

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, FU JEN CATHOLIC DEPARTMENT

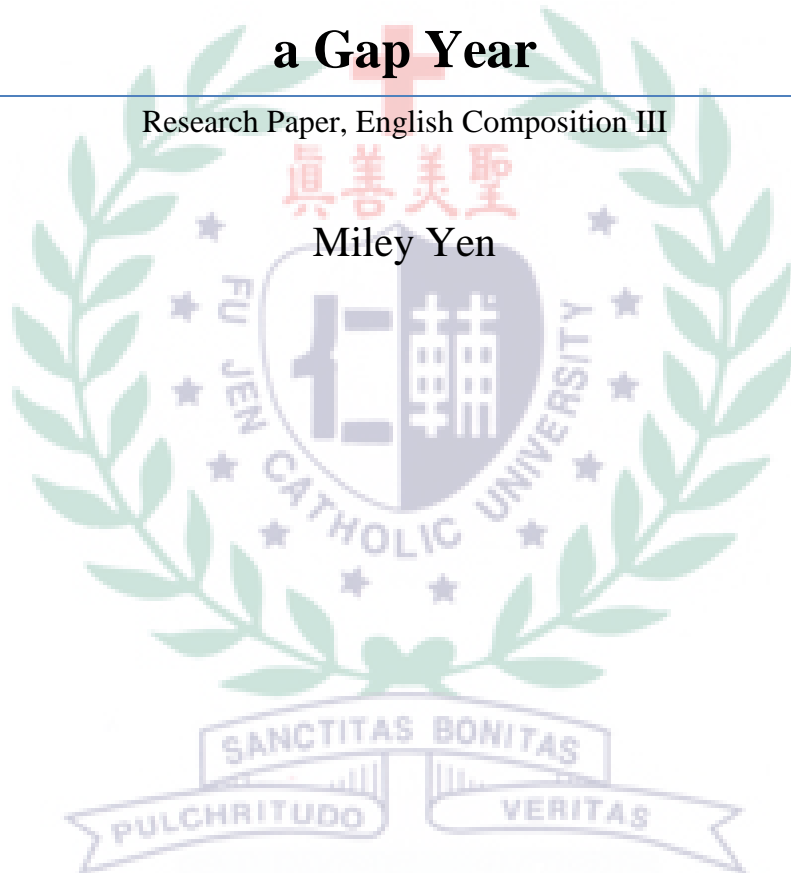
GRADUATION PROJECT 2016

FJU Undergraduate Students' Views on Taking a Gap Year

Research Paper, English Composition III

真善美聖

Miley Yen



Miley Yen

401110092

Composition & Composition III

June 23rd, 2015

RP Draft 3

FJU Undergraduate Students' Views on Taking a Gap Year

A gap year, a year often taken between high school and college, during college years, or after college graduation, has long been a tradition in Europe. Those who delay their formal education to take a gap year participate in various kinds of activities, such as learning foreign languages or skills, voluntary work, internship, working holidays, or traveling. Apart from Europe, the popularity of gap year is growing rapidly in the U.S. Some of the most well known universities including Harvard, Princeton, and New York University have been promoting the notion actively and even encourage students to take a gap year in their acceptance letters (USA Gap Year Fairs, 2014).

In the U.K., where college students taking a gap year has been rather common and popular, gap year is “promoted in newspapers, books and on the internet”, and it is reported by students who had taken a gap year that it helped them to develop their interests, make them more mature, confident, independent, and potentially more attractive to employers (King). Through interviewing students in the UK, King, the author of “Minding the gap? Young people’s accounts of taking a Gap Year as a form of identity work in higher education”, also suggests, “some participants linked their gap year experiences with developing or restoring confidence, maturity and independence, which they believed was necessary for gaining entry to university.” However, most students in Taiwan are not aware of the choice. Most of them know nothing about what taking a gap year means. A common problem for students in Taiwan is that a lot of them have no idea what they want to major in

university since they don't know where their interests lie, not to mention what they really want to do in the future.

