

## PRE-HEALTH GAP YEAR OPTIONS

The terms “**gap year**” (also referred to as “**building year**” or “**experiential year**”) refers to a period of time, usually one or two years after college graduation, when students take a break from education to work, volunteer, or travel before continuing with graduate or professional school. These experiences can help students gain experience and credentials that will contribute their success in matriculating to medical school, dental school, or ANY other professional degree in medicine or healthcare. MANY pre-health and pre-med students choose to utilize a building year or two in order to further develop the skills and experiences expected of professional school applicants. Review these expectations through the [AAMC's Core Competencies of Entering Medical Students](#) – it is easy to see how a building year can further build competencies and therefore result in a more competitive applicant. Also review [AAMC Making the Most of Your Gap Year](#) for advice and resource links. If considering a building year, think about the following:

**Think about your motivation:** Why do you want to take a building year or two? Why do you NEED to do so? Have you thoroughly thought about how this might fit with your future goals?

**Define your goals:** Are you interested in expanding upon your experiences/qualifications, working and living independently, clarifying your interests, or experiencing a different culture?

**Research:** What are your options? Are you using all resources available to you (career fairs, QU Career Connections database (“[QUCC](#)”), online databases, networking, etc.)?

**Plan ahead:** Planning ahead is useful in order to avoid missing deadlines for applications or fellowships. Give yourself ample time to update any international travel documents you may need, save money, or book trips in advance.

### Pre-medical and pre-health students may choose to do gap years for many reasons:

- Gain additional exposure to medicine and the field of healthcare.
- Further build upon volunteer experiences or mission work
- Gain hands-on patient care experience
- Perform clinical or non-clinical full-time research to be more competitive
- Further prepare academically or address academic shortcomings (additional coursework, repeated coursework, master’s program, post bac, etc.)
- Complete pre-requisite courses over four years in lieu of three years
  - Professional school applications (medical, dental, PA, etc.) can be over a year long, so senior year courses (and grades) are *not utilized* for applicants not taking a gap year.
- Solidify professional goals and work values (“terminal degrees” are a life-long commitment)
- Earn money in order to reduce the burden of application costs and professional school debt
- Gain additional life skills or simply recharge to prepare for the rigors of professional school
- Allow time to better for MCAT or other standardized test
- Pursue activities, experiences, and interests they did not have time for in college (Ex: travel abroad to work or volunteer)

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Gap year opportunities are extremely varied and should be designed to meet *your specific goals*. Reflect on your undergraduate experiences and think about *what areas you could or should improve upon* before starting your research.

The following list is to provide examples of gap year opportunities common for pre-health students. It is NOT EXHAUSTIVE – students should proactively do online research to see what else is out there. **Regularly check QUCC (Quinnipiac's internship and job database)** in addition to the resources below.

## RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

**National Institutes of Health (NIH)** research opportunities and grants: <http://www.nih.gov/science/>

**Yale PostDoc Job Listings:** <http://postdocs.yale.edu/yale-postdoctoral-positions> (many one or two-year clinical research positions listed here)

**NewScientist:** <http://www.newscientistjobs.com/jobs/default.aspx>

**Research Associates Program:** <http://www.raprogram.org/>

**Immune Disease Institute at Harvard University:** <http://idi.harvard.edu/>

**Target Specific Organizations:** Research specific research organizations in your area! Professional associations are great resources. They may have job postings and all should have member listings. These listings will make it easier to find out what organizations are in the area and then you can dig further to see about job opportunities. **CURE** in Connecticut is one example: <http://cureconnect.org/portfolio/> (look under *Member Directory* for area listings).

**NETWORKING** is *extremely important* when looking for research jobs. Find research organizations to connect with. Speak to your faculty, clinicians who you've work with or shadowed, and alumni with similar interests. Also search the websites of hospitals, universities and medical schools in your local community for organization-specific research positions (these may not be listed on a national search engines). AAMC provides good general advice on [How to Get Lab Experiences](#).

