

## College

This word causes an enormous amount of stress among teenagers. College has become deeply ingrained in our society making it a necessity for any young adult especially in the United States who has hoped of being successful. College has become a difficult decision for any young adult to make that could change their lives for good or better. College has always been taught as this narrow depressing path but it really isn't. Everything people have taught you about college in school is only one option. College doesn't have to be this chore or tough decision instead it can be one that is celebrated and where your education excites you for once. Life isn't all just school, there is more to life. Taking a break before you start your path in college can be one of the smartest decisions you can make. A gap year. You may have heard this word before along with its stigmatized meaning as a "year off", meant for lazy people, is a waste of time and money. Well it is not. A gap year is the exact opposite of the stigmas associated with it. A gap year is a year for self improvement, you can travel, take time to find your passions, and save energy and money in the process. A gap year is a great gateway into adulthood where you learn about what you want to study and do if you are to move onto college. In Europe gap years are more popular but in the United States there is a certain stigma around it for some reason. Gap years are usually taken by kids who go against the grain. It's estimated that 8,000 kids a year take a gap year in the U.S. This is a shockingly low number compared to other countries but this number rapidly increases every year as more and more people realize that gap years are a great option.

College is something a young adult should be excited about, it shouldn't be this impending breaking wave that crashed on you while you are caught looking in the sky. It should be the excitement of looking forward to riding that wave. In the 70's and 80's the world was a lot different. Along with the bright neon clothes and the totally tubular music there was this laid back attitude. When I was talking to my mom about how stressful college applications were she sat down and told me about how life was when she was a kid. Her senior year instead of stressing about college she would just have fun times. No one was competing or bragging about where they got in; they just lived in the moment. That is what I wish life was like now. High school has turned into a 4 year talent show. Everyone steps up to the stage and flaunts their talents. Some of these talents can be "I picked apples for my local church" while other talents can be "my mom died when I was young". The point is there is this bubble in high school where everything you do is being watched and monitored 24/7. Every little thing that you do is recorded, you are forced to spit out the problems in your life to a complete stranger as if you were confessing to a cop. The cop yells at you until you tell them everything you know and in the end your future is decided. College's bombard your inbox with emails telling you "go here" "go there" until you give in and just apply. In essays you're forced to share every big moment in your life to make the point of how great you are. Parents contribute to this as well. Parents see college as the gateway to being a responsible

adult, which it is despite the partying. Don't get me wrong I think college is great and a month ago I actually started to get excited about college. I can't wait to move somewhere, meet new people, and make memories. But parents go the wrong way, they bombard their children with their opinions that the kid agrees with just because they are in a fragile state. For my life my mom constantly is saying have you talked to this person about this college or you should really go here. My friend's son goes there and he really likes it. I DON'T CARE. No one is me and no one is going to tell me what I'm going to do. College is for me it's not so you can brag to your friends at a dinner party because I went to Stanford or whatever. It's not so you can live through me. NO it's my life and it's now or never baby. There is so much pressure these days from our parents and pushed on to us at an early age that we must do good in high school or you are not going to be successful. I hope I am not the first person to tell you how there are other ways to live your life. The one I want to talk about is a gap year. I myself am not taking a gap year but my brother took one and I am constantly interested in people I do take gap years. I am not taking one while because I want to go to college, I'd love to take a year off and travel but unfortunately due to the pandemic I am not able to. But Gap years are awesome. My brother took a gap year. My brother was always more free spirited than me, his senior year he didn't have great grades but he enjoyed his time. He met this girl named Rachel who was from new zealand. She moved to mountain view and her and chase became really good friends, after high school she was planning to go back to new zealand so chase went along with her to new zealand for his gap year, he got there and they kept getting into fights and chase just wanted to get out and do his own thing. After hitchhiking around New zealand and going to local bars and cafes he caught a lot of people telling him he should go to a place called mount maunganui. He had no idea where that was but he eventually got there. You enter this industrial port that is icky at first but then you travel down the coast and you see this massive mountain with a city wrapped on the side of it. This was a total beach down. Chase had all kinds of adventures and he told me about how much he grew as an adult from that experience. He was in the best shape and having the best time of his life. He spent his days hiking on the mountain and working at a mexican restaurant. At nights he would go out on the town with his friends and on his off days he would chill at the breathtaking beach. To me that sounds more appealing than sitting in a disgusting dorm room and binge drinking. This one year in our lives is so important to step back and take a break especially in the climate we are in now where in high school we are being worked so hard so that we can train for the talent show. This is just one first hand example I saw of how gap years are beneficial.