

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

“The well-rounded nature of the Diploma Programme allows you to explore things you enjoy or even maybe never considered before.”

Amy Wu
2015 Diploma Programme graduate
St. Cuthbert’s College
Auckland, New Zealand

Amy Wu completed the Diploma Programme in 2015 at St Cuthbert’s College in Auckland, New Zealand. She is now studying health science and chemistry at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

Why did you originally decide to pursue an IB diploma?

I originally decided to pursue the IB diploma just as I was entering grade 11 at St Cuthbert’s College—we had the option to continue with the NCEA pathway (the New Zealand national qualification), or choose to pursue the Diploma Programme. Something that immediately appealed to me was the multi-faceted nature of the programme. It allowed me to keep my options open before deciding upon what I wanted to do after high school graduation; it is an educational pathway that really allows students to explore different interests and become curious, well-rounded, critical thinkers that have the capacity for academic exploration.

As an IB student, how did you shape your IB diploma studies to your interests?

Before starting the Diploma Programme, I knew that science (and eventually medicine) was the one thing that I wanted to pursue following high school graduation, so I chose my courses to cater for the career path I had in mind. At the same time, I wanted to allow myself to explore other possibilities. I took higher level (HL) chemistry and biology, but also took French and economics. They were fields I didn’t want to pursue in university, but that definitely interested me. Looking back, all the academic courses were equally valuable—the science courses gave me a fantastic foundation of knowledge that I have built upon here in university, but courses like English literature, French, mathematics and economics allowed me to see the world through different lenses.

Did the extended essay, TOK, and CAS prepare you for university? Are there skills you developed that you still use today?

It was through the extended essay that I developed the basic skills for scientific research that I have used throughout my time working in the research lab. It also taught me to effectively communicate my ideas and was probably the best preparation I could have obtained for pursuing my undergraduate research here at Northeastern.

The creativity, activity, service (CAS) component of the Diploma Programme was one of many things that allowed me to expand my horizons and take my learning outside of the classroom. Whether it was developing a start-up company that competed at the Lion Foundation Young Enterprise Challenge, representing Auckland at the U17 New Zealand Regional Basketball Nationals, or volunteering at Elizabeth Knox Rest Home, the number of learning opportunities to develop intra- and interpersonal skills were countless.

Theory of knowledge (TOK) was perhaps the most enjoyable part of the Diploma Programme, and was the course that taught me the most important skills that I will continue to utilize as I move into my career—not only does it teach you to think critically and to see different situations from other perspectives, it has made me extremely comfortable with challenging ideas in academia. There exists a dichotomy between what we think we know and what we actually know, and TOK allowed me to constantly push boundaries and understand things beyond the surface level.

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Tell us about your current work—was there a moment when you knew you wanted to pursue this career?

I am currently double-majoring in health science and chemistry as an honors student at Northeastern University in Boston. I am looking to apply to medical school in a few years, hoping to specialize in psychiatry or pediatrics. For the past year, I have worked in the DNA Damage Recognition and Tolerance Laboratory on campus. We investigate cellular responses to genotoxic stress on a biochemical level. At the moment, I am working with a doctoral candidate, researching the β -clamp to gain information on the processivity of this important protein, which is needed for DNA replication, damage tolerance and repair.

I always knew that medicine was something that I wanted to pursue—it is a field that is never stagnant, so there is an inherent commitment to lifelong learning, and it carries with it the opportunity to help others and solve problems through engagement with people. However, research is never something that I thought I would pursue post-high school graduation until I completed my extended essay in biology. I developed an affinity for posing hypotheses, thinking creatively and, more often than not, learning through trial and error to uncover new information that I would never have been able to learn from reading a textbook. I definitely credit my extended essay supervisor, and all those who helped me during that process, for fostering my curiosity and love for scientific research.

Who inspired you most as an IB student? Did you have a mentor or teacher that left a strong positive impression?

All of my IB teachers at St Cuthbert's College were, and will always be, inspiring in their own right. They are all competent and skilled educators that have a knack for nurturing intellectual curiosity and fostering students' interests, willingly going that extra mile to facilitate learning. They made learning such an enjoyable process and I cannot thank them enough for all their hard work!

Did you face any obstacles during your education, studies or career? How did you overcome them?

Throughout my high school years, I was juggling school, extra-curricular activities, sports and various other commitments. In addition, I had to deal with a rather large obstacle in the illness of a family member. This added a lot of anxiety to my life. Trying to navigate this was difficult, but looking back, these seemingly discombobulated moments influenced my career choices and have resulted in a resilience that I would not otherwise have. Such life experiences (as cliché as it sounds) really do shape the way you view the world, and I urge anyone experiencing difficulty to reach out and confide in people you trust. Try to see such experiences in a positive light even though it may seem anything but positive at the time. Through my experiences, I have developed an intrinsic passion and motivation for healthcare and mental health, and I hope to use these in the future to help others.

What advice do you have for current IB students that are thinking about a career like yours?

For students who are looking to pursue science, research or medicine in the future, make sure that you have a solid foundation within the sciences, but also don't be afraid to branch out and nurture your interests outside of what you want to pursue after finishing the DP. The well-rounded nature of the Diploma Programme allows you to explore things you enjoy, or even maybe never considered before. You never truly realize the innumerable opportunities you have during the course of the programme—make sure you take advantage of as many of them as you can. You may find yourself discovering a new interest that you never knew you would have. Finally, always ask questions, challenge the status quo, and never suppress curiosity or creativity!

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