Comparing to Taiwan, where the amount of information on gap year is relatively rare, gap year is highly valued and encouraged in some countries. The news article "Government gap-year funding for graduates" published by *The Independent* in 2009, reported that the UK government paid for hundreds of recent university graduates to take a gap year (Woodcock). In countries where taking a gap year is greatly supported, students do not have to worry about delaying their formal education since they can apply for a one-year deferral from the college of their choice. Moreover, to reduce hindrance to students' gap year plans, deferrals for two-year obligatory military service are also granted. As reported by Harvard University (Admissions and Financial Aid, 2011), between 80 and 110 students defer their matriculation to the college each year.

Unlike some Western countries that encourage and take real action to help students to take a gap year, there is very little research done to examine the gap year application situation in Taiwan. The purpose of the present study is to examine FJU undergraduate students' views on taking a gap year. In the paper, the researcher investigated to what extent FJU undergraduates knew about a gap year, what they thought about it, and provided suggestions on ways that academic organizations can help promote the concept of a gap year.

The research was conducted through a survey and interviews with FJU undergraduates in order to collect their opinions toward gap year from different aspects. Therefore, the respondents were asked to answer three main research questions, followed by some subquestions:

1. What do FJU undergraduates know about taking a gap year?

(a): How do FJU undergraduates define a “gap year”?

(b): Have FJU undergraduates ever heard of a “gap year”? If yes, how did they know about it?

2. What are FJU undergraduates’ views on taking a gap year?

(a): How do FJU undergraduates think about taking a gap year?

(b): Would FJU undergraduates like to take a gap year?

3. How can high schools and colleges in Taiwan help promote the concept of taking a gap year?

The data were collected from online survey and interviews. The respondents were all FJU undergraduate students. Questionnaires were distributed on Facebook, and the sampling strategies used to conduct the survey were convenience sampling and snowball sampling. The interviewees were all respondents who volunteered to take part in the interview.

The questionnaire first required students to fill out their personal information in order to for the researcher to make sure that the respondents were all FJU undergraduate students. The questionnaire was divided into five parts, including the respondents’ personal information, their knowledge on taking a gap year, their views on taking a gap year, their experience in taking a gap year, and their willingness to take part in an interview. Section One required the respondents to fill out their gender and major. Before the respondents moved on to Section Two, they were asked to try their best to define a “gap year”. Section Two investigated if the

respondents have heard of gap year before, and if yes, they were asked to answer how they knew about it. Section Three offered a definition of a gap year and examined the reasons why the respondents consider a gap year experience would or would not benefit students. Also, the respondents were asked to fill out the reasons why they would or would not like to take part in a gap year themselves. Section Four investigated whether the respondents felt that there were too little information they received about a gap year, and how they would like to suggest the academic organizations in Taiwan to provide more information on a gap year. Moreover, the respondents were asked to provide the reasons why taking a gap year is not common in Taiwan. Section Five simply asked the respondents to leave their names and phone numbers if they were willing to take part in an interview. The complete questionnaire is included in the appendix. The interview questions were extensions of the questionnaire, with the purpose of helping the researcher to collect more detailed and elaborated responses from the respondents. The interview was conducted face-to-face between the interviewees and the researcher at Fu-Jen University, and the interviewees were free to express as many opinions as they wanted.

The survey collected 40 valid questionnaires and responses from 5 interviewees. After analyzing the data, the researcher came up with some findings. First, as the researcher asked the respondents to define a gap year at the very beginning of the questionnaire, it turned out that only 6 out of the 40 respondents expressed that they had no idea about what it meant. As for the other students who tried to explain the term, the most common responses about a gap year are:

- It is a period of time when one takes a year off from formal education.
- It involves traveling, voluntary work, internship, and part time jobs.

- The purpose of taking a gap year is to explore and fulfill oneself.

Only 2 responses were a combination of three of the ideas listed above, and the majority merely pointed out one of the three notions above. On the other hand, few of them gave vague explanations that were not so related to a gap year. Therefore, the researcher found out that although most of the answers were not complete explanations, the majority of the students have some basic ideas about a gap year.

