

Episode 10

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SPEAKERS

Moira McCullough, Marion Taylor

M Moira McCullough 00:00

Welcome to the College Scoops podcast. I'm your host, Moira McCullough. And today we are talking with Marian Taylor, founder of Taylor the Gap. Marian will share her insights as to how to choose a gap year program. That's the right fit for you.

M Marion Taylor 00:14

I really try to dismiss the notion as a gap year off, because it's really a year on for students really to finally be free of all the obligations and commitments.

M Moira McCullough 00:33

This is the College Scoops podcast and I'm your host Moira McCullough, we focus on everything college related from the admissions process to where to eat, stay and explore on and run campuses. Our guests include founders, educators, authors and experts in the college space. Join us as these experts share their knowledge, experiences and lessons learned to help you have stress free, informative and tasty college journeys. Whether it's your first or last child to go to college, or you're just interested in going to a college town for a game or male. We've got you covered. If you haven't already, please subscribe to the College Scoops podcast to get the inside scoops and everything college related and leave us a review. Thanks to all of our sponsors partners in the entire College Scoops

Ambassador team for helping us bring valuable content to our community. If you would like to support college scoops as a sponsor, please head over to patreon@patreon.com slash college scoops and sign up as a sustaining listener, insider or Deluxe sponsor. We have exclusive benefits for our members free ebooks and even a College Scoops care package. Born and raised in Colorado, Marian Taylor is married and the mother of four children, ranging in ages from 23 to 32, who all grew from the personal gap experiences, or parenting perspective of four Gappers and 35 years of social work experience with knowledge profit organizations and foundations focused on families women and children, distinguishes her as one of the more qualified accredited gap year counselors in the industry. Marian collaborates with students of any age, orientation and economic background and believes in the importance of student engagement and ownership. When exploring gap options. She offers financial assistance to diverse students of all means. And she serves as the keynote speaker at gap year fairs across the country and high school and colleges in Colorado. Marian will join us today to provide some guidance and tips on how to choose a gap year program. That's the right fit for your student. Welcome, Marin, and thank you so much for joining us today.

 Marion Taylor 02:46
Thanks, Moira. I'm glad to be here.

 Moira McCullough 02:48
I remember talking with you just recently and just being mesmerized by the incredible, rich experience you've had throughout your years as you studied and traveled and worked overseas. I mean, I just was excited listening to you, I could have sat there for days. Listen to all that you've done. So could you please just provide us some insight as to who you are and how you founded Taylor the Gap?

 Marion Taylor 03:14
Well, thanks for having me. I appreciate it. I actually live in Boulder, Colorado. I grew up in Littleton. So I'm a native Colorado one. And I am owner and founder of a small business just run by me myself. And I called Taylor the Gap. So it's a small gap year consulting business. And I established this about 10 years ago. Prior to that I had worked for about 30 years as a social worker. I have a master's in social work, which actually has come into play in working with many of the families sort of as a third party facilitator between the parents and the students. I'm married, I have four children, they're all older ages 32 to 23. And all of them had a gap experience of some sort ranging from interning to working for a

full year to Traveling to volunteering. So they all did a number of different things. And then I myself way, way, way back in the Medieval Ages in 1974 took a gap year prior to gap years even being a movement or even having a label. I took a gap year before I went to college because I was really burned out, I really needed a break and worked really, really hard to get into college. It had been very academic. And so I decided to go to the University of Grenoble, in part based on my passion and interest in learning French, and learning to speak it. And also because I'm from Colorado, skien. Grenoble is surrounded by the Alps and it's beautiful. And then also my love for travel. So combine those three and then after college, I use my French because I joined the Peace Corps and served in French speaking Senegal, which was formerly a French colony. So I use my French in order to learn the local dialect. I served in a rural village about 16 hours from the capital of about a population of 1000 and spent three years in a rural development program. So that was a gap experience in and of itself as well. And then over the course of my adult life, I have learned Spanish in two different language program, shorter term, one in Antigua, Guatemala, and one in Quinta, Ecuador. And then I have continued to volunteer in Moshi, Tanzania in essene. Rwanda visited a small village up in Nepal. And then I put myself in an adult gap program just last March, a year ago in the sacred valley of Peru, which was really interesting. And then finally, I'm an accredited gap your advisor through the gap year Association, which takes a number of years, number of clients and it's a lot of hard work you really evaluated you go through a very rigorous review. And I also am a proud member of the board of directors of the gap your association

