



THINK AGAIN

ACADEMY

Version 2.0/Summer 2026



THE THINK AGAIN WAY

Think Again seeks to help students thrive by promoting the foundational values of freedom of expression, viewpoint diversity, intellectual humility, and critical thinking. We believe that the pursuit of truth depends on the free exchange of ideas and we want to help students become more comfortable adding their voices to that exchange.

At Think Again, we focus on *student-facing programming* – rather than white papers or panels of experts for students to silently listen to. Our programming gives students opportunities to take off the headphones, listen well, ask good questions, and take part in thoughtful conversations with those who may think differently from them. Our hope is to equip the next generation of Americans to participate in thoughtful, civil conversations, and by doing so, prepare the future leaders of our democracy, one step at a time.

To that end, it is helpful if we are operating from the same set of goals and expectations. Student groups (and others) who plan to affiliate with the work we are doing at the University of Virginia and to use the Think Again name on their campuses agree to the following:

1. Think Again is a non-partisan organization that includes students whose ideologies fall on different parts of the political spectrum. We do not endorse candidates for office.
2. Think Again follows a policy of organizational neutrality on issues that fall beyond support for our core pillars: (a) freedom of expression, (b) viewpoint diversity, (c) intellectual humility, and (d) critical thinking.
3. Think Again is open to all students at the university who are interested in practicing respectful dialogue with others. At our events, students express themselves and their viewpoints using words. We address and critique ideas, policies, viewpoints, and opinions. There is no room for violence, verbal attacks, or “heckler’s vetoes” aimed toward individuals at our events.
4. All communications coming from Think Again should reflect an attitude of respect toward others. This is reflected in all of our communications, including social media posts, advertising, emails, or other forms of messaging. We are also thoughtful in how we use the resources and time that others share with us, and we refrain from using obscenities and slurs in our communications.
5. We do not work to disrupt the work of the university. Rather, Think Again seeks to improve and enhance intellectual life on university campuses.

We ask that you collect student surveys after your Think Again event so that we can improve our programming and build metrics of success. You can find a sample survey [here](#).

Our Events

- 01 Disagree with a Professor
- 02 Tell Me Why
- 03 Faculty Debate
- 04 Food For Thought
- 05 Oratory Competition



EXPECTATIONS

Audience

At UVA, we typically expect **25-30 students**

Budget

\$300-\$500 (depending on lunch selection)

Expenses

- Lunch for 25-30 students (pizza, sandwiches, your local favorite)
- Room rental fees (if applicable)
- Cold drinks (water, soda)
- Branded merch (stickers, pens)
- Printed flyers and any other materials that you may need

ADVERTISING

Advertising to students can be tough. This is how we do it.

Social Media

We have an Instagram account (@thinkagain.uva), which we use to post all of our events. If we want a little extra love online, we ask other student clubs to post it on their accounts. (We think Instagram stories work best!)

Email

Over the years, we have accumulated a list of students who regularly attend our events. We send email invitations to that listserv, student groups with similar missions, and student leaders we think might enjoy the event. We always ask that they RSVP-- you can use those emails for event advertising later.

Postering

Our survey data has surprised us by showing that many students hear about our events through our posters around campus. We poster in highly trafficked areas, outside of classrooms, and outside in the poster-heavy areas.

Classroom

Especially for Disagree with a Professor and Faculty Debates, we use the professors' network to our advantage. We ask them to share the event in class, post it on their LMS system, send to their TAs, etc.



Disagree with a Professor

Disagree with a Professor is our most popular event. We invite professors from different departments to join students over lunch in a casual environment, asking them to bring **three original statements** that they are willing to defend.

GOAL:

To create a space where students feel comfortable disagreeing with faculty outside of the classroom, forming and expressing their own views with intellectual humility, and learning how to respond to arguments that may be outside of their comfort zone.

STRUCTURE:

We have each professor at a table with their three statements printed out and invite students to join them and engage in respectful debate. Every 20 minutes, we have the tables rotate.

STATEMENTS:

The professor's statements can be on any topic, serious or silly, and could be in their field of study or not. Past statements have included commentary on politics, pop culture hot takes, or even casual topics like the best ice cream flavor. Some examples from our events: "Washing one's hair is unnecessary," "AI is immoral," "the best path for women to a meaningful and happy life is marriage and motherhood," and "Taylor Swift is the greatest artist of our generation."

P.S. We have a podcast under the same name! It's modeled after our live event, just recorded. You can listen to the episodes wherever you get your podcasts, [or find it on our website.](#)



Tell Me Why

Tell Me Why is an event that brings together religious leaders and students for structured interfaith conversation, focused on viewpoint diversity within religion.

GOAL:

For students to leave with a greater understanding of interfaith dialogue, having engaged honestly with the questions at the core of major religions.

STRUCTURE:

We invite a panel of faith leaders to speak on a predetermined topic from their religion's perspective. We begin with a 45-minute panel, where leaders answer questions in broad strokes, followed by about 30 minutes of rotating small-group discussion with each faith leader.

