

STUDENT TESTIMONIAL

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Akua Kwakwa
1995 Diploma Programme graduate
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Akua Kwakwa completed the IB Diploma Programme at SOS-Hermann Gmeiner International College in 1995. Since then, she has received a bachelor's degree in biology from Scripps College, as well as a master's degree in food science and nutrition from Chapman University. She has worked in the food industry for over 12 years in many different areas, including pet food, infant nutrition, and food and beverage. Akua is currently working as a consultant and has also recently launched her business in Ghana focused on all natural, locally made and high quality meals for pets.

Tell us about your current work—was there a moment when you knew you wanted to pursue this career?

I'm a food scientist and I'm currently starting a pet food company. The moment I knew was the first day of my masters program in food science and nutrition. It was food engineering and the topic was chocolate manufacturing! I was hooked! It's one thing to love chocolate, it's another thing to know its flow properties, viscosity, etc, and to set up the proper processes to create this absolutely amazing product! It's the perfect blend of art and science.

As an IB student, what courses were most valuable?

I was still a physical science student at the core, so I did higher level biology and chemistry as well as economics; for standard level I did French, English literature and maths. Honestly every one of my courses was (and still is) extremely valuable in broadening my understanding of the world.

Who inspired you most as an IB student?

My biggest inspiration was the principal at that time. She showed me that I could be an assertive female leader at a point in my life when I was still quite insecure and wondering if I could be me and create my own legacy. Coincidentally, my best teachers were my biology teacher and my French teacher. [My French teacher] kept assuring me I would achieve my dream of wanting to live in France one day, and guess what? I did!

Did you face any obstacles during your education, studies or career? How did you overcome them?

In IB, I had to learn time management quickly, as well as how to manage my stress and have a balanced life in spite of the hectic schedule. In college and career, I was struggling to choose my final path until I realized I didn't have to fixate on one. I had wanted to be a doctor from the age of six, but by my junior year of college I felt burned-out and unsure. I realized there were so many other options available, and when I finally set on food science and nutrition, I felt it was the right choice for me. I was still involved in health, in a very interesting and dynamic industry.

What advice do you have for current IB students that are thinking about a career like yours?

I would say take one or two intro courses to see if you like it. The food industry is very dynamic with everything from ice cream to salads to pet food. Be open to lateral moves into other functions and leverage your skills into other industries too, like tech and energy. If you can, start a small company of your own even if it's a side gig. Your expertise gives you an invaluable opportunity to generate wealth and even create employment for others!

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