
Why You Should Take A Gap Year

Many of you in the audience may be on your way, mid-way or even finished with university. However, what you study is less important to your success than WHEN you study it. It's time to become independent, it's time for you to see the world for yourself and it's time to find your purpose.

There are many misconceptions and fears about taking a gap year, and you might have heard that a gap year will immediately put you at a disadvantage. Despite most concerns being valid in one way or another, it's important to weigh up the concerns against the benefits. In order to advantage yourself emotionally, socially and academically. This is why you should take a gap year. I'm here today to tell you to explore, to live and to grow into your own person, and a gap year is the key to do just that.

Let me begin by telling one person's story, Jean Fan. Jean was definitely considered the 'model student'. During her high school career, she was a straight A student and both of her parents had obtained PHD's. So, when she declared she was going to take not just one, but two years off her admission to one of the most prestigious schools in America, her parents were certainly surprised. Jean explains that she began to realise that she had been "herded into this narrow path- that [she] was really just an excellent sheep"

She proposed to work full time at an organisation called 'UNCOLLAGE', an organisation that runs gap year programs to form students into self-directed learners. She explains that her parents were very worried and reluctant in letting her delay university. She said to them

"I want to take time off from school. Not from learning." According to those who oppose gap years, if you don't go to college while the ink on your high school diploma is still fresh, you'll be eternally trapped in a low-paying, mundane and repetitive job that you'll hate for the rest of your life. However, this is just not true. Gap years provide a great alternative opportunity for those who need a change of scenery. An opportunity to learn in a completely different way than the usual pen and paper. An opportunity that allows students to immerse themselves in a culture that's completely different than the one they're used to. An opportunity to earn money, earn independence and decide what you truly want to study or pursue.

And yes, a gap year can be beneficial to you. However, you must MAKE that gap year useful and fulfilling. Jeffrey Selinger, author of *There Is Life After College* says students who have "transformative" gap year experiences do better than those who just delay college for a low-wage or low-skilled job.

To my fellow students, I advise you to entertain, educate and enrich yourself by taking a gap year. The idea of taking a year off before further studies is becoming a more and more socially acceptable trend. In 2015, America saw a 22% increase in high school leavers taking a gap year. Furthermore, Harvard College, one of the most prestigious institutions in the world, also encourages young people to take a gap year. Harvard's website states:

"We encourage admitted students to defer enrolment for one year to travel, pursue a special

project or activity, work, or spend time in another meaningful way”

Additionally, a study from Professor Andrew Martin at Sydney University, similarly argues in favour of gap years. Following the results of 904 Australian students across a range of academic backgrounds, including science, social science and arts found that, when the gap year was used constructively, the experience helped students gain skills, better grades and did not slow down their academic momentum. Martin claims: “For many students, a gap year is about crystallising their decision-making; developing... self-regulation skills, broadening their competencies and self-organisation,”

I will now turn to this issue of the many arguments made against gap years. Firstly, the statistics are clearly in favour of them. Some may say it's too expensive, nonetheless it's certainly worth the cost, and there are many organisations or programs that offer cheap volunteer or travel experiences. You may be on your own throughout the experience, however, that's a guaranteed way of growing your independence and to even make new friends and connections. One particular argument I've heard myself is that you might lose momentum. However, the statistics don't back this up. The Centre for Analysis of Youth Transitions did a study on gap years and they found that, in both the United Kingdom and United States, students who took a gap year were more likely to graduate with a higher GPA than observationally identical individuals who went straight to college. Moreover, gap years are a chance to recharge and feel refreshed before university or higher education.

Discovery, self-discovery, the journey towards self-discovery demands the freedom in which to find one's underlying passions.

How can you say no to a gap year? Gap years afford us an entire year to do whatever we want. Not things that our parents or our teachers or our friends tell us we should be doing. All throughout our lives we've been drilled with the idea that our career is on a timer and that if we're not at the peak of success by 25, our life will dwindle away into mediocrity and meaninglessness; but it's a lie.

So, if you, a friend or a sibling are currently in university or going to university consider giving yourself that time to find what you love and what excites you. Take a year off. Do nothing. Do everything. Do whatever you like and don't buy into the idea that you're wasting your life.

And as said by Charles F. Muntz from Disney's UP “Adventure is out there!”