

The National College Planning Summit

Will Your Student Benefit From A Gap Year?

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Sandy Furth has over 20 years' experience teaching school in the US, Malaysia, Japan & England. She launched World Student Support as a response to parents looking for specific educational options for their children.

1. The idea of the Gap Year is unfamiliar to many Americans. Can you introduce our listeners to the Gap Year? What is it?

- a. A Gap Year is “Time On.” Time between high school and college or even during university studies to focus on a passion or pursuit that students may not have had time for while in high school.
- b. Taking a year to explore a wide range of different areas.

2. How is this different from taking a “year off”?

- a. It may or may not, but it is definitely not eating bon-bons and watching soap operas for a year! A Gap Year needs to be structured with a goal in mind.
- b. It can be a structured program.
- c. It can be a way to earn money to pay for University.
- d. Some Gap Years may be a medical leave or to care for a family member.

3. What are the benefits?

- a. It provides a breather from academia, the opportunity to take a good hard look at one's goals in life, a time to learn about different cultures, opportunities to look at careers or a time to develop self-awareness.
- b. Students are under a tremendous amount of pressure to perform and focus on their curriculum in High School and applying to competitive colleges. A Gap Year offers these students the opportunity to look at different goals and interests.
- c. For example - One student had to do 2 years of High School in one year because his High School was closing. His Gap Year allowed him a year to step out of academia and pursuing his own interest in gourmet cooking as well as looking at a career in catering.

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4. Do students need to have certain qualities in order to be successful during a Gap Year?

- a. They need to be flexible thinkers!
- b. A Gap Year program may stretch a student's personal resources.
 - i. Things do not always turn out as they seem.
 - ii. It may be the first time a student is stepping foot into a developing country.
 - iii. Observationskills are important.
 - iv. Giving up "creature comforts" is important - in some programs travelling may be a little rough.
 - v. Knowing that things may not always go as planned. You may miss a train or a plane and you have to figure out alternative plans. Looking around with all your senses.
 - vi. Having a sense of humor.
- c. Taking a Gap Year makes students become better listeners and empathetic to different situations - sometimes it makes students become politically aware.
- d. Students are gaining a better sense of the world around them and a better sense of themselves.
- e. Many programs offer home stays which is a different life style.
 - i. Example - I had a student in a home stay in South America. No cell phones were at the dinner table which was a first for her. She had conversations with her host family and she loved it. She took that piece of culture home with her - no more cells phones at dinner!

5. Are there specific Gap Year programs that are tailored to student's particular areas interests?

- a. Anyone can find a program tailored to their needs whether it is becoming a ski instructor in Europe or learning about art or cooking or learning about international relations.

6. Are all Gap Year programs international?

- a. There are a few in the US, but most are abroad
- b. GAP Year started outside the US so most programs are outside the US.

7. Is there any sort of cost range?

- a. Costs can vary from minimal to as much as in-state tuition.
- b. There are a few opportunities for financial aid, but students need to be creative to get it.

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8. What do colleges think of students who are taking a Gap Year?

- a. There was a formal survey by Bob Clagget, a former Dean of Middlebury College, who found:
 - i. Gap Year Students had an increase in GPA upon returning to the University.
 - ii. Smaller private liberal arts colleges are more observant in noticing the increased GPA and maturity of Gap Year students.
 - iii. Students tend to complete university within the 4 year time frame with less changing of majors.
 - iv. Gap Year Students often take leadership positions in the university.
- b. Additionally, I conducted my own research by calling a variety of public and private universities and also found that the colleges are supportive of students who take a Gap Year.

9. Do students earn any credit that may be applicable to college?

- a. Sometimes - students must check with the college they will attend. If they do earn credits they may be considered transfer credits.
- b. State schools are a little more flexible with the credits than private liberal arts colleges.

10. When should students be applying for college? While they are still in HS, during the Gap Year or after they have returned?

