

**CONSULTANT'S REPORT FOR
THE GEORGE MASON HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY**

**Submitted to Dr. Lois Berlin
11 January 2006
Consultant: David Roylance**

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I. Consultant's Mission:

To study the "health" of the International Baccalaureate program at George Mason High School in relation to the overall school program – to ascertain the perceptions and/or realities of its problems and strengths with an "outside eye"; then to generate a report based on his observations. While this report can be seen as a stand-alone tool, it will probably make more sense as the initial stage of the official IB *Programme Evaluation* (formerly the Five-Year Review). This evaluation is a significant self-study which will be conducted by the school during the 2006-2007 school year, the final draft of which will be submitted to the IBNA office by 15 March of 2007.

II. Consultant's Credentials:

Employed by Fairfax County Public Schools from 1968 to 2004 as:

- GT and AP English teacher at JEB Stuart High School;
- One of the first two IB coordinators in Fairfax (JEB Stuart from the early 1990's; South Lakes from 2000 to 2004);

Work with the International Baccalaureate North America Regional Office as:

- Consultant for IB applicant schools;
- Level I and Level II Teacher Training Workshop presenter for IBDP coordination;
- Leader of authorization visit teams to IB applicant schools;
- Reader and evaluator of applications for IBDP school participation;
- Reader and evaluator of IB Program Evaluations (formerly Five Year Review).

Member of International Baccalaureate Curriculum and Assessment Professional Development Committee.

Executive Consultant for the Mid-Atlantic sub-Regional Coalition of IB World Schools.

Member of accreditation visit teams for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Independent educational consultant.

III. Springboards for discussion in interviews (among others that may come up during the consultation visits):

- Review of student workload
- Accessibility of students to the IB program
- Perception of relationship between IB courses and non-IB courses (e.g., CP and AP)
- Course offerings and sequencing of each IB subject group
- Vertical and horizontal articulation of IB curriculum
- General satisfaction and/or dissatisfaction with the IB at George Mason and the IB in general
- Overall satisfaction with George Mason High School.

IV. Basic Consultation Schedule:

- Phase I: Interviews with selected teachers, administrators, and students conducted near the end of the 2004-2005 school year (8-10 June 2005), including some preliminary observations and suggestions. **(See Appendix 1, p. 9 ff.)**
- Phase II: Interviews with George Mason constituencies not represented during Phase I, conducted during the fall of the 2005-2006 school year (25, 27, 28 October and 2 November 2005), including experience as a SAC team member, 20-22 November **(See Appendix 2, p. 15)**
- Phase III: Generation and presentation of a full and final consultation report to be completed by early January, 2006.

Phase III: Final Consultation Report

After spending the better part of two school weeks, and after interviewing a total of twenty-five different groups and individuals at George Mason High School, the consultant strongly agrees with a summary statement recently provided by the SACS Quality Assurance Review Team (of which he was a member) which found the school to be...

“...a highly effective school led by a skilled and talented professional staff, involved parents, and a supportive community that collectively encourage and support student success. Instructional improvement that results in increased student achievement is a high priority.”

By any measuring stick, GMHS is an excellent school. In the consultant’s opinion, one of the strongest assets of any outstanding school is its willingness to re-assess an already strong program, to determine what problems or issues exist, to address these issues head-on, and to seek their meaningful resolutions. In this case, George Mason has commissioned the “outside eye” of a consultant to identify existing problem areas and to suggest ways they may be resolved. More specifically, the consultant was tasked with reviewing the relative “health” of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program in relation to the school’s overall program.

As a review of the consultant’s preliminary conclusions (see Appendix 1) will confirm, those areas of concern that were most frequently brought to the consultant’s attention during his experiences were:

- The perceived discrepancy of rigor levels that exists between IB and CP courses;
- The academic workload placed on IB and CP students;
- The specific issue of IB English H;
- The perceived disadvantage that IB scheduling places on the arts and electives;
- The need to refocus the “IB-ness” of the IBDP at George Mason;
- The need to redefine the role of AP courses at George Mason.

The nature of this final report will be to briefly describe each of these issues, and to suggest ways in which they can be addressed by the school. The descriptions are based on the consultant’s informal synthesis of input from all the constituents gathered during the twenty-five interview sessions, with the recognition that the *individual perceptions* of those interviewed varied in their relation to *reality* – based on their own perspectives. The suggestions are products of the consultant’s own experience of similar issues when working in or with other schools.

AT ISSUE: The perceived discrepancy of rigor levels that exists between IB and CP courses

Anytime a school establishes a “tiered” curriculum – specifically identifying some courses as “advanced” (call them what you will: IB, AP, GT, whatever) – it automatically sets up an academic caste system: one is recognized as more rigorous (and, by implication, “better”), the other as less rigorous (and, by implication, “not of as high a quality”). This is especially true in schools such as GMHS, which are geared to prepare most of its students for post-secondary education. The *reality* of this tiered system has been in place ever since the IB arrived at George Mason in 1981, and existed before with the prevailing AP courses. And, needless to say, it is in place in all schools seeking to better prepare their students for college. Over the years, the *perception* of “better” and “not as good” has been perpetuated by a number of factors, but especially by two:

- a) IB teachers who have gone well beyond the requirements of their respective subjects (therefore leading students and parents to characterize IB courses as “very challenging”);
- b) CP teachers who have taught to the “lowest common denominator,” i.e., the least motivated students in their classes (therefore leading students and parents to characterize CP courses as “way too easy”).

