Summer 2020 RiDE Fellowship
Nicholas School of the Environment Individual Development Plan (IDP) Summary
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In January 2020, the Marine Science and Conservation (MSC) PhD program underwent its external review. Out of that review came a final report from the external review team that contained a number of recommendations to improve our program. Many of these matched with the recommendations from the Duke University Reimagining Doctoral Education (RiDE) report. To help implement several of these recommendations into the MCS PhD program, Dr. James Hench (MSC DGS) and Rachel Lo Piccolo (MSC DGSA) submitted a proposal to the 2020 Summer Funding for Doctoral Students Related to Reimagining Doctoral Education (RiDE) Implementation grant. Through this program, I was funded to help improve the MSC PhD annual student evaluation process this summer.

Currently, the MSC’s annual student evaluation process focuses on student progress made in the past year (e.g., courses completed, presentations, manuscripts submitted, outreach activities). Students meet with their advisor at the end of spring semester to discuss their progress and any problems that arose in the past year. While this format has been helpful to assess if students are on track for their degrees, we wish to make this process more constructive and useful for PhD students by replacing it with an assessment that is more forward-thinking. We planned to create an individual development plan (IDP) that focuses on helping students define and pursue their career goals and facilitating an open discussion with advisors about plans for the upcoming year. After reading through several IDP models published online, we identified the IDP used by the School of Biosciences at Stanford University as a model, which would work well for our purposes. We contacted the Stanford University BiosSci Careers and received permission to adapt their IDP template for our own.

In the RiDE Implementation proposal, we said we would share the IDP with the other 5 PhD programs within the Nicholas School of the Environment but have gone beyond that to include all the programs in the creation and development of this work. Using the Stanford model as a guideline, I met with Directors of Graduate Studies, other faculty, and students from across the six PhD programs to discuss what they would like to see in a document such as this. Using this feedback, I refined the Stanford IDP model to fit the needs of our PhD programs.

The final version of this new Nicholas School of the Environment IDP program has three separate forms – 1) an evaluation to be filled out annually by the advisor prior to meeting with each student; 2) an IDP for incoming first year PhD students that focuses on creating a strong mentoring relationship between the student and advisor; and 3) an IDP for PhD students in year 2 and beyond. This last document focuses on research and career goals, challenges, professional development activity plans, the identification of new skills to develop, and plans to leverage mentorship from multiple faculty mentors. Each PhD student will meet with their advisor at least once a year at the start of the academic year to discuss the IDP (students and faculty will be asked to share their completed documents with each other prior to meeting). At the end of the meeting, the student and advisor will jointly develop an Action Plan to address specific goals in the upcoming year.
We will adopt and implement this IDP program in the upcoming 2020-2021 academic year. We will create a specific email address for the IDP to accommodate correspondence. At the start of the semester, the official version of the IDP will be sent out to all PhD students and faculty along with instructions for completion, timeline, and due date. Because this new evaluation progress is looking forward into the upcoming academic year, it will be due at the end of September rather than April. We will also invite constructive feedback for a revision next year.