

## **Cool Ideas for Summer**

After weeks of chilly rain, the weather here at the NACAC home office in Alexandria, Virginia, has turned warm and sunny. Suddenly, we are thinking fondly of summer: afternoons at the pool, hamburgers fresh from the grill, and wearing shorts and sandals after months of boots and sweaters.

Spending three months working on your tan or perfecting your strategy for your favorite video game seems attractive when you're knee-deep in calculus. But the savvy student knows that the long summer vacation can be an opportunity to try out new things, make money, travel, help the community, or do any of a variety of fun and interesting activities. The key is to start exploring options now, before school is out. Here are some ideas to get you started on planning a fun--and meaningful--summer.

### **Taking time out**

Summer can be a great time to do some thinking and planning for the school year ahead. No matter what else you do this summer, allow yourself some time alone. Think about your hopes and dreams for the future. What activities or academic subjects excite you? What talents do you want to make the most of in the coming months? What careers or college majors are you interested in?

Different people use "alone time" in different ways. Perhaps you like to take walks or ride your bike while you're thinking and dreaming. Maybe you enjoy writing in a journal or listening to your favorite CD. Do whatever refreshes or inspires you. You may wish to jot down ideas or personal goals that come to you during your time alone, but don't pressure yourself. There is no goal to alone time except getting to know yourself better.

### **Getting a job**

Summer is a great time to make a little spending money and get experience in the world of work. And choosing a summer job carefully can give you a lot more than just money.

"It's an important time to line up your high school experiences with things you are planning for life after high school," says John Boshoven, counselor for continuing education at Community High School (MI) and director of college counseling at the Jewish Academy of Metropolitan Detroit.

So if you're interested in becoming a lawyer, try to find a job at a law office. Thinking about medicine? See what jobs are available at the nearest hospital. Even if you end up cleaning floors in the hospital cafeteria, you can observe how a hospital works and look at the kinds of careers are available in the health care field.

Even if you can't get a job that's close to your career interests, you can still learn plenty of skills that will serve you well later in life. "[A summer job] teaches students discipline, time management, and how to budget money," says Charles Purcell, director of guidance at Mater Dei School (CA).

"Having some responsibility is going to go a long way [in] college," says Joddy Meidinger, director of admissions at Presentation College (SD). Your experience in holding down a job will prepare you for the increased responsibility and independence of being a college student.

### **Taking a class**

High schools and colleges all over the country offer summer courses for high school students. You can brush up on a subject you're having difficulty with or take a more advanced course in an area that interests you. Check out your local community college or any nearby four-year colleges to find out about summer programs for high

school students. Or you may wish to participate in a summer program on a college campus away from home.

Taking a college-level course, whether close to home or farther away, can give you a taste of what to expect in college. You may even be able to earn college credit.

### **Traveling**

Whether it's a family vacation to the Grand Canyon or an abroad program for high school students, traveling is a fun and educational way to spend a few days or a few months. To make the most of your trip, take a camera and/or a journal. Watch for opportunities to take interesting pictures, not just the standard tourist views.

Capture the image of the homeless man asking for change near the Smithsonian in Washington, DC or truckers eating a late meal in a roadside diner. If you're more a writer than a photographer, each evening, write about what you've seen that day. What did you like the best? What stories do you want to jot down before you forget them?

### **Visiting colleges**

The summer can be a good time to make preliminary college visits. Don't expect to get a good sense of the student body, since many colleges have few or no college students on campus during the summer. But you can take a tour of the campus and have an interview with an admission officer. Try to visit colleges of different sizes. It's a good time to figure out if big universities excite you or intimidate you, or if small colleges seem welcoming or stifling. Even if you don't have specific colleges in mind, summer visits can help you get an idea of what types of colleges appeal to you.

### **Volunteering**

Are you passionate about improving the environment, helping children, or building affordable housing for low-income families? Summer vacation gives you the time to volunteer for an organization or cause that's important to you.

"Find ways to make your community better," says Boshoven. Ask your family, guidance counselor, or clergy person for recommendations of local community service organizations. You might be surprised at how many different ways you can help people in your community (and even around the world).

### **Reading**

Don't let your brain get lazy just because school's out. Visit the library or bookstore and find books that interest you. Some high schools and colleges have reading lists. You can also find recommendations for good books online (see Hot Summer Reading) or from your English teacher or librarian.

You don't have to read Shakespeare (unless you want to!) to get the benefits of an enriched vocabulary and broadened imagination. "It's always good to read, period!" says Boshoven. Newspapers, magazines, fantasy novels, teen romances--even comic books and Web sites--can all give you some benefits.

### **Getting creative**

Don't limit yourself. Think about something you've always wanted to do. Write a book? Paint? Start your own business? Learn rock-climbing? Now is the time to plan. You can find books on summer opportunities for high school students at the library, or search the Web. Talk to your parents and others about what you'd like to do over the summer. Start lining up possible clients for your own summer lawn-mowing business, or apply to that creative writing workshop. And get ready for a great summer!

*Written by Jennifer Gross.*