

Rethinking Post-High School Plans Due To COVID-19?

Factors to Consider to Make an Informed Decision



“A gap year” is the term for when you take one year off between high school graduation and post-high school (or postsecondary) enrollment.

Students who take a gap year typically may use this time to volunteer, work, or travel.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the workforce, colleges and training programs, and family finances. Faced with uncertainty about the future, you may be exploring the possibility of taking a gap year or postponing your college or career education after high school. Typical gap year activities may not be realistic during this period.

For current high school seniors, here is what you need to know about postsecondary (after high school) options to help you make an informed decision and plan.

Challenges of a Gap Year:

- Students who choose to delay are at considerable risk of not completing a postsecondary credential when compared with their peers.
- It can be costly, and you may lose momentum or get sidetracked.
- You may no longer have access to a school counselor to help you navigate the admissions and financial aid process.
- If you were awarded a seat in a competitive major or program, you may lose that placement.
- You may lose content knowledge in a subject for which you have the possibility to test out of (e.g., foreign language, math, and English).
- Due to COVID, employment and travel may not be reliable options.

Benefits of a Gap Year:

- If you are employed you can gain work experience, possibly in the career field you are interested in pursuing.
- If you can volunteer, you can gain experience in community service and explore career fields and interests. It can also strengthen a college application.
- Both employment and volunteering can help you strengthen soft skills like teamwork, problem solving, communication skills, and time management.
- This time is an opportunity to explore options and interests before having to commit to a college major or training program.

Gap Year & Other Options

DEFERRED ENROLLMENT: “Deferred enrollment” is the ability, process, and procedure to postpone starting classes for a semester or a year at the college that you have selected. This process will vary by school or program. Traditionally, some schools will review and approve the request on a case by case basis, while some approvals are automatic. Contact the admissions office to find out what options they offer and how to proceed.

AMERICORPS: AmeriCorps is a national service program. Members volunteer their time to address critical community needs like increasing academic achievement, mentoring youth, fighting poverty, sustaining national parks, preparing for disasters, and more. Most members receive student loan deferment (if needed), training, a living allowance and limited health benefit options. After a completed term of service, they receive a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award (which is equivalent to the value of a Pell grant) to help pay for college, graduate school, or vocational training or to repay student loans. For more information, visit the national service website:

<https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ameri-corps/ameri-corps-programs> or for opportunities in Washington, visit the Serve WA site: <https://servewashington.wa.gov/>

EMPLOYMENT/INTERNSHIPS: During a gap year, you can explore employment or internships. Factors you should consider include housing, transportation, and living costs. It is challenging to find paid internships if you are just out of high school. When searching for a job:

- Be aware of your public social media presence. Potential employers may check your social media accounts before hiring.
- Use a professional looking email address on any job applications and be sure to check that account regularly. Also remember that postsecondary schools and programs regularly communicate through email accounts and will expect you to regularly check them and respond.
- Research and practice building cover letters, job applications, resumes, job interviews, and follow up etiquette.
- Check out resources like Get Schooled’s JobLaunch: <https://getschooled.com/journey/find-a-job> or WorkSource: <https://worksourcewa.com/>

ONLINE AND COMMUNITY COLLEGE OPTIONS AKA THE VISITING YEAR: If you have been admitted into a residential four-year school and need to change plans, you might consider taking a “visiting year” option. A visiting year is an option that allows you to complete introductory courses and stay at home. During the year, you would:

- Enroll in a local community college or an online college or program for one year.
- Aim to take 30 credits of general education classes. You may be able to transfer these credits and return to your 4-year school.

This option offers you a chance to reduce the cost of college and stay on track for on-time graduation. You should contact your college to find out if they offer deferred admission. If so, is it possible to take classes at another institution during a deferment and maintain your enrollment status? It is important that you understand and follow their rules about deferment, transfer, and the number of credits you can earn during this period.

Decide on Pathway for The Fall

If you have accepted an offer of admission from a four-year college or university and have concerns about attending in the fall, contact the Office of Admissions as soon as possible to learn about your options. It is important that you talk to them about the process for taking a gap year. When deciding what option works best, you should consider these important factors:

- Does your school require you to submit an Intent to Register, a deposit, and/or a statement about your plans? Do you need to complete a deferral agreement? You should wait to be notified to see if you have been granted a deferral of admission and scholarship (if applicable).
- Will you lose your place if you had been awarded a seat in a highly competitive program or major? If you had been selected, will you lose your place in a support program like TRIO, CAMP, First-Year Experience?
- Will your school require you to submit a new application and fee? Will you need to retake admissions or placement exams?
- You should check with your scholarship providers to see if and how your scholarships may be deferred. If you had applied for financial aid, you will need to submit a new FAFSA or WASFA as soon as possible after October 1 for the next school year.
- Can you reach out to your high school counselor for support and guidance now? Can you this fall when reapplying for financial aid?