

The Adventure Begins

The Story of the Forge Leadership Summit



Fall 2020



“ I must say that this week has probably been the highlight of my entire year. The first four months of this year were very difficult for me, and for awhile, I did not really believe that my year would get much better. Then I heard of Forge. It has been such an incredible blessing to be here and to be encouraged by so many to speak truth and to do it boldly. It has been very lonely for me this year, but this week I made some connections with some pretty great people, learned so much about politics, and was just very encouraged to persevere even when I feel like giving up. Thank you to everyone for this wonderful experience!

– Rebekah Dickerson, 2020 Forge Leadership Summit Attendee




Dear Forge Champions,

Thank you for making it possible to host the Forge Leadership Summit – in person – with 80 aspiring young leaders at the end of July! Before delving further into testimonials and a recap of the week, let me give you some context on how this adventure began:

Five days before the Forge Summit began, our scheduled venue cancelled our event due to COVID-19 concerns. Thankfully, God provided an alternative location the very next day – Deer Creek Lodge and Conference Center, located southwest of Columbus, Ohio.

So, against all odds, and everything that 2020 could throw at us, we held the Forge Leadership Summit – in person – as planned July 21-25.

Our students were thrilled that the Summit was still on, our speakers and trainers were excited to invest in young leaders; and, after asking and trusting God to open or close doors and guide us, we believed this would be a powerful event, one in which we honored and followed best practices and health guidelines in partnership with the host location. It was just that and more – a phenomenal event, and the students we met were thrilled and grateful that we didn't cancel or postpone. Rebekah Dickerson, a young woman from Texas, opened up to us:



Despite knowing the Summit would be powerful in the lives of these young leaders, it didn't mean it was an easy decision to proceed with the event...

Even after negotiating a substantial discount, the Summit cost us significantly more than our campus location would have. But given what our country has been facing, we believe our mission to raise up faithful young leaders has never been more crucial.

We didn't take this financial hit lightly, but we hope this story of perseverance and wanting to find a way to not let COVID-19 undermine our mission will encourage and inspire you!

Thank you for joining us in the mission of Forge,



Adam Josefczyk
President and Co-Founder
Forge Leadership Network

Summit Overview

After countless hours spent recruiting high caliber students, scheduling featured speakers, and organizing the event, all the hard work culminated with the most important moment of the year for us: The 2020 Forge Leadership Summit! The Forge Summit is the gateway to the rest of Forge programming, and standout students are accepted into our yearlong Mentorship Academy.

The Forge Summit is a five-day intensive that trains young adults (ages 18-25) to think critically about limited government, Judeo-Christian ethics, religious liberty, and economic freedom. Accepted students represent talented conservative students and young professionals from across America pursuing different vocations, but each dedicated to better understanding and defending the first principles of the American Founding in a 21st-Century context. Through professional media training, mock political campaigns, participation in the Forge Legislature, and intentional networking coaching, young conservatives are equipped to become the leaders of tomorrow.

This year's Summit saw a mix of knowledgeable and renowned speakers, dynamic real-world, hands-on exercises such as Campaign-In-A-Day and Media Training, participation in the legislative process, and it all ended with an opportunity for adults older than 25 to experience a day in the life of a Forge student through Forge-For-A-Day! Despite COVID-19, we welcomed over 80 students hailing from over 20 states.

Calvin Blaylock is Executive Assistant to the Vice President of Development at The Heritage Foundation and participated in the 2020 Forge Leadership Summit. He had this to say about his first experience with Forge:



“

The Forge Leadership Summit is a remarkable launching pad for the next generation of principled statesmen, community leaders, and faithful Christians in the public square. By participating in the Summit's engaging activities, you'll be equipped with everything you need to succeed as an emerging conservative leader. And you'll form a lasting cohort of newfound friends in the process. The Forge Leadership Summit excels at catalyzing moments of personal and professional growth and is definitely an opportunity worth pursuing.

