

# Advocating for PhD Career and Professional Development (CPD) in Times of Institutional Disruption

## CPD is essential to institutional priorities for research training

- **CPD attracts the strongest talent.** Prospective students/postdocs seek institutions demonstrating investment in CPD to give them the best possible onramp to STEM careers.
- **Participation in CPD maintains or improves time to degree** by demystifying career development and motivating drive toward academic and career goals (Brandt, 2021).
- **CPD enhances workforce preparedness** and the ability to navigate a breadth of career options, increasing career resilience (Mishra 2017) that is critical during times of workforce contraction.
- **CPD strengthens relationships with alumni** by demonstrating commitment to training and creating opportunities for alumni engagement with current trainees (Binkley, 2012).

## CPD benefits the institution's research enterprise

- **Availability of effective CPD support strengthens funding applications.** Many public and private research funders expect CPD for fellowships, research grants, and training grants.
- **CPD supports development of professional skills that immediately benefit research** (e.g., writing, presentation, team science, time management skills; Rybarczyk, 2011, Nowell, 2018).
- **Trainee participation in CPD can benefit faculty research advisors** by complementing mentorship and increasing its efficiency (Watts, 2019).

## CPD cultivates a learning environment in which all trainees thrive

- **CPD empowers all individuals (including those new to PhD-level U.S. research)** by making explicit the norms and strategies inherent to science (**the “hidden curriculum”**; Pensky, 2021).
- **CPD enhances mental health**, buffering against stress from career uncertainty (CGS, 2024, NPA 2025) by increasing resilience via broadly-transferable skills and readiness for career pivots.
- **CPD programming creates opportunities for cohort-building**, which can otherwise be challenging for postdocs (Nowell, 2018) and at times of declining graduate enrollment. Cohorts **strengthen peer mentorship and sense of belonging** (Akhtar, 2024).
- **CPD contributes to student/postdoc retention** by valuing individual trainees' unique backgrounds, interests, and attributes, and exposing them to a breadth of role models, helping trainees see themselves in the science ecosystem.

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**What is CPD?** Career and Professional Development (CPD) focuses on the development of professional skills that are core to both **research training and a breadth of future careers**. CPD includes skills such as *writing, presentation, time and project management, communicating within teams, mentoring up, leadership, teaching, career awareness, career planning, and job search skills*.

## PROGRAMMATIC ELEMENTS TO INCLUDE

- Individual Development Plans
- workshops/courses
- individual appointments
- networking opportunities
- alumni/employer engagement
- experiential opportunities
- facilitated reflection
- peer-to-peer discussion
- mentorship
- accountability
- online resources

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR INVESTMENT

- **Tailor CPD to the needs of PhD students and postdocs**, which are specialized and distinct from the needs of undergraduates
- **Invest in dedicated staff/faculty** with protected time for CPD to enable CPD-specific, evidence-based teaching approaches and content knowledge
- **Integrate CPD into core curriculum** to increase reach and impact

## WHO TO APPROACH

- deans of graduate schools
- deans of colleges of arts & sciences
- provosts of medical schools
- vice presidents of research
- associate provosts/deans for academic affairs, graduate education, postdoctoral affairs
- chairs of academic departments
- graduate program directors
- training grant directors
- graduate student governments
- postdoctoral organizations

## UNDERSTANDING THE CURRENT ECOSYSTEM

- What interconnected web of units and services currently supports CPD at your institution?
- What are the current strengths of CPD at your institution and its benefits for trainees?
- What are opportunities to evolve institutional CPD to better meet current and future needs?
- How is CPD currently funded at your institution?

## QUESTIONS FOR ADVOCACY

- Who are advocates and champions of CPD at your institution?
- Who is involved in making financial decisions at your institution?
- What is the institutional long-term plan for supporting CPD in light of budget restructuring?