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N.C. Senate passes budget, final negotiations begin

By Gary D. Robertson
The Associated Press

RALEIGH — Legislators began Thursday to work out differences in competing state budget proposals, hours after the Senate gave final approval to its $21.4 billion spending plan for next year.

Higher education, the debt level and children's health insurance are the likely main sticking points as lawmakers seek to assemble a compromise and get it to Gov. Mike Easley's desk before the new fiscal year begins July 1.

"I think we can get most of it done," said Rep. Mickey Michaux, D-Durham, senior co-chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. "We may have to carry over a few things. I hope not."

There's also a sense of urgency because legislative leaders have said they want to adjourn for the year early in July.

Budget negotiators from both chambers started meeting together Thursday afternoon, and the health budget subcommittee is scheduled to meet today — usually a day when legislators are back home — to start chipping away at the list of differences.

The Senate passed its budget bill by a largely party-line vote of 31-14, a margin similar to the one Wednesday on the first of two required votes.

Then the House unanimously rejected the Senate's plan, setting up negotiating teams dominated by Democrats, who hold the majority in both chambers.

The Senate budget would spend $15.5 million more overall than the House plan approved two weeks ago, but there are several big differences about where all the money should be spent.

The Senate earmarks $69 million more than the House does to the University of North Carolina system, including $20 million more to prepare for a projected 8,100 students to enter school this fall.

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"Education is certainly always an issue for us," said Sen. Linda Garrou, D-Forsyth, the Senate's chief budget writer. "We need to be sure that we provide enrollment growth for our universities."

But the House would spend $45 million compared to $11 million in the Senate to help local school districts pay for the rising costs of school bus fuel. They'll also have to work out differences in spending for Easley's More at Four preschool program. If history is any indication, the governor is likely to receive the higher amount offered by the Senate.

Easley's influence during these negotiations may wane compared to previous years because the two-term Democratic governor is leaving office in January. Easley has never vetoed a budget since taking office in 2001.

Both the House and Senate declined to meet Easley's request for a nearly 7 percent increase in teacher pay so that the average teacher salary could reach the national average during the upcoming school year. Instead, the two chambers are set on 3 percent raises for teachers.

The Senate approved a special provision permitting Easley, as soon as November, to use half of tax revenues above what is projected toward further raising teacher salaries.

But the House is skeptical of the idea, especially with a slow economy raising questions whether the state will generate a revenue surplus in the early months of the new fiscal year.

House and Senate finance leaders also have agreed there should be $30 million in tax breaks or credits for the coming year. But Democrats in each chamber have their own preferences on which taxes should be cut.

Leaders in the Senate, which passed several pieces of tax-reduction legislation separate from the budget, said they'll go home if they can't agree in a reasonable time.

"We're under no obligation to do anything," said Sen. David Hoyle, D-Gaston. "We're going to negotiate in good faith."

Since the final spending bill would adjust the second year of a two-year state budget approved last year, state government would continue to operate if a final deal isn't struck before July 1.
Renovations help theater back to life in Washington

By Kelley Kirk-Swindell
The Daily Reflector

"It was ankle-deep in pigeon dung and was really in terrible shape," John Shearin said about the historic Turnage Theatre in Washington, N.C. "But the potential was bright."

Bright indeed. The theater received a $5 million rehabilitation and is open for business.

Shearin, director of the East Carolina University School of Theatre of Dance, toured the historic building that had been unused for more than 30 years.

"There are two theaters in the Turnage," said Executive Director Robert Chumbley. He explained that the first theater, a Vaudeville stage, was built in 1913.

See TURNAGE, D1

TURNAGE

Continued from D1

"Then when talking motion pictures became popular, the downstairs theater was built in the 1930s and was open until the 1970s," he said.

From that point, around 1976, the theater lay neglected and fell into disrepair.

The restoration project began in 1996 when a group of Washington residents created a foundation to raise money for rehabilitating the old theater.

ECU and the foundation teamed up about four years into the project, when ECU's Shearin began working with the restoration foundation.

Acting as consultants, ECU faculty members Jeffrey Phipps and Patch Clark helped formulate a business plan.

"Part of our mission at ECU is to do outreach and assist in economic development, all of which comes together with the Turnage project," Shearin said. "We thought our participation would be a fulfillment of that mission."

