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***An Exploration of Faith, Service, & Calling for 2025-2026 High School Sophomores, Juniors, Seniors***



October 2025

Dear High School Sophomore, Junior, or Senior,

Below you will find an application for the Simpson Youth Academy, of which the residential portion runs **June 20-28, 2026**. We are delighted by your interest in the program!

At SYA, we believe that the world needs young people’s gifts, talents and insights right now, not just in the distant future! And we believe that the church can be a special and supportive place for youth to develop those gifts, for the good of the world.

So we gather twenty-five high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors from throughout the region for our summer Residency, a nine day and eight night experience in community. Our goal is to help you grow in your faith in a challenging and supportive mentoring community of college preparation where your views, talents, and insights are welcomed and encouraged.

So, what will this look like? Kind of chaotic, actually, as we live out our commitment to exploring our faith in the concrete situations of everyday life. We’ll make it possible for you to engage in classroom exploration, service-learning, and community building with a diverse group of “scholars” (as we call the participants) and staff. You will take an *Exploratory Course* that focuses on the history of Christianity and different ways to read the Bible. You’ll engage in *Service Immersion* *Trips* in organizations in the city of Des Moines, which might include work with people who are unhoused, communities involved in the resettlement of people who are refugees or immigrants, or farming and creation care. We do our best to bring together youth from diverse backgrounds, so that you will be challenged to learn how to *engage honestly and respectfully with people whose experiences, commitments, and perspectives are different from yours*. You’ll have an opportunity to plan and lead worship on Simpson’s campus. And there will be time for relaxation and play, like pool visits, yoga, and ice cream. Because the Residency is full of new experiences, and because we emphasize building a community as an important part of our work together, **we require that all Academy participants be present for the entire Residency, arriving June 20 and departing June 28, 2026**. It is not possible for you to participate in other programs (camps, mission trips, etc.) during the nine-day Residency.

At the Residency students often build strong connections with peers and mentors. And we want to provide optional ways for you to stay in touch throughout the following year. So after the summer, we offer two **24-hour retreats** – one weekend in October, one in March. We also offer a monthly Zoom or in-person event where we can regather to continue building community. **Note that these academic year offerings are optional.**

We believe so strongly in SYA that we make the program available to you at a fee far below what the program actually costs. To run the Academy costs about $4,150 per student per year, but through generous donations from Simpson College, and our partner donors and churches, we provide every participant with a $3,650 scholarship!

This means that **you will only be asked to pay $500** to cover housing and meals for the Residency. **Additional scholarships are available. Please do not let the cost of SYA deter you from applying. We will work with you, your family, and your home congregation, to make it possible for you to attend.**

**How to apply:**

1.) Complete the below application (which includes demographic info, and 4 essay questions). If you complete it as a Google Doc, please share it with Eric Rucker at **eric.rucker@simpson.edu**. Or you can save the application as a Word or PDF and email it to that same email address.

2.) Identify two adults who are not family members to complete recommendation forms for you. One should be a teacher from your school, the other a pastor, youth group leader, coach, or other mentor in your life. Email these two people the Recommendation Form, and after they complete and sign it, have them *email it directly to* director Eric Rucker at **eric.rucker@simpson.edu.** The recommenders **should not** send their completed forms back to you. **Make sure they know the date by which you want them to complete and submit the form!**

The priority deadline by which we would like to receive all these materials is **February 1, 2026**.

Applicants who meet this deadline will be given first consideration for acceptance into the program as well as for financial aid. However, if all spots are not already filled after the priority deadline, the second and final deadline for applications will be March 1, 2026. Keep in mind that applicants who wait until February 1 may not be considered if all Academy spots are already filled. Please note that it is *your* responsibility to make sure that all your application materials arrive on time, so you may want to give your recommenders a friendly reminder several weeks before you need them to complete the form. **We run a rolling acceptance process, so if you submit your materials in the weeks or months before February 1, you will likely hear about your acceptance status early.**

**Acceptance and Registration:**

Our admissions staff will notify you of your admission status by **March 1, 2026**.

If admitted, you will have until **April 17, 2026** to confirm your commitment to the Academy in writing, and to send the $100 admissions deposit (which will serve as a non-refundable security deposit for the Academy). Your full payment of the additional $400 will be due by **May 15, 2026**.

***Please note that our students often work with their churches to help cover the remaining tuition fee.*** For more information about financial aid, see the pages below.

If you have any questions about the Simpson Youth Academy or application process, please contact us by phone (515.961.1610) or email (eric.rucker@simpson.edu).

