

# Michael Brownstein '99 Memorial Gap Year Fellowship Program Student Application

## Outline

- I. Overview
- II. Brownstein Fellows Expectations
- III. Application Process
- IV. Application Guidelines & Suggestions
- V. Application Questions
- VI. Sample Gap Year Programs and Advice from HW Alumni

## I. Overview

*The Michael Brownstein '99 Memorial Gap Year Fellowship Program* ("Brownstein Fellowship") has been established at Harvard-Westlake School to perpetuate the spirit and memory of Michael Brownstein '99, a young man with a strong humanitarian spirit and sense of social justice whose life was tragically cut short in a June 2007 accident, but not before he lived his life to the fullest, passionately pursuing life-affirming experiences through extensive travel. As Harvard-Westlake strives to prepare its students to be global citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we want to embrace, encourage and promote the concept of a gap year. Thus, the Brownstein Fellowship will be awarded to a member of the senior class based upon a proposal for a "gap year" experience that incorporates ***both travel and service to others***. The award will be an amount up to \$10,000 (depending on proposal) to be used toward expenses of the proposed gap year experience.

The Brownstein Fellowship proposal can include experiences such as cultural immersion or academic enrichment in a foreign country combined with service or volunteer work. It is up to the applicant to define the scope of the experience. Examples might include volunteering at a bio-reserve associated with a language school in Guatemala; coaching, teaching and working in an AIDS clinic in Tanzania; building houses worldwide; working a construction internship with a builder/mountaineer in Alaska; or some combination of the above. The length of time does not have to cover one contiguous time period but could be broken up into segments, if desired.

## II. BROWNSTEIN FELLOWS EXPECTATIONS

Not only is it an honor to be awarded the Brownstein Fellowship for service and travel in the gap year, but there will be an expectation to give back to the Harvard-Westlake community as well as the greater Los Angeles community in the years following the gap year.

- Brownstein Fellows are expected to share their experiences and provide some kind of tangible report to their school community—presentation, web site, written report, etc.
- Brownstein Fellows will serve as advisors to future students in the research/application phase of the process.
- Brownstein Fellows are expected to create opportunities to serve as ambassadors of global service experiences to the Los Angeles community and beyond by actively seeking or creating forums to promote their experience.
- In the future, we hope to create the Brownstein Consortium by extending the Brownstein Fellows program to a small group of primarily public schools in Los Angeles, and Brownstein Fellows will be expected to be active in promoting and encouraging proposals from Consortium member schools.

## Resources

There are many resources and organizations where applicants can learn more about gap year service experiences and seek help in putting together proposals for the Brownstein Fellowship. Here are a few:

Cross-cultural Solutions <http://www.crossculturalsolutions.org/>

Interim Programs <http://www.interimprograms.com/index.asp>

Projects Abroad [www.projects-abroad.org](http://www.projects-abroad.org)

Rustic Pathways <http://www.rusticpathways.com/index.html>

Time Out Associates <http://www.wheretheyouheaded.com/home1.asp>

Thinking Beyond Borders [www.thinkingbeyondborders.org](http://www.thinkingbeyondborders.org)

City Year [www.cityyear.org](http://www.cityyear.org)

Dynamy [www.dynamy.org](http://www.dynamy.org)

**Lonely Planet The Gap Year Book** by Joe Bindloss, Charlotte Hindle, Andrew Dean Nystrom

**Planning Your Gap Year** by Nick Vandome

**Taking a Gap Year** by Susan Griffith

**Taking Time Off, 2nd Edition (College Admissions Guides)** by Colin Hall, Ron Lieber

**The Gap-Year Advantage: Helping Your Child Benefit from Time Off Before or During College**, by Karl Haigler, Rae Nelson

There are also recent graduates who have completed gap year experiences. See the advice from some of them on page 4. They are ready and willing to help, so free to contact them directly.

## III. Application Process

- **January: Begin the application process**
- **March: Applications Due Monday, March 17, 2008**
  - Completed applications should be submitted electronically to the Brownstein Fellowship Selection Committee, c/o Ed Hu, Chief Advancement Officer, at [ehu@hw.com](mailto:ehu@hw.com).
- **April:** The winner of the Brownstein Fellowship will be notified before the end of April 2008.
- **May:** Selected student can notify college of plans for deferment with gap year plans.

## VI. Application Guidelines & Suggestions

- Brownstein Fellowship proposals should have elements of travel and volunteer service experience. There is much flexibility in tailoring a program that is best suited for you, given the goals you articulate. Use the resources available to you, including the deans, alumni and faculty/staff members.
- Travel and experience in an environment to which one is not accustomed are important considerations for the proposal. International and domestic travel proposals (or a mix of both) will be considered.
- The experience can be broken into segments of travel. For example, a four-month proposal can be broken into two separate two-month components or four different month-long components. The experience can be a part of a structured program with a credible track record, such as Rustic Pathways, or totally independent, or a combination.
- Please note: In the first year, preference may be given to proposals that involve travel to China, given the ties that Michael Brownstein had established in China at the time of his death.

