

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

"The IB develops skills and a way of thinking that helps one adapt to different learning environments and problem-solving situations that I've found valuable ever since."

Oriana Fuentes
2007 Diploma Programme graduate
Hiram Bingham School
Lima, Peru

Oriana graduated from Hiram Bingham School in 2007. In 2012, she graduated as valedictorian from Syracuse University with a dual bachelors in finance and economics. She is currently studying for a master's degree in computer science at Columbia University in New York, after spending four years at J.P. Morgan as a banker.

Why did you originally decide to pursue an IB diploma?

I attended Hiram Bingham, a British international school in Lima. Hiram was the first school in Peru authorized to teach all three of the International Baccalaureate programmes— IB values are embedded in the school culture and all students are required to complete the full programme(s). Looking back, I haven't heard of another programme that offers such a well-rounded yet in-depth experience. The quality of research required for the extended essay and individual course portfolios provides really phenomenal preparation for university-level coursework.

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

I chose history, higher level biology and higher level chemistry because I initially intended to pursue an undergraduate degree in chemistry or biochemistry. Although I ultimately didn't go into either of these fields, I loved the subject matter. Two years of coursework and research is a big commitment, so it's important to be intellectually curious and engaged with the subjects you choose. Once I enrolled at Syracuse, I took honors general chemistry and the class was a breeze after completing higher level IB chemistry. Having had to work through and retain two years of class material made college semesters seem more like sprints, and I had earned great organizational and study skills.

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

I am currently a computer science master's student at Columbia University. Previously, I spent four years at J.P. Morgan in New York, where I worked at their investment bank structuring convertible bonds and equity derivatives, then I spent some time in a specialty finance coverage group, banking non-regulated financial institutions such as financial technology firms, investment funds and other untraditional finance entities.

I've had an interest in computers since I was very young. When I was about 12-years-old I taught myself HTML and have dabbled on-and-off over the years. Enrolling in Columbia's programme has been an opportunity to formally pursue this interest. It's an exciting time in technology, particularly surrounding the intersection between computers and finance. I have always loved making things and finding ways to do things more simply and in less time. This probably stems from my desire to dedicate time to several interests and my enthusiasm for design. Computer science brings together the engrossing process of problem-solving and the satisfaction of being able to immediately apply the solutions to real-life situations.

Who inspired you most as an IB student?

Hiram was a small school with a fantastic set of teachers that were very dedicated. My IB class sizes ranged from 15 to a single student—myself. In that kind of environment every teacher left an impression on me through their commitment and constant encouragement. As the sole higher level chemistry student in my class, I spent a lot of time around the lab and my professor demanded perfection every step of the way. Planning an experiment for my portfolio required a thoughtful list of steps and necessary implements, careful data collection, and then producing a thorough report with analysis and insightful conclusions. This work ethic is something I've maintained ever since: every task, no matter how small, is important to the integrity of the overall result.

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

The extended essay taught me a tough lesson in perseverance. Mid-way through my senior year we realized my almost-finalized research project didn't fully adhere to the requirements and I had to start again from scratch. After a brief panic, my advisor and I mapped out a new literary analysis project and managed to salvage some of my research and sources. The truth is, this scenario is something that all students and professionals will encounter eventually, maybe in the form of scrapped projects or research dead-ends. I learned to be practical and proactive because "even the best-laid plans..."

CAS was also a fundamental part of Hiram culture and education. Even though IB diploma students were the only ones required to complete CAS hours, the school scheduled a CAS class for every student grade 6 and above. Often, the entire school, even kindergarten and elementary students, participated in CAS-related activities. By the time I graduated, I had worked with developmentally disabled children, teenage mothers, senior citizen homes, the blind, and orphans, and then I focused most of my junior and senior year on volunteering at a children's hospital burn unit.

At Syracuse, I was also very involved in volunteer work in the local community. I ultimately founded and ran a mentoring organization for students in the Syracuse City School District through the honors programme. When I moved to New York after graduation, I volunteered at New York Presbyterian Hospital and continue to be very involved with Syracuse, sitting on a young alumni council and mentoring current students interested in finance.

I think the IB has a "renaissance" philosophy. Research, community work and the critical thinking skills developed through the theory of knowledge course go beyond traditional education, which is focused on content. The IB develops skills and a way of thinking that helps one adapt to different learning environments and problem-solving situations that I've found valuable ever since.



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

One obstacle, in a way, has been the desire to pursue different, seemingly unrelated fields over time, and working through each new learning curve. However, from chemistry to banking and now computer science, this obstacle has become a unique educational and professional narrative in the modern world, where fields are increasingly overlapping. "Software is eating the world" wrote Marc Andreessen. We are seeing technology change finance, science, healthcare and how we think about society—I'm happy to have come full circle to my 12-year-old self, typing HTML tags on a computer.

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

As I mentioned, I think enjoying the courses you pick will be fundamental to success—the IB diploma is a very demanding two years. I would also encourage students to be very involved in CAS projects: learning more about your communities and giving back is going to be cornerstone of our progression as a society. Specifically, for those pursuing careers in banking, computers or quantitative fields, I would advise you to find ways to foster your creativity. Finance and computers are both completely man-made fields, whose evolution has been fueled uniquely by innovation and creativity. The IB's holistic education model nurtures global citizens who are able to think critically about problems, ideas and their role as productive members of society.

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