

DEC/JAN EDITION NEWSLETTER

NOVA UNIVERSE

Welcome to the second edition of our monthly college newsletter, written by Grade 10 Student Council Representatives Lana Filkova and Anika Friedman. In this newsletter, we will discuss and advise you on various aspects of your academic and college preparation, along with our mentor, the college counselor, Mrs. Irena Filkova. This edition contains both months of December and January, due to the minimal school days in both months as a result of the winter break. The topics discussed in this newsletter are meant to prepare students for the course selection coming up next month. If you have any suggestions or questions, feel free to contact one of your Grade 10 Student Council Representatives via email.

This time, we will cover:

- Interview with the NOVA University and Career Counselor - IB course selection & university applications
- Academic enrichment programs in focus
- Tips from current grade 11 and 12 IB students about choosing IB classes
- The importance of teacher and counselor recommendation letters in the admission process

INTERVIEW WITH THE UNIVERSITY AND CAREER COUNSELOR: HOW DOES THE IB COURSE SELECTION RELATE TO PROGRAM CHOICE AND UNIVERSITY APPLICATIONS?



Requirements



When choosing IB courses in the Diploma Programme, you should consider several factors:

- Subjects you enjoy studying about and are interested in and good at, i.e., you find them engaging, and you perform well in them
- Subjects related to your future undergraduate studies and potential career
- Subjects that satisfy country-specific entry requirements
- Having a realistic sense of the academic rigor you can handle

Aptitude and interest

When choosing IB courses in the Diploma Programme and deciding on which to pursue at Standard Level and Higher Level, you should primarily reflect on what subject areas you have some prior knowledge or aptitude in, or areas that you have always found intriguing and would like to dive in greater depth in. Even if not yet decided at this stage as to what you would like to study in university, you do have evidence of achievement to date, i.e., how you fared in your academic studies thus far, and which subjects you performed well in and conversely, which were the areas where you struggled or did not find as engaging. You should also bear in mind that while the MYP presents a broad conceptual framework in which you did lots of research, creative assignments, and presentations, the Diploma Programme is more content and exam-based, teaching you specific subject material in greater depth and asking you to approach assignments in a specific manner, tested on final exams at the end of Year 2. In the DP, different IB subjects carry different weights or rigour, and some are more demanding than others. For example, HL Mathematics: Analysis and Approaches, HL Physics, and HL Chemistry are deemed as more exacting subjects. Again, this should be read in context and in relation to each student's individual strengths. Knowing yourself as a learner and being realistic about your strengths and weaknesses is very important.

Relevance to undergraduate studies

When choosing IB courses, you should give some thought to what potential academic fields interest you in terms of undergraduate study, as certain IB subjects provide a more solid foundation and are relevant to specific fields. For instance, someone interested in studying medicine and health sciences would typically take HL Biology and Chemistry, along with Psychology, while a person interested in Engineering Sciences/STEM would pursue HL Math: AA and HL Physics, or/and HL Chemistry. On the other hand, if you are interested in a career in law, taking IB English A at HL and History at HL would be a good idea. If you want to study Economics or Business, taking those classes along with a relevant math class would be the way to go. If someone wants to study marketing, human resources, public relations, or art, taking Psychology at HL and AI Math would be a typical pathway. If you are interested in more areas or are undecided, you can opt for a more general course combination that covers all the bases.

Entry requirements per country and program

In relation to this, now would be a good time to consider which study abroad destinations you will likely apply to, as some countries have specific requirements in relation to subjects they require and recognize both overall and in specific fields, as well as HL/SL requirements. In particular, Germany and Switzerland are rather restrictive in this sense. For example, Germany doesn't recognize Sports, Health, and Exercise Science as a Science and if you want to study STEM, you must have your natural science or math class at HL. In addition, you are required to study the same IB subjects and levels for 2 consecutive years, so switching levels and subjects is not accepted. Similarly, in Switzerland, Psychology is not recognized as a Social Science. For more information, you should refer to the IB country recognition database and country-specific search engines.

IB Diploma Recognition database - <https://recognition.ibo.org/en-US/>

Switzerland -

<https://www.swissuniversities.ch/en/themen/zulassung/zulassung-universitaere-hochschulen/international-baccalaureatete>

Germany - <https://www.daad.de/en/studying-in-germany/requirements/ib-diploma/>

In addition, many countries (such as the UK and the Netherlands, for example) would have specific entry requirements regarding what IB courses, at what level, and what grade they require applicants to have. In particular, check the math requirements. In some cases, there may be an alternative way to lift a deficiency if you don't have the right IB subject, level, or grade, by taking another exam or qualification. Looking into specific universities and program requirements before deciding, i.e., doing some legwork before the course selection, is important. In other cases, there are countries that don't have specific requirements, but rather ask for the IB Diploma only, especially if they have their own admission tests.