As described by many stakeholders in the GMHS community, this perception of a *very* wide “rigor gap” has become deeply entrenched: “All IB courses are much more difficult than all CP courses,” or, taken to the extreme, “All CP courses are ‘stupid’ courses.” The reality, of course, is that if all IB and CP courses stayed within their prescribed curriculum guidelines, there would still be, by definition, a rigor gap – but *a gap nowhere near as wide as that which is perceived by the community*. A major problem, therefore, is basically one of inconsistency: with those IB courses which go beyond their curriculum requirements, and with those CP courses that do not reach theirs. Yet the overall issue is not quite as simple as this. The students, parents, and staff at GMHS place a great deal of emphasis on getting ready for, and into competitive colleges. Since most of these colleges strongly recommend that prospective students take as many advanced courses in high school as possible, the drive to take IB courses at the school is a strong one. Regardless of very appropriate college preparatory curricula in the CP courses, the IB Diploma Program (along with a few AP courses) provides the recognized advanced courses sought on transcripts sent to colleges. Additionally, the rigor gap between IB and CP courses is officially recognized by the school with its policy of adding an additional 1.0 to grades earned in IB courses over those earned in the respective CP courses. And, partly as a result of GMHS’s “open enrollment” policy for IB courses and partly as a result of the evolution (both locally and nationally) of Jay Mathews’ “Challenge Index” over the past several years, there is even more institutional encouragement for students to take as many IB (and/or AP) courses as possible. All of these factors, either directly or indirectly, contribute to the message that is heard: “If you want to go to a good college, take IB courses rather than CP courses.” While the major contributor to the community’s perception of the rigor gap remains with inconsistencies of curriculum guidelines, this tacit message certainly doesn’t help to dispel the existing perception.

The consultant recommends:

- Closer administrative monitoring of both IB and CP teachers with regard to how effectively each teacher is adhering to the given curricular guidelines of his/her respective subject;

- Administrative counseling of any IB or CP teachers who stray significantly from the curricular requirements (either by requiring work well beyond or well below the respective requirements);
- A full staff reexamination of the IB grade-weighting system: a full grade point beyond CP grades is very significant when calculating GPA's. The staff needs to consider if this policy may be contributing to the perception of such a wide rigor gap between IB and CP courses.

AT ISSUE: The academic workload placed on IB and CP students.

Obviously, workload issues are directly related to perception issues, but go beyond whether or not teachers are assigning too much or too little work in IB and CP courses. In any IB Diploma Program, the teachers need to be reminded on a regular basis that their respective courses are only one-seventh of the IBDP curriculum scheme. When teachers disregard the big picture, they usually have a tendency to increase work in their own course with the aim of improving student performance in that course. The fact that students may have assignments in other classes becomes irrelevant to these teachers. Another tack that teachers who lack overall vision take when they perceive that their IB student load is too large for effective teaching is to winnow out “non-dedicated students” by assigning extra work. The other side of the workload coin is when CP teachers gear their assignments (workload) to the least motivated of the students in their respective courses. By wanting to “bring along” these students by lowering the expectations of the course, they tend to ignore the needs and abilities of those students who can and should meet more rigorous curriculum standards. It should be noted that students are not always simply *victims* of teacher indiscretion when it comes to over- or under- “workloading.” In many cases, the perception of overwork is more the result of poor time management, or poor prioritizing of tasks, or disorganization on the part of the student. In other cases, the perception of underwork is more the result of the student not taking responsibility for his/her own learning: just because assignments were not specifically given does not mean a student couldn't go beyond the minimum expectations of the teacher. (See Appendix 4 for two other issues related to student workload.)

The consultant recommends:

- That IB teachers need to meet as “horizontal teams” in order to understand each others' course and workload expectations (and also to discuss interdisciplinary connections among the IB subjects at the same grade level). The idea here is to see and discuss the “big picture.” These meetings should be prescribed by the administration and overseen by the IBDP coordinator. Until the workload issue is determined to be manageable by most IB students, these meetings should occur no less than bi-weekly. The master assignment calendar now in place could become more timely, and therefore more effective, by the school's investing in and implementing “Blackboard” technology. A policy should be agreed upon which prevents workload build-up within any given school week. Additionally, a policy should be agreed upon that would prevent an excessive build-up of work for students over school breaks/holidays (to include summer assignments). These policies should be monitored by the IBDP coordinator and enforced by the administration.
- That IB teachers need to meet as “vertical teams” up and down the grade levels within their respective subject groups. The objectives of these meetings would be to discuss the

subject's curriculum requirements at each grade level, and to determine strategies as to how students could meet these requirements by "working smarter" rather than working more.

