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From IB to university

Diploma students at university

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More than 1.5 million students have participated in the DP since it began in 1968. In 2015, over 150000 students sat DP exams globally. That's more than four times the number of students in 2000. DP students study at more than 3000 schools in nearly 150 countries. The curriculum and assessment are developed in consultation and collaboration with educators from around the world, and there are nearly 9000 trained examiners worldwide involved in marking the exams. The structure of the programme itself incorporates the best educational practices from different national systems without being based on any particular one.

DP academics compare favourably to other curriculums

Over the last few years, several studies have compared the DP with other qualifications, including Advanced Placement (AP), A-levels, and some national curriculums. The DP has consistently fared well in these comparisons, and DP courses were generally found to be at an equivalent or higher or level of rigour than the comparisons.

DP maths courses were compared with a range of high-performing systems from around the world. The DP had the greatest range of courses, the most challenging options, and used one of the widest ranges of assessments. Another study found DP maths HL students, on average, earned the best UK degree classifications compared to students with other qualifications (Homer, M. and Monaghan, J. 2016).

In the USA, the Education Policy Improvement Center examined DP courses against the widely accepted college-readiness standards, 'Knowledge and Skills for University Success' (KSUS), which detail the traits students need to succeed in their first year university studies. DP standards in all subject areas exceeded or aligned with the KSUS. The research also found that the DP promoted all of the key cognitive strategies university lecturers think are important for success (Conley, D. and Ward T. 2009)

Student aspirations and destinations

In 2015, DP students sent transcripts to nearly 4,000 higher education institutions in 99 countries. Although this diversity of destinations is striking, the majority of DP students tend to apply to more selective institutions. Twelve of the 20 higher education institutions that received the most transcripts from IB students in 2015 were ranked in the top 100 globally. Research suggests that DP students are more likely to enter university and enrol in more selective institutions. In the UK, IB students were nearly 60% more likely to attend a top 20 university than their A-level peers after controlling for differences in academic ability.

What do admissions officers think of the DP?

University admissions officers have long held the DP in high regard. Annual surveys over the past 10 years have consistently shown the esteem UK admissions officials have for the programme. Research in the UK and Australasia drew similar conclusions. The widespread practice in North America of granting DP students credit and/or advanced standing further demonstrates the positive perception of the DP among higher education officials.

Feeling prepared for university

The DP isn't just about getting into university — you need to do well once there. Compared to students from other programmes, IB students consistently report feeling well prepared for and confident in undertaking university studies. In addition to pride in participating in the programme, DP students commonly report feeling well equipped to adjust to, and succeed in, university coursework. Motivation, work habits, time management, academic self-concept, research capability and interest, writing and analytical skills, and the ability to draw interdisciplinary connections have all been reported by students as benefits of the DP.

A big part of what sets the DP high school experience apart are the core components of CAS, TOK and the extended essay. You may not realise it, but most other secondary programmes don't have these kinds of features. There are a variety of studies that suggest that these elements play an important role in improving the competencies mentioned above. Personal growth, an ethic of service, maturity, open-mindedness, reflection and a better understanding one's place in the world have also been cited as important benefits. Be sure to include these attributes in your application material.

Post-secondary performance

IB students tend to go on to very highly regarded universities and report adjusting well to their new environment, but how do they actually fare once there? Evidence suggests that DP students are more likely to earn a degree than their peers, and often in less time. These results were consistent across different countries and systems.

A series of studies in the USA consistently showed that participation in the DP leads to higher postsecondary graduation rates. The most recent analysis, from 2015, shows that US DP students were much more likely to earn a bachelor's degree within 4 years than the national average (79% vs 39%). These rates were even higher for students who earned the full Diploma.

In the UK, IB students were significantly more likely than A-level students to earn both first- or second-class honours degree classifications, after controlling for academic ability. Former IB students were also more likely to pursue further studies after graduation.

It's not just the students who already have an advantage

Students from diverse backgrounds and circumstances can benefit from participating in the DP. In fact, some research suggests that students from economically or socially disadvantaged backgrounds may benefit the most from participation.

In a study examining University of California students, the positive impact of the DP was most pronounced among students from lower-income families. Similarly, in a separate study, urban low-income and minority students from Chicago Public Schools were shown to benefit greatly in terms of university enrolment and academic self-concept.

Analysis in 2015 revealed that low-income IB students from all ethnic backgrounds in the USA were nearly twice as likely to enrol directly in an undergraduate programme compared to the national average of low-income students. The differences were the most pronounced among minority students. Additionally, 76% of DP candidates from US high schools with high percentages of low-income populations went on to earn a bachelor's degree.

Beyond academics

There is a growing body of evidence that the DP really does prepare you for more than just further study. You may have joined the IB Diploma Programme because you wanted to broaden your horizons or were inspired by the mission 'to help to create a better and more peaceful world'. By making the decision to take DP courses or the full programme, you made a choice to join a group of diverse but like-minded individuals from around the world, and this may be where the difference lies. DP alumni have often cited traits like curiosity, reflection, self-motivation and a sense of community developed through the DP as making a real difference in their university years and beyond.

In-depth interviews with DP alumni who participated in the programme from 1968 to 2014 revealed a profound and long-lasting impact, including on academic and career trajectories, broader global perspectives, critical thinking and analytical skills, and positive dispositions towards lifelong learning. A common thread was the DP's potential to powerfully shape the lives of participating students.

On a more practical level, former DP students in their first year at the University of British Columbia were found to be considerably more likely to participate in student leadership activities, student clubs or organisations, volunteer work, and tutoring/teaching other students. Additionally they were more likely to indicate that they planned to be involved with faculty research, study abroad, and undertake a practicum or internship.

Many universities are looking for students who do not just succeed academically, but really make a positive contribution to the campus community. So be sure to think of the ways the IB has helped you to both develop and express these qualities and how you can communicate them in your application material.

Resources to help in transition

Want to keep up to date on IB university recognition developments? Stop by the university success section of the IB blog for regular updates: <http://blogs.ibo.org/blog/category/university-success/>

Thinking of applying to a university overseas? The IB recently developed guides for international students considering higher education in the USA, the UK, Australia, Canada, Netherlands, and Hong Kong. You can find them in the IB recognition resource library:

www.ibo.org/university-admission/ib-recognition-resources-and-document-library/

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