

Anne

WR 13300

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### IB or not IB?

Situation: As a former student at Vincentian Academy and a recipient of the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma, I have been asked by my former principal, Mrs. Lennon, to speak with the current sophomore class about participating in the IB program. The sophomores are currently deciding which classes to take during their junior year, when the IB curriculum begins at Vincentian. Many of them see the program as rigorous and intimidating, and may not want to participate because of the time and effort it requires. I hope to convince them that the IB program will benefit them in the long run and that they should sign up for IB classes next year.

Hello Vincentian Academy Class of 2017! I can't believe you're all at the end of your sophomore year already. It seems like just yesterday you walked into this gym for morning assembly on your very first day of freshman year and on *my* very first day of senior year. It was in this gym that I cheered our Royals basketball team on to victory countless times, danced the night away at four homecoming dances, and sat wide-eyed at the end of my own sophomore year weighing all of my options for my junior year schedule. Now those decisions are yours, and I know that one in particular is weighing on all of your minds: whether or not you should sign up for IB classes. I hate to stress you all out too much, but this decision is a pretty important one, as it plays a huge part in your academic status during these next two years of high school and throughout college. Hopefully this decision will not seem so intimidating after I share my own experience with the IB program, which has positively impacted my life in countless ways over the past three years.

To make clear to you the impact that the IB program can have on your life, I want to start off by explaining how the IB program will transform the quality of your education during your final two years at Vincentian Academy. Since the IB program is an international organization with uniform standards to which all assignments and exams are held, IB classes are designed to maximize your learning and test performance. While non-IB teachers may allow an easier workload for their students since they make their own exams and grade them, IB teachers must ensure their students learn enough to pass the externally graded exams and uphold the program's standards. John Bishop, an associate professor of human resource studies at Cornell University, explains that since students in the IB program are no longer competing against each other, they enthusiastically take on the challenges of the classes and allow their interest in the subject matter to be shown, leading to more involved class discussions and a more fun learning experience ("AP"). I myself can attest to this thanks to the interesting discussions about cancer treatments in IB Biology and the complexities of *Othello's* characters in IB English that I was lucky enough to experience. The IB program excels in providing students with a great high school learning experience and in turn a better educational foundation for the next step in life.

Since I was in your shoes not too long ago, I know that many of you may be thinking, "More knowledge sounds great and all, but why should I opt for much harder classes when I could just take the easier ones?" I agree that a heavier workload isn't the most fun thing in the world, especially in high school when you're in the midst of so many social distractions you'd rather take part in. However, I guarantee that the vast majority of my fellow IB graduates would agree that the rigorous IB classwork has been paying off since we got to college, a time in your life when you don't want to be behind academically. For one, college

assignments and exams that seemed terrifying at first to some of my classmates weren't too intimidating to me thanks to my IB background. As Jay Mathews explains in his article in *The Washington Post*, AP and IB courses "give average students a chance to experience... heavy college reading lists and difficult college examinations" ("Inside"). The IB program allowed me to experience a smooth transition into my freshman year of college (as smooth as can be expected when moving 400 miles away from home) and prepared me well for the challenging curriculum I've faced at Notre Dame so far. Since Vincentian Academy has a 100% college acceptance rate, I have no doubt that transitioning into college will be an important part of each of your lives in the near future and that the IB program will most definitely make a huge difference in that process ("Academics").

One specific aspect of the IB program that sets it apart from regular classes, or even other advanced learning programs, is the infamous 4,000 word extended essay. Naturally, the thought of writing 4,000 words about a school subject would send any high school student into panic, as it did for me when I was first told of the program requirement. However, once I had started my research and writing process, I quickly learned that the extended essay wasn't nearly as bad as it had seemed before and was actually a blessing in disguise. I chose to write my extended essay on Hitler's role in the Holocaust, which I know is not the most uplifting topic but is actually one I have great interest in. The Holocaust had always intrigued me since I first learned about it in middle school, so when I was told I would have to write 4,000 words about a topic in one of my school subjects, I figured that would be the right path to go down. The project allowed me to really delve into an issue I had always wanted to learn more about, and at times I got so caught up in my intriguing topic that I completely forgot I was fulfilling a requirement for the IB diploma. As you may

know, there is a large array of possible topics to research for the extended essay, so many of my classmates spent their time exploring the effects of soil salinity on plant growth or the theme of love in *The Hunger Games* book series. What seemed like a taxing, gruesome process to my sophomore class actually taught our senior selves that pursuing an academic interest could be fun and that we had a lot to gain from such an experience.

The experience gained from the extended essay not only transforms the learning process during high school, but also plays a huge part in preparation for college. The IB website explains that the extended essay “provides practical preparation for undergraduate research,” an attribute that has definitely proven itself in my own experience (“What”). The length of many college-level essays and research papers is intimidating to anyone, but the fact that I had already overcome the hurdle of writing a 4,000 word essay helped me approach my assignments with a high level of confidence. The writing process involved with the extended essay also boosted my skills in communicating ideas and presenting arguments, two areas of development the extended essay is aimed at promoting (“What”). This skill set has helped me in all of my papers throughout my freshman year of college, especially in my Writing and Rhetoric class aimed at improving argumentative skills. Without the extended essay requirement of the IB program, I wouldn’t have had such a solid background in writing quality papers and subsequently would have had a much harder time adjusting to the college workload.

