



SENIOR SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW

Lahiri Paolella

What courses are you taking in the IB Diploma?

I take high-level *history, economics, and English* Language and Literature, and standard-level *Spanish, math, and ESS*.

What do you want to study?

I've known for a while that I want to study *political science and international relations*. A few years ago, I was still exploring my interests, but it became clear that political science really sparked my passion. The combination of history and economics in the IB program has helped me think critically, and economics has been particularly useful in understanding the connections between various systems and how they relate to political science.

Do you enjoy your classes?

Yes, I find studying fulfilling. While the IB workload can be overwhelming, especially towards the end of last year and this year, *I've always valued the process of learning*. The IB program has taught me how to learn effectively and how to acquire knowledge. I've been exposed to this educational approach since my time in Denmark, where I studied in an IB school from first to seventh grade. This background made it easier for me to adapt to the IB in high school, as I was already familiar with its core values and balanced approach to learning.

You have a 41 in the IB and are involved in extracurriculars like MUN. How has MUN influenced you, and what do you enjoy most about it?

I've been involved in MUN since ninth grade, and it's been crucial in guiding me toward political science. *Initially, I was shy and introverted, but MUN helped me develop confidence and speaking skills*. Although the early conferences were virtual due to COVID, which made it harder to engage, I gradually became more comfortable. I remember feeling much more confident at the ACM Anatolia event. What I enjoy most about MUN is debating global issues. I love focusing on international topics and engaging with other delegates, especially when representing different countries' perspectives.

How does participating in MUN influence the way you engage in conversations?

MUN encourages collaboration, as you often work with others who share your country's viewpoint. You have to cooperate to support your resolution, which promotes constructive debate. *It's not just about opposing viewpoints, but about working together to create a solution*. As you improve your debating skills, you shift from simply opposing claims to proving why your perspective offers a better solution.



What other passions do you have outside of MUN? You're a musician, right?

Music has always been important to me, especially because of my family. My mom is a professional singer, and my dad played guitar in college, so music was always present in my life. I started listening to classic rock, particularly Queen, which my parents loved. I began playing drums when I was around seven or eight but didn't focus on it enough to improve. *Rhythm has always been important to me, so a few years ago, I picked up the bass. I've really enjoyed it, and playing with the school band and performing at concerts has been fulfilling.* While I still play drums occasionally, I've focused more on bass, and I feel more confident with it now. I enjoy the melodic side of bass and creating my own music, which I didn't do much with drums.

How do you balance all these activities with studying? Do you have a strategy?

Once these activities become part of your routine, they feel natural, and the workload doesn't seem as heavy. It can be hard to adapt at first, but once you settle into a rhythm, balancing schoolwork with extracurriculars becomes easier. Doing things I enjoy helps keep me motivated and productive. *If you love what you do, it doesn't feel like work.*

You're heading to the US for university, right? You've been accepted to many universities with scholarships.

Yes, I applied early decision to the University of Rochester. It has a strong music program, including a conservatory, which is important for me. I also love the location in upstate New York—the cold weather and proximity to Toronto are a bonus. The university's academic reputation, coupled with its large international student community, which comprises about 30% of the student body, was a big draw for me. *As someone who has always been part of an international community, this feels like the right fit.*

You've lived in many places. How has that shaped you?

I've been fortunate to live in Saudi Arabia, Denmark, and Italy. *These experiences have taught me how to adapt to different environments and shaped my worldview.* They've given me a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives, which has influenced how I see the world.

Do you plan to pursue a double major to include music?

I'm not sure about a double major. I want to keep music as something I do for personal enjoyment and growth, not as an academic focus. *The flexibility of the US education system allows me to continue studying music theory without it being the central focus of my degree,* so I'll keep learning music, but it won't be the academic focus of my studies.



How has Pinewood shaped you? What lessons or values will you carry with you?

Pinewood helped me become more confident and social. The tight-knit community allowed me to adjust quickly and feel welcome. Coming from a large school in Denmark, the smaller environment at Pinewood meant teachers could focus more on individual students, which really helped me grow. *It encouraged me to be more extroverted and made it easy for me to make friends, which I had feared before coming here.* The supportive environment at Pinewood has had a huge impact on my personal development.

What's your favorite memory at Pinewood?

One of my favorite memories is *performing with the school band at the spring concert.* It was a student-led event, and we worked together to organize and perform. Seeing it all come together and playing in front of the school was a fulfilling experience.

If Pinewood were a person, how would you describe them?

Pinewood would be sociable, inclusive, and welcoming. There's no division among students, and everyone feels comfortable and connected. It's an environment that encourages collaboration and openness.

What's your favorite place to hang out at school?

At the new campus, I've spent some time by *the pine trees* near the Cassandra Center and other buildings. It's a peaceful spot where we can relax and chat.

What's a dream or goal you have for the future?

My dream is to pursue something with music, even if it's not an academic pursuit. *I'd love to perform with a band or individually, sharing my music with others.* Politically, I see myself *working with international organizations or NGOs.* I don't feel ready to represent Italy politically due to my limited experience living there, but I hope to continue developing my Italian and eventually work in Italy when I feel more comfortable with the language.

You have so many different passions. Have you considered combining politics with music?

I would love to. *Music is a powerful way to express political views.* Art, especially music, has always been influential in politics, especially during times of uncertainty or chaos. *It's a way to communicate ideas and help people understand the world around them.*

What advice would you give to younger students just starting high school?

My advice would be to *pursue what you enjoy.* It can be hard to find what you like, but trying different things is key. Balancing academics with activities that help relieve stress, like music or sports, is important to stay motivated. Also, having close friends who support you through challenges is essential.