Gap Year

What Is a Gap Year?

If you don’t know what you want to do after you graduate, or if you do know what you want to do, but aren’t ready to start doing it, then taking a gap year might be the solution for you.

A gap year is a short-term opportunity for graduates who have not yet decided upon a career, want to do something for a year or two before going to graduate school or starting a career, or simply want to take time off to explore opportunities that the world has to offer. Gap years may be as short as a few months or as long as several years. During this time you may explore interests, develop new skills, find direction, make a meaningful contribution to the community, or just take a break and have fun.

Some examples of gap year opportunities include:
- volunteer work
- working for a temporary agency
- working on a ranch or cruise ship
- enrolling in a publishing or business institute or advertising portfolio program
- joining the military
- acquiring an internship or fellowship
- traveling
- teaching

Gap years can also be a great way to enhance your resume, gain experience, increase your marketability, and develop new skills. Gap years are a good time to do something fun or rewarding like travel or volunteer work without having to worry about financial or relationship obligations you might have later.

A gap year, however, might not be right for everyone. If you have student loans or other financial concerns, opportunities that offer little or no compensation (volunteer work) or have fees (traveling, business institute) might not be financially plausible. Also, your future employers or graduate school admissions officers might question you about your decision to take time off to travel for a year or work on a cruise ship, so be prepared to explain why this experience was necessary for your future goals.
A Sample of Gap Year Opportunities

International
See International handout for more listings

BUNAC  www.bunac.org
Work in countries such as England, Australia, or New Zealand for up to twelve months

Cultural Embrace  www.culturalembrace.com
Work, teach, intern, or volunteer

Educational Services International  www.teachoverseas.org
Christian organization which offers opportunities to teach English all over the world

International YMCA  www.ymca.net/world-service

Peace Corps  www.peacecorps.gov
Serve overseas communities to help people help themselves

JET  www.jetprogramme.org
Teach English in Japan

United Nations Volunteers  www.unv.org

Projects Abroad  www.projects-abroad.org

United Planet  www.unitedplanet.org

Peacework Development Fund  www.peacework.org
Domestic and international volunteer opportunities

Gap Daemon  www.gapdaemon.com
Social networking site for students who are interested in participating in an international gap year

Teach English in rural Argentinean schools

Educational Programs
Summer programs in business for liberal arts majors:
Dartmouth Tuck Business Bridge Program  www.tuck.dartmouth.edu/bridge

UVA McIntire Business Institute  www.commerce.virginia.edu

WFU Schools of Business Summer Management  http://business.wfu.edu/default.aspx?id=1184

Summer publishing institutes:
Columbia Publishing Course  www.journalism.columbia.edu

NYU Summer Publishing Institute  www.scps.nyu.edu/pubcenter

University of Denver Publishing Institute  www.du.edu/publishinginstitute/index.html

Technical:
International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience  www.iaeste.org
Exchange programs for technical students looking to intern outside the United States and companies looking for international technical interns
Environmental/Outdoors

**Environment America**  www.environmentamerica.org
Two year environmental advocacy program

**Student Conservation Association**  www.thescu.org
Provides national and community conservation service opportunities, outdoor education, and career training in national parks, refuges, and urban areas

**Adventure Jobs**  http://adventurejobs.co

**Student Action with Farm Workers**  www.saf-unite.org
A nonprofit organization created to build a network of campus-based projects focusing on farm worker issues. Projects include summer internships and various year round opportunities. Spanish is helpful.

Nonprofit

**Americorps**  www.americorps.gov
Opportunities to help communities across the country in various capacities

**Teach for America**  www.teachforamerica.org
Go to “Teaching” page on OPCD website for other similar opportunities

**Catholic Volunteer Network**  http://catholicvolunteernetwork.org
Over 200 faith-based, full-time volunteer programs

**City Year**  www.cityyear.org
One year youth mentoring program

**HealthCorps**  www.healthcorps.org
One year opportunity working in schools to promote healthy living

**Volunteer Connections**  www.pallotticenter.org
Variety of full-time volunteer opportunities in the US and abroad

**Universal Giving**  www.universalgiving.org

**Idealist.org**  Great source for nonprofit information and opportunities

Post-Graduate Internships/Fellowships

**DeaconSource**  career.opcd.wfu.edu
Information about employers recruiting at Wake Forest and job and internship listings

**UCAN/Internship Exchange**  career.opcd.wfu.edu (shortcut on home page of DeaconSource)
Listings of national internship opportunities

**WFU Scholars**  college.wfu.edu/scholars/
Listings of competitive post-graduate scholarship opportunities

**WFU Fellows Program**  president.wfu.edu/fellows
One year full-time assignment for new graduates within an administrative department at the University
Temp Resources
Also see cities handouts and New York and Washington DC staffing agencies handouts

Temporary, temp-to-hire, and direct hire positions in accounting and finance professions

Carolina Legal Staffing   www.carolinalegal.com
Permanent and temporary legal staffing opportunities in North and South Carolina

Turner Temps   http://cgi.turner.com/careers/turner_temps.html
In-house temp agency for administrative support positions in Atlanta.

