

Volunteer a year

Postponing college for a year to do volunteer work could be as valuable as a year of classes.

By Joseph O. Legaspi

You got into your first-choice college, and yet there is that nagging feeling in your stomach: Am I ready to commit to four (or more) years of studies? Am I sure about my major? Do I know what I want?

Ben Isaac had that nagging feeling after graduating high school in 1998. Deferring his freshman year at

Skidmore, he decided to join City Year (cityyear.org), which enables young people between the

ages of 17-24 to perform an entire year of full-time volunteer community services. Isaac, along with a team of his peers, facilitated workshops on domestic violence in Boston schools. They also spent afternoons at battered women shelters providing child-care and assistance to the women. "More importantly, we [were] projecting positive male and female role models," he added.

This fall, Isaac is an NYU sophomore majoring in religious studies and peace & global studies. He said his experiences with City Year have made him a better student: "I

"I am a lot more focused, more mature, with a different mind set in achieving my goals."

Related Links

For more volunteer opportunities, surf the following web sites: volunteermatch.org, U.S. Community Action Network (getinvolved.net), and helping.org. You can also go to various nonprofit organizations like the American Red Cross (redcross.org), United Way (unitedway.org), Habitat for Humanity (habitat.org), and Green Peace (greenpeace.org).

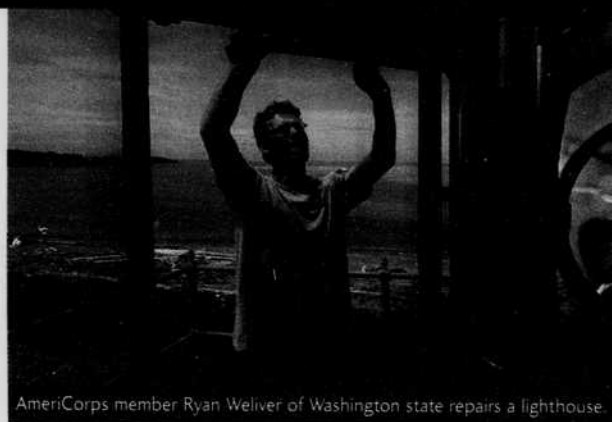
services and the environment. AmeriCorps members' services range from teaching elementary school students to assisting victims of crime and natural disaster. A modest living allowance and health coverage are provid-

ed to participants. Upon completion of a service year, members also receive a monetary education award, which can be used to pay off student loans or to finance college.

If you're struck with wanderlust, consider volunteering abroad. It's a great way to integrate with the local culture, and concurrently broaden your horizons. The Peace Corps (peacecorps.gov) is the largest organization of its kind. It's a two-year commitment, and participants tend to have degrees, so the competition is fierce. Other options include Global Service Corps (globalservicecorps.org), with volunteer opportunities in Costa Rica, Thailand and Kenya, and the AFS (American Field Services) Intercultural Program (afs.org), which places individuals in many countries. Both organizations have positions available in education, conservation and agriculture. For someone considering a medical career, the International Medical Volunteers Association (imva.org) has an on-line list of volunteer-seeking organizations, and a database of jobs.

But if you haven't decided whether to volunteer, work or study abroad, the following sites are excellent comprehensive resources for students and young nomads: International Study and Travel Center (istc.umn.edu), collegeboard.org, council-travel.com, iagora.com and studenttraveler.com. And save travel expenses by logging on to student-discounted sites like statravel.com and travel-store.com.

If nothing particular tickles your fancy, ride the wind. Missouri, feeling lackadaisical after her second year of college, set off on a road trip, winding up in Espanola, New Mexico, where she worked as a waitress. Then she jetted to Greece and entered an arts program on the island of Paros. Broke from her wanderings, she returned home and interned at an educational start-up web



AmeriCorps member Ryan Weliver of Washington state repairs a lighthouse.

site company. Now, Missouri says, "I'm thrilled to be heading back [to school] to complete the second half of my education with a better focus, a stronger awareness of my goals."

Instead of studying, it may be time to start asking life's larger questions. Don't worry, the school of your dreams will still be there when you return. •

For more information on studying and working abroad, plus links to help you plan your adventure, visit steamtunnels.net.

Top all-time video rentals

1. Star Wars (Fox)
2. On Golden Pond (ITC)
3. 48 Hrs. (Paramount)
4. The Karate Kid (Columbia)
5. Romancing the Stone (Fox)
6. An Officer and a Gentleman (Paramount)
7. Flashdance (Paramount)
8. Back to the Future (MCA)
9. Beverly Hills Cop (Paramount)
10. First Blood (Avid)
11. The Terminator (Live)
12. Lethal Weapon (Warner)
13. Dirty Dancing (Vestron)
14. Raiders of the Lost Ark (Paramount)
15. Police Academy (Warner)
16. Poltergeist (MGM)
17. Terms of Endearment (Paramount)
18. Ghost (Paramount)
19. Braveheart (Paramount)
20. The Usual Suspects (PolyGram)

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