Over the coming years, Shearin and numerous ECU faculty members would provide insight to the project by meeting with the architect and providing direction as to how the interior needed to be remodeled.

The actual construction and refurbishment didn't commence until late 2005 or early 2006.

During the final days before reopening in 2007, Chumbley visited the theater to help with getting it ready for the public.

He was living in Winston-Salem at the time and would make the three-hour trip to Washington each week.

He had been involved as a favor to a friend, but things changed shortly before the first curtain was raised.

"When the (executive director) position became open just weeks before the theater was to open to the public, it was just a nice fit for everyone," Chumbley said.

ECU's School of Theatre and Dance staged the gala performance Nov. 3, 2007, before a sold-out show.

"They have preserved a lot of historical elements of the theater. Facades, ceilings, plaster—the work is quite beautiful," Shearin said. "It's a wonderful addition to the area."

Turnage Theatre is listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

Kelley Kirk-Swindell can be contacted at 329-9596 or kkirk-swindell@coxnc.com

"Part of our mission at ECU is to do outreach and assist in economic development, all of which comes together with the Turnage project. We thought our participation would be a fulfillment of that mission."

John Shearin
ECU School of Theatre and Dance
All the world’s a stage

ECU productions move to Washington, N.C.,
while campus theater is repaired

By Kelley Kirk-Swindell
The Daily Reflector

The East Carolina University/Loessin Summer Theatre is hitting the road, literally. While ECU’s McGinnis Theater receives some much-needed repairs, the summer theater productions will be staged in Washington, N.C., at the newly renovated Turnage Theatre.

There will still be three productions, beginning with Thursday’s 8 p.m. opener of “The Boy Friend.”

Shows will run daily, except Monday, through July 5. Saturday offers a 2 p.m. matinee June 28 in addition to the 8 p.m. show and there is a 2 p.m. Sunday matinee.

The second production, “Arsenic & Old Lace,” is set for July 10-16, and the final offering of ECU’s summer theater season is “The All Night Strut!”, July 24-Aug. 2.

“We originally thought about a split season between here and Turnage, but the repair needs were pretty urgent at McGinnis,” said John Shearin, director of the School of Theatre and Dance. “It was very convenient to relocate to Turnage for the season.”

Work under way at McGinnis largely deals with behind-the-scenes stage mechanics, but renovations also include landscaping outside.

Robert Chumbley, executive director of the Turnage, hopes that Greenville theater lovers will make the trip to Washington to see the ECU shows.

“I think that the experience of coming to Washington, walking up and down the waterfront, walking up and down Main Street, having dinner at one of the fine restaurants here is a really fairly classic way to spend the day,” he said. “And it’s only 17 miles to get here.”

The partnership between ECU and the Turnage Theatre began several years ago when Shearin and several other ECU faculty members served as consultants on the restoration project.

Shearin said the theater was in terrible disrepair prior to its restoration; the building had been vacant since 1976.

“We started talking about the infrastructure and consulted from a producing point of view,” Shearin said.

Turnage is smaller than McGinnis, which meant that Shearin needed to select plays requiring smaller casts.

“Shows were chosen to comfortably put in the space,” he said. “We couldn’t do a cast of 40, but we could do a cast of 20. There’s still a big-show feel.”

“The Boy Friend” is an upbeat musical by Sandy Wilson.

“Basically, it’s a boy-meets-girl story,” Shearin said. “Also an older man rekindles the flame with a mature woman.”

Shearin added that there are really six love stories in this production that’s set in a seaside girls’ finishing school in Nice, France, during the 1920s.

“It’s really a spoof of British aristocracy,” Shearin said. “The music is very bright and tuneful.”

Shearin also said that the production is true to the time period with the dances that are performed.

If You Go!

What: ECU/Loessin Summer Theatre
“The Boy Friend”
When: 8 p.m. Thursday through July 5
Where: Turnage Theatre, Main St., Washington, N.C.
Cost: $20-$30
Call: 975-1191
Visit: www.turnagetheater.com

“We couldn’t do a cast of 40, but we could do a cast of 20. There’s still a big-show feel.”