Miscellaneous
Cool Works   www.coolworks.com
Links to seasonal jobs at national parks, theme parks, resorts/lodges, cruise lines, and other tourism related organizations

Back Door Jobs   www.backdoorjobs.com

CampStaff   www.campstaff.com

Camp Channel   www.campchannel.com

Opportunities in the Education Field
If you are interested in teaching and aren’t able to get a full-time position, you might consider starting out as a substitute teacher. To be a substitute teacher in Forsyth County, call 727-2861 or apply at the Office of Substitutes, located at 1605 Miller Street.

Many private schools do not require that their teachers be certified. The following organizations visit Wake Forest to recruit private school teachers:
- Carney Sandoe & Associates   www.csa-teach.com
- Southern Teachers   www.southernteachers.com

Part-Time Pays

Transitioning
Using part-time work to build skills isn’t relevant merely to the first-time job seeker. Today’s twenty-somethings hold an average of four jobs, and often those jobs are within different industries. Whether you’re prepping to swap industries or companies, or feel that you need to build skills before you’ll be able to land that coveted full-time position, think about part-time work. After all, part-time pays. In essence, part-time work can be used in much the same way that we now use internships—as a trial offer of sorts. Without committing to a job in the way conventionally required of full-time employment, a part-time job allows you to try out a career for size. It’s a chance for both employees and employers to get a feel for one another.

Resume Builder
Nothing makes a resume shine more than job skills and experience, and a part-time job is a great opportunity to build both skills and experience. Before you apply for a part-time job at the Gap, think about part-time employment as a paid internship. If you’re looking to hone interpersonal and customer service skills, for example, a sales job at the Gap might be a great fit. If you’re hoping, however, to develop conflict resolution and crisis-management skills to better prepare you for your human services career, consider peer counseling at your university or administrative work at a local drug rehabilitation center. If you have your sights set on biotech, think about part-time work at an academic or government lab. You get the idea—you need the cash, but what can you learn?

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Taking a Gap Year before Medical School or Physician Assistant School
Many medical schools (as well as other health care programs) encourage prospective students to take a year or more off before medical school. During this time, prospective students can gain more experience to improve their applications as well as make sure a career in medicine is the right path. Physician assistant programs usually require 1,000 hours of clinical experience before PA school, which makes taking a year off to complete those hours a necessity. Here are some suggestions of constructive ways to spend a gap year:

Postbaccalaureate Premedical Programs
Postbaccalaureate premedical programs assist people interested in pursuing a medical career after they have received a bachelor’s degree. Some programs are designed for people who have been working a while and want to change careers. Others are for people who have been on the premed track but either need to take prerequisite courses, get research experience, or retake classes to improve their academic record and/or GPA. Some postbac programs are specifically for people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or groups that are underrepresented in medicine.
For a list of postbac programs go to: www.services.aamc.org/postbac/.

Clinical Experience
Volunteering in a medical setting is great experience, but there are many limitations on how directly volunteers can interact with patients. Getting a certification as an assistant in the medical field (usually from a community college) enables prospective medical professionals to get more hands-on experience with patients. The most common programs are:
• Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) - To become a CNA, you may take a 7-15 week course at a community college or a one day accelerated class that prepares you to take the Nurse Aide 1 competency test. For more information on accelerated classes, go to cnanow.org.
• Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
• PT Tech/Rehab Tech (certification usually not required)

Research Experience
A few examples of places that offer research experience:
• National Institutes of Health (NIH) – www.training.nih.gov/programs
• Oak Ridge Associated Universities – www.orau.org
• Wake Forest research – http://college.wfu.edu/research-fellowship
• DeaconSource, CareerShift
• Hospitals, pharmaceutical companies

Other Altruistic/Helping Professions Experiences
• Teaching in a private school
• Teaching in a public school via lateral entry
• Teach for America (see “Teaching” page on OPCD website)
• AmeriCorps
• Peace Corps
• International medical volunteer/missions, such as Doctors without Borders or International Service Learning (www.ISLonline.org)