

Is IB for Me?

The Challenge

I will put my heart and soul into an intellectual adventure for two years with like-minded inquiry-oriented friends yielding a special internationally recognized high school diploma: the *International Baccalaureate*. I do this for the love of collegiate learning and not just for the honors grades and college credits. I do this because I want to learn about the interconnectivity of all subjects, I like independent learning, and I'm bored with too many directions.

What will I do?

It's not a foreign exchange program in Barcelona. While every year or two, we may have foreign exchange students in our program, it's called *International* because after the War (yeah, the one against the Nazis), Europeans decided that if they were going to stop killing each other they should start teaching kids to engage in critical thinking and inquiry across the curriculum to invent new ways to address the challenges of the world. It's called *Baccalaureate* because that is just a fancy word derived from French or Latin for a high school academic degree that is recognized by colleges in about 150 countries.

In the spring semester of sophomore year, I ask my counselors to enroll me in the IB diploma program. For the next two years, I take all honors classes in the core academic areas plus a philosophy class after school for two semesters, make a commitment to developing my own creativity and community service after school, and (deep breath) I write a college-level research paper about anything I want. The classes are small, the curriculum is intense, and almost everyone cares about what they learn. Here's a [link to the International Baccalaureate website](#). Below, a diagram from this site shows the IB subject areas. Our QHHS classes fall under each of these subjects and meet college entrance requirements.



The Diploma Program (DP) Core is about the IB approach to learning which emphasizes research, service, and thinking about how we're thinking and trying to figure out right from wrong, not by command but by choice.

What do I gain?

Consider these benefits:

- a boatload of learning in small classes with like-minded fellow students. Since we started the IB program at Quartz Hill in the late 1990s, we have had about twenty to sixty juniors and a similar number of seniors in the program.
- not just exam-oriented work but projects and papers that I design myself
- classmates whose family heritages are from all around the world and where respect for our cultures washes over into school clubs (such as the Multicultural Club) that are fun and motivational
- college credit for classes (we do have some students who are not full diploma candidates but still earn college credit for individual classes)
- Beyond the strong qualifications for college applications, IB is about learning for learning's sake, doing something because it is intrinsically valuable, and preparing for a successful college career.

What might I lose?

- Sleep. Sometimes we can overdo it. Students don't just do IB; they are in with the crowd doing journalism and/or ASB; they take classes at the college, plus maybe a sprinkling in Virtual Academy. Then the SATs come along (yes, I know, they are not required anymore for UCs and Cal States, but still optional or required for other schools), then college apps...plus maybe there's that crush who is just so high maintenance...By itself, the IB program is a reasonable time commitment; it's just everything else...Sigh!

I have questions

- *How does IB compare to AP (Advanced Placement classes)?* Both are good, and many IB teachers teach in both honors programs. One way to compare them is to think of IB as college classes at QHHS and AP as college-prep classes. An AP class is oriented toward preparing for one exam without projects or papers. The AP exams are good, but they are very structured and don't have that college feel to them. It used to be said that AP exams catch you on what you *don't* know, and IB exams demand that you show them what you *do* know. Still true.
- *How much college credit do I get?* A full year. But keep in mind that colleges have very structured programs, and the amount of time I will spend in college often depends on the sequencing of the classes in the college major. IB superbly prepares students to excel in college.
- *Can I still take non-IB classes?* Usually, students take some AP or regular classes and a few AP exams each year, too!

- *I still have questions. Who do I contact?* Contact your counselor at QHHS. Mr. Tepper, the head of the counseling department, has worked with us for many years (jtepper@avshd.org). Contact me, Dr. Reti (sreti@avhsd.org). I am co-coordinating IB. And, of course, contact Mr. Cassady (jcassady@avhsd.org), the coordinator of the IB program.

Thanks for reading this letter. If you care about learning for learning's sake and are willing to work hard, then IB is for you.

Go, Royals!