



2026 Social Justice Debates - Denver
MSU Denver
Denver, CO
October 24-25, 2026



Letter of Invitation

Dear friends,

You are invited to attend the **2026 Social Justice Debates - Denver** at Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver)! This Civic Debate tournament, a collaboration between the Civic Debate Consortium and the founder of the Social Justice Debates (SJD), Ken Newby, Director of Debate at Morehouse College, will be held in our Jordan Student Success Building (see map later in this invitation). Our campus is steps away from Larimer Square, the 16th Street Mall, Meow Wolf, and Denver's arts and cultural districts. There are also numerous hotels and restaurants nearby.

Check-in will be on the evening of **October 22**, and rounds will take place on **October 23, 2026**. This tournament will feature **3 rounds** of preliminary debates and a final round using the SJD style (see below for more details). As much as possible, rounds will be judged by experts in our topic area: **Food Justice**. The specific topic for this competition will be: **"RESOLVED: When the pursuit of food justice requires a choice between competing approaches, food sovereignty should take priority over an individual right to adequate food."** Please review the topic statement and research guide (available on FTN by September 8) for more details on how to prepare. This is a **free tournament** open to any college students enrolled and in good standing at an institution of higher education. We will provide breakfast and lunch. We will also cover on campus parking on October 23.

Also, please note that this event is being planned in tandem with a British Parliamentary style tournament, the **Rocky Mountain Debating Championship**, to be held at MSU Denver on October 24-25. At this point, our assumption is that most people attending SJD-Denver will also be attending this tournament as you will get two tournaments for the price of one trip. You will find an invitation to our BP tournament here on FTN as well. **We have secured extra rooms so there is no cap on teams per institution or overall at this point.** Please register as many teams as you like.

Please do not hesitate to write with any questions you may have. I'm happy to help with travel planning, logistics for getting around Denver, and preparing for the tournament.

We look forward to hosting you at MSU Denver!!

Sincerely,

John Rief

MSU Denver

jrief1@msudenver.edu

Tournament Staff

Tournament Convener: John Rief (with an assist from Rob Boller!)

Tab: Will Silberman

For all registration questions, travel logistics, and pre-tournament assistance, please contact John Rief at jrief1@msudenver.edu.

Registration Information

There is **no registration fee** for this tournament. The baseline judging commitment is 1 judge per institution with an N-1 rule for any institution intending to bring more than one team. **We are unable to accommodate uncovered teams.** While our plan is to have MSU Denver alumni and faculty along with community partners judge all our debates, if we fall short of such judges, we will ask coaches/judges from participating schools to step in and help us fill out our judging pool. **If you are unable to supply (a) judge(s) to cover your commitment, please contact John Rief (jrief1@msudenver.edu) for assistance in locating (a) local judge(s) who may be able to do so.**

Please enter your teams on forensictournament.net by Monday, October 12. No new registrations will be accepted after that time. We need to know our total numbers by this date to complete our catering orders. All changes should be sent to John Rief by no later than **Wednesday, October 21**. If you have questions or special requests, please email John Rief at jrief1@msudenver.edu.

When registering, please note that you will need to select SJD(2) for 2-person teams and SJD(3) for 3-person teams. Please see the Registration Screen Shot linked to the splash page for additional assistance. Thanks!

Tournament check-in will take place at [Degree Brewpub](#) from 7-9pm on Thursday, October 22. If you are unable to join us, please feel free to email or text John Rief confirming your arrival and to let us know of any last-minute changes.

Tournament Details

Topic and Topic Statement

The SJD series, founded by Morehouse College and George Washington University in 2016 in honor of the late Derrick Bell, has become one of the premier Civic Debate series in the nation. You can read more about its history and development [here](#). Throughout the years, debaters who have participated in this series have considered wide-ranging topics from policing to voting rights, environmental justice, education, restorative justice, reparations, and social movement tactics. This year, the topic area is **Food Justice**. As with previous iterations of the series, Ken Newby has supplied a topic, topic

statement, and resources to help frame our work as we prepare for this competition. The topic for this competition is:

“RESOLVED: When the pursuit of food justice requires a choice between competing approaches, food sovereignty should take priority over an individual right to adequate food.”

