

WHERE THERE BE



DRAGONS

# GAP YEAR GUIDE

PART I

WHY CONSIDER A GAP YEAR?

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## WHY CONSIDER A GAP YEAR?

Gap Year Alumni overwhelmingly tell us that **taking a Gap Year was the best decision** that they have ever made. This said, the choice to take a Gap Year might feel a bit daunting or scary. It's your future and committing to a Gap Year is a big decision.

This guide is designed to help you understand whether a Gap Year is right for you. Inside, we'll cover:

- What is a Gap Year
- Common Gap Year Misconceptions
- Benefits of Taking a Gap Year
- Common Reasons to Take a Gap Year
- Gap Year Stories & Advice
- How to Talk to Your Parents About Taking a Gap Year
- How to Plan Ahead, Financially

If you are just getting started, we encourage you to explore this guide from the beginning. If you have already done some research and are ready to move forward with your plans, check out [Gap Year Guide Part II: Resources to Plan Your Gap Year](#).



**EVA VANEK, MARKETING & OUTREACH DIRECTOR**

*"Believe it or not, I've taken TWO Gap Years! Chatting with students and families about Gap Years is one of my favorite aspects of my work. I love helping students figure out whether a Gap Year is the right fit and starting to dream about future adventures. I would love to help you plan yours!"*



**ALEX BIDDLE, OUTREACH MANAGER**

*"I felt like I fit five years of growth and life experiences in during my Gap Year. I learned so much about myself and the world, and it shaped my future in countless ways. Which is why I absolutely love supporting students and their families in designing meaningful Gap experiences!"*

**Need help?** Reach out to us anytime during your process. The Dragons team is here to chat through all of your questions, no matter how big or small.

# WHAT IS A GAP YEAR?

A Gap Year is typically taken between high school and college or during college. **It's an opportunity to step away from traditional education and academic fatigue to explore new experiences, develop practical skills, and gain clarity on future goals.** Research shows that 98% of colleges and universities accept deferrals for planned Gap Years! During this time, students might travel, work, volunteer, or pursue personal projects. The idea is to use this year for self-discovery, and growth, and to gain a fresh perspective before diving into the next chapter of your academic or professional journey.

## COMMON GAP YEAR MISCONCEPTIONS

While the benefits of a Gap Year are vast, a lot of students worry about taking one. It's quite common for us to hear from students that they have a lot of preconceived ideas about what a Gap Year actually is.

### 1 IT WILL DELAY MY FUTURE SUCCESS

While some students worry that taking a Gap Year might set them back, it can actually enhance future success. A well-planned Gap Year allows individuals to acquire real-world skills and experiences, making them more competitive and well-rounded candidates for academic programs and careers. Data shows that Gap students outperform their peers with higher GPAs, graduate college on time, and report higher college satisfaction. A Gap Year can also be your first year of college abroad! On programs like Dragons, you can gain a full semester-worth of college credit experientially!

### 2 IT'S FOR STUDENT'S WHO FEEL "LOST" OR "FAILING"

Gap Year students are usually very curious, eager to learn, and motivated to build meaningful experiences and relationships. Time away is healthy whether it's taking a break after rigorous high school work loads and gaining clarity on future choices. This is not a gap or a void for students to slack off, it's actually, quite the opposite.

### 3 FEAR OF MISSING OUT

Many students fear missing out, aka FOMO. While you are stepping into a new context, Gap Year students find more fulfillment when they get to college and even find friends who did a Gap Year too!

### 4 IT'S A WASTE OF A YEAR

A Gap Year is far from a waste of time. It offers a chance to engage in meaningful and productive activities that can enrich personal development and better prepare individuals for academic and professional opportunities. Far from idly passing time, it's an exciting time to grow and prepare for future success.

### 5 I'M GOING TO FORGET EVERYTHING I LEARNED IN HIGH SCHOOL

While Gap Year students take a "break" from traditional schooling, the learning doesn't stop. Remember that skills and knowledge can be built upon and refreshed. Many students find that their experiences reinforce and enhance their foundational learning, returning back to academic endeavors more excited and inspired.



# BENEFITS OF TAKING A GAP YEAR

Many high school graduates feel pressure to follow the traditional trajectory and go straight to college. If you are wondering how taking time off the typical academic path will better prepare you for your future, the answers are endless. For starters:

## EDUCATIONAL & CAREER BENEFITS

- A Gap Year experiences translate to better admissions essays.\*
- 88% report that their Gap Year significantly increased their employability.
- 84% of students report being satisfied with their career.
- More likely to graduate in 4 years compared to the 5 year average.
- Higher GPAs than non-Gap Year peers.

## PERSONAL BENEFITS

- Increased self-confidence and maturity
- Better understanding of self and interests
- Develop cross-cultural competencies
- Increased communication and personal reflection skills
- Develop tools for Global Citizenship
- Increased ownership of one's life direction



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I think it is such a valuable experience for someone to have especially before going off to college. I feel that I value education differently now, especially after my time on my Gap Year and I think it's important for people to have a broader sense of the world and get out of the bubble of their town or college.

