CBS Student
Services

College of
Biological Sciences
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover℠

Gap Year Planning for Pre-Health Students

Are you planning to apply to a professional health program after you complete your undergraduate degree in CBS, but not sure if you want to go immediately into a new program after you graduate? A break in education between completing your undergraduate degree and starting professional school is often referred to as a "gap year." During this time, students pursue a variety of interests including: work, volunteer, travel, and more. While many students go directly into professional school, many students will choose to pursue one or more gap years instead. You may be interested to know that the average age of a first-year medical student is 24--making the decision to pursue a gap year is quite common for traditionally-aged undergraduate students, and won't put you at a disadvantage, so long as you make good use of your time.

Why might I consider a gap year?

Experiences gained during a gap year can help strengthen your application to a health professional program, especially if you are intentional and gain science, healthcare, or other related experiences such as community engagement work or volunteering during this time.

Some students decide to take a gap year for a variety of reasons, including:

- Study for professional school entrance exams
- Take courses to fulfill prerequisites or improve GPA
- Gain experience in a professional setting, especially related to healthcare or research
- Volunteer or travel, especially in areas related to healthcare
- Develop professional relationships and request letters of recommendation
- Reflect on career interests and ensure you are ready to commit to a professional health program
- Developing competencies such as the AAMC's Core Competencies for Medical Students: https://www.aamc.org/initiatives/admissionsinitiative/competencies/

Before starting your gap year, explore these important questions:

- What areas of my professional school application portfolio do I want to work to develop during my gap year?
- How much time do I want to take off before I start professional school?
- What is the timeline for the professional school application process?
- How will you maintain relationships with letter of recommendation writers if you are away from campus?

What would I do during a gap year?

This document contains just a few places to begin your exploration of potential gap year plans. As you're exploring options, reflect on your experiences and identify areas in which you want to develop skills. Many programs suitable for gap years will offer information session for prospective

students, which can be a great way to determine the specific skills and experiences you could expect to gain.

Gap Year Employment Ideas

Do you want to gain direct patient contact experience?

- Medical Scribe | Examples: EPPA Scribe, Elite Medical Scribes, Emergency Care Consultants
- Certified Nursing Assistant or Personal Care Attendant | CNA training available at Red Cross or Community Colleges and PCA training available through Minnesota Department of Human Services
- Emergency Medical Technician | Training available through U of M Emergency Medical Services or Hospitals
- Direct Care/Support Professional | ACR Homes, Fraser, Other group home/assisted living sites
- Pharmacy Technician | Walgreens, CVS, Cub Foods, Wal-Mart

Are you interested in honing your research skills?

- Colleges and Universities employ recent grads in research positions, often called Junior Scientists or Lab Assistants. Network with your professors and let them know you are looking for a post-graduate lab position and peruse employment.umn.edu for postings.
- The National Institutes of Health Postbaccalaureate Intramural Research Training Award and Cancer Research Training Award are outstanding research opportunities for recent grads. tinyurl.com/NIHtraining
- Many companies and hospitals hire recent graduates for entry-level lab positions. Examples may include 3M, Pace Analytical, R&D Systems, or the Mayo Clinic. Select jobs may be posted on goldpass.umn.edu

Thinking about a year of service?

1-2 year fellowship programs provide an avenue to gain professional experience while committing to a social cause that is important to you. Many of these programs have specific application processes and deadlines that start several months before you will graduate. Examples of fellowship programs are listed below.

- Teach for America
- AmeriCorps VISTA
- City Year
- Peace Corps
- Health Corps
- Public Allies

Do you want to give back to your community as a volunteer?

Volunteering is a great way to gain patient contact, demonstrate your commitment to serving others, and gain experience in a healthcare setting. As such, many students continue volunteering during a gap year. Whether you pursue a full-time volunteer opportunity or volunteer a few hours a week in addition to working, the below resources are great places to starting your search.

- volunteermatch.com
- servicelearning.umn.edu
- idealist.org
- handsontwincities.org
- minnesotacouncilnonprofits.org
- mdcinc.org/about/autry-fellowship/

Are you interested in taking more classes?

Some students pursue additional education during a gap year. Education may include any of the following:

- Retake selected courses to demonstrate your ability to succeed in these courses
- Earn a Master's Degree in a related field such as Public Health
- Earn a Master's Degree in the hard sciences to demonstrate academic capability
- Pursue a health sciences post-baccalaureate program

Do you want to see the world?

CBS graduates pursue international travel, work, intern, volunteer, and research opportunities. Below are a few ideas to jump start your exploration, and be sure to check out resources on the Learning Abroad Center website at tinyurl.com/UMabroadWIV and at goinglobal.com (access through GoldPass.umn.edu). Pay attention to the application timeline for your program(s) of interest if you will travel abroad for your gap year.

- Service Examples: Global Volunteers, Global Citizens Network, World Endeavors
- Intern or Work | Examples: Peace Corps, World Teach, Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET)
- **NOTE: All CBS students interested in going abroad are encouraged to complete the Global Ambassadors for Patient Safety Module at z.umn.edu/cbsglobal**

CBS Student Resources

Be sure to take advantage of the great resources available to support you in the pursuit of your goals.

- Meet with a CBS Career Coach to discuss your goals and interest in a gap year, and for support in writing your resume, cover letter, and conducting a mock interview. CBS Career Coaching students are open to all current students, and alumni up to two years after graduation.
- Post your resume, look for networking opportunities through the Maroon and Gold Network (alumni database) , and search for employment opportunities on GoldPass.umn.edu.

Have Questions?
We invite you schedule a Pre-Health coaching appointment to discuss your motivations and goals, as well as any other career related questions you may have. For additional assistance, contact CBS Student Services at 612-624-9717 to schedule an appointment with a Pre-Health Career Coach