

American Gap Association National Alumni Survey

REPORT



Institute for Survey Research

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Executive Summary

This survey of American gap year experiences was conducted in 2014-15 and reached hundreds of gap year alumni. While limitations do exist (see Limitations), overall, this study represents the most comprehensive exploration of gap year experiences of Americans to date.

Highlights Include:

- 81% of all survey participants said they were very likely to recommend taking a gap year to someone considering it.
- The general experience of “being in a new and different environment” was the most meaningful element of the overall gap year experience
- Having a wide range of experiences was also important
- Gappers experienced the greatest impacts related to their personal growth and development
- Those who participated in a gap year had, on average, shorter times to graduation and higher GPAs as compared to national norms.
- Gappers currently experience higher levels of job satisfaction and civic participation as compared to national norms.

American Gap Association and Research

American Gap Association (AGA)

“The American Gap Association is a 501(c)3 nonprofit accreditation and standards-setting organization for Gap Years that is recognized as such by the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission. We continue to advance the field of Gap Years by collaboratively pioneering research on its benefits, as well as serving as an information and advocacy hub for university admissions personnel and educational counselors. Our main goal is to focus on accreditation so that every student signing on with an AGA accredited organization will have the best and safest experience. We will focus on accrediting organizations rather than individuals or individual project sites.”

Research Committee

The Research Committee of the American Gap Association, headed by Karl Haigler, has outlined the following purpose, goals, and objectives:

Purposes:

- Support AGA’s primary mission--to increase number of students taking gap years
- Serve as the primary vehicle for ensuring AGA as the central hub and de facto voice of the gap year movement through its “access to reliable data”
- Contribute to the AGA Standards and Accreditation Process to promote quality and student safety as well as providing a quantifiable foundation for institutional and governmental support of gap years
- Inform (and be informed by/responsive to) work of other AGA committees
- Evaluate organizational models that can fund ongoing research

Goals: AGA Strategic Plan activities include:

- Increasing access to credible gap year experiences for low-income students by extending the number of accredited member organizations,
- Providing education for all Gap Year organizations designed to ensure students have safe, challenging and meaningful experiences,
- Promoting this educational model to students, families, educational counselors, and universities, and expanding research.

Objectives:

- A. Student Success: Validate program outcomes’ contribution to student success in both cognitive and “non-cognitive” evaluations. These include, for example, such components as GPA, grit, resilience, empathy, and self-awareness.
- B. Market Development: (1) Provide macro-data on the growth of Gap Year to benchmark development and help make the case to the public. These include data from AGA Accredited Programs, non-AGA Programs, and broader trends from surveys and public databases (e.g. Google, NACAC, NCES, etc.) as well as ongoing annual surveys of Gap Year organizations (that currently ask for enrollment trends, charitable giving activities, and student satisfaction through the use of the Net Promoter Score). (2) Support and expand pioneering research in Gap Year outcomes in partnership with field researchers as well as academic researchers such as Temple University (Institute for Survey Research), the Society for the Study of Emerging Adulthood, etc.. “e.g. The National Alumni Survey data will allow us to compare all varieties of Gap Year (structured vs. unstructured, post-graduate vs. post-secondary, etc.) as well as explore details such as debt-to-income ratio as compared to the national average and employment outcomes versus non-Gappers.” (3) Support the growth of the field by developing research to support the “case for a Gap Year” for parent education, high school college counselor education, and the broader promotion to education markets.
- C. Program Integrity: Serve as the repository of “best practice” information from gap year programs involving program evaluation strategies, staff development, student development methods, educational scaffolding (such as curricula, pedagogical models, etc.) and resources to support these.

The National Survey of Gap Year Alumni

Background: On August 28th, 2014, the American Gap Association launched the first ever, nation-wide comprehensive study on the effects of Gap/Bridge Year experiences. The survey was designed and hosted by Nina Hoe, PhD at the Institute for Survey Research at Temple University. It was distributed through social media, program leaders and word of mouth, and remained open for 11 months. It took approximately 15 minutes to complete and participants were entered into a raffle to win 1 of 20 \$50 Amazon Gift Cards.

The Sample: The survey allowed respondents to answer whichever questions they chose and did not force responses. As a result, the total sample size for each question varies. Overall, 1,002 people clicked on the link for the survey. Of them, 863 were eligible to take the survey – meaning that they gave consent to be a part of the study of gap year alumni, had participated in a gap year according to the definition outlined in the survey introduction, were citizens of the US or Canada, and were over the age of 18. In total, 558 people completed the entire survey.

As a general note, in this report all findings apply only to the group of gappers who responded to this survey and cannot be generalized to all American gappers. As previously described, participating in the survey was completely voluntary. The demographic and background information of the survey participants is reported below.

GENERAL			HIGH SCHOOL		Freq.	%
Age (n=686)			High School Type(N=562)			
Mean	23.4		Private	196	35%	
Std Dev	7.3		Public Neighborhood	313	56%	
Range	18 - 60		Public: Charter	17	3%	
Median	21		Public: Magnet/Spc Ad	31	6%	
			Other	5	1%	
Gender (n=722)			High School GPA (n=561)			
Female	505	70%	A (4.0)	151	27%	
Male	208	29%	A- (3.7)	196	35%	
Other	9	1%	B+ (3.3)	90	16%	
Race (n=721)			B (3.0)	49	9%	
American Indian/AK Native	3	0%	B- (2.7)	45	8%	
Asian	22	3%	C (2.0)	8	1%	
Black or African American	7	1%	C+ (2.3)	11	2%	
Hispanic or Latino	28	4%	D+ (1.3)	3	1%	
More than one race	37	5%	D- (0.7)	1	0%	
Native HI/ Pacific Isl.	1	0%	I cannot remember	2	0%	
Other	18	2%	No HS grades	5	1%	
White	605	84%				
Hispanic (n=716)			SAT Score Averages			
Yes	62	9%	Verbal (n=173)	681		
Native English Speakers (n=722)			Math (n=184)	662		
Yes	696	97%	Writing (n=164)	684		
Parents born in the U.S.(n=722)			ACT Score (n=154)			
Both	554	77%	Overall	29.4		
Neither	74	10%				
One	94	13%				
Parents' Income at Time of Gap Year Est. (n=723)						
Less than \$25,000	24	3%				
\$25,000 - \$49,999	43	6%				
\$50,000 - \$74,999	75	10%				
\$75,000 - \$99,999	65	9%				
\$100,000 - \$124,999	78	11%				
\$125,000 - \$149,999	47	7%				
\$150,000 - \$174,999	36	5%				
\$175,000 - \$199,999	37	5%				
\$200,000+	131	18%				
Not sure	187	26%				

Parental Backgrounds and Gap Year Taking

24% of all gappers said their parents or peers influenced their decision to take a gap year – but parents' education matters!