- That IB and CP teachers should be further trained in methods of differentiating instruction to meet the range of student abilities within their classes. The administration should arrange and pay for this training. Additionally, the school administration should closely monitor and evaluate IB and CP teachers on their effectiveness in differentiating instruction for their students.
- All students in Grades 8, 9, and 10 should be trained in time management and organizational skills – either as a separate course or embedded within designated classes.

AT ISSUE: IB English H

Since IB English H came up over and over again in many of the interviews in Phases I and II regarding both perception issues and workload issues, it deserves some special focus here.

- a) As noted in the preliminary observations from Phase I (see Appendix 1), at least one of the IB English H teachers believes that "Higher Level" loses its significance when the course is accessible to so many students (38% of last year's senior class were enrolled in IB English H – which was down from rates of earlier years); this teacher contends that many of the students are in the course for dubious motives: to increase their GPA, to embellish their college resumes, to bend to parent and/or peer pressure to not take "stupid English." (See discussion on "Perception Issue" above.)
- b) To counteract this tendency toward overcrowding, the teacher creates a "workload fence" with the intent of persuading the least motivated students to drop the course, theoretically leaving only those true Higher Level English students willing to stretch into the more challenging workload through pure love of the subject and as preparation for their future as English majors in college.
- c) The reality is that while some of the less motivated or "non-English majors" do drop the course, most do not. These students usually respond in one of two ways: they become very stressed by what is, to them, a disproportionately heavy workload; or, they do just enough to "get by" in order to stay in the IB course (for the higher GPA and/or college transcript) – doing less than quality work, much to the disappointment and frustration of the teacher.

The dilemma is one between the school's commendable policy of encouraging more and more students to take IB courses, and the teacher's valid attempt to maintain the standards of a Higher Level IB course. IB English H is indeed a symbol for both the perception problem and the workload problem: student/parents feel that college-bound students are either condemned to "stupid English" or to the far-too-stressful workload of IB English H. The solution sought by most students and parents interviewed by the consultant would be to offer an IB English S (Standard Level) course or a one-year AP English course as a "compromise" between CP English and IB English H. While such a compromise is certainly an option, it too has issues to consider:

- a) Very few North American IBDP schools offer IB English S. Unlike some other Standard Level courses, it must be taught over *both* Grades 11 and 12. And the syllabus of SL English A1 SL is not significantly different from that of English A1 HL (one less world literature paper to submit, four fewer works to cover). Therefore, most schools opt not to

set up a separate SL course – this lack of significant difference between the syllabi does not justify the staffing or master schedule adjustments that would be required to do so.

- b) A one-year AP English course would create the same staffing and master schedule issues, and not necessarily lessen the workload for Grade 12 students.
- c) In reality (as opposed to perception), *the CP English curriculum offers an excellent college prep alternative to IB English H.*

The consultant recommends:

- Every effort be made, by the English department and the administration, to ensure that the requirements and demands of the IB English H course be kept reasonably within those of the prescribed English A1 syllabus;
- The school should consider adding an additional IB English 12 H teacher – to spread out the student load, to take the full burden of so many Grade 12 students off a single teacher;
- The English department and the administration should pursue strategies to dispel the inaccurate perception of CP English (see suggestions under “Perception Issue” above);
- The English department could explore the options of offering an IB English S course or an AP English course, *as long as the disadvantages of doing so are taken into account.*

AT ISSUE: The perceived disadvantage that IB scheduling places on the arts and electives

Any IBDP which is established in a school which functions with a seven-period day, by its very nature, will put scheduling pressure on elective courses. The DP requires a seven-course structure (six subjects plus TOK), and even if the cadre of full Diploma candidates is relatively small in relation to the entire population, the master schedule must accommodate the full Diploma scheme. Concern was expressed in interviews with the consultant that while the master schedule provides very adequate access to the core academic courses, the arts and electives are apparently not as easily accessible to students. This concern has been complicated by the school’s decision to spread the TOK course over Grades 11 and 12 instead of just containing it within Grade 12 (as has been done up until this school year). While this decision is a valid one when considering a more meaningful structure of TOK within the IBDP curriculum scheme, it does further limit the school’s flexibility when offering electives.

The consultant recommends:

- The school should consider offering an additional section of TOK either right after school or during “zero hour” before school. While this would not completely solve the master scheduling issue, it would provide Diploma candidates greater flexibility in scheduling arts and/or electives in Grades 11 and/or 12.
- If the school were to offer an after-school TOK option, a clear agreement must be reached with coaches and other sponsors that activities would not start until the designated start time, and that IB students would not be penalized for opting to take the after-school TOK class.
- The school could study the feasibility of an eight-period day, which is the most “elective-friendly” of all timetables in IBDP schools.