John Shearin
ECU School of Theatre and Dance
Happy birthday, Bill Werber. The oldest living major league baseball player turns 100 today in a south Charlotte retirement community. In front of about 85 friends and family, with a plate of fried chicken and barbecue, he will celebrate hitting the century mark.

Check that.

“T’m not celebrating it,” Werber said. “I’m tolerating it.”

Werber is by turns merry and cantankerous. He boasts a full head of white hair, zips around in a motorized wheelchair and lives alone in an apartment at The Carriage Club retirement complex. He remembers stories about playing alongside Babe Ruth 75 years ago more easily than he remembers his daughter’s address. A conversation with Werber opens a fascinating window into a world most of us never experienced — a world where roads were unpaved, haircuts were 35 cents and baseball on the radio was king.

I ate lunch with Werber the other day, carefully timing the visit to occur before his afternoon nap. His daughter Pat Bryant instructed me to sit on his left side and speak slowly and distinctly toward his left ear. But any fears I had of a one-sided interview were quickly allayed.

“T’m still sharp,” Werber told me early in the interview, grinning wickedly. And he is. Words like “bellicose” and “interlocutor” rolled off his tongue. He told me about his first-ever at bat in the major leagues, in 1930 for the New York Yankees, offhandedly remembering the name of the pitcher, catcher and plate umpire.

Werber took two strikes and then four straight balls, never lifting the bat off his shoulder.

“I was too scared to move,” he said. “Paralyzed.”

Ruth came up a couple of batters later and slammed a deep ball to right.

“I knew it was going into the right-field bleachers,” Werber said. “But I said to myself, ‘I’ll show these Yankees how fast I can run.’ So I put on a burst of speed and ran around the bases. The third-base coach was hollering for me to slow down, but I ran on in at full speed. I crossed home plate before Babe got to first base — he took those little mincing steps, you know. When Babe came in to the dugout, he sat on the bench beside me. He patted me on the head and said, ‘Son, you don’t have to run like that when the Babe hits one.’”

Werber was a superb athlete, a third baseman who played in the majors for 11 years at the height of the Depression, ending his career in 1942. He was a good player, not a great one, who led the league in stolen bases three times. He won a World Series in 1940 with the Cincinnati Reds, when he batted .370 in the series and had 10 hits.

As a 5-foot-10 guard, Werber also was the first All-American basketball player Duke ever had, in 1930. But the NBA didn’t exist then, and so if you

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WERBER
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were going to make a living in sports, baseball was your shot.
Werber grew up in what is now College Park, Md., home of the University of Maryland. He spent most of his life following baseball back in Maryland, working at the insurance agency his father founded. Although he never made more than $13,500 in any one baseball season, he cleared more than $100,000 in his first year selling insurance. His business sense allowed him to retire very comfortably, although it was not impeccable. He once told the patriarch of the Marriott family that he should never consider expanding into the hotel business.

When he retired, Werber moved from Maryland to Naples, Fla. He spent 28 years there until poor health forced him to move to Charlotte, near daughter Pat. He has spent the past 10 years living in a retirement home here. His left leg was amputated below the knee when he was in his early 90s, a complication of his diabetes. Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski phoned Werber during his recovery, a call he still treasures.

Werber’s secret to longevity?
“I don’t drink, I don’t smoke, and I married a lovely girl who never got mad,” Werber said.

Kathryn “Tat” Werber died in 2000, after she and Bill were married 70 years. They produced three children. Bill Jr., at age 77, still runs the family insurance business in Maryland. Pat, 73, lives in Charlotte. Susie Hill, the youngest daughter, is 60.
The whole family has major Duke connections, and all remain huge Duke fans, none more so than Bill Werber, who skips his normal 9 p.m. bedtime whenever the Blue Devils have a late basketball tipoff.
He doesn’t watch baseball anymore, though. The pro game moves too slowly now, he believes, and he doesn’t like the excess hair sported by players like Johnny Damon.

Much like my own grandparents, Werber is not politically correct all the time. He has strong opinions about the national anthem. He believes it should only be sung by men with powerful voices — “no trilling,” Werber declared — and only to the roll of drums. He has written baseball commissioner Bud Selig about that and other matters, he said. “He always responds,” Werber said of Selig, “but he never says anything.”

