

IB and the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Trip  
Amanda Pingel Ramsay, IB Graduate

The International Baccalaureate program is more than the potential for advanced academic challenge and the potential for early college credit; it is also an opportunity for high school students to learn how to view the world from different perspectives. The program requires 6 separate certificates for precisely this reason; an IB student must not only be an expert in her preferred field, but also have a solid grounding in all the basic areas of knowledge. The program also requires that students learn a foreign language in order to force them to think differently about their world and their culture, and to examine other ways of life.

The UU 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Trip is also about helping students to view the world from a new perspective. Our visits to the Navajo and Hopi reservations allow the trippers to not only learn about a new culture, but to actually experience that culture directly – to spend time with people for whom this is a way of life, and to participate in some of the customs and daily activities of a different people.

IB students in the US are at a disadvantage relative to most students around the world because of the size of our nation; travel to another country is expensive and difficult, and few US students have much opportunity to do so. As a result, US viewpoints tend to be more ethnocentric than most, and these biases – though invisible to the American teachers grading American essays – come through in the papers that are sent overseas to be graded by international scholars.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Trip gave me several benefits that assisted me in my career as an IB student:

- Unlike many of my classmates, I had not only visited a place with a different culture, but I had engaged in that culture as a guest, rather than observing it as a tourist.
- The experiences of the trip – both with the Hopi/Navajo students and with the other trippers – were profoundly moving, and forced me to reexamine my beliefs and priorities. My essays therefore showed greater strength and insight than those of my classmates.
- I made friends who were *not* in IB, and did not judge me based on my academic standing. Although my IB friends were supportive and understanding of my struggles in the program, by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Trip friends were supportive no matter what.
- The events of my Trip provided excellent material for IB and college essays by providing unusual and emotional experiences on which to draw for my writing.
- The experience of stepping outside my own life and my own world gave me greater perspective and long-term understanding. The result was greater responsibility and willingness to work, which resulted in better grades and better understanding.

It is true that participating in the 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Trip involves completing make-up work for school, and IB students are hit harder by this make-up than most trippers. But despite the effort involved, my Trip was an asset, not a liability, to my obtaining my IB diploma.

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Tips for managing IB the semester you go on the Trip:

**1) •Talk to your teachers early•**

This cannot be overemphasized. Well, it could, but I'm not. Most teachers believe that the trip is a valuable educational experience and are happy to have you go, but (just like the rest of us) get stressed out and irritable when something is sprung on them at the last minute...and an irritable teacher is more likely to assign extra work. So talk to your teachers in the first week of the semester.

**2) •Ask for make-up work ahead of time•**

About a month before the Trip, go to all of your teachers again, and remind them that you'll be out for a week. Ask them if you can have your make up work now, so that you can start early. (Most of them will say "I don't have anything now, but I'll get it together. Talk to me tomorrow.")

This approach gives you several advantages:

- A. It reminds your teacher about the Trip in a polite way.
- B. It allows you to spread out your make-up work over a month instead of trying to do it all the week you get back.
- C. It allows you to "group" similar assignments. If your English class has a paper on Huck Finn due the week before the Trip, and another due the week of the Trip, it's a lot easier to write them both at the same time.
- D. It lets you take less stuff on the Trip (8 textbooks and no extra underwear=bad thing)
- E. It lets you come back from the Trip mostly caught up, so you can enjoy telling your friends about the fun you had, instead of panicking about schoolwork.
- F. It increases the odds that you'll get a Trip-related assignment (see below)

**3) •Ask for assignments related to the Trip•**

People have had assignments from science classes asking them to discuss the geology of Arizona or the astronomy of the Navajo. English teachers have asked for papers on the stories and literature of the Hopi. Occasionally you'll get lucky enough to get a geometry assignment based on Navajo rugs. But assignments related to the Trip are way more fun. Which relates to tip 4...

**4) •Suggest assignments related to the Trip•**

This doesn't always work, but it never hurts to try. Before you go ask your teacher for make-up, review what you'll be studying, and try to think of assignments that might fit, while still being related to the Trip. Bring that up when you ask for make-up work. Many teachers will be just as happy to not have to come up with something and will accept your suggestion.