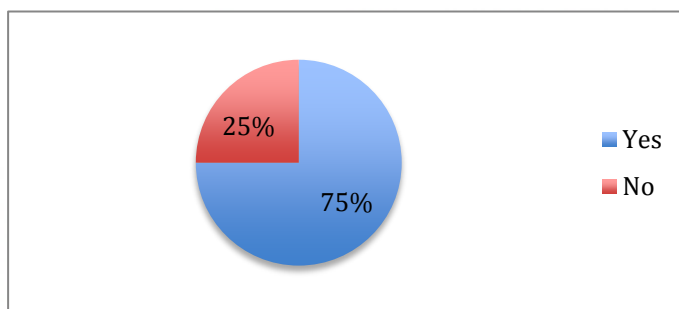


Fig.1 Have you ever heard of a “gap year”?

Fig.1 indicates that 75% of the respondents had heard of a gap year before, and it is shown in Fig.2 that most of them got the information on gap year from friends and the media, and the least of them got the information from school.

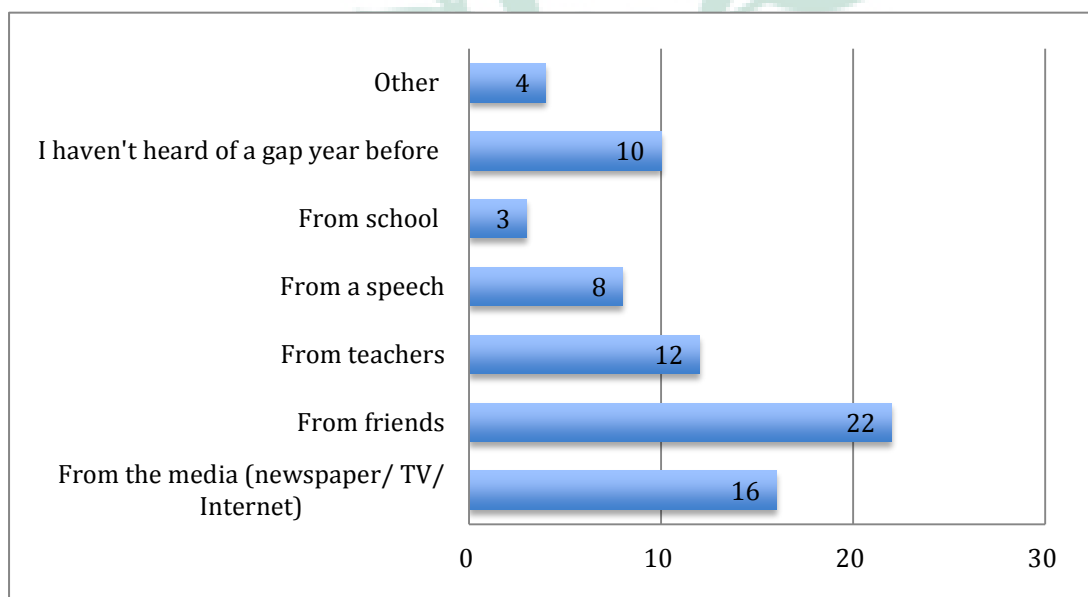


Fig.2 How did you know about a gap year? (Multiple choices)

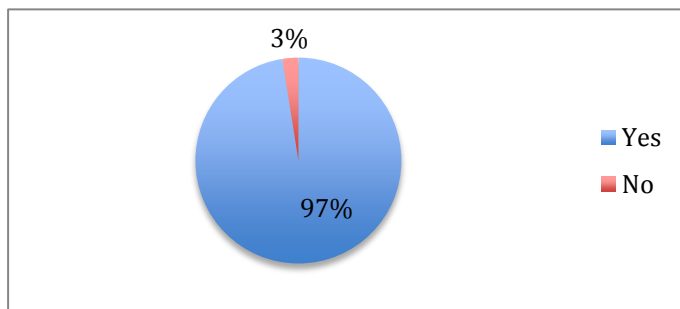


Fig.3 Do you think taking a gap year may benefit students in some particular ways?

