

Choosing a Dissertation Advisor: Why do I need one and how do I get one?

The ideal thesis advisor should be successful as a scientist, experienced directing students, and willing to commit the time and resources needed for you to become successful yourself.”

“When shopping around for an advisor the idea is to fit the type of advisor and stages of their career development with the personality type and goals of the prospective student...”

How to choose a Dissertation Advisor

Understand your goals for the Dissertation

- To learn how to ask interesting and important questions.
- To learn how to translate these questions into experiments that will produce verifiable results.
- To learn how to critically evaluate the results of these experiments.
- To learn how to present your ideas and data to the scientific world in written and oral form.

Develop an Individual Development Plan: MyIDP



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You have put a lot of time and effort into pursuing your PhD degree. Now it's time to focus on how to leverage your expertise into a satisfying and productive career. An individual development plan (IDP) helps you explore career possibilities and set goals to follow the career path that fits you best.

myIDP provides:

- 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

There is no charge to use this site and we encourage you to return as often as you wish. To learn more about the value of IDPs for scientists, read the first article in our myIDP series.

Click below to get started.

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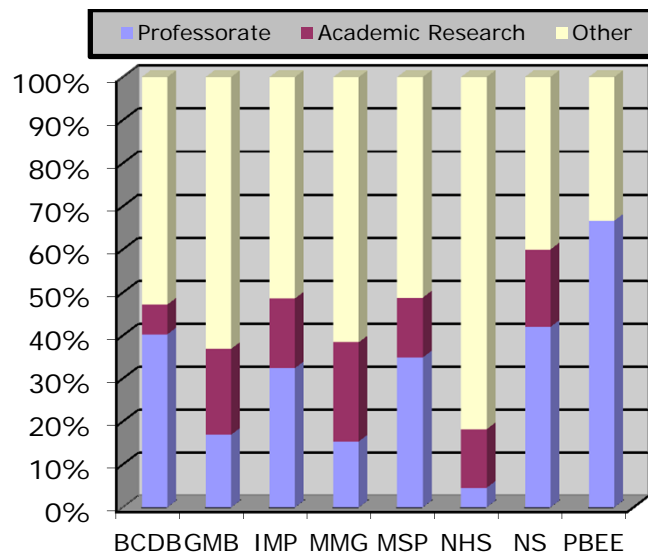
Individual Development Plans

5-year planning tool to direct and document your training

Living document that is routinely revised and updated

A nationwide study of 7600 postdoctoral researchers found that postdocs who developed training plans with their advisers at the start of their appointments reported greater satisfaction, published more papers, and experienced fewer conflicts with those advisers.

Mentors reported similar benefits for their postdocs, and both groups found the IDP to be helpful for facilitating communication about postdocs' career goals. Graduate students at the University of California, San Francisco, reported similar beneficial effects.



GDBBS outcomes 5 years after degree

Less than half in academia

Only half of those are in the professoriate

Others go into

- law
- journalism
- intellectual property
- public policy
- biotech and big pharma
- etc.

Advisor vs. Mentor vs. Role Model

Role Model- A person who leads by positive example. May not have a personal relationship with you (or even know you).

Advisor- Directs your dissertation research. Responsible for seeing that you learn the basic skills and supports you in your dissertation research. May or may not be a Mentor.

Mentor- A trusted, more experienced individual who leads through guidance and shares their wisdom. The mentor takes a personal role in developing your professional career and challenges and supports both your professional and personal development.

Roles of a mentor

Offer counsel and advice on workplace values and expectations.

Nurture career and personal development.

Act as a confidant and friend.

Share interest and knowledge.

Challenge level of aspirations.

Provide insight into career opportunities /options.

Spend one-on-one time.

Provide assistance for developing “Individual Development Plan”.

Promote action and activities that are positive.

Make introduction to key players.

Your role as a good Protégé

Establish and maintain a philosophy for high performance.

Have a positive attitude.

Have a clear vision of where you are going.

Be proactive.

Invest time and energy in your personal development.

Set reasonable, and attainable, yet challenging goals.

