



Inspired by Ideas: IB World Student Conference

by Carolyn Willander

When people asked me about my experience at the IB World Student Conference that I attended in August 2010, it was hard for me to find the words to describe it. I soon realized that no amount of explanation could truly convey how this experience changed me. One had to have been there to understand its effect.

Yet, as I summarized the events of the conference again and again, I heard myself repeat one word: INSPIRED.

Inspired by the people, inspired by the cultures, and inspired the ideas. Most of all I was inspired by all of our differences, and how we were able to form incredible bonds despite cultural barriers over the course of just one week.

In the aftermath of the conference, I know the important thing isn't to tell people about it. The important thing is to SHOW them, to help others realize the same inspiration.

Through events like the One Day One Goal soccer tournament, I can share my experience with my classmates firsthand, in the hopes they will feel a little of what I felt during my week in Oregon. I know even this small portion will have a profound impact, because what I experienced as a whole completely changed my life.

The IB World Student Conference, held at Oregon State University, was attended by approximately 300 students from 10 countries around the world. It was the first IB student conference held in North America, and by far the largest ever held.

The conference was set against the backdrop of OSU, one of the leading American universities in sustainability, and Oregon, a community rich in cultural and scientific opportunities. The goal of the conference was "to foster cultural awareness and communication, celebrate global citizenship and empower youth to make decisions for a just and sustainable world."

In order to achieve this goal, we listened to and spoke with global figures who addressed the six topics of the IB community theme, "Sharing our Humanity." We addressed the fight against global poverty, peacekeeping and conflict prevention, education for all, global infectious disease, the digital divide, natural disaster prevention and environmental concerns.

Speakers at the conference included Michael Furdyk, a millionaire at 17 and now the CEO of TakingITGlobal, a social networking site for non-profit and community service organizations. We also Skyped directly with Jeremy Gilley in London, founder of the Peace One Day organization. We even heard from an IB student who received 42 out of 45 points on his IB Diploma!

After each speaker, we returned to our Global Action Teams, or GATs, where we exchanged ideas and conversed critically. By the end of the week, each GAT had also designed a CAS project which could be brought home to be implemented in schools around the world. These projects included international film festivals and global diaries.

Other activities included a day-long excursion to the Oregon Coast where we visited estuaries, an aquarium, and a marina.

Even better than the organized events was our free time, and we had plenty of it. By the first night, after a rousing game of Jenga and several matches of bowling, I had already made what felt like best friends.

The first two days of the conference also held a mock World Cup, and nearly everyone came out to play or watch. We relaxed in the common rooms, explored the campus, and visited the recreation center.



Carolyn with her friend Reina from Japan

The conversation hardly ceased as students talked about their schools, their countries, and of course, the IB program. Even the dance was educational; I learned how to salsa!

When the conference finally drew to a close and we reluctantly boarded our buses, tears in our eyes, it did not feel like we were returning home to our families, but leaving them behind at OSU.

Although I cried as I waved out of the bus window, I knew there was nothing to fear. Our action during that week had given me the confidence to believe I'd see my new friends again. I had the power to make that happen.

In today's world, events like these are more effective than ever. Technology and tools like Facebook and Skype allow us to maintain the relationships we build and the projects we design.



Carolyn with her Global Action Team (GAT), including students from Oregon, Colorado, Mexico, Venezuela, and Washington.

We can encourage each other as we continue on our path into the real world, where conferences aren't necessary to be immersed in cultural and intellectual diversity.

I can honestly say I'd be headed toward an entirely different future had I not attended the conference. I've developed a whole new appreciation and love for other cultures, and made friends who I'm certain will last me a lifetime.

Our activities helped me realize my passion for global action and change, and I now plan on majoring in International Relations in college. I left the conference with an endless list of ideas and projects, and although I know I must move one step at a time, I take comfort in knowing that all around the world, my friends from the conference are taking these steps with me.



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Carolyn has joined the CapeWomenOnline team as a regular contributing writer.

Her work with this magazine will earn Carolyn credit toward her C.A.S. (Creativity, Action and Service) requirements, which is a fundamental aspect of the full I.B. Degree.