

# HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Note:** This document is a PDF of web content. You may also access all content by visiting the Professional Development section of the HPPLC web site, [www.hpplc.indiana.edu](http://www.hpplc.indiana.edu).

### *Why Should I Care About Professional Development?*

If you plan carefully, you can use your undergraduate years to become a mature, professional person who does not merely look good on a résumé, but who can also impress during admissions and job interviews. In addition, you will perform more adeptly in your professional program and chosen career; and become a more whole and fulfilled person, who in turn has the potential to have a profoundly positive impact on other people.

The majority of students procrastinate or pay little attention to their professional development. Doing either is a serious mistake. Be one of the exceptions and commit yourself to a professional development plan early, during your freshman year in college or

### **IMPORTANT**

The information and suggestions on the Professional Development web page apply to any student. It is also important that you refer to those parts of the HPPLC web site that pertain to your particular area(s) of interest, whether it be law, medicine, or another health profession. There, you will find more specific information about what students need to do in order to fulfill requirements and become competitive for admission to a given program.

even during high school. A plan that incorporates a variety of interesting and rewarding experiences will deeply enrich your life as a student, add depth to any undergraduate degree, and build a foundation upon which you can create future opportunities and a higher quality of life for yourself and others.

### **Who Should Undertake Professional Development?**

Anyone who is serious about professional and personal success, however one chooses to define those terms, should commit himself or herself to their professional development very early on. High school students, undergraduates, and graduate students all benefit from such experiences.

### **When Should I Begin My Professional Development?**

You already have, just by coming to this web site. Now, read on and continue your progress.

### **So What Is Professional Development?**

The overarching goal of professional development is, simply put, to gain the ability to consistently demonstrate the traits of a professional. A thorough professional development program has many components, including: activities (e.g., job shadowing, students organizations, serious hobbies, volunteer work, networking), skill and leadership development, professionalism (e.g., attitudes, etiquette, ethical development, civic engagement), personal development, and overall maturity. To this list of professional traits we can also add life-long devotion to self-improvement, pride in your work (in whatever setting it may be - your chosen profession, your college experience, and even everyday tasks), and personal accountability for your work and behavior.

From your perspective as a student, we could say that professional development is the process by which you will develop the skills and characteristics necessary for success as a student, an applicant to a professional program, a career professional, and most importantly (since nothing truly productive can happen without it), success as you grow in both experience and maturity as an individual.

While professional development may seem like an awful lot to take on, remember that you have already begun. The information on this web page is designed to help you continue the process. *Process* is an important word here. While it's true that you will need to undertake a variety of endeavors at the same time, you don't need to expect yourself to complete or master them all at once. Initiating a structured professional development program early-on allows you to gradually but steadily develop these characteristics and experiences over time, so that when you graduate you are already well on your way to becoming professionalized.

### **What Specifically Can I Do To Become Professionalized?**

The preceding ideas provide a useful starting point, but we need to take things a step further to help you plan out some specific actions you can take through which you can continue your own professional development.

#### **Activities**

##### *Job Shadowing, Clinical Observation, and Interning*

A critical first step in your professional development is to arrange, *as soon as possible*, job shadowing, clinical observation, or internship experiences with people who already work as professionals in your area(s) of interest. Doing so early in your exploration can help you decide for certain whether a given career is the best choice or whether you need to continue exploring different areas. For instance, if you are considering both nursing and respiratory therapy as possible careers, then arrange to shadow both nurses and respiratory therapists in a variety of settings - hospitals, clinics, retirement homes, and so on. Or, if attending medical school or a physical therapy program is your goal, you should undertake clinical observation of people working in a variety of settings within those professions. Students interested in law school can gain exposure to the legal profession by, for instance, interning at a law firm or committing themselves to law-related volunteer activities. If you are a high school student and your school has a shadowing and observation program or offers classes that involve such, we strongly encourage you to participate in them.