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Moira McCullough 05:59

It's interesting when you talk about the gap year because I did not go on a gap year. But I did go on a semester abroad, which at the time for me was I was the oldest and my parents had not done that. And it was frightening. But I was so excited. And if I could go back and change something, I think I probably would have tried to fit in that gap year, but then I laugh because I did go overseas and live overseas for eight years when my husband and I were just married. And I thought, well, at least that was my gap programming experience. And unfortunately, I did not come across being fluent in French like you did. You have so much experience. It's like where do you even start with all that, but you mentioned the gap year Association, and you know, you're on the board of that board of directors. So can you tell us a little bit about that aspect because as people start to look at gap year programs, and gap your counselors and companies, can you delve into that a little bit and just tell me the process because that's a important for parents to know.

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Marion Taylor 07:01

Absolutely. The Gap Year association is run by Ethan Knight. He's the executive director.

He lives in Portland, Oregon. He started at about almost 10 years ago, I believe around the same time I started out. And it really is this vital resource for anyone who's a student, a parent college program. It is the go to in terms of information. He has collected data and statistics as to the benefits of a gap year. There's a whole link for the list of colleges and 50 states as to what the college department policies are. In addition, he has a list of all the non accredited as well as accredited gap year programs, as well as gap year advisors as well as colleges. And I always recommend people take a look at that. It's just this terrific resource for anyone kind of entering the gap year field, either as a form of work or who are just taking again happier,

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Moira McCullough 08:00

Perfect. So we will definitely include that in our notes, because as you said, it's knowing where to go to find the resources and information to assist families and students as they start this journey. Perfect. Thank you for that. With everything going on and the reopening of colleges, I hear and I know because I have two college students and a rising senior in high school, when we were talking about our colleges opening if there are reopening, and if not, what can we do go on a gap here? Can you walk us through and help us? Where do you start? And what would you recommend looking at copier programs, companies and counselors and how to go about that for families and students?

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Marion Taylor 08:47

So that's a pretty broad question and it got to write down a little bit. I always start with students and ask them has their sibling taken a gap year or their cousin or friend what Do they already know what ideas did they have in mind? And also, have they done any preliminary research? Have they googled gap year when 1 million ideas and programs come up. So from there, I build on what they've already, you know, dabbled into or what their parents might say, or perhaps they took a gap year. And then I really focus in on what their intention is, I really try to dismiss the notion as a gap year off, because it's really a year on for students really to finally be free of all the obligations and commitments both you and I know as mothers how busy our students are in high school with all the clubs and homework and college applications and all the commitments that they finally can take this year to really be more proactive about their learning to kind of take charge, whether it be an internship or volunteer. And at the same time, also reflect maybe journal maybe sketch, maybe blog. They can kind of really think about what they're doing because they haven't had time in high school to be able to do that. And then from there, I really focus in on what their interests and their passions are, as well as take into account their budget and talking with their parents if they are not funding it

themselves, what are their boundaries? And do they plan to work to earn money to be part of their gap year? Is it going to be both summers on either side of their gap year? Or do they need to carve out time within their gap year to earn money, I oftentimes have students come home in December and they work retail December, January, kind of an off months and then go out again in the winter spring. And then I really asked them after perhaps if they have not developed goals on themselves. I'll work with them to develop those goals. But I asked them, Do they want a structured gap program? Do they want more freedom? Do they want to be more independent? Do they want to be with a cohort of their peers, most 17-18 and 19 year olds really want to be with their peers? That is just a high need of theirs? And do they want to do a seven to nine month program over the span of a full academic year? Or do they want to break it up into shorter term gap experiences something in the fall, perhaps, maybe something shorter in the winter, and then something in the spring that they can piece together? And then finally, I really hone in on what their areas of interests are. Are they help oriented? They really want to volunteer or do something with community service? Do they really have this desire to learn Italian? Do they really want to dabble in a career and maybe intern and kind of dip their toe in the water to see if they really want to go into engineering? Or do they want to work for a year to earn money towards college? So those are some of the preliminary questions I asked them. The Gap Year Association has been hosting a weekly forum every week. And in that forum, our gap year providers or gap year advisors, oftentimes College higher ed representatives, as well as maybe some specialists like risk mitigation specialists or insurance specialists. So they can talk to us now during this time at COVID-19. Because every day it seems to be shifting. And we're all trying to kind of keep abreast of all the different changes, who's opening up their borders, who is not accepting American students. And I hand it to these gap year programs, they are really working hard to kind of keep in tune with CDC, their own state guidelines, the country of destinations. Paramount is the importance of not bringing in COVID to those host country nationals, the NGOs, the partnerships that they have long standing with these gap year providers is super important that we don't infect them. So we're trying to be very, very sensitive to them. And I hand it to those gap programs. They are now coming up with domestic options. They've been very, very creative. So if they can't offer The International Programs they are offering domestic ones and perhaps having a later start or an earlier finish, or they're condensing it. Or if they are hoping to run internationally, perhaps they are not crossing borders. So it becomes one country. So they are working very, very hard to kind of shift and be flexible as this virus changes.