Parental Education and Gap Year Influence $\chi^2 (2, N = 708) = 22.308, p = .000$	Neither has Bachelor's	At Least 1 Bachelor's	At least 1 Grad Degree	Total
Parental Education Level	13%	25%	62%	
Parent/Peer Did Not Influence Decision	90% ←	82% ←	70%	76%
Parent/Peer Did Influence Decision	10% →	18% →	30%	24%

- There is a significant relationship between parents' level of education and whether or not gappers were influenced by their parents or peers to take a gap year.
 - A greater proportion of gappers whose parents had higher levels of education were also influenced by their parents and peers in their decision to take a gap year.
- For gappers whose both parents had less than a bachelor's degree, only 10% reported being influenced by parents and peers in their decision to take a gap year.
- For gappers for whom at least one parent had a bachelor's degree, 18% reported being influenced by parents and peers in their decision to take a gap year.
- For gappers for whom at least one parent had a graduate degree, 30% reported being influenced by parents and peers in their decision to take a gap year.

Estimated Parental Income	Freq.	%	% Parental Contribution*
Less than \$25,000	24	3%	38%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	43	6%	46%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	75	10%	53%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	65	9%	55%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	78	11%	51%
\$125,000 - \$149,999	47	7%	57%
\$150,000 - \$174,999	36	5%	68%
\$175,000 - \$199,999	37	5%	60%
\$200,000+	131	18%	71%
Not sure	187	26%	63%
Total	723	100%	59%

The table to the left shows the estimated level of parental income at the time of the gap year, and then the percentage of gappers within those income categories whose parents contributed financially to their gap year.

- For example, 18% of gappers estimated that their parents income was more than \$200K. And of the, 71% said their parents contributed financially to their gap year.
- **There is a significant positive relationship between estimated parental income and parental contribution.**
 - The higher the parental income, the more likely parents were to contribute financially to the gap year.

[* = $\chi^2 (9, N = 716) = 20.362, p = .016$]

The table to the right shows educational backgrounds of gappers' parents. **Parents of gappers are highly educated**

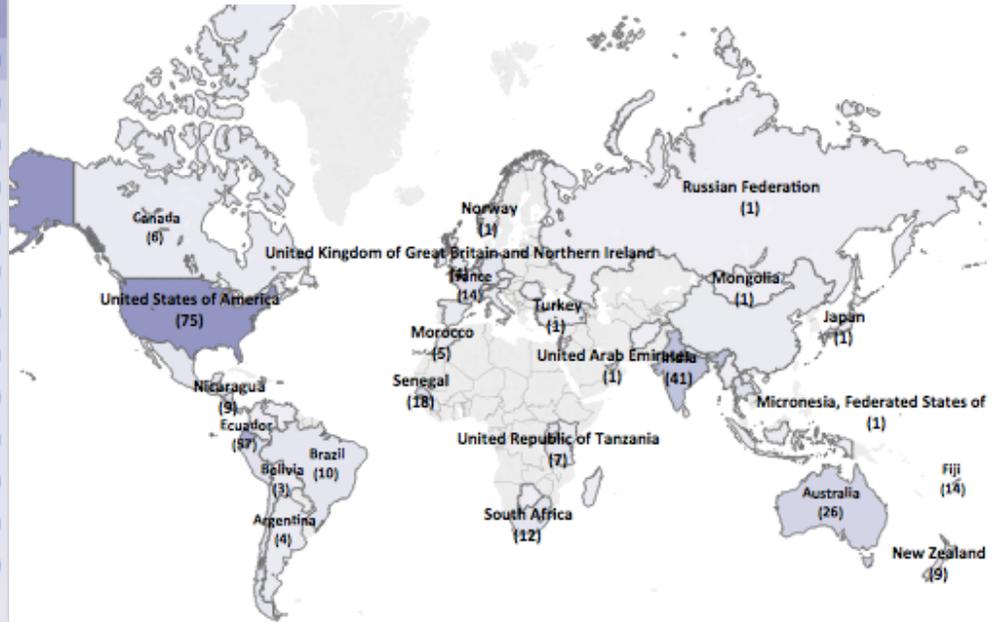
- Of gappers, 81% had mothers and 82% had fathers with a bachelor's degree or higher
- (Census shows ~30% of Americans have a bachelor's)

Parents' Highest Level of Education	Mother		Father	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Do not know parent's education level	16	2%	44	6%
Did not complete high school	10	1%	12	2%
High school diploma or equivalent	39	6%	35	5%
Vocational or technical training	19	3%	16	2%
Less than two years of college	26	4%	27	4%
Associate's degree	25	4%		0%
Bachelor's degree	238	34%	195	28%
Some graduate school courses but no degree	26	4%	28	4%
Master's degree or equivalent	201	28%	184	26%
Professional degree (M.D., D.O., D.D.S,	81	11%	111	16%
Doctoral degree or equivalent (Ph.D)	27	4%	56	8%

Where They Went (Primary Destinations)

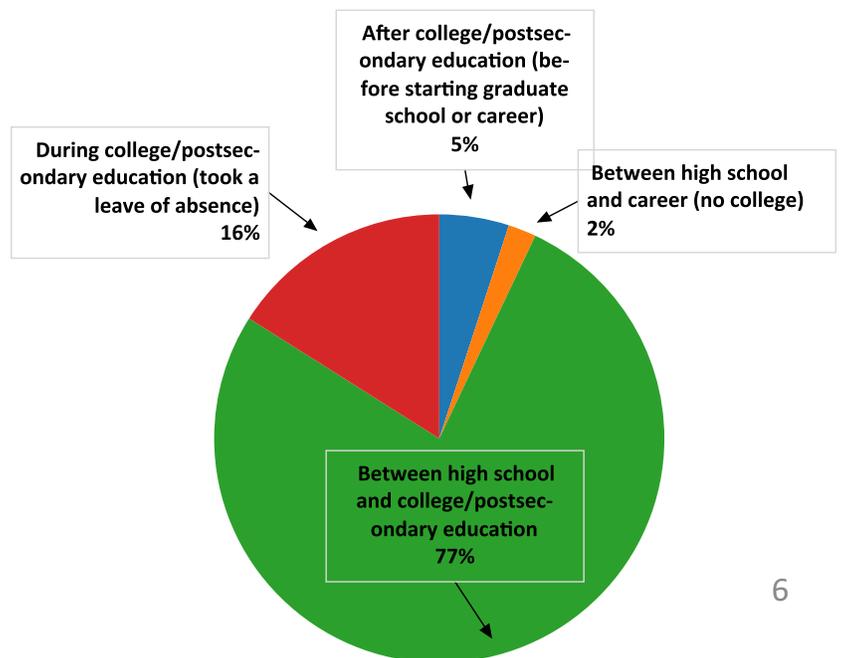
- The U.S., Ecuador, Israel, India, and Australia were the most common destinations reported amongst gappers

