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REASONS WHY THE IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME IS IDEAL PREPARATION FOR UNIVERSITY

From academic rigour to a compassionate viewpoint, presenting an at-a-glance guide to why higher education institutions are so enamoured of Diploma Programme students

1. It offers academic breadth and depth

We know graduates do well. In 2011, figures from the UK's Higher Education Statistics Agency found that IB graduates were "much more likely to be enrolled at one of the top 20 higher education institutions than entrants holding other qualifications." Studying six subjects means students aren't forced to narrow their choices while still at school, and can keep university options open. That doesn't come at the expense of academic rigour, though. IB Diploma Programme students follow three subjects at Higher Level, where they receive 240 teaching hours in each. And learning a second language has been linked in studies to a higher level of achievement at both school and university.

2. Graduates care about more than just results

The creativity, action, service (CAS) requirement in the Diploma Programme encourages experiential learning – acquiring knowledge through direct experience. That could mean anything from building new homes in Africa to creating a newspaper for your local community. It gives students a perspective on the world, and the drive to plan their own activities – all skills that help distinguish IB alumni in the university admissions process. As IB graduate Gregoire-Francois Legault, now studying at McGill University in Canada, puts it: "While some see [CAS] at first as a pain, most do way more than the 150 required hours."

Good study habits create learners who hit the ground running in university

3. It creates independent learners who feel prepared

Every Diploma Programme graduate will have written an Extended Essay – an immersive research paper of up to 4,000 words that requires independent research and excellent organizational skills. A 2011 survey of university admissions staff undertaken by Cardiff University, UK found they valued the Extended Essay's role in developing cognitive, research, writing and communication skills. Dr David Conley, Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Oregon and founder of the Educational Policy Improvement Center, says the IB "exceeds standards in critical thinking and research skills" required for college-readiness in the USA. And many Extended Essays are presented at admissions interviews, to demonstrate students' analytical skills. Perhaps all that college-readiness is why research by SRI International found the graduation rate for IB alumni after four and six years studying in US universities was higher than the national average.

4. It's a genuinely international qualification

Major global challenges require global solutions – and the Diploma Programme aims to balance local and national identity with an international mindset as part of its commitment to building a better future. Students learn to see the world from different cultural perspectives, while learning another language that will help them communicate with peers from different backgrounds. "Like all IB programmes, the Diploma Programme aims to encourage students to become internationally minded people who recognize their common humanity and shared guardianship of the planet," explains Robert Harrison, Curriculum Manager for Continuum Development. "IB World Schools help students engage in inquiry, action and reflection on locally and globally significant issues across the curriculum." And fittingly, the qualification is internationally benchmarked, allowing graduates to continue their studies anywhere in the world.

Learning a second language has been linked in many studies to higher achievement at both school and university

5. Universities recognize it – and give credit for it

The number of higher education institutions recognizing the Diploma Programme grew 21 per cent in 2011, backed by a proactive campaign of engagement, including a range of professional materials made available on the official IB website (www.ibo.org/recognition). And IB students are at an advantage with elite institutions: in the US, IB graduates are 21.4 per cent more likely to be admitted into 10 of the country's most prestigious universities, including Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Stanford.

6. The IB encourages critical thinking

Students learn to look beyond the facts: to analyse sources, link one subject to another and question the consensus. Inquisitiveness and interpretation are among the key cognitive properties of an IB education: a 2012 study of Diploma Programme students in Chicago found strong academic skills, especially related to analytical writing. Leading thinkers such as Professor Howard Gardner have identified the ability to reflect and critique as vital to effective 21st century learners.

7. You'll never need to learn time management

All that rigorous, independent study leads to vital organizational techniques that only become more important when students reach university. Good study habits create learners who hit the ground running in higher education. The 2012 Chicago study of Diploma Programme students found that they were able to set aside time for homework and resist going out with their friends when they needed to study.

IB graduates were much more likely to be enrolled at one of the top 20 higher education institutions than entrants holding other qualifications

8. It assesses more than examination techniques

Diploma Programme assessments are summative, largely taking place over the two years of the programme, focusing on what students have learned and their abilities, rather than what they haven't learned or can't do. Testing is rigorous, backed by high-level evidence and is based on performance against set standards. As well as helping give a true picture of student performance, it also assists universities in the admissions process – with no grade inflation for more than 30 years, the Diploma Programme is a reliable and internationally consistent measure of academic excellence.

9. Subjects aren't taught in isolation

One of the main differences between the Diploma Programme and other curricula is Theory of Knowledge (ToK) – classes that encourage students to make connections between subjects and gain the skills they need to become critical thinkers and more effective learners, rather than simply repositories of knowledge. But ToK is only part of the picture: teachers in IB World Schools are encouraged to plan interdisciplinary classes. Seeing connections between subjects also helps prepare students for higher education studies, where learning is becoming less compartmentalized.

10. And here are 10 more...

The IB learner profile offers 10 qualities underpinning the Diploma Programme and the learners who embrace it. From 'open-minded' to 'balanced', they form a framework for an international education that goes much deeper in meeting the needs of a changing world.

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