

COLLEGE 2.0

NEW PATHWAYS TO HIGHER
EDUCATION



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INTRODUCTION

ALEX ELLISON ON LEARNING RESOURCES
AND ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS TODAY

At one time, I thought college was the only way for students to get up and out. Up and out of what exactly, I am not entirely sure, but probably the middle, the average, the same old. I viewed it as exclusive access to bigger and better things, but today's alternative learning options have led me away from this university tunnel vision. College is still a fantastic ecosystem built to support growth in young adults, but it's not the only solution, or even the best solution for the majority of students today. Counselors, parents and schools serve every student better when they explore options beyond college.

Despite the difficulties inherent in tailor-made options, students actually have a comfier place in the driver's seat when determining what they want to learn and how they want to use that information.

From visiting an old-fashioned library to taking online, open source classes on just about any topic, students can direct their own educational experiences, and continue on this path well into adulthood as true lifelong learners. Maybe that path includes formal schooling, which leads to a formal degree or certificate, or maybe the student curates a unique buffet of online courses with a series of e-badges, culminating in a credential that will be recognizable in the near future. Others take advantage of the plethora of educational options and resources for the sake of learning itself, not caring about the formal recognition attached to the process.

As a result of these educational developments, I refrain from spending all of my counseling hours talking about grades, classes and test scores. Instead, I dedicate time with the students with whom I work to explain the values starting a blog, creating an independent project they can be proud of, and building a unique portfolio of all the cool stuff they have done over the years. For the college-bound, these pieces are immensely beneficial in the college admission process. For those students not convinced college is for them, these pieces become a sort of replacement for a formal degree, adding tremendous value to their future job applications. But perhaps the most important benefit of this kind of out-of-the-classroom work is to the students themselves, who can say they have both skills currency as well as a greater sense of purpose in a world where grown adults still struggle to find such a thing. This guide is a brief exploration of options students should explore today. We hope you find it useful.

GAP YEARS, INTERNSHIPS, AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING

TYPES OF GAP YEARS, FURTHER RESOURCES, STUDENT PROFILES

“Thirty percent of students who attend college or university will drop out during their freshman year. Two-thirds of those dropping out in their first year will never go on to graduate.”

Why is This Happening?

Lack of direction, a burning desire to start a business, or just plain curiosity about opportunities outside of the traditional classroom help explain those crazy high rates.

The most common reason for deferral we hear from students these days is that they want to gain real world experience before picking an area to study and settling down at college. As it turns out, that instinct is spot on - time in the real world can greatly increase your chances of success at university.

In fact, students who defer admission between high school and college are more likely to graduate, earn higher GPAs, and report greater job satisfaction than their peers who decide to enter college right after high school. Even big name schools like Harvard and Yale have encouraged students to defer in order to pursue a gap year.

What Should You Do to Get Ahead if You Don't Go Straight into College?

If you are thinking about deferring or bypassing college altogether, you aren't some lone ranger. It's supported and encouraged by colleges and counselors and if you're lucky, your parents are on board, too.

Here are three common, beneficial options:

I. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH GAP YEAR

Not many gap year programs focus on personal growth as well as the professional growth needed to succeed in today's competitive job market. But they do exist and for some young adults, they act as a launching pad for their development. These programs allow you to explore and discover areas of interest while learning the skills needed to succeed in the real world – skills such as time management, relationship building, self-advocacy, growth mindset, public speaking, and others known as “soft skills” – all necessary for future success

What Can You Expect From a Quality Program?



Self-Directed Nature

You are young and need freedom to explore. Quality gap year programs will coach you, but also push you to explore your innate curiosities. As a teenager, it's okay not to know what you want to do. On the other hand, it is not okay to sit back and avoid looking for it – identifying your interests takes time and active investigation.



Mentoring and Networking

College graduates walk away with a diploma, but most lack professional connections outside of academia. Gap year programs that emphasize professional growth set you up with mentors who work in the industries you are interested in. For example, if you are interested in digital art you could end up matched with professional animators or graphic designers. Entrepreneurial? Get matched up with people who have already ridden the roller coaster of launching their own business. This kind of real-world experience allows you to learn quickly through the guidance and mistakes of people out in the trenches.

Personal growth-focused gap year programs also teach networking like any other subject and offer endless opportunities for you to make solid connections with people who will help you develop skills – a lever that will bolster your professional network.



Professional Experience

Not all work experience is created equal. Serving up ice cream cones at your local ice cream shop or babysitting for the neighbors may help pay the bills, but a quality gap year program should help coordinate an internship that can really boost your resume as a young adult. You need to find out the intricacies of how a company works in some capacity whether in sales, marketing, or administrative functions. It's invaluable experience. Think about what you can learn spending several months at a fast-paced start-up or a Fortune 500 company! Not to mention, this helps lay the foundation for future work with the same company, making it easy to grab a paid summer internship should you decide to enroll in college after the completion of your gap year.



