

MLK 2026 Oratorical Contest Guidelines

The Center for Multicultural Student Services (CMSS) is calling the JMU students to participate in the MLK Jr. Oratorical Contest, as part of our 2026 MLK celebration.

Theme

This year's theme comes from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech on December 10, 1964:

“I have the audacity to believe that peoples everywhere can have three meals a day for their bodies, education and culture for their minds, and dignity, equality and freedom for their spirits.”

Requirements

- Must be a current JMU Student
- Speeches must not exceed 1000 words (approximately 2 pages double spaced)
- Speech must have connection with the MLK Jr. 2026 theme
- Submissions will be screened for AI content
- At least 85% of the speech must be original
- All quoted/non-original material must be clearly cited and identified in writing and in speech
- Please provide a bibliography for all quoted/non-original material

How to Enter:

If you are interested in participating in the contest, please complete the Microsoft Form by December 12, 2025: <https://bit.ly/MLKJr2026OratoricalContest>

Once interest to enter has been received, you will be added to the MLK Jr. 2026 Canvas Classroom within 48 hours where you will be required to submit your speech by the deadline.

Deadline to Submit Speeches to Canvas:

Speech submissions to the MLK Jr. 2026 Oratorical Canva Classroom will be available within 48 hours after submitting your entry of participation and will close on December 31, 2025, at 11:59pm.

Selection Process

The top 3 speeches will be selected by a committee made up of CMSS pro and student staff. We will reach out to all who have submitted work to notify you whether your speech has been selected. The top 3 orators will be invited to present their speech live on January 22, 2026, at 7:00pm in Taylor Down Under, as part of our 2026 MLK Jr. Celebration.

Judging Criteria

Orators will be judged on the following criteria:

Physical Delivery

- Poise, Presence, Posture, and Appearance
- Engagement of Audience
- Eye Contact
- Body Language

Vocal Delivery

- Fluidity and Tempo of Speech
- Voice
- Clarity, Diction, and Pronunciation

****Memorization of the speech is NOT required****

Content of Speech

- Theme, Message, and Originality of Speech
- Organization of Speech
- Grammar and Word Choice

Scholarship:

1st Place: \$1000.00

2nd Place: \$750.00

3rd Place: \$500.00

Key Dates to Keep in Mind

- **November 21, 2025:** Contest entries open
- **December 31, 2025, 11:59PM:** Deadline to submit entire speech, bibliography, and contestant biography
- **January 16, 2026:** CMSS notifies Selected Contestants
- **January 22, 2026:** Oratorical Contest Day