-LAURA, PAST DRAGONS STUDENT

# COMMON REASONS TO TAKE A GAP YEAR

As we've already noted, students who take a Gap Year are curious to learn about themselves and the world around them in new ways. Students report that they took a Gap Year for one or many of the following reasons:

- Get hands-on life experience
- Gain transferable skills for their future
- Build professional and personal development skills
- Explore personal interests and hone in on possible career paths/fields of study.
- Step away from the pressures of school and change up your daily routine.
- Find out more about who they are.
- Gain language fluency
- Expand their perspective by experiencing different worldviews and realities.
- Slow down and find time for personal reflection.
- Explore the natural wonders of the world.
- Learn about service and/or apprentice with a mentor.
- Build meaningful friendships and relationships.
- Try something new, daring, and challenging.
- Actually, breathe and slow down



## IS A GAP YEAR RIGHT FOR YOU? ASK YOURSELF:

- 1 Do I want to take time to develop my interests?
- 2 Do I need a break to refresh from school and academia?
- 3 Do I want to do something unique?
- 4 Do I want to go on a fun adventure?
- 5 Does going to college this year feel rushed?

If you answered "yes" to any or all of the questions above then a Gap Year could be for you!

# GAP YEAR STORIES & ADVICE

There is no mold for the typical Gap student. If you're curious about yourself and the world around you, a Gap Year could be for you!

## MEET SOME OF OUR GAP YEAR STUDENTS AND THEIR STORIES



*"My advice for students considering a Gap Year is to do it. You're going to meet people from all walks of life, who will be some of the greatest people you'll ever meet. The strength you gain both internally and with your peers from the shared adversity, accomplishments, and challenges is going to change your life. Taking a Gap Year, especially with Dragons, was the best decision I've ever made. But don't just sit around for a year, make a plan!"*

**-ARJAN, SOUTH AMERICA SEMESTER ALUM**

*"My Gap Year felt completely necessary. I knew I was interested in getting into social justice, and that I needed to have a broadened perspective that was different from what I already knew. I wanted to go see a different part of the world before I sat in my college classes. I did my spring semester with Dragons before heading to Occidental College as a prospective Critical Theory and Social Justice Major."*

**-SADHANA, SOUTH AMERICA SEMESTER ALUM**



*"I did Dragons in the fall. In the winter, I worked as a skiing instructor and substitute teacher in a local preschool. In the spring I WWOOFed in Greece. In the summer I did the Middlebury Language School for French, before I started in the Fall at UVM studying Anthropology and Language. You will learn so much about yourself and the presence you want to have in the world during your gap year—write these realizations down! Reflecting, and being able to re-read these reflections months later, have helped me mature, and identify my own growth."*

**-CHARLOTTE, GUATEMALA & MEXICO SEMESTER ALUM**

*"I met a couple of my best friends on my Dragons program. I know it can be a scary leap for some people and in the beginning I was even skeptical. As I did more research I got really excited for my Gap semester. Having the opportunity to learn how to travel responsibly and safely in a new country are skills that I will always be able to take with me on future adventures."*

**-SKYLAR, INDONESIA SEMESTER ALUM**



# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS ABOUT TAKING A GAP YEAR

## TIPS WE RECOMMEND ON HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS

- Explain how a Gap Year is **not** an alternative to college or your future career
- Help them understand **who** does a Gap Year and that taking one is very common
- Refer to the benefits section on page 4
- Figure out why you want to take a Gap Year and share your basic goals with your parents (see suggested steps below)
- Send them our way to chat with and help them see the value

We're no strangers to nervous or skeptical parents! If you need help planning a successful Gap Year, our team of experts is well-versed in walking you and your parents through the entire process.



## SET GOALS & MAKE A PLAN TO TALK TO YOUR PARENTS ABOUT A GAP YEAR.

- 1 What do you want to achieve, and feel this year?
- 2 What skills will you gain on a Gap year that will impact your future?
- 3 What's something you're struggling with that a Gap Year may help with?

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I was challenged. I became more confident. I became more inspired. We had incredible discussions. I learned about a new culture which in turn made me think critically about myself and my own life. I reevaluated my values and I think I am now a more loving, compassionate, understanding, curious, and inspired person.”

- ELIOT, PAST DRAGONS STUDENT

# HOW TO PLAN AHEAD, FINANCIALLY

One barrier students often face is figuring out how to finance their Gap Year. There are ways to keep costs down and ways to fund your Gap Year. Remember, a Gap Year is an investment in yourself and your future. It's not an alternative, it's a continuation of your education.

## HOW CAN YOU MAKE IT FINANCIALLY POSSIBLE?

- **Scholarships:** Apply for a scholarship or grants through [GoOverseas](#), [Gap Year Association](#), your local rotary club, or other providers.
- **529 Funds:** Many Gap Year providers accept 529 funds as a way to finance your Gap Year experiences. All plans are different, be sure to check with your 529 provider.
- **Dragons Sliding Scale Pricing & Financial Aid:** WTBD offers [sliding scale pricing](#) and [financial aid](#) that meets participants where they're at financially to ensure they can join us.
- **Other:** There are so many fun, creative ways to support your experience. You can make a plan to work, fundraise, or save money, we can help you with brainstorming ideas!

## ARE YOU READY TO SAY "YES" TO THE BEST YEAR YET?

- 1 Download our [Gap Year Guide Part II: Resources to Plan Your Gap Year](#)
- 2 [Schedule](#) a 30-minute consultation call with our team
- 3 Research some of our [programs](#)
- 4 Get inspired to travel with Dragons—watch our newest [video](#)!

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*Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified accountability, transparency, and social and environmental performance.*

\*Data points from the [Gap Year Association](#) website

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