

How the DP arrived in the US

A series of unlikely events led to the launch of the IB Diploma Programme in US public high schools. Pioneer and former Principal Mel Serisky looks back

The year 1978 is remembered for many reasons: film lovers flocked to watch *Grease* premier in cinemas, The Jacksons released ‘Blame It On The Boogie’, and in Queens, New York, Francis Lewis High School became the first public high school to graduate IB Diploma Programme (DP) students.

Today, there are 1,623 IB programmes offered in US public schools. And this is partly thanks to Mel Serisky, former Principal of Francis Lewis High School in New York. In 1975, he set out to find a programme that would challenge his students academically.

Chance meeting

Serisky attended an education conference and came across a brochure entitled *The Time Has Come*, which was about the DP. “I read it and was very impressed with the programme it described,” he says. “It stated that the DP was being implemented at The United Nations International School (UNIS) in New York

City, which was a private school not far away.”

The DP was in its infancy, but Serisky was willing to take a leap of faith. Without hesitation, he visited UNIS that very day to find out more. By coincidence, Alec Peterson – the first IB Director General – was also there. They spoke about the DP and Peterson promised to send Serisky detailed information and an application form when he returned to Switzerland.

Peterson had to leave right away to catch his

programme. He was impressed and was able to secure the funds from his budget.”

Parents of selected students were overjoyed and eager to have their children participate in the programme, recalls Serisky. “The students loved it – they were challenged, and had the best teachers and peers.”

As all IB World Schools know, the authorization process is rigorous and demanding. But Serisky didn’t employ

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plane. But keen to continue the conversation, Serisky drove him to the airport. The flight was delayed for 24 hours so Serisky offered Peterson a bed for the night in Long Island, which he accepted. That night, Serisky learned more about the programme and, the following day, he took Peterson back to the airport.

Retraining staff

Serisky immediately wrote a letter to Peterson to apply for the programme. “I didn’t ask my secretary to type it because if I were turned down I did not want anyone to know,” he says. However, Francis Lewis High School was accepted.

Next, Serisky had to secure funding for the school. “I met with the Superintendent for the New York City School System to explain the

new teachers. Instead he provided additional training. “I knew the strengths of my current staff members,” he says. “I held a meeting with my department chairmen, explained the DP and asked them to select their best teachers. The teachers happily accepted the invitation and agreed to additional training and the time needed to learn and absorb the programme.”

Inspiring change

Francis Lewis started a domino effect in the US and later around the world. “When I implemented the DP, dozens of Principals from US public schools visited me to learn more about the programme,” says Serisky.

It was a fantastic opportunity. He was invited to sit on the IB North America Board of Directors and travelled the world, speaking to international audiences about the IB.

Serisky’s leap of faith proved vital to the spread of the programme in the US and is a source of great pride: “I feel very satisfied and proud of my innovation,” he says. **IB**



As the **IB leads up to its 50th Anniversary in 2018**, we are looking back on the early days of the International Baccalaureate. If you have a story to share, please email editor@ibo.org

classroom spans Atlantic

Students work for special degree

By MIKE HUREWITZ

When some students at Francis Lewis High School take a final exam in history this spring they'll have to await word from Geneva, Switzerland, to find out if they passed or failed.

The 150 honor students are participating in an International Degree Program, the first to be offered by a public high school in the United States.

If they pass the rigorous two-year course their degree will be recognized internationally and, of more immediate practical significance, allow the students to skip their first year of college.

Melvin Serisky, principal of the high school, said he learned about the program two years ago at an educational conference, and persuaded the city to try it as a pilot project.

The curriculum includes courses in science and mathematics in which final research papers must be accepted by international headquarters in Geneva. There is a foreign language course which assumes fluency in the language as a starting point and demands that students critique and analyze their readings. And there is a history course in which the final research paper is read by an international committee. The committee then sends the students questions on their research, which they must answer orally on a tape cassette.

William S. Dobkin, chairman of Francis Lewis' history department, said the international nature of the program lends a broader perspective to the teaching of history.

Dobkin explained, "Whenever we teach social studies or history we don't jam our own opinions or any set values down the students. Our objective is that they will arrive at conclusions based on a valid survey of available data."

"What is beautiful about ID (International Degree) is that data is available from multiple sources. For example, when we study World War I and must

make a decision on whether President Wilson or French statesman Georges Clemenceau was right on the issue of punishing Germany, there is data on the French losses and why they wanted to be vindictive."

Dobkin said each school is given guidance on the course themes, but is free to choose materials and text.

Nivea Roman, chairman of the foreign language department and coordinator of the program said American students are at a particular disadvantage in languages. They are tested against their counterparts in United Nations Schools and European private schools, where a second-language is second nature.

Serisky said he has warned about the problem at several meetings of the international committee, but was told that Americans generally perform better in mathematics and science, so it evens out.

Two students in the program said that so far it has meant deeper probing of subjects, rather than more work.

"It makes us think in different areas... It makes us all world citizens — more aware of each other," Vincent Kostini, a 17-year-old junior said.

Helen Deutsch, a 16-year-old junior said, "I've gotten better teachers and learned how to do research. And a lot more of it is up to you. In an honor's classroom, teachers do more organizing, what you are supposed to do and when. Here they say, 'read' but they don't check up on you. You are expected to do more."

Serisky said just how much more the students are doing, and how well, will become apparent when the first round of tests are given this spring.

"All of us are wondering about those tests, and a little afraid," Helen said, "but I think it's mainly fear of the unknown."

of the International Degree
am Dobkin. (Photo by Dan

Board of Education—The City of New York

Francis Lewis High School

58-20 Utopia Parkway
Flushing, N. Y. 11365
357-7740

Francis Lewis High School opened the doors to its first in September 1960. Many of you were born that same year. In its early years, our school achieved an outstanding record. Our students won awards in all national and local competitions. Francis Lewis was recognized as one of the best schools in the New York City System.

As you grew older and had problems, so did our school. In the 60's and the beginning of the 70's produced world wars. These difficult times were reflected in the school throughout our country and, inevitably, touched our school.

World conflicts subsided somewhat in the mid 70's, students here again began to concentrate on higher academic achievement programs and procedures to help them realize these goals. We, at Francis Lewis High School, created a number of programs: The Science Institute, The Performing Arts Center, Lewis Academy, The International Baccalaureate Program, The Project, as well as expanding our sports programs.

The graduating class of June 1978, have made a major contribution to the success of these programs. As you leave us now, Francis Lewis High School is achieving even greater recognition from our community.

We hope that you will bring to all your future endeavors, the same spirit and dedication that you brought to your student years here at Francis Lewis High School. Good Luck!



On October thirty-first, Francis Lewis was honored in being the host school for the International Baccalaureate Seminar.

Educators from around the country and from Canada attended the seminar exchanged ideas and hear the presentations given by student and teacher representatives from each department.

The main purpose of this seminar was for Mr. Serisky, other principals of I.B. schools across the country and I.B. officials to inform interested teachers about the I.B. program and its success in Francis Lewis.

Helen Deutsch
Harry Aziza

BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

DIPLOMA

FRANCIS LEWIS HIGH

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT

Jeffrey Jonas

HAS SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

OF THE

HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

AND HAS MERITED GRADUATION

JUNE 1978

Stephen R. Quells
PRESIDENT BOARD OF EDUCATION

Left: local and student newspapers record the success of the first IB Diploma Programme at Francis Lewis High School
Above: Letter from Mel Serisky (pictured)