Academic rigor (subject difficulty)

In deciding the IB courses and the levels, be realistic about the academic rigor you can handle, as the IB is a demanding program, so knowing the time commitment and requirements in relation to your other extracurricular activities is a key consideration. Balancing academic rigor (how demanding your classes are) and academic performance is also important in the context of university admissions, as countries that practice holistic admissions, such as the US, look at those 2 key factors first.

Finally, in deciding on your IB course selection, it would be helpful if you spoke to current IB students in both grade 11 and 12, the IB subject area teachers, the IB coordinator, and your counselor, so you can get multiple perspectives. Checking the subject brief guides to gain an understanding of the topics covered in the class, instructional hours devoted to each, the types of assessments, and their weight would also be very instructive. You can find them on the IBO website or just type the name of the subject + the subject brief guide.

For example:

<https://www.ibo.org/globalassets/new-structure/programmes/dp/pdfs/hl-economics-en.pdf>

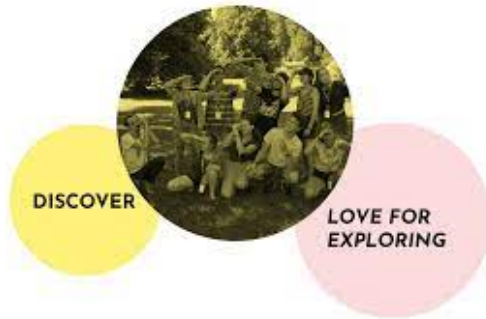
A note - while all courses at NOVA are IB courses, not every student needs to be a full IB Diploma student. As the IB DP requires a specific student profile, some students may find pursuing the IB Certificates route a better fit. Ultimately, instead of the DP, or in conjunction with the DP, students who are Macedonian citizens, i.e., have taken Macedonian, Albanian, or Turkish in HS, may also sign up for the Macedonian State Matura and use that as a qualification to access higher education and meet direct entry requirements as an alternative to the DP.

The next 2 years of your IB journey will be demanding and exacting, but they will be worth it, as you not only develop fully as a learner and holistically as a person, but you will also be deemed a more competitive candidate for university and overall be more ready to handle the university coursework, as consistent studies show. In addition, there are countries that recognize IB courses (level and grade specific) for university credit, and some universities give scholarships specifically for IB students or tuition reduction for obtaining a certain IB score.

ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS IN FOCUS

Discover Academy - Slovakia and Czechia: <https://discover.sk/en/>

The Discover Summer Academy is a self-development summer holiday program for high school students from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and around the world. It is a week spent in nature, during which you can discover what excites you and find the direction you want to take after high school. At Discover, you can explore dozens of different fields and gain inspiration from lecturers with diverse life, academic, and career experiences.



University of Amsterdam Pre- College Programs - Social Sciences - Politics, International Relations, Psychology, Media & Journalism, Sustainable Thinking, Business & Entrepreneurship:

<https://www.uva.nl/en/education/summer-school/programmes/summer-programmes.html?tab=pre-university>



IE University Madrid Summer School:

<https://www.ie.edu/ie-summer-school/pre-university/pre-university-summer-program/>

- To give you a real taste of the IE Experience, including campus life and the excitement of Spanish culture.
- To develop essential skills like team formation, problem-solving, and critical thinking through dynamic, hands-on experiential learning.
- To help you build lasting connections with international peers from all over the world.



Frankfurt School of Finance and Management:

<https://www.frankfurt-school.de/de/events/bachelor-master-summer-school>

Want to solve real cases, boost your presentation skills, and meet future classmates and professors – even before starting university?

The FS Bachelor Summer School is your chance to dive in! In just a few days, you'll experience hands-on workshops, inspiring company visits, and professional seminars that will sharpen your leadership and management skills – and give you a real taste of student life at Frankfurt School.



In the US, check out:

- University of Notre Dame Pre-College Programs: <https://precollege.nd.edu/>
- University of Rochester Pre-College Programs: <https://admissions.rochester.edu/pre-college-apply/>
- National Student Leadership Conference: <https://www.nslcleaders.org/> (multiple locations)
- UW Madison - [Accelerated Learning Program \(ALP\)](#): A three-week residential program where students dive deep into one university-level content course in a supportive and challenging environment.
- [Badger Summer Scholars \(BSS\)](#): A two-week residential program exploring an academic track, learning about university life and applications, and connecting with peers from across the U.S. and the world.
- [Wisconsin International Precollege Academy \(WIPA\)](#): A three-week residential program for international students to experience U.S. university life, participate in interactive workshops, and explore Midwest culture.
- [Summer at Hopkins](#)
- [NYU High School Programs](#)
- [Cornell Pre-College Studies](#)
- [Columbia University Summer Programs](#)

- [University of Toronto Summer Enrichment Programs](#)
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TIPS FROM CURRENT GRADE 11 AND GRADE 12 STUDENTS ABOUT CHOOSING IB CLASSES

Q1: What IB subjects are you taking in the DP?