- The Fellowship will provide funding for travel, lodging, and other related expenses. Some funding should come from student/family (work, etc.). Your proposal should address, in addition to the awarded amount, how you will pay for the experience. If paid work is part of your plan during the year to help pay for expenses, please include tentative details in your proposal.
- The successful application will provide thoughtful and thorough rationale for the selection of places and experiences hoped for. Quality of experience is more important than quantity. The Brownstein Fellowship encourages proposals that embrace independence, a spirit of adventure, and a sense of social justice with a humanitarian perspective. This is not a “let me travel around the world and see the sights” experience.

## V. Application Questions

To make an application, submit a proposal that contains a detailed statement of the objectives, program, itinerary and budget by answering the questions below. The completed application should be electronically submitted to the **Brownstein Fellowship Selection Committee** c/o Ed Hu, Chief Advancement Officer, at [ehu@hw.com](mailto:ehu@hw.com).

1. **Objective:** Describe the general objectives of your proposed gap year plan. Discuss what you hope to get out of the gap year experience and the reasons for the proposed program(s). The proposal needs to convey how the chosen program will lead hopefully to a transformational experience with impact that is both personal as well as beneficial to others in some way.
2. **Program and Itinerary:** Provide a detailed overview of the time period between graduation from Harvard-Westlake in June 2008 to the anticipated start of the deferred year of college in September 2009.
  - This should include a description of the “non-traveling” time, e.g. time for a job to earn money to help fund the experience (or pay the taxes).
  - Description of the country/culture/program/itinerary(ies) chosen, as well as an explanation of any research conducted in preparing the proposal.
3. **Budget:** Please specify the size of grant requested. You should also provide appropriate information/research to support your reasonable and appropriate budget projection. The Selection Committee will award a grant in an amount up to \$10,000.

**Applications Due Monday, March 17, 2008.** Notification will be made before the end of April.

For more information on Michael Brownstein '99, please go to [www.brownsteinfund.org](http://www.brownsteinfund.org).

## VI. Sample Gap Year Programs: Advice from HW Alumni

### **Sarah Wick '05** [swick@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:swick@fas.harvard.edu)

In the September after I graduated high school, I went to Thailand, where I spent two months traveling with a group of gap year kids and two high school seniors all around the country. Though I didn't love the program, Thailand was incredible, completely different than any place I had ever been. I had wanted to travel by myself, but my parents were insistent that at least for the first part of my year, I go with some sort of organized program. I actually would strongly recommend this, especially for people like me, who - at the time- had never stayed in hostels or seriously traveled alone. After the program, my mom met me in Thailand and we spent the next three weeks traveling through Cambodia, Vietnam and Japan. After resting a little when I went home, I started working as an intern on the TV show the OC. After a month there, I got hired as a production assistant in the writers' office. I stayed there for a little over three months. I would strongly suggest adding some sort of work component to a year off. I think of everything I did, it made me reevaluate what I wanted out of my college education the most. After that, I went to a place that basically serves as half a hostel/ half a surf and language school in Costa Rica by myself. I went with some of the people I met there on little excursions to other areas. Even though I really liked it there, I was only able to stay for a couple of weeks due to family reasons. To plan my year off, my family hired a company that specializes in that sort of thing called Interim. It is run by Holly Bull. The main reason we did this was because I didn't really know anyone who had taken time off, and didn't really know where to start looking. If you have other resources, like the one that Harvard-Westlake is putting together, I don't think it is really necessary to hire one of these sorts of companies as they are expensive and not that helpful. I think the best way to plan a great year is to talk to people who have taken time off. This will give you interesting ideas not only of what sort of things you might want to do, but what you might not be interested in as well.

### **Andy Okuneff '06** [lakerball1@yahoo.com](mailto:lakerball1@yahoo.com)

I participated in the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange (CBYX), which was sponsored by AYUSA and Partnership International and fully funded by the US and German governments. Each scholarship is estimated at about \$10,000 and includes airfare to and from Germany, a 3 1/2 week crash course in German in a small town in East Germany and transportation and lodging for 3 different weekend Seminars in Cologne, all alongside the other 49 other scholarship participants. After the 3 1/2 week crash course, and excepting the 3 Seminars, we were sent to different host families all across Germany, studying at a German high school (German high schools go up to the 13th grade, so we were not the oldest kids there). All in all, the program lasts a little more than 10 months, including the 3 1/2 week course, and though the program places kids all across the country, I was in Wiesenthou, a small town of 1200 people about 20 km from the more known cities of Bamberg, Erlangen and Bayreuth. The CBYX scholarship is available to high school sophomores, juniors, seniors, and gap year kids and though they accept kids from all 4 groups, our group consisted of only 1 sophomore, a half dozen juniors and around a dozen seniors, so they definitely lean towards accepting more older kids.

