

Ellie Van Gorden

High school for me consisted of simultaneously blending in a fighting to stand out. IB represented a space where I could learn things outside of what was prescribed by the district and begin to immerse myself in the world. The community that my class created was one held together by humor, trust, and compassion. Yes, we had our moments when cohesively we were a mess, but I do look back on my two years fondly. It was this group of people that propelled me, actually, into what I would call one of the most life-changing decisions I've made thus far. Seeing how engaged and ready to learn about other people and cultures my classmates and I were, I chose to take a gap year with other like-minded people through Global Citizen Year.

While my former classmates were scattered across the country entering lecture halls and joining sororities and fraternities, I was headed for Senegal--the place I would call home from August 2018-April 2019. At first, I felt scared, was I putting myself behind? Am I going to remember enough to have good grades in college? But a few weeks in, I knew--I was exactly where I should be. During my time there, I lived with a wonderful host family and discovered my love for writing and storytelling. I fell in love; with myself, with someone else, with this world, with learning, with all of the opportunities yet to come.

I credit IB with instilling a sheer intrigue in what is often deemed "other" within me. This program, difficult to say the least, is for those who have always wanted to connect on a deeper level with literature, concepts, and knowledge. Furthermore, the skills I learned in IB are directly related to my assignments and expectations at Whitman College. I am more than prepared, and was able to pick it right back up once I returned to a classroom in the fall of 2019...I can say with confidence that my ability to conduct and express myself (foundational skills learned throughout the IB program), will help carry me into any situation or adventure I find myself on next.

Celia Hack

IB represents to me one of the moments in my life where I've been wholly surrounding by people I enjoy and who I feel not a sense of competition with but companionship and genuine desire to learn and converse with each other. I don't think I realized how special that was before going to college...It's been four years out, and some of my favorite people are still people I met and became close with in IB.

Katie Drake

Certificate allowed me to pick classes that interested me in IB and AP, and I ended up enjoying my IB classes much more. They gave me a close group of classmates that became my best friends. The small classes made learning much more personal and fun. I enjoyed learning about history and literature throughout the world, rather than just the American focus...I felt IB focused on real teaching rather than just preparing for a final AP test. In just my first semester at college, I have found that my IB classes prepared me better...for college learning.

Kelly Romer

3 years later and I still think IB is one of the best decisions I've ever made. The curriculum set me up with skills and knowledge that are still laying the framework of my success in college and beyond. At Tulane, I have felt confident that I am up for any challenge. IB has given me the time management

skills needed to be a STEM major in college. Lastly, I am still close with my IB class and stay in touch with many of my IB peers regularly.

Diana Percy

"My decision to do the IB Diploma Program was one of the best decisions I have made for my education. Not only did I learn about a diverse range of subjects that I wouldn't have ever known about, IB also taught me *how* to learn. Being surrounded by people who were interested in learning and teachers who were excited to teach motivated me to do my very best work and push myself. I felt like I had a little family in such a big high school, and being around the other IB students and teachers made me feel comfortable to express myself and participate in class. Coming out of IB and going to college, I knew how to deal with a large course load, the best ways for me to study, how to write research papers and literary analyses and technical reports, and I was excited about learning. It really set me up for success and I would encourage anyone to do it, even if they feel like it could be daunting, the benefits of the program and the support system of your classmates and teachers outweigh the difficult parts of the program!"

(P.S. Everyone told me not to expect college credit from IB tests, but I got 21 credits and was able to bypass almost all of my core prerequisites so that I could take more interesting classes when I started college!)"

Natalie Nitsch

Being a student from public school in Kansas at a college like UChicago is difficult and very much contributes to impostor syndrome. So many of my peers went to insanely fancy private schools or even boarding school (!), and although I remind myself that I earned my spot here as much as they did, it's still easy to feel inadequate because I can't put my high school on my resume like they can. The thing that almost everyone from those schools had in common was that they did IB; IB has been an excellent equalizer. Especially early in my first year when I was struggling to find my place and reassure myself that I belonged here, talking to students from these rich fancy schools who had done IB and had similar experiences with it helped me to both fit in and feel like I belonged –IB at East gives its students a chance at a world-class education that they otherwise would not get, and I am eternally grateful that I took that opportunity.

