

Why Take a Gap Year?

because the research says you should

THE TOP TWO REASONS STUDENTS GIVE FOR TAKING A GAP YEAR:

- Burnout from the competitive pressure of high school
- A desire to find out more about themselves

HERE ARE MORE REASONS, based on the latest research, why you should take the leap and experience a semester with *Where There Be Dragons*.

1. Research shows that students who take a Gap Year graduate with higher GPAs than their peers and are more satisfied with their careers. This advantage held when controlling for socioeconomic background or academic performance in high school. *Clagett, 2011. See: http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/12/27/clagett-gap-year/?_r=0*
2. 98% of colleges and universities accept deferrals for planned Gap Years. In fact, Harvard, Princeton, University of North Carolina, Colorado College (to name a few) encourage it because students enter more focused, mature, and passionate.
3. A majority of students now take five or more years to complete their college educations, while a majority of Gap Year students graduate in four years. If you think a Gap Year is expensive, try 6 years of college tuition.
4. 70% of Gap Year students go on to do a Study Abroad. But Gap Years are different: they occur at a developmental stage in which big decisions are being made. Gap Year students take time to reflect and experience a larger world with real consequences BEFORE making decisions about the rest of their lives. Study Abroad is a terrific experience, but it usually takes the form of academic study in the four-walls of a classroom... just in another country. Gap Year programs are holistic and largely experiential; students learn about place and global issues, but more significantly they gain clarity on who they are, what they believe in, and what they're capable of achieving.
5. More than 90% of students who do a structured Gap Year program enroll in university within one year of their time-off. While working for a year or traveling alone can be a valuable experience, the same outcome doesn't necessarily apply. Students who take the time to PURPOSEFULLY discover what makes them passionate tend to perform better on GPAs, are more motivated, involved in campus activities, and are better contributors in college and beyond. When the researchers tried to identify what were the major factors distinguishing a designed-program from mere time off, they discovered two factors that made the Gap Year a transformative experience:
 - a significant home-stay experience in another culture
 - excellent mentorship

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WHERE CAN I FIND MORE INFORMATION?

There is a large amount of information on Gap Years out there, and it's important to do your research. Gap Year providers should be able to provide specific information on risk management policies and share personal recommendations. Dragons connects students and parents researching Gap Year options with former students. Be wary of pay-for-space websites which may publicize programs based on payments for advertising space, rather than quality or reputation. Here are some of our top recommendations:

- USA Gap Year Fairs: www.usagapyearfairs.org
- American Gap Association: www.americangap.org
- *Gap Year Advantage* by Karl Haigler & Rae Nelson
- *The Complete Guide to the Gap Year* by Kristin White

HOW TO TAKE A GAP YEAR

1. Apply to college FIRST. Prepare for college admissions as usual: take the tests, write the essays, send in applications. When admitted, request a deferral, which 98% of colleges will grant if presented with legitimate Gap Year plans.
2. Don't plan for time off. A Gap Year is time ON. Plan ahead with clear goals. What do you want to learn? Compare & assess Gap Year programs based on safety, access to rich experiences, and the quality of mentorship.
3. Go alone or go with a group? Do both. Educational consultants recommend something more structured in the fall followed by more independent work or travel. For example, Michael Gellman of New York City spent fall 2012 on Dragons Central America Semester Program in Guatemala and Nicaragua. After graduating from high school, he knew that he needed to "take a break to re-discover [his] passion for informal learning." As a Dragons student, Michael learned to construct composting toilets while working with a Guatemala-based community organization. He stayed in Central America after his three-month Dragons semester program— where he spent four months applying his new skills to other community projects.
4. Prepare to make the investment. A Gap Year can be a significant investment, but is well worth the cost. Currently over 40% of students take five to six years to graduate from college. Investing in a Gap Year allows students to start college with greater focus and a stronger idea of what they want to achieve. This can help them to complete college in four years and connect their studies to their previous experiences and potential careers. Think of this year between high school and college as a bridge, not a gap. David Hawkins, Director of Research at the National Association for College Admission Counseling. "Colleges see that, if properly vetted, these [Gap Year] opportunities actually help students succeed in college."
5. Do your research. Find an experience that you won't be able to participate in at other times in your life. Affiliate with companies or organizations that are doing it right; ensure that your experience is with others who share your values and who are committed to the well-being of participants, but also to the well-being of the communities in which the travel or work is being done. Whether you want to backpack alone or go deep with a small group, spend your time and resources in ways that create a minimum of cultural impact while affording the greatest learning and most positive social outcomes for others. And...what happens to your financial aid if you defer. Find out and plan ahead.

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