

GAP YEARS:  
A TOOL FOR  
GREATER  
STUDENT  
ENGAGEMENT



## PRESENTER INTRODUCTION

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## AGENDA

- Clarification of gap years
- Profile of gappers
- PSE responses thus far
- Actionable steps for colleges and universities
- Open discussion and Q&A



WHO IS IN THE ROOM &  
WHY DID YOU SELECT THIS SESSION?



## GAP YEARS

In the UK: “any period of time between 3-24 months which an individual takes ‘out’ from formal education, training or the workplace, and where the time ‘out’ sits in the context of a longer career trajectory”

Jones (2004)



## WHAT IS A GAP YEAR?

- A gap year is an experiential semester or year "on," typically taken between high school and college in order to deepen practical, professional, and personal awareness.
- Gap Years originally started in the United Kingdom in the 1970's as a way to fill the 7 or 8 month gap between final exams and the beginning of university. The intention in the UK for that time was to contribute to the development of the student usually through an extended international experience.
- Gap years came to the USA in the early 1980s
- Gap years came into Canada (it is thought) in 1999 with the publication of a book, the gap year advantage.



## WE DEFINE IT AS...

- a time away from normal routine, for one to experience personal growth through volunteerism, travel and/or work

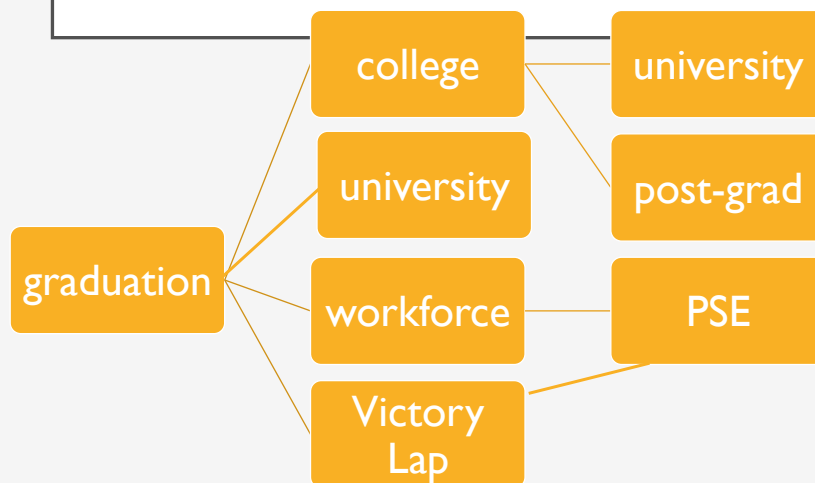


IN A FINAL YEAR OF HIGH SCHOOL....



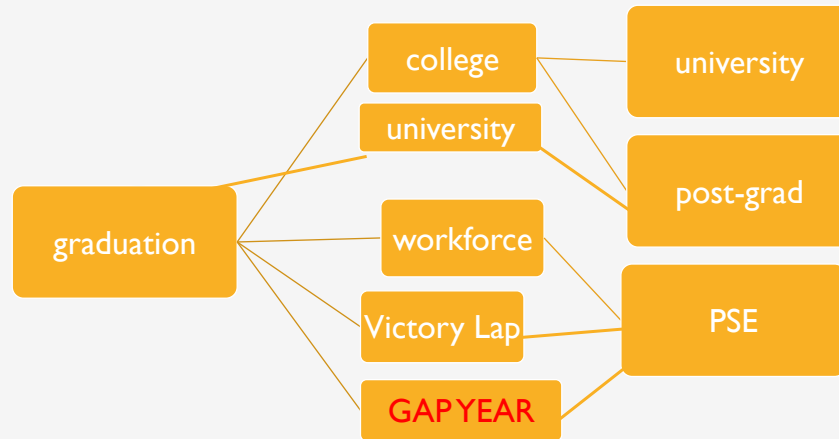
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PATHWAYS: TRADITION



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## PATHWAYS: CURRENT



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## COMMON MYTHS

- ☐ They will lose a year
- ☐ They won't be accepted back to university (deferral)
- ☐ They will never come back/go back to school
  - ☒ **The majority of teens do return\***
  - 3 months after high school:
    - Almost 50% of grads entered post-secondary program
    - 73% by 15 months
    - 81% by 28 months

\*Statistics Canada study, "Delaying Post-Secondary Education: Who Delays and for How Long?"