- a. Students should apply their Senior Year of High School year, get accepted and then ask for a deferral.
- b. They shouldn't mention that they are doing a Gap Year on the application.
- c. It can be difficult to apply while you are on the Gap Year - complicated because of needing teacher or counselor recommendations and being out of the country.

11. Is there a formal process for deferrals?

- a. Students are accepted and should pay their deposit and then contact Admissions and Admissions will walk them through the process. Not all schools accept deferrals.
- b. California public universities don't accept deferrals.
- c. Harvard & Princeton are very supportive of students taking a Gap Year.
- d. University of Southern California has a second semester start date. USC doesn't have a Gap Year Program built into its curriculum, but it makes it very convenient for students to take a Fall Gap Semester.

12. Should students ask in advance if the college has a deferral program?

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- a. Before you apply you can contact the school & ask if they have a deferral program.

13. What happens to a scholarship if the student chooses to take a Gap Year?

- a. Check with the college to find out what will happen with their Financial Aid Package and their scholarships.
- b. Each school will handle it differently- some Gap Programs give credits and students may be able to use the Financial Aid.
- c. Families need to do due diligence about their Financial Aid.

14. Some parents are afraid their child will not return to college if they take a Gap Year. How do you respond to that?

- a. Students will be more mature and more focused - A Gap Year fosters maturity, focus and a better idea of what they wish to accomplish in life.

15. How many options are there for taking a Gap Year? How many options should a student be looking at if they are planning a Gap Year?

- a. There are infinite possibilities so the students need to research.
- b. Earlier I mentioned the student who was interested in cooking – He spent a year in France learning farm to table cooking. He learned French and ultimately decided that being a chef was not for him.
- c. Another student – She was an Ivy diploma student and wanted to see if her professional path would be in the art world. She went to art school in London and continued with Art Studies.
- d. Another student was an American living in Australia. She did her High School studies in Australia and took a Gap Semester to South America.

16. What is the most unusual Gap Year student experience?

- a. One student volunteered in Central America – she chose a program with a little more independence and ended up in hospital and took care of herself completely.

17. Are there websites that students can go to for more information?

- a. American Gap Association www.americangap.org
- b. USA Gap Year Fairs www.usagapyearfairs.org

18. What is your best tip or final advice for families beginning the Gap Year journey?

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- a. Keep an open mind, listen with care, and keep in mind the outcome.
- b. What is it that your child wants from the program? Remember, it is their experience, not yours!
- c. Use someone who has had experience in Gap Year placement.
- d. Read up on the Gap Year. Here are a few books:
 - i. Complete Guide to the Gap Year by Kristin White
 - ii. The Gap Year Advantage and The Gap Year American Style by Karl Haigler & Rae Nelson
- e. Look at the safety record of the program.
- f. What the student wants to do determines the program they should choose. Here are just a few examples of Gap Year Programs:
 - i. Americorp
 - ii. NOLS
 - iii. Outward Bound
 - iv. Dynamy
 - v. Sea Mester
 - vi. Where There Be Dragons
- g. The programs will interview the student as part of the Gap Year Application to make sure the student is a good fit.
- h. Remember, a Gap Year is not a one year vacation - you have to be an active participant.
- i. It is the opportunity to become self-aware and culturally aware!

19. How do you work with students?

- a. Students fill out an in-depth intake form with questions such as:
 - i. What are you looking for?
 - ii. Where would you like to explore?
 - iii. How adventurous do you want to be?
 - iv. Are you looking for a full year or divided program?
- b. And then we research!

20. How do families contact you and what services do you provide?

- a. www.worldstudentsupport.com
- b. sandy@worldstudentsupport.com
- c. 303-526-9148 or 303-956-9604
- d. I do college advising for students looking for a 4 year program.
- e. I work with students with learning issues to find the best college for them.
- f. I work with High School families who are looking for boarding or day schools.
- g. I work with students looking for summer programs.