 Moira McCullough 13:21

A couple comments on that front in terms of when you first started to explore that question in terms of talking with students. My oldest just went on a gap year. And it was

interesting when we started the discussion, as you said, you're going through and identifying the self reflection, like what is it you're looking to accomplish? And as a parent, I found myself almost injecting what I thought he wanted to accomplish. And I quickly learned that Oh, stop and listen. A gap year as you said, you can have either a glorified trip that's your business being taken from one experience to another which works Well for students, but it was very interesting to learn what my son really wanted to get out of that program. And when it came down to studying in Milan, or going to University of Sydney and Australia, he was more comfortable with the Australia option. Because he was working, he decided he wanted to work in an internship and that program offered him. So you're right. There's a lot of questions that parents and students need to ask themselves and to delve into.

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Marion Taylor 14:28

And I totally agree with that. I think it's really helpful if a gap advisor has some sort of understanding of family dynamics, it is really important to hear what the parents say they know their child best. And for them to share their hopes and needs. Safety usually is number one, a meaningful experience is number two, and not breaking the bank is usually number three. And I have to take all that into account. But also this is the child's gap experience. And so it's super important. To honor that, but also take into account the parents wishes, oftentimes they are the ones paying for it, or helping to pay for it. And so it's a tricky balance between the two. But if I can combine and hear both of them and honor both those wishes, and what they're saying, that is really the key.

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Moira McCullough 15:21

Well, it is. And to your point, I knew when talking with our son in terms of setting expectations, just as you would a college, what are you looking for in a college? What is it that you want to get out of it? Here's the financial considerations. And as a parent, here's what we're willing boundaries are guidelines that we'd like you to work within. And then from there, let's come up with the program. That's the right fit, especially given what just went on last in the spring if we had not listened and my son had ended up at a place that he was not comfortable at that he did not really have the desire to succeed there. Given what happened With coming home earlier and all of that it could have turned into a situation that didn't end as well as it did. So the student is driving this, right. As I say, as a parent as and you know, with multiple kids, it's like you have to take the time to listen, ask the questions, but don't immediately inject your answers into those. As tempting as that is, it's so tempting. So in terms of sitting and meeting with the students first and kind of getting them to dig in and reflect on where they want to go is the first step. What else

should they be asking or what questions should they be considering when looking at a gap year?

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Marion Taylor 16:41

So if we were to shift that and just to ask what kind of gap program might be the right fit for them? I have a whole newsletter that's in my winter 2018 archive newsletter on Taylor the Gap website called "Guidelines for Choosing the Right Gap Program" and it's pretty lengthy but to start summarize the key points in that I would have a student really look at the length of the program do they want to do short term, some have never traveled before. And so they they're only comfortable with maybe four weeks, I usually recommend four weeks as a minimum, if you're barely arrived and kind of going through the cross cultural changes and differences and adjusting. So I recommend at least four weeks, but some might be down for doing three months a structured get program three months, and the really hard and brave might want to sign on for a global gap year program for nine months. So length is super important to double check about accreditation, I think that is important because gappiya programs that are accredited have been through two years of rigorous review, to really take a look at all the standards, you know, in terms of the training of the staff in terms of risk mitigation, couldn't be more important and we saw that really clearly this spring with COVID. So those are really important and even if it's a program is not accredited It doesn't mean that they're bad. It's just that they might be working towards it. It might be worth asking about that. But I think it gives them a leg up in terms of credibility. I would also look at the mission, the philosophy, are there program reviews readily available? Are they recent? Because I think you can tell a lot by a student testimonial or a parent testimonial. And I know for parents, that's really, really important. What did they really think? And usually they're very honest. And then, you know, is the program experiential? Is it more hands on? Is that the type of learner your student is? Or if she or he more academic, they really want to be in a university setting or they want to be in a classroom or a language lab, something like that. Where does your child fit in? What components are there in the program? Do they want to do a homestay? Are they uncomfortable doing a homestay? Is there a community service component? Is there a travel component, many students are very clear, they just want to be focused in one place in one country in one culture for three months, and they don't want to travel, whereas another might want to see four countries in Southeast Asia over that same timeframe. Is there a language program involved? Is there a cultural immersion program? Are there additional excursions the Taj Mahal, Machu Picchu or Angkor Wat as these wonderful additions that they can see and travel to? Is the program more travel oriented? I think it's important just to measure the student's maturity, have they had some prior travel experience, whether it be with a family with a friend backpacking away at camp on their own, they're independent, or do they really need that structure and that supervision and