AT ISSUE: The need to refocus the “IB-ness” of the IBDP at George Mason

As almost everyone in the GMHS community knows, the school’s International Baccalaureate Program has evolved into one of the most challenging and widely recognized programs in the

country. This evolution has been well documented and is certainly supported statistically. As the first public school in Virginia to affiliate with the IBO back in 1981, GMHS's "open enrollment" policy for students wishing to participate in the IB program has indeed been a trendsetter not only here in Northern Virginia, but across North America. By encouraging its students to "stretch" into the more rigorous IB courses, GMHS, over the past ten years, has achieved an average of 67% of its Grades 11 and 12 students participating in at least one IB course. An average 14% of the students in each senior class over the past ten years have been full IB Diploma candidates. 88% of these candidates have received the IB Diploma. (These figures are based on an average Grade 11 and Grade 12 class size of 160 students each. Refer to IB statistical table in Appendix 3 of this report.) By any account, one must conclude that the IBDP at GMHS is very impressive and, more importantly, of significant benefit to the students of the school over the years.

All of this being said, the consultant would not significantly change his description of George Mason's IBDP that he provided in conclusions from Phase I (see Appendix 1). After conferring with several more constituencies, he would simply reaffirm the need for the school community to renew its commitment to refocus the *vision* of the IBDP – to ensure that it is not perceived, as one parent put it, as "an IB program built on an AP chassis." While such a description may be an oversimplification, it does point to the school's need to seriously reevaluate the IBDP – as a *program*, with all the philosophical and curricular rationale intended by the IBO. To that end, the consultant would reemphasize the recommendations made in the Phase I conclusions (see Appendix 1) in addition to these...

The consultant recommends that:

- The school should conduct a poll of the entire *faculty* and *administration* to ascertain whether they are willing to maintain and strengthen the IBDP at GMHS, or whether the IB should be replaced by an AP program. This poll should initially be limited to the staff only. These are the individuals with the most institutional memory and professional perspective to make the most thoughtful decision on this basic, but very important choice. The contention of the consultant is that if the faculty is not behind the IBDP, then any attempt to continue to implement and to improve it would be very frustrating. In other words, there needs to be consensus among the staff if any meaningful effort involving the refocusing of the IBDP will be willingly pursued.
- The school should consider ways to continue increasing the number of full IB Diploma candidates – as impressive as 14% of Grade 12 students is, the GMHS population should be able to generate more. If so many students are taking IB courses, one is led to ask why are not more attempting the *essence* of the IB program: the full Diploma package? Based on interviews with many constituents, the pervasive perceptions for why more students do not opt for the Diploma route are:
 - 1) it is too hard – the workload doesn't merit the result;
 - 2) it lacks meaning beyond taking as many rigorous courses as possible to get into college.

Consequently, the ways to lower these roadblocks to the full Diploma route would be to:

- 1) balance the workload throughout the IB curriculum scheme (see "Workload Issue" and "IB English H Issue" above) – make it more accessible to motivated students by determining a *reasonable* and humane workload;
- 2) dedicate several in-services or a retreat to "refreshing" the staff's institutional

memory of the mission and philosophy of the IBDP – as a *Diploma* program.

- The school should consider sending a lead teacher from each IB subject group to an IB Level 2 or Level 3 Teacher Training Workshop with the intent of renewing DP pedagogical techniques and philosophy, and of sharing this experience with others in their respective subject groups. Also, the school should consider sending a designated CAS and a designated Extended Essay supervisor to IB Teacher Training Workshops for updates and inspiration in these areas of the DP curriculum scheme.
- The school should appoint a steering committee consisting of the IBDP coordinator, one IB teacher, one administrator, one parent, and one student to review and analyze the *Programme Evaluation* Questionnaire (formerly the Five-Year Program Review). This committee should be further tasked with describing the intent of this document and with suggesting strategies for its successful completion by the GMHS community by the 15 March 2007 deadline. The committee should report its conclusions in a meeting with the IB staff either at the end of the 2005-2006 school year or at the very beginning of the 2006-2007 school year.
- The school could consider implementing a Grade 8 through Grade 10 IB Middle Years Program which, in addition to providing a solid curriculum scheme, would enhance awareness of the IBO mission and philosophy in the pre-Diploma years at GMHS.

AT ISSUE: The need to redefine the role of AP courses at George Mason

Currently, a few Advanced Placement courses at GMHS are taught where there are no IB counterparts (e.g., AP US Government, AP Calculus). At several times during the series of interviews by the consultant (especially during the meeting with parents on 28 October), the question about replacing the IBDP with an AP program arose. Reasons for such a move included the stress generated by the workload of IB, the perceived rigor gap between IB and CP classes, the relative lack of scheduling flexibility within the IB Diploma scheme, the pressure the IBDP places on students' extracurricular schedule, and the lack of college credit given to IB SL courses. It is the consultant's strong belief that such a systemic change would be unwise and detrimental to the GMHS community for two conspicuous reasons:

- a) While there are several issues (as addressed in this report) that suggest improvements for the existing IBDP, the fact remains that the IB provides a strong and advantageous experience for the students.
- b) Many of the issues described concerning the IBDP are "advanced courses" vs. "regular courses" issues – there is no reason to believe that these problems would go away simply by substituting one advanced course system for another.