Do not delay this important step in your professional development. For further advice on the types of experiences appropriate for your desired career path, consult the pages on the HPPLC website that are devoted to your specific area(s) of interest. The Career Development Center offers [internship courses](#) and [internship databases](#), and the student-run Council for Advancing Student Leadership ([CASL](#)) offers a Professional Mentoring Program that connects students with mentors from the professional community. Since there is no central location at IUB for internship and mentoring information you will also need to keep your ears and eyes open for opportunities.

### *Volunteer Work*

In addition to shadowing and observation, performing [volunteer work](#) (sometimes called "service work") is also an important part of any professional development plan. It is often required for admission to a given program, but regardless of whether or not it is required, volunteer work is one of the best ways to develop professional skills (see *Skill Development*, below). Furthermore, by volunteering you simply become a better citizen and a more mature person, which are rewards in their own right, and ideals which are often undervalued in our 24/7 culture. It is wise to begin doing consistent volunteer work as soon as you are able - perhaps an hour or two each week. *Consult with a HPPLC advisor and visit each area's web page for more specific requirements, suggestions, and resources.* Feel free to sample different opportunities until you learn which are best for you given your circumstances and area(s) of interest.

### *Networking*

All students interested in professional programs should take advantage of any connections they might have, such as family members or friends of the family who are members of the given profession, or anyone who knows someone who is a member of the profession. These connections can sometimes open the door to shadowing, service, or internship opportunities. Some old-fashioned leg work is usually involved in arranging such opportunities as well. For instance, some students have had success scouring the yellow pages for the kinds of businesses, practices, and firms associated with their area of interest, making a list of two or three dozen of them, and then delivering a well-crafted résumé and cover letter inquiring about internship, shadowing, or volunteer opportunities. Also keep an eye out for networking events like those offered through the Career Development Center. The Council for Advancing Student Leadership ([CASL](#)) offers a Professional Mentoring Program that connects students with mentors from the professional community, and attending [HPPLC-sponsored events](#) is another way to meet people from a variety of areas and backgrounds.

### *Participating in Events, Clubs, and Organizations*

Any activity that helps you become a more experienced, skillful person can become part of your professional development. Look through the listings of student [activities, clubs, and organizations](#), for instance, and see if you can find one or two of interest in which you can become involved. If you remain actively involved with a student organization for two or more semesters, opportunities will usually arise to take on a leadership role of one kind or another (e.g., president or vice-president, treasurer, events or recruitment coordinator). Not all IUB student clubs are listed at the link above, so you might also contact [academic departments and programs](#) and ask about other such opportunities. Some students also become politically active in local, state, or national elections, and / or become involved in student government ([IU Student Association](#), [IU Student Body Supreme Court](#), [Department of Student Rights](#)). Also, frequently check the [HPPLC events calendar](#) and attend those events pertinent to your area(s) of interest.

### *Keep a Professional Development Journal*

Material from a professional development journal could become part of a personal statement or résumé cover letter. As you engage in professional development, whether it is shadowing, volunteering, skill development, or the process of becoming more aware of your growing professionalism, keep a journal in which you consistently keep track of and reflect upon your experiences. If a particular event, experience, or interaction with another person strikes you as especially significant, write a few paragraphs about it. Later on you'll be able to better recall it when writing your personal statement and assembling other materials for your application or for people writing letters of recommendation. Your professional development journal is also an excellent self-assessment tool: What skills am I developing? Where are my strengths and weaknesses? Where do I most need to concentrate my efforts at this

point? How is a given experience helping me prepare for my professional program? How is it confirming or making me question my decision to pursue this particular career?

## **Skill Development**

Skill development, like most components of professional development, is something that occurs on an ongoing basis and in a variety of ways. What skills you consciously pursue will depend to some extent on your current strengths and weaknesses, the demands of the program you choose to pursue, the time you have at your disposal, and other circumstances.