oftentimes that's where parents input can be really helpful. The child may not see that they need it, but the parents are kind of certain because they know their child best that Johnny really would do better this first instance With some structure and supervision with the program leader, and then I would take a look at the quality of the partnerships with the ongoing community service programs on the ground. Are they already sustainable? Or are they dependent on the American gap students coming in? Who are volunteering? I think it's really important and we are learning this now. Those programs that are dependent on American students, well, what have they had to do this this last spring and fall if those students aren't there? So I really make sure that those programs are ongoing before the students come in and work alongside shoulder to shoulder and not dependent on those American students so that they're we're not doing more harm than good. I think that's really, really important.

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Moira McCullough 20:44

That is unbelievably important. And one that as a new parent, you may not think to ask because it has never been really an issue. Thinking back to when I went and I know so many years ago, but this has evolved and changed so much. I mean, When I went, it was like, sure I want to go to that program. My school didn't have the study abroad program. So I went with a different University of Wisconsin Madison, I ended up that my homestay family. And that was it. And then it just kind of was more organic. And so much has changed now, but actually it goes back to those programs still are available, where, to your point? Are you leaving every single weekend to travel to different countries? Right. That's great. But if that's not what you want,

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Marion Taylor 21:29

you think along with that, it's really important to take a look at the fees. Do they have a clear breakdown of the costs? Where are they going to homestay to travel? Do they offer financial aid? Perhaps if they don't actually have money in a fund? They will help you write a grant proposal or help you come up with creative ideas for raising money? Are they college credit bearing, and can you use your 529 savings funds? They must be college accredited to do that, but that's another question to ask. And then I think a very important component that oftentimes gets overlooked is do they have a reentry component at the end before the students are coming home, I really believe that transition is important. And I think they can't just have the child return and then you're on your own there. But you know, they need to prepare them before they come back. They need to put in plan, perhaps a communication correspondence between the different group members, because oftentimes, that's their lifeline. When they come back, they have changed, their families may not have changed, their friends might not have changed. So

oftentimes, that's the one strong support system. And so I think it's really important that that be in place. And I offer transition services because I really believe there's a reverse culture shock when you come back for it, and then I talked a little bit about safety that is absolutely paramount. When parents are talking to programs, ask them how they handled cobit what was their evacuation plan? Because I think that's also very telling. And along those lines, what's their insurance policy regarding evacuation. How do they mitigate risk? And then also ask about staff, I think, what is their experience? What are their qualifications? What is their age? What is their training? What's the staff turnover? And what's the ratio of staff to students? I think those are all really important questions.

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Moira McCullough 23:21

When you talk about the re entry, that is something that I think is an afterthought until you go through it, right. So that is something I know that didn't exist. But with my son not just coming home, is that something when you talk about the re entry, I know you just mentioned that you provide that type of service. But who do you ask for? Is that the school typically that would run that program? Is it the program itself that would offer that opportunity to have a reentry group session?

