Life After Graduation: Exploring Gap Year Options

You've got this pearl of a decade in front of you: THE TWENTIES. This is the prime of your life! You've been on a straight educational path since you learned to tie your shoes, and now suddenly you've got a diploma, enough energy to run the length of the globe, and all of the freedom in the world. So how are you going to spend the glorious days of your independent youth?

From Delaying the Real World by Colleen Kinder

If your thoughts sound like those above, then you’re looking at the right publication. Many students find jumping into graduate school or a full-time job daunting, yet they still want to do something meaningful and potentially skill-building after graduation. The time after graduating from college can be pivotal for your identity development and your definition of career goals. Some consider this time where dreams can manifest into a reality, while others use this time to discover their calling they couldn’t find while in college. Still others use this time simply to take a break. Many students call this time after college and before a full-time job a “gap year.”

Reasons to Take a Gap Year after Graduation:
1. Better transition into the real world
2. Great way to learn adaptability, independence, and other life skills
3. Opportunity to explore possible career interests
4. A chance to add experience to your resume or graduate school applications
5. After you start working, you might not have another opportunity to take a break!

Types of Gap Year Programs or Activities:
- Volunteering/Service programs
- Teaching programs
- Internship programs for recent graduates
- Cultural exchange programs
- Seasonal or temporary work
Where Do I Begin?
The first thing you should do is brainstorm ideas about what your interests are or what you would like to find out about yourself. Your inspiration might be that you have always wanted to work with kids or you may want the chance for a more outdoorsy, adventurous lifestyle. Regardless of your motivation, once you have a range of ideas of what you would like to do, it is important to start making a concrete plan.

1. Set your priorities (Why are you doing this?)
   - Expanding your resume, learning a language, travel and/or service experience, getting your “foot in the door” of a particular type of organization

2. Evaluate your needs (What are your goals?)
   - Working and living independently, getting work experience, identifying or clarifying your interests, exercising your moral principles, experiencing a different culture

3. Determine your strengths (What are you good at?)
   - Communication skills, interpersonal skills, time management skills, professional or technical skills

4. Research your ideas (What are your options?)
   - The UCS Library is a great resource for handouts and books
     - *Taking Time Off* by Colin Hall [@UCS]
     - *Delaying the Real World* by Colleen Kinder [@UCS]
     - *How to Live Your Dreams of Volunteering Overseas* by Joseph Collins
     - *Gradspot.com’s Guide to Life After College* by Chris Schonberger
     - *Taking A Gap Year* by Susan Griffith
   - Online resources
     - [http://www.gapyear.com](http://www.gapyear.com)
     - [http://www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)
     - [http://www.bunac.org/](http://www.bunac.org/)
     - [http://www.collegeaftermath.com/](http://www.collegeaftermath.com/)
     - [http://www.gapyearjobs.co.uk/](http://www.gapyearjobs.co.uk/)

5. Plan ahead & start applying!
   Planning ahead is useful in order to avoid missing deadlines for applications or scholarships! Giving yourself ample time to create your gap year plan is important for updating any international travel documents you may need (Visa, Passport), for saving money and for booking trips in advance.

Types of Programs
The following resources are commonly used by undergraduates in the U.S. in their gap year search. This is NOT an exhaustive list, so you should always use caution when researching opportunities. Keep in mind that it always helps to talk to someone in the program or a recent participant before committing to a particular experience.
Volunteering/Service Programs

In the U.S.:
- Volunteer USA
  - Non-profit organization geared toward:
    - Family Literacy
    - Youth Mentoring
    - National Disaster Recovery Fund
    - Training for Families and Teens
    - eco-Volunteer USA
- The Borgen Project
  - Campaign to bring U.S. political attention to severe poverty
- The Marine Mammal Center
  - Non-profit veterinary research hospital
- City Year
  - Opportunity for a year of volunteering in school-based service, youth leadership and community transformation all across the United States
- AmeriCorps VISTA
  - National service program specifically geared toward fighting poverty in all 50 states
- The Women’s Initiative for Self-Employment
  - Assisting high-potential, low-income women in entrepreneurship

Outside the U.S.:
- Global Gigs
  - Advice and resources for looking for jobs overseas
- Peace Corps
  - Volunteer for 27 months in over 77 countries
  - Schedule an appointment with the Peace Corps recruiter at UCS for more information or email peacecorps@virginia.edu

Teaching Programs

In the U.S.:
- National Teaching Fellowship
  - Two-year leadership development experience includes service as a team leader at a Citizen Schools campus, professional development in community organizations, and optional enrollment in a Master's program
- Teach For America
  - Non-profit organization seeking to place recent college graduates in teaching positions throughout inner-city school districts in the U.S.

