



FIRST STEPS

- ✓ Think about what you want to get out of your gap year by considering your post-gap year plans
- ✓ Assess potential gap year programs and opportunities based on your goals and resources
- ✓ Begin applications early, as they may require letters of recommendation or essays

IDENTIFYING YOUR GOALS

Thinking about why you want to take a gap year—beyond just ‘to take a break’—will help you find opportunities that are best for you. Speaking to advisors, current professionals in your target field, faculty, and others in your network may be helpful to answering these important questions, identifying programs, learning what other students have done, and supporting your application. Career Specialists and Career Counselors in the Career Center are also available to talk through your options.

Why do you want to take a gap year?

Develop your résumé. Whether you are looking to stand out in the job search or preparing for a graduate program, a gap year can be an excellent opportunity to develop your **résumé**. Think about what, specifically, you are looking for: Experience in a specific role? Developing a certain skillset? Gaining exposure to a new region or field?

Earn money for graduate school. Taking a gap year to begin paying off undergraduate loans or to save money for graduate school is common. If you are planning to seek full-time employment outside of your field of interest, think about how you will continue to maintain a connection to your interests (Volunteering, shadowing, taking classes, and informational interviews are just a few possibilities!).

Other motivations. A gap year may be a break before moving forward with more schooling, an opportunity to explore a potential career, a way to give back to your community, or something else entirely. It is important to dig deeper to find connections between your program and your interests.

What are your needs? What are your wants?

Funding. Some gap year programs offer stipends, hourly pay, or scholarships; others are entirely self-funded. Understanding your compensation for the role (including benefits) may help you determine whether it is a good opportunity for you.

Access and opportunity. If you are preparing for graduate school, make sure that you can take graduate entrance exams and easily apply for your programs while in your gap year. Also, make sure your program is equipped to support your goals! Don't be afraid to ask.

SEARCHING FOR OPPORTUNITIES

There are many gap year programs, providers, and opportunities. Once you know what you are looking for, you can start to identify opportunities that match your interests. Check out our Guide to the Gap Year handout in our Job Search Series for some ideas!

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Service programs

Direct or indirect service? When considering a service opportunity, it is important to think about the work you hope to do. Direct service opportunities work with target populations; indirect service builds organizational capacity. For example, direct service may be tutoring in a high-need school, whereas indirect service may be coordinating a tutoring program.

Full-time national service. Programs like AmeriCorps offer full-time, 9-12 month service opportunities for graduates in a variety of fields across the country. Non-profits, political entities, and religiously-affiliated organizations offer similar programs. Some programs do not allow members to hold second jobs, however, AmeriCorps offers scholarships to successful alumni.

International service. The Peace Corps may be the most well-known U.S.-based international service program, however many non-profit and religious organizations manage longer-term international service programs as well. These programs vary in quality and level of compensation, with some requiring the participant to fundraise to cover costs. Check out program reviews, ask to speak to current or past volunteers, and consider speaking with the International Center or the Office of Service Learning on campus before committing to a program.

Academic preparation programs

'Bridge' programs. If you are interested in pursuing graduate school, you may consider a bridge program to build important academic skills prior to beginning your studies. To identify a program, you may wish to speak with admissions advisors at the institutions you intend to apply to.

Research opportunities. Students who pursued research as undergraduates or students interested in graduate school may seek opportunities to continue or begin research projects. The Fellowships Office and the Office of Undergraduate Research at MU may be able to assist students in identifying and applying for these kinds of program.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR GAP YEAR

A year goes by in the blink of an eye. Once you've chosen a program, revisit your goals and make a plan for your year. Include experiences you want to pursue and connections you hope to make.

Set specific goals. Breaking large goals into monthly components may help you keep on track. This may be related to a skill (such as completing a certain project), to post-gap year plans (such as taking the GRE), or to professional development (such as networking in your field).

Think about your narrative. A gap year is part of your story. Journaling, keeping records of your daily work and achievements, and remaining in touch with mentors may help you see the ways your gap year is preparing you for the future. Reflection is key to helping you learn from this year.

Come to the MU Career Center to talk with someone about your gap year plans!

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ Come to the MU Career Center to talk with someone about your gap year planning.
- ✓ Take a self-assessment, if you haven't already, to help you with your planning and reflection.
- ✓ Visit <https://career.missouri.edu> and click on the "Resources" Tab to visit [Mizzou Career Tools](#), where you can search our site for career guides, videos, links, infographics, and more!