

FLORIDA TECH

M A G A Z I N E

WINTER 2025



Introducing the

President's Ambassadors

Exemplifying intelligence, character and Panther Pride, these blazer-adorned students are ushering in a new era of servant leadership at Florida Tech.

In This Issue

Winter 2025 • Volume 33, Issue 3

Night of Fire

On Nov. 16, President John Nicklow and university leadership joined students, alumni, faculty, staff and bleachers full of racing enthusiasts at Orlando Speed World for its Night of Fire event. They cheered on the Florida Tech jet dragster racing team led by driver Elaine Larsen, who dazzled the crowd with her high-octane performance, fueled by the hands-on work of Larsen Motorsports' Florida Tech student interns.



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A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear Florida Tech family,

Your university is committed every day in every way to advancing student educational opportunities while conducting groundbreaking research and strengthening the economic health of our region and nation. That commitment was again validated at December's fall commencement ceremony, where we

welcomed a high-flying keynote speaker: U.S. Space Force Maj. Gen. Timothy Sejba (pictured left), commander of Space Training and Readiness Command (STARCOM).

This high-tech military group is responsible for preparing more than 8,600 U.S. Space Force Guardians to prevail in competition and conflict through education, training, testing and more. STARCOM is relocating to nearby Patrick Space Force Base.

Sejba's remarks to the class of 2024 were thoughtful and gracious, leaving no doubt in my mind that the U.S. Space Force is in amazing hands thanks to visionary leadership. Among his comments, he shared:

"You know, it's been said that without NASA, there might not have been a Florida Tech. But I think the opposite is also true: Without Florida Tech there might not have been a NASA.

"In his book, *Failure Is Not An Option*, NASA legend Gene Kranz talks about reinforcing his existing teams with the first generation of college graduates who had grown up in space, young engineers schooled in new technologies," Sejba continued. "You are those reinforcements. You're the reinforcements we need in commercial space, in military space and in civil space during this new highly competitive, highly technical Space Age."

Inspiring words that alumni of all ages should be proud to associate with their alma mater.

Until next time, go Panthers!

Sincerely,

John Nicklow, Ph.D.
President



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Evans Library Celebrates 40 Years

Join the celebration by attending an event, posting a message on our anniversary website, donating or visiting and taking advantage of everything Evans Library has to offer.

This year, Evans Library is celebrating its 40th anniversary, marking four decades as a vital center of research and innovation at Florida Tech. To celebrate this milestone, the university is hosting several events, including a Breaking Barriers Reception before the annual Martin Luther King Jr. Commemoration, the 10th Annual African-American Read-In and “Event Horizon: The Next 40 Years of Space and Beyond,” a contest to show and tell via any medium what participants think will happen in the next 40 years of space exploration using library resources.

Since it opened, Evans Library has evolved to meet the growing needs of students and faculty, now featuring modern study areas, multimedia makerspaces, scholarly support services and a vast array of print and digital resources.

“A lot has changed over the past 40 years at Evans Library—from wall-to-wall print resources to millions of electronic resources, flexible and comfortable study spaces, 3D printing and so much more. But one thing has remained the same: At the Evans Library, we support Florida Tech’s mission of teaching, learning and research through our spaces, services and collections, with great people delivering maximum human impact.”

—Jason Martin, dean, Evans Library



“When I go in a library, it is for me the same experience many have when they go into a church. Last time I was on campus, I sat quietly in the library for over an hour, just grateful for the place (and the staff) and all it means and offers, and enjoying being in a place where knowledge and civilization and access to who, what, when, why and how are actually available—and learning about any and all of it is genuinely encouraged. It fosters the actuality of living your life, instead of just enduring it.”

—Big, Fun Alumni Survey Respondent '79 M.S., '81 MBA

“I enjoy when Evans library has destressing events for final exams such as kitten therapy and dog therapy. I also like looking at the whiteboard by the stairs and seeing what students wrote or draw as it provides insight into the vast diversity among the student population.”

—Ashleigh Bianchi '24



link.fit.edu/evans40

“During my time as a student, I spent so much time navigating between the 4th and 2nd floors. It was an escape from reality being on the 4th floor, honestly one of my favorite spots on campus. The Evans Library was not just a place to study for me, I made friendships, reevaluated life choices, and learned about myself, and of course, it helped me pass many exams. Absolute love for all who make the Evans Library what it is! (Also, shoutout to anyone who played the piano on the 1st floor, thank you!)”

—Kevin Boodoosingh '20, '21 M.S.

“Week 2 freshman year: I was feeling overwhelmed, as if I were not smart enough to make it. Had a random conversation with someone in Evans from the cross country team and just felt a sense of belonging that changed my mindset for the rest of my college experience.”

—Big, Fun Alumni Survey Respondent



Flow Tank

Florida Tech's department of ocean engineering and marine sciences has a new tool for assessing how biofouling may affect ship power. Assistant professor **TRAVIS HUNSUCKER** '11 M.S., '16 Ph.D., (left) pictured here with ocean engineering student Tim Patschorke (right), designed and built a flow tank that measures the effects of drag between water flow and biofilm. Located at the Mertens Marine Center, it subjects naturally grown biofilm to different water flow rates to explore how water flow erodes biofouling on ships in motion and how that erosion conserves energy.

SPOTLIGHT ON COOL TOOLS:

Scanning Electron Microscope



“The surface of a leaf might look smooth under a regular microscope, but under an electron microscope, we see it’s not smooth at all but features caverns and hills and mountains, comparatively to what we see.”

—Andrew Palmer

After winning a \