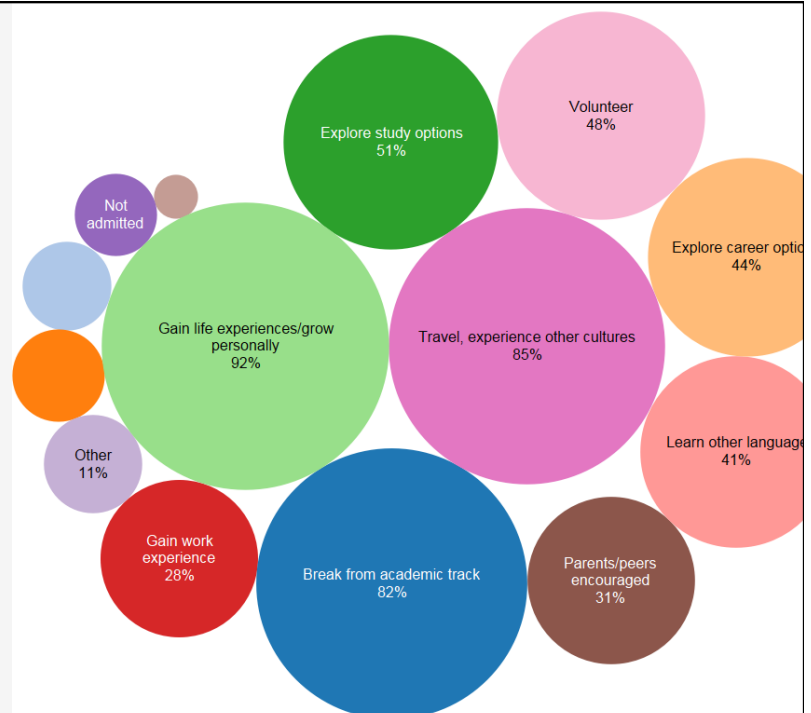
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## BENEFITS

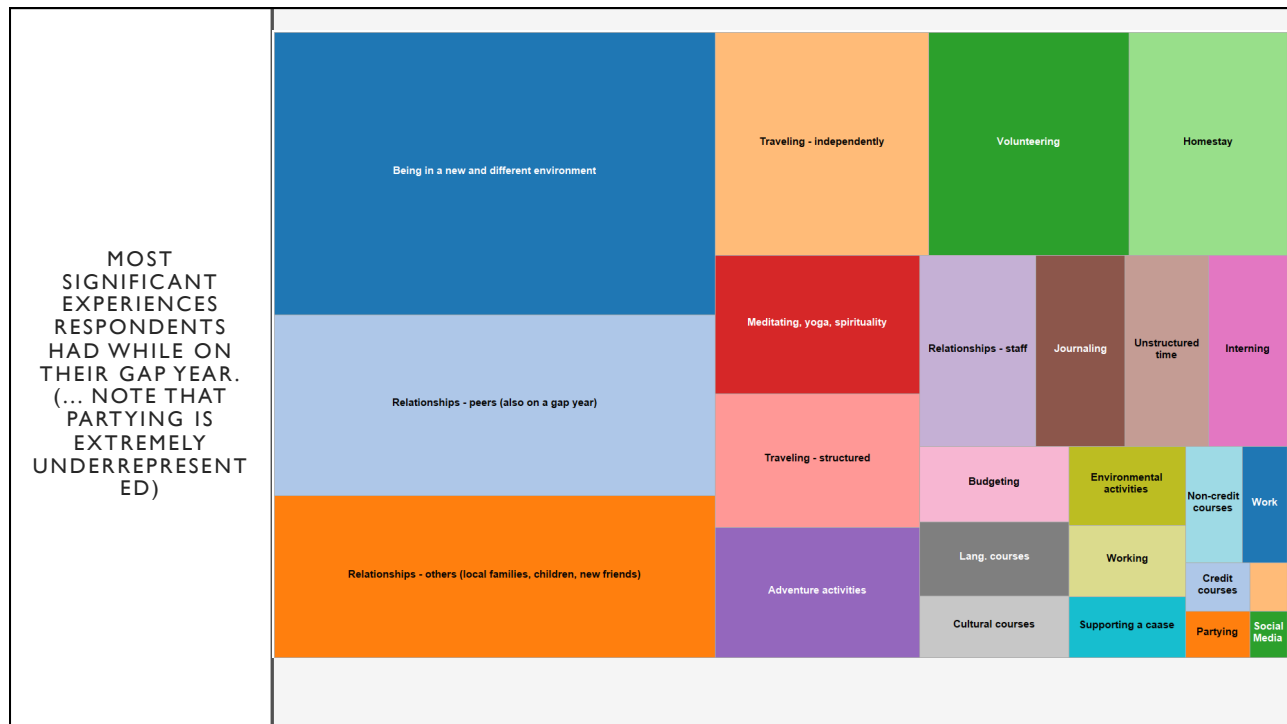
- Increasing self-awareness
- Learning about different cultural perspectives
- Experimenting with future possible careers
- Financial literacy
- Amelioration of a sense of academic burnout \*



## MOST SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCES WHEN DECIDING TO TAKE A GAP YEAR



[Americangap.org/data-benefits.php](http://Americangap.org/data-benefits.php)



## SKILL DEVELOPMENT

"Taking time to explore new perspectives and grow as a person made a huge difference," Simon told us.  
 "I enjoy school now, and I'm succeeding at it."



## 8% MORE LIKELY TO BE EMPLOYED

- Indeed, studies show gap years actually benefit students. The non-profit [Canadian Council on Learning](#) found students who took gap years—affectionately known as “gappers”—were eight per cent more likely to find employment upon return, possibly because of their extra work experience.