On top of the extended essay, yet another part of the IB program designed to promote learning is the required Theory of Knowledge (TOK) course. I know this class probably seems extremely vague to all of you, as it did to me when I was a sophomore. However, after a few TOK classes, I quickly realized that the material and discussions

played a huge part in how I approached and interpreted information in all of my other courses. This is because the Theory of Knowledge course promotes metacognition, in which a student monitors his/her own learning, a skill characteristic of experts in any field along with school-age learners, according to research by the National Research Council Committee on Programs for Advanced Study (Gollub). TOK also develops critical thinking and reading skills, which not only lead to success in high school courses, but also prepare students for the challenges of college classes (Gollub). The questions about truth, belief, and perception that we would discuss in my TOK classes sometimes seemed irrelevant and pointless to me, but now that I'm in my first college philosophy class I realize the course was actually helping me start to think about important philosophical issues and was a great primer for the discussions I now have in philosophy. Principal Robert Snee, whose school has had the IB program for over 30 years, explains that TOK can be seen as "a total package that prepares students better for college than anything else" ("AP"). He couldn't be more right.

Although the IB program is undoubtedly renowned for its high academic standards and success, I want to stray away from that idea for a moment and talk about the ways IB promotes community service through Creativity, Action, and Service (CAS). I know this phrase probably sends shivers up your spines in dread of the 150 hours of community service ahead of you if you choose the IB route. To be honest with you all, waking up early on a Saturday morning to help at the soup kitchen was never as enticing as staying in my comfortable bed and sleeping until noon. However, looking back three years later, I'm so glad CAS pushed me to fulfill all those service hours, because the experiences and lessons I learned from my volunteering helped shape me into the person I am today. Witnessing how

I could make someone's day a little bit brighter by helping at the hospital showed me how important it is to give back to the community and played a huge part in ensuring I would continue this work even after high school. For example, I'm currently in a club called College Mentors for Kids, in which we serve as role models to disadvantaged kids in the area and teach them to contribute to their communities and strive for a college education. I really enjoy my time in the club because I know it's important that I give back to the community, a lesson I learned thanks to CAS. The CAS aspect of the IB program is essential in making sure students obtain the right values during the most formative time in their lives.

I know what many of you may be thinking right now: how am I supposed to take all those rigorous IB courses, participate in 150 hours of community service, and still have a social life? It may seem like a tight squeeze at first, and you may be questioning if there is even time for sleep with such a schedule. As an IB program survivor, I can assure you that you will have time for anything you may want to participate in during high school. During my time at Vincentian Academy, I played varsity tennis in the fall, cheered for football and basketball throughout most of the school year and took dance classes almost every day year-round. My involvement in extracurriculars meant I had at least one sporting event or activity to attend almost every day of the year. Despite the endless stream of dance practices and tennis matches, I still managed to receive my IB diploma and enjoy the typical high school experience, including the championship basketball games and weekend parties. This doesn't mean to say that the whole process was easy, as it took a lot of determination and effort to continue working hard over those two years, but I am completely sure that if

you all set your mind to it, each one of you could become the next IB diploma recipients at Vincentian Academy.

I'm not the only IB diploma recipient who was able to experience all of the social benefits of high school despite rigorous coursework, as my boyfriend and fellow graduate Neil Young also boasted a busy social life throughout high school on top of participation in the IB program. As many of you most likely recall, Neil was a starter and captain of the varsity basketball team during his junior and senior years, leading the team to the regional championship both seasons. This success didn't come easily, as the Royals basketball team practiced six days a week for most of the year, a schedule Neil maintained along with his duties as student body president, his involvement in National Honors Society and his IB classwork. In preparation for this speech, I asked Neil for his opinion on the busy schedule he maintained throughout high school. He admitted that the IB program was difficult to work around at first, but that it didn't take long for him to adjust to it and create balance between his schoolwork and social life (Young). He also shared that looking back now on his final two years of high school, he doesn't regret choosing the IB program at all, because he was still able to experience parts of high school he will never forget, including maintaining a steady relationship--which I can attest to--and making friendships he still holds to this day (Young). Similar experiences can be found throughout the Class of 2014, as well as the many graduates before us, and I'm confident that they will be found among the IB diploma recipients in the Class of 2017 as well.

Although I know 150 hours of community service isn't the most exciting idea in the world and such a heavy workload sounds pretty scary, I without a doubt urge each one of you to sign up for at least one IB class. Some of you may be wary of my advice, wondering

what in the world I could be getting you into, but I assure you that participating in the IB program will not be something you regret later in life. I truly want all of you to make the most of your time at Vincentian, especially since I often wish I could go back and live just one more day in those halls. I'm confident that whoever chooses to participate in the IB program will get the most out of their high school experience and will thank themselves later on for making the right decision. I wish each of you luck during your final years of high school and urge you all to reach out to me if you have any questions or need advice. As they always say, you are forever a part of the Vincentian family, so make your family proud.

Thank you!



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