

Proposal for North American Perception Study

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Background:

As of August 2009, there has not been a North American university perception study of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP). To date, two major university perception studies have been completed – one dealt with the United Kingdom (the UK Study) and one was concerning universities in Australia and New Zealand (the ACER Study). The purpose of this paper is to outline the issues and a proposal for the completion of a perception study in North America and to raise questions that IB might ask North American universities and colleges.

Issues:

The first thing that should be considered is separating the United States and Canada. Because of the geographic size of each nation and the number of higher education institutions in each - over 5,700 in the United States and more than 300 in Canada, keeping the two nations together and expecting to potentially survey all institutions would make the sample unmanageable. These numbers most likely also include two-year institutions and a researcher might want to further consider breaking these schools at least in one country to reduce the sample size and/or tailor questions for a population that attends an institution for less than four years and may experience different issues.

Second, since the UK study has been completed, there has been a change in the UK system of higher education. Although the data received in 2003 is valuable to current practice, there are substantially more higher education institutions in the UK currently because of the older polytechnics receiving the equivalent of university status. It would be interesting to see how these 'recruiting' institutions view the IB Diploma versus the 'selecting' institutions. In addition, a new study in the UK could include questions about university perception of the IB Diploma and IB Programmes in relation to A-levels, a series of exams which have come under scrutiny in the last couple of years.

Methodology for a Potential Study in the United States:

In order to keep all of the perception studies related to IB uniform, it is advisable to use the same or similar methodology (survey with follow up interviews) in conducting any North American study, whether completed in the United States or in Canada. The one difference however, that should be considered in the United States, is the question of sample size because of the overwhelming number of higher education institutions and the time research would entail should a decision be made to survey every institution.

A U.S. sample can be determined in various ways. If desired, a researcher could separate the sample by focusing on only four-year institutions, two-year institutions, or both. According to Pearson Education, Inc., there are 2,474 four-year institutions and 1,666 two-year institutions. Of the remaining higher education institutions, these include technical schools, for-profit institutions, and trade schools that may not have much interaction with the IB DP and IB students. A possible study could separate the two- and four-year institutions and design the study based on the frameworks offered in the ACER and the UK studies. For additional information, questions concerning the Pathways to the Baccalaureate program

should also be incorporated into any study concerning two-year institutions as this program is an avenue that students in the United States are now using to transition to four-year institutions and the decision to attend a two-year school may not be only academic, but financial or personal.

Even with the above break, sample size in the United States could still be problematic and depending on the timeframe set aside to complete the study, another sampling setup might be required. Another way of doing this might be to look at American colleges and universities in terms of location and designate a certain percentage of the sample to certain areas of the United States, perhaps in similar percentages to the number of current IB World Schools (DP) in that area of the country. Again, it is suggested to keep two- and four-year institutions separated for the same reasons as noted above.

A third option might be to look at a more regional approach. Many schools in the United States are accredited through not only a national accrediting body but also through a regional accrediting agency. Perhaps smaller samples could be determined using the members of the major U.S. regional accrediting agencies (Middle States, Southern States, New England, North Central, Northwest, and Western) and then the survey and work could be applied to these divisions.

Finally, if this data is available, a final option is to develop a sample using college and university ranking data. This would probably only apply to four-year institutions as most two-year institutions do not have competitive admissions policies. Researchers could look at schools that are deemed extremely competitive for admission, highly competitive, competitive, and less competitive in terms of how they perceive the DP.

Methodology for a Potential Study in Canada:

As Canadian universities are similar to American institutions of higher education, any Canadian study should also follow the same methodology as the ACER and UK studies. The difference between Canadian institutions, however, is that some already do extend offers of admission based on the predicted grades for a student in an IB Diploma Programme. This is not currently a practice in the United States.

Because the number of Canadian institutions is much smaller than in the United States, a sample of around 330 colleges and universities should be manageable, given that not every institution will respond. In addition, technical schools, for-profit institutions, and trade schools could be discounted from the study on the same basis as noted above with the United States. As a side note, the UK study's questionnaire was distributed to 225 institutions with 71 responses. It is also suggested here to break out the two-year institutions, but may not be necessary to do it as a separate survey, given that the numbers may be more manageable.

References

Number of U.S. colleges and universities and degrees awarded, 2005. (2006). Retrieved August 5, 2009, from Pearson Education, Inc. Web site: <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0908742.html>