Please read the topic statement (**this document will be available on FTN by September 8**) to learn about resources your team is encouraged to consult as you prepare for the competition. Unlike many other debate competitions, the SJD provides a topic statement that helps debaters to interpret the topic and frame their preparation of materials. In many ways, this statement is just as important as the topic itself and will be used by the tournament staff and judges to determine whether the approaches each team decides to take in their debates fit within the parameters it establishes. In short, please carefully read the statement and feel free to send questions to John Rief who will also consult with Ken Newby as needed to make sure we are in alignment.

SJD topics are designed to encourage affirmative and negative teams to approach their advocacies from the shared starting point of justice. No teams or individuals should be placed in the position of arguing against justice. Instead, SJD topics tend to focus on competing strategies to achieve justice for the greatest number of people.

The SJD-Denver will be an early event in the series which will culminate with a national championship at Morehouse College in Atlanta, GA in the spring. Thus, it is a great opportunity to share initial results of research and gain insights that will help students revise and improve their advocacies at future iterations of the series. It is also an excellent stand-alone event for those who are interested in experiencing the SJD model, perhaps for the first time. One of our motivations for hosting it in tandem with our regular BP tournament is to invite our friends from the BP community who have not yet experienced SJD events to do so while they are here.

Format

The SJD format is a modified form of research-based cross-examination debate. Debaters are encouraged to make use of the materials from the topic statement (PDF attached to FTN site) as well as those they find on their own to develop their advocacies. The key rule regarding research is that all students should be prepared to present copies of their original research (articles, scanned parts of books, website URLs, etc.) to the other team and/or their judges upon request. Keep in mind that most judges at our event will be experts, practitioners, faculty, and community leaders who have committed themselves in some way to food justice. Thus, research that is drawn from reputable source material, especially community-engaged scholarship and other peer reviewed sources, will be most effective when developing an advocacy.

Teams may be composed of two or three students who will debate using the format below. Teams will be assigned to debate on both the affirmative and negative sides of the topic.

If there are three students per team, they should each give one of the speeches for their team. Two students of the three should conduct one of the cross-examinations in the debate.

For teams of two, the expectation is that the partners will split rebuttal duties. So, one will give affirmative and the other negative rebuttals (or the partners can trade off rounds regardless of sides). Each student must also conduct at least one cross-examination in every debate. When a student speaks twice, they will be awarded the highest score of their two speeches for the purposes of power matching.

Speeches	Time Limits
First Affirmative Speech	6 minutes
Cross-examination by Second Negative Speaker	4 minutes
First Negative Speech	6 minutes
Cross-examination by First Affirmative Speaker	4 minutes
Second Affirmative Speech	6 minutes
Cross-examination by First Negative Speaker	4 minutes
Second Negative Speech	6 minutes
Cross-examination by Second Affirmative Speaker	4 minutes
Preparation Time	2 minutes
Affirmative Rebuttal Speech	6 minutes
Preparation Time	2 minutes
Negative Rebuttal Speech	6 minutes

Structure and Schedule

There will be three preliminary rounds. Rounds 1 and 2 will be preset and round 3 will be power matched. The top two teams (based on win-loss records and speakers points) will advance to finals. If we have enough judges, we may panel preliminary debates. Finals will be judged by a panel of 3-5. We are also working on an **experiential learning activity** that will take place during or just after lunch. More details about this activity will be shared soon. All rounds and other activities will take place in the **Jordan Student Success Building (890 Auraria Parkway, Denver, CO 80204)**. A campus map is supplied below.

Please note that all times in the schedule below are MDT (Mountain Daylight Savings Time) and are subject to minor modifications. You will be informed of any changes well in advance.

