

The Impact of IB

How the leader in international education has prepared six alumni for the future



New Horizons

Now in his first year at Brown University, Zhengxian “Jason” Lin ’19 admits that his experiences with the IB program have helped open doors to new subjects in college.

Lin, an IB Diploma Programme graduate, said taking courses in humanities and English made him pursue similar classes at the college level. He is currently considering studying applied mathematics-economics, comparative literature, and philosophy.

“The IB program just opened the door to a new world,” reflected Lin. “For example, I hadn’t really thought about my interest in humanities or



English until I took classes like the Theory of Knowledge or Language and Literature.”

When Lin began engaging with his classmates and teachers during seminar courses at Cheshire Academy, his interests in the subjects “were just sparked.”

“The IB program paved the pathway toward my interest in humanities and, at the same time, it equipped me with fundamental skills like writing, speaking, and doing presentations,” he said.

But the IB program did more than just introduce Lin to new subjects—he was able to immerse himself into topics for which he already had a passion. He also gained the necessary reading, studying, and test-taking skills to succeed at the college level.

“By having three high level and three standard level classes, you dive deeper into certain topics that you’re interested in and, at the same time, learn a little bit about something you have never learned anything about,” explained Lin. “...With the Theory of Knowledge course, everything is interwoven together, so you get to see how different subjects are connected.”



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Our decision at Cheshire Academy to become an International Baccalaureate (IB) World School nine years ago involved a paradox. It was simultaneously one of the easiest and hardest things the school has ever undertaken.

Becoming a “world school” was easy, as we have always been focused on producing globally minded citizens. For more than 150 years, we have educated students from many countries and have sought to embrace international perspectives. In addition, we have always promoted creative teaching focused on student interests and creativity—factors central in the methods and design of IB curricula.

The hard part was the significant training, expense, and effort required to become a successful, sanctioned IB school. Despite many parallels in curricula and mission, not all IB schools are the same. It takes a focused effort, experience, and skills to become an excellent IB school, but with the overwhelmingly positive response from both teachers and students, we are proud to have reached that level.

The IB program has, with just a few exceptions, led to the elimination of our Advanced Placement (AP) courses. In terms of quality and rigor, IB’s High Level and Standard Level courses compare favorably to AP offerings. The only difference between the two levels is the amount of work assigned; in all other respects, they are exactly the same. Nearly all our students take one or more IB courses, and some select the highly demanding IB Diploma Programme, thereby joining about 85,000 students around the world who excel with high academic drive and skills.

The portraits of the students that follow give clear testament to the IB program’s excellence and impact. We could have easily featured any of the 100 recent graduates whose achievements are a credit to themselves and the IB program, but we have chosen six alumni. As these graduates express, they acquired excellent academic skills and they feel empowered and adventurous in many areas of their college lives and beyond.

Investment

Julia Rafferty ’18, a sophomore at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill studying dramatic arts, media journalism, and music, believes graduating with an IB Diploma helped set her on a path to academic success.

The investment, she added, did not come without its challenges.

“The choice to pursue the IB program (demonstrates) how much you’re willing and want to invest in yourself and in your future,” she said. “I’m glad that I struggled through those two years. I’m not going to lie—it was extremely difficult. I stayed up many late nights studying, I had a lot of work to do, so it definitely was not easy ... but it is so worth it now that I’m in college and I get to see the benefits of it.”

Some of Rafferty’s college classmates, for example, did not transition well from a typical high school classroom to smaller lectures at the college level.

“It better prepared me to be a college student and be a functioning member on a college campus,” Rafferty said. “I have friends who did other programs or went to other high schools who really struggled at first with sitting in small lectures at the university level and having to adjust to that classroom dynamic and navigate that environment. I was so prepared for that and just adjusted right off the bat when I arrived at UNC.”

Through the IB program, Rafferty strengthened skills related to time management, studying, and asking questions in class. She also learned

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Julia Rafferty ’18



and understands the importance of building relationships with her teachers, making it a point to introduce herself to her professors at the beginning of each semester. Those foundational skills, she said, were gained only after having gone through the program and graduating as an IB Diploma recipient.

Varied Interests

Kamila Zygadlo '19 recalled sitting down with a classmate the night before classes began at Trinity College last fall. They were both writing a paper for their class, but Zygadlo's friend was concerned she wouldn't meet the five-page requirement.

Zygadlo, however, wasn't worried after having graduated from the IB Diploma Programme.

"I've done this before," Zygadlo remembers saying to her friend. "It's all about practice. It's all about knowing how to deal with stressful situations, which there are a lot of in college."

Zygadlo, who graduated as valedictorian of her class, is currently majoring in biochemistry and is a three-season athlete, playing volleyball and participating in both indoor and outdoor track and field. She credits the IB program with setting her up with the necessary skills to balance and meet the demands of her academic and athletic workload.

"I'm able to play sports and pursue academics, and all of that is not challenging because IB was the hardest thing that I've done so far," Zygadlo said. "I know it's going to get harder and harder as I go through college but, right now, I'm perfectly managing my time, and it's great—I love it here."

While at Cheshire Academy, Zygadlo, a native of Poland, was enrolled in a variety of IB courses. Not only did she learn about chemistry, calculus, and Spanish, but also took courses on music and other topics new to her.

"The U.S. puts a lot of emphasis on being a well-rounded person, an educated person—not just a specialist," reflected Zygadlo.

Students entering their junior year at Cheshire Academy should be open to taking a few IB courses or pursuing the diploma, Zygadlo added.

