



Top Benefits of a Gap Year

By Holly Bull

If you are considering a gap year (a year of exploring interests before or during college) for your students, here are 9 compelling reasons to pursue this great option:

Find one's passion or determine what isn't.

Sitting in a classroom is not an ideal place to figure out if one wants to be a doctor, journalist, teacher, etc. Hands-on internships or volunteer work during a gap year give students a concrete sense of what a particular field is like and whether or not it suits.

Build self-confidence and independence.

As soon as students step into a gap year, they are instantly more mature because they have to be. And they develop a fuller sense of themselves, undefined by their friends, family, or culture.

Choose/create one's life for a year.

A key proactive shift for many students is moving from "I have to...I should..." to "I choose!" Learning how to choose and create their lives at 17 or 18 stands them in very good stead in college and beyond.

Gain skills – resume building before college and career.

On a practical level, gap-year students are building effective resumes before stepping foot onto a college campus. And, for many, in-the-world experience and good recommendations have resulted in job placements down the line.

Take time to rejuvenate.

After K-12 years of classes, school fatigue is common. Recent statistical research by Karl Haigler and Rae Nelson (The Gap Year Advantage authors) reveals one of the most touted reason students chose to take a gap year was that they felt "burned out." A typical gap-year outcome for students is increased energy, enthusiasm, and sense of relevance of the world to the classroom.

Improve chances for college acceptance.

Mary Lou Bates, Director of Admissions at Skidmore College noted that gap-year freshman at Skidmore generally produce GPA's several percentage points higher than their peers. Most colleges realize that gap-year students are more mature and focused and an obvious asset to any campus. For some students who may not be happy with their college choices, a gap year provides an opportunity to reapply with a stronger portfolio in place.

Gain a clearer sense of college studies.

From Haigler and Nelson's statistics, 60% of students assert that their gap year helped them either determine or affirm a choice of major or course of study. This can save time and money because students are less likely to take the national average of 5-6 years to graduate college.

Ease the transition from college to the work world.

A gap year is, in essence, a half-step out into the world and offers students an opportunity to realize that they can handle it just fine. It makes the later post college transition less daunting.

Embrace a gap year when one is free to do so!

Adults often laughingly agree that they would love to take gap time but kids, jobs, pets, homes, make it a tough proposition. Students are not so tied down and are free to travel and explore their interests during this jewel of a period of time in their lives.

Holly Bull is president of the Center for Interim Programs, founded in 1980 as the oldest independent gap-year counseling service in the US. To date, Interim has worked with 590 students from NJ since 1980. Overall, Interim has worked with over 5600 students nationwide. Holly took a gap year before and during college and has been counseling students and parents through the gap-year process for over twenty years. Her office is based in Princeton, NJ and website: www.interimprograms.com.