

The National College Planning Summit

Everything You Need to Know About the Gap Year

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www.americangap.org

Ethan Knight is the founder of the American Gap Association. As a former Gap Year Student in India, Nepal & Tibet, he recognized first-hand the value of the Gap Year and believes strongly that education is the closest thing we have to a panacea for the world's ills.

1. What is a Gap Year?

- a. It is an experiential semester or “year on” typically taken between High School and College in order to deepen practical, professional and personal awareness.

2. How is this different than taking a “year off” between High School and College?

- a. There is structure, intention and working with young people in an experiential fashion and includes 5 core elements:
 - i. Reflection – just experiencing something doesn't translate into learning.
 - ii. Self-governance - what you put into it is what you get of it.
 - iii. Mentorship - having someone to identify a real opportunity for growth or learning and be available for guidance.
 - iv. Being beyond the comfort zone - learning happens best at the edge of what is comfortable.
 - v. Learning to see things from another perspective - we live in a global economy.

3. What are the benefits of a Gap Year before college vs study abroad?

- a. There are more opportunities for exploring and experimenting during Gap.
- b. When you are on study abroad you already have your major.

4. How common is the Gap Year?

- a. There are 30,000 students in US taking a Gap Year.
- b. Colleges are becoming more supportive of the Gap Year. (Harvard is very supportive)
- c. 90% of Gap Year students are back at a 4 year school with in one year of taking their Gap Year.
- d. Students after their Gap Year are more driven and engaged on campus.
- e. 80% of Gap Year Programs are International.

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5. What is the process of applying to college if you are considering a Gap Year?

- a. In general, you should Apply, get Accepted and then Ask for a Deferral for the Gap Year.
- b. It is easier to apply to college when you are in the US instead of overseas.
- c. Go to www.americangap.org for a listing of University Deferral Policies.

6. Why did you start the American Gap Association?

- a. We recognized the tremendous power Gap Years have to transform a student, how the experience helps them grow, helps them find a more purposeful career and have a life with impact.
- b. We wanted to address:
 - i. The general fears around the safety of students while on a Gap Year.
 - ii. What is a good Gap Year Program?
 - iii. How to pay for a Gap Year? Is Financial Aid available?
- c. “Parents are afraid of their student not getting onto the college path, while students are afraid of never finding their path.”
- d. Go to www.americangap.org for detailed information on all the Gap Year programs.

7. What is the process to become accredited by the American Gap Association?

- a. There are 150 individual standards - Safety and quality are the most important:
 - i. What is the access to medical care?
 - ii. Is the service work meaningful to the community?
 - iii. Are the local people included the project?
- b. It takes 6 months to one year for the accreditation process.
 - i. There are approximately 30 programs on the website and 10 are fully accredited.
 - ii. 20 are in various stages of accreditation.

8. When should I apply to the Gap program?

- a. Fall Semester Programs are more popular than Spring Programs - most US students are only taking a One Semester Gap Program.
- b. For Fall you would apply before June. To participate in the Spring Semester, apply in the Fall.
- c. Applying to Gap Year Programs can be more last minute than regular college admissions.

9. Do any Gap Year programs offer college credit or Financial Aid?

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- a. If you see a program you are interested in, call them and ask if they have any Financial Aid.
- b. Some colleges are partnered with Gap Year programs - Tufts University and Princeton University have 1 +4 Program. You apply to the school and then when accepted, apply to the Gap Year program.
- c. Some Programs have college credit opportunities and a few have access to Federal Financial Aid dollars.
- d. Students need to check with their college to make sure there are no issues with transferring credits earned during the Gap Year.
- e. The US State Dept. offers a scholarship if the student can earn college credit –The Benjamin A Gilman award is \$5,000.
- f. The American Gap Association acts as a connector for scholarship opportunities.

10. What questions should students be asking when they are doing research into the Gap Year Program?

- a. Start with an accredited program.
- b. Focus on the Field staff–Who are they? What are their qualifications?
- c. Who will be part of my group?
- d. What kind of Financial Aid or college credit is available?
- e. Can I talk to alumni of the program?

11. Final thoughts - Is a Gap Year good for everybody?

- a. Everyone stands to benefit from a Gap Year but it is not necessarily the right fit for everyone. If someone is genuinely excited about college, then go to college. For other students who are not so sure about why they are going to college, then investigate a Gap Year. You'll walk away more aware of what motivates you and what kind of impact you can have in the world.

12. What is the best way for families to contact you?

Through our website www.americangap.org.