According to Fig.3, 97% respondents suggested that taking a gap year may benefit students in some ways. The most common reasons are:

- Exploration of life: “A gap year helps students to explore their interests and learn more about themselves, so they can have a clearer picture of the future.”
- Experience: “What students do in their gap years provides them more experience outside of school, which helps them to become more mature and independent.”
- Reflections of life: “It allows students to take a break from school, and think about what they really want in their lives.”
- Knowing more about the world: “It helps students to gain more understanding of the world and experience cultural differences.”
- Different interests cultivation: “It provides a period of time for students to cultivate their hobbies and all things they are interested in and curious about, so they can have better ideas toward their future.”

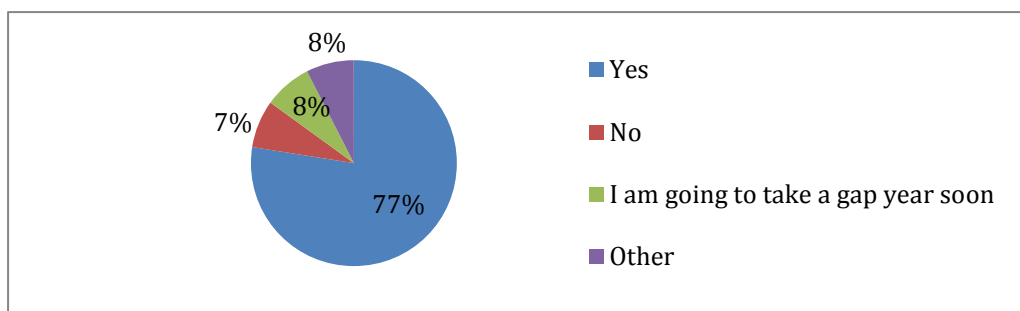


Fig. 4 Would you like to take a gap year?

Although there are 97% of students who consider taking a gap year benefits students, the percentage of respondents' willingness to take a gap year is lower. As shown in Fig.4, there are 77% of them who want to take a gap year, and 8% of them who do not want to take a gap year. Also, there are 8 % of them who are going to take a gap year soon. For those who would like to take a gap year themselves, there are some similar reasons:

- Experience: "I want to gain more experience and know myself better, so I can plan for my future."
- Explore: "I'm not really interested in what I'm learning at school. I think it might be easier for me to explore my interests when I am abroad alone since I will be exposed under various new stuffs."
- Take a break: "It would be nice if I could take a break before entering the next stage of life."
- Travel: "I want to travel around the world before I'm constrained by too many responsibilities."

As for those who do not want to take a gap year themselves, a few reasons are:

- "I already have a clear idea of my future."
- "My family doesn't support me since they don't want to spend money for me to take a gap year."
- "I don't think it's suitable for me since I don't prefer to plan things myself. I'm pessimistic that taking a gap year will help me know my life goal better. It will only defer the time I get my job."

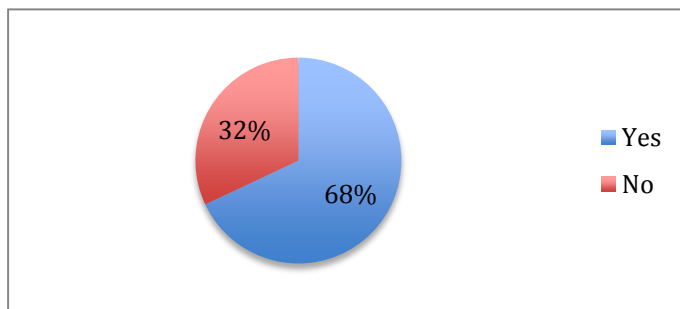


Fig. 5 Do you think you are lack of the information of taking a gap year?