United States of America	75 (14%)
Ecuador	57 (11%)
Israel	57 (11%)
India	41 (8%)
Australia	26 (5%)
Senegal	18 (3%)
Thailand	16 (3%)
Fiji	14 (3%)
France	14 (3%)
Peru	14 (3%)
Nepal	12 (2%)
South Africa	12 (2%)
Chile	11 (2%)
Germany	11 (2%)
Brazil	10 (2%)
Mexico	10 (2%)
New Zealand	9 (2%)
Nicaragua	9 (2%)
Uganda	9 (2%)
Costa Rica	8 (1%)
Guatemala	8 (1%)
United Republic of Tanz..	7 (1%)
Canada	6 (1%)
Italy	6 (1%)
China	5 (1%)
Indonesia	5 (1%)
Morocco	5 (1%)
Spain	5 (1%)



When They Went

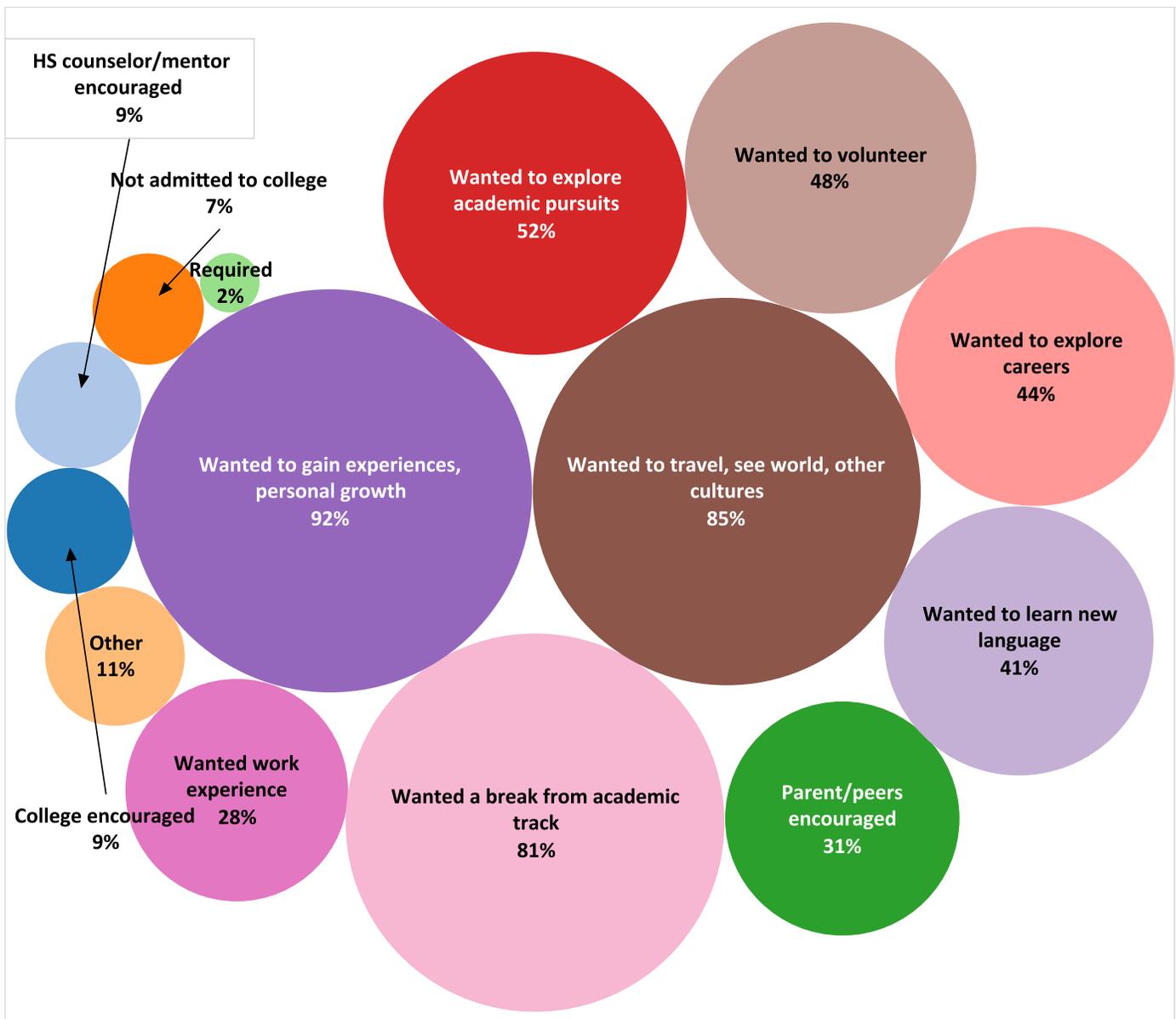
- 77% took their gap year between high school and college



