

## Big Questions

Use these examples to inspire conversations about calling and the meaning of the “good life.” Obviously you need not discuss them all! It’s often helpful to have the student read the list and pick out one or two he or she feels comfortable discussing.

1. When you were a little kid, what was one of the things you wanted to be when you grew up?
2. What has been the biggest difference for you between this year and last year?
3. How are your plans for major(s)/minor(s) shaping up?
4. Plans for international travel, either semester abroad or May term?
5. What is currently your most satisfying/interesting/challenging class, and why?
6. What is the most important thing you have learned in the past few months (this does not have to relate to a class!)?
7. What are your plans for the summer? Is there a way your summer plans can support your educational goals at Simpson?
8. As you think about your college experience in general, what has been the most helpful? Where are you growing and learning? Where are you struggling?
9. What advice would you give to an incoming student about preparing for and living through the first year of college?
10. What else would you like me to know about your life at this point (plans, frustrations, hopes, etc.)?
11. When you look back in old age, how do you think you’ll measure the *significance* of your life?
12. What causes, ideas, issues, or activities are you *passionate* about? What things in your life give you the deepest sense of satisfaction?
13. What are your gifts or strengths (i.e. communication, writing, the arts, leadership, compassion, service, creativity)? How are you *intentionally* developing them, or how might you start to do so?
14. Think about a person you *admire*. What are the values, beliefs, traits of character, commitments, or achievements of that person?
15. When you reflect on your future direction, there may be *other voices* whispering in your ear about what they think you should do. Who are those important voices in your life?
16. In 10 years, what kind of person do you want to be? Is your time at Simpson so far helping you learn to become that person? Why or why not?
17. List some of your life experiences in serving others. How did they change you? Name one thing you hope to do *for the benefit of others* in your life.
18. What is the difference between a job and a vocation?
19. What should I do with my life?
20. How can I best use my gifts?
21. Who can serve as my mentor as I search for a meaningful life?
22. How can I integrate my sense of spirituality into my daily life?
23. Do I have what it takes to minister others?
24. What adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
25. To really know me, you need to know that I...
26. Whose job would you most like to have?
27. Complete this sentence by listing as many things as come to mind: I am... (use nouns, adjectives, whatever.)
28. Are there times when you have felt “called” to do something? How does that differ from simply “doing” things?
29. Are you “called” to work in your current field/major? If yes, what does that feel like? If no, what do you feel “called” to do and why are you not pursuing it?
30. Quickly list everything you can think of that interests you. What do you just love to do?
31. When you walk into a bookstore, which section do you go to first? What other sections do you visit?
32. Imagine that you are going to a mall that has every possible store that exists. In which stores would you enjoy spending time browsing?
33. When you pick up a newspaper, which section do you read? Why?
34. What do you enjoy talking about? If you were stuck on a plane for eight hours and the person next to you wanted to talk, what subjects or fields would make the time fly by?

35. When you browse the Web, what topic do you like to enter? Favorite web sites?
36. Someone has offered to pay you to go anywhere in the world to study for three weeks at any university/school/training program. Where would you go? What would you study? What does this tell you about yourself?
37. What is really important in your life? What really matters?
38. What would you be better off doing more of?
39. What would you be better off doing less of?
40. Of all the things that you've done, what has made you happiest?
41. Of all the things that you've done, what has satisfied you the most?
42. Finish these sentences: I was most happy when . . . I will be so happy when . . . How are the two questions different?
43. What is the most valuable thing you've learned?
44. What is the best thing you've done to help other people?
45. Who is your professional role model? What qualities does he/she possess that have earned him/her your respect?
46. What are your gifts and how are you being called to use them?
47. How have your parents' occupations influenced your choice of vocation?
48. What emotions and values have impacted your selection of major and career?
49. How do you define professional success?
50. Are you making time to be still and listen to your inner voice? What are you being called to do?
51. Who can you rely upon to support you in the decision you make regarding your vocation?
52. If you had to wear your philosophy as a motto on a T-shirt, what would it be?
53. Do you live your life like this is your philosophy or is your fantasy?
54. Are you inhibited by a fear of failing? Just for a moment, pretend that failure is a triumph, not a shame. What would you reach for, what would you risk?
55. How do you envision yourself at age 60? What would you like to know that you don't know now? What should you be doing now that you will happily look back on then?
56. **What is vocation, anyway?**
  - (1) First, it might be helpful to know that vocation means "calling." Thinking about vocation as a "calling" causes one to think about the source of the call, which can be different things for different people. For some it is God or the Divine; for others it is the community, other people and their needs, nature, or one's deepest self. It also implies an ongoing dynamic of listening and response, seeking and discovery, and questions and "answers."
  - (2) It is who you most truly are, in and for the world. It is all the places in life where "your heart's deep gladness meets the world's deep hunger." It is our summons to utilize our gifts and passions in order to address the world's deep needs. It is the expression of one's truest identity by living life in a way that benefits others.
  - (3) It is the shape your entire life takes as a certain kind of answer to the "Big Questions": Who am I, and why am I here? What's my place in the world, and how can my life make a difference? What does my life really stand for? Is my life today contributing to peace and justice? What will be my legacy?
  - (4) It is more than your job, occupation, or career. These can and likely will change. It's great if your vocation can be lived out, at least in part, in and through your work, but there is much more to it.
  - (5) It doesn't have to be something particularly "religious." One's vocation may grow out of and express one's faith, but does not depend on identifying with a particular religious tradition or holding a particular set of beliefs or practices.
  - (6) It is something that grows out of our life experiences. It is not something that you "have", "buy", "find", or "get", as in "Get a life!" Instead, it emerges within and around us--and takes on various shapes and meanings--in and through our experiences, relationships, and discoveries.
57. Take a few minutes to reflect. In thinking about these questions, did you learn anything new about yourself? If so, explain. Is there anything you want to *change* about your direction or how you spend your time or energy? If so, what specific positive steps should you take?