



Considerations When Crafting Your Gap Year(s) Experience

How exciting—planning for a year or two of experience before the next career chapter of professional or graduate school! How scary—how in the world do you decide the what/how/where/when/why of taking a gap year (or two, or more)? With so many options available and so many factors to consider, it makes great sense to think intentionally about several key elements important in maximizing your gap year experiences.

Spend time thinking about and reflecting on the questions below; each refers to a particular aspect you may want to consider in planning your gap year(s). Thinking about all these topics may take some time, so plan to work and reflect in doable chunks. These topics can be a great starting point for intentional conversations with a faculty or staff member, an advisor or a mentor.

Topics for Your Consideration:

Knowledge: In what areas of knowledge—intellectual, personal, experiential—can you claim a particularly strong grasp, find great enjoyment, and feel particularly solid? Are there areas you need to spend additional time developing, e.g. academics, clarifying your passion, gaining additional experience, etc.?

Skills: In what skills do you feel confident, both technical and “soft” skills? Which skills do you see as important for your chosen professional pathway, but need further development? Are there particular skills you want to focus on acquiring or further developing during your gap year?

Goals: What do you want to accomplish during your gap year(s), both in the short-term and by the end of the time, e.g. *study, experience, preparation*?

Values: What are your personal and work values, and how do you see them intersecting with your plans? Which of your values will be most important to hold in common with the people with whom you work, e.g. *structure, taking risk, loyalty, influence...other*?

Environment: What physical environments allow you to thrive in what you’re doing? Which cause you to struggle? What type of environment would you seek for your gap year experiences, e.g. *flexible/structured; team/solo; lab/clinical/workplace*?

Relationships: What types of relationships do you want in the experience you plan for yourself, e.g. colleagues, research subjects, clients, mentors, customers, peers, etc.? Who do you envision your colleagues to be, and how will that affect your experience?

Compensation: What kind of financial compensation will you need or want? What sorts of benefits or perks will be important to you? What other types of compensation might you seek from a gap year experience, e.g. *learning, mentoring, connections, clarity*?

Location: Where do you want, or need, to be? What geographic factors are important to you? How might location affect your application process, e.g. *do you plan to be at home, specific state(s) of preference, etc.*?

Challenges and Barriers: What real difficulties do you see ahead as you embark on planning a gap year experience? How might you begin to address them? *Who might you enlist to help you navigate these?*

Value for Your Development: How will this experience contribute to your personal and professional development? What do you hope to gain from the experience? How will you discuss the experience in application essays, interviews, etc.?