Werber, on the other hand, has lots to say. He’s opinionated. He’s mesmerizing. And he’s 100 years old today, surrounded by folks who love him and still sleeping every night all the way through.

His is a life well-lived, one brushed by men like Ruth but ultimately painted by those much closer to him.
In his apartment, Werber displays zero pieces of baseball memorabilia, but the walls are covered with pictures of his family.

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Former Duke athlete Bill Werber, right, with Cincinnati Reds teammate Lonnie Frey, turns 100 today.
COURTESY OF BILL WERBER
UNC seeks millions for safety

The system says its 17 campuses need more counselors, police officers.

BY ERIC FERRERI
STAFF WRITER

In each of the last five years, the number of student counseling appointments jumped by 500 or more at N.C. State University, taxing a student health staff that hasn't grown in nearly a decade.

"We can't see all the students who need help," said Lee Salter, NCSU's director of counseling. "Many students have depression or anxiety that can disrupt a semester of school. Getting prompt attention can save a semester."

Relief may come soon. In the aftermath of the shooting spree last year by a mentally ill student at Virginia Tech that left 32 people dead, universities across North Carolina have begun to revamp safety and security measures.

For the UNC system, the request is a project to the General Assembly for $11.7 million in annual funds and $17.5 million more in one-time money for a broad swath of spending intended to make college campuses safer. Much of the money would bolster mental health services.

The request, though pared down from $46 million in initial requests from campuses, may still be ambitious. Gov. Mike Easley's budget included $5.6 million in recurring campus safety money and $5.4 million in one-time money. The state House's budget proposal was slightly higher — $6.4 million in recurring funds and $6.49 million in one-time money.

Annual funds would largely pay salaries for new employees, while non-recurring funds would cover one-time expenses for new equipment or training programs.

The UNC system's wish list — its top legislative priority — is heavy on new hiring, particularly in mental health support. It would create 26.5 case worker positions — staffers

SEE SECURITY, PAGE 4B

I think the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois shootings jolted everybody. Ten years ago, for reasons I can't tell you, students needed less counseling.

ROB NELSON, VICE PRESIDENT FOR FINANCE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA SYSTEM

SECURITY
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who would work directly with students identified as being "of special concern," according to a UNC system memo.

Those case workers would help monitor students and make sure they got treatment, said Mary Covington, UNC Chapel Hill's assistant vice chancellor for campus health services.

"If you're struggling because you have a mental illness, you're not thinking clearly," Covington said. "It's someone to help them get connected to a therapist."

The UNC system also wants 23 new counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists at student health departments across the 17-campus system.

The money would also help bolster campus police departments by filling vacancies and raising pay for officers to make their salaries more competitive with those of municipal police agencies. The money would hire 78.5 new police and security officers and dispatchers across the state.

The Virginia Tech shootings and a subsequent spree at Northwestern Illinois University that left five students dead quickly forced university leaders to analyze and modify the ways they treat students with mental health issues and how they respond to campus emergencies.

A changed world

"I think the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois shootings jolted everybody," said Rob Nelson, vice president for finance with the UNC system. "Ten years ago, for reasons I can't tell you, students needed less counseling. The world has changed in terms of the demand from students for mental health services. And society has increased our need for police services."

More students with mental health issues are attending college these days, putting a greater strain on campus health services, said UNC-CH's Covington. The reasons are many: better societal understanding of mental health, new medications, and greater willingness by people to seek help.

"A lot of these students who would have flunked out of high school ... can basically manage their problems now so they can be academically successful," Covington said.

Needs vary from campus to campus. At N.C. Central University, campus police are fighting a frustrating battle with doors propped open. The answer: A wired, campuswide monitoring system that will alert police to a dormitory door left open for too long, said Willie Williams, the campus police chief.

At NCSU, the counseling center is desperate for a third psychiatrist, said Salter, the counseling director. The campus of 32,000 students has one psychiatrist per 16,000 students, far worse than the American Psychiatric Association's recommended ratio of 1 per 10,000.

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High costs keep doctors from switching to electronic records

Those surveyed say systems improve care

By Robert Davis
USA TODAY

Primary care physicians are slow to adopt electronic health records systems, according to a new survey, largely because moving from paper-based to computerized records costs so much.