Motivations for taking a Gap Year

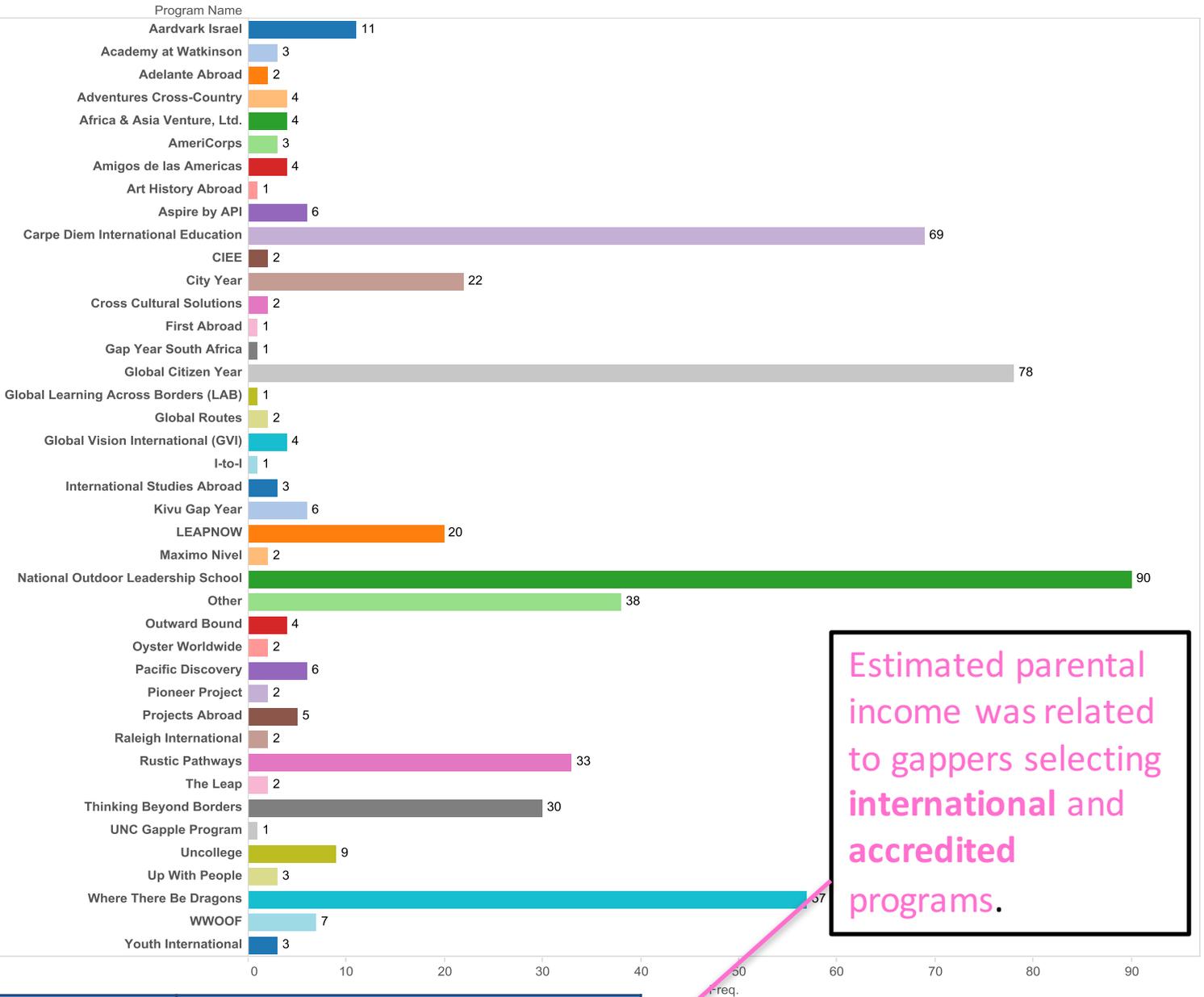
Of the gappers surveyed...

- ✓ 92% wanted to **gain life experiences** and experience **personal growth**
- ✓ 85% wanted to travel, see the world, and experience other cultures
- ✓ 81% wanted a break from the traditional academic track



Gap Year Program Participation

63% of respondents (n=455) had participated in at least one commercial gap year program, leaving 37% who designed an independent gap year. Also several gappers participated in multiple programs, so a total of 546 program experiences were reported:



Estimated parental income was related to gappers selecting international and accredited programs.

Program Type	Estimated Parental Income				
	Less than \$100K	\$100-200K	More than \$200K	Not sure	Over all
International					
No	52%	43%	32%	39%	42%
Yes	48%	57%	68%	61%	58%
Accredited					
No	78%	68%	50%	59%	65%
Yes	22%	32%	50%	41%	35%

SES and Program-Type Selection

- Gap Year programs were classified into five categories:
 - ✓ Individual
 - ✓ Team
 - ✓ Domestic
 - ✓ International
 - ✓ Accredited

Gap Year Net Promoter Score

What is NPS?

The Net Promoter Score, or NPS®, is a metric used to assess customer loyalty and satisfaction. **How likely is it that you would recommend [company, organization, experience X] to a friend or colleague?** Applied to Gap Year Experiences, survey takers were asked the following version of the NPS question:

“Based on your own experiences, how likely would you be to recommend taking a gap year to someone who has expressed interest?”

In the context of this survey for gap year alumni:

- Promoters (score 9-10) are gappers who are avid supporters and promoters of gap year experiences, and are highly likely to encourage others to take a gap year. Their advocacy could serve to fuel the movement through their promotion and support.
- Passives (score 7-8) are gappers who were satisfied with their gap year experiences, but may be more unenthusiastic, and not fully support the movement or recommend gap year experiences to others.
- Detractors (score 0-6) are those gappers who were unhappy and may impede growth through negative word-of-mouth.

NPS is calculated by taking the percentage of people who are Promoters and subtracting the percentage of people who are Detractors.

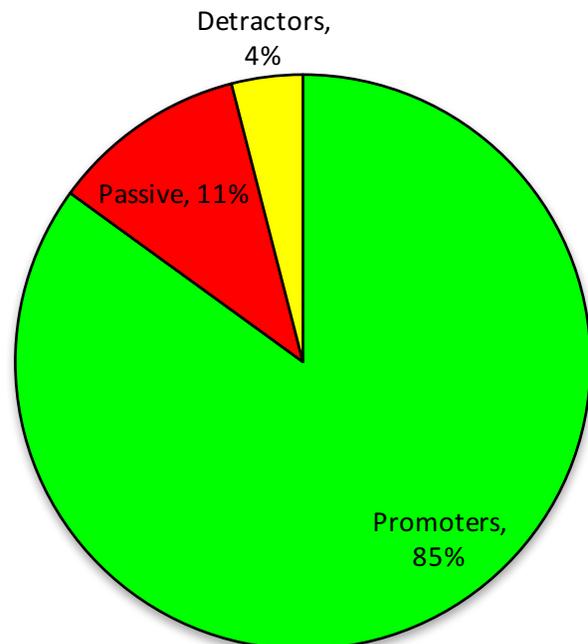


“A score of 75% or more is considered to be relatively high.”
 -<http://www.marketresearchworld.net/content/view/3674/78/>

Survey Respondent NPS

American gappers surveyed here reported an NPS of 81%!

