

GAP YEAR

Gap years have been a common practice in the U.K. and Australia for some time, and their popularity is rapidly growing here in the United States. Admissions officers recognize the pressure on high school students today and the stress it creates; they tend to appreciate the greater maturity and focus that can come from a gap year experience.

A gap year is just that, a year that is typically taken between a student's graduation from high school and the beginning of their college experience. We have also had students investigate gap years during their time at college. It's a time out to pursue some alternative activity or activities that might clarify the student's academic interests and future objectives. For many students, it is an opportunity to examine and come to know and understand the answer to the question, "Why college?" In our experience, this period of reflection leads students to approach college more inspired and better prepared to invest themselves in their academics.

Is a gap year right for everyone? No, but it is an option that every rising senior should at least consider as a possible alternative. We encourage all our students, even those who feel strongly about participating in a gap year experience, to go through the college application process in exactly the same earnest, committed, focused manner at the same time as their high school classmates. Some students have a clear idea of what they would like to do during a gap year; others have no idea, except for the fact that the concept appeals to them. Most colleges and universities are very supportive of gap years, but a student should look at the website of each college he or she plans to apply to and determine the school's position on deferring before enrolling. Most colleges will assume that the student will enroll the following year and will not use the gap year as an opportunity to apply to other colleges; some ask students to sign a request/contract stating that they will not apply to other colleges during their gap year, others may ask for a larger deposit and others may say nothing. The most important thing is to stay in communication with the college admissions office so that both you and the college are on the same wave-length.

In terms of what is available for students to do, the possibilities seem almost limitless. There are service opportunities at home and abroad, paid jobs and travel/experiential programs for one to look into. One approach we often recommend is breaking the year up and doing several things, perhaps including a period of paid employment to cover the costs of the more exotic opportunities.

In addition to discussing gap year possibilities with a Dunbar consultant, you could contact a gap year specialist such as Holly Bull at The Center for Interim Programs or Gail Reardon at Taking Off.

www.interimprograms.com

takingoff.net

Other resources include:

Children of Fast-Track Parents, Andrew Brooks

Coming Into Our Own, Mark Gerzon

The Complete Guide to the Gap Year, Kristin White

The Gap-Year Advantage, Karl Haigler and Rae Nelson

Success Without College, Linda Lee

Taking Time Off, (The Princeton Review) Colin Hall and Ron Lieber

Teenage Liberation Handbook, Grace Llewellyn

Teenager's Guide to School Outside the Box, Rebecca Green

The Uncollege Alternative, Danielle Wood

Where's the Map?, Beth and James Hood

And two articles on gap years produced by the National Association for College Admission Counseling and William Fitzsimmons, Dean of Admissions at Harvard College:

www.nacacnet.org/studentinfo/articles/Pages/Gap-Year-.aspx

www.college.harvard.edu/admissions/preparing-college/should-i-take-time



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