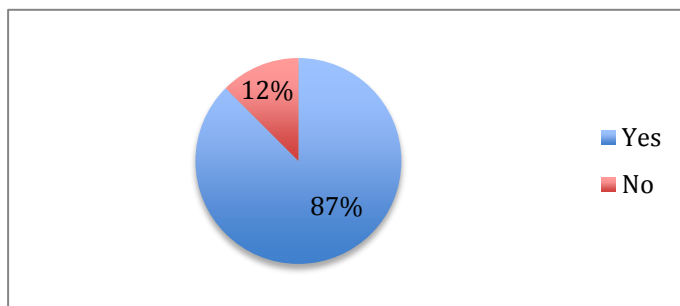


Fig. 6 Do you think universities or any academic organizations should provide students with more information on taking a gap year?

Fig. 5 shows that 68% of the respondents think that they are lack of the information on gap year. Also, as shown in Fig.6, 87% of the respondents think that academic organizations should provide more information on gap year. Suggestions that the respondents offer to help the academic organizations to improve include “inviting people who had a gap year experience to give speeches”, “setting up websites that offer information on gap year”, “encouraging students to take a gap year in the acceptance letters”, “sending emails and posting some posters on campus to spread the information”, and “having the professors talk about it in classes”.

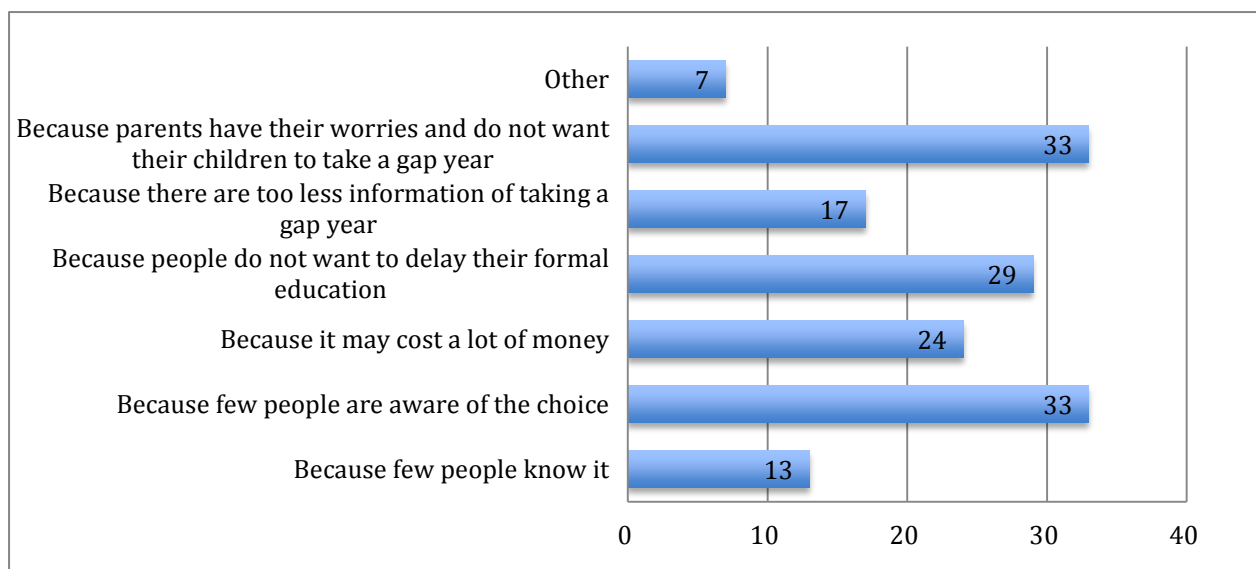


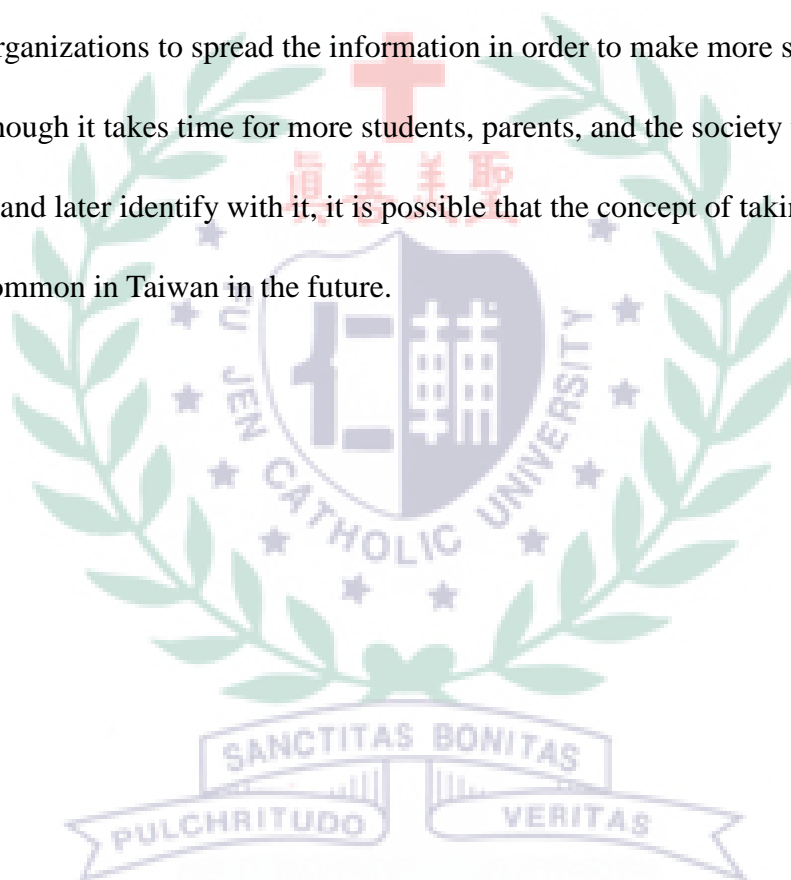
Fig.7 Based on the current situation in Taiwan, taking a gap year is not popular among college students. Why do you think taking a gap year is not common for students in Taiwan? (Multiple choices)

According to Fig.7, the three major reasons that respondents think that taking a gap year is not common in Taiwan is because few people are aware of the choice, students' parents have their concerns and do not want their children to take a gap year, and people do not want to delay their formal education.

In fact, it turns out that the respondents' motivations to take a gap year correspond with what O'Shea mentioned in his book that "gap year reflected disenchantment with the school system" as lots of respondents suggested that they feel detached from practical things and the real world that what they had learned from school does not satisfy