A Residential or Immersive Experience

Many college freshmen struggle with adapting to the social experience of college. An immersive gap year provides the same experience but on a much smaller scale. Gap year residences provide a supportive, international and diverse community in which you can learn alongside and gain perspective from others. It also provides an environment where others are as excited and motivated as you are about learning. A part-time program that you can do from the comfort of your own home can't provide a learning environment that is 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Modern Skill Building

As mentioned in the introduction, you can expect to learn skills that will be useful for your entire life no matter what you choose to pursue professionally. Gap year programs like UnCollege teach workshops on topics like personal finance, public speaking, negotiation, self-advocacy, personal branding, basic html skills, time management, meta-learning, and more that they consider essential.

II. LANGUAGE IMMERSION GAP YEAR

Why Take a Year to Learn a Language?

The world feels smaller than it used to be. Think about how easy it is to connect with people from all over the world via Skype in a matter of seconds, or perhaps jump on a plane and be in another country before dinner. It's incredible! Language and the art of communication are becoming more and more important professionally and as a good member of your local community. Nearly 25%

“Nearly 25% of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home.”

of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home. Take San Francisco, for example, where 11% of the population considers Mandarin their primary language. That being said, fluency in a second or third language isn't just useful for traveling and seeking adventures. It's a skill you really should develop as a citizen. But why do that in your hometown when you can travel and see the world?

Why Go Abroad to Learn?

Immersive language programs give you the opportunity to learn a language, travel, experience a new culture and leave free time during the day to pursue other passions you might have.

What Should You Expect from a Quality Program?

There is a sea of options to choose from, but no matter what program you pick, make sure it has great relationships with the communities where it hosts its programs. Try not to pick an international metropolis as your destination. (Ex: everyone wants to study Spanish in Barcelona, but Barcelona is a big city where English is spoken by many, making it hard for you to focus on Spanish. Also, they don't even speak Spanish in Barcelona. They speak Catalan). Instead, choose a smaller town with a rich history or go off the beaten path to a cultural village. Lastly, look for results. Try and find a program that can prove that they help people become proficient speakers. One of the more popular options out there is Middlebury Monterey. Why? Because they boast results like this one: “91% of beginning students gained a full language level on the American Council of Teaching of Foreign Language's proficiency scale.” That's a great statistic to have.

III. INTERNSHIP GAP YEAR

“An internship can give you valuable on-the-job training and most importantly, help you figure whether you want to work in a given field before you jump into a four year university program aimed to equip you with the foundational knowledge you would need to enter a field.”

Unlike personal and professional growth programs, an internship year is a deep dive into the 9-5 world. An internship can give you valuable on-the-job training and, most importantly, help you determine whether you want to work in a given field before you jump into a university program, most of which are designed to give you foundational knowledge. They also allow you to start working on a portfolio of work that’s produced outside of academia, which HR managers will not only take seriously, but will require once you decide to apply for jobs.

The tricky part of an internship year is finding a position that you’ll enjoy, especially if you don’t take the time to identify your fields of interest. However, some programs will allow you to participate in multiple internships, which is a great option if you are unsure where you want to go.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Before you decide to participate in any program, make sure to do your homework. Here are some must-see links:

American Gap Year Association

Visit this resource if you want to: learn more about the benefits of taking a gap year from an unbiased party.

Bio: The American Gap Association is a 501(c)3 non-profit accreditation and standards-setting organization for Gap Years that is recognized as such by the US Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission. We continue to advance the field of Gap Years by collaboratively pioneering research on its benefits, as well as serving as an information and advocacy hub for university admissions personnel and educational counselors. Our primary focus is on increasing the awareness of Gap Years and their many proven benefits within the American educational system. While we believe that every student will benefit greatly from a Gap Year, we also maintain that a Gap Year is not the right ‘fit’ for everyone.

Education First

Visit this resource if you want to: discover a wealth of language immersion or volunteer positions abroad.

Bio: EF is an international education company offering educational tours, immersion language learning, cultural exchange and academic programs around the world. Whether you study abroad, learn a language at one of our language schools, host an exchange student or travel with your teacher or professor to exciting new destinations, our programs will expand your horizons, teach you new skills and show you the world.

TeenLife

Visit this resource if you want to: learn more about the plethora of outside-the-classroom experiences that will help you or your child succeed in school, college, and beyond

Bio: TeenLife is a comprehensive directory of STEM, gap year, pre-college, overnight summer and community service programs for students in grades 7-12. Its mission is to make it simple for teens (along with their parents and educators) to develop a meaningful personal experience portfolio, no matter the makeup, for their individual interests, talents, and resources.

Go OverSeas

Visit this resource if you want to: find reliable information about programs abroad.

Bio: Go OverSeas is a website comprised of constructive, honest ratings and reviews about overseas programs. Unlike other websites, Go OverSeas gets their information from the source (people who have been there) and differentiates between reputable organizations from fly-by-night programs. The company's mission is to empower more people to spend meaningful time overseas.

Dynamy

Visit this resource if you want to: learn more about the Dynamy Internship Year and its educational beliefs.

Bio: Dynamy is a US-based residential internship program that was founded in 1969 as an experiential educational organization based in MA. The program strives to challenge, support, and empower young adults ages 17-22 to find their mission in life during a gap year. It provides internship programs and mentoring that helps participants gain confidence, leadership, and a sense of responsibility to their fellow man.