The survey, appearing in Wednesday's online edition of the New England Journal of Medicine, found that only 4% of U.S. physicians use comprehensive systems of electronic health records. These include key patient safety features, such as prompts when a medication may react badly with another drug the patient is already taking.

Another 13% of physicians have a more basic electronic record system without the added safety features.

But 42% said they are either in the process of implementing an electronic system or are planning to do so within two years. That is the "good news in our findings," says Catherine DesRoches of Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, the lead author of the survey.

The survey authors estimate that switching costs a doctor about $60,000 — totaling hundreds of billions of dollars nationwide. The federal government announced a $150 million pilot program last week that would help hundreds of physicians make the switch and help create a blueprint for others to follow.

If those doctors began using the systems, DesRoches says, the nation could be on the brink of widespread change. "The physicians who now use these systems like them," she says.

The survey of 2,758 physicians provides the most comprehensive data yet showing how doctors are adopting the technology that has been credited with preventing medical errors, improving care and making it easier for patients to share information with their doctors.

Physicians who use electronic records said in the survey that the systems help their patients. The fully functional systems improved the quality of care, doctors said, by helping with clinical decisions, communicating with other providers and refilling prescriptions.

The systems prevented some errors, such as the prescribing of drugs that could prompt an allergic reaction.

Richard Baron, a Philadelphia doctor who switched to a comprehensive electronic medical records system in 2004, says the change "transformed care" in his practice — but it wasn't cheap. The system cost

$40,000 per doctor — there are five doctors in the practice — and they now pay a total of $60,000 a year for technology support.

Baron says he and his colleagues can do more for patients because tasks such as refilling prescriptions are automated. Everyone is "less frustrated," he says.

Karen Bell, a physician who directs the Office of Health IT Adoption at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, says she is "heartened" by the fact that more doctors are using the systems but says the survey shows "we are a long way from universal adoption."

The survey found that doctors who treat the wealthy and those who treat the disadvantaged use the technology at about the same rate. But more research is needed to ensure that a disparity doesn't exist, says study co-author David Blumenthal of the Institute for Health Policy at Massachusetts General.

Practical applications
Medical practices with comprehensive electronic-records systems report patients can do the following online:

Request prescription refills 63%
Request appointments 52%
View medical records 50%
Request referrals 36%
Update medical records 26%

Source: New England Journal of Medicine

By Veronica Salazar, USA TODAY
College can wait awhile

"Gap year" catches on with students who want to gain life experience after high school

By G. Jeffrey MacDonald
Special for USA TODAY

Worn-out high school seniors are getting fresh encouragement from a range of sources to take a break — a "gap year" — before plunging into college. But to be beneficial, it needs to involve more than rest and relaxation.

This spring, high schools in seven metropolitan areas hosted their first gap-year fairs to acquaint students with options for spending a year away from the academic treadmill. Earlier in the year, Princeton University announced plans to formalize a "bridge year" program for admitted students to do service work abroad before enrolling.

Meanwhile, gap-year consultants have ramped up efforts to serve what they see as a market ripe for growth.

"The U.S. is viewed in our sector as the sleeping giant," with the "potential to surpass the rest of the world in numbers and possibly spending within the next five years," says Tom Griffith, founder of gapyear.com, an information clearinghouse in Ipswich, England.

Though the concept may be new to many in the U.S., it's an established tradition elsewhere. In the United Kingdom, for instance, about 11% of the 300,000 college-bound seniors take a gap year before enrolling. Australia puts up similar aggregate numbers in what's known Down Under as "going walkabout."
Gap years should be constructive, not leisurely

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Reliable data for gap-year activity aren’t available for the USA, but guidance counselors and college admissions officers say they’re seeing a surge of interest.

One contributing factor: The high-pressure senior year of high school increasingly leaves students drained and craving refreshment.

Also, counselors are coming to bless the gap-year option, and colleges increasingly are offering a deferred enrollment option as more and more “gappers” arrive on campus with enhanced focus, motivation and maturity — all of which bodes well for their undergraduate years in college.

“Counselors are recognizing that there are many pathways to college,” says David Hawkins, director of public policy and research at the National Association for College Admission Counseling. “They see that, if properly vetted, these opportunities could actually help students succeed in college.”

