

Graduate Professional Skills Development

– A Guide for Supervisors/Faculty Mentors

This document is designed for academic supervisors and other faculty mentors seeking a short overview of graduate professional skills programming at York University and to encourage a productive dialogue with supervisees around career planning and exploration.

Professional Skills – Context

- Most PhD students indicate their goal is a tenure-track academic job, however, few will achieve this outcome. Only 20-25% of PhD graduates find work in academia within their trained discipline, while the remaining 75-80% must find non-academic work or work not directly related to their field of graduate research.¹ Further, fewer than 20% of Canadian PhD graduates find full-time employment as university professors.²
- York University's 2019 *Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS)* also found that 42% of students enrolled in graduate studies in order to “start a career, or advance an existing career outside of academia.”³
- While supportive of professional development, many faculty members may not feel well equipped to advise students on non-academic career paths.

Individualized Development Plan (IDP)

The Faculty of Graduate Studies' IDP is part of a cyclical process that asks students to assess their current level of expertise, identify areas in which they would like to explore or improve, and map out a plan for achieving their goals. It is designed to provide a framework for encouraging active participation among students in professional skills training and career management over the course of their degrees.

If the mutual expectations – informed by the [Discussion Topics to Inform Productive Supervisory Relationships](#) – align with the goals in students' IDPs, supervisors may consider incorporating some – or all – aspects of the IDP into ongoing conversations and planning.

- Visit yorku.ca/gradstudies/idp/ to access the IDP

As the individual most connected to a student's research project, the Faculty of Graduate Studies encourages supervisors to have a productive dialogue on professional skills planning with their supervisees. An important aspect in helping students to realize their scholarly potential involves advising and guiding them towards opportunities that may help them succeed in a wide variety of careers and/or personal ventures.

The Faculty of Graduate Studies (FGS) divides [professional skills programming into six broad areas](#) covering a wide range of skills from which graduate students may benefit while at York and following graduation. FGS partners with other organizations on campus to provide programming in these areas, supplementing activities that may or may not be covered through one's degree requirements.

- **Career Exploration and Planning** – There exist a variety of versatile career options for those with advanced degrees. Learning the tools required to evaluate career options, and the skills needed to enter those careers, will help graduate students transition from university to workplace.
- **Communication** – An important aspect of the expertise one acquires as part of graduate study is the ability to effectively communicate information through writing and other mediums. What are some techniques for improving written and oral communication to professional colleagues or to laypersons?
- **Health and Wellness** – A variety of campus and community services are available to support and enhance the well-being of scholars during one's academic pursuits.
- **Managing Time and Resources** – It is difficult to balance the demands of life, work and study, but there are strategies that can be used to help manage time more effectively.
- **Research Dissemination** – The importance of research isn't limited to other scholars. What are the tools and techniques that help translate academic work into other contexts?
- **Teaching** – The skills learned when leading a classroom are skills that can be relevant in many other contexts, such as public speaking, formulating plans and interpersonal skills.

The **Graduate & Postdoctoral Professional Skills (GPPS)** webpage hosts all centralized graduate professional skills development opportunities across campus in a single location: yorku.ca/gradstudies/gpps/. Users can filter by thematic area and/or search by keyword to find relevant offerings.

Guiding Questions for Meeting with Students

Making use of the IDP as the base tool for conversations on professional skills development, the following questions can help lay a supportive foundation for ongoing discussions:

- Have you considered booking a 1x1 advising appointment with the [Career Centre](#) to discuss your plans further? **Note:** Susan Pogue, Career Counsellor – spogue@yorku.ca meets with graduate students and can advise on academic- and non-academic career planning
- Are there certain professional skills areas you see being most beneficial in developing further, in line with your current or future aspirations?
- Has the IDP assisted you in identifying opportunities you would like to participate in?
- Are there specific individuals/groups I can assist in providing introductions to expand your network and build collaborative relationships with others?
- What kinds of opportunities would you find most interesting and/or fulfilling post-graduation?

¹ Rose, M. (2013). Preparing for Life “Beyond Academe”: Professional Skills Development for Graduate Students in Canadian Universities. *ESC: English Studies in Canada*, 39(4), 4-8. doi:10.1353/esc.2013.0041

² Edge, J., & Munro, D. (2015). *Inside and Outside the Academy: Valuing and Preparing PhDs for Careers* (pp. 1-131, Rep.). Ottawa, ON: The Conference Board of Canada.

³ CRIEVAT. (2019). *Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey Summary Report (York University Report, pp. 1-17, Rep.)*. Toronto, ON: York University.