– Calvin Blaylock, 2020 Forge Leadership Summit Attendee



Student Voices

Paul Kayembe

After the election of President Donald Trump, I first became involved with Turning Point USA (TPUSA). While TPUSA was the push I needed to get my foot into the field of politics, I still needed something extra that would revitalize my Christian, fighting spirit. Attending my first Forge event was a great experience that indeed revived that dormant spirit in me. From the moment I attended the Forge Leadership Summit, I knew that Christian values in America were not dead, just on life-support.



Born and raised in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country that has been torn apart by wars and armed conflicts, my parents have dedicated 25 years of their lives protecting, serving, and promoting the cause of the voiceless women and children of the Congo by creating a Non-Governmental Organization. Their faith and values have driven their decision to show selflessness to the communities that needed a reaching and helping hand in times of injustice and hopelessness. I learned from a very young age the importance of serving others with compassion, kindness, and to always stand up against injustice. In fact, I have always considered myself a staunch advocate for justice and the truth of the gospel, both quintessential elements of life that have gone missing nowadays.

As someone who has experienced the divisiveness of tribalism, I try to befriend people who share at least one of my values, not simply the color of my skin, who are grounded in faith and believe in Jesus Christ. At the Forge Summit, I met a handful of people from all races that met that threshold and beyond..

The experience at the Forge Leadership Summit was one of a kind: the type of experience that gives you a glimpse into the future, reviving hope in you.



Winning in the Media

Every year, Forge provides professional, hands-on instruction for public speaking, effective message development and execution, and interview navigation as a part of our Media Training. This training is presented by Aaron Baer, president of Ohio's family policy council, Citizens for Community Values. Jordan Leatherwood, Forge alumnus who returned as a student mentor, is a senior at Ohio University Chillicothe, majoring in Middle Childhood Education. He describes the Media Training as follows:

“*The media training that Aaron Baer offers gives Forge students a real-life experience of the atmosphere of a press conference and the types of questions they may be asked. The experience makes those being interviewed think on their feet while trying to stay on message. The simulation is thought provoking, nerve wrecking, and a lot of fun.*

Aaron Baer is always one of my favorite speakers during the Forge Leadership Summit. Every year, Aaron brings a much-needed perspective on the life of a journalist through media training. For me, the greatest point he makes is to always stay on message. There may be questions asked to trip you up, but it is your job to bring it back around to the message you want your audience to hear. The information Aaron brings to Forge is unique and exciting to learn, as is the case with the quality of speakers we have at the Forge Summit every year.

**– Jordan Leatherwood,
Student Mentor**



Forge Legislature: The Art of Persuasion

The Forge legislative simulation is one of the most high energy and exciting aspects of the Forge Leadership Summit. Normally we are hosted at the Ohio Statehouse, but we were unable to do so due to COVID-19. Still, we held the same exciting training in a brand new venue — in the Ballroom at the Deer Creek Lodge!

Before arriving at the Summit, students work with their assigned committee chair (a Forge alum) to prepare a piece of legislation they will submit, present, and debate with their fellow committee members once we get to the Summit. If their bill passes out of Committee it will be debated on the mock House Floor during our Forge legislative simulation. We spend two full days working in committees and on the House Floor learning to sharpen their debate skills, effective argumentation, and the art of persuading others.

In addition to staff and student mentors, each year we are fortunate to have elected Ohio lawmakers volunteer time to coach our students in how to effectively present themselves and participate in the committee process. This year Representative Jim Butler, Representative Derek Merrin, Representative Jena Powell, Representative Todd Smith, Representative Jason Stephens, and Representative Nino Vitale joined us to help coach and guide students through the committee process.



“Forge students represent the next generation of conservative warriors. It is an honor to train and prepare them to fight for the freedoms and soul of America.

They are the best and brightest young conservatives in the country. They have a passion for conservatism and limited government. We must encourage and equip them to win in the public arena – our future depends on it.