- **Ayse Ayperi Sevinc (Grade 11):** HL History, HL English Language & Literature A, HL Economics, SL Biology, SL Mathematics Analysis and Approaches, and SL Spanish ab initio.
- **Tamara Tashkovska (Grade 12):** Math AA, Physics and English B on HL, Macedonian A, Economics and Dance on SL.

Q2: What did you base your course selection on? What are you planning or hoping to study in university, and how do your IB subjects and the DP overall prepare you for applying to and studying in university?

- **Ayse Ayperi Sevinc (Grade 11):** Firstly, I based my course selection on subjects that I am interested in. Then, I thoroughly researched what universities around the world typically look for in applicants who want to study law, especially in terms of essay-based and analytically demanding subjects. Subjects like HL History, HL English A, and HL Economics help me develop critical thinking, argumentation, and strong writing skills, which are all essential for a law degree.
- **Tamara Tashkovska (Grade 12):** I based my course selection on what I'm hoping to study at university, which is data science and computer science, potentially in combination with AI or economics. I chose Math AA HL and Physics HL because they are very connected with the fields I want to study, and many universities explicitly require them at HL for my chosen programs. Economics is one of the subjects that also may appear in my university studies, but even if I do not pursue it further, it was the social science that interested me the most. It is very logical and quantitative and it involves graphs and calculations which makes it the best choice for logical thinkers and problem solvers like me compared to other humanities and social sciences. English A is very demanding and time consuming, and since it was not required for any of my university options, I decided to minimize my workload and focus more energy on my high level subjects, which is why I went for English B HL. Dance was the subject I debated the most, as it is not at all related to what I want to pursue. I considered taking Chemistry instead, but ultimately chose Dance because of the adaptable and flexible structure of the curriculum and exams. Additionally, if you are passionate about it, taking a subject from the Arts will show universities that you are a well-rounded and holistic student, more than just rigorous academics. Overall, the IB has prepared me very well for

university by covering material similar to first year university content and by teaching me how to interpret and apply knowledge in real life situations. Writing the EE and TOK essay has improved my academic writing, which I think is visible in my university applications as well.

Q3: Can you give us some advice on how to choose IB subjects and some tips on how to be successful in the DP?

- **Ayse Ayperi Sevinc (Grade 11):** I would recommend researching possible university courses and countries over the summer and check their IB subject expectations or typical recommendations for your intended field. You should choose Higher Level subjects that match your strengths and the area you might want to study, especially essay-based HLs if you are considering law or other humanities related careers like me. Make sure you also pick subjects you genuinely enjoy, because you will study them in depth for two years and motivation matters a lot. Furthermore, I believe that effective time management is a key factor in achieving strong academic results. The workload in the IB Diploma Programme is significantly more demanding than in the MYP, making consistent and organized study habits essential. In addition to academic studies, I would strongly recommend participating in extracurricular activities such as academic or sports-based school clubs. These activities not only strengthen university applications by demonstrating commitment but also help fulfill CAS requirements, which are a core component of the IB.
 - **Tamara Tashkovska (Grade 12):** When choosing IB subjects, the most important thing is to think ahead and be strategic. Start by researching what you might want to study at university and check the subject requirements for those programs. Many degrees require specific subjects at HL, so those choices should come first. At the same time, be realistic about your strengths and learning style. For example, if you are a logical, pattern-based thinker like me, subjects with clear structure and calculations may suit you better than heavily essay based subjects. Also think about workload balance. Some subjects are extremely demanding, especially at HL, so research each subject's syllabus and make sure your overall combination is sustainable for you for two years. Regardless of what you choose, focus on understanding the material rather than memorizing it, otherwise you will struggle later when the final exams come. Be consistent and respect deadlines, as they are there for a reason. I would also advise you to try to finish components like IAs, the TOK essay, and the EE as early as possible, since they are done at your own pace but are very time consuming and become more stressful the more time passes.
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THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER AND COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATION LETTERS IN THE ADMISSION PROCESS

Why do recommendation letters matter?

When admissions officers are evaluating applicants, they are looking at two categories: the “hard factors” like grades, test scores, GPA; essentially anything that’s quantitative, and the “soft factors,” or qualitative elements like essays, extracurricular activities, demonstrated interest, and recommendation letters.