Discover Praxis

Visit this resource if you want to: learn more about the Praxis education experience

Bio: The Praxis education experience is built around outcomes, not just activities. Participants create tangible results through projects and tailored learning plans. The program delves into everything from digital skills and professional proficiencies to core concepts in history, economics, technology, and business.

UnCollege

Visit this resource if you want to: gain access to self-directed learning resources and learn more about the UnCollege gap year program.

Bio: UnCollege is a gap year program and self-directed learning movement helping young people pursue their interests proactively through learning relevant skills and gaining real world experience. Since their first gap year program in 2013, young adults from 15 different countries have participated in the program.

FURTHER RESOURCES

[American Gap Association](#)

[Education First](#)

[Teen Life](#)

[Go Overseas](#)

[Dynamy](#)

[Discover Praxis](#)

[UnCollege](#)

STUDENT PROFILES



Michael K., Gap Year Participant

I always liked school—and still do—but I had growing entrepreneurial ambitions, and eventually I hit a point where I felt my academic studies weren't going to be any help to me in bringing any potential venture to fruition. I wanted experience. I wanted perspective. I wanted the opportunity to succeed or fail in a meaningful way—more meaningful, at least, than merely what could be reflected on an official transcript. And in my gap year program, I got exactly that. I traveled, started a business, and landed an internship at a startup accelerator. I stretched and put myself in uncomfortable situations, and it was in these situations that I had to engage, learn, and grow. When my gap year was over, I found myself uncharacteristically excited to go back to school. With a little real-world perspective under my belt, I couldn't wait to get back into the classroom, reading challenging books and having hard conversations with people smarter than myself. After my gap year, I was more curious and more engaged than I had been just nine months before. I had a newfound appreciation for what a college education could be and how I could get the most out of it. I did a lot of growing up, no doubt about it. I can't say I'd be where I am now had I not taken the time to put school on hold and make exploration and discovery my priority for a little while.



Taylor F., Gap Year Participant

When I started my gap year I was insecure, and unsure of myself. The program really changed everything for me. I grew up a lot, learned how to network, communicate professionally, and stay organized. I worked three internships, travelled to Spain, and started writing a blog focused on young women's issues which has now eclipsed the one million view mark. Unlike most of the others in my program, I chose not to return to school, but I feel motivated and confident that I can succeed at the professional level. Upon completing the program, I moved to NYC (which has always been a dream), my internship turned into a job, and I'm excited for what comes next!

ONLINE RESOURCES AND LEARNING

WHAT YOU CAN DO ONLINE, FURTHER RESOURCES, STUDENT PROFILES

Not that long ago, there were just three main ways to acquire new skills: Go to school, hire a tutor, or get a library card. And there was usually just one surefire way of “proving” you’d gained a skill set — with a degree.

Now, students are taking advantage of the growing viability of e-learning opportunities, from degrees and certificates to microcredentials and enrichment. For some, online courses have replaced in-person classes altogether. For others, they complement and enhance traditional learning opportunities. There’s no denying that online learning is disrupting higher education and the workforce. But why?

“Now, students are taking advantage of the growing viability of e-learning opportunities, from degrees and certificates to microcredentials and enrichment.”



COSTS AND BENEFITS

For starters, traditional learning is becoming increasingly impractical for many students. To be sure, brick-and-mortar universities have a lot going for them - they enrich students’ lives with a world of new experiences, opportunities, and networks. They can also be expensive (given tuition, fees, and opportunity costs), time-consuming, and inflexible.

Gone are the days when [tuition was measured in hundreds](#) (not tens of thousands) of dollars. (College costs are rising at such a staggering rate that for a baby born today, a four-year private-school degree is [expected to cost](#) nearly \$438,000!) Gone too are the days when a degree led to a lifelong career. Now, students expect to hold [multiple jobs](#) (and several careers) — and to be judged based on their skills rather than their credentials. Learning itself is different, too. With the advent of digital resources, students no longer need to travel to institutions like the Library of Congress if they need a book from a particular collection; many once-rare sources are freely available on the Web.

Learning online brings a wealth of benefits, some of which may not be immediately obvious. One professor who teaches online humanities courses cited five top reasons that e-learning is opening educational doors for millions of students across the country.



TOP FIVE REASONS FOR E-LEARNING

1. Some students feel more comfortable sharing their views in an online forum. than in person. [Research](#) has shown that our education system is designed to accommodate -and encourage-extroverts. But in Web-based environments, introverts are getting the opportunity to have their voices heard too.

2. Online learning options make educational opportunities more accessible to students with disabilities. For [learning](#) as well as physical disabilities, an online forum is often particularly well-suited to providing the [supports and accommodations](#) that enable students to thrive.

3. Online learning affords many students who wouldn't otherwise be able to attend in-person classes the chance to further their educations. Whether students are unable to attend classes during the day because of work or family commitments, or whether their chosen institution is geographically remote, online learning offers an unmatched chance to develop critical skills.

