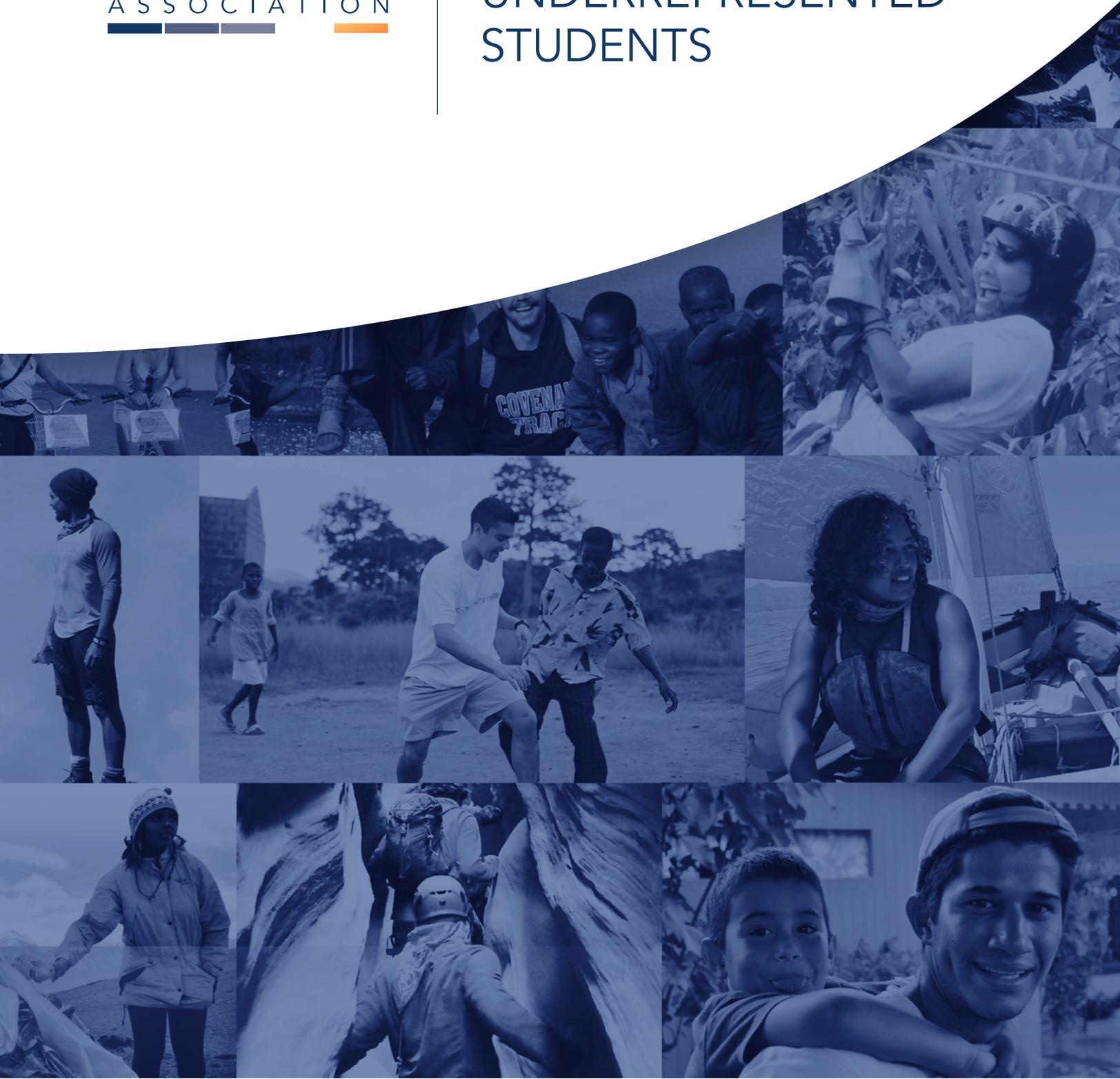




RESOURCES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS



RESOURCES FOR UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

Who is an underrepresented student when it comes to gap years? Unfortunately, a very large group of folks fit this description: students of color, first generation students, immigrant students, students from lower socioeconomic groups, male students, etc. In fact, as of 2017, participants on gap years were still primarily white female students from middle and higher income socioeconomic groups. So what can we do about this? How do we make sure that the many personal, professional, and educational benefits of gap years are equally available to *all* students, thus making gap years more representative and accessible for everyone?