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Marion Taylor 23:51

So it depends if they were on a study abroad program, for example, the spring, they may have needed to carry on those courses. In order to get the college credit, I had a couple clients that were having to get up at three and four in the morning, in order to take those classes. They weren't pre recorded. And so there was very little thought about that. And I do believe it's up to the program, whether they'd be study abroad or gap program provider, they should be doing something on the about three weeks before those students come home, start talking about re entry start talking about closing out or closure within the group. And then gap advisors, I think, need to pick if they've had a gap advisors, I think they need to pick that up. I stayed with my students that came back after being evacuated for about a month, did weekly online zoom calls just to check in how are you doing? How are you adjusting? Because there was definitely process that they went through of disappointment, having to kind of reset their goals. Okay, now, what if they didn't have classes that they were continuing? And I think that's really, really important. One thing that the gap year Association and the alumni committee has been working on is trying to set up an established gap clubs on college campuses. If a gap your student is heading on to college, and not everyone is they might be working, they might be doing an internship, whatever they're doing, more and more colleges are setting up gap clubs. So there might be a group of people that have been there done that knows how that feels,

who can help them in the readjusting when they get to college, we are really trying to establish those more and more, but there are some already at some colleges. I personally am going to try to work with cu here locally. I have a few gaps alone, and I think we can get that going. So the entering freshmen have a group that they can join up with the beginning.

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Moira McCullough 25:46

I think that's so important. It's like the same I go to the college process. When you're visiting a college campus. You try to connect with the current students. And that's when you pull them aside and say lessons learned. What do you wish you knew at freshman orientation? What do you wish you knew You know, going into sophomore year, and that is so valuable that communication that those mentorships for the gap year program would be invaluable. I know my son, the first thing he did when he came back was reached out to his three good friends who are all at different programs and they kind of met because they shared something as you said, that was not what they had expected. So many emotions coming through. You come home and you try to explain that to a fellow classmate or friend they can't possibly understand what you just experienced to no fault of theirs.

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Marion Taylor 26:35

Right. I should mention there's a Facebook group for gap you're alone. It's hosted by GAY so they should definitely look into that especially your son. And also there is a link called GapYearly.com it was started by a gap year student who's currently a senior at Stanford. And students can write up what they did over their gap year they can kind of describe their experiences they also can be interviewed for a video. So that's an outlet for them as well. So

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Moira McCullough 27:04

both of those are good resources. I think that's so important for kids because A, it's fresh in their minds. It's gonna help them with re entry, but it also will allow them an opportunity to help somebody else come in and link up with other gap alum, right? It's an instant friend group, that kind of stories as you and I did when we first got on the phone, talking about those stories, trying to get that coffee at a blotch array. And the stories are trying to work with your host family and all those stories that are so rich and that you can't wait to tell somebody or somebody you mentioned to with the lessons learned. There's so much and you're saying that GMA has done a lot to kind of like, sit back and look at Okay, what just

happened? How can we continue to provide and help our members and students with information going forward? Because it's almost like this is like the new normal kind of, as you said, risk mitigation. Like when did I ever think about that? To be honest, when I sent my son just in January, I did not think about that. How do you handle it? And I know talking with a couple parents, it was very interesting. I never even had thought about this as a result of that. If the semester was cut short, could they fulfill those credits for that semester? And when you were mentioning about taking the classes at three and four in the morning, that was my son taking classes, and I thought, right? Can't you just tell them that the time difference? It's, it's one o'clock in the morning for that exam. But again, didn't think to ask those questions. So all valuable information that between the resources that you're mentioned, which we'll put on the show notes, valuable to kind of look at what students are doing, how companies are changing and how gap your consultants like yourself are quickly incorporating the lessons learned to help students and families going forward. If you had advice for students, I think one of the things you mentioned early on, which I think is so important is identifying your goals and being in charge of the process. my three kids went On a high school semester abroad, and everyone thought it was so easy, and I'm thinking it was one of the hardest things that they ever experienced. What would you say to a student thinking about this and just, if you had a couple tips,

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Marion Taylor 29:17

I would say, take the risk, be different from your peers stray from your pack of friends. I know FOMO is real and there is terror in leaving your group and what is familiar and what is known. But I guarantee that once you say yes to a gap experience of some sort, your life will be forever changed for the better. I'd recommend to get outside your comfort zone. Even if you cannot go international just get outside of your community. It certainly could be somewhere in America. America has wonderful programs all over the country. You could work for City Year teaching in inner city, but get out there. Be willing to take that risk to get uncomfortable. I think there's so many issues that are pressing globally as well as in the United States, homelessness, climate change, immigration, those are things that we really need to pay attention to. So I would say, definitely take the risk. Scary as that is anxiety provoking as that is, you will be so much better prepared to navigate college when you go in terms of making the social decisions in terms of really have a purpose and a focus about what you want to study what courses you want to take. I've never had a gap your student regretted ever. So that would be my advice.