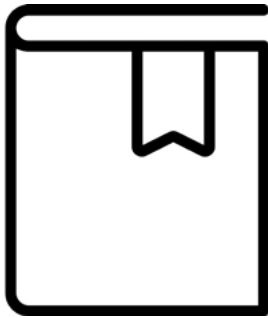
4. Online learning is often significantly cheaper than its brick-and-mortar counterpart. While tuition rates may not (necessarily) be dramatically lower in an online learning environment, e-classes can still pay for themselves in savings alone. For starters, online microcredentials can often be earned in lieu of whole degrees — and they can also require significantly less substantial investments of time and money. In addition, online learning, when paired with in-person studies, can help students earn their degrees faster, enabling them to save on tuition, fees, and room and board. In turn, students can launch their careers sooner and avoid the substantial opportunity costs of extended higher education.

5. Online learning offers an incredible breadth of options. Can't find a class on meditation and the brain at a nearby university? There's probably an online course for that, as there likely is for any other imaginable area of interest.

All of these factors have conspired to make online learning an ever-more

popular—and pragmatic— choice. In fact, during the fall 2013 semester (the most recent one for which we have data), [more than 5.5 million students](#) took at least one post-high school class online. And that’s to say nothing of the many learners who took online courses without pursuing a degree. [Confidence in the value of online classes](#) is growing too, among students and employers alike.

Read on to find out how online learning opportunities may be a perfect fit for you — in high school and beyond.



WHAT YOU CAN DO ONLINE

It turns out that there’s not much you can do in the real world that you can’t do online. In fact, there may be more options on the Web than in your geographic area. You can earn college credits, complete entire degrees, and acquire new skills. And the best part is, you don’t have to wait until you’ve reached a particular stage in

your education or career — you can get started right now. Here are a few of your options:

1. Earn College Credits

...During High School (a.k.a. Concurrent Enrollment)

Who can do it: High school students

What it involves: Concurrent enrollment, in the form of dual credit or dual enrollment, allows high school students to take college classes. Dual-enrollment classes let you take college-level classes for credit, while dual-credit courses provide the added benefit of counting toward a high school diploma and a college degree simultaneously.

Why pursue it: Dual-credit courses provide maximum time efficiency by letting you double up on credits. But even without this two-for-one bonus, concurrent enrollment still affords a number of benefits: the challenge of doing college-level work, the opportunity to take classes not available at your high school, the prospective option to place out of introductory-level college classes, and the potential to save on college costs.

How to get started: Look for programs that are members of the [National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships](#) (NACEP), which ensures that participating institutions adhere to rigorous standards; these programs are also

more likely to be transferable, meaning that you'll actually be able to get future college credit for your college-level concurrent-enrollment classes.

...During College

Who can do it: College students

What it involves: If you're currently enrolled in college, online classes offer a way to cover additional subjects in another format, either at your home institution or at a partner school (whose credits are transferable). You'll need to be good at self-pacing and time management, but the benefit is that you will get to work on your own schedule.

Why pursue it: Taking online college classes can help you graduate early, meet rigorous program requirements without extending your college career, take classes not offered at your school, and make the most of your school vacations. While online college course tuition and fees may be comparable to what you'd find in an in-person equivalent, taking additional classes online can help you graduate early (or on time, depending on your program requirements), thus saving you money on room, board, and fees — and obviating the opportunity costs of delaying your entry into the workforce.

How to get started: Talk to your college advisor about whether your school offers online courses for credit. If you think you may transfer schools, check to see whether your online credits would transfer with you to the schools you're considering. If instead you're looking to stay where you are while taking online courses offered at another institution, then ensure that your home school will accept the credits you earn.

...Beyond College

Who can do it: Anyone

What it involves: Whether you've started (or finished) a two- or four-year degree, you may find that taking an online class piques your interest in something new, builds on skills you've started to develop, positions you for further education, or helps you pivot in your career.

How to get started: If you've attended college before and want to earn credits at your alma mater, check out the offerings there. If you're open to considering a broad range of schools, you can use the [Noodle college search tool](#) to find the one that best fits your needs.

2. Get Undergraduate and Graduate Degrees

While you're earning credits, you also have the option to pursue whole

degrees — at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. And you'd be in good company if you did. In the fall 2013 semester, nearly 2.7 million college students (just over 13 percent) undertook their studies exclusively online. The preceding year, an [even higher proportion of graduate students](#) could be found in degree programs offered entirely online: about 208,000, or 15 percent. For many students — especially those with established careers or family commitments — the flexibility of e-learning makes higher education possible in the first place.

Think distance learning is the best fit for you? Here's what you need to know:

Who can do it: College and graduate students

What it involves: Typically, online programs have admissions procedures similar to those at their brick-and-mortar counterparts. If you're considering colleges, you'll likely need to submit SAT/ACT and other standardized test scores (unless the schools you're looking at are [test-optional](#)). Schools will probably also require essays, letters of recommendation, and transcripts. (Even some schools that participate in the Common App have all-online programs.) For graduate schools, you'll very likely also be asked to submit standardized test scores, transcripts, letters of recommendation, and other relevant materials.