## GAPPER PROFILES

What motivated our gappers to take a break from post-secondary



## OVERALL THEMES

- Most our current gappers are taking a break from post-secondary
- They return to post-secondary within 6-12 months of starting their gap year
- Some of them return to their initial school, many transfer
- The students we work with who are taking a traditional gap year are often burnt-out, working through health or low level mental health-related challenges



## MAX



Max came to us after a full 16 months in university. He was attending out of province at a smaller university. He was studying business.

Max was from a smaller town, nuclear family. He was not a first generation student. High school had been challenging; graduated with fair marks.

His parents called us on the Holiday break, and we met right away to discuss a break for Max. He was barely passing, concerned about his rent and what he could actually do if he didn't go to school.

In the end, Max decided to take a gap year. He did remain enrolled at his university, but did not take courses.

Max got a job, worked at golf course, volunteered for two weeks abroad, and gained an incredible amount of confidence and a stronger vision of an academic future.

He left Uni in Dec, and returned to PSE in September. Max applied to an applied college degree in automotive business. He is excelling in his courses, and enjoying the change of pass and environment.

## EMILY

Emily started with us in December 2015. She was attending a university close to her hometown. She found being away from home difficult, as well as the rigour of her program.

During her gap year, she worked in Vancouver, travelled the USA with her family and spent some time in Europe. She has goals of traveling but she didn't actualize any of those plans.

In September, she returned to PSE to complete a degree in Humanities at a local University.



## Bj

Bj lives on the West coast. He was studying out-of-province and was enrolled in a science program. Stressed and uncertain, Bj took a break from school after his first year to travel and work.

Bj was initially interested in pursuing a year of exploration that involved a dream to become a helicopter pilot; however, he decided to travel and work through his 12 month gap year.

Bj then returned to the same university, and took a few extra liberals but continued on as a science student. He has now added a minor to his course of studies and is highly engaged in campus activities related to mental health and peer-support.



## PSE RESPONSES

- Havard
- Princeton
- York
- Algonquin



## CURRENT THEMES FROM HIGHER ED.



## PRINCETON AND HARVARD

Harvard College encourages admitted students to defer enrollment for one year to travel, pursue a special project or activity, work, or **spend time in another meaningful way**—provided they do not enroll in a degree-granting program at another college. Deferrals for two-year obligatory military service are also granted. Each year, between 80 and 110 students defer their matriculation to the College.

For more thoughts on the advantages of taking time off before college, read the article below, “Time Out or Burn Out for the Next Generation.”



## PRINCETON

### Princeton’s Bridge Year Program

The Bridge Year Program allows a *select number* of Princeton students to delay the start of their freshman year in order to engage in nine months of University-sponsored service at one of five international locations. In addition to supporting community-based initiatives at each program site, Bridge Year aims to provide participants with **greater international perspective and intercultural skills, an opportunity for personal growth and reflection, and a deeper appreciation of service in both a local and international context.**



## IN CANADA...

"We at **York University** are pleased to be the first Canadian university to formalize the process of deferment based on a gap year. We have done this because we believe so strongly in the importance of taking a gap year before jumping into university" said Ken Withers, Director, Recruitment and Applicant Relations at York University.

"Students are coming to Ontario universities at a younger age than ever before and many actually benefit from time off to learn more about themselves" said Diane Crocker, Registrar and Director of Enrolment Management, **University of Toronto**. "A gap year can prepare students for a more meaningful university experience."



## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Making the Grade, Globe and Mail, 9/12/16
- 20% of students leave post-secondary, never to return
- 20-50% of students drop out of the program they initially chose
  - Feel like failures
  - Financial, psychological changes



ADDRESSES CURRENT MENTAL HEALTH  
CRISIS EXPERIENCED BY YOUNG ADULTS

NSSE scores, and the research out of the  
[Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health](#)



DO YOU HAVE GUIDELINES FOR  
DEFERRALS PROMOTING GAP YEARS OR  
BREAKS AT YOUR INSTITUTION ?



ARE STUDENTS AWARE OF THE  
OPPORTUNITIES THEY HAVE TO TAKE  
BREAKS DURING THEIR ACADEMIC  
CAREER AT YOUR INSTITUTION?



WHEN STUDENTS TAKE A BREAK FROM  
HIGHER LEARNING HOW DOES YOUR  
INSTITUTION INTERACT WITH THEM TO  
REENGAGE THEM WITH THEIR  
ACADEMIC CAREER AT YOUR SCHOOL?





DOES YOUR INSTITUTION VALUE OR  
PROVIDED ADDITIONAL RECOGNITION  
FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE TAKEN A  
GAP YEAR?  
(IE: CAN HOLD A SCHOLARSHIP, CAN  
RECEIVE A CREDIT FOR GAP  
EXPERIENCE)



DO YOU TRACK, OR KNOW HOW MANY  
STUDENTS ARE TAKING SHORT TERM  
BREAKS? DO YOU PUBLISH OR REVIEW  
THESE RESULTS?