This section of the GYA website is dedicated to introducing some of the common barriers cited by underrepresented students, followed by tools and strategies for how to overcome these barriers. Know of additional resources we should list here? Please contact us!

| Section | pg |
|---|-------|
| Barriers to Gap Years: 6 Key Issues | 2 - 3 |
| Strategies to Overcome Barriers | |
| Economic Access | 3 |
| Representation and Visibility + Faculty Support | 4 |
| Family Support | 5 |
| Community/Social Support | 6 |
| Concerns about Racism and Mobility | 7 |
| Additional Resources/Contact Info | 8 - 9 |





BARRIERS TO GAP YEARS

According to current research on gap years and study abroad, as well as anecdotal evidence, there are six key issues cited most frequently as being barriers to the gap year participation of underrepresented students:

① *Economic Access*

Gap years can be expensive and not all students have equal or equitable access to the funds needed to afford a gap year experience.

② *Representation/Visibility*

Gap year participation is not as diverse as it could be – and many gap year program marketing materials reflect this, primarily highlighting the stories of white and/or economically advantaged students. This lack of representation is especially a critical issue for students of color as well as students with disabilities.

③ *Faculty/Administration Support*

If high school/college/university faculty members and administration do not actively support or mentor students, it can become a challenging prospect to consider going on a gap year. This is even more true for students who are already experiencing some or all of the other barriers on this list!

④ *Family Support*

Gap years are relatively new in the United States. However, study abroad has a lengthy history at U.S. institutions. Many white students, particularly those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, have parents who went abroad themselves. This isn't as common for students of color, first generation students, and immigrant students, thus making families sometimes wary about the costs, benefits, and potential risks of going overseas for a gap year experience. For immigrant students, there may also be parental resistance to students seeking to travel to the countries and/or regions from which their parents emigrated: their parent likely went through many obstacles to relocate the family to their new country so why would the student seek to return? Lastly, many students are responsible for caring for younger siblings or family elders as well as contributing to family finances. For these students, spending time away can be an especially difficult option to consider.

⑤ *Community/Social Support*

Similar to family support, if a student doesn't know others who have gone on a gap year, then the chances are low that their friends, neighbors, and others in their community will have had a similar experience. Again, there may not be trust that this is a good or safe investment of time and money for a student with little exposure to gap years or representation in their community.

⑥ *Concerns about Racism/Discrimination/Mobility*

While all students going on gap year experiences have questions and concerns about safety, this is especially true for underrepresented students. As one student of color, as she prepared to embark on an international service-learning semester, once remarked, “I know how to deal with the racism at home. I don’t know what to expect abroad.” Similarly, students with disabilities may have concerns about mobility and access. In short, many underrepresented students know how to navigate the challenges they regularly experience at home but may have trepidation about braving these same challenges in unknown environments.

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS TO GAP YEARS

While the barriers listed above may seem daunting, there are several things students, families, gap year programs, and high school/college/university study abroad staff and faculty can do to minimize them. Here we’ll take each barrier one by one and offer suggestions for what each audience can do to help facilitate gap year participation for more individuals:

Economic Access

What Students and Families Can Do:

Fortunately, there are many options to apply financial aid, program-specific scholarships and grants, general scholarships and grants, and educational travel scholarships – not to mention personal fundraising – towards gap year costs. To learn more, please visit [this link](#). You might also consider working with a gap year counselor, many of whom offer scholarships of their own. In short, don’t rule out a gap year on cost alone! There are many options to help with the cost – plus research has shown that the investment is worth it!

What Gap Year Programs Can Do:

Offer new and expanded scholarship and grant opportunities to your applicants, especially to underrepresented students like individuals who are experiencing financial barriers to participation. Your program will benefit from greater diversity of participation; help to facilitate this by making your program even more financially accessible!

What Educational Staff and Faculty Can Do:

Research and identify gap year programs that offer a range of financial entry points, as well as those that offer scholarships to their participants. Share resources with students to help them identify and apply for scholarships and grants independently. Also, consider offering scholarships for gap year participation – either for future participants or alumni coming to your institution! If you are a college or university, be sure to also create clear policies and procedures for how students can defer their admission – including any potential scholarships for which they have already been approved. In an ideal world, students shouldn’t have to choose between funding for school and funding for a gap year!



