

# Viewpoints of Academic Advisors on International Baccalaureate Diploma Students Studying at Okayama University

Mahmood Sabina

(Associate Professor, Okayama University Admission Center)

The number of International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma students taking admission into Japanese Universities is on the rise. Okayama University was the first national university in Japan, to establish the IBDP admission policy in which, IB students are not required to take the National University Entrance Examination or any other written exams, for admission into the undergraduate course. In 2012, IB student enrollment began in 4 faculties and 1 special course, and from 2015, all 11 faculties and the special course welcomed IB students. As of April 2017, 20 IBDP students from 6 IB schools in Japan and 6 IB schools abroad, have enrolled at Okayama University in different faculties.

In order to make Okayama University more IB friendly, Okayama University Admissions Center (AC) has set up an IB student support system with IB student advisors, to help IB students adjust to academic and campus life and meet IB student needs. In 2016, a survey on IB students was published by the AC, which looked into the views and perspectives of IB students studying at Okayama University. The feedback obtained from the students, helped student advisors to understand IB student perceptions, their hurdles and their expectations. The present study, is a continuation of the earlier study, highlighting perspectives of Academic Advisors (AAs) of different faculties hosting IB students. AC members, actively involved in IB admissions and IB student support, constructed a questionnaire for faculty AAs where IB students are presently enrolled. Each of the 10 questions in the questionnaire, was intended to give AAs an opportunity to share their views and experiences with IB students studying at their respective departments, for a period of at least one year from the time of enrollment.

From October 2016 to January 2017, 11 AAs were interviewed by 2 AC members at their respective offices. Interviews revealed that, AAs who were not directly involved in IB admissions, were not familiar with the IB education. Most AAs were impressed by the positive, interactive and good communication skills of IB students. Regarding academic performance, some AAs reported IB students to be doing exceptionally well, while others thought they were average and few, expected better academic performance. Overall impressions of IB students included serious, cheerful, talkative students, who were also good at group work and presentations. Regarding adaptability in a Japanese educational environment, some AAs felt, IB students from IB schools in Japan, who had some previous exposure to Japanese education, adapted faster. Unlike Japanese high school students who are trained in the traditional Japanese education system of emphasizing knowledge acquisition, IB students seemed more accustomed to discussion based lessons. Although IBDP students at Okayama University are enrolled without having to take the standard written examination or any other individual entrance examinations, their

eagerness to learn, is no less than Japanese high school students, who take the general university entrance exam. Therefore, support from AAs in the early stages of orientation, is essential for IB students to adjust to the new way of learning and also a new educational approach. At Okayama University, AAs are making every effort to understand and educate themselves about the IB education system and IB students. Some faculties are even holding meetings to discuss alternative ways to educate IB students. As a pioneer of IB student admissions in Japan, collaborative efforts by IB student advisors and AAs at Okayama University, are fully underway to create a more IB friendly University and increase the number of IBDP students.