

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: 3-11-2026

Contact:

Carly Watson

Michigan State University, ADA PR Chair

wunderl3@msu.edu



American Debate Association Crowns 2026 National Champions

[Atlanta, GA/US] – Emory University hosted the American Debate Association (ADA) National Tournament the weekend of March 7-9, 2026. The tournament was attended by 104 teams total – 65 in the open division, 16 in the junior varsity division, and 23 in the novice division.

Debaters from across the country were asked to debate both sides of the season-long resolution about labor policy. The full wording of the topic is “Resolved: The United States Federal Government should substantially strengthen collective bargaining rights for workers in the United States.”

Students who participated at the tournament debated half of their preliminary debates in favor of the resolution and half of their preliminary debates in opposition to the resolution.

At the conclusion of the preliminary debates, the tournament seeded teams in all divisions based on their win-loss record and speaker points. Elimination debates were single elimination for the top 11 teams in the novice division, top 8 teams in the junior varsity division, and the top 32 teams in the open division.

In the open division, teams from Northwestern University, the University of Michigan, Liberty University, Western Kentucky University, the University of Southern California, University of California Berkeley, the University of Kansas, Emory University, Georgetown University, the University of Texas Austin, Missouri State University, the University of Kentucky, Michigan State University, California State University Long Beach, the University of Texas at Dallas, and Macalester College debated in a double octafinals.

After four elimination debates, the University of Michigan and Georgetown University advanced to the championship round. Eleanor Barrett and Cyrus Esmailzadeh from the University of Michigan won the round to be named Open Champions of ADA Nationals.

The novice division is typically for students who are in their first year of competitive debate, and junior varsity is for students competing in their first two academic years of intercollegiate debate.

In a junior varsity quarterfinals, teams from Liberty University, George Mason University, the University of Texas Austin, Indiana University, and Boston College participated. The final round was between Indiana University and Liberty University and Jay Duggal and Lily Jones from Indiana University came out on top.

In a novice division, teams from Southern Nazarene University, Indiana University, Liberty University, Boston College, the University of Kentucky, West Georgia University, and George Mason University advanced to elimination rounds. The championship round was between George Mason University and Boston College where Denzel Bell and Camila Rosa-Pérez Montes from George Mason University won.

Debaters participating also receive speaker points for each of their preliminary debates. In the novice division, Camila Rosa-Pérez Montes from George Mason University was named top speaker and Lily Jones from Indiana University was named top speaker in the junior varsity division. In the open division, Curtis Ortega from California State University Long Beach was named top speaker.

In addition to the awards related to tournament competition, the ADA presents several other awards recognizing individuals at the national tournament. Brett Bricker from the University of Kansas received the Excellence in Coaching Award to recognize the excellent performance of a coach, whether a director, assistant, or graduate assistant at an ADA school. Chad Meadows from Western Kentucky received the Outstanding New Director Award to recognize a new director who demonstrates outstanding achievement in scholarship, service, community building, or competitive success. The Barkley Forum of Emory University was given the Founders' Award for Service to recognize people in the ADA that go above and beyond the requirements of their jobs.

To recognize teams with season-long success, the Front Royal Cup is awarded to two-person teams in each division with the strongest tournament results during the invitational season. The award is named for the site of the American Debate Association's founding meeting in Front Royal, Virginia. Indiana University (Foudali & Garcia) won in novice, Liberty University (Etienne & Yoon) won in junior varsity, and Michigan State University (Jarman & Scully) won in varsity.

In a balloting process that included participants at the tournament, Nathan Daley from Liberty University was named Novice Debater of the Year, Elaine Yoon from Liberty University was named Junior Varsity Debater of the Year, Daniel Gallagher from Emory University was named Varsity Debater of the Year, and Brett Bricker from the University of Kansas was named Judge of the Year.

The ADA also presents the Julia Burke Award annually. The Julia Burke Award recognizes the ADA debater who most closely upholds the combination of characteristics that Julia Burke displayed in her love for the activity. These qualities include excellence in and passion for debate, a commitment to helping others, love and respect for the debate community and dedication to maintaining friendships despite the pressures of competition. This year's recipient was Joanna Gusic from Michigan State University.

About the American Debate Association

The American Debate Association began in 1985 as an intercollegiate debate association. It uses the resolution selected by the Cross Examination Debate Association and the National Debate Tournament. Currently they have 44 member schools. The ADA's mission is increasing participation, maintaining a balance between education and competition, and ensuring an equitable and fair activity for all programs, regardless of their size or experience.

Patrick Waldinger
University of Miami
President

Mikaela Malsin
Emory University
Vice President

Carly Watson
Michigan State University
PR Chair