**– State Representative Derek Merrin,
Ohio District 47**



“*The Committee Meetings were my favorite part of the Forge Summit! Not only was I able to learn the art of debate and critical thinking. I got to know my fellow Forge students on a more personal level as we grew into better statesmen and stateswomen.*

– Dinora Ruiz, 2020 Forge Leadership Summit Attendee



Ohio State Representatives introducing themselves to Forge students



Winning Campaigns through Strategy and Teamwork

Our friends at American Majority presented “Campaign-In-A-Day”, which is a unique hands-on training that gives students the tactical political skills necessary for electoral victory. Matt Batzel, the National Executive Director, and Scott Ellis, the Wisconsin Campus Director, returned once more to organize the Campaign-In-A-Day event which is one of our highest-rated trainings of the entire Summit. During this hands-on exercise, students are divided into groups of 10 and are assigned a fictional congressional campaign contest.

Best learned through application, students apply their newly developed skill sets through a mock election cycle. They work together to produce communication and marketing plans, discover their constituency's niche, develop and present speeches, and struggle through their the candidate's weaker points. They collaborate in their campaign group for a total of five hours, including a working dinner, and then prepare to present their candidate's speeches in a campaign “shark tank” before expert guest judges. After the candidate and her press secretary speak, the judges ask focused and pertinent questions to discern the strategy and implementation of their campaign. The groups are scored, and after this 6.5 hour intensive, prizes and bragging rights are announced!



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In 2016, American Majority ran our first Campaign-In-A-Day event at the Forge Leadership Summit with 60 attendees. Since then over 1,800 students have participated in these intensive campaign simulations. Students learn specific skills through our trainers, and then must apply those skills as they collaborate with their campaign teammates. Students are taken out of their comfort zone with on the spot questioning as well as challenging campaign tasks such as creating radio ads and public speaking. Forge students were encouraged by the event to be leaders, and several students, who have gone through both Campaign-In-A-Day and the Forge Leadership Summit, have gone on to not only run for office, but to win their elections.

– Scott Ellis, Wisconsin Campus Director at American Majority

Save the Date



Spring Fundraising *Banquets*

Columbus

Friday, March 19, 2021

The Fives
555 W Goodale St.
Columbus, OH 43215

Dayton / Kettering

Saturday, March 20, 2021

Presidential Banquet Center
4572 Presidential Way
Dayton, OH 45429



Daniel participates in Committee and rallies support for his bill with fellow students

Student Voices

Daniel Gerber

The Summit is designed to accelerate the personal and professional development of future politicians, business leaders, and cultural influencers. The legislative simulation, Campaign-In-A-Day, and Media Training were the hands-on exercises which I found to be most challenging and meaningful. Presenting our bills before the Rules Committee and the Floor not only highlighted everyone's passions and interests but also taught us how to communicate our ideas.

Most importantly, Forge teaches students to care about people first and ideologies second. Often in today's culture, when we have disagreements over political stances, we tend to misidentify the main issue and attack the person rather than the problem. Since the Leadership Summit, I have been emboldened to be a catalyst for positive change in my community by attacking the problems rather than the people perceived to be behind them.





Student Voices

Adrienne Ferguson

I come from a humble family of seven. Aside from our religious convictions, nothing is cherished more among us than our Hispanic heritage. My Latino roots always manifest a strong influence on my daily life and have sculpted the person that I am today and what I do to make a difference in the world.

Respecting life, valuing personal responsibility and hard work, and possessing a reverence for God are values that I always saw fervently manifested in the lives of the Hispanic community. These values have distinguished the Latino community and cultivated their eminence in society. As a daughter of a Guatemalan immigrant, I have fortunately been molded by these premier conservative Hispanic values. They have fostered my enthusiasm and dedication to the conservative movement. Woefully, these values are now

under attack in unprecedented ways all across America and most especially in the Hispanic community. An absence of these values imperils our country's future. It pains me to imagine a country without these principles guiding our society and laws, these principles that have led to the United States being reputed as the city on the hill. How can I preserve them for our country? How can I make a difference? That is how I ended up at Forge; I knew Forge could truly assist me in my endeavors to support the conservative movement.

