

Why Advanced Placement?

Many students (and their parents) want the best academic program possible so that they can get into a good university and be well prepared to succeed in their studies. In Beijing, many international schools offer the International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma program. Hope International School has chosen to offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses. What's the difference between the AP and IB programs? Which one is better preparation for university? Do universities look upon one program more favorably than another? Which program is better suited for which kind of student? These are important questions that are addressed below.

What's the difference between the AP and IB programs?

AP

AP exams are two to three hour exams which students take in order to demonstrate university-level proficiency in a certain subject area. Students may choose to take AP courses and exams any time during high school, but the majority of students will take AP courses and exams in 11th and/or 12th grade. There are no required courses – no minimum nor maximum. Students should choose AP courses in their areas of strength and interest. AP courses and exams are usually one year in length, and exams are taken in May. The student's AP exam score is determined solely by their performance on the exam in May.

At HIS, our students can choose to take AP courses in 8 subject areas (Biology, Calculus, Chemistry, Chinese, English Literature, Statistics, Studio Art, and US History). Students will earn high school credit for AP courses with passing grades, regardless of their AP exam results.

IB

The **IB diploma** program begins in 11th grade, and students choose a set program of 6 courses which they will study over two years. Some Standard Level exams may be taken at the end of 11th grade, but all Higher Level exams must be taken at the end of 12th grade. Students should choose Higher Level courses in their areas of strength and interest. IB courses and exams are one or two years in length, and exams are taken in May. The student's IB grade is a combination of ongoing in-class assessment, as well as their exam result in May.

In addition to the six courses and exams, IB diploma students take a Theory of Knowledge class, participate in CAS (extracurricular activities in creative, action, and service areas – total 150 hours), and write an Extended Essay (4000 words).

Students in the full IB diploma program need to successfully pass all IB exams in order to obtain the IB diploma. However, a student may lose the IB diploma if he/she achieves a low grade on a Higher Level exam, or a total score less than 24 points..

Summary

In a nutshell, the AP program is similar to a buffet meal where you can choose what you want, and leave behind what you don't want. The IB diploma program is more like a set meal where you take all of it or nothing.

Which program is better preparation for university?

University admissions officers will tell you that they like both the AP and IB programs. Success in either the AP or IB shows that a student is strong academically, and ready to take on academic challenges. Both AP and IB students are more successful in university than students in standard high school programs.

The AP program allows students the opportunity to show academic strength in any subject area of their choice. Students can choose to study a broad range of subjects, or take AP courses in certain specific subjects only. Students who succeed in AP courses are usually very successful in university. They have already learned to work hard and manage their time, while doing university-level academic studies and students who take multiple AP courses must learn to manage a demanding workload.

The IB diploma requires study in a range of six subjects, as well as in-depth study in three subjects (Higher Level courses). This provides students with a good, broad academic foundation, and students can additionally show their academic strength in three Higher Level courses. With the added requirements of the Theory of Knowledge course, extracurricular activities (CAS), and the Extended Essay, students must learn to manage a heavy workload.

Students who succeed in the IB diploma are usually very successful in university. They have already learned to work hard, manage their time, and have learned how to write a research paper.

Do universities prefer one program over the other?

No. When university admissions officers review student applications, they are pleased to see an applicant who is enrolled in either AP courses or the IB diploma.

For American colleges, the general rule of thumb is that highly selective colleges prefer students who are taking the most rigorous course of studies available to them. If a high school offers the IB diploma, then students who want to enter a top college should be taking the full IB diploma program. If they take less than the full program, then they are considered not as a competitive applicant. Likewise, at HIS, students who want to enter a highly competitive college should be taking AP courses whenever they can. If they choose to take less demanding courses, then they also will have lower chances of entering top colleges. If a student is enrolled in a high school with neither the AP nor IB program, then they should still be taking the most challenging academic courses available if they want to attend a top US college. Students who achieve excellent results in AP exams (4 or 5) or IB Higher Level exams (6 or 7) are usually granted advanced standing in college.

For Canadian universities, students enrolled in the AP or IB programs are considered to be excellent candidates for admission. Canadian universities view the AP and IB programs highly, but do not require either AP courses or the IB diploma for admission. Students who achieve excellent results in AP exams (4 or 5) or IB Higher Level exams (6 or 7) are usually granted advanced standing in university.

For Australian, UK, and European universities, students need a minimum of 3 AP courses or the full IB diploma for entry to university. Certain AP courses and IB Higher Level courses are required, and must be related to the student's intended major.

Which program suits which kind of student?

Choose AP if you are a student who

- is ready to work extremely hard in areas of academic strength,
- wants the flexibility of taking different courses in 11th and 12th grade, and/or
- wants to continue participating in extracurricular activities throughout high school.

Choose IB if you are a student who

- does well in a broad range of subject areas,
- is ready to take a set program of six courses in 11th and 12th grade, with three courses where you have greater academic strength (Higher Level), and/or
- is organized and ready for a heavy workload.

Why did HIS choose the AP program instead of the IB diploma program?

High Academic Standard

Universities look very favorably upon students who take AP courses. They do not classify an IB school as being any higher or lower than an AP school, but want to see that students are taking the most rigorous courses available to them at the school they are currently attending.

Students who take AP courses are considered to be excellent candidates for admission.

Flexibility

The AP program offers more flexibility to students than the IB diploma program. Students can choose to do AP courses in 11th or 12th grade, and choose the subjects in which they are very interested and very strong academically.

Time

Students in AP programs have more flexibility in choosing their extracurricular activities and how they spend their time outside of school than students in IB diploma programs. Some students do not want to attend an IB diploma school because they want to continue their involvement in sports or other extracurricular activities throughout high school. Many IB diploma students find that their time is very tight, and they have to give up playing sports, extracurricular involvement, or having a 'life'.

