Discussion Topic: “Taking a Gap Year”

Professor Carrier ~ Fall 2014

Gap years…good or bad? Today we will discuss what they are, talk about the pro's and con's of taking a gap year, and talk about some ideas for how to get the most out of a break if you decide to take one. Other topics that might come up in this discussion are self-discovery, sexual responsibility, body art and tattoos, and travel.

TEXT: **“10 reasons you should take a gap year.”** From [“The Huffington Post”](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/30/gap-year_n_4325969.html)

Taking a [gap year](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/gap-year) between high school and college doesn't mean you're lazy, or that you're **skipping out** on life. In fact, it means that you're **living life to the fullest**. Here are 10 reasons why.

1. *You’ll perform better in college.*

Students might worry that college admissions officials or professors will **look down on them** for taking a gap year. This isn’t necessarily true: [many schools report](http://americangap.org/benefits.php) that gap year students have higher GPAs and are more involved on campus, so their attitudes toward gap years are far from unfavorable. [Acceptance letters from Harvard](http://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/right-school/timeline/articles/2010/05/19/7-questions-to-ask-when-considering-a-gap-year?page=3) even suggest that students might want to take time off before they enroll.

2. *You’ll realize what you love before you start studying.*

More often than not, college students commit themselves to one area of study, realize it’s not for them, and then **swap** to a completely different major… often [two or three times](http://advising.uoregon.edu/AA_Pages/AA_ChooseMajor.html). You’ll cut down on coursework, tuition bills and stress if you take time before college to decide which **role** in the “real world” is most appealing to you.

3. *You’ll get to adventure at your prime.*

When else are you going to be 18 years old with no job, no mortgage payments, no **significant other**, no kids, no homework and no worries? Never. The answer is never.

4. *You’ll know what’s important in life before most people do.*

College is insanely fun, but it’s easy to get so caught up that you begin to believe your fraternity or friend group is the absolute center of the universe. As such, any small crisis or fight might seem like the end of the world. However, if you’ve traveled the wider world in all its complexity and glory, you’ll understand there are bigger issues for humanity than a failed date night or lost game of **beer pong**.

5. *You’ll be an expert at adapting to new places.*

On a gap year, you’ll be forced to **integrate** into a new society, a new group of friends, and maybe even new languages or cultural norms. College requires similar **adaptation skills**, and you’ll be much more ready to **handle it** if you’ve already **shifted societies** once before.

6. *You’ll have something to talk about.*

Skip the same old “where are you from?” and “what’s your major?” **chitchat**, and **nail** the “what’d you do this summer?” question with stories from your gap year. You’ll have first-hand opinions to share about people, places and ideas that your peers might have never even heard of.

7. *You’ll have a* ***shinier*** *resume.*

Oftentimes, a gap year involves staying in one spot and soaking up its culture, part of which means getting a job. No matter where you work -- a sandwich stand in India or the embassy in London -- you’ll have valuable (international!) experience for your resume and can explain your ability to do business with customers from different cultures. If you’re a real cheap traveler, you might even have some earnings left to use on college tuition.

8. *You’ll pick up the pieces you missed in high school.*

Slept through every Spanish class? Head to Argentina for your gap year, where you'll be forced to speak the language **for reals**. Wish you knew more history? Spend time touring government buildings in Europe. A gap year is your time to **refine** the specific **skills** you feel like you’re **lacking** and **sharpen** them up for college.

9. *You’ll have time to think.*

Life feels like it’s **unfolding** fast right now, and in college, things only move faster. Give yourself room to think and breathe and *be* on long train rides from country to country or days spent strolling through new towns. You’ll be surprised where your mind wanders when you give it **free rein**.

10. *You’ll make new friends.*

How cool would it be to go through life knowing you have a best friend in Italy or a pen pal in New Zealand? Their unique perspectives on life will hugely **enrich** yours as you compare all the major events that happen in your 20s and beyond. Plus, you’ll have crazy awesome places to visit during college breaks.

VOCABULARY:

1. skipping out
2. living life to the fullest
3. look down on
4. swap
5. role
6. significant other
7. beer pong
8. integrate
9. adaptation skills
10. handle it
11. shifted societies
12. chitchat
13. nail
14. shinier
15. “for reals”
16. refine skills
17. lacking
18. sharpen
19. unfolding
20. free rein
21. enrich

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Would you like to take a gap year? Why or why not?
2. If you could take a gap year where would you like to go and why?
3. If you took a gap year would you work, study, travel or some combination of them?
4. Do you have any friends who have taken a gap year? If so, what was their experience like?
5. Do you think that taking a gap year will help you get a job after university?
6. If you take a gap year, how will you pay for it?
7. What are some bad things that can happen while travelling?
8. What are some of the crazy things that young people do while travelling? (For example, getting a giant tribal tattoo on their back.)
9. Do you think that young people have a different attitude toward sex and relationships when travelling long term? Is this a bad thing?
10. Do you think that it is important for a young person to take some time to “find themselves” before they begin their adult life? Does taking a gap year help young people do this?