From the Forge Summit, I am grateful to have been endowed with a plethora of knowledgeable guidance and advice in how to be as efficient for the conservative



movement as possible. From social media to public speaking, Forge was diligent in providing a wide range of individuals of the highest of expertise to share their testimonies and counseling. It is an understatement to say that I learned more from the Forge Summit than I have from the past decade of schooling.

“Nunca olvides a quienes te ayudaron en el camino”, my mother always says... “never forget those who helped you along the way.” When I recall this adage my mother repeats often, I hark back to the institutions that have had the most lasting and influential impact on my career, my goals, and my personhood. For me, one of those institutions is Forge Leadership Network. I look forward to the day that I will be able to share my time, talent, and treasure that I accumulate in the future with Forge, as a form of recompense, for all that the organization has generously gifted me. I am eternally grateful. Thank you, Forge.



Forge-For-A-Day: Experiencing Forge Firsthand

Forge-For-A-Day is a chance for Forge Champions to join the students they bless. Supporters, friends of Forge, and members of the community often share the sentiment: "I love the vision of Forge, but I wish I could receive the training the students receive, too!" To accomplish this, Forge-For-A-Day was launched at the 2018 Summit to enable adults over 25 to experience a "taste of Forge" on our most exciting day. This year, twenty-one adults spent a full day with Adam Josefczyk and Justin Powell, Forge co-founders, to experience a number of the essentials of the Forge Leadership Summit. Forge-For-A-Day attendees hear from some of our most popular speakers and have the opportunity to participate in the Forge Legislature with the students.

For the second year in a row, Charles DeMasie joined us as host and facilitator for the day. Charles is a Forge Champion who attended Forge-For-A-Day in 2018 and has helped us develop the vision for this program going forward. *Thank you, Charles, for taking ownership of this ministry and helping others catch the vision!*

“Forge-For-A-Day is a unique opportunity for individuals to learn about the public square in a hands-on environment. It is crucial for individuals who care about their community to take time to invest and learn about what’s happening in politics on a local, state, and federal level. Over the years, Forge taught me that to be an influential leader you must prepare yourself. At Forge-For-A-Day, it was encouraging and uplifting to share some of these lessons I’ve learned with such a dynamic and motivated group of Forge Champions. Forge does an incredible job of training young leaders to care for and change their community. I was thrilled to be part of Forge-For-A-Day and look forward to next year!

— State Representative Jena Powell, Ohio District 80

“ This year at the Forge Summit, I had the opportunity to spend a few days getting to know several Forge students and taking part in the Forge-For-A-Day experience. Forge invited parents of students and champions of Forge to take part in this day so they could see how their support translates to the amazing program that Forge has developed for young conservatives. Personally, getting to speak to the students and seeing them in action gives me tremendous hope for our nation’s future. It is also amazing and encouraging to see so many young conservatives become trained to interact with society with a Christian worldview.

During Forge-For-A-Day, supporters were treated to several amazing speakers that addressed hot-button issues facing our country today. They also actively participated in the mock legislative session where the students debated bills they had created. In the evening, supporters were invited to the Forge Reception where they listened to more incredible speakers and watched the students, who have completed their Forge Academy Mentorship during the last year, graduate. If you haven’t yet had a chance to take part in Forge-For-A-Day, I would highly recommend it. You will not regret spending the day with some of the brightest young people our country has to offer.

— Charles DeMasie, Forge Champion



Showcase Reception: Celebrating Your Success

After spending two full days in legislative sessions, we had the opportunity to spend Friday evening at the Forge Showcase Reception where current and past students get to meet and thank our supporters and Champions who help make Forge possible. During this event, we are all encouraged by the Forge Showcase Presentation highlighting student and alumni stories, while enjoying hors d'oeuvres and dessert. It is a well-deserved opportunity to relax and celebrate another successful Summit.

