

The Trustees of Florida Tech:

The Florida Tech Women's Rowing team has come together to form this letter regarding the decision announced on June 28th, 2022, to transition 5 varsity sports to club sports; specifically Women's Rowing. We have drafted this letter in hopes that our voices as scholar-athletes will be heard and this decision will be reconsidered. This letter will expand on topics we believe are vital to this conversation.

1. Lack of Transparency

The communication and cooperation with the Coaches and athletes was non-existent prior to making the decision. On June 28th, 2022, the Coaches were notified barely an hour before the public announcement was made. Due to no forewarning on the decision, both Coaches and athletes were blindsided, and some found out their teams were being demoted to a club status over the internet. The decision was made without discussing with those being affected. After the decision was announced, there seemed to be no plan in place to follow through on the plan; other than immediately removing the sports and rosters from the athletics page. Student life was not notified that they would be undertaking the task of organizing and running 5 former varsity athletic teams; including handling the multiple endowments for the Rowing teams. There is no arrangement for coaching staff. With the Fall semester less than 2 months away, this lack of planning will cause further harm to the team; leaving athletes with little to no guidance or support from Florida Tech.

2. Timing of Decision

The timing of this decision comes less than two months prior to the start of the Fall semester. This leaves athletes with little to no time to react. Coaches have done an incredible job recruiting for this upcoming year, putting the team in a good position for the years to come. The incoming freshman agreed or signed to come to this school to compete in a nationally competitive varsity program. Due to this decision, most freshman will consider not attending Florida Tech at all; thus, harming the future of the rowing program. Also, at this point, the transfer portals have closed leaving athletes stranded. Even if that was not the case, Coaches have filled rosters and given out most, if not all, of their available scholarships. Athletes are left with less-than-ideal options. They either continue at Florida Tech and compete at a lower level than they agreed to or put themselves in a poor financial situation by attempting to attend another school. If current and incoming athletes choose to remain at Florida Tech and compete, this puts their NCAA eligibility at risk by using a year to compete on a club team.

3. Contradictory Statements

When reviewing the announcement and reasoning for this decision there seemed to be some contradiction; this statement "This is not a cost-cutting measure but rather a strategic decision to deliberately increase our competitiveness within our Sunshine State Conference," by Athletic Director Jamie Joss in particular. First, to address that this is a "not a cost cutting measure", in the announcement it is also said that "our resources are simply spread too thin" which contradicts the first statement. To address Florida Tech's competitiveness within the Sunshine State Conference (SSC), we find it difficult to understand how demoting a varsity sport that has placed at multiple NCAA DII National Championships and won the SSC Championships numerous times in the past few years

alone fails to be defined as a “highly competitive athletic programs that bring pride to the university”. The SSC is one of the toughest conferences and the Women's Rowing team has 9 conference championships: the most in the conference. Rowing is followed by Basketball with 6, and Soccer with 1 conference championships. From 2005-2022, there have been 25 athletes selected for the All-SSC team award, and 19 athletes from Florida Tech Women's Rowing selected for the All-Freshman team award. We say this to support the position that this team is highly competitive and successful in the SSC. By demoting the Women's Rowing team, the school will cut off resources and hinder the legacy of success this team has had.

4. Legacy Sport

Women's Rowing has had a lot of victories throughout it's 50+ year legacy. In the past 5 years alone, we have placed in the top three at 3 NCAA DII National Championships, and placed 2nd in 2019. We defended our title as SSC Champions for 4 years straight, won gold at the Dad Vail Regatta, FIRA, SIRA, Head of the South...and that is just recent wins the team has brought for Florida Tech. These victories have come through the struggles of losing nearly 2 years of competition due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. During this time, the program was significantly smaller and despite this we still managed to find success; specifically in 2021 placing 3rd at the NCAA DII National Championships. We continue to bring in athletes from all over the world, including some who are Olympians and have rowed at Worlds. This team is a legacy sport it has been around since 1968, only 10 years after the schools founding. Florida Tech is recognized and well-respected in the rowing world. We wear our traditional red-and-white striped uniform to all events, paying homage to our legacy.

The decision to transition Women's Rowing from a varsity to a club sport needs to be reconsidered. A few important considerations to remember is that the purpose of any athletic team is to be competitive and represent its school. Women's Rowing is among one of Florida Techs strongest teams and is competitive at the national level. If the team were to be reduced to a club sport, competing at this intensity for any team would be nearly impossible due to the lack of resources. Florida Tech Women's Rowing is a well-respected team with large alumni support, connecting multiple generations of rowers and supporters of Florida Tech. We strive to bring pride to both past and future Florida Tech alumni and believe that this program should be allowed to continue at a varsity level and represent Florida Tech's rich history in the sport. We want the opportunity to state our case to the board with the help of alumni to discuss possible solutions beneficial to all parties.

Respectfully,

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