Why pursue it: Maybe your dream program is three states away, and you can't move right now. Maybe you can only take classes after work hours. Maybe you thrive in in-person settings. Whatever your reasons are, there are many paths to success — and a degree. In fact, some online programs have synced so fully with traditional options that they are not even marketed as *online* programs; they're considered fully equivalent to regular college degree offerings.

How to get started: Check out whether the [colleges you're considering](#) offer online degree programs, and see if the requirements fit your needs. If you're looking at grad programs specifically, also check out the offerings at [2U](#).

3. Develop New Skills

Whether you are a coding enthusiast or an aspiring graphic designer, you can take online classes anytime to sharpen your skills. This can help you get a promotion or even set you up for a complete career change. And it can always enrich your life and your mind.

Who can do it: Anyone

What it involves: Depending on your preferred learning method and level of engagement, an online class could consist of anything from a self-paced lecture-and-problem-set series to a highly structured course. If you are seeking a microcredential — a certificate or other non-degree testament to your newly

acquired skills — you will probably have to complete a series of assignments that demonstrate your mastery of the subject matter.

Why pursue it: You can cultivate a new hobby, strengthen your skills, try your hand at something new, set yourself up for a promotion at work, or prepare for a career change. You never need just one reason to pursue lifelong learning.

How to get started: The [Noodle classes search](#) is a great place to find a wide range of online options across a variety of subjects. You can search by subject, start date, and provider, among other options, and you'll find everything from paid certificate-granting programs to free MOOCs — and many options in between.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Concurrent Enrollment

[National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships \(NACEP\)](#)

[Noodle: College Credit in High School](#)

Microcredentials and MOOCs

[Alison](#)

[Coursera](#)

[edX](#)

[General Assembly](#)

[Khan Academy](#)

[Lynda](#)

[Microsoft Virtual Academy](#)

[MIT OpenCourseWare](#)

[Noodle Classes Search](#)

[Open Culture](#)

[Skillshare](#)

[Tuts+](#)

[Udacity](#)

[Udemy](#)

Online Degree Programs

[College Navigator](#)

[Noodle College Search](#)

[2U](#)

STUDENT PROFILES



ELON
UNIVERSITY

Cait, Elon University Graduate

At Elon, I had a major, a concentration, and a double minor—meaning I had to take a lot of courses, many more than could fit into four fall semesters and four spring semesters. I also really wanted to graduate on time. To make that happen, I completed four online courses during college. Conveniently, Elon offered a wide selection of online classes, so it was easy to meet my curriculum needs without worrying about whether my credits would be accepted. While the tuition for online classes was the same as for on-campus costs, the ease of taking them remotely and not worrying about having to transfer credits was well worth the money. My classes were never lecture-oriented, so there were no set times that we had to be online. I was most fond of the flexibility that I had while taking online courses. Although there were the usual assignments and projects with deadlines, the largest appeal was having a more relaxed setting where the work could be done on your terms. I took some great classes, too. My favorite was on the [short story](#).



Jill, New York University Graduate

I took my first online class nine years out of college. It was called [Neuroscience and the Classroom](#), and it was geared toward K–12 teachers. (Editor’s note: It’s still available for free online, and in some cases can be taken for graduate-level credit.) I didn’t take it for credit — I took it to develop a skill set and vocabulary for a project I was working on for my job. That project, a written piece about integrating the latest science of learning into the classroom, benefited a lot from the knowledge I gained: I got a strong foundation in the neuroscience of learning and a vocabulary to help me explain it to a general audience. The class also directed me to other related research, which helped me dig into specific areas I needed to know more about. It was also really engaging. The course incorporated a lot of video, which was exactly the right way to present a bunch of new and complicated topics to a layperson like me. Scientific text can get a little dense, but a lot of the concepts here were fleshed out TED Talk–style, which I found more accessible. In the end, it gave me a totally new outlook on education, and I still find myself thinking about this course all the time. When I see a new learning product, I think about whether it meets the basic criteria of how we learn things (for example, I now know how important emotional relevance is to learning). When I think about what we could do to help low-income kids learn better, I have a scientific basis to understand stress and the impact it has in the classroom. I think about taking another online class all the time. The challenge for me is always making the time to actually do it.

IMMERSIVE HARD-SKILLS PROGRAMS

BENEFITS OF IMMERSIVE SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMS, TYPES OF PROGRAMS, FURTHER RESOURCES, STUDENT PROFILES

Graduating high schoolers of today and tomorrow are afforded some exciting opportunities that weren't presented to their parents' generation. Instead of the straight route to college, there's now an abundance of alternative learning programs that teach hard skills and provide a modern, focused, and self-empowered education opportunity at a fraction of the cost of even in-state college tuition.

Some students are foregoing the college route entirely, in favor of a direct route toward the technical skills, training, and real-world education provided by programs that dive into areas including web development, user experience/user interface (UX/UI), digital marketing and entrepreneurship training. Others are simply using these programs to get a head start before making the plunge into a four year college or university or to supplement their higher education.



