

Gap Years and 13th Year Programs

A **“Gap Year”** is one way to describe a year off between high school and college or between college and entering the work force. But this isn't a vacation, it's a planned learning opportunity. Taking a year to travel, do volunteer work, or working are three ways a gap year could be spent.

What's the value? For some students, a gap year gives the student more time to mature and be ready and eager to start college. For others, the gap year is an opportunity to work in a field before choosing it as a college major. And some students feel that it's important to give back to our society by volunteering before other responsibilities divide their time and make volunteering more difficult.

Regardless of your motivation, there are a few things to keep in mind. First is cost. If you are planning on volunteering through an organization or if you are planning on traveling, there will be costs to consider. Even volunteer programs may involve paying for your living expenses or travel costs. Second, if you're taking a gap year between high school and college, you should still apply to college during your senior year. This way you can take advantage of your high school resources in the college search and application process. Your family will probably feel much better about you taking a gap year if they know you've already applied and been accepted to college (you'll need to ask the college if you can defer for a year). Plus, if you're choosing to travel, applying to college might be more difficult if you're away from home.

A gap year can be a great resume builder, so plan to make the best use of your time!

A **13th year** is basically a fifth year of high school. Why would anyone want to do that, you might ask? An extended illness could cause gaps in learning and you would want to fill those before college. Possibly you need another year of high school before being ready for college athletics (either to help yourself become NCAA eligible or to become a better athlete before beginning a college career). Maybe you are young for your grade and want another year to mature before heading off to college. 13th year programs aren't usually offered at public high schools, so you would have to look into private prep schools. The costs for this could be almost as much as going to college. But depending on your situation, another year of school before heading off to college could be beneficial for you.