Letters of recommendation help round out your applicant profile. They provide insight into what you are like as a student and person from the perspective of someone who has worked closely with you during your high school career. The experiences that counselors and teachers have had with you can help to paint a better overall picture of your accomplishments, potential, and character.

How many recommendation letters do I need?

Most selective colleges and universities require one to three recommendation letters with your application, usually from your college counselor and at least one teacher.

Recommendation letters are typically submitted electronically through the school-specific supplements or application portals.

In some instances, like in the UK, ONE chief referee is required.

In other cases, in addition to academic references, colleges may allow optional references (mentors, coaches, peers, advisors, etc that know you in an extracurricular setting).

Counselor Recommendation Letters:

A counselor recommendation letter is exactly what it sounds like – a letter written by your college counselor that recommends you as a student. In essence, it’s a letter sent to colleges that brags about what a great student you are and why a particular college should accept you.

Recommendation letters are creative and personal, unlike the numerical value of your SAT score or your grades. They can convey your strengths to an admissions counselor in a way that an essay or transcript can’t.

While you may have heard of the concept of teacher recommendation letters, counselor recommendation letters are a little different. Counselors have a special insight into where you stand among other students because they’ve gotten to know many of them. While teacher recommendations focus on your performance in the context of that class, counselor recs present you in the school context and beyond in a more holistic way, telling a story about who you are.



In addition to giving some background on you as a student, a recommendation letter can also give an admissions counselor some information about where you come from. “Many college and university admission officers use the counselor recommendation to learn more about the school and the community of the student applying for admission,” says Shawn Abbott, assistant vice president and dean of admissions at New York University. “It is helpful to learn about the academic profile of one’s senior class, testing averages, and the socioeconomic background of the students attending and the town or city in which the school resides.”

Not all students come from the same environment with the same resources, so a counselor recommendation letter may give admissions counselors that insight and put your achievements in perspective based on your peers.

Moreover, letters of recommendation can let admissions counselors peek into your life. “They can be really helpful in explaining grades that are anomalies or family situations that may have adversely impacted a student,” says Jacqueline Murphy, director of admission of the

undergraduate program at Saint Michael's College.

While you might not be able to explain a familial situation or environmental factor on your transcript, your counselor has the opportunity to do so in his or her letter. In general, a recommendation letter is another medium that allows your counselor to express your strengths and advocate for you as a candidate.

In short, the counselor's recommendation (secondary school report) acts like a floodlight, focusing on you in the larger context of the school and beyond.

Teacher Recommendation Letters:

Teacher recommendation letters act like a spotlight - they focus on your qualities as a student and individual **in the context of a specific class** (performance, academic potential relative to a specific field, attitude to learning, relationship with peers, reaction to feedback, criticism and setbacks, and the like)



Whom to Ask for a Recommendation Letter?

[It's never too early](#) to think about recommendation letters. [Build and foster relationships with teachers and counselors from day one](#) so that you not only get the most out of your classes, but also have people who can advocate on your behalf when it comes time to apply to colleges.

- **For a summer program in sophomore/junior year**, ask a teacher related to the subject area you're applying for and who knows you well, or a guidance counselor.

[COUNSELOR RECOMMENDATION INFO SHEET](#)

[TEACHER RECOMMENDATION REQUEST FORM](#)

Teacher Recommendation Letters for University:

Junior year teachers or senior year teachers are usually the best for writing recommendations, since they are more likely to have taught you in a high-level course, taught you over a few years,

and know you in different capacities.

It is also good to get a recommendation letter from a teacher in the subject that is relevant to the course of study you intend to pursue. If you plan to apply as an engineering major, a letter from your physics or math teacher might hold more weight than one from your English teacher.

When to Ask for University Recommendation Letters:

Ideally, you will ask teachers and counselors if they will write on your behalf at the end of junior year or the very beginning of your senior year. This will give them ample time to plan and draft a thoughtful and comprehensive letter.

Be sure to provide your teacher with proper instructions and any other materials he or she may need to reference, such as your resume or a great assignment you completed in his or her class. You can assume that popular instructors will have a lot of students asking for recommendations. If you wait too long, they may not have time to write a compelling letter for you.

Asking for a Reference Nova Protocol:

- Approach the teacher in person or write an email asking for a recommendation letter (state specifics).
- If the teacher accepts your request, fill out in detail the official [teacher recommendation request form](#).
- Provide the teacher with specific instructions as to how the letter should be formatted and sent.
- Ask for a letter of reference a minimum of 3 weeks ahead of the deadline.
- Teachers may decline writing a recommendation letter on short notice; even if they accept, a last-minute request would result in a last-minute quality recommendation letter.

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