BENEFITS OF IMMERSIVE SKILLS TRAINING PROGRAMS

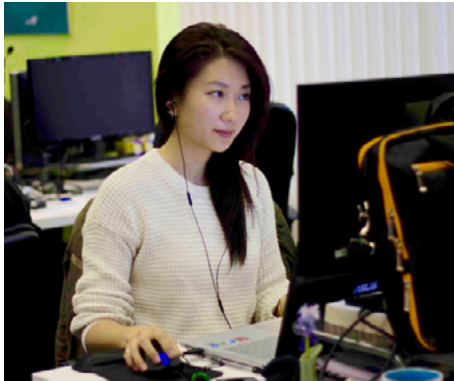
Let's take a look at why these immersive skills training programs are taking hold and why they may be a good option to pursue as a high school senior or graduate.

Rapid Growth in the Tech Industry

Immersive skills training programs have emerged over recent years to fuel the fast growth of the tech industry, which shows no signs of slowing down. There's a high demand for talent within the tech industry, but not enough talent to fill open roles. Immersive skills training programs meet that need by training students in in-demand fields, such as programming.

The number of jobs available to Software Developers is [expected to increase by 17% over the next decade](#) with nearly 200,000 additional positions opening up. And, with the continued expansion of the internet and volume of web applications used by many people every day, the job growth for Web Developer positions is [expected to increase 27% in the next ten years as well](#). These positions often require very little if any formal education to get started.

Other technical positions are seeing very similar growth over the next few years as the industry continues to see a boom well beyond that of more traditional industries. This gives a strong indication that high school students who opt to focus on these alternative learning programs will find it easier to secure gainful employment with a heavy emphasis on career stability moving forward, as the need for jobs in these fields will only continue to rise.



Stand Out from the Pack

Whether or not a high school student plans to attend college, one of the biggest benefits to learning through immersive training programs are the skills that can be put to use immediately after completion.

For one, going through an immersive training program demonstrates clear self-motivation and initiative. For instance, university computer science programs are getting increasingly more competitive, and learning a skill like coding or UX/UI design can show that the student is serious about computer science and give them a leg above the rest when applying for a university CS program.

Additionally, the employer mindset is changing in that a college degree in itself won't be the golden ticket to a job. Today's employers value job candidates with hard skills, and the best way to demonstrate you can do the job is through successful completion of an immersive program that forces you to apply your skills to real-world scenarios.

Path to Entrepreneurship

Immersive skills training programs can provide students with tools to become a freelancer or entrepreneur, whether it be directly after high-school or after college graduation.

Well known entrepreneurs, like Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg, were able to launch very successful businesses because they had the hard skills needed to

turn their idea into a reality. As we'll dive into later, there are also a variety of programs specifically aimed at helping high schoolers and recent graduates incubate their business ideas and provide the skills and leadership training to become successful entrepreneurs.

Lesson the Financial Burden

One of the most beneficial reasons to consider an alternative learning program over a traditional four-year university degree is the sheer financial burden of attending a college or university. The trend for decades now has been an ever-increasing cost for college tuition (well in excess of standard inflation), and there are no signs that these costs will flatten out or decrease anytime soon.

According to the [College Board's Annual Survey of Colleges](#) and based on metrics provided by colleges and universities across the United States, yearly tuition for the average public in-state four-year college is approximately \$9,410 USD while the out-of-state equivalent is \$23,893 USD. Even excluding additional expenses like room and board and ignoring inflationary costs over subsequent years, that's a four-year tuition cost of \$37,640 USD and \$95,572 USD for in- and out-of-state, respectively.

According to College Board's findings, adding room, board, and other typical costs dramatically raises those costs over a four-year period to \$96,244 USD for in-state and \$154,176 USD out-of-state.

The truth of the matter is, even with the occasional scholarship or financial aid assistance to help out, for many recently graduated high schoolers taking on that kind of financial burden amounts to an incredible amount of student loan debt that will have to be paid back over the coming decade or more. For this reason alone, many high school students are considering alternative learning programs as a significantly less expensive alternative to acquiring similar training and skills at a fraction of the cost of traditional universities.

Moreover, many of these immersive learning programs provide scholarships and financial aid of their own to reduce the financial burden even more.

TYPES OF PROGRAMS

1. Coding Bootcamps

Who can do it: Anyone with strong motivation and self-discipline.

What it involves: Coding bootcamps enable students with little or no coding experience to rapidly write code and build applications like websites and

mobile apps. Bootcamps place a heavy emphasis on the speed of learning. By focusing solely on the fundamental aspects of coding that are most in-demand, bootcamps are able to produce highly skilled and relevant developers in just a matter of months or even weeks, as opposed to the four-year or longer journey of a university graduate.

Why pursue it: Coding bootcamps are an excellent alternative option to a four year university if you want to be a developer and create websites or launch apps. Coding bootcamps teach only the most relevant coding skills that match the technologies that the hottest start-ups and tech companies are using. According to Course Report, students who graduate from a coding bootcamp receive an [average starting salary of \\$75,965](#). Computer science programs are becoming increasingly competitive, so if that's a route you decide to take, attending a coding bootcamp shows your commitment to the field and gives you a leg up on additional program candidates.

