

Is a Gap Year the Silver Bullet to Student Success in University?

A Gap Year, for many students, is the key to success in post-secondary study, career, and adult life.

A Gap Year is not a year off, but a year *on* - the Canadian Gap Year Association defines a Gap Year as: an intentional step away from normal routine to pursue personal, educational, and professional growth through work, volunteer, travel, and interest activities, with the express purpose of figuring out:

- ***Who you are***
- ***Who you want to be***
- ***What steps to take to get to where and who you want to be***

Many students express that they feel pressure to attend post-secondary immediately upon graduation. Yet a recent Statistics Canada study found that just 50% had started college or university within three months; 73% had begun in a year's time; and by 28 months after graduation, 81% of students were attending a post-secondary school.

Here are some of the reasons why we as educators should encourage students to consider a structured, intentional Gap Year as an option after they finish grade 12:

<p style="text-align: center;">RECHARGE & REINVIGORATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Step off the education conveyor belt</i> • <i>Do something fun</i> • <i>Take time for oneself and pursue what is enjoyable</i> • <i>Take control of mental and physical health</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2010, more than 45% of students involved in an American College Health Association survey reported feelings of hopelessness. • In a 2013 American study, around one-third of college-aged American students reported experiencing depression in the year prior almost half experienced overwhelming anxiety. • In a 2018 study in New York, 49% of high school all students reported feeling a great deal of stress daily.
<p style="text-align: center;">SKILLS & CAREER DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Gain real world experience</i> • <i>Take time to consider options</i> • <i>Develop job-relevant knowledge and life skills</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an American Gap Association (AGA) study, 88% of Gap Year graduates reported that their Gap Year improved their employability • 60% reported that it helped them define their career path • 84% reported it helped them acquire skills to be successful in their career path • According to the Canadian Council of Learning, students are 8% more likely to find employment after graduation if they took a Gap Year.
<p style="text-align: center;">PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Take on roles of adult responsibility and advance maturity</i> • <i>Be exposed to different perspectives and become more open-minded</i> • <i>Gain confidence to try new things</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the AGA, 92% of students who choose to take a Gap Year say their intentions are to add life skills and experience personal growth. • In a survey of Canadian gappers they reported more independence, more confidence, greater maturity, and stronger inter-cultural understanding • 96% of gappers reported that their Gap Year gave them more confidence and willingness to try new things

REFOCUS & BE READY FOR UNIVERSITY

- *Experience the world and see what lies beyond the classroom*
- *Take the time to pursue current interests, discover new ones, feel connected to a specific field, and become passionate*
- *Test drive career options before committing to a program of study*
- *Figure out what one wants to do or does not want to do*

- According to a Canadian study, many students zigzag through school, with only 54% of students graduating from their original program within 5 years.
- A 2008 study by the Canadian Education Project suggests students are less likely to change career paths once they return to school after a Gap Year.
- One study found that students in the United States and United Kingdom who had taken a Gap Year were more likely to graduate with a higher grade point average (GPA) than similar individuals who went straight to college.
- According to the AGA, gappers are more engaged on campus and achieve meaningful leadership opportunities
- Gappers have lower dropout rates at university (3%) than students going directly into university (~ 40%)
- Gappers persist to graduate from their degrees faster. They complete a BA on average 1 year faster than students going directly into university (5.2 years compared to 6.5 years) -- *and that includes the Gap Year!*

At Lattitude Global Volunteering our goal is to educate and develop young people in the years following high school. We do this through culturally immersive international volunteering placements where young people grow through embracing adult responsibilities in an unfamiliar culture. Lattitude (formerly GAP Activity Projects) was established in 1972 and we have sent over 40,000 volunteers abroad. We are longstanding partners with secondary and post-secondary schools like yours, providing your students with transformative and supported Gap Year experiences.

We would love the opportunity to speak to your Grade 11 and 12 students about the value of a Lattitude Gap Year. Or better yet, become a member of our network of Schools with Lattitude, and we'll host an information evening for families in your school.

For more information and to set up a presentation at your school, please contact:

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"I knew that for myself to grow into a well-rounded adult I would have to force myself into a situation where I knew nothing and no one and build myself back up. The thought of all this terrified me but that's how I knew I made the right choice. I recommend that everyone take a Gap Year. It was one of the best choices I've made and has affected in me in a million different ways." -- Jane Galloway, Schools Assistant -- Northern Ireland

"I completely fell in love with teaching and feel like I finally have some real direction as to what I want to do with my life. I have decided that I want to pursue becoming an ESL teacher. Being able to watch my students develop their language skills and gain confidence was one of the most profound and rewarding moments that I have witnessed. I have never felt so passionate about anything until my placement. It really has opened my mind to so many possibilities I never thought were an option for me." -- Lily Adler, English Teaching – Vietnam