The Forge Academy Class of 2019-20 were recognized for their accomplishments, their tenacity, their growth both personally and professionally, and for their burgeoning contributions to the conservative movement. Jeremiah Martin, Chief Operating Officer of Forge, spent a great deal of time this past year investing in the Academy students. He had the pleasure of presenting our graduating students and even shared some heartfelt words and reflections about each of these graduates and some inspiring thoughts about what they'd taught him this past year:

Following Jeremiah's reflections and testimonials by two Forge graduates of this past year, we heard an inspiring message from Jonathan Jakubowski. Jonathan is a social entrepreneur, author, and Forge Board Chairman.

“ *Participating in the Forge Showcase Reception was one of the joys of my year. One could tangibly feel the potential brimming from the students and alumni present in the room. This room full of young ladies and gentlemen from every corner of America represented the tangible evidence of a force capable of bringing light, hope, and truth to a world full of darkness, despair, and deceit. Through a series of powerful testimonials, stories, and speeches, the Showcase Reception demonstrated the God-given, limitless human potential, which cannot be stopped regardless of external conditions. More than anything else, I left the reception with concrete evidence that Forge is shaping leaders who will have outsized impact on future generations for decades to come.*

– Jonathan Jakubowski, Forge Board Chairman

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We believe the people we meet in this world, we do not meet by accident. That we serve a God who makes our paths straight and allows us to be sharpened by the iron of the relationships He orchestrates in our lives.

I joined the Forge team full-time at the end of 2018. This meant I joined half-way through the Academy year, and, while I enjoyed my time with that Academy class in D.C., I didn't get to spend nearly as much time with them as I would've liked. This class, the 2019-2020 class, has a special place in my heart because I knew them from the beginning. I recruited them to attend the Summit (some of which were harder to convince than others!) and spent time with them in Washington D.C. this January. We've spent countless hours discussing everything from public policy to faith to whether a hot dog is a sandwich (and everything in between!). Because they live all over the country we've spent a significant amount of time hearing from world class experts and thoughtfully engaging in constructive discussions using digital platforms. This past year I have had the privilege to get to know each of the Academy members, seen their growth, and we've grown together as friends. I have seen firsthand the beauty in each of you, and I am thrilled to see what the future holds for each of you!

– Jeremiah Martin, Forge COO



Jeremiah Martin, Forge COO, and Members of 2019-2020 Mentorship Academy





Student Voices

Dinora Ruiz

Having grown up in Chicago, schooled at home, and from a Christian family, politics was a part of growing up. As years passed and my interests developed, so did my interest in government and politics. At 25, where do I go from here? I've been to so many conferences and trainings but I didn't know how or where to take this long term.

What intrigued me about Forge was their commitment to seeing leaders developed and established. They want to see YOU grow into the culture-shaper you are meant to be. Whether that is a pastor or a legislator, mother or businessman, they are committed to creating strong leaders.

During the legislative simulation, I began by feeling nervous and awkward while presenting my bill to my committee. I relied on my fellow committee members to help me out, and ended strong. With their help, I took the challenge to articulate, defend, and communicate the bill I had written. This week left me excited and challenged to grow and stretch myself as a leader and influencer.

Student Voices

Van Sui

I was motivated by the incredible example of State Representative Jena Powell, a Forge alumna running for a second term at the age of 26. I thank Forge for showing me an intelligent leader who is passionate for the truth, loves her communities, and shows a commitment to Forge students' futures.

The heart of the Forge team is to learn each student's passion and to support students' success.

I had the opportunity to spend time with students who are hungry to learn and grow in leading with truth. I was grateful to meet, connect, and build friendships with these future leaders as we learned and grew together. Throughout the summit, the people I met, the lessons I learned, and the support I received were incredibly valuable. I am thankful for Forge.