Seek and utilize the mentor's advice.

Establish strategic alliances (internal and external).

Be accountable (keep score).

How to choose an Advisor

Become familiar with all your options.

Start with your own program faculty.

- Attend as many seminars and program functions as you can.
- Meet and talk with the faculty, postdocs and students.
- Listen carefully to the faculty presentations of scholarship.
- Pay attention to their student's presentations.
- Read papers and books from the group and talk about their scholarship.
- Make an appointment and ask lots of questions.

If necessary, broaden your search to other faculty, but be certain of program limitations on who you can work with.

How to evaluate faculty prominence (or potential for it).

Publications- steady record of publications in good journals

- Strength of journals (Impact Factor, faculty opinion).
- Impact of their publications.
- Number of papers-2 or more a year without long interruptions.

Grant support- NIH, NSF, ACS, etc.

- Need at least one continuously.
- How long have they had the grant (was it renewed)?

National reputation- evidence of recognition.

- Editorial boards, peer review panels.
- Invitations to give seminars or present at international meeting.
- Chairing sessions at, or organizing, international meetings.
- Authorship of invited reviews.

The importance of rotations

The laboratory rotations are VITAL opportunities to audition; both parties get to evaluate each other.

To optimize the value of these rotations:

- Show up. If you are not in class you should be in the lab.
- Work hard. Read, ask questions, and become part of the intellectual life of the lab.
- Pay attention to the atmosphere in the lab. Are people unhappy or struggling? Is there an excitement about the research? Does your style of learning and working fit in?

Questions to ask a prospective advisor

How much time do you spend with students?

Who will directly supervise my day-to-day activities?

What are your expectations for student workload and time?

Is the schedule flexible? Is there a minimum number of papers expected?

How will I be funded?

What space and equipment are available?

How many people will be working on this project?

What is your approach to deciding authorship on collaborative projects?

Questions to ask a prospective advisor

How many students have earned Ph.D.s in your group?

- How long did it take them?
- Where did they go after Emory?
- What are they doing now?

What specific strategies do you use to help students hone their interests, refine their technical skills, and develop independence?

How do you guide students who are interested in pursuing non-traditional- or industrial- career options or are unsure of their career goals?

Do you support student travel to scholarly meetings?

Pros and cons of a Junior Advisor

Easier to relate to

Inexperienced

Enthusiastic

Little track record

Motivated to succeed

May not get tenure

Cutting edge research

May be risky area of research

Small groups

Limited resources

Want/need students

Under enormous pressure

Hands-on mentoring

Harder to develop independence

Fewer outside responsibilities

Fewer networking contacts

Pros and cons of a Senior Advisor

Experienced and knowledgeable

Generation gap

Significant track record

Beware of burnout

Motivated to succeed

May depend on postdocs

Established research

May be dated area of research

Strong resources

Large groups

Trained more students

May delegate supervision

Can foster independence

May not pay as much attention

Many outside responsibilities

Probably travels a lot

Common complaints/conflicts

My advisor is never around/always breathing down my neck

I am being treated like a technician

He/she treats me differently

I did all the work but am not recognized or rewarded

My project is going nowhere

Lab morale is lousy



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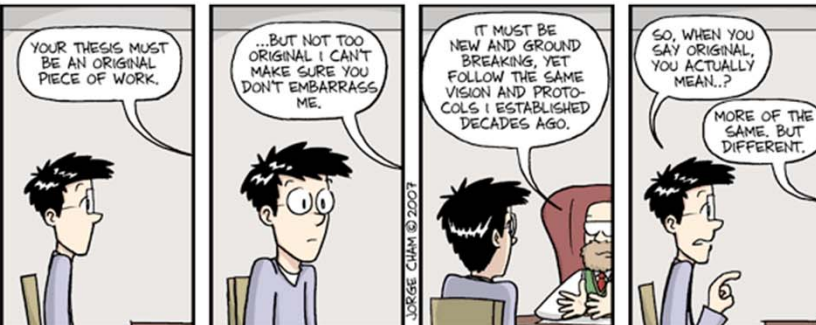
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