Because gap years conform to no pre-set mold, the sky is the limit in terms of designing rich experiences. Hawkins says most gappers pursue personal enrichment through travel, service work or educational programs. Their chosen challenges range from City Year, a non-profit tutoring and mentoring program, to backpacking independently abroad.

Costs vary widely but often run $10,000 to $20,000 for a year of fee-based programs and living costs, according to Holly Bull of the Center for Interim Programs, a gap-year consultancy in Princeton, N.J.

Consultants agree gap years shouldn’t be just “time off,” and should instead be crafted with clear goals in mind.

But whether a gapper learns and grows more in a highly programmed environment than in one that’s less predictable remains a topic open for discussion.

Some recommend adhering to a set of structured activities that minimize the likelihood of prolonged downtime at home or major pitfalls on the road.

“Most people need structure,” Bull says. “Parents come to me halfway through a child’s gap year and say, ‘It’s sort of falling apart here. We need more ideas or more structure.’ So structure is important.”

Others say that while the highly structured approach may be good for businesses that cater to gappers, too much “hand-holding” can hinder the maturation process that tends to happen in the absence of ample support systems.

“Unlike Europeans, (Americans)’ happiness to be hand-held throughout the process creates demand for support services, orientation and premium products required to keep them safe and show them a good time,” Griffiths says. “But if you’re not in a group, you get more out of it. It’s just a fact that if you travel around the world on your own, you grow up.”

Confidence from experience

U.S. gappers sing the praises of structured programs, but they also say they grew most when they had to live by their wits.

Jacob Feinstein of Brookville, N.Y., has spent the past year doing an internship with a software startup in New Zealand, taking cooking classes and studying filmmaking in New York City before he enrolled at Harvard University in September. He points to flying alone internationally and living in a house in New Zealand with 11 peers as key experiences that boosted his confidence and life skills.

“Before the gap year, I would have had a lot of hesitance about flying on my own from New Zealand through Japan and China, two countries that don’t speak English,” Feinstein says. But he did it.

During the gap year, “I became a much more self-sufficient person. Now I’m not stressing at all about living on my own in college.”

Owen Henry of Waterford, Va., opted in 2007 to take a gap year when he received a pile of college rejection letters. His goals for the year: to be challenged, gain work experience and clarify academic goals. He participated in a program for American gap-year students that last fall at Oxford University, where he says he spent less than $10,000, and he decided on a career as an Arabic translator.

Since March, he has been handling two tons of sail as a deckhand on the Lady Maryland, a 104-foot-long tall ship and floating classroom in Baltimore. He gets room, board and $6,54 an hour. He has saved $1,600 of this for college, and he plans to enroll this fall at Oberlin College, to which he applied and was accepted during the gap year.

(Most experts recommend applying to colleges during senior year instead of deferring.)

Feeling my hands cracking apart and being destroyed and slowly built up again with calluses was a slow and painful process,” Henry says. But this was his first job, and he resolved, “I’m not quitting just because my hands are sore.”

Learning from failure

Sarah Calvert of Wayne, Pa., says a blend of experiences during a gap year she took in 2003-04 made her bolder and more respected at Middlebury College in Vermont than she would have been otherwise. She arrived on campus focused on a geography major and organized a college-wide service day during her first year. Later, she branched out further than most of her peers by spending her junior year abroad in Tanzania and Ghana.

Even missteps can be a boon by yielding the very outcomes that a gap year is supposed to deliver.

Kari Haigler, author of The Gap Benefit From Time Off Before or During College, recalls a gapper who got malaria in Africa. “She had to cope, and she turned it into a positive. She said she learned to be an advocate because she had to advocate for herself to get health care.”

Says Samer Hamadeh, co-founder of Vault.com, a career information company: “To be able to talk about a failure as an experience and how you learned from it—that’s invaluable. So you can’t go wrong. That's the bottom line. Just plan it, do it as a deferral (to college), have a goal and then go for it.”

But figuring out how best to do a gap year is still a matter of balancing risks, potential benefits and personal interests.

In that mix, Bull says, students should do plenty of advance research and try to avoid potential nightmare situations, such as becoming ill without a solid support network in a developing country.

“You don’t have to go through that as a parent or as a student,”