Blessings,

**Rev. Eric Rucker**

Director, Simpson Youth Academy

  **2025 Academy Application; please print or type**

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_   
 last first middle preferred

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

City:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ State:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Zip code:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Student Phone:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Student Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Gender: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Place of birth:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

city state (country, if not U.S)

Parent/Guardian Email: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Guardian Phone: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Religious Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Church/local religious community denomination

Your pastor’s contact name + email:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

School name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Anticipated graduation date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

City\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ State\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Zip code\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

School phone (\_\_\_)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Hobbies or special interests\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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How did you hear about the Simpson Youth Academy? (brochure, my minister, teacher, etc.)\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Are there other youth you know who might be interested in the Simpson Youth Academy and should be added to our mailing list in the future? If so, please tell us their name, contact information, and CURRENT grade in school.

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**OPTIONAL 🡪** We have received funds for 2025 to offer additional scholarships to LGBTQIA+ youth. Check here if you would like to apply for one of these scholarships: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**RECCOMENDATIONS**: Two letters of recommendation are required as part of your application. Choose adults who know you well and who are NOT members of your family. At least one of your recommenders ***must*** be a high school teacher with whom you have successfully completed a class and who can comment on your academic abilities or interests. The other should be a mentor who knows you well (another teacher, pastor, youth pastor, coach, etc.) Please list below the names, phone numbers, and addresses of the persons who will complete the recommendation forms found below.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Email:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How do you know this person? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Email:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Phone:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How do you know this person? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ESSAYS**: The SYA admissions team are interested in learning more about you. References tell us many things about your academic and personal achievement, but they tell us little about the questions that intrigue you or how you think about them. Therefore we would like for you to write a brief essay in response to ***each*** of the first three questions, and then ***one of the two questions listed under number 4***. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers; please just try to answer the questions honestly and thoughtfully.

**Each response should be 250-300 words (at least half a page, single-spaced). Please type your responses, and be sure to put your name on each page.**

1. What have you done in the last year that you really care about, and why is it important to you?

2. What interests you most about the Youth Academy, and why do you want to attend? What kinds of questions about God, God’s involvement in the world, faith, or your calling would you like to explore at the Simpson Youth Academy?

3. Describe a time when you went “outside your comfort zone.” (like visiting a strange or foreign place, trying something new, encountering a person or people different than you, reading a book that challenged your thinking, etc.) How did you respond at the time? What do you feel or think about it now?

***(questions continued below)***

4. **CHOOSE ONE**:

A. What do you consider to be important about yourself that others might miss? (like convictions, qualities, feelings, spiritual or religious feelings, etc.)

B. How have your experiences or thoughts about God shaped your commitments and your understanding of the world?

I certify that all of the above information is correct to the best of my knowledge, and that the enclosed essays are my work alone. In order to participate in the Simpson Youth Academy starting in the summer of 2026, I understand that I must complete my current year of high school and plan to enter the next class in the fall of 2026. If I am accepted as an SYA scholar and choose to attend, I agree to participate in the full duration of the Residency in 2026, and I will abide by the rules and regulations of the Simpson Youth Academy.

**E-Signature of applicant**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*I certify that I give permission for my son/daughter to apply for the 2026 Simpson Youth Academy.*

**E-Signature of parent/guardian** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

***The priority application deadline is February 1, 2026.***

**Application Checklist:**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Completed application form with applicant and parent/guardian e-signature**

**\_\_\_\_4 essays**

**\_\_\_\_2 recommendation forms emailed to recommenders**

**Financial Aid**

The Simpson Youth Academy works hard to make the program affordable for all youth. The nine-month Academy costs about **$4,150** per student to run. But thanks to the generosity of Simpson College, we provide every student with a scholarship of $3,650! Therefore, students are asked to pay only **$500** tuition, which will cover housing and meals for the summer Residency and retreats.

If you are unable to pay the $500, we ask that you please first consider asking your church or community for financial support. We are happy to help you in this process of raising the remaining tuition. To get started, contact our program director for a copy of the SUPPORT LETTER. You can give the letter to your pastor, youth pastor, or board members/elders in your religious community to help explain the program and the funds that you are raising. **Please contact us if you need help in this process or would like to figure out other ways to raise support!** Do so by emailing program director Eric Rucker at eric.rucker@simpson.edu or calling 515-961-1610.

If you are unable to raise financial support from your community, you may apply for additional financial aid from the Academy. Application for financial aid and application for the program itself occur on the same timeline. If you wish to request financial aid, please contact our program director to let him know. You will be notified about your admission status and financial aid status before or by **March 1, 2026.** Again, please first ask your community for financial support before applying for additional aid from the Academy.

***The Simpson Youth Academy does not use financial information to determine admission to the program. Likewise, we encourage students not to let financial concerns deter them from applying.***

Financial Aid and Admissions Timeline:

February 1, 2026: Priority deadline for application forms and Financial Aid Requests

March 1, 2026: Applicants notified about admissions status and additional financial aid by this date

April 17, 2026: Applicants commit to Academy in writing and submit $100 non-refundable security deposit\*\*

May 15, 2026: The remainder of tuition – $400 – is due.

\*\*Students will know by this time how much of the remaining tuition will be covered by financial aid