them. Therefore, the main reasons that gap year is uncommon in Taiwan is not because students do not value it. Instead, it is because most of the students are not aware of the choice. On the other hand, students in countries where gap year has long been a tradition consult those who have the gap year experience for advices (Haigler and Nelson). While students in Taiwan have no model to refer to, they are worried about whether their parents will support them, whether they have enough money, and whether they can plan their time well. As one of the interviewees stated,

“taking a gap year is not normal here in Taiwan, and lots of people don’t value informal education like a gap year. They don’t know the advantages of it, let alone having their children to do so.” Also, another interviewee reported, “I’m worried that I cannot plan my time well. In addition, since it will cost me a lot of money, I feel like I really need to ponder over lots of things before I discuss with my parents.”

Therefore, as most of the respondents value the idea of taking a gap year, it is important for academic organizations to spread the information in order to make more students aware of the choice. Although it takes time for more students, parents, and the society to know more about gap year and later identify with it, it is possible that the concept of taking a gap year will be more common in Taiwan in the future.



Works Cited

Haigler, Karl, Rae Nelson. "The Gap-Year Advantage: Helping Your Child Benefit from Time Off Before or During College." London: *Macmillan*, 2005. Print.

King, Andrew. "Minding the gap? Young people's accounts of taking a Gap Year as a form of identity work in higher education." *Journal of Youth Studies* 14.3 (2011): 341-357. Print.