Program Examples:

Coding Dojo

[Coding Dojo](#) has set itself apart from many other coding bootcamps -- instead of just offering courses devoted to miscellaneous languages (such as JavaScript or Python), Coding Dojo offers programs that cover the entire development software stack, from the programming language and associated framework to the web server and database backend that supports the project. In fact, Coding Dojo is the only national bootcamp that teaches [five of the industry's most in-demand web and mobile development technologies](#).

This emphasis on the entire technology stack ensures that graduates of a Coding Dojo program are well versed in every aspect of the development process. The variety of full development stacks taught during their bootcamps are used by some of the biggest names in the industry, providing graduates with a huge leg up on the competition who may only learn one small piece of the entire stack through other programs.

As one of the industry leaders in focused development training, Coding Dojo provides on-campus bootcamp courses in [six major cities around the country](#): Silicon Valley, Seattle, Los Angeles, Dallas, Washington DC, and Chicago. Moreover, like some other bootcamps, [Coding Dojo also offers online bootcamps](#) for students that are unable to attend in-person.

General Assembly

Unlike other coding bootcamp programs that focus solely on web or mobile development, [General Assembly](#) takes a more general approach by providing

bootcamps and courses that cover a wide range of technological subjects including web development, design, digital marketing, data science, product management, and much more.

General Assembly, of course, offers code-oriented bootcamps like their [Immersive Web Development](#) program which teaches a full web development stack including front-end CSS/HTML/JavaScript and back-end frameworks like Ruby on Rails and Node.js. For high school students interested in other topics, General Assembly has plenty of other courses.

The [Immersive User Experience Design](#) program allows students to learn from some of the industry's best user experience (UX) designers while building up their own portfolio.

For students that love all the bits and pieces of data, the [Immersive Data Science](#) program offered by General Assembly may be a great place to start. Teaching students how to manage data with tools like Git, SQL, and Unix -- before moving on to data analysis and machine learning with Python, then finally into properly visualizing and presenting the data in a meaningful way -- the data science program with General Assembly is as unique as it is powerful in the hands of a motivated student.

As one of the largest career accelerator programs in existence, General Assembly provides a [plethora of 15 campuses](#) spanning five different countries across four continents, and even [offers purely online, digital courses](#) for individuals who cannot attend in-person.

StartUp Institute

[The StartUp Institute](#) offers an immersive 8-week program that teaches web development, but students can also choose other tracks including web design, technical marketing and sales and account management.

Uniquely positioned at the center of tech ecosystems in Boston, New York, and Chicago, Startup Institute is designed to open new doors for students. In addition to expert training in the most in-demand skills, they also offer personalized career mentorship and connections to the people and companies that advance students' careers.

2. Technical Camps

Who can do it: High school students or recent high school graduates interested in technical subjects.

What it involves: Yet another fascinating mode of alternative learning is that of technical camps, which are often (though not always) held during the summer.

Tech camps are a great resource where students can socialize and study while receiving inspiration from tech-savvy instructors who are ready to lead students toward the technical skills required for working and thriving in the 21st century. While locations and subjects vary greatly, most technical camps are hosted at universities or other prestigious campuses and thus, provide a great environment for high school students to explore the surroundings and become a bit more comfortable in that setting, whether intending to enroll in college or not.

Why pursue it: By participating in a tech camp you can network with fellow students who share your love of tech and boost your college applications.

Program Examples:

Google's Computer Science Summer Institute

The Google Computer Science Summer Institute (CSSI) is a three-week summer course, hosted at one of the amazing Google offices, which introduces computer science to high school seniors intending to move on to a four-year university degree. CSSI is an interactive, hands-on, intensive yet fun program that aims to empower young innovators and tech leaders of the future by supporting students' studies in the software development and computer science fields.

During the three-week program, students will learn the fundamentals of programming directly from highly experienced onsite Google engineers and instructors. Students are also given an inside look at Google's latest emerging technologies and will finish out the course by designing and developing their very own application, along with other fellow students, which will be showcased within the Google office itself.

iD Tech Camps

With camps that cover a wide range of subjects that high school students may be interested in, [iD Tech Camps](#) may provide a perfect opportunity for fun and engaging learning experiences during the summer months. With programs [hosted at over 150 prestigious universities](#) across the United States, iD Tech Camps are a great opportunity for nearly all high school students interested in exploring technical fields like web development, design, game development, animation, 3D modeling, and much more.

For students ready to get started right away, iD Tech offers two-week onsite academy programs designed for pre-college teenagers who want to get a jump-start. For example, the [iD Programming Academy for Teens](#) focuses

on teaching coding skills for app development, game modding, robotic engineering, and much more at over a dozen university campuses across the country.

While the entry fees of these courses can be quite expensive relative to online classes, for those students with the means and desire to get started down the technical path as soon as possible, these tech camps can provide that great boost that is needed to get ahead of the competition.

3. Young Entrepreneurship Programs

Who can do it: High school students with a business idea.

What it involves: Young entrepreneurship programs are specifically designed for high school students and other young people that just need a little guidance and assistance to launch their idea into a full-fledged business. These programs typically sit down with students and help with every step of the process, from prototyping and fleshing out application ideas to creating business plans and acquiring the seed money necessary to launch a company.

