Full Summers: Relaxation or Preparation?

By Ali LeJeune

I have always prided myself on my ability to stay busy. For my entire life, I have typically had something to do in my free time after school, and my summer has been filled with fun camps and trips that made me feel satisfied at the end of each day. These fun experiences also make me cherish my summers between school years because of the personal time and relaxation they provide.

Recently though, while talking to one of my friends, I came to the realization that filling your summer now feels like an *obligation*. She had filled her summer with pre-college camps related to her intended major, and I felt slightly taken aback. I have always thought that summer was only for fun, because it is the only time you truly get off from school. Even though you get summer work so you don't forget everything about math and you maintain your literacy, it is often a small enough amount so that you can enjoy the first two months of summer and lock in in the last two weeks before school to complete it all.

After doing some research and watching many videos on TikTok, I realized this "summer-packing" isn't just something one of my friends does. Summers have become a prime time for students of all grades to establish their dedication to their personal niche for college applications. Students can take deep dives into any subject they want through classes and camps, but I think all this work concentrated into a time meant for relaxation robs summers of an important purpose. Summers are the one reprieve that students have from constant work during the school year, and, in my opinion, it is terrible to ask students to give up time meant for themselves to dedicate it to something they are not even 100 percent sure they want to do.

Starting early is imperative to craft a good essay or application. But it is one thing to start writing your Common App essay, and another to spend every waking hour working on things to add to your resume during your personal time off. One of the pointers from TestTakers is to build a "personal narrative" for colleges to follow. This tracks with the precollege programs that so many students attend. There are an infinite number of camps that teach pre-law and pre-med concepts to help prepare students before college even begins. Some of these camps are diagnostic, helping students figure out the answers to questions like what their major should be or if they would actually enjoy studying their intended major. But pressuring students to go through these programs pressures them to decide what their intended path is. Building a "personal narrative" forces students to focus on a narrow set of topics or just one topic, instead of letting them explore all there is to offer.

What I have found in my own college process as a junior is that a sense of balance is what is best. All year, I have been stressing about how my grades will look on my application, but summer provides the balance I need to reset and come back to everything with fresh eyes. I

go on trips all summer and have fun exploring new places while also setting time aside to work on college preparation and applications. Creating a space where you can walk the line somewhere between obsession with college and enjoying personal time should be the real goal.