

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

“The true worth of the IB diploma ultimately lies in the principles and values that constitute an integral part of your personality.”

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Zeynep Akkalyoncu completed the Diploma Programme at TED Ankara College Foundation High School in 2013. Zeynep is currently researching artificial intelligence as she pursues a degree in computer engineering at the Middle East Technical University.

Why did you originally decide to pursue an IB diploma?

I was especially fascinated by the unique internationally minded approach to education. I wanted to expand my knowledge in several different subjects and nurture my critical thinking skills, instead of focusing solely on excelling at traditional subjects. This wouldn't have been possible with the Turkish national curriculum alone. By completing the requirements of the IB diploma, I built fundamental research and writing skills that will serve me well throughout my life.

As an IB student, how did you shape your IB Diploma Programme studies to your interests? What courses were most valuable?

I believe it was the particular combination of different subjects that made my IB diploma experience so fruitful. Despite my inclination towards engineering, I was inspired by my other interest, literature, to write my extended essay about English literature and take English literature at higher level. I also had the opportunity to delve deeper into biology, physics and chemistry—both in the classroom and in the laboratory. Given my university studies, higher level (HL) mathematics turned out to be arguably the most valuable course for me. It prepared me very well for university-level courses by introducing advanced concepts and proof-based techniques.

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

I am currently a research intern at a robotics lab, specializing in artificial intelligence and deep learning, and I'm about to begin my final year of computer engineering. Unlike most others in my field, I didn't have a lifelong passion for computer science. I have always been mathematically minded, and enjoy trying to understand and model natural processes. It wasn't until my freshman year that I knew that this would be an excellent fit for me.

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

Whilst writing my extended essay I picked up indispensable research and writing skills that have helped at university and uncovered unexpected opportunities. I found TOK to be by

far the most captivating component of the IB diploma. It encouraged me to develop a critical mind and reasonable skepticism, which are useful in both academic and day-to-day settings. Aside from presenting a way to cultivate artistic and athletic skills, creativity, activity, service (CAS) urged me to take part in social work and engage in group activities, motivating me to hone my social skills.

Did you face any obstacles during your studies? How did you overcome them?

Both during the IB programme and my undergraduate studies, I went through periods where I felt the burden of both personal and academic pressures. In retrospect, had I not faced such obstacles early on, I wouldn't have learned to appreciate the value of process-oriented goals. The true worth of the IB diploma ultimately lies in the principles and values that constitute an integral part of your personality, rather than the actual diploma, and any such pursuit must be primarily treated as a learning experience.

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

It is never too early to start. You might be overwhelmed by the amount of information that awaits you in the realm of computer science and engineering, so take time to explore and master [your field]. Surround yourself with inquisitive people (whom you might have taken for granted in the Diploma Programme). Above all else, make it your highest priority to preserve your curiosity and learn unceasingly. It's crucial that you continue to educate yourself about a variety of topics, as well as establish a solid technical foundation in your area of specialization. Becoming a well-rounded individual gives you a fresh perspective on intellectual challenges, which is perhaps why much groundbreaking research has its roots in interdisciplinary studies.

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