

EDUCATION

Is it worthwhile to drop A SEMESTER?



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

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The decision of whether to take a semester off from college is one that many students consider, which comes with its own set of benefits and drawbacks. As with many other life decisions, the answer isn't always simple. It's deeply personal and varies according to individual circumstances.

Shams Islam*, a student at the University of Guelph, shares, "I had to return to Bangladesh since my father is ill, which is difficult at the moment but also provides me some time to unwind and refuel after studying full-time and working long hours in Canada. Academically, I don't believe there is much of an impact. The only negative aspect is that I am now six months behind schedule and will graduate a little later, but that doesn't bother me personally."

The university experience is unquestionably enriching, but it also comes with a lot of pressure, starting with strict academic standards and extending to the arena of personal and social difficulties. The thought of dropping a semester presents a tempting window of escape in such a demanding setting. This break isn't just an opportunity for an escape but it's also a chance for mental reconditioning.

Tasin Tayeba Khan, a student at North South University, says, "I genuinely believe that an undergraduate degree that requires four or more years with only two weeks off between semesters is excessively demanding. After a rigorous semester, two weeks off is not enough time to rest and relax, so this was an essential break for me after almost three years. I had time to focus on my mental health and even practised some programming skills."

The time spent outside of lecture halls opens up opportunities for real-world experiences, whether it's

working as an intern in a busy corporate office, helping in the community, taking interesting trips, or even planning your own start-up.

Ramisa Mustafa, a student at York University, says, "I worked on my passion project throughout my semester off. I devoted all of my time to it and received hands-on experience in managing a small business, which contributed considerably to my career portfolio. If I hadn't taken a gap semester, I would not have had the opportunity to apply what I learned in Business and Economics classes to real-world scenarios at such an early stage."

A semester off also offers a practical benefit in light of the ever-rising cost of tuition and other related expenses. It allows students to work, save money, and thoughtfully reassess their financial plans for continuing their education.

"Taking a semester off during the pandemic made the most sense to me since it would help me figure out a new path for my degree, given the enormous changes in the global and local economies we experienced. I needed to come up with alternatives that were within my budget," says Ramisa.

When considering dropping a semester, several challenges should be considered. The potential disconnect that students can experience upon returning is one of the main worries. Possible curriculum changes may make it difficult to adjust, and in social situations, one might feel "out of sync" with friends who have maintained their education without interruption.

A break may provide a chance for financial relief, but it also carries the danger of losing out on financial aid and scholarships. Additionally, the prolonged study period may incur additional fees.

Concerning academic breaks, the majority of

universities retain unique policies. Hence, students need to be well aware of these requirements before taking such a step. Ensuring they are ready for any potential difficulties with the re-enrollment procedure, course availability, or even changes in degree requirements.

"My main challenge would be having to leave a genuinely good job on good terms and making sure I'm still connected to my prior employer to keep prospects open. In addition, managing my university scholarships, which total more than CAD 12,000 and are only set to be paid out at specific semesters, was a hardship for me. I had to get in touch with the scholarship committee and provide them with proof of my absence from one of the semesters to get my scholarship instalment shifted," expressed Shams.

Finally, taking a break could unintentionally project a sense of backsliding in a setting where academic progress is frequently equated with achievement. Even though these feelings are unfounded in reality, this perceived setback can be intimidating in a society that values competition, establishing a psychological barrier.

The decision to skip a semester depends on a variety of things, including one's own well-being and financial reasons. While it offers many benefits, there are also some drawbacks. However, in an era when



the meaning of education is constantly evolving, it's critical to remember that learning isn't limited to classrooms, nor is it completely linear.

*Names have been changed upon request.

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