O'Shea, Joseph. "Gap Year: How Delaying College Changes People in Ways the World Needs." Baltimore: JHU Press, 2013. Print.

"Should I Take Time Off?" *Harvard College, Admissions and Financial Aid* N.p., 2011. Web. 24 May 2015.

<<https://college.harvard.edu/admissions/preparing-college/should-i-take-time>>.

"Why Gap Year?" USA Gap Year Fairs N.p., 2014. Web. 24 May 2015.

<<http://usagapyearfairs.org/about-us/why-gap-year/>>.

Woodcock, Andrew. "Government gap-year funding for graduates." *The Independent*.

Independent. 1 Aug. 2009. Web. 24 May 2015.



Appendix

Topic: FJU Undergraduate Students' Views on Taking a Gap Year

Hello, I am an English major at Fu Jen Catholic University. I am currently working on my Research Paper. The topic is FJU undergraduate students' views on taking a gap year. I will greatly appreciate it if you could fill out this survey. Your responses will be used only for this research, and your personal information will be kept confidential. Thank you for your time.

Survey:

1. Are you a FJU undergraduate student?
 - Yes (continue the questionnaire)
 - No (This is the end of the survey. Thank you for your time.)

Section I: Personal information

1. Gender

- Male
- Female

2. What is your major? _____

3. There is a term called “gap year.” Based on your understanding, what can this term possibly mean? Try your best to explain what you think the term is. However, if you don't know what this term is, you can simply write “I don't know.”

Section II- Knowledge on taking a gap year

A gap year is a period of time when students take a break from formal education. Those who take a gap year often go traveling, volunteering, interning, and working, typically far away from home or abroad. A gap year can last from a few months up to a year, and it is often taken after high school education and before university, or during the university years. Taking a gap year has a long tradition in Europe; it's very common for students to do so. Also, in the U.S. the popularity of Gap Year is growing at an exponential rate. Some of these universities even openly encourage students to take a Gap Year in their acceptance letters.

1. Have you ever heard of a “gap year”?
 - Yes (continue to question 2)
 - No (continue to part III)

2. How did you know about it? (Choose all that apply)
 - From the media (newspaper/ TV/ Internet)
 - From friends
 - From teachers
 - From a speech
 - From school’s information
 - Other: _____

Section III. Students’ views on taking a gap year

1. Do you think taking a gap year may benefit students in some particular ways?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Please explain the reasons why you think taking a gap year benefits/ does not benefit students.

3. Would you like to take a gap year? Why?
 - Yes
 - No

4. Please explain the reasons why you want/do not want to take a gap year.

Section IV. Students’ information on taking a gap year

1. Do you think you are lack of the information of taking a gap year?
 - Yes
 - No

2. Do you think universities or any academic organizations should provide students with more information on taking a gap year?

Yes. Explain how: _____

No. Explain: _____

3. Based on the current situation in Taiwan, taking a gap year is not popular among college students. Why do you think taking a gap year is not common for students in Taiwan?

(Choose all that apply)

- Because few people know it
- Because few people are aware of the choice
- Because it's not common, people somehow have some concerns
- Because it may cost a lot of money
- Because people do not want to delay their formal education
- Because there are too less information of taking a gap year
- Because parents have their worries and do not want their children to take a gap year
- Other: _____

Section IV:

1. Would you like to take part in an interview? (Your identity will be kept confidential.)

Yes

Name: _____

Phone number: _____

No

Interview questions:

1. Have you ever considered taking a gap year yourself? If yes, what is the main reason that stops you from taking a gap year?
2. Why do you think taking a gap year is not common for students in Taiwan?
3. The result of the questionnaire shows that the respondents would like to suggest that academic organizations “invite people who had a gap year experience to give speeches”, “set up websites that offer information on gap year”, “encourage students to take a gap year in the acceptance letters”, “send emails and posting some posters on campus to spread the information”, and “have the professors talk about it in classes” in order to provide students with more information on taking a gap year. Among all these suggestions, which one would you recommend most? Why?