Advanced Standing

Advanced standing means that a student can bypass a freshman or first year introductory course and choose a sophomore or second year course in the subject area in which they have proven to excel. Many North American universities will grant advanced standing for excellent grades in the AP exams (4 or 5) and the IB Higher Level exams (6 or 7). Advanced standing is not granted for low grades on AP or IB Higher Level exams, nor for IB Standard Level exams.

Comparing the IB Diploma with the AP Exams

	IB Diploma	AP Exams
Program Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two years (Grade 11 & 12)• 6 courses (Language A, Language B, Math, Science, Social Studies, elective*)• 3 courses at Higher Level (HL) and 3 at Standard Level (SL)• Theory of Knowledge course (TOK)• Extended Essay (4000 words) (EE)• CAS – extracurricular involvement in three areas – creativity, action, service	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One year (Grade 11 and/or 12)• 30+ exams available overall. 8 courses available at HIS (Biology, Calculus, Chemistry, Chinese, English Literature, Statistics, Studio Art, US History)• Students may choose any number of courses
Grading	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each HL/SL course is graded from 1 to 7• Up to 3 bonus points for TOK & EE• CAS required, but no bonus points• Max: 45 pts; Passing: 24 pts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Each AP exam is graded from 1 to 5
Recognition	Accepted worldwide for university entrance. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• USA & Canada – university entrance and advanced standing• UK, Australia, Europe – university entrance (certain HL/SL courses required)• South Korea – university entrance	Recognized as an excellent standard for university entrance <ul style="list-style-type: none">• USA & Canada – university entrance and advanced standing• UK, Australia, Europe – university entrance (specific AP exams required)• South Korea – university entrance
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent academic preparation for university• Requires students to develop organizational and study skills, and to write a research paper• Broad education across 6 subject areas with in-depth education in HL courses• Advanced standing for HLs (6 or 7)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excellent academic preparation for university• Requires students to develop organizational and study skills• In-depth education in each subject area• Advanced standing for AP results (4 or

		5)
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very intensive and time consuming (not just 6 courses, but also TOK, EE & CAS) • Students must choose courses in Grade 11 and generally cannot change courses during the two-year program • Broad education not always appropriate for all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academically – very challenging • Exam based only – course work during the year not included in the exam score
Other options	<p>IB Certificates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete course work and take exams for specific courses • No TOK, EE or CAS required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AP International Diploma – 5 AP courses/exams (English, World Language, Science/Math, Global Perspectives, Social Studies/Art/elective*)

Frequently Asked Questions about AP Courses and Exams

What does AP mean?

- AP stands for Advanced Placement, and reflects the practice that US universities and colleges follow where students who earn excellent scores (usually 4 or 5) on the AP exams can receive advanced placement in university and college courses. The universities and colleges view AP exams as equivalent to university and college level courses.

What are AP courses and exams?

- There are over 30 AP exams in several subject areas.
 - English (2) – English Language & Composition, English Literature
 - Math/IT(4) – Calculus AB, Calculus BC, Statistics, Computer Science A
 - Science (6) – Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Physics B, Physics C: Electricity & Magnetism, Physics C: Mechanics
 - Social Science (9) – Human Geography, European History, World History, US History, US Government & Politics, Comparative Government & Politics, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Psychology
 - Foreign Languages (8) – Chinese Language & Culture, French Language & Culture, German Language, Italian Language & Culture, Japanese Language & Culture, Latin, Spanish Language, Spanish Literature & Culture

- Arts (5) – Art History, Studio Art 2D Design, Studio Art 3D Design, Studio Art Drawing, Music Theory

When are AP courses and exams?

- Students generally take an AP course in grade 11 or 12 for one school year.
- Exams are taken in the first two weeks of May, and last for 2 to 3 hours per subject.
- AP results are available in early July.

How are AP courses graded?

- Students receive two grades: a course grade (school grade) assigned by their AP teacher, as well as an AP exam grade.
- Completed AP exams are sent to College Board for evaluation.

How are AP courses/teachers monitored?

- An official AP course/teacher is one whose AP course curriculum has been approved by College Board as providing sufficient instruction to prepare students for the AP exams.

How do universities/colleges view AP courses/exams?

- Universities and colleges value AP exams as a very high standard for university entrance. Students who take AP exams are considered to be excellent candidates for admission, especially since AP courses are above and beyond a normal high school program.
- Many universities worldwide recognize AP exams for admission and/or for advanced standing. More detailed information can be found on the College Board website (AP Credit Policy, and AP International Recognition).

What AP courses are available at HIS?

- Biology (offered 2014-15 and in alternate years)
- Calculus
- Chemistry
- Chinese
- English Literature & Composition
- Statistics
- Studio Art
- US History

Are AP courses available to all students at HIS?

- AP courses are available to all students at HIS.

- AP courses are at a high level. Students who have strong academic ability, are responsible and take initiative in their learning, and who have good organizational skills are more likely to succeed in an AP course than those who lack any of these qualities.

How much does it cost to take an AP course/exam at HIS?

- For AP courses that are taught by an HIS teacher, the course fee is included in HIS tuition fees.
- Students are responsible for paying AP exam fees. The AP exam fee for May 2014 is USD\$119.

How do students register for AP exams?

- Registration for AP exams takes place at HIS. Students must request AP exams and pay the exam fee to the AP Coordinator by mid-March.

Any other questions?

- Visit the [College Board website](#) for more information on AP courses.
- Email the [HIS guidance counselor](#)