



African Leadership Academy
Developing the next generation of African leaders

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DECIDING YOUR NEXT STEP: UNIVERSITY, GAP YEAR, INTERNSHIP...?

There are many ways to aspire to and achieve a successful career and life in Africa. Many options will be available to a student who graduates from African Leadership Academy with strong grades and good involvement in a range of extracurricular activities. Proceeding immediately to undergraduate education is just one path to follow. Rather than simply going along with the crowd, we encourage students and families to carefully consider and discuss several next-step options, so that each student carries on in the direction that will best lead to happiness and success.

An important question to ask, consider, and answer honestly is: Am I ready for university? Some students come to ALA at a younger age than their peers. Some feel they would benefit from some more time to develop their academic strengths and fill in gaps in their education before university. Another important question is, Do I want to study further? Some might want to expand their extracurricular portfolio and gain some hands-on work experience in a particular field, instead. Each adolescent develops and matures at his or her own pace, and should not be rushed to take steps for which they feel under-prepared. Any of these students might be a good candidate for a gap year, or year of further preparation through an internship or other professional exploration before university.

The following are wonderful options to consider if you need more time before university study:

Academic Gap Year: Students who are younger than their peers, or who would benefit from an additional year of academic preparation before university (for example, to continue to improve their skills in English, if this is a new language for them) should consider enrolling for a gap year at one of ALAs institutions. The US, Canada and the UK have a number of very competitive, highly regarded boarding schools that enrol international students (often with full financial aid) to complete an extra year of high school. During this year students can polish their academic English, augment any weaknesses in their academic or extracurricular portfolio, and explore themselves, their interests, and their university opportunities. Students who complete a gap year before university often are *more competitive applicants* after the experience. ALA has built relationships with a number of top US and UK boarding schools and the university counselling and career office is fully equipped to assist those students who want to apply for a gap year.

Extracurricular Gap Year: Students who have a strong academic portfolio, but who have had less involvement in extracurricular activities may have a less competitive application. Some may feel that, before committing to a particular course of university study, they want to gain some hands-on work experience in that field. Others may want to take some time away from academics to explore a new country or community. Any of these will want to explore an extracurricular gap year. There are a number of programs that offer the chance to do community service work in various parts of Africa/the world. Or, perhaps an internship with a hospital, a bank, a law firm, a non-profit organization, a government office, etc. etc. might be a valuable experience. Again, the ALA counselling and career office will work with any student interested in securing an extracurricular gap year opportunity.



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Again, there are many different paths to success, and many different ways to approach the process of pursuing higher education. It is crucial that students, families, and mentors keep an open mind and offer support as the student explores various opportunities and identifies that which is most appropriate for fruitful development.