The consultant recommends:

- That George Mason High School continue to implement, maintain, and enhance the IBDP, while offering AP courses where there is a recognized need of advanced courses that the IB Diploma scheme cannot conveniently or systemically provide;
- That the GMHS staff and community click the "Refresh" button for its otherwise very excellent IBDP.

APPENDIX 1: PHASE I OF CONSULTATION

Phase I Conclusions

Qualifications to Phase I:

- Phase I interviews occurred during the final days of the 2004-2005 school year and, as such, end-of-year fatigue, busy-ness, and stress may have had some impact on participants' viewpoints. This being said, the consultant never felt a lack of cooperation on anyone's part.
- No hard and fast conclusions can be drawn from this initial round of interviews. Any statements so far about conditions and/or trends at George Mason are based on the consultant's informal synthesis of input from a limited number of constituents gathered during relatively short interview sessions. Yet the information collected over the three days does lead to some preliminary observations and suggestions that hopefully will prove helpful as the process continues into the 2005-2006 school year.
- Phase I of the consultation will be followed by a final report after Phase II has been completed in the fall of the 2005-2006 school year.

Logistics of Phase I:

Over the course of the first three days of his visit, the consultant interviewed the following, using most, if not all of the areas of observation (identified above) as springboards for conversations:

- Two teachers from the English staff
- Two teachers from the Languages staff
- One teacher from the Social Sciences staff
- One teacher from the Science staff
- Three teachers from the Mathematics staff
- One Theater Arts teacher and one Music teacher
- Thirteen senior IB Diploma and IB "saturated" students in a Theory of Knowledge class
- The IBDP coordinator
- The head of counseling
- An assistant principal
- The principal

Most interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. Both staff and students were cordial, cooperative and made conspicuous efforts to be helpful and candid. With the exception of one teacher from the English department, all teachers interviewed taught at least one IB class. Most taught a mix of IB and CP classes.

Observations by Groups of Those Interviewed:

English: Those English staff members interviewed expressed several concerns:

- In the latter half of 2003-2004 school year, a great deal of concern over what was perceived as an excessive workload in IB English was expressed by both students and parents.
- Work overload on students in IB English was acknowledged by teachers: to cover more than the syllabus seems to be a source of pride; and, may be used as a way to lessen teacher workload by eliminating the less dedicated students through attrition. There is a

sense that English HL is too accessible, that too many students are in the class for the wrong reasons (e.g., higher GPA, college transcript), that they are given incentives by the school that almost force them into IB – all of which seem to marginalize more valid motives (e.g., desire to learn, love of literature) for being in a “Higher Level” English class. With such a high percentage of the senior class in English HL, “Higher” loses its meaning. Teaching beyond the syllabus will cause some students to drop out, but will cause many more to do “only what I need to do to survive the workload.”

- Another concern is directly related: the pervasive perception within the George Mason community is that there is a large quality gap between IB English and CP English. The assumption by students and parents is that college-bound students must be in IB regardless of their ability and appreciation range, and that these students must avoid taking “stupid” English if they plan to get into a good college. The teachers are concerned because they believe that the perception is very different from reality: CP English actually has a demanding curriculum and is very capable of meeting the needs of many college-bound students.

Second Languages: The language teachers contended that IB students were well served by the IB since the curriculum, course offerings and sequencing of the department’s upper level classes are driven by the IB syllabus (all upper level courses are IB, but not all students are IB students in these classes). Further observations by the language teachers:

- The Spanish native speakers do not have as meaningful or relevant course offerings, especially since IB Spanish A2 will no longer be offered.
- The language teachers are not as concerned with their contribution to student workload, given the nature of the curriculum and the level of language acquisition by the time students reach their IB years. Workload issues from other IB courses are what seem to cause problems with the students.
- One teacher perceived that some students entering the upper levels of the second languages simply to get more advanced courses on their college transcript do not always have the skills necessary for them to excel at these levels.

Social Sciences: Of the several Group 3 IB courses offered, only one History teacher was interviewed during Phase I. This teacher was just completing her first year of History II, but is a social science teacher of long standing at George Mason.

- Again, concern was expressed about the expectations placed on the students (and teachers) by parents – who seem to really push their kids into IB for weighted grades and college transcripts. These expectations, coupled with the policy of open admission to IB classes, can cause problems for students not willing or not capable of dealing with the workload.
- The same perception problem between IB and CP classes exists for history as it does for English. The reality is that the CP social studies courses are rigorous and can serve college-bound students very well.
- The SOL’s do present some sequencing problems for the department, given the difference between the nature of, and preparation for these tests and the nature of, and preparation for the IB exams. Most IB students, however, do very well on the SOL’s.
- Student workload is a concern, but could be alleviated somewhat by more communication with other subject group teachers.

