Good study habits create learners who hit the ground running in university

Every Diploma Programme graduate will have written an Extended Essay – an immersive research paper of up to 4,000 words that requires independent research and excellent organisational skills. A 2011 survey of university admissions staff undertaken by Cardiff University, UK, found they valued the Extended Essay’s role in developing cognitive, research, writing and communication skills. Dr David Conley, Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership in the College of Education at the University of Oregon and founder of the Educational Policy Improvement Center, says the IB ‘exceeds standards in critical thinking and research skills’ required for college-readiness in the USA. And many Extended Essays are presented at admissions interviews, to demonstrate higher-order analytical skills. Perhaps all that college-readiness is why research by SII International found the graduation rate for IB alumni after four and six years studying in US universities was higher than the national average.

Learning a second language has been linked in many studies to higher achievement at both school and university

Students learn to look beyond the facts to analyse sources, link one subject to another and question the consensus. Inquisitiveness and interpretation are among the key cognitive properties of an IB education a 2012 study of Diploma Programme students in Chicago found strong academic skills, especially related to analytical writing. Leading thinkers such as Professor Howard Gardner have identified the ability to reflect and critique as vital to effective 21st century learners.

Diploma Programme assessments are summative, largely taking place over the two years of the programme, focusing on what students have learned and their abilities, rather than what they haven’t learned or can’t do. Testing is rigorous, backed by high-level evidence and is based on performance against set standards. As well as helping give a true picture of student performance, it also assists universities in their admissions process – with no grade inflation for more than 30 years, the Diploma Programme is a reliable and internationally consistent measure of academic excellence.

IB graduates were much more likely to be enrolled at one of the top 20 higher education institutions than entrants holding other qualifications

One of the main differences between the Diploma Programme and other curricula is Theory of Knowledge (TOK) – classes that encourage students to make connections between subjects and gain the skills they need to become critical thinkers and more effective learners, rather than simply repositories of knowledge. But TOK is only part of the picture: teachers in IB World Schools are encouraged to plan interdisciplinary classes. Seeing connections between subjects also helps prepare students for higher education studies, where learning is becoming less compartmentalized.