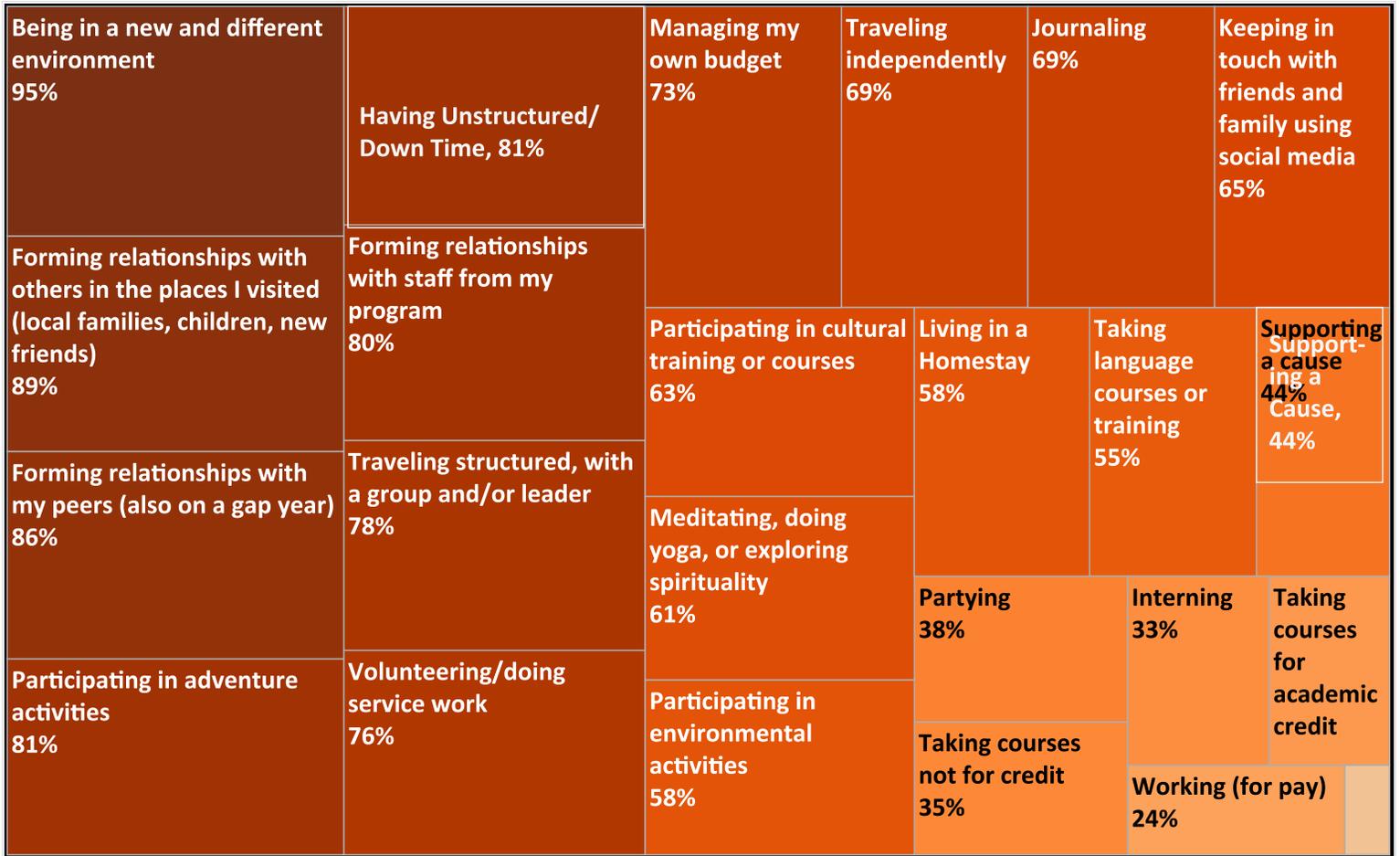
	Freq.	%
Promoters	478	85%
Passives	62	11%
Detractors	20	4%
NPS		81%



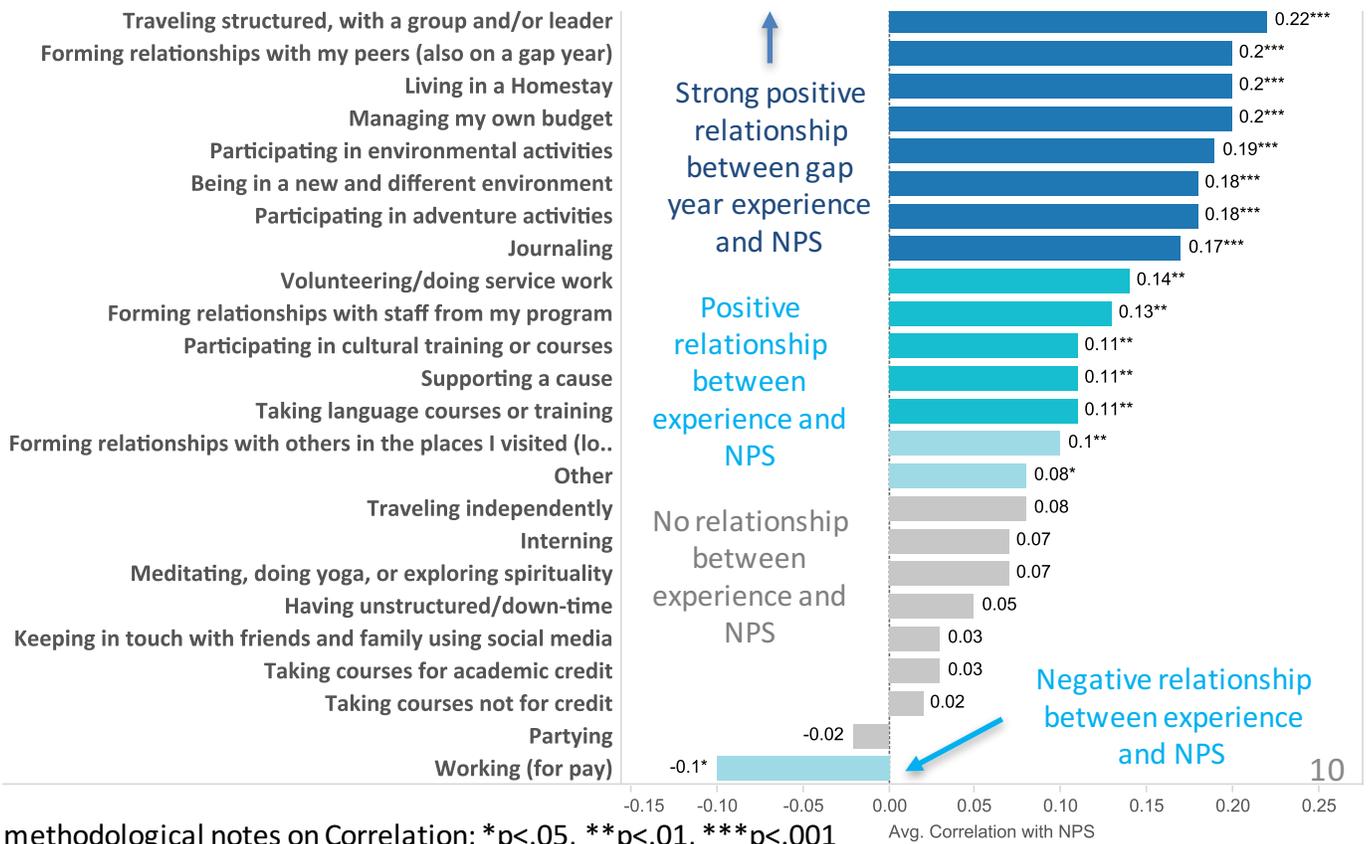
Overall, the average score given was a 9.43 out of a possible 10.