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Moira McCullough 30:41

You mentioned again, with all the surge of calls you must be getting right now what's available, you know, without the international travel you've just mentioned think local too.

There are opportunities as you said to think local, learn local and volunteer local. So is that something that you're working with your current students now to say, you know, don't give it up. Let's just look at it in a different way.



Marion Taylor 31:07

Yes, I am kind of working on four different levels for different case scenarios. One, the worst case scenario is if we are restricted and have to shelter in again, at home. But within that there are lots of things that one can do virtually online. They can get their TEFL degree teaching English as a foreign language, they can get a skills workshop, Google certification, they can take a coding course, they can get international online badges. So there's lots of possibilities. You can also work if you have any sort of skills around website design. You can help women's program in Ghana or down in Cape Town but Peru. So there is that international exchange that can happen. So that's if we're sheltering in if we are lucky enough to kind of go outside our home and we're just statewide or citywide. There are so much that can be done locally, I have a whole list of community service programs that you can do United Way's in every single state in every single city. And there's lots of possibilities there. America has programs all over the country, in Colorado themselves, their contact tracing program for the summer associates now. So there's lots of programs this locally as well. And then if the third scenario, if we're lucky enough to be able to cross borders across states, if we're able to work all across America, there are wilderness programs, environmental programs, and marine conservation programs. You can do dance, theater, art, comedy writing, there are so many possibilities, you know, just within America, and to the international programs have come up with really strong robust domestic programs. So that's still an option. And then the fourth case scenario ideally is if we find out vaccine or if it magically disappears, the international borders will open up. We already seen that the Republic of Ireland is now accepting American students for the fall, however, they have to have a 14 day quarantine. So that is one bright glimmer of hope. New Zealand has no more cases at COVID. They may be opening up in January right now it's just between Australia and New Zealand. But there are glimmers of hope where international travel may resume. So those are the four different case scenarios. And I don't want people to get discouraged because there are lots and lots of options whether it be virtual, whether it be domestic or whether it be International. I have been talking to all my students who may be set on going to Nepal for the fall, I say okay, let's come up with a backup domestic option. And if maybe even plan see a virtual option so that they're all taken care of just so that they can be flexible and shift as COVID seems to shift.



Moira McCullough 33:57

Well I think that is the one thing that I have I've always kind of my life on, I have a plan A, but then I'm always not that I don't think that it's gonna happen. But I'm a planner. So I need to have Plan B and C in my back pocket, so that I can still get what I want out of life or out of that experience. And the only way to do that is to spend the time to provide those plans and have them well thought out, so that we'll be happy with either or

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Marion Taylor 34:26

that it's a time of uncertainty. So I try to provide my students as many choices that are clear that they can choose from when there's so much uncertainty. You know, they've had a hard senior spring term or they've had to be remote online. That is the last thing they really want to be doing again, so whether it be you know, at college or whether it be online for a gap experience, but there are very creative, robust good programs that people are developing. So I try to say you have some good choices here.

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Moira McCullough 34:58

Again, I go back to your Experience individually. And then the fact that you've had four children who have gone through a gap year program and continued in some way, shape or form, traveling in their lives. And now running and having the community that you have in the network that you have and your colleagues to really be able to shift in the manner that you have, as you said, everyone's in this together, any one's learning and it's changing every day. So keeping up with that, and being able to communicate that effectively is very important, right? Something that you're doing, if you had advice for parents,

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Marion Taylor 35:41

speaking from a parental perspective, as scary as it is to release them and let them soar, I would really strongly recommend to encourage your students to do it for whatever length of time that they're comfortable with. If it's small baby steps with a four week program on the front end just for the fall to kind of get their seat Legs underneath them, then let them try that out the growth that you will see over the course of their gap experience. That is my favorite part of working with students. They learn so much about themselves, whether it be within a cohort where their peers call them out on being late for the bus, or whatever it is, or perhaps the relationship with the program mentor in the group, or perhaps just by traveling by themselves, they have to rely on themselves and they gain so much confidence. And it usually really sets them up really well for college they are better able to navigate all those social decisions that will come at them. They are better able to study we have found there's a few studies that are out that say gap your students that have

taken a gap year graduate in four years versus the national which is six, and they have a higher GPA throughout their entire four years. So that's something really noteworthy they go to college with. Much more sense of a purpose. It may be that they didn't know they were interested in women's studies, or because of their cross cultural experience. They decide they want to take anthropology, or they spent time in Nepal. And now they want to take a course on Buddhism or international world religions. A lot of times doors are really opened up. So I really encourage parents to let them go.

