

What is a Gap Year?

A gap year is the common name for a year taken between high school graduation and entry into college or university. During this year a student might travel, work, study a specific subject (such as a language), or do volunteer work.

Who should take a Gap Year?

A gap year is an option for all students but is usually taken by someone who either wants to accomplish something specific before starting his or her college work – such as learning a language by living abroad, or taking an outdoor survival course – or someone who is feeling the need for a break for formal education before starting the serious study of the college years. A successful gap year often takes more planning and preparation than the conventional transition to college life, and is most productive when there is a plan and the year offers new and expanding experiences to the student.

How do I go about setting up a Gap Year?

Students interested in a gap year should complete the full college application and acceptance process as if they were not planning on the gap year. In the spring of your senior year, after you have accepted the offer from the college of your choice, and paid the deposit, then you can request permission from your college to delay your entry into the college for twelve months to allow you to take a gap year. In almost all cases colleges are happy to agree to this request. It is very important that you complete the college application process and secure a place for you for the September after your gap year. Students who do not choose to do this find it much harder to apply to college from the activities of their gap years, and are much more likely to have a delay in entering higher education.

What are the pluses and minuses of a Gap Year?

The answer to this is highly individual, as a gap year is. A gap year can be an expensive option, and is financially challenging for some students. For others, if they have a confirmed job with good pay, it can be a way to reduce the financial challenges of the first year of college. For some students the idea of a break longer than the summer before college entry is a huge relief, for others it feels like delaying the start of adult life unnecessarily. For some students the opportunity to figure out how to live independently without also handling the stress of the first year of higher education is a great transition, for others it is unnecessary. The best way to decide if a gap year is the right choice for you is to talk with parents, teachers, and other adults who you trust.

Gap Year Resources and Ideas:

The list of things that you can do during a gap year is unlimited. However, it can be helpful to see what other students have done as you consider it. The following resources are all ones that RSSAA students have participated in, or are options for Waldorf students, but this is just a starting place. There are lots of options on the web, but be sure to check out programs well before signing up for anything.

- Travel and Language Study
 - AFS International Programs – International Exchange opportunities in 40 countries around the world. www.afsusa.org
 - Where There be Dragons – International travel and study (college credit giving) semester long programs – www.wheretherebedragons.com
 - International Studies Abroad – International study abroad with a focus on college credit – www.studiesabroad.com
 - Goethe Institute - Study German in Germany – www.goethe.de/Germany
- Volunteer Opportunities
 - Voluntary Service in Germany – opportunities to work in German Waldorf schools, and farms – www.freunde-waldorf.de/incoming
 - Camphill – Camphills are Anthroposophical communities for life-sharing with disabled children and adults – there are opportunities in the US and abroad. <http://www.camphill.org/>
 - WWOOFing – opportunities to volunteer on organic farms around the world - <http://www.wwof.net/>
- Study Opportunities
 - The International Youth Initiative Program – a social entrepreneur training in how to create positive change in the world (in Sweden, but run in English). <http://yip.se/>
 - Free Columbia Art Course – a nine month full time course of painting and anthroposophy - <http://www.freecolumbia.org/>
 - Alderleaf Wilderness School – A variety of outdoor survival and permaculture courses - <http://www.wildernesscollege.com/>

Questions?

If you have any questions or concerns about the possibility of a gap year, please feel free to speak with Siân Owen-Cruise, sowen-cruise@steinerschool.org.