Gap Year Experiences

% of Gappers Who Reported Having the Following Experiences



Correlation (strength of relationship) between Experiences and Net Promoter Score (NPS)



See methodological notes on Correlation: *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001

Gap Year Experiences and NPS

Number of Activities Matters!

- The **number of activities** gappers participated in was **positively associated** with their given **NPS**. Each additional activity participated in was associated with a 0.06-point higher NPS.

Going Abroad is Powerful!

- Spending time abroad was associated with a 0.93-point higher NPS.
- In addition, there was a **positive correlation between the number of months spent abroad and the NPS score given** ($r = 0.12^{**}$).
- For those who participated in a program ($n = 455$), having participated in **an international program was associated with 0.25-point higher NPS**, while having **participated in a domestic program was associated with a 0.33-point lower NPS**.

However, there was also a relationship between having spent time abroad and the number of gap year activities one participated in. **On average, gappers who spent time outside of the US participated in 15 activities, while those who did not leave their home country during their gap year participated in an average of 9 activities.** When controlling for the number of activities participated in, the effect of an international program became insignificant.

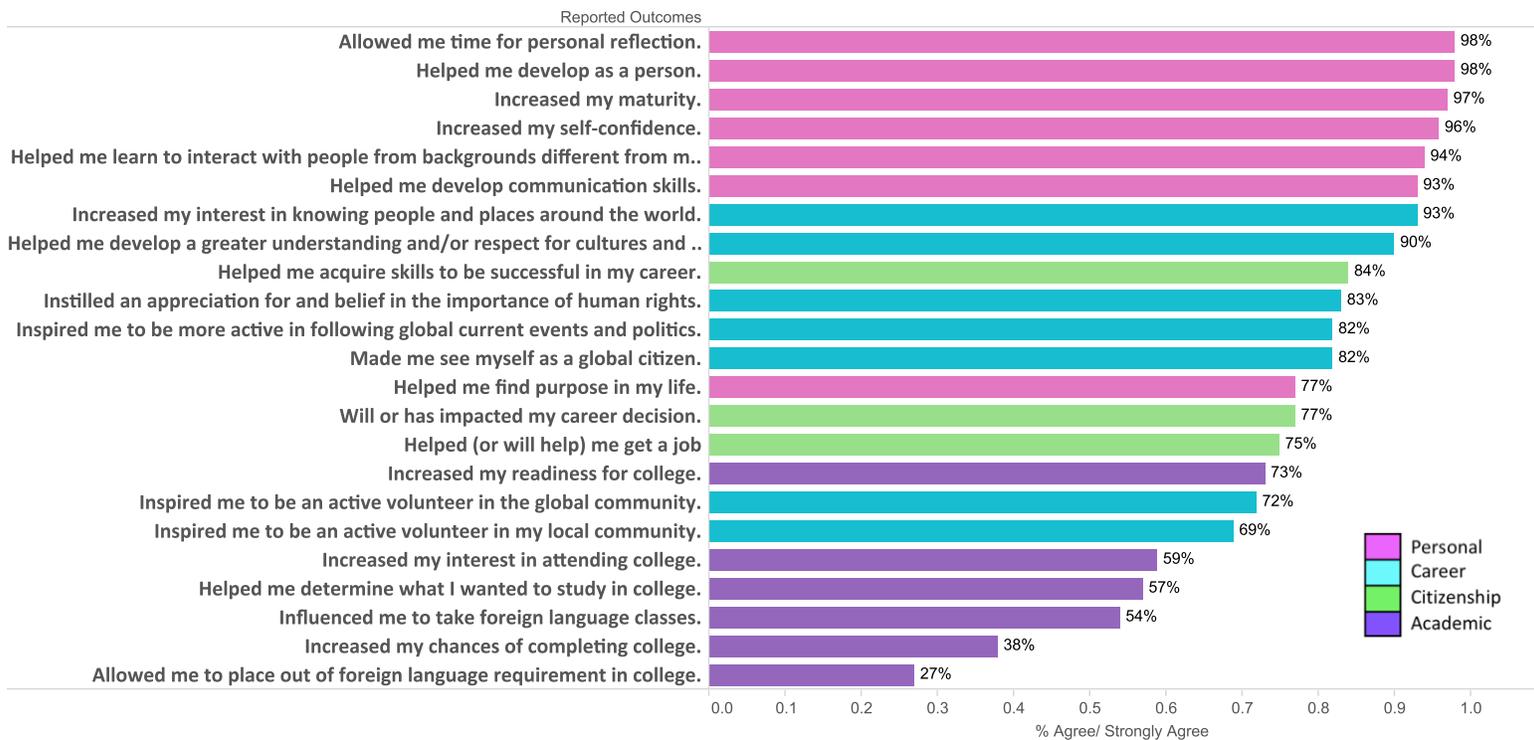
The table below shows the proportion of gappers who participated in activities overall, in international and in domestic programs, along with the correlation of those activities with NPS

Gap Year Activity	% Overall	Correlation with NPS	% Intl Programs	% Domestic
Being in a new and different environment	95%	0.18***	97%	81%
Forming relationships with others in the places I visited (local families, children, new friends)	89%	0.10**	93%	63%
Forming relationships with my peers (also on a gap year)	86%	0.20***	89%	66%
Participating in adventure activities	81%	0.18***	85%	50%
Having unstructured/down-time	81%	0.05	84%	58%
Traveling structured, with a group and/or leader	78%	0.22***	84%	34%
Forming relationships with staff from my program	80%	0.13**	83%	58%
Volunteering/doing service work	76%	0.14**	80%	55%
Journaling	69%	0.17***	78%	44%
Managing my own budget	73%	0.20***	76%	60%
Traveling independently	69%	0.08	74%	35%
Keeping in touch with friends and family using social media	65%	0.03	69%	44%
Participating in cultural training or courses	63%	0.11**	68%	26%
Living in a Homestay	58%	0.20***	65%	8%
Meditating, doing yoga, or exploring spirituality	61%	0.07	64%	47%
Participating in environmental activities	58%	0.19***	61%	44%
Taking language courses or training	55%	0.11**	61%	2%
Supporting a cause	44%	0.11**	40%	34%
Partying	38%	-0.02	40%	27%
Taking courses not for credit	35%	0.02	38%	10%
Interning	33%	0.07	37%	10%
Taking courses for academic credit	28%	0.03	29%	21%
Working (for pay)	24%	-0.10*	21%	47%

See methodological notes on Correlation: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Reported Gap Year Outcomes

The survey asked gappers to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements. All statements began with, “My Gap Year...” The 23 statements fell into 4 categories pertaining to 4 areas of Gap Year Impact on one’s life: **Personal**, **Career**, **Citizenship**, and **Academic**.