### *Cognitive Skills*

Polls consistently indicate that employers desire applicants who have mastered fundamental cognitive skills, including well-developed writing, reading, and critical thinking abilities; creative problem solving, multitasking, and time management skills; leadership skills, and the like. The same skill sets are indispensable throughout your undergraduate degree and as you prepare to apply to professional programs.

For instance, it's very difficult to write an effective personal statement or engage in articulate conversations with faculty and program representatives if you have not worked to develop strong verbal abilities. Throughout the semester, constantly remind yourself that the classes required to fulfill prerequisite or degree requirements are not simply intended to help you learn about the topic of the class, but are also golden opportunities for you to focus on skill development. For example, in a history course, don't read the assignments and write the papers merely to fulfill the assignment. Use assignments as part of your conscious effort to strengthen your reading and writing abilities. If you approach every class from the standpoint of *What skills can I use this class to further strengthen?*, it will pay huge dividends. But what if you dislike a class? Then use it as an opportunity to do well at something you don't enjoy. Learning to succeed at unpleasant tasks is a crucial characteristic of a true professional.

### *Practical Skills*

It is also important to develop practical skills as you work on your degree(s). *Practical skills* are concrete "tools" you can use from one day to the next in a given setting, be it in school, on the job, or in your personal life. These skills include, but are not limited to: computing skills (overall comfort in a computing environment; becoming proficient with specific types of software, such as spreadsheets, databases, web development, or graphics software like Photoshop); public speaking and business / professional writing skills; organizational skills; foreign language skills (if you are able, earning a minor in a language will often garner you a usable skill); leadership development and networking skills (e.g., [CASL's](#) leadership lectures and mentoring program, [LESA](#), [LAMP](#), SPEA's [Washington Leadership Program](#), HPER's [Leadership Minor](#), HPER's [Aspen skiing experience](#), other such opportunities); and so on.

*Work with a HPPLC advisor to assess what skills you possess and which you could strengthen or begin to develop in light of your area(s) of interest. Also refer to each area's web page for more specific requirements, suggestions, and resources.*

## **Professionalism**

Here, we use the term *professionalism* to represent the attitudes, actions, etiquette, ethical behavior, and civic responsibility you need to learn so that you can conduct yourself like a professional and convey to others that you are a true professional.

As with the other components of professional development, professionalism is a set of traits you should continually work to develop during high school and college, and then exhibit in school, on the job, and even in your personal life.

### *Attitude*

Because these traits don't develop by themselves or just appear suddenly out of nowhere, we encourage you to practice making a *conscious effort* to develop and maintain constructive, determined attitudes about classes,

activities, responsibilities, situations, circumstances, and people. This does not mean you have to like everything and everyone. It simply means that you adopt an attitude that focuses on solutions rather than problems. For instance, as we suggested earlier, a class you dislike is not simply an opportunity to complain; it's an opportunity to learn to do well at something you dislike - a crucial attribute for any professional to possess. Work hard to be relentlessly positive! This attitude, developed through practice, will impress any interview committee.

### *Action*

There are certain things that every student should simply do, but which many do not. The result is *always* a student who is not performing academically or professionally as well as they could. Here is a practical list of things you can do to help avoid this pitfall:

- Follow-through: Keep appointments with your advisor, people you are shadowing, instructors, and others.
- Deliver on commitments and promises you have made to peers, instructors, and others.
- Be an active participant in your own education: Consistently and meaningfully participate in class discussions. Sit in the first two or three rows everyday.
- Go to class **every** day and be on time. Do your assigned readings **before** class. **Always** know where your grade stands. If you have a genuine reason for missing or being late, explain it to your instructor beforehand or email them the same day. Follow-through and personal accountability are signs of someone who is becoming a true professional.
- Introduce yourself to your instructors: During the first week or two of class make an appointment to visit each and every one of your instructors during their office hours (two minutes before or after class doesn't count!). If their office hours conflict with your class schedule then ask to arrange an appointment outside their office hours. Most instructors are willing and able to do so. Bring all of your course materials and introduce yourself. Discuss course content, but also talk about yourself and your interests, and talk with them about how and why they became interested in their area of expertise.
- Meet consistently with instructors throughout the semester; ideally, one or two each week for most of the semester. Doing so serves many purposes: 1) It shows them that you care about your grades and about the course content; 2) It helps you develop a sense of personal responsibility and accountability, two crucial points of professional development; 3) It garners experience interacting one-on-one with someone who is already a *professional*; 4) If you and an instructor get to know one another well enough, and you do well in their class, you can ask for a letter of recommendation if required by your program, or ask to use them as a reference.
- Manage your time efficiently. Efficient time management is crucial to your success in every facet of life. Your degree progress and professional development as a whole will be less stressful and more fulfilling, and you will be better equipped to convey a sense of professionalism, if you develop this skill early and continue to improve it.

### *Etiquette*

Another set of actions which reflects your level of professionalism has to do with personal etiquette. Usually your behavior is not interpreted by others as being neutral. In every setting - email and web, interpersonal, public - your personal conduct usually impacts the image you convey either positively or negatively.

- Email etiquette: Email is often mistakenly thought of as a form of communication in which it is always acceptable to be casual no matter who is being addressed. Don't make this mistake! All the usual rules of good writing apply to your emails to faculty, staff, and professionals. In other words, begin sentences with capital letters, use proper punctuation, use paragraphs, thoroughly spellcheck, and thoroughly proofread. Begin your message with a greeting. Address the recipient as Professor, Mr., Ms., Dr., or whatever is correct and appropriate. (It is usually not appropriate to address them by first name.) When in doubt, err on the side of caution and use a formal greeting and closing. Sending emails with typos, misspellings, and incoherent sentences is extremely unprofessional and will not leave the recipient with a good impression of you. This is a bad thing in and of itself, but is especially unproductive when you are hoping to garner a letter of recommendation, arrange an internship,

and the like. Most importantly, writing emails and all correspondence carefully is simply the mature, professional thing to do.

- Web content: *MySpace* and similar web spaces are public and can be viewed by anyone. If you wouldn't want a prospective employer, instructor, or professional program representative to see it, then don't post it!
- Phone and interpersonal etiquette: Be professional, be polite, always and with everyone. When you call a school or program on the phone, it doesn't matter whether you are speaking with the Dean of Admissions or a receptionist. Don't be rude, impatient, or presumptuous. Treat them with respect. It is simply the mature way to behave. But if you need another reason, remember that *any* given staff member may have influence, and may have something to say about whether or not you are admitted to the program. When you are finished with the conversation, thank them for their time and assistance. Similarly, remember that a firm handshake and confident eye contact can also go a long way towards establishing a professional demeanor.
- Public etiquette: Be professional, be polite, always and with everyone.

### *Ethical Development*

There is no simple way to define the concept of *ethical conduct*, but if you look up *ethical* in a thesaurus you will find synonyms like moral, principled, right, fair, decent, and just.

Whether something is "legal" or "illegal" does not necessarily determine whether it is ethical or not, and it is not always obvious what is "right" and what is "wrong" in a given situation. Furthermore, peer pressure - the desire to be accepted, the fear of rejection or of looking bad, the desire to avoid getting other people in trouble - can become a factor *if you let it*. For example, if a group of students were to actively seek the confidential password that would give them access ahead of time to exam questions, they would be engaging in unethical behavior, as would any student who used the password. What may not be obvious, though, is that even students who did not cheat, but who knew about the cheating and did not report it, would be deemed guilty of unethical conduct.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.) defines *ethical* as, "Being in accordance with the accepted principles of right and wrong that govern the conduct of a profession." Your *profession* at this moment is *student*, and Indiana University has a [Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct](#) that you are expected to follow. You are also either considering or have already decided to become a member of another profession, be it in the area of law, medicine, or another health profession. Both the professional program and the professions they lead to will have their own codes of ethical conduct they will expect you to adhere to, and they take breeches of ethics very seriously. Many programs and professions also expect students to report on their applications incidents where they have been involved in breeches of ethics. Criminal background checks are commonly required as well.