I also don't think there's any way I would have gotten in at UChicago if I hadn't done IB. Some of that is that it probably stood out on my application – whether or not IB is "harder" than AP is irrelevant, but the fact that there are fewer people who do IB than AP is – but it's also that being surrounded by highly motivated students definitely pushed me to try harder and do more.

Emily Chisholm

I wanted to share a couple additional personal anecdotes:

1. When you join the International Baccalaureate Program, you truly join an international community. You become a part of a curriculum taught to high school students across the globe. I learned this first hand when I took my first international trip to Cusco, Peru with a service-learning program. There was another student on my trip from Lucca, Italy. We got to talking and quickly discovered that we were both in the IB Program. Before long, we were sharing CAS hour experiences, complaining about HL Math, and discussing the topics of our extended essays. I remember thinking

about how incredible it was that I could be in South America, connecting so much with a European I had just met. It helped me to develop an appreciation for my education that I did not previously possess, and allowed me to realize that the benefits and opportunities of an IB education go far beyond a classroom in Prairie Village, Kansas.

2. Almost five years ago, while searching for the perfect university to call home, I was extremely fortunate to receive a four-year, full tuition scholarship. I truly believe that I would not have been given this award without the IB program. In order to be selected for this scholarship, applicants must participate in two 30-minute interviews. Throughout both interviews, a majority of the time was spent discussing things relating to my IB experience. If I was not explaining what IB meant, I was describing my personal goals and worldview developed as a result of my IB education. The interviews were clearly fascinated by the program. Additionally, the oral exams and group discussions required in my classes more than prepared me for the articulation necessary for these interviews. I have no doubt that the IB Diploma Program helped set me apart from other applicants thereby making an incredible impact on my undergraduate life.

Completing the IB Diploma Program was one of the best decisions I've ever made.

Ireland Hague

I would say that IB helped me in a lot of ways, first and foremost being able to realize how much I was capable of. At so many times, it was so stressful and it felt impossible, but I did it and knowing that did a lot for me in the long run. It also helped me set boundaries in terms of not taking on too heavy of a workload. I think there's a lot of pressure to finish undergrad in 4 years or less, but that doesn't work for everyone and that's perfectly okay.

Starting college, I felt I was at a real advantage in terms of writing and reading comprehension. Essays were and remain fairly easy. Navigating difficult texts was no problem. As an English major, that's been especially useful. Although, it proved useful in the single semester I spent pre-med too. I would also say it normalized working closely with teachers and in small classes, of which I've taken plenty since graduating IB.

Spencer Frank

Though IB could be frustrating as a teenager, I am very glad to have been a part of the program. With the credit I came into college with as a result, I was able to double major and minor in four years, each in completely different fields. I probably could have even knocked off my last semester and graduated early if I had tried to. The program also prepared me well for research in college, and honestly was at times more rigorous than certain undergrad classes, leaving me wanting to pursue higher education after that. Maybe some day!

But really, IB gave me a lot more than some ticks on a spreadsheet and the ability to read critically. It took me a long time to understand that, though. In my early adulthood, I think often about my IB teachers- and you, specifically- for your abilities to recognize areas that our community was letting us down as kids. Our little neck of the greater Kansas City area is very homogeneous in terms of race, religion, and general socioeconomic status. It even seems to be in terms of gender and sexuality. Giving students access to education that does NOT center on treating our standard as "the neutral"

does wonders for expanding their capacity to imagine a better world and give them the drive to work to build it. This year, I've been thinking a lot about how I was in IB during the Ferguson protests, and how my thinking has since evolved to treat movements like that with a lot more reverence. I've been thinking a lot about how I was in IB following the Sandy Hook shooting. I've been thinking a lot about how same-sex marriage was federally legalized shortly after I was in IB. I voted for the first time just a year after finishing IB, and watched the winning candidate run exclusively on a xenophobic platform. In a country plagued by these and too many other transgressions to fit here, I was really, really lucky to be surrounded by mentors that recognized these problems and cared.