As a Burmese refugee from Burma, I grew up under a government ruled by military dictators for over five decades. I am passionate to make an impact in that country. I have been wanting to learn and grow as a Christ-like-minded leader in different dimensions. With the summit experiences, I have found the leadership I have been wanting, and I look forward to learning more through the Forge mentorship program.





Student Mentors: Jordan Leatherwood, Collin Gosche, and Brant Kitchen



Student Mentors: Madeleine Castle, Michelle Kullberg, and Navy Schrock

Forge Alumni Continue to Stay Involved

Every year we have returning alumni join us as student mentors to lead students, facilitate the Forge legislative process as committee chairs, host and introduce speakers, help shuttle students and speakers from the airport, and more.

You name it, they will step up and graciously do it! Justin, Adam, Jennie, and Jeremiah could not run the Summit without the energy, servant leadership, and the variety of talents our returning alumni bring as Student Mentors.

Navy Schrock, a Forge alumna and 2020 Student Mentor, reflects on returning to Forge once again to help:



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After attending my first summit in 2017, I've learned that the friendships made at Forge are irreplaceable. I'm so thankful for the different opportunities I've had to stay connected with this network that has changed my life in many ways!

The July 2020 summit was the first time I returned as a Forge student mentor. This role involved reviewing bill ideas submitted by incoming students and also leading discussion during committee sessions while students presented their bills. The Forge staff did an excellent job training the alumni they brought back as mentors, helping frame our perspective that the main goal wasn't perfection but learning. It's all about offering guidance and helping students maximize their time and experience at the summit!

During the week, I was privileged to chair the absolute best committee! We were able to better learn the legislative process together, engage in passionate discussion over new ideas, and sharpen each other's minds. All while having fun and forming friendships along the way! I can't say how blessed I was by this year's student group – their enthusiasm for learning and desire to serve others was refreshing to see both before and during the summit.

Like everything I've done through Forge, I was surprised at how much I grew by trying a role that was unfamiliar and even a little bit uncomfortable to me initially. But I can say with confidence that returning as a student mentor was one of the best experiences I've ever had. Year after year, I've seen this Summit change lives, and I can't wait to see how the lessons from the 2020 group continue to impact everyone who attended! Here's to many more great years of Forge!

– Navy Schrock, 2017 Forge Alumna & 2020 Student Mentor



In Memoriam

Spencer Sims

1990-2020

Spencer was a Software Engineer from Los Angeles, California. He grew up in the foster care system and was sent to an Adventist High School, where he met Jesus and his life of servant leadership began. He was a problem-solver and loved to solve problems by writing software. He attributed his creativity to the power of God in his life.

Spencer loved creating technology to help churches and to promote conservative values and improve peoples' lives. He was driven to use his skills to advance the Kingdom of God. He desired to engage the culture for Christ, and make a difference in the field of technology. He was always willing to speak up, say what he believed, and stand up for Truth. He wanted to attend Forge to sharpen his skills and be able to be winsome for Christ in the areas of science and technology.

Spencer attended the 2020 Forge Leadership Summit on a full scholarship. He was offered a check to help cover the cost of a flight from the West Coast and he declined. He told us to consider it a donation to the cause. Forge had made an impact on his life and he wished to pay it forward to others. This is who Spencer was. He was a generous servant leader with a heart for Christ and a heart for people. He was a joyous soul with a contagious personality.

Shortly after Spencer was accepted into the 2020-2021 Forge Mentorship Academy, he was killed in a tragic car accident. While his loss is felt deeply by the Forge staff and other Academy members, we rejoice in knowing that Spencer has entered into heaven for an eternity with his Savior. Recorded in John 11:25, Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, will live, even though they die.' Today he lives in heaven.





Recommend a Student

Do you know any talented young conservatives
[ages 18-25] who would benefit from the
Forge Leadership Summit?

Any students you recommend will
automatically receive \$100 off Summit tuition!

To recommend, visit:
ForgeLeadership.org/Recommend



Thank You, Champions & Sponsors!





Forge Leadership Network
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Raising Up the Next Generation of Conservative Leaders in the Public Square