Sciences: The science teacher interviewed was also the department chair and CIRT. Some of her observations:

- New course sequencing beginning this coming school year will hopefully provide better options for IB students in the sciences and lessen the need for them to make sequencing decisions as early as Grade 8. Low enrollment in Chemistry in the past may also be addressed by both the sequence changes and by a staffing change.
- The student workload seems mostly exacerbated by the long and unrealistic reading and writing assignments in English and History. Additionally, the cumulative expectations placed on students by themselves, their parents, teachers and coaches puts too much performance pressure on the kids. This overload stress may be responsible for why more students do not pursue the full Diploma.
- Another concern of the IB science teachers is the inconsistency of the IB moderation of internal assessments. Over the years, this inconsistency has taken its toll on the morale and enthusiasm of the IB science staff – to the extent that some teachers may prefer an AP curriculum to that of the IB.

Mathematics: All three math teachers interviewed seem quite satisfied with both the courses offered (indeed, three different IB math courses are offered in addition to both AP Calculus AB and BC), and the course sequences (especially now that Algebra 3 and Math Studies have been “flip-flopped”).

- The teachers are very much aware of the different emphasis placed by the IB (mainly European) system of studying math and by the American system – the former covering many math topics in any given course, the latter mostly focusing on a single topic per course. The math department feels that by offering both IB and AP math courses, that more students’ needs are being met.
- Math teachers expressed concern about the amount of pressure placed on IB students – especially in Grade 11. This pressure comes from a heavy workload in IB English and History courses, from parents trying to place their kids in advanced math courses that they may not be ready for, and from the students themselves by equating the hardest courses with the only “road to success” in the getting-into-college journey.
- The smaller size of George Mason does cause some scheduling problems, given the number and variety of upper level math courses. Having a K-12 curriculum coordinator significantly helps with sequencing, placement, and scheduling.

Fine Arts: The IB Theater Arts and IB Music teachers expressed the following concerns:

- The fine arts at George Mason seem to be marginalized by the “academic courses.” In Theater Arts this problem manifests itself by a lack of meaningful prerequisite courses in the lower grades. Students who need to have a Group 6 elective will end up in Theater Arts with no genuine interest in being there – motivated by IB requirements or the need to be in IB courses to get into college, rather than having a true interest in theater.
- The music teacher felt as if music students, especially band members, were being forced to choose between IB and music – especially since Theory of Knowledge is moving from a one- to a two-year format this coming school year.
- Both teachers perceived that students, in general, were not real happy – that their experience with the arts was either too superficial or too limited. Both teachers

mentioned an existing disconnect between the IB curriculum and philosophy (which they both embraced) and the George Mason reality (by which they seemed somewhat discouraged).

- The recurring theme was that there is too much pressure placed on students for “academic” performance – by parents, by the school, and by the students themselves.

Administration: Since discussions with the IBDPC, the assistant principal, the head of guidance and the principal will be ongoing through the summer and fall, the consultant will reserve more specific observations until the completion of Phases II and III.

Students: Graduating Diploma and “saturated” candidates had a variety of points of view (as would be expected from a group of kids in a TOK class), so no real consensus was reached on most points raised. This being said, students identified several main areas of concern during the interview:

- The “city-wide” perception was that you were either in IB or in “stupid classes.” This perception limits student choices – and the pressure exists for college-bound students to limit their courses to only IB. This situation can lead not only to “unneeded stress,” but can prevent students from taking electives they may really be interested in.
- Too much emphasis is placed on getting through the advanced courses and preparing for exams, and not enough time is allotted to stop and think about what you’re learning.
- Younger students who are thinking about going into IB need to be more fully informed about all the demands of a full IB schedule – how much time is required, the relative difficulty of the courses, and the impact on extracurricular activities.
- Not enough emphasis is placed on the “IB” aspects of the experience – the Extended Essay, CAS, and international mindedness seem to be just “add-ons” – more added work than integral parts of the Diploma program.
- When asked about the satisfaction of students with the IB program at George Mason, one student suggested that the level of satisfaction was contingent upon what the student wanted to get out of it.

General Observations and Suggestions by Consultant after Phase I Interviews:

George Mason High School is a community made up of many extremely competent administrators, teachers, and students – all of whom want to meet the demands of the broader community, as especially represented by the parents of its students. These demands have created both positive and negative results.

On the one hand, the IB at George Mason has evolved into a statistically powerful, nationally recognized program, challenging more than half its Grade 11 and 12 population to participate in at least one IB course in any given school year. And these IB students have consistently generated impressive exam results based on worldwide standards. Additionally, George Mason offers an amazing array of courses and levels to meet the needs of so many of its students – an array all the more commendable given the relatively small size of the student body. And because the IB program at George Mason is “open enrollment,” the school encourages its students to challenge themselves to reach their full potential.

On the other hand, the demands of an achievement-oriented community seem to have created a great deal of pressure and stress for both students and staff. After this first round of interviews, the consultant came away with the feeling that the drive to get into the best colleges and to get the most amount of college course credit for exam scores are the dominant forces behind the IB program. Interestingly, both teachers and students recognize the reality – *that they are more strategists than visionaries when it comes to education* – and they are dissatisfied with, or disillusioned by this reality.

