

Time off after school can reap benefits at university

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(Phys.org) —A University of Sydney study suggests students who have a gap year achieve more highly at university than students who enter university straight after school and mature age students.

The findings of the research, conducted by researchers at the Faculty of Education and Social Work, have been published in the prestigious *Journal of Higher Education*.

Another major finding was that the effects of [school achievement](#) on university achievement diminished over the first three semesters at university. A much stronger influence on university achievement in later semesters was performing well at university in earlier semesters.

The study of 904 Australian undergraduate university [students](#) tracked achievement over their first four semesters at university. Students were from the [disciplines](#) of arts, social sciences, and science.

"The study shows school achievement will get students into university, but its impact on university achievement is relatively limited," says the study's lead author Professor Andrew Martin. "Instead, factors beyond school achievement come into play. For example, taking a gap year seems to contribute to university achievement further into one's course. Doing well in the first semester of study is also great boost to one's achievement in subsequent semesters."

Very little research has investigated the effects of a gap year. Previous

published research by Professor Martin found a positive effect of a gap year on university students' motivation. This research is a major extension of that prior study because it is longitudinal, examines actual [achievement](#), and found much the same positive effect of a gap year.

"Once school is over, post-school education is a new chapter, a fresh start, a blank slate - it's yours to make of it what you will," says Professor Martin. "For students with great school results, our findings underscore the importance of not resting on one's oars. For those who might have done better at school, the year following school is a chance to shape something new. This might mean a constructive year off in the form of a gap year; or it might mean having an honest look at what academic skills they need enhance in order to make university a more positive experience."

Provided by University of Sydney

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