If you want to discuss ethical development in more depth, or if you have a hypothetical situation you'd like to discuss, feel free to make an appointment with a HPPLC advisor. If you have been accused of misconduct or caught in an act of misconduct at IU, you may contact the [Student Advocates Office](#) and / or the [Department of Student Rights](#) for assistance. Information about the Campus Judicial Process is available [here](#), and the [Student Ethics & Anti-Harassment Programs](#) home page offers additional resources.

You may want to learn about ethics through coursework. (In fact, many professional programs require an ethics course or have ethics built into the core classes.) Examples of ethics courses include PHIL-P 140: Introduction to Ethics, REL-R 170: Religion and Ethics, and REL-R 373: Religion and Bioethics. The Leadership, Ethics, and Social Action minor ([LESA](#)) is another way for students to bolster their ethical development.

### *Civic Engagement and Social Responsibility*

Two other components of ethical development which comprise another important dimension of your professional development as a whole are *civic engagement* and *social responsibility*. Examples of activities which reflect *civic engagement* and *social responsibility* include volunteering just for the sake of being of service; voting and being politically active; making yourself aware of local, national, and international news; becoming active in student government (refer to Participating in Events, Clubs, and Organizations); and pursuing civic engagement

academically (the LESA minor, for instance, requires students to propose and implement a project designed to produce concrete, positive results in the community; and [service learning](#) incorporates volunteerism into the coursework). In the past, the word "citizenship" was used to describe these actions and attitudes. More recently, many have lamented what they see as the loss of these "core values." Regardless of what degree to which this assessment is correct, it remains true that being an active and responsible participant in the communities to which you belong (campus, city, and beyond) is an important characteristic possessed by any truly professionalized person.

### **Personal Development**

Personal development involves undertaking activities and fulfilling responsibilities which expand your life experience and help you to become a mature, knowledgeable, ethical person. In one sense or another, everything that can be considered professional development is also part of your personal development. But in addition to the activities described throughout this web site, other, more simple activities can also be part of your personal development: consistently reading daily newspapers, magazines of substance, or alternative news sources; reading fiction; pursuing hobbies and other extracurricular interests (rock-climbing, photography, dance, sports, travel, writing - anything fulfilling that makes you a more worldly person); attending [university](#) and [city-wide](#) academic, cultural, and other events. Admissions committees often look for something interesting that sets one applicant apart from another. At least as important, if not more so, is that activities of this sort are simply a fulfilling part of your educational process and your ongoing experience as a life-long learner.

### **Where To Go From Here**

Now that you've actively begun your professional development by reading through these suggestions, here's what we suggest you do next: 1) Look over the HPPLC web information for your program(s) of interest. Either electronically or on paper, make a list of specific requirements or suggestions for the program that reflect professional development as described on this web page. 2) Add to your list other professional development items with which you are already engaged or plan to undertake. 3) If you are a college freshman, a continuing student, or a returning student, make an appointment to meet with a HPPLC advisor to discuss your professional development and other topics related to your area(s) of interest. 4) Remember to keep a professional development journal.

### **IMPORTANT**

This document was prepared for Indiana University students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. It explains some suggestions and options students might wish to consider. Students are ultimately responsible for making decisions appropriate for their given plan of study and professional interests. The information and suggestions on the Professional Development page might apply to any student, not just preprofessional students. It is also important that you refer to those parts of the HPPLC web site that pertain to your particular area(s) of interest. There, you will find more specific information about what students need to do in order to fulfill requirements and become competitive for admission to a given program.