The consultant suggests that in its striving for excellence and achievement, the George Mason community has perhaps placed too much emphasis on the *mechanics* of the IBDP, an emphasis that has blurred its overall *vision*. The community needs to ask where the “IB-ness” of its program is? – or, more basically, does it even want the IB-ness? If the primary mission of the school is to get as many students as possible into the best colleges, and to get these students out of as many college courses with high exam scores as it can, then why go to the extra trouble and work of implementing the IB?

However, if the community wants a cohesive, meaningful university *preparation program*, replete with interdisciplinary, student-centered learning, with emphasis placed on critical thinking and communication skills, with the overriding goals of global peace and understanding -- in other words, if the George Mason community wants to *refocus* its vision on IB ideals *in addition to* IB mechanics, then it should be willing to consider certain suggestions as the 2005-2006 school year progresses:

1. In conjunction with the IBDP coordinator, all relevant George Mason constituencies should contribute to the generation and completion of the *IB Programme Evaluation (Five-Year Review)* during the school year of 2006-2007.
2. With administrative support and encouragement, and with oversight by the IBDP coordinator, interdisciplinary teams should meet on a regular basis (at least once a month) to discuss:
 - a. content and philosophical connections among the subjects – translated into real-time lesson plans to assist students in making these connections;
 - b. assignment calendars – logical, humane scheduling of major tests and assignments, with the specific intent of dispersing student workloads over a more manageable timeline.
3. With administrative support and encouragement, and with oversight by the IBDP coordinator, IB subject group teams should meet on a regular basis (at least once a month) to discuss:
 - a. strategies to teach students how to “learn smarter” – to emphasize learning through quality rather than through quantity, to dispel the myth that “more is better”;
 - b. curriculum and teaching strategies as a vertical continuum (i.e., Grades 8 through 12).
4. Investigate and implement strategies to more fully develop the Extended Essay process and the CAS program – to make these elements of the Diploma more meaningful to the students.

5. Investigate and implement strategies which meaningfully generate international mindedness within the George Mason community.
6. Intensify information sessions for students and parents of the earlier grades, emphasizing the *vision* as well as the mechanics of the IBDP.

All of these suggestions are aimed at bringing the *vision* and the *reality* of the IB program at George Mason closer together. Upon further examination, they appeal to the staff to make the full Diploma path more accessible and more achievable (and therefore more palatable) to more students. This should in no way be interpreted to demean the school's significant achievement in encouraging so many students to pursue certificates in IB courses. Nor does the emphasis on the IB Diploma mean to suggest a lack of quality in CP courses. The point is that if George Mason wishes to improve its already impressive school program, the entire ship should be piloted by the *vision* as well as the mechanics of the full IB Diploma scheme.

APPENDIX 2: PHASE II OF CONSULTATION

Phase II of Consultant's Report

Logistics of Phase II:

Over the course of the four days of this phase his visit, the consultant interviewed the following constituents, using the same format and areas of observation described for Phase I:

- Mix of CP and IB students selected from a morning study hall
- Two IB English 11/CP English teacher
- IB Math Studies teacher
- IB Music teacher/band director
- CP English teacher/English CIRT
- Grade 9 Advanced English class
- Grade 10 Advanced English class
- Parent group (met in evening for approximately 90 minutes)
- IB and CP Art teacher
- IBC's T.A. group (mix of CP and IB; mix of grade levels)
- CP History teacher/Social Studies CIRT
- CP U.S. History class (Grade 11)
- Grade 12 IB Diploma candidates in TOK class
- Grade 11 IB Diploma candidates in Spanish 4 class

In addition to these interviews, the consultant was invited to a GMHS staff meeting on the afternoon of 26 October, at which a dialogue was conducted with IBO's Directory General and IBNA's Regional Director. And, on 20-22 November the consultant served as a member of the Quality Assurance Review Team for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Observations based on Phase II Experiences

None of the issues described to the consultant in Phase I had gone away or significantly changed by the completion of his Phase II experiences. The main distinctions between Phase I and II were in the number and variety of interviews, providing the consultant an opportunity to consider these issues from several different perspectives. But the issues indeed remain, and the nature of the consultant's final report will be to more thoroughly describe these issues, and to provide suggestions for the GMHS community to consider as it addresses them. It should also be noted that the consultant's participation on the SACS Review Team provided him with a very informative general view of the effectiveness of GMHS that he would not have had without the experience.