"Do it, even though it seems hard or it seems scary. Everything is scary in the beginning because the unknown is scary, but ... do it," she said. "...You can't lose anything and there's so much you can gain."



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Kamila Zygadlo '19

Possibilities

While at Cheshire Academy, Aliya Catanzarita '19 knew she would be playing softball at the collegiate level. Still, she wanted to be challenged academically, so she enrolled in—and ultimately graduated from—the IB Diploma Programme. She later became the first female softball player at CA to sign with a Division I school: Hofstra University.

“Because I knew I was going to play softball in college ... I wanted to have a heavy course load and work on time management skills,” Catanzarita said. “Even after college, I want to go to medical school, and I know I’m going to have a huge course load there. The IB Diploma Programme helped me with time management, being challenged academically, and really changed my way of thinking and studying.”

Now in her freshman year at Hofstra, Catanzarita is pursuing a major in pre-health science. During her first semester, Catanzarita immediately saw the benefits of taking IB courses in comparison to how her classmates responded to the workload. She said the program changed the way she studies and thinks about course material and has helped her handle her long 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. days.

“When I came to college, I was relieved, “This is nothing compared to what happened last year,” she reflected. “Even writing papers—

I already know how to write papers; I already know how to get straight to the point and elaborate on my opinion.” The learning curve did not exist for her, as it does with many new college students.

Catanzarita credits science teacher Lauren Kelly with helping her form good study habits. Before taking IB courses, Catanzarita would try to memorize information for tests, but now she studies to understand the material.

Even in comparison to her college classmates, Catanzarita recognizes that she is better prepared due to the IB program, despite her looming athletic demands.

“No matter what you do, it is possible,” she said, of the Diploma Programme. “I’m playing Division I softball and our schedule come springtime is going to be really busy. I’m not worried one bit because I’ve been through the IB program at CA.”



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Aliya Catanzarita '19

A Way of Thinking

Now in his senior year at UCONN, Ben Buchmeier '16 will be graduating with a computer science and engineering degree with a concentration in cyber security and a minor in mathematics. He has also secured a job with iDevices, a home automation company located in Avon, Connecticut, where he interned for the past two years.

While his career path has strayed from the IB's focus on critical thinking and its writing-intensive course load, many of the skills Buchmeier gained from the program have carried over to his college and work life.

"Being able to kind of step back and analyze a problem in a way in which I did for the IB Diploma Programme is still applicable, even in the sciences," he said.

Looking back at when he was a freshman at UCONN, Buchmeier believes he was much better prepared for the course load than his classmates.

"In my English class freshman year ... I had classmates who were struggling to write these five-page papers," reflected Buchmeier. "They were struggling not only with writing it and getting materials, but also grade-wise. For me, it was kind of, almost, a vacation. Freshman year of college for me was extremely easygoing in terms of workload and difficulty."

Buchmeier pursued the diploma understanding that he would face challenging courses.

"The IB program seemed to offer an academic curriculum that would challenge me in a way that maybe some of the normal standard advanced classes wouldn't challenge me in terms of critical thinking skills, time management, and workload," he said. "It was definitely a rigorous program and I knew what I was signing up for, but I knew that if I could take on this challenge, it would benefit me in the long run."

Even now, Buchmeier notices that he approaches course work differently from his classmates.

"By senior year, people have the college way of working down, but, in terms of the way I think and the way I approach problems, it's drastically different, and a lot of that comes from the IB program and the way it frames your mindset," Buchmeier said. "In problem solving and critical thinking, I think I still have a leg up. I can approach problems in a much more reasonable and perhaps more efficient way than some of my classmates."

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A New Challenge

When Patrick Brown '17 was entering his junior year at Cheshire Academy, he chose the full IB Diploma Programme due to his interests in the classes offered through the program, and because he wanted to experience everything the school had to offer.

Now in his third year at Yale University studying neuroscience, Brown can say that the program has paid off by providing him with a holistic understanding of many different subjects.

“Coming from IB, I don’t think people are necessarily specialized in any one subject or topic in a serious way,” explained Brown. “We have the things that we’re more interested in and spend more time on, but the fact that we come out of the program knowing a little bit about a lot of different things makes it easier to jump into a cognitive science class, a music class, and an organic chemistry class, all in the same term.”

That strength, Brown continued, helped him during his first semester at Yale, when he was introduced to new content and greater challenges, more than he had seen before. He took different courses spanning across several subjects, “trying to see as much as I could among what was offered here.”

“I think having that sort of broad experience from IB makes it a little bit less daunting, a little bit more familiar, to be exploring new areas,” he said.

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Patrick Brown '17



Not only did Brown refine his time management and critical thinking skills through the IB program, he also gained an understanding of how to approach daunting tasks, being able to look back on the challenges he faced in the IB program and remembering how he overcame them.

“The experience of working through something that is more intimidating than something that you thought you could do and seeing it come together over time, knowing that’s something you could repeat in the face of an even greater task, is just mentally reassuring,” he said.

Brown urges any Cheshire Academy student interested in the IB program to pursue it, but to understand that the entire course load is an opportunity that will carry through beyond the first semesters of college. For Brown, those experiences have carried over to his course work even in his junior year.

“What you are doing in those IB classes is valuable because of what you learn from them,” Brown said. “There are still days here where I’ll be working on a project for the startup that I work for here and I’ll be drawing on things that I learned in economics in IB.”

Brown continued, “I wasn’t necessarily thinking of that value when I was taking the class, I was thinking of it more as ... something that can supplement an application, but those lessons still help me now.” 