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Moira McCullough 37:23

You said in terms of the maturity too, sometimes it's that level of maturity, the confidence, and then you throw in the fact that you're a more efficient or productive or you, you've learned how to learn kind of in a more effective way. And then I read something else, too, that people are happier in the professions that they've chosen because of that experience that they had. I don't know many 17 year olds that really know what they want to do. I did

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Marion Taylor 37:51

not, thank goodness. Because along those lines coming up to mind is when they have these gap experiences, they learn the skills skills, we call them power skills that you cannot necessarily teach. It's how to get along. So the interpersonal skills, how to be a team player, how to take initiative, how to collaborate, all those type of things are something that you can't necessarily teach in a classroom, but are learned by life and being out there and by experiences. And that is something that employers say is really lacking. And that students that come with that are much better off, they add more to the working industry, to the working field. And we have found that those soft skills are a real benefit that come out of gap experiences.

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Moira McCullough 38:41

Absolutely. I mean, the fact that you can go into a lecture hall or a professor and sit down in a class, whether it's 20 people or 100, and be able to provide the insight let's say that you had hiking through Nepal and working with, you know, the village, no one could teach that that's something that's coming from a fellow person You're a student who's sharing that information. What an incredibly valuable lesson that is a win win because the professors love that the person's discussion is enhancing the classroom discussion and bringing in their own life experiences and the students get to learn from their peers. So it's definitely a win win. Something that years ago, it was more of the perception of a gap year was more of Oh, maybe I didn't get into the school that I wanted. Or maybe I'm at a

loss I'm may not be a student or something like that. I think you had to kind of justify maybe why because the perception was something went wrong, and that's why you're doing it, which it's totally changed now and more and more everywhere you read, there are more articles out there and more schools that are encouraging it and also accepting some students on your condition right that you take a gap semester. I know many schools are doing that right now is



Marion Taylor 39:59

many college Just just include that in their acceptance letter, would you like to take a gap year? So I think they finally see the value add when students come that much more mature that much more focused as freshmen after their gap year.



Moira McCullough 40:15

Is there anything you wish you knew before you attended college?



Marion Taylor 40:19

I wish that I had not been so afraid to step outside my comfort zone. When I got to college and really explore courses like economics, terrified, like environmental science, I never stepped foot in that science building. Because I didn't think I was good at them or I had no interest. So I stayed very close to all the humanities languages, the English is the histories, because those felt safe to me. And I really regret that because I don't think my liberal arts education was as broad as it could be. And I think I would have had a better understanding of a lot of major issues that are going on today. So I myself should have stepped outside myself. comfort zone and kind of broaden my horizons a little bit at college. So that's one regret I have.



Moira McCullough 41:06

I keep on saying this every single person who comes on I'm always like, Oh, I think that's my new regret. I think it's so easy to reflect to look back now and just think there are so many things that we wish we had done. And that's what we've tried to instill in our kids too. And in our students in our business in terms of, you know, take risks and go outside of your comfort zone. Things will be okay as long as you put the work in.



Marion Taylor 41:30

One thing I did take away from my gap experience, though, was I went to a college way up pretty isolated in Vermont. I did get outside and volunteer in the community. College can be very insular and very, you can just stay on campus and just live your life there without really getting outside. But I think that was stemming from my gap experience. I was willing to at least get involved, whether it be politics or I've volunteered for Big Brother Big Sister program. There were a lot of different things that I did. And I'm proud of myself for that. But I don't think I would have done that had I not taken a gap experience, I think it prompted me a little bit to get outside.