Thursday, October 22

Tournament Check-In: 7-9pm [Degree Brewpub (on our campus)]

Friday, October 23

Check-In: 8-8:30am [light breakfast in JSSB 400]*

Round 1 Debates: 8:30-10am [various rooms in JSSB]

Round 2 Debates: 10am-11:30am [various rooms in JSSB]

Round 3 Debates: 11:30am-1pm [various rooms in JSSB]

Lunch: 1-2pm [JSSB 400]

Experiential Learning Activity: 2-3pm [JSSB 400 or alternative location TBD]

Finals: 3-5pm [CAVEA Theater]

*Those teams not checked in at this time will be dropped from the tournament.

Adjudication

As noted previously, we intend to use expert and community judges during this competition. A **judging guide** will be made available shortly. This guide will be shared with our judges ahead of the event and will frame our judge training sessions before rounds begin. Studying this guide will be very helpful as you consider how to write your affirmative and negative positions. It will also provide key information about how you will be assessed in rounds. If we do need coaches to step in and judge, we expect that they will abide by the judging guide. Primarily, this will mean emphasizing the degree to which the competing teams are presenting arguments that would gain traction with experts and community members who work in the food justice space. Please feel free to raise any questions you may have about our model of adjudication.

Philosophy

The philosophy of this tournament is guided by the best practices promoted by the Civic Debate Consortium. These principles emphasize: the development of advocacies rooted in good faith research and designed to persuade audiences outside of competitive debate, the promotion of diverse approaches to debate and debating, and the cultivation of inclusive practices that show respect for differing opinions as this tournament will be attended by individuals from multiple debate communities, a variety of scholarly communities, and many different partners from MSU Denver's surrounding community. In short, we expect all faculty and students in attendance to join us in building up a community of scholars, advocates, and activists committed to achieving food justice, even if we may disagree about the best tactics and strategies to do so. You can read more about the Civic Debate Consortium's principles [here](#).

Please let me know of any other questions. Thanks!

Food

We will be serving breakfast and lunch. Coffee and snacks will be available throughout the day. Please contact John Rief at jrief1@msudenver.edu with any **dietary requests, restrictions, and allergies** on or before **Monday, October 12** using the [DIETARY RESTRICTIONS SURVEY](#).

Lodging

The [SpringHill Suites by Marriot Denver Downtown](#) is our campus hotel. Given that it is very small, they are unable to supply us with a large room block. However, we do have a courtesy hold for 10 rooms, and they will take independently made reservations any time. Please note that the night set aside for the SJD block is expensive at \$349 per night. However, you can also book nights for our BP tournament at only \$187 per night. Thus, the overall cost of your stay averages out to around \$230 per night. This is a great price for downtown and would also mean you do not need to use public or private transit services throughout the weekend. If you would like to book a room for October 22, please use this link below. You can find the link for our other block from October 23-25 in our invitation for the Rocky Mountain Debating Championship.

MSU Social Justice Debates

Start Date: Thursday, October 22, 2026

End Date: Friday, October 23, 2026

Hotel(s) offering your special group rate:

- **SpringHill Suites by Marriott Denver Downtown for 349.00 USD per night**

[Book your group rate for MSU Social Justice Debates](#)

For individual reservations, the cancellation policy is 48 hours prior to arrival, with no charge. Cancellations made within the 48-hour window will be subject to a charge of one night's stay.

Given the limited number of rooms available at our campus hotel, many of you will need to seek out other options. The Denver Tech Center (DTC) has been a good location for exceptional rates in the past and is on a light rail line. You will also find numerous hotel options near our campus in downtown. I'm also happy to chat with anyone who would like help locating a good hotel option. Please just email me.

Parking

We will be paying for parking and will release a code to everyone a week ahead of the tournament. Please consult the attached map (below) for the best places to park during the tournament.

Campus Map

You will find the Jordan Student Success Building in the upper middle (northwest) section of campus on the map below. The best parking areas for the tournament are Holly, Spruce, or Dogwood. You can find an online version of the map by clicking on the hyperlink above.



We hope to see you in Denver!