

# STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

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Brian Vaughn  
DP Graduate  
Spruce Creek High School  
Florida, US



Brian Allen Vaughn completed the Diploma Programme (DP) at Spruce Creek High School, Florida, US before beginning his university studies at the University of North Carolina.

## Why did you originally decide to pursue an IB diploma?

In my hometown, the IB Diploma Programme (DP) has a reputation for supporting student achievement. After being encouraged by my parents and middle school teachers to apply to the DP at Spruce Creek High School, I was accepted and completed my first two years of preparation, which included advanced placement classes and practice internal assessments. What convinced me to stick with DP, as difficult as it was at times, was a presentation that a guidance counsellor gave. She explained that DP candidates were among the most competitive college applicants in the United States. After completing the DP, I am fortunate that the curriculum made me both a competitive university applicant and a complete learner.

## When did you choose to pursue environmental studies?

Since coming to UNC, I have pursued a degree in environmental studies, with a minor in city & regional planning. I chose this path after being inspired by an assignment in my theory of knowledge (TOK) class senior year. During my junior year, I had the fortune of taking environmental systems and societies with Joshua Platt, the chair of Spruce Creek's Science Department. It was impossible to take this class and not be deeply and immediately inspired to protect the environment.

My academic focus at UNC is rooted in this inspiration, as I have followed my passion for sustainable urban design to a research project I will pursue this summer. The research is supported by the [UNC Scholars Program](#), which considers every UNC applicant for a full merit scholarship. I am studying how people interact with the built environment (sidewalks, benches, plazas) around rail transit stations in Charlotte, NC, Atlanta, GA, and South Florida. My goal is to create a theory of how the different visions for rail systems in these cities have

influenced the way people use them.

## Did the extended essay, TOK, and CAS prepare you for university?

Without a doubt, the extended essay was the most valuable preparation for university that I had in the DP. So many of my term papers I write for my courses resemble the format of my essay. Completing a significantly challenging research paper in the DP prepared me for writing papers quickly, efficiently, and comprehensively at university.

An assignment in my TOK course, which asked us to consider how a career dealt with a knowledge issue, inspired my initial interest in city planning and urban design. Understanding how areas of knowledge pursue the "truth" through ways of knowing helped me immensely in a host of university courses.

## What advice do you have for current IB students?

Public universities in the United States have a wide variety of paths for undergraduates. I encourage current DP candidates to consider the merits of a large research university. These institutions have vast resources, every sort of research imaginable, diverse summer opportunities, and many provide a curriculum that incorporates aspects of a liberal arts college. I think this exists at UNC and its peer institutions, and this has facilitated my growth as a learner in a way that replicates the IB [learner profile](#).