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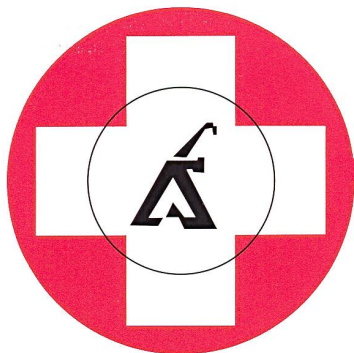
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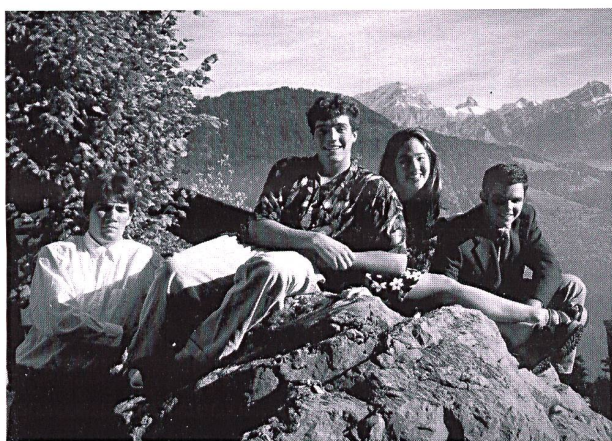
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# LEYSIN AMERICAN SCHOOL IN SWITZERLAND

## The International Baccalaureate

The International Baccalaureate (IB) equates with «top of the line» secondary school programs. What is it? Who participates? What are the advantages of the IB Diploma over a regular high school diploma?



*Student Council officers, view from the school*

Twelve schools in Switzerland offer the IB Diploma program, nine international and three Swiss schools. All but two offer the program in English. More than 750 schools in nearly 100 countries offer the program, a figure which is increasing by leaps and bounds as schools realize the quality and significant advantages for their students.

The International Baccalaureate originated in the mid-1960s at the International School of Geneva. Faced with the problem of preparing students of United Nations families for universities in their home country, the school decided to launch the concept of a diploma that would meet requirements for university entrance in as many countries as possible. The curriculum evolved to such an extent that the IB head office was established in Geneva in 1967. In 1976 the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) in Geneva was recognized as a permanent institution accredited to grant an international school-leaving examination.

The IB diploma program, as described by the IBO, is a rigorous pre-university course of studies, leading to examinations, that meets the needs of highly motivated secondary school students between the ages of 16 and 19 years. Designed as a comprehensive two-year curriculum that allows its graduates to fulfill requirements of various national education systems, the diploma model is based on the pattern of no single country but incorporates the best elements of several. The program is available in English, French and Spanish.

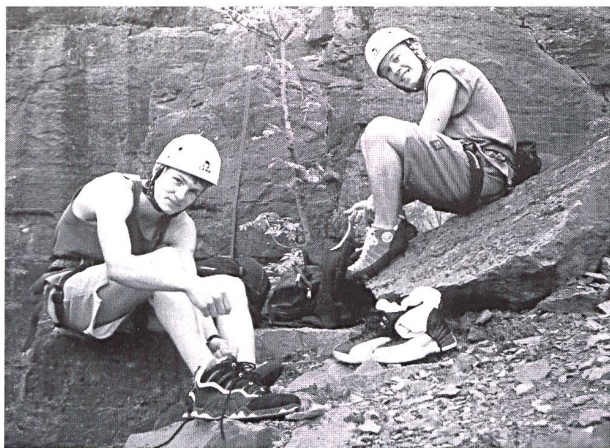
Students are exposed to the two great traditions of learning, the humanities and the sciences. They must select one subject from each of the six subject groups: First Language, Second Language, Individuals and Society, Experimental Sciences, Mathematics, and Arts and Electives. At least three and not more than four are taken at higher level (HL), which represents 240 teaching hours for each course, while the others are taken at standard level (SL), covering 150 hours each.

By arranging work in this way, students may explore some subjects in depth and some more broadly over two years. This is a deliberate compromise between the early specialization preferred in some national systems and the breadth found in others. Thus, the science-oriented student is challenged to learn a foreign language and the natural linguist becomes familiar with lab procedures. At the same time, there is flexibility of choice so that students may pursue areas of personal interest and meet special requirements for university entrance.



*History comes alive at LAS.*





*Rock climbing on peaks above Leysin is a favorite fall and spring sport.*

Within courses themselves, the syllabi are flexible, suiting the interests of an international student body, which is typical of international and boarding schools. «In history, we can relate a great deal of current events to what we are studying,» said Mr. Jamie Skove, teacher of history and economics at Leysin American School in Switzerland. «An article on human rights in China may tie into our studies of that country, for example, giving us a global outlook.»

«It's also exciting and rewarding for the teacher,» he added. «We can choose to study regions and topics that interest us and the students.»

What sets the IB program apart from other courses of study, in particular, is its focus on teaching the process of thinking rather than mere learning. The two-year program provides an integrated approach to studies rather than individual classes. Students follow a process in every class, whether it's a journal in science, portfolio in English, or a combination journal/portfolio in art.

«Because there's a process, teachers and students are able to track their progress and results,» said Mr. Hamilton Gregg, IB Coordinator at Leysin American School. «This helps students with organization in whatever they are doing.»

The IBO has recently made concession in the areas of language and maths, enabling a greater number of students to participate. Students may now take study Language A in their mother tongue as a self-taught language, usually at standard level, and Language B, English, at higher level. Students may also start French at a beginning, «ab initio» level.

Students no longer need to be accelerated in maths to enter the IB program. They may take mathematical studies for one year, with algebra 2/trigonometry as a prerequisite.

In addition to the traditional courses, IB requires the following:

- Theory of Knowledge (TOK), a interdisciplinary course which challenges students to question the bases of knowledge, to be aware of subjective and ideological biases, and to develop a personal mode of thought based on analysis of evidence expressed in rational argument. TOK seeks to develop a coherent approach to learning which transcends

and unifies the academic subjects and encourages appreciation of other cultural perspectives. This is, indeed, the key element in the IBO's educational philosophy.

- Creativity, action, services is known by its acronym CAS. This requirement takes seriously the importance of life outside the world of scholarship. Participation in sports, theatre productions, and community service encourages young people to share their special talents while developing awareness and the ability to work cooperatively with others.
- Diploma candidates must undertake original research and write an extended essay of about 4000 words.

External examinations are given in May, with grading on a scale of one (minimum) to seven. There are more than 2100 examiners worldwide, led by chief examiners with international authority. The minimum passing score of 24 is recognized as entrance qualification for universities in most countries. In American and Canadian universities, the diploma may grant the student enough credits for advances standing or even to save one year of university study.

«IB diploma candidates definitely stand out when vying for university admission,» said Mr. Gregg. «Universities recognize that those students are taking the most demanding curriculum possible.» IB diploma holders gain admission to selective universities throughout the world, including Oxford, Yale, Stanford and the Sorbonne.

With a steady growth rate of ten percent, the IB is an increasingly important part of education worldwide. At Leysin American School, the number of students enrolled in the program tripled this year, indicative of the growing interest.

«The curriculum is particularly relevant to today's and tomorrow's world,» said Mr. Gregg, «where there is need for varied skills, flexibility, and cultural and linguistic awareness.»

Without question, IB students will be at the top in the global community of the 21 st century.



*«Beau Site» Dormitory for girls, grades 9–11*