492-0978