I found the scholarship on [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com), but if someone would be interested in searching for other opportunities abroad, AIFS, AFS, CIEE, ASSE and YFU, in addition to Partnership International and AYUSA are all good organizations for exchange programs.

Because the CBYX scholarship is fully funded, it should definitely be mentioned to people applying for this fellowship. If someone is looking for a life-changing experience abroad, I would highly recommend it.

### **Charlie Melvoin '05** [cmelvoin@gmail.com](mailto:cmelvoin@gmail.com)

Taking a gap year was without a doubt the best decision of my life. In nine months I traveled to 22 countries in Asia, Africa, South America, and the South Pacific (Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, China, India, Sri Lanka, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Tanzania, Kenya, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador). I spent roughly 2 to 3 weeks in each country, backpacking from place to place in an attempt to see as much of the world and do as much as possible given the time I had. It was after going on trips during two summers with Rustic Pathways, one of the world's leading high school travel companies, that I approached the founder and president of the company with my tentative plans to defer college. I had considered patching together a variety of short-term programs with Habitat for Humanity and other organizations, but I feel the year was ultimately so successful because the planning had been a cohesive and comprehensive process. I worked with Rustic Pathways both before and during the year to design the trip, utilizing their many resources around the globe. Admittedly, my gap year was incredibly extensive, but it wasn't the number of stamps I received in my passport, but rather the experiences I had in

every place that made it as meaningful as it was. Whether you go abroad or stay at home, whether you travel or work, whether you have friends taking a year off or are the only one doing it – this is really the first opportunity you have to feel like a human being and not just a student. It was around this time my senior year that I started to seriously tackle the question of how to fill so many months away from school. Now, midway through my sophomore year of college, I can't imagine what life would be like had I not wandered off the beaten path.

**Seth Familian '97** [familian@mac.com](mailto:familian@mac.com)

The year I spent abroad after graduating from college was a truly transformative and eye-opening experience. I traveled through 22 countries in 3 continents (Europe, Asia, and South America). I immersed myself in utterly foreign cultures. I learned new languages and customs. I forged wonderful, lasting friendships. And I returned with a newfound maturity and perspective which to this day positively influences my attitudes and endeavors.

Along the way, I learned a few practical lessons on independent world travel--lessons which should be useful to anyone planning a gap year abroad:

1. Start with a goal in mind. A goal or project pursued while traveling serves a driving force that gives your travels a sense of purpose, and immediately transforms you from 'tourist' to 'cultural observer', and perhaps even 'cultural participant.' For me, that driving force was a photography and writing project on textures of the built and natural environment. That project resulted not just in 4,000 images, 40 blog entries, a website, and a self-published book; it sustained me throughout my journeys, and gave me a wonderful lens through which I could appreciate so many otherwise disparate experiences. I urge you to shape your travels around a similarly-minded goal--one that originates from your heart, and resonates with your intellectual passions and curiosity.

2. Have a plan, but be flexible. Not having an itinerary is pure folly, but so is planning every hour of every day. Be willing to have a general sense of where you would like to go and what you would like to experience in a given country or region. But also be willing to act with at least some spontaneity. After just a few weeks of travel I came to realize that other travelers are often your best guidebook, and you'll never know what they'll suggest until the planning phase of your trip is long gone.

3. Go slow. I can't emphasize this enough. A whirlwind trip through 22 cities in 2 months (also known as the first part of my year abroad) was both exhausting and unsatisfying. I was always on the move and never had a chance to really sink my teeth into any given culture. By the time I arrived in Southeast Asia 4 months later I had learned to slow down. Though I only visited 10 places in a 4 month period, those experiences were far more enriching and rewarding. I also learned to travel slow. Take busses or even the multi-day 'slow boat' (as I did in both Chile and Laos). It's a wonderful way to really see the landscape as you travel through it, and engage far more in local culture.

4. Take a break every 3-4 months. Traveling can be exhausting, and sometimes it's really nice to take a break, head back home for a little bit, and refuel. Also, traveling on a round-the-world ticket sometimes isn't the most cost-effective way to go. For these reasons I structured my year of travel around three 3-4 month trips, using Los Angeles as a hub. That way I was able to easily travel to and from Europe, South America, and Southeast Asia while giving myself a chance to take breaks in between, switch out gear, and reflect upon each experience along the way.