Why pursue it: These provide a unique opportunity to get your idea in front of successful entrepreneurs, and learn first-hand what it takes to launch and run a business.

Program Examples:

Catapult

[Catapult](#) is a startup incubator program for high school students which takes students to three high-profile tech cities over the three-month summer period. At each city, an intensive multi-day session takes place, focusing on various aspects of the entrepreneurial process including concepts like problem-solving, customer focus, marketing, business modeling, pitching, and growth strategies.

An excess of "Strategic Partners" also assist in the process, from branding experts and legal assistance to strategic consultants and numerous networking opportunities with other entrepreneurs and thought leaders.

Endevvr

[Endevvr](#) is another entrepreneurship program that is devoted to helping high school students become entrepreneurs during a focused summer program. Attendees are mentored and instructed by experienced alumni from leading business schools and successful entrepreneurs from around the country.

As expected, students are guided through the entire process of launching a company, from business modeling and financial projections to market research

and pitching to potential investors. Endevvr aims to teach students the fundamentals of creating and growing a startup company solely through acts of doing-by taking action and going through the necessary steps, students will learn the appropriate skills and techniques to become successful entrepreneurs in their own right.

FURTHER RESOURCES

While this guide has aimed to provide a good overview of what alternative learning programs entail along with some examples of prominent programs in each area, we've only begun to scratch the surface of everything that is out there.

To assist high school students in further exploration of these opportunities and begin to dig into which programs may be right for them, we've assembled a few choice sites and resources that will be tremendously beneficial throughout this process.

Coding Bootcamps

[Course Report](#) (Coding Bootcamp aggregator/review site)

[Coding Dojo](#)

[General Assembly](#)

[Start-Up Institute](#)

Tech Camps

[Google's Computer Science Summer Institute](#)

[iD](#)

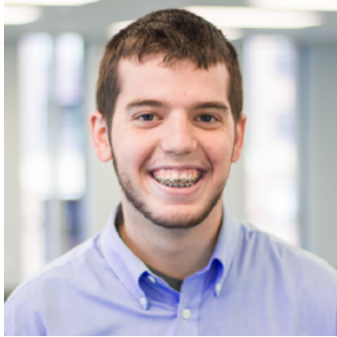
[Tech Camps](#)

Young Entrepreneurship Programs

[Catapult](#)

[Endevvr](#)

STUDENT PROFILE



John Walz, Coding Bootcamp Student

In the past few years, “coding bootcamps” have seemed to spring out of the ground everywhere. They advertise themselves as being a viable alternative to higher education. They claim that within anywhere from 3 to 6 months you can go from an absolute beginner to a skilled and hireable professional. They cost a fraction of the amount of any bachelor’s program with tuitions ranging from \$6,000 to \$20,000. These bootcamps sound almost too good to be true. But are they all they claim?

I have gone through such a bootcamp. I attended Coding Dojo, a 14-week coding bootcamp, from October 2015 to January 2016, right after graduating from high school.

Coding Dojo’s stellar curriculum and excellent instructors did an awesome job of training me in many of today’s technologies and frameworks. I learned everything they claimed and so much more - not just how to code but teamwork, project management and algorithms. I had loads of fun and met so many awesome people that have helped me get to where I am today.

However, the greatest lesson it taught me was the ability to efficiently and effectively learn any new language, framework, or technology with its three stack curriculum. By learning these three very different yet closely connected technologies, I saw the patterns that exist in all programming languages. I was able to understand all that goes on under the hood of a computer language and as a result can quickly pick up any language by just learning its few unique features!

I emerged four months after starting at Coding Dojo, tired and worn out from countless 12-16 hour days spent coding, but confident that with my new found skills and experience I could land that job I dreamed of. And so I have. Within a month of finishing school, I accepted an awesome job offer from SellerVantage in Tampa, Florida to work as a full stack web developer. So far, I love it and not a day goes by that I don’t think back to my days at Coding Dojo and consider that going there was the best decision I have ever made.

SPONSOR COMPANY PROFILES

Coding Dojo

Coding Dojo is one of the highest rated coding bootcamps in the industry, and the only coding bootcamp in the world to teach three full technology stacks in a single 14-week program. Since 2012, Coding Dojo has helped individuals from a variety of backgrounds and skill levels transform into professional developers who go on to be hired by start-ups and world-class companies.

Noodle

Noodle is an education website helping parents and students make better decisions about learning. Using our interactive search tools, families can find the right preschool, college, tutor, or any other learning resource. In addition, they can read expert-authored articles, ask questions and get answers from some of the leading minds in education, and connect with others in their communities.

UnCollege

UnCollege Gap Year is a nine-month program aimed to equip young adults with the skills needed to succeed on both a personal and professional level after high school. Since its inaugural cohort in the Fall 2013, the program has graduated over 100+ students and has been featured by NPR, PBS, TED, The Today Show, Katie Couric, The New York Times, and other mainstream publications.

Booklet design by Nora Benson (norabenson.com)

