

# A Self-Assessment Strategy to Guide Graduate Professional Development Programming

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## Introduction

Many graduate schools, especially at top research universities, have well-developed graduate career advising and professional development programs. In 2016, funding became available for NIU's Graduate School to hire two faculty members as Co-coordinators of Graduate Career and Professional Development to develop a centralized graduate career and professional development program at NIU and to assess its impact on graduate programs and students. This presentation is focused on how we, the co-coordinators, tackled the challenge.

## Statement of Problem

Many graduate schools that are doing career advising and professional development have centralized resources and services on their public-facing web pages, or on an intranet. This was lacking at NIU. Also, most graduate schools, especially at the top universities, support primarily doctoral students. NIU's demographic is mostly master's. Rather than leverage what these other graduate schools were doing we felt that a more tailored approach unique to NIU graduate students was needed.

## Strategy

- Use NIU Office 365 to build an intranet to centralize resources and services related to graduate career and professional development and, later, promote it on public-facing web pages.
- Develop a self-assessment survey comprised of 24 baseline career skills to identify skills that have the highest declared needs.
- Use findings to identify skills to target partnerships and workshops for initial focus.
- Deploy workshops and collect data on student participation trends across programs.

## Results

### Self-Assessment Survey

A self-assessment survey was then developed using the SharePoint survey tool and deployed on the portal. Graduate students across 28 programs were initially surveyed on 24 baseline career skills, coded 8 through 31, in four categories: **Communication, Leadership and Management, Professionalism and Responsible Conduct of Research.**

A **Career Development** category was added to the survey later. Students could choose whether they felt confident or needed development for each skill. The “needs development” count is summarized in *Figure 1*.

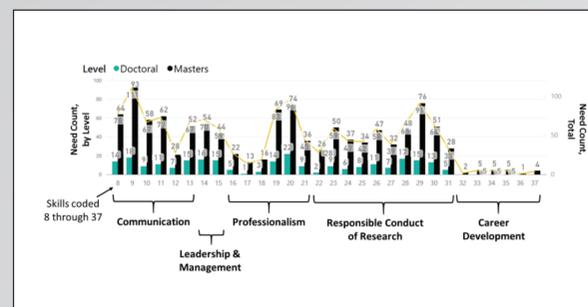


Figure 1

The yellow trend line in Figure 1 identifies four skills, denoted 9, 14, 20 and 29. These are summarized in *Figure 2*.

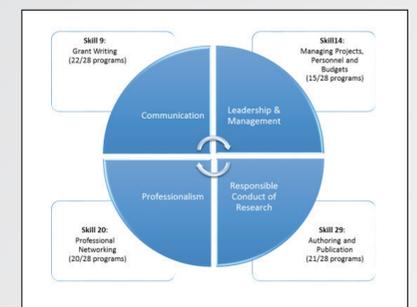


Figure 2

### Use of Data – Partnerships and Workshops

The Graduate School's focus on partnerships and workshops was based on the four skills identified in the survey.

**SKILL 9**—The Graduate School is partnering with Sponsored Projects Administration to centralize a grant writing program for graduate students (AY17 implementation planned).

**SKILL 14**—Discussions are pending with the School of Business and the College of Engineering and Engineering Technology on how to centralize this (AY17 implementation planned).

**SKILL 20**—The Graduate School partnered with Career Services to offer two workshops on advanced uses of LinkedIn (Implemented this semester).

**SKILL 29**—The Graduate School partnered with the Office of Research, Compliance, Integrity and Safety (ORCIS) to offer a faculty-led seminar on authorship and publication. A panel of graduate students who have published was also offered a week before the faculty-led presentation (implemented this semester).

The Graduate School also partnered with the Writing Center to offer workshops on Cover Letter Writing Tips, and CV Writing Tips, and with ORCIS to offer additional seminars on RCR topics. *See Figure 3.*

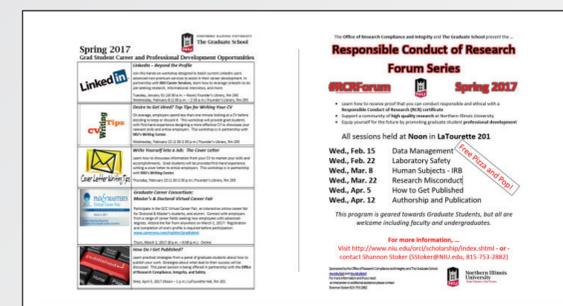


Figure 3

## Showcasing Best Practices Assessment Expo 2017

## Conclusion

We started with two challenges: (1) centralizing graduate professional development resources and services, and (2) building a graduate professional development program. A data-driven process guided our initial partnerships and workshops. In moving forward, the Graduate School will emphasize a **Career Development Pathway (CDP)** framework, and will leverage the portal's ability to centralize resources and services. Future professional development programming will align with the CDP and will integrate real-time job analytics and alumni networking. *See Figure 4.*

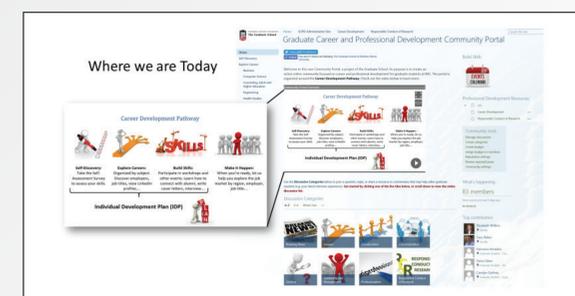


Figure 4