

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Heather Tindall
860-944-4976

FLORIDA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (FIT) STUDENTS AND ALUMNI STUNNED BY CANCELLATION OF INTERNATIONALLY RENOWNED VARSITY ROWING PROGRAMS

MELBOURNE, FLORIDA — The highly decorated and internationally renowned Florida Institute of Technology (FIT) Men’s and Women’s Varsity Rowing programs were unceremoniously axed on Tuesday, June 28, with no notice given to both scholarship and non-scholarship athletes on the teams.

The FIT Board of Trustees announced that the change is effective immediately — and leaves current rowers and incoming recruits with no opportunity to row at the varsity level for the 2022-23 rowing season (which begins in less than two months). It was further disclosed that both teams would be downgraded to club only status. Alumni who were in the process of raising money for a new boathouse for the teams, as well as parents, crew (rowing) coaches and volunteers were also not made aware by the university of the upcoming cancellation.

“We are stunned,” said rising sophomore and *2022 FIT Athletics Department Freshman of the Year*, Jaden Krekow. “We chose to attend FIT for many reasons, not the least of which was its 50-year rowing pedigree. As athletes, we are devastated and upset by the complete lack of consideration and communication by this administration.” Rising senior oarswoman Yarisse Adorno Oyola, coxswain of the first varsity 4 boat (V4) last season, agreed that she and her teammates are in shock over the decision. “FIT Rowing began in 1968 and is the first and longest tenured varsity sport at Florida Tech,” she said. “There does not seem to be a respect for that accomplishment or the accolades that rowing has brought to this institution over the years.” She concluded, “The saddest part of this announcement, is the seeming lack of empathy for us, the student athletes, and the situation they have put us in. There was no warning— we have already registered for fall classes and begun training for the upcoming fall season.”

Laurie and Matthew O’Connell, parents of incoming freshman Katie O’Connell, said there is now a dark cloud over what was supposed to be a celebrated time in her daughter’s life. “We just don’t understand what they were thinking! Our daughter had opportunities at colleges and universities like Louisville and Drexel, and she chose FIT because of its coaching staff, the prestige of the program and its winning tradition.” They continued, “She earned a scholarship. What is she supposed to do now? The complete lack of transparency by the FIT administration with athletes and their parents, and not giving these kids at least a year’s warning so they could transfer, is not just disappointing, it’s infuriating!”

Craig McKay (’81), the President of *Friends of FIT Rowing Association (FFRA)* — which represents at least 1,000 rowing alumni and donors — said the Association immediately launched into action upon hearing the announcement. “We understand that we are living in financially trying times and we are not unsympathetic to the struggles that universities across the nation are enduring in the wake of the pandemic,” he stated.

— more —

“However, the rowing programs have brought much acclaim to this university, and we believe that the Board did not realize that moving these teams to club status, will ultimately result in the demise of rowing at FIT.”

He said that the Association has already been in contact with the Chairman to suggest a collaboration with them to reverse the decision or delay the cancellation, while a funding plan can be developed. “We are working with all stakeholders to present a win-win plan to the Board that would, ideally, convince them to reinstate these teams to varsity status.”

In addition to discussions with the Board, other measures have been launched simultaneously, according to Scott Barberides ('84) who rowed for FIT on the 1982 National Championship team. “We have created an online petition calling for the reinstatement of both teams to varsity status,” he said, “and it has already garnered over 6,800 signatures.” Those wishing to add their names may visit:

<https://www.change.org/p/reinstate-fit-athletics?redirect=false>

Dr. Jerome P. Keuper was impressed with the cache associated with his alma mater, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and other Ivy League schools, and sought to build similar regard for FIT when he founded the university. He envisioned that FIT would one day become known as the “*MIT of the South*” and he knew having a varsity rowing program was a key component of that vision. Today, the crew program at FIT has exceeded even his wildest dreams and is by far the most successful and highly regarded sport in the school’s history. Teams have won multiple National, Regional, and Conference Championships as well as representing the university internationally at the prestigious Henley Royal Regatta in England and in Lima, Peru. Additionally, FIT Rowing has produced multiple Olympians, World Champions, and a Para National team member. It attracts student athletes from across the country and the world based on its reputation of competing (and winning) consistently against schools in both Division I and II.

Please visit the FFRA website <https://friendsfitrowing.com/> for more information or to learn how you can help.

Florida Institute of Technology, located in Melbourne, Florida, is a tier 1 ranked university with programs in science, engineering, aeronautics, business, humanities, psychology, and communication. It is a private, not-for-profit, global research university and competes in the NCAA Division II. More than 65,000 students from over 120 countries have earned degrees from Florida Tech. Notable alumni include five Space Shuttle astronauts, the first female four-star general in U.S. military history, a 1984 Olympic gold medalist in rowing, a two-time major league World Series-winning pitcher, a National Teacher of the Year, and a member of the LPGA tour.

###