The areas for consideration in the final report will therefore include:

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Perception issue between IB and CP classes | Arts and electives issue |
| Workload issue | "IB-ness" issue |
| IB English H issue | AP issue |

APPENDIX 3: IB Statistics at George Mason 1995 – 2005

Year	# of Students In IB	% of total Jrs. & Seniors	# of Exams	# of Certificate students	Average overall score, Max 7.	# of Subjects examined	# of IB Diplomas awarded	% rate of success in GM Diplomas	Avge. Diploma grade all USA Max 7	Avge. Diploma grade GM HS Max 7
2005	207	67%	524	187	<u>4.30</u>	32	17/20	85%	n/a	5.01
2004	205	66	554	179	<u>4.30</u>	32	22/26	85%	n/a	5.04
2003	190	64	481	166	<u>4.39</u>	28	22/25	88%	4.6	5.09
2002	186	70	482	166	<u>4.45</u>	28	20/20	100%	4.58	4.84
2001	185	65	562	158	<u>5.05</u>	29	26/27	96.29%	4.62	5.36
2000	205	73	530	180	<u>4.46</u>	29	25/27	92.59%	4.56	5.09
1999	166	68	406	153	<u>4.44</u>	29	13/16	81.25%	4.53	5.15
1998	130	66	271	120	<u>4.57</u>	26	10/12	83.33%	4.51	5.1
1997	150	68	391	118	<u>3.78</u>	23	29/33	87.87%	4.4	5.24
1996	136	58	310	121	<u>4.8</u>	20	15/16	88%	4.45	5.32
1995	111	59	278	96	<u>4.51</u>	19	15/18	83%	4.44	5.14

APPENDIX 4: OTHER WORKLOAD-RELATED ISSUES

In a recent review of my correspondence with the George Mason High School community, I noticed that I had inadvertently overlooked an email message I received from a parent on 1 November (a few days after the evening parent meeting). Although I deal with several reasons for work overload on students, this parent has identified two other areas that I did not mention in the final report. They are certainly points that should be considered, and I would not want my oversight to prevent the community from considering this parent's input. I've extracted the salient points of the parent's message below.

Concerning IB History of the Americas:

“In social studies the SOL's add to the workload because SOL and IB requirements do not match. This is particularly a problem because the school wants all students to take the US History SOL. Students who elect IBH Americas/World History do not cover colonial history or post-WWII US history in that course. Thus they must study 20th century US history in their sophomore year AP government course and they must read US colonial history over the summer before their junior year. I realize some 20th century history knowledge is necessary to understand US government, but I am concerned that additional material is added to what is already an already challenging AP course. In addition, while students are doing extra work for the course, colleges who evaluate their transcripts will have no way of knowing the students actually did additional work. What is the effect here? While it's hard to imagine that too much knowledge is a bad thing, is it easier for a student not burdened by having to learn 20th century history to get a good grade in an AP government class? Do we know that this twentieth century history helps the student to get a better score on the AP exam? Or does it actually distract from the ability to focus on the material that needs to be covered for the AP exam? In other words, I am not only concerned about the additional workload, but the effect of that workload on the strategies of assessment in the course.”

Concerning the sequencing of IB sciences:

”In science, students who want to get the IB diploma have to do more work than students who have a humanities orientation. Because students have not done well in the higher- level science courses, the school now requires students to take the high school equivalent of the IB course as a prerequisite. In other words, anyone taking the two-year sequence in IBH physics has to take high school physics also. However, most students need to take biology, chemistry, and physics at the high school level in order to get an advanced diploma (and many colleges want to see this broad training also.) At some point over the four years of high school, therefore, a student has to add an extra science course. This doubling up is not necessary for students who are pursuing interests in

the humanities. Students who wish to study history or English at the higher level do not have to double up on course work in these areas in order to pursue higher-level courses. Thus, students who try to pursue a serious, high-level science curriculum face a much tougher academic pathway. This problem is also true for some math students who must add calculus into their curriculum. Unless they have started Algebra in 7th grade (and a few do, but not many), they too must double up to cover both the Calculus that many colleges want to see and the IB math that is required for the diploma. Students do it, but it adds significantly to their high school workload (these are not easy classes!) and it makes it more difficult for math/science kids to get the IB diploma. It's not surprising so few math/science kids get the diploma – the curriculum is really hostile to them.

The extended essays make it clear that most IB diploma students are not oriented to math and science. When I have voiced my concern about the difficulty math/science students face in getting the diploma, administrators have admitted that perhaps some of those students are better off simply focusing on the math/science courses and not going for the diploma. But that seems to make these kids second-class citizens in the overall pedagogical hierarchy of curriculum programming. If the diploma is the crown jewel in this program, it should be equally available and oriented to students of all interests. If it is not attracting math/science students in equal numbers to humanities students, that is a problem we have to confront.”

My reply, in part, to this parent was as follows:

”Both issues you raise definitely impact, either directly or indirectly, on the workload problem at George Mason -- a problem that I'll be addressing in my report. I can tell you that the government/SOL/HOA situation and the science sequencing within the IBDP are not unique to GMHS. Fairfax County IB schools and IB schools I've visited throughout the North American region have struggled (and indeed are still struggling) with these very issues. There seem to be no easy answers or "fixes" short of saying that each school and/or school system needs to seek solutions best matched to their respective environments. While the main report will not be addressing either of these two issues specifically, it will definitely describe the workload concerns at GMHS and suggest some approaches to address these concerns. As to addressing them more specifically, may I suggest that you contact Brian Dickson. I did talk to him after reviewing your message and he provided helpful insights from the IBDP perspective.”

Because each of these descriptions constitutes two perceptions of the work overload issue not identified in the main report, I felt it important to include them in this appendix.