

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 FIVE MORE REASONS, based on the latest research, why you should consider taking the leap and including a Where There Be Dragons semester program in your Gap Year plans.

- 1.** Structured Gap Year programs add value to the college process. Research shows that students who take a Gap Year graduate from college with higher GPAs than their peers and are more satisfied with their careers later in life. This advantage holds 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.** Ninety-eight percent of colleges and universities accept deferrals for planned Gap Years. In fact, Harvard, Princeton, University of North Carolina, and Colorado College are among the many institutions that encourage students to take a Gap Year after high school because they have seen that students starting university after taking a Gap Year are more focused, mature, and passionate.
- 3.** Gap Year programs provide students with focus, helping them to complete college in four years. Colleges may not publicize that 40% of students graduate after five or six years. Gap Year students, however, are largely graduating in four years. The investment in a Gap Year is often significantly less than additional years of college tuition
- 4.** Seventy percent of Gap Year students go on to do a study abroad program while in college. But Gap Years are different: they occur at a developmental stage in which big decisions are being made. Gap Year students can 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 often mirrors more traditional learning models, just in another country.
- 5.** Ninety percent of students who take a structured Gap Year go to university within one year. While working or traveling alone for a year can be valuable experiences, they don't always result in the same outcome as a structured Gap Year. Students who take the time to PURPOSEFULLY discover what makes them passionate while on a structured Gap Year tend to achieve higher GPAs, are more motivated, involved in campus activities, and overall are better contributors to college and beyond. When researchers tried to identify what major factors distinguished structured programs from mere time off, they discovered that a significant home-stay experience in another culture and excellent mentorship were two factors critical to making the Gap Year a transformative experience.

w h e r e t h e r e b e d r a g o n s

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. Ask questions. Whether you want to backpack alone or go deep with a small group, figure out what you are going to do if you get sick. And what happens to financial aid if you defer. Find out and plan ahead.