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Moira McCullough 42:09

It puts you outside, as you said, outside of your comfort zone and your risk. And actually, you're not programmed with all these other things aren't as easy and accessible. So therefore, you really have to sit back and think, well, what is it that I want to do? And to your point, you meet people who all of a sudden just open up your eyes, and you're like, of course, why wouldn't I be volunteering and helping? Or I immediately came back and I was teaching reading to kindergarten students, you know, and sitting and reading and volunteering in Newark, New Jersey. That was something that I couldn't get enough of, because I thought it's an opportunity to give back and I love doing it. Mm hmm. Absolutely. You love seeing the smile on your students faces to when you know that they've just been awakened to something new. And that is something that as a parent as a teacher, it's priceless I think,

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Marion Taylor 42:57

in raising their awareness about what's bigger than them. What's bigger? You know, what are the bigger issues in our world, especially today?

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Moira McCullough 43:07

When my kids came back from their island school experience, the first thing we learned had to not have napkins all the time. So it served us very well for this current COVID-19 scenario, because when you're on an island, you don't have napkins, you don't use paper products. So it's all about sustainability. And then I'm judged on my cooking, and if there was any waste, do you really need that plastic water bottle? I mean, it's enlightening for everyone involved. Exactly. What is the biggest takeaway that you had on your gap year experience?

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Marion Taylor 43:42

So I think it comes from to during my three years living in a rural village of about 1000 people 16 hours from the capital. It was in the southern region of Senegal. I live with the Chiefs family in this compound. And he had four wives, one of the wives, this is To me and became a dear dear friend, she taught me all the local dialect every night sitting out under the palm trees on the mats, when it finally not wasn't so hot from that homestay experience to the recent one I had in Peru with a Peruvian family up in the Andes above 14,000 foot peaks. It was only for four days, but I came away really again saying, you know, human beings are human beings everywhere, and that we all have so much more in common than we realize we're all interconnected. You know, holding her baby because I had been a mother. We connected because we were mothers, my learning catch wha the basic greetings in order to talk to her mother who was you know, older who didn't speak any Spanish. We connected and she appreciated the fact that I was trying to speak her language, sharing a meal we all have to eat. So all Those things that we share in common, we're all human, we all have the same needs and desires. And if we could just forget about color race borders, if we could just transcend that I think that's the biggest takeaway. And I feel that students that take a gap experience, they oftentimes will learn that it's such an important lesson, especially now.

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Moira McCullough 45:21

I always say sitting down at the kitchen table, bringing people together to celebrate being together and to celebrate food. Food is a consistent theme. That's something it doesn't matter what language where you are. But that is something when you come together, it's breaking bread together, and you find the similarities more than the differences. Absolutely. And although this is we've been trying to help students and families, I didn't say what age the students would be. So I'm going to make sure that we can include your comments about the adult gap amps because I'm gonna ask for that for my birthday. Okay. happy to work with you. I've worked with adults also work with students that are post college that are trying to figure out Okay, next step,

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Marion Taylor 46:07

do I want to go into law and apply to law school? So maybe I'll do some internships? Do I want to go into engineering? So you know, I work a lot with students after college as well.

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Moira McCullough 46:18

So students is anyone who wants to learn and experience something? Yes, we'll help them

navigate and make sure they find the right fit for them, whatever that may be tailor it to their gap to their their desires, their passions, their interests. Yeah. Marion, thank you so much for joining us today.



Marion Taylor 46:37

Thank you.



Moira McCullough 46:41

Thank you, Marion for joining us and sharing your knowledge and insight on finding a gap program that will address your own specific needs and goals. Finding the right match takes time and energy, but as Marian pointed out from her own personal experiences and that of our students. There are so many benefits associated with taking a gap experience at any age. More colleges are encouraging a gap experience. The lessons learned and growth that a student gains is life transforming and all those travel as we know it has been restricted for the time being. gap consultants, companies and colleges are working hard to create opportunities whether it is virtually or locally for students to take advantage of in the fall. You can learn more about Marian on her website at Taylor the Gap.com or on Instagram and Facebook at Taylor the Gap. You can find all of our show notes and links to the helpful resources mentioned throughout our conversation on our website at CollegeScoops.com/podcasts. Please take a couple of minutes to rate review and subscribe to College Scoops. Thank you for listening to our College Scoops podcast. Our entire College Scoops team strives to make the college journey a little bit easier, less stressful, fun and tasty by sharing all this Inside scoops we have curated along the way. We would love to hear from you about topics to cover and your ideas and everything college related. Reach out to us at CollegeScoops.com or follow us on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook.