

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

“You don’t have to do it alone, everyone needs advisors and allies.”

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Joseph Obiagwu completed all of the requirements for the Diploma Programme (DP) at Paxon School for Advanced Studies in Florida, U.S. Even though he was just short a few points for earning the full diploma, Joseph was able to obtain acceptance into the University of South Florida, where he is currently studying biomedical sciences and public health. He explains how valuable his IB education is for both his success in college and in his future academic goals.

Why did you originally decide to pursue the IB diploma?

I first learned about IB while in middle school through various recruitment programmes for high-achieving students. I am the first in my immediate family to go through the education process in the United States and was unsure as to what was the best course of action for my high school years. Initially, I was torn between completing the IB programme at Paxon and doing Advanced Placement at another school. But what had helped me make a decision was seeing how valuable the Diploma Programme (DP) had been for students whose goal it was to attend college. Many past and current students said that although the programme was difficult, doing the IB programme made adjusting to college easier. Additionally, the relationships that they built with classmates made the process worth it. I was always the type of student who was ready for an academic challenge and believed that Paxon and the IB programme could help me to be the best person that I could be.

As an IB student, how did you shape your studies to your interests? Are there skills you developed that you still use today?

One very unique aspect of the DP is that you have to take courses from all of the various subject areas and do so at the same level of rigor. The work in each of the courses provided insight into what it takes to be successful in each area and taught me how to ask questions of my college professors to help me grow. One thing that my organic chemistry professor encouraged my class to think about was the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, which reminded me of how we were taught to view our skill development in the DP. I certainly feel more prepared to think that way, than my peers who didn't have IB at their schools.

Additionally, the extended essay helped me bring to light my passion for racial issues. I focused my essay on the role of Black college athletes in the civil rights movement and throughout high school I was exposed to issues of racial relations in the United States. The shooting of Michael Brown in Louisiana happened just as I entered high school and protests led by NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick began to capture national attention while I was an IB diploma candidate. Being able to write about such issues helped me to realize that I wanted to impact issues surrounding race, especially in my

future career in the medical field. After graduation, I hope to utilize this passion by pursuing an MD/MPH, with a focus on healthcare disparities.

What advice do you have for current students?

You're not alone even if it feels like you are. An important lesson that the DP taught me was to ask for help when I needed it. Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness or vulnerability, but it means that you are strong enough person to get help when needed. There is no point in struggling and not talking about it. I'm doing that more in college than I did when I was in high school and it has helped me immensely in both my academics and my personal well-being. Find people who understand what you're going through and who you know you can count on: Peers, loved ones, mentors, or even your guidance counselor. Listen to your teachers because they have helped so many students over the years and they also often keep in touch with students after high school. Another thing is to develop good study habits, time management skills, and avoid procrastination! Learning this now will make things your IB experience much more bearable and will pay dividends once you start college.

What would you say to students considering the DP?

What kind of person do you want to become? Universities are not only looking at your grades and test scores. The unique qualities I see in myself and other students in my DP class were that we are all well-rounded, ambitious and want to make a difference in our own way. I think we allow our perceptions, fears, and current circumstances to get in the way of doing what will make us the best version of ourselves. Don't get me wrong, it's definitely a challenge to do IB and a huge accomplishment to complete the programme and get the diploma. But getting the diploma, or even the college credit for that matter, isn't the end goal. It's the ways that you improve as a student, the experiences you get through CAS and other experiences, and the people you meet along the way that make the journey worthwhile. I could summarize that not only will the IB give you the opportunity to challenge yourself in the ways you want to, but it will also challenge you in ways you haven't thought of.