Representation and Visibility + Faculty Support

What Students and Families Can Do:

Share your stories! Help others from similar backgrounds and of similar identities understand what their experiences might be like. Write essays, share photos on social media, and participate in gap year program alumni networks. Consider serving as a mentor or guide. Pass it forward to help ensure that future participants similar to you have a better idea of what gap years might hold for them! And if you're a potential gap year participant yourself, seek out alumni to share their experiences with you. Many colleges and universities have gap year clubs on campus so see if you can connect with fellow alumni in person as well!

What Gap Year Programs Can Do:

Actively reach out to alumni from diverse backgrounds and identities, making sure to highlight the stories of students of color, first generation students, immigrant students, students with disabilities, and students from lower socioeconomic groups. Highlight these stories in social media, marketing materials, and on your website. Remember that representation is critical but so is visibility! If underrepresented students don't see themselves in your outreach materials, they may not see themselves as your future participants. Also, create volunteer positions that engage alumni as mentors and guides for new and potential gap year participants. Not only will alumni provide invaluable insights and advice to new students, they can also gain leadership experience and networking skills in the process. Lastly, consider offering cohort program models so that students can participate in a gap year with peers from similar backgrounds, creating an immediate network and community of support.

What Educational Staff and Faculty Can Do:

Make a concerted effort to identify students who would benefit from gap year experiences. Research has shown that underrepresented students, particularly students of color, benefit from the mentorship of faculty and study abroad staff, especially when those staff and faculty members are themselves people of color. Seek out leaders of color on campus to help build and sustain a pipeline of future gap year participants so that *all* students can potentially benefit from the valuable experiences of a gap year. At the same time, start identifying members of your campus community who have already experienced a gap year. Create clubs and opportunities for them to socialize and connect with one another, not to mention future potential gap year participants. Lastly, if you are staff at a university or college, make sure that you have clear policies and procedures for admissions and scholarships deferrals so that students understand the process for taking a gap year before or during their educational journey at your institution.

Family Support

What Students and Families Can Do:

Contact gap year programs of interest and ask lots of questions. How will they support your student? What benefits can your student expect to receive from gap year participation? Ask to talk to student alumni and their families. What concerns did *they* have before participating? What does your student need to know to prepare for and make the most of their gap year experience?

What Gap Year Programs Can Do:

Foster and sustain robust alumni networks. Consider hosting subgroups of alumni for students with specific identities, e.g. students of color, LGBTQIA students, students with disabilities. Make these networks available to individuals who are in the application phase so that they can build relationships with fellow students from the start, lasting throughout their gap year and ideally beyond. Consider creating a network specifically for parents and family members as well so that they can directly connect with and ask questions of one another. Also, be sure to have materials available in a number of different languages. This is especially important for immigrant and first generation students whose parents may not speak the language used in your program's primary materials. Lastly, consider offering programs of varying lengths; shorter programs may potentially be a better fit for students who have substantial familial responsibilities and are having difficulty committing to a longer experience.

What Educational Staff and Faculty Can Do:

Identify gap year programs that have strong alumni networks with whom students and their families can connect and ask questions. Train staff to understand the barriers experienced by underrepresented students so that you can address them when meeting with students and their families considering a gap year.



Community/Social Support

What Students and Families Can Do:

Similar to addressing the issue of representation and visibility, sharing stories is key. Tell friends, neighbors, and other community members about gap years and why you're interested in going on one. Share the benefits of a gap year experience and how you will apply it to your own future path. Consider sharing photographs on social media or a blog so that people you know can follow along with you as you travel. Lastly, share your stories after you return – informally and potentially formally through short speeches and presentations at local community groups. And again, if you're a potential gap year participant, seek out alumni online, through program alumni networks, and via on campus clubs and groups. Ask them questions and expand your own network of support!

What Gap Year Programs Can Do:

Create dynamic multimedia to easily and accessibly share the stories of your alumni, including underrepresented students in your network. Share photos, videos, sound bites, etc. on your website so that anyone can view them! Make these easy for gap year applicants, participants, and alumni to share via their own networks. Also, again, consider offering cohort models that create communities of peer support from the start of the program.

What Educational Staff and Faculty Can Do:

Similar to gap year programs, be sure to collect diverse stories from your students who have participated on gap years. Share these widely and use visual mediums. Make them easy for students to repost and share on their own social media channels. Also, just as was suggested for representation and visibility, encourage the creation of on campus clubs and groups for gap year alumni and future participants to connect and create communities of support.



Concerns about Racism and Mobility

What Students and Families Can Do:

Ask questions. Lots of questions. Ask gap year programs what their students have experienced – both the inspiring and, more importantly, the challenging. Ask for examples of when students have experienced discrimination: what happened, how did the student handle it, how did the program respond. Ask for examples of what to expect with mobility and accessibility: what are the laws of the country to which you might be traveling, how will the program make things more accessible, etc. Talk to alumni and ask them about their experiences. What do they wish they'd known before they went? Did they ever feel unsafe? Marginalized? What advice would they give others? Lastly, strategize with your program for how to make sure that everyone is safe and protected during their gap year experience. Reputable gap year programs should already have strong policies and procedures in place – both to help prevent incidents and to rapidly respond to them should they occur. Make sure you feel supported and protected by the program you choose so that, should you run into any issues abroad, you know exactly what to do and who to contact.

What Gap Year Programs Can Do:

Be honest. Racism and discrimination exist everywhere. Mobility will be limited in some if not many places. Tell your students what to really expect and provide them with the tools to respond. Make sure you have clear and transparent policies and procedures in place to protect your students so that they know what to do should they experience incidents of racism, discrimination, or lack of accessibility on their gap year. Train your staff – especially staff on the ground abroad – to respond quickly and compassionately to any incidents of racism, discrimination, or lack of accessibility. Connect applicants and participants with alumni who can share with them firsthand experiences of what to expect on their gap year experience.

What Educational Staff and Faculty Can Do:

Research and share with potential students only those gap year organizations that you feel have demonstrated preparation and care to adequately support underrepresented student participation. Request copies of their policies and procedures and ask them the hard questions about how they work to prevent incidents of discrimination as well as what their response process is should they occur.





ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Looking for additional resources? Here are a few of our favorites:

DiversityAbroad.com

This is a comprehensive website that hosts diversity and inclusion guides for a variety of audiences as well as articles and blog posts on diversity and inclusion for individuals traveling and studying abroad. Here are a few of the specific diversity and inclusion guides currently available on their site:

- Economically Disadvantaged Students
- First Generation Students
- Heritage Seekers
- LGBTQ Students Abroad
- Religious Diversity Abroad
- Students with Disabilities Abroad

LGBTQIA Students & Education Abroad – University of Colorado

This site shares several questions to ask and explore as an LGBTQIA student considering a gap year experience abroad. There is also a number of links listed for further research and exploration.

Mobility International USA

This international organization offers a plethora of tips, strategies, and tools for students with disabilities traveling abroad.

Students of Color Abroad – Portland State University

This site lists issues to consider as a student of color going abroad as well as a series of links to check out for further information.

Students of Color and Under-represented Groups – University of Oregon

Similar to the link for Portland State University above, this page offers some great questions to ask and things to consider as well as a list of additional resources to explore. Want to read the sources for the research cited on this page? Here are some of the studies and websites we consulted to compile the list of barriers on this page:

- “10 Things Stopping You From Taking a Gap Year Abroad That Shouldn’t”
by Olivia Christine Perez – GoOverseas.com
- “2015 American Gap Association National Alumni Survey”
by Nina Hoe, Ph.D. – American Gap Association
- “Gallup-Purdue Index Report 2016” - Gallup
- “Managing Education Abroad: How to Overcome Key Barriers to Education Abroad” - NAFSA
- “Prevent First Generation College Dropouts with a Gap Year”
by Winson Law – Thinking Beyond Borders



Resources Continued:

- *"Race and Socioeconomic Status Differences in Study Abroad Participation: The Role of Habitus, Social Networks, and Cultural Capital"* by Jennifer Simon and James W. Ainsworth – International Scholarly Research Notices
- *"Rethink the Gap"* by Brendan Pelsue – Harvard Ed Magazine
- *"Students of Color and Study Abroad"* by Multiple Authors – University of Minnesota

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