

The Gap Year

What is a Gap Year?

Wikipedia defines the term gap year (also known as "year out", "deferring", "overseas experience") as a "prolonged period (often, but not always, a year) between a student's completion of secondary school and matriculation in a university or college or also between college and graduate school or a profession." In this manual we use the term to mean a period of time, generally a year, between high school and college.

Gap Year Benefits

A gap year is a concept worth considering for some students, as it can be used to accomplish something meaningful to them. For some, it might be as simple as an additional year of maturity before taking on something as huge as college. For others, it might be a chance to earn necessary dollars to pay for postsecondary education. For still others, it is an opportunity to do something unusual or adventurous that will be more difficult to accomplish later when pressures of school and career prevail. In summary, the benefits of a gap year will vary by individual, but can include one or more of the following and probably others as well:

- Maturity
- Dollars saved
- Focus
- Decisions about career
- Helping others
- Learning a skill
- Honing in on a major or area of interest
- Better college selection

The Commercialization of the Gap Year

As with so many aspects of the college selection and admission process, the gap year concept has become a booming business. There are websites and publications galore that attempt to guide you to a meaningful gap year experience. This is not to say that these are bad resources; not at all. However, we encourage you to think independently first as to whether a gap year makes sense for you, as opposed to being sold by the glamorous websites touting exotic life experiences. If you DO decide that a gap year is in your plans, then researching these gap year programs may make sense.

Is it Right for You?

Whether or not a gap year makes sense for you is a decision that only you, and perhaps your family, can make. Be sure to involve your parents, as they probably know you best. Ask yourself some of these questions and discuss the answers with them:

- Have you decided that college is definitely for you?
- Do you feel that you're ready for college?
- Do you have a sense of what you'd like to major in?
- Do you have a clear sense of what type of school will fit you best?
- Did you find one or more "dream schools" that you'd love to attend?

For many students, the answers to one or more of these questions may be “no”, and that certainly doesn’t mean they aren’t ready for college. “No” answers don’t mean that you need a gap year. Many students proceed on to college with little or no idea of what they want to major in, and listed “undecided” on their applications. Again, that does not indicate that they need a gap year to figure it out first. A major usually emerges after you experience some of your general course requirements.

However, if you answered “no” to all or most of those questions, a gap year might be something to consider.

Gap Year Resources

If you get to this point, here are some resources that are designed to help plan your year. But again, beware of expensive programs that seem focused on selling you something. Note that we are not recommending any of these resources specifically, but are passing them along for your research and investigation.

www.gapyear.com

www.dynamy.org - resident internship programs for ages 17-22

www.gapyear.com - planning worldwide travel for students

www.gap-year.com - planning worldwide travel for students

www.gapyearireland.com - spend a gap year in Ireland

www.frontier.ac.uk - conservation and exploration in Fiji, Madagascar, Cambodia etc.

www.globalcrossroad.com - volunteering and interning abroad

www.leapnow.org - group study, travel, internships

www.cityyear.org - a year of service in a city of choice

www.collegegapyear.com - all about gap years and gap year search directory

www.gapguru.com - gap year in India

www.sea.edu - Ocean education, sea oriented travel on board a boat

www.findagap.com - gap year directory

www.gapyearjobs.co.uk - gap year jobs directory

www.americorps.org - community service

www.thesca.org - Student Conservation Association

www.worldlearning.org - World Learning

www.whereareyouheaded.com - researching and planning for a gap year

www.realgap.co.uk/Gap-Year-Advice

Remember, a gap year isn’t for everyone. And if you decide that it makes sense for you, you (and your family) need to define it. Don’t let “gap year marketing” (such as the websites above) sway you from what you need to do. Sometimes it’s as simple as working for a year in your own community. Whatever it is, above all, make it count and make it right for YOU.