The Impacts

A higher proportion of gappers reported impacts falling into the “personal” category, followed by “Career” and “Citizenship.” Fewer gappers reported “Academic” impacts. This finding is not surprising given the that the most commonly reported reasons for taking a gap year were to gain experiences, personal growth, and to take a break from the traditional academic track.

Overall Gap Year Impact Score

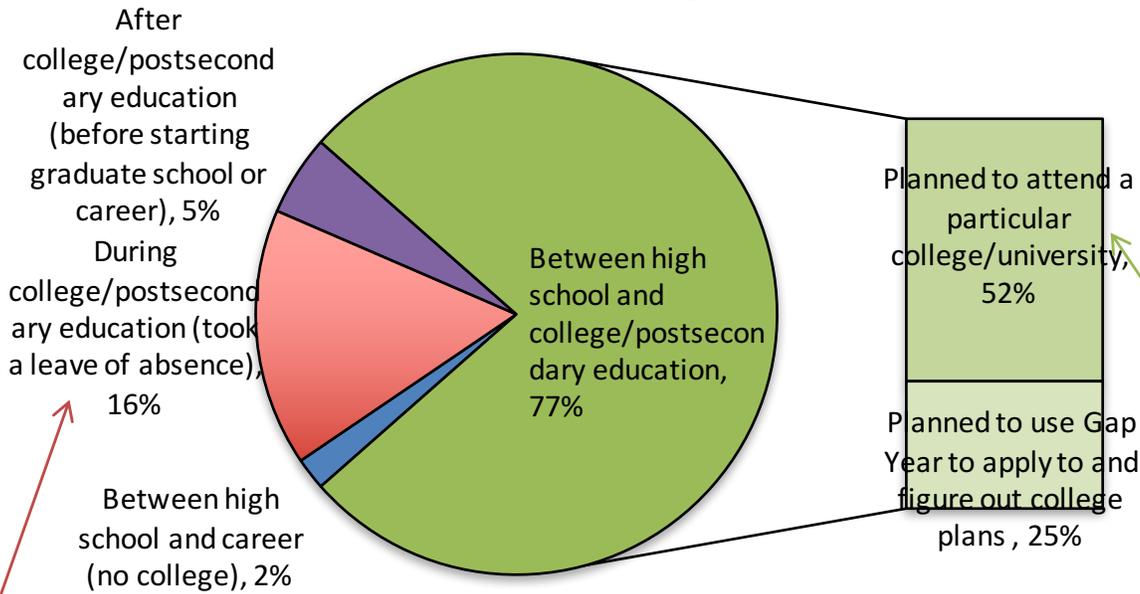
An “overall gap year impact score” was created for each gapper. The score was calculated as the mean of all of the ratings on the 23 items. **Mean = 4.06** (scale from 1 – 5 where 1 = strongly disagree with impact and 5 = strongly agree with impact.)

Highlights

- **Estimated parental income was NOT related to the impacts gappers experienced.**
- Higher overall ‘Gap Year Impact’ scores were positively associated with:
 - Participation in **International Programs** and **Team-Based Programs**
 - Gappers who participated in international and/or team-based programs experienced higher impacts.
 - Number of **months spent on Gap Year**
 - The longer the Gap Year, the more impact was experienced.
 - Number of **months spent outside of the U.S.** during the Gap Year
 - The longer the amount of time spent outside of the U.S. during the Gap Year, the more impact was experienced.
 - Number of weeks spent **doing more than 30 hours of community service**
 - The more time spent participating in community service, the greater the impact.

Gappers in College

Gap Year Timing and Plans



Of the 16% who took their gap year during college,

- 52% returned to the same institution
- 37% transferred to a different institution
- 11% decided not to continue their postsecondary education

Of the 52% who planned to attend a particular college/university:

- 12% reported that they did something different

Transferring in College

Transferred	After college (before starting graduate school or career)	Between high school & college	During college (took a leave of absence)	All
Yes	30%	16%	45%	22%
No	70%	84%	55%	78%

- There were significant differences related to undergraduate transfer status depending on when students took their gap year. Those who took a gap year between high and college/postsecondary education had the lowest transfer rate (16%), while those who took a leave of absence had the highest transfer rate (30%).
- 34% of all transfer students had transferred more than once

Institution Types and Attendance

	Full-Time	Part-Time	Total
4-year	93%	45%	90%
2-year	7%	39%	9%
Less-than-2-year	0%	15%	1%

21% reported having studied abroad, while an additional 49% reported planning to study abroad!

Gappers and College Outcomes

Selected College Majors

	Freq.	%
Biology, Physical Science, Math, Science Technology	55	11%
Business	29	6%
Computer, Information Sciences	8	2%
Education	13	2%
Engineering, Technology	14	3%
General Studies & Other	8	2%
Health Care Fields	22	4%
Humanities	71	14%
Other Applied	79	15%
Social Sciences	119	23%
Undecided	104	20%

College GPAs

	Freq.	%
A (4.0)	56	13%
A- (3.7)	182	42%
B+ (3.3)	89	7%
B (3.0)	30	21%
B- (2.7)	23	5%
C (2.0)	1	0%
C+ (2.3)	5	1%
C- (1.7)	2	0%
D (1.0)	2	0%
D+ (1.3)	2	0%
F (below 0.7)	1	0%
Cannot remember	22	5%
College did not award grades	17	4%

Time to Graduation

The average time to graduation for gappers is 4 years!

Overall, 105 survey respondents gave sufficient information about their dates of beginning and graduating from college. An additional 72 participants had not yet graduated but provided “expected graduation dates.”

- The **median time to graduation for gappers was 3.75 years**, with an average of 4.07 years (for the 105 college-graduated).
- The median expected time to graduation was also exactly 3.75 years, with an average of 3.95 years (for the 72 gappers who had not yet graduated).

Note: The 2013 6-year graduation rate for first-time, full-time undergraduate students who began their pursuit of a bachelor's degree at a 4-year degree-granting institution in fall 2007 was 59 percent. That is, 59 percent of first-time, full-time students who began seeking a bachelor's degree at a 4-year institution in fall 2007 completed the degree at that institution by 2013. (NCES, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cva.asp)

Gappers Now

Job Satisfaction

86% were satisfied or very satisfied with their job!

“According to the current edition of The Conference Board Job Satisfaction survey, and for the eighth straight year, less than half of US workers are satisfied with their jobs.”

	Freq.	%
Very Dissatisfied	12	4%
Dissatisfied	30	10%
Satisfied	177	60%
Very Satisfied	76	26%
Total	295	100%

Civic Engagement

63% reported voting in the 2014 November elections!