I'm teaching, myself, now! I'm working in adult education with mostly neurodivergent students, many of whom are immigrants. I try to keep that idea- that I am not the neutral- in mind each day at work. IB was a wonderful gateway drug to activism and intersectionality in the classroom, in the workplace, in public, and at home. Through IB, you and the other teachers gave me the tools to grow into a more empathetic and critical adult, and I really don't think I would have gotten those without your hard work, patience, and resilience.

I should wrap this up. If I can add an addendum to any prospective students, it would be this: yes, you do belong here. Spending all day sitting next to classmates that would end up going to Ivy League schools or had already named Mars Rovers or could run a mile no less than three times as fast as me had me feeling constant imposter syndrome. I was far from the best student, and even I managed to find my own degree of success here and grow at my own pace. It's VERY hard to see that in the moment, but the program really pays off.

Kevin Grinstead

As for International Baccalaureate, I think that program did a lot for me. As a Certificate IB student, I only took 4 classes throughout my time there, but 3 of them were actually my favorite classes of high school (junior and senior year English, senior year history). The teachers in those classes were also my favorite. Perhaps the IB mission often attracts the best teachers. These classes were just the best, they pushed me to become a better essay writer, showed me how I should be teaching history in my career as a high school history teacher, and in general made me a better student. They surrounded me with like-minded students who want to push themselves in school and have an engaging experience (for the most part) and that also benefited my academic experience at school. Along with that, I became closer with some now lifelong friends I love and rely on, people I am yet to find in my year and a half of college. I know IB changed the course of my social and academic life and future, and I am certain that it did so for the better. Also, speaking from a future educator's standpoint, I think the focuses of content and examination methods of IB are also more cultivate of knowledge than standard and AP classes are. I am becoming an educator because it's something I love to do, and a career I know will be fulfilling, but also because it can become so much better, and I know IB is a great step towards improving the pretty dreadful standards of American education.

Jessica Moore

IB really helped me be prepared for college, particularly when it came to literary analysis and essays. Writing essays and analyzing text have both been really big parts of my college experience thus far. It also helped me collaborate with peers in an academic way, as well as form long lasting bonds outside of the classroom.

Mark Towster

"I really appreciated the relationships IB helped me build. It put me into a close-knit crowd of individuals with very similar educational aspirations, where I felt comfortable being myself and continuing to grow academically, not to mention preparing myself for the rigor of college courses. Some of those relationships have even blossomed into lifelong friendships, and I'm eternally grateful to IB for giving me that!"

Alexandra Freeman

"The IB certificate program allowed me to access an intellectually stimulating set of courses without having to sacrifice my electives and extracurriculars. The analytical writing skills that I gained in IB have been critical in my liberal arts college education, and I've been fortunate enough to combine what I learned in IB with skills I developed in the electives which shaped my high school experience."

Jana Banerjea

Since I took IB, AP, and regular classes at East I got a good range of experiences & I definitely felt like my IB classes were easier to follow for people who like to learn more creatively. The curriculum was interesting & the assignments & projects were way more hands-on in a positive way! I felt like I gained a lot of skills that are very important in college at the moment like creative problem solving and the learning was a little bit more self-directed.

Will Green

"IB was one of if not my favorite high school experience (and I wasn't even diploma). The curriculum always challenged me in the best way possible: it creatively and legitimately motivated me to do my best. The curriculum is completely incomparable and as someone who's in college I can honestly say that no college class even has had the same engagement as IB English. Plus your classes are smaller so you get a really good community that you actually still talk to after graduation."