## VOLUNTEER & SERVICE PROGRAMS

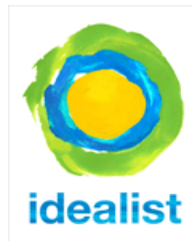
The following are *medical and non-medical* opportunities. If your goal is to expand upon your volunteer and community building efforts AND get healthcare exposure, focus on options in healthcare. Some students do part-time volunteering in addition to research or clinical work. Others find full-time volunteer oriented programs, jobs or internships. Think about organizations such as:

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## Databases (U.S. and international listings)



**Idealist** is one of the **BEST databases available!** Search for local, nation-wide, and international opportunities. Idealist is a project of Action Without Borders. Idealist is an interactive site where people and organizations can exchange resources and ideas, locate opportunities and supporters, and take steps toward building a world where all people can lead free and dignified lives. Various opportunities can be found: volunteer, internship and job opportunities. [www.idealist.org](http://www.idealist.org)

### Additional Databases:

**Volunteer Match:** <http://www.volunteermatch.org/>

**United Way:** <http://www.unitedway.org/get-involved/volunteer>

**Health Care Volunteer:** [http://www.healthcarevolunteer.com/volunteers/search\\_opportunities](http://www.healthcarevolunteer.com/volunteers/search_opportunities)

**VITAS:** <https://www.vitas.com/about-us/hospice-volunteers>

**Public Health:** <http://www.publichealth.org/volunteering/>

## U.S. Opportunities

These are specific programs – be sure to utilize the broad search databases above for more options.



**AmeriCorps** has more than 80,000 Americans across the country participating each year. All of them are tackling different problems in different ways. Here are just a few examples: disaster relief and recover,

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building affordable housing, community clean-up, school nutrition program assistance, and aiding veterans and military families. <https://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/ Americorps>



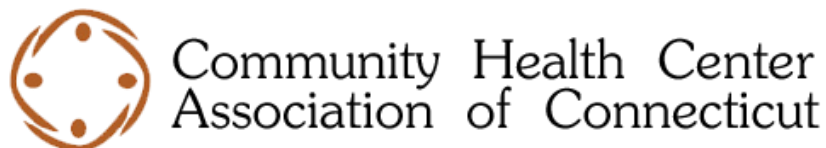
**Community HealthCorps** is the largest health-focused, national AmeriCorps program that promotes health care for America's underserved, while developing tomorrow's health care workforce. To apply for the Community HealthCorps AmeriCorps program, locate the program you wish to join by visiting <http://my.americorps.gov/>. After creating an account, you can search opportunities and submit an application to any AmeriCorps programs. <http://www.communityhealthcorps.org/>

## TEACHFORAMERICA

**Teach For American** alumni are actively sought out by many top-ranked graduate and professional schools. They recognize that corps members have gone through a highly-selective process and value the rich perspective and insight that come from teaching in a low-income area. Many graduate and professional schools offer special benefits to corps members and alumni including two-year deferrals, application fee waivers and scholarships. Read [3 Ways Teach for America Prepared Me for Medical School](#) for a TFA alumni's perspective. [www.teachforamerica.org](http://www.teachforamerica.org)



**City Year** is a ten-month service commitment where members work to bridge the gap in high-poverty communities between the support that students actually need, and what their schools are designed and resourced to provide. In doing so, they are helping to increase graduation rates across the country, and changing the lives of the students. There are 28 City Year locations in the U.S. Volunteer provide a wide range of support including tutoring, mentorship, after-school program leadership, and community transformation. <https://www.cityyear.org/>



**CHCAT's Service to Improve Community Health (STICH) Program** is an AmeriCorps program that hires graduates to work 9-12 months full time at health centers throughout Connecticut. Members work on: case management & referrals, patient navigation & enrollment services, outreach & health education,

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program research & development, community service projects, and training and group development. Benefits include: \$12,630 living allowance, \$5,815 education award toward graduate or professional school, student loan forbearance, health insurance (if eligible), and training opportunities.

[www.chcact.org](http://www.chcact.org) and <http://www.chcact.org/job/2017-2018-chcact-service-to-impact-community-health-stich-program/> (NOTE: additional job postings available on their website for clinical and non-clinical positions!)



**Area Health Education Centers** ("AHEC") improve the health of individuals and communities by transforming healthcare through education. AHECs work with public schools to provide health career programs for grades K-16, partner with community organizations to address local health issues, provide continuing education that improves the care received by vulnerable populations, and develop and support community-training opportunities for health professions students.

