

From  to



Dear second years,

Today, I want to tell you a little bit about my experience in hopes to encourage you to once again consider taking a different path.

The first time I decided to take a different path was when applying to UWC. UWC is a place where I chose to be because I longed for more, I wanted to live something different, suffice my thirst to grow and be able to expand my opportunities.



Description: Picture taken at UWC Mahindra College, 2017.

Being a student at UWC meant stretching further than I thought I could, making life-long friendships, acquiring precious knowledge and collecting some of the most meaningful memories I treasure today.

Then, as fourth term started, I felt pressured to apply to college. As a Latina, I was never encouraged to take a gap year, I thought it was some sort of European concept, or an opportunity only people from a certain financial background had access to. However, I still wondered if there was a way in which I could earn more time. Time off from the pressures of an academic life, time to process all the baggage of experiences and emotions I had collected for the past two years. Time to find out what really mattered to me, time to put to practice all I learned at UWC while exploring the world a bit more.



Description: UWC Alumni from different UWC schools during GCY in Brazil.

Fortunately, the universe proved me wrong right before I lost all hope. One evening, I received an email from my college counselor talking about a *bridge year* program called [Global Citizen Year \(GCY\)](#).

The email highlighted how the program facilitated College deferrals and how Shelby Davis provided UWC students with scholarships every year to support their applications. It took me only a couple of hours to browse through their webpage and watch some GCY alumni videos to fall in love with the idea of submerging myself into a new culture, being part of a local family, learning a new language and having an apprenticeship experience.

And so, I decided to take a different path once again and left for [Brazil](#) in August of 2017, meanwhile some other UWC Fellows left for countries like [Ecuador](#), [Senegal](#) and [India](#).

In the next seven months, my life took a 180° turn and I was amazed. Brazil filled me with its diversity, its colors, its landscape, its music and overall its people.

I found myself surrounded by individuals that taught me new things every day, situations that stretched me and challenges that made me grow. I found a use of all the knowledge I had earned at UWC and felt grateful for it. I was glad to have a platform to redefine myself in a new setting, to have my mind occupied at learning a language and to feel at home again after UWC.



Description: Juliana at the organic market with her host-mom and host-aunt.



Description: Juliana facilitating an activity at her apprenticeship.

My bridge year revolved around how I decided to take ownership over my experience. It brought me self-awareness as I navigated through the challenges. I explored empathy as I acknowledged how I affected everyone around me and adopted a lifestyle foreign to me. I took initiative as I searched for ways to make a difference in the lives of those around me and in the process expanded my global competency a little more.

Today, I can't imagine having gone straight to college. Today, I want to believe UWC students are open-minded enough to take a chance on more of that experiential learning the academic pressure took us away from so often. I would like to also invite you to give yourself the opportunity to step back and ask "Why not?"

Regardless of you feeling all set to go straight to college or not, I want you to consider the idea that there's really no carved path for you. Opportunities like this exist and you have access to them! You are ready because UWC prepared you for this. The person you have become can make the difference in the lives of many others out there that have no access to the opportunities we've had. Just think about it, you can experience it yourself.

If you resonate in any way to what I have written here I urge you to [apply](#). Remember that if you already applied to collage GCY will help you to defer, that you can re-apply to university during your gap-year and that those Davis-scholarships will always be there. So now is the time where you consider taking the different path, embarking a new adventure ... Are you ready?

All best,

Juliana Trujillo Mesa.



*Juliana is a Mahindra United World College of India graduate student from the class of 2017. She completed her Global Citizen Year the summer of 2018.*