According to an article in the Washington Post, “just 36.4 percent of the voting-eligible population cast ballots” in the November 2014 election.

89% reported participating in community service in the last month!

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “The volunteer rate was little changed at 25.3 percent for the year ending in September 2014

Earnings Based on Employment Status

(n = 309)	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Less than \$25,000	31%	85%	66%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	30%	2%	12%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	10%	1%	4%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	7%	0%	3%
\$100,000 - \$124,999	8%	0%	3%
\$125,000 - \$149,999	2%	0%	1%
\$150,000 - \$174,999	1%	0%	0%
\$175,000 - \$199,999	2%	0%	1%
\$200,000+	2%	0%	1%
Not sure/Prefer not to say	7%	12%	10%

309 gappers were employed (either full-time or part-time)

Summary and Conclusions

Area 1: Background Factors

- Gappers who took the survey were majority female, White, native English speakers, and from families where the estimated household income was over \$100,000 per year. In addition, whereas approximately 10% of American high schoolers attend private schools, 35% of gappers did. The surveyed gappers were also majority A-students in high school and had higher high school test scores (SAT and ACT) than national averages.
- 24% of all gappers said their parents had influenced their decision to take a Gap Year - but parents' highest level of education was related to whether or not they influenced their gappers. Whereas only 10% of gappers for whom neither parent had earned a bachelors degree were influenced by their parents, 18% of those with at least one parent with a bachelor's degree and 30% of those with at least one parent with a graduate degree were influenced by their parents.
- Also, a significantly higher proportion of gappers from higher income backgrounds received financial support from their parents during their gap year.

Conclusion 1: Because this report outlines the positive effects associated with taking a Gap Year, these demographic findings highlight the importance of:

- Recruiting more male, non-White and lower-income students to participate in Gap Years.
- Providing parents from all backgrounds with adequate information to support their potential gappers. This study has shown that parents with lower levels of education are less likely to influence a students decision to take a gap year. Because of the known benefits, these parents may be specifically targeted.

Area 2: Gap Year Experiences

- The three most commonly reported reasons for wanting to take a Gap Year were (1) wanting to gain life experiences and experience personal growth; (2) wanting to travel, see the world and experience other cultures; and (3) wanting a break from the traditional academic track.
- For gappers who participated in commercialized programs, estimated level of parental income was related to the types of programs they selected. Specifically, a higher proportion of gappers from families with an estimated income of more than \$200,000 per year participated in international programs, and programs that had been accredited by AGA.
- Overall, the NPS of the survey takers was 81% - and was positively correlated with the number of Gap Year activities participated in, as well as spending time abroad and having participated in an international program.

Conclusion 2:

- Gap Year programs, or supporters/facilitators (such as parents or counselors - for those students not participating in a program) should aim to offer gappers a wide range of experiences and activities. When going abroad is not feasible, programs should attempt to foster experiences that allow gappers to "be in a new and different environment" - which is correlated with NPS. In addition, programs or facilitators should prioritize creating environments where gappers can form meaningful relationships with both peers as well as those different from them.

Summary and Conclusions

Area 3: Impacts

- A higher proportion of gappers reported impacts falling into the "Personal" category, followed by "Career" and "Citizenship." Fewer gappers reported "Academic" impacts. This finding is not surprising given the that the most commonly reported reasons for taking a gap year were to gain experiences and personal growth and to take a break from the traditional academic track.
- There were significant differences related to undergraduate transfer status depending on when students took their gap year. Those who took a gap year between high and college/postsecondary education had the lowest transfer rate (16%), while those who took a leave of absence had the highest transfer rate (30%).
- Compared to national averages, gappers had lower average time to graduation (4 years or less, compared nationally to only 59% graduating within 6 years).
- A higher proportion of gappers reported majoring in the social sciences and humanities as compared to science and technology-related (STEM) fields.
- Gapper grades are skewed towards higher grades.
- Beyond academics, 86% of gappers surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs, 63% reported voting in the 2014 November elections, and 89% reported participating in community service in the last month.

Conclusion 3:

- Some graduating seniors need a chance to develop personally, and need a break from the traditional academic track!
- Gap Years taken before college may help students to be more focused and more closely select college study plans, reducing the likelihood of transferring while in college.
- Taking a Gap Year may help students be more deliberate in college, staying on track and completing studies faster than they otherwise might have, but it may be less acceptable in STEM fields
- Based on the fact that this survey found an association between job satisfaction and civic engagement, and taking a Gap Year, participating in a Gap Year may have implications beyond immediate personal and college/academic outcomes.

Limitations

The study of gap year participants is challenging in many ways – but in particular because there is no way to accurately account for and reach all (or a representative sample) of those who have taken a gap year in the US. Thus, this study is significantly limited by the methods used to recruit survey participants. Mainly, participants were recruited through word of mouth and by the programs in which they participated. Thus, there is likely an overrepresentation of commercial gap year participants in this sample, which could skew data. The group of survey takers described here are not representative of American gappers, and at best, can only provide insight into the background and experiences of American gappers. The fact that participation in this survey was completely voluntary may have skewed results towards those who felt strongly about their Gap Year (either positively or negatively).

- This limitation points to the need for developing methods nationally for identifying and tracking gap year participations, so that their experiences can be understood more scientifically and meaningful comparisons between gappers and non-gappers can be made.

Recommendations for Future Research

- This study strongly recommends that future studies conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) specifically define “taking a gap year” and ask students to report whether or not they participated in a gap year.
 - In order to understand the true effects and impacts of taking a gap year, an accurate and representative group of gappers, and an appropriate comparison group, must be identified.

Findings from this study highlight the importance of ongoing research related to gap year takers, their backgrounds, experiences had, and the impacts of their gap years. Specifically, a pre- and post-gap year experience survey would help to better isolate the outputs and outcomes related to particular experiences as well as their relationships to gappers’ background characteristics. In addition, an area of importance for American Gap Association is facilitating and providing opportunities for students from all backgrounds to participate in gap years. Useful future research may include case studies of both low-cost gap year programs or itineraries as well as the Gap Year experiences of low-income individuals. Findings from these case studies may be used to better design and support more accessible (low-cost) Gap Year programs, and better understand how low-income gappers can be supported to have the most fruitful gap year experiences.

In addition, case studies of college-sponsored gap year programs, such as those at Princeton and Tufts, may also be important in informing and supporting this growing trend.

Methodological Notes

Correlation: “The correlation is one of the most common and most useful statistics. A correlation is a single number that describes the degree of relationship between two variables. Let's work through an example to show you how this statistic is computed.”

Read more: <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/statcorr.php>