Search online for the AHEC organization that serves your area. Find information about the National AHEC at <http://www.nationalahec.org/> and CT AHEC at <http://www.publichealth.uconn.edu/ct-ahec.html>



**Courier Program** is an eight week, rural and public health, service-learning program with a rich and adventuresome history that targets college students with interest in public health, health care or a related field. The Courier Program offers a unique opportunity for students to gain insight into the challenges and opportunities of providing healthcare in rural and underserved areas. Couriers become immersed and engaged through their Courier Clinic Site. These sites are often remote, located in culturally unique communities in Appalachia and elsewhere. During their time on site, Couriers shadow a variety of clinicians and provide leadership on special projects, as well as other avenues of community participation. Courier's experiences help them to fully comprehend the complexities of rural and underserved communities and health care. Couriers learn by observing their clinic site mentors, speaking with patients, assisting with special projects such as health booths, brochures on health related topics, leading events and other projects. <https://portal.frontier.edu/web/fnu/courier-program>

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**KDDS Gap Year Program** Kuchnir Dermatology has successfully employed more than one hundred of the country's best future physicians to spend a bridge year between college and medical school working as Doctor Assistants. Over sixty of these students have completed the program and are now attending medical school at UPenn, Cornell, UChicago, Johns Hopkins, Northwestern, UMichigan, UCLA, UIllinois, Georgetown, UAB, UMass, BostonU, NYU, Tufts, UConn, UCSD, USC, UTSW, and UWisconsin. We offer both one-year (14-month) and two-year (26-month) options. [www.kuchnirdermatology.com/gapyear](http://www.kuchnirdermatology.com/gapyear)

## International Opportunities

When searching for international opportunities, it is easy to get overwhelmed quickly. There are a large number of for-profit organizations that have short-term and long-term programs abroad. What's the catch? These sort of programs are "pay to play" can be *incredibly expensive!* If your goal is to truly make an impact on international communities, do your research about what you will *get and give by participating* in a paid program. Talk to your pre-health advisor about the pros and cons.

*Be wary of any organizations that promise hands-on medical experience* for participants without clinical certifications or training in the U.S. The ethical implications of performing medical procedures on patients outside of the U.S. that you would not be allowed to perform here are huge (and very much frowned upon by professional schools). Review the [AAMC Guidelines for Premedical Students Abroad](#).



**International Service Learning (ISL)** is an educational agency that offers medical and educational teams of volunteers the opportunity to provide essential services for the under-served populations of *Central and South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and Africa*. The programs offer students the opportunities and funding to travel abroad and serve the under-served while gaining hands-on experience working with patients and our professional medical staff.

ISL has gained a reputation for safety as all teams travel with local professional staff and medical personnel. <http://www.islonline.org/>



**Cross-Cultural Solutions** has special opportunities for volunteers to work side-by-side with local people in healthcare. With small health clinics and understaffed hospitals serving low-income communities, volunteers support the over-worked staff, adding to their efficiency and allowing more people in need to be served. Volunteers provide moral support and reduce anxiety for patients and/or residents in

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communities where many people still view doctor's visits as a last resort. For those who aspire to a career in health-related fields, these placements offer an international learning ground where you can not only view healthcare in practice, but healthcare as practiced by professionals in a different country. [www.crossculturalsolutions.org](http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org)



**Global Medical Training (GMT)** is an International Humanitarian Organization that provides free medical-dental services to medically deprived communities in Central American countries. GMT objectives are (a) to provide, as a team, free Medical and Dental healthcare services, and free medicines to the needy in Latin America; (b) to teach students basic clinical skills, basic Medical / Dental knowledge, and the art of medicine, in preparation for and during implementation of the clinics; and (c) to provide students with a first-hand experience of cultural, social, historical, and political life in these regions. <http://gmtonline.org/>



**Connect-123** Internship and Volunteer Programs facilitates career-related internship and service learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students across the world in a wide range of fields including medicine, nursing, public health research, and health education and promotion. [www.connect-123.com](http://www.connect-123.com)

## Child Family Health International

**Child Family Health International (CFHI)** programs can be an important stepping stone for pre-medical and pre-health students interested in Global Health, health disparities, and international medicine. These are opportunities to get unique exposure to clinical and public health realities, build relationships with health care providers abroad and like-minded fellow trainees. CFHI provides an understanding of global health that builds knowledge of health policy, global health movements, careers in Global Health, language skills, and cultural competencies. CFHI Global Health Education Programs come in two forms: 4-16 week Global Health Immersion Programs (offered 12 months a year), and Global Health Intensives (shorter 2 week experiences offered during particular times of the year). <https://www.cfhi.org/>

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**Flying Doctors** general volunteers do everything on LMV trips from equipment sterilization, to generator maintenance, intake recordkeeping, photography, or report writing. Even with no healthcare training, the healthcare volunteers on your team may teach you to assist them by handing them instruments, holding a flashlight to help a dentist see inside a patient's mouth, or do any of the other dozens of tasks required to help a clinic trip run smoothly on the ground.