Outside the U.S.:
- WorldTeach
Volunteers are placed in schools and host communities in developing countries that specifically request WorldTeach volunteers and would otherwise be unable to afford or locate qualified teachers.

- Japanese Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme
  - Aimed at promoting grass-roots international exchange between Japan and other nations
  - Students are placed mainly in public schools or local boards of education as Assistant Language Teachers

- Educators Overseas
  - Native English speakers can teach abroad while enjoying benefits of travel opportunities, excellent salary, housing and transportation expenses paid, health insurance and small classes.

- Additional resources for teaching abroad can be found at [http://www.teachabroad.com/](http://www.teachabroad.com/)

### Internships Programs for Recent Graduates

- U.S. Department of State
  - Cooperative Education Program
  - Fassell Fellowship Program
  - Student Internships (Spring, Summer, Fall)
  - Summer Clerical Program
  - Workforce Recruitment Program (for students with disabilities)
  - Details at [http://careers.state.gov/students/programs#.UXbQNkqd58E](http://careers.state.gov/students/programs#.UXbQNkqd58E)

- Pathways Program Internships for Recent Graduates
  - [https://www.usajobs.gov/StudentsAndGrads](https://www.usajobs.gov/StudentsAndGrads)

- White House Fellows program
  - [http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/fellows](http://www.whitehouse.gov/about/fellows)

### Cultural Exchange Programs

- Center for Cultural Interchange, CCI
  - Based in Chicago, IL, CCI is a non-profit organization geared toward promoting cultural understanding and consciousness

- Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (U.S. Dept. of State)
  - [www.exchanges.state.gov/prog-us.html](http://www.exchanges.state.gov/prog-us.html)

- French American Cultural Exchange
  - Non-profit organization chartered in NY to nurture French-American relationships through innovative international projects in the arts, education, and cultural exchange
  - [www.facecouncil.org](http://www.facecouncil.org)

- Fulbright Program (U.S. Dept. of State)
  - Provides students with funding to pursue graduate studies, advanced research, university teaching, and teaching in elementary or secondary schools abroad
  - [http://www.iie.org/fulbright](http://www.iie.org/fulbright)
Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship
- Largest privately funded international scholarship program
- Aims to further international understanding and friendly relations between cultures

Seasonal or Temporary Work

In the U.S.:
- National Park Service
  - The NPS hires approximately 10,000 temporary and seasonal employees annually in a range of career fields

Outside the U.S.:
- Tourism and Hospitality Work
  - [www.transitionabroad.com](http://www.transitionabroad.com), click “Travel Jobs Abroad”
- Work & Travel Program with InterExchange
  - InterExchange has positions in Australia & New Zealand working in hospitality, call centers, offices, childcare, teaching, retail, or manual labor
  - Live and work for up to a year and begin any time
  - [http://www.interexchange.org/content/1/en/Home.html](http://www.interexchange.org/content/1/en/Home.html)
- Find Paid Work in London
  - [http://www.gapyearjobs.co.uk/](http://www.gapyearjobs.co.uk/) directly targets students taking a gap year and wanting to travel
- Au-Pair in France
  - Matches young students to French families in the South of France who need childcare assistance
  - Chance for language and cultural emersion

Additional Factors to Consider

Sources of Revenue:
- Fundraising
- Grants and Fellowships
  - UVA Center for Undergraduate Research
  - Department of State
- Scholarships
  - Rotary Club
http://www.studyabroad.com/scholarships.aspx

Necessities for Traveling Abroad:
- Medical Records & Insurance
- Student, Work, or Travel Visas
- Travel Warning Information
- Passports

Getting the Right Information:
- Visit the UCS library for more books and handouts on your area of interest
- Visit a gap year fair
  - http://www.usagapyearfairs.org/
- Contact alumni through UCAN, part of the HoosOnline network
- Contact UCS to make an appointment with a career counselor