TOPIC IDEAS:

What does your faith tradition teach about:

The Afterlife? Suffering? Authority of Sacred Texts/Scripture? Gender roles? Messiah figures?



Faculty Debate

Faculty Debates feature two professors with opposing viewpoints debating and discussing a series of questions related to their field of study.

GOAL:

To model healthy debate, educate students outside the classroom, and expose them to viewpoints they may not have heard before.

STRUCTURE:

Two professors, from the same department or similar field of study, and a moderator sit on a panel and answer questions aimed at their difference in opinion. We prepare the questions beforehand, then open up the debate to Q&A from the audience.

TOPIC IDEAS:

We pick our topics based on what is culturally relevant, and we tend to pose it as a question. So far, our Faculty Debate topics have been: “Is America becoming a dictatorship?,” “Should AI be banned in higher education?,” and “The State of American Politics” following a gubernatorial election in our state.



Food For Thought

Food For Thought is a discussion based event that provides students with a series of conversation questions. They range from “soft-ball” to “hard-ball,” prompting students to engage with one another at a structured pace.

GOAL:

For students to have grown more comfortable having hard conversations with new people, and to continue their conversations when the event is over.

STRUCTURE:

We seat students around tables and place the three sets of questions in the center of the table. (We also have the questions posted on a slide deck on the AV system.) We encourage students to go at their own pace within each section, but announce when they should switch levels.

TOPIC IDEAS:

Soft Ball Questions:

- Name your favorite lunch spot on campus.
- What is your favorite class and why?
- What is something small that made your week better?

Medium Ball Questions:

- Should donors be able to influence university policy or curriculum?
- Should tenure still exist?
- What makes a good professor?
- Is social media helping or hurting campus dialogue?

Hard Ball Questions:

- Name your favorite lunch spot on campus.
- What is your favorite class and why?
- What is something small that made your week better?



Student Oratory Competition

“ Oratory competitions are important because they help students gain the confidence they need — no matter what they do in life — to stand up for what they believe, argue with evidence, and make their best case. It makes them realize how even one person speaking up **can change the course of our democracy.**”

-- Mary Kate Cary
Founder, UVA Student
Oratory Competition

How it Works

Each year, we select a pro-democracy prompt and invite students to write and deliver an original **five-minute speech in response**. Eight finalists compete in two divisions, four undergraduate and four graduate, with one winner selected from each division and awarded a cash prize.

First, all applicants submit both the written text of their speech and a video recording of their delivery for review by our semifinalist judges (we have a group of UVA professors and staff.) Once submitted, the written text is final and may not be changed during delivery. The top four contestants in each division are selected as finalists and move onto the Final Competition.

For the final round, the eight finalists perform their speeches in front of a live audience and a bipartisan panel of judges, who evaluate each competitor: 50% on the writing, 50% for delivery.

The two winners are selected, the audience cheers, we take photos, and we host a dinner to celebrate everyone's hard work and the student's achievements.



Sample Prompts

Tell the story of a hero to our American democracy.

What is the greatest founding value of our American democracy?

Which is the most important right protected by our Constitution?

Why does the Declaration of Independence still matter today?

Is free speech important at a public university in our democracy, and why?

Tell the story of a moment when the American democracy was tested and persevered.

Run of Show

- 01 A university leader welcomes everyone and introduces the emcee who will be guiding the audience through the evening.
- 02 The competitors appear in two divisions, graduate and undergraduate, and speak in alphabetical order. The emcee introduces each by name. Their speeches last about five minutes, and in total, the Competition itself lasts between 40-45 minutes.
- 03 After the last competitor has finished, judges deliberate for about 10 minutes ([You can find our judging criteria here](#)). The audience is called to attention, and one of the judges give a few words of reflection to the finalists before announcing the winners.
- 04 The winners are announced, photos are taken, and then all finalists, judges, and special guests head to a seated dinner celebrating the evening.

Audience & Venue

Click [here](#) to watch our 2024 Competition

Live

We plan for roughly **75-100 people**, including students, faculty, alumni, and community members. We ask that audience members RSVP, but walk-ins are welcome.

Virtual

We recommend that you film or live-stream the event for distribution afterward. **Both will require the permission of the student contestants to be filmed.**

Venue

We host our Oratory Competition in the most beloved and historic location on Grounds: the Rotunda Dome Room. We highly recommend that you host your Competition in a location that holds historical significance to your university.

At UVA, we're funded by

The Fund for Free Expression & Viewpoint Diversity

The Fund for Free Expression and Viewpoint Diversity at UVA was established to give individuals – often alumni, parents, and friends of the university – the ability to financially support Think Again's student-facing programming and independent student organizations that are aligned with our four pillars. All gifts are counted as gifts to the University and are tax deductible.

All funds are for current use only – not endowed – and are controlled by the director of Think Again and a board of trustees.

At UVA, the Alumni Association handles the administration of the Fund in terms of issuing gift receipts for donations, paying accounts receivable, and keeping a current balance of the funds available. [Here is a sample charter](#) that could be used at other schools.



National organizations to consider partnering with:



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