Because their clinics require foremost the volunteer assistance of healthcare professionals, interpreters, and (for Mexico and Oasis trips) pilots, and because team sizes are limited, they may not have space on a trip for you as a general volunteer. Contributing your time and energy as an Administrative Volunteer will help give you additional knowledge that may make you more valuable as a General Volunteer on a trip, so consider volunteering for the appropriate LMV chapter if you are able. For the most updated openings, see the Chapter Officers & Administration sections of their online chapter pages.

<https://flydoc.org/>



**AJWS** World Partners Fellowship is a partially funded award granted to recent Jewish college graduates and young professionals seeking an intensive international volunteer service experience. On the ten month-long program, fellows live in India and volunteer with AJWS grantees. <https://ajws.org/get-involved/travel-with-ajws/>



**Unite For Sight** has hands-on, immersive and unique volunteer abroad experiences. Global Impact Core Fellows with various interests and backgrounds work in the areas of medicine, public health, social entrepreneurship and international development. Unite For Sight applies best practices in eye care and public health to achieve their goal of high-quality eye care for all. Unite For Sight's international eye care services with partner local eye clinics are provided year-round and are comprehensive, including examinations by local eye doctors, diagnosis and care for treatable conditions, education, and preventative care. Read-round care is delivered in Ghana, India and Honduras. (*NOTE: Their*

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headquarters are located in New Haven, CT – if interested in this organization, there may be way to volunteer locally) <http://www.uniteforsight.org/volunteer-abroad>



**Amizade** Global Service-Learning has been empowering individuals and communities through worldwide service and learning since 1994. Over 8,000 individuals have served with local community leaders in 12 countries on 4 continents with 16 partnerships. From working with women and girls on rainwater harvesting initiatives in rural Tanzania to running at-risk youth camps in Jamaica, Amizade volunteers have transformed and been transformed. [www.amizade.org](http://www.amizade.org)



**Somos Hermanos** has Spanish immersion programs that help pre-health and pre-med students gain the language skills and cultural competency required to provide quality health care, education and/or social services to Latinos. Through lectures, weekend field trips, afternoon activities, films and group discussions, Somos Hermanos enables participants to gain a deeper, comprehensive understanding of cultural, social, political and health care issues. <http://www.somoshermanos.org/>

## **TEACH ENGLISH ABROAD**

There are *many* of programs through which you can teach English in another country for a year. Be sure to review the program specifics carefully: costs, housing, location, time commitment, and how long the organization has been established. Some more well-known organizations are:

**ESL Job Project** – made by ESL teachers for ESL teachers.

**ESL Jobs World** – created by David Rogers, who's been active in the field since early 90's.

**Dave's ESL Cafe** – the ONE and ONLY for everything ESL.

**Ajarn** – Thailand's number 1 TEFL site.

**International Schools Services** – learn about International schools.

**Council of International Schools** – more info on International schools.

**Teach English in Asia** – TEFL jobs around Asia.

**Serious Teachers**– International alliance of Teachers & Employers.

**Working Abroad** – how to become a traveling English teacher.

**World Teach** – volunteer teaching in Developing countries.

**CIEE** – teaching Chile, China, the Dominican Republic, South Korea, Spain, or Thailand.

**The Beijinger** -focused on China

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**Cross Cultural Solutions** – a non-profit with over 25,000 participants.

**Transitions Abroad** – K-12 and University jobs.

## WORK & INTERNSHIPS

### Clinical Work

#### **EMT** (Certification Required)

EMTs work as local volunteers or employees of ambulance companies. Some EMT trained students are also able to find work as emergency department technicians in local hospitals. EMT experience will allow you to get valuable hands-on experience working in the medical field and may, depending on your location, increase your understanding of the health issues facing underserved and diverse communities. Student should seek out EMT training programs in the state they plan to work. Certification courses may be available through organizations such as community colleges, local hospitals, ambulance companies, health departments, etc. In New York there is an Emergency Medical Services Training website where EMT training programs can be located: <http://www.health.state.ny.us/nysdoh/ems/training.htm>. Resources will depend on the state and location, so do some research!

#### **Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) or Phlebotomist** (Certification Required)

This type of work allow students to gain first-hand experience in working with and treating patients. CNAs (sometimes referred to as LNA – Licensed Nurse Assistant) work in *many* medical settings such as hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, hospice care, etc. Phlebotomists are trained to draw blood from patients for clinical or medical testing, transfusions, donations, or research. CNA and phlebotomy certifications are typically shorter in length than EMT training. Check your regional community colleges, hospitals, Red Cross, and health departments for certification options.

#### **Medical Scribe** (Certification *not* Required)

A Medical Scribe is essentially a personal assistant to the physician; performing documentation in electronic medical records, gathering information for the patient's visit, and partnering with the physician to deliver efficient patient care. Scribe companies hire and train scribes to work in area hospitals and clinics. Some scribe companies include:

- **ScribeAmerica:** [www.scribeamerica.com](http://www.scribeamerica.com)
- **ProScribe:** [www.proscribemd.com/](http://www.proscribemd.com/)
- **Emergency Medical Associates:** [www.ema.net](http://www.ema.net)
- **Elite Medical Scribes:** [www.elitemedicalscribes.com](http://www.elitemedicalscribes.com)
- **Scribe Connect:** <http://www.scribeconnect.com/>
- **American Scribes:** <http://www.americanscribes.com/>

BE SURE to check with the human resource departments of local hospitals (where you may want to do scribe work) to see if (a) they use scribes, and (b) they utilize or prefer one particular scribe company.

### Jobs & Internships

There are *countless* national and local organizations that have jobs and internship programs available to gap year students. Think broadly about public health and non-profits organizations and see if there are

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any programs, jobs, or internships of interest. Student should always search [QUCC](#), Quinnipiac's job and internship database – new postings are submitted all the time, so check regularly!

## ACADEMIC ENHANCEMENT

Many colleges and universities offer **post-baccalaureate programs (“postbacs”)** or **special masters programs (“SMPs”)** for aspiring medical or dental school applicants than need to improve upon their undergraduate academic performance. These programs vary in scope and purpose. Some are designed for persons who have not yet completed the majority of prerequisite or MCAT/DAT necessary courses (often referred to as “career changer” programs). Other programs are designed for persons needing to improve upon an existing academic record - these students have taken the prerequisite courses, but need to improve upon their GPAs in order to be competitive. Carefully review all [AAMC articles](#) for students considering postbac programs before starting your search.

### Factors to consider if thinking about a postbac or SMP:

- **How you will perform (*realistically*)?** How have you changed as a student? What is different about you now vs. your undergraduate years that would enable you to perform extremely well in a challenging masters or postbac program? Look for trends of improvement in your undergraduate path. You should only invest time and money into these programs IF you have some actual assurance or evidence of improved ability. If you have no trend of improvement (i.e., struggled with sciences throughout college) or no *significant* extenuating circumstances than impacted your academic performance, a postbac or SMP may not accomplish anything at the end of the day.
- **Cost.** These programs can be very expensive with *NO GUARANTEE* of acceptance upon completion. Is the cost worth the risk? Have you reviewed a range of programs to make a smart investment?
- **Program Benefits & Perks.** Is there linkage to a medical school? Does it include MCAT prep? What are the student outcomes of past classes? What other resources and opportunities will be available? Review the [AAMC's Seven Benefits to Consider](#) for guidance on factors to consider.
- **Eligibility.** Check carefully. Many well established programs have a 3.0 minimum GPA amongst other eligibility requirements. Other programs that are geared towards “career changer” type applicants may not accept undergraduate science majors. Check *all* requirements before you apply.

### How to Search for Postbac or SMP Programs

**Search the AAMC SMP & Postbac Database:** <https://apps.aamc.org/postbac/#/index>

**Search Locally:** Be sure to check websites of universities, medical schools, and dental schools in your geographic area. Not all SMP or postbac programs will be listed on the AAMC database.

**“Create Your Own” postbac or SMP:** This option involves students taking self-selected, challenging undergraduate or graduate level science coursework as “special standing” or “non-degree seeking” students. Make sure you are strategic if using this strategy! Be aware that undergraduate course grades are not “replaced” when you repeat a class. ALL courses and grades are calculated into undergraduate or graduate level GPAs when you apply (overall and “science” GPAs for each – see AAMC and AAMCAS, AACOMAS, or AADSAS course coding/calculation instructions for more details).