

## **Counselors: More students take time off before college**

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Daniel Dellatorre got his much anticipated letter of acceptance into Columbia University during his senior year and was prepared to attend in fall 2006. Then something his mother said caught his attention: "Do an AmeriCorps program and help out with hurricane relief work." Dellatorre recalled recently how his mother made the surprise suggestion late in his senior year.

The idea set surprisingly well with Dellatorre, who is from Bethesda, Md., and who wanted a break from school anyway. "I was exhausted after the end of my senior year. I was taking extra college preparatory classes," he said. He deferred his admission to the New York-based university to do service work in Baton Rouge and in New Orleans and in so doing, joined the growing ranks of students who take a "gap year" — time off between high school and college.

Some do it to find enlightenment and introspection, others to learn something new or pursue a passion.

There are no hard counts of gap-year students, but the National Association for College Admission Counseling reports anecdotal evidence from counselors that more high school graduates these days are seeking a year off. Gap-year consultants who charge \$1,000 or more to advise students on how to fill the time have emerged.

Some students say they take a gap year to escape stress accumulated from Advanced Placement courses and competition over grades and class rank. Dellatorre said his decision to sit out a couple of years has helped everybody. "I did it to help my parents financially and to take a break from school."

Dellatorre signed up with City Year, which is part of the AmeriCorps network in which young adults provide a year of full-time community service. He provided mentoring and tutoring help to students in Baton Rouge and in New Orleans schools last year. "It's been a joy to help with rebuilding efforts and to help people who were forced to flee," Dellatorre said. "I've never lived away from home and it's been a maturing experience."

This year he is serving at University Terrace Elementary School, where he will be tutoring, mentoring and offering literacy training. Dellatorre had no problems requesting a deferral from Columbia University once he explained his plans to serve in Louisiana. "They (Columbia) were supportive. I'll be going back there in 2008," he said.

College admissions officers say they want gap-year students to improve upon an area of expertise or perform some kind of public service. John Blackburn, dean of admissions at the University of Virginia, said students often seek deferrals for missionary work or public service jobs. Admissions officials at Georgetown University estimated that 25 to 30 students admitted each year in a class of almost 1,600 ask for a deferral. The University of Louisiana at Lafayette does grant deferrals, including those for service work, said Dan Rosenfield, dean of enrollment management. "Should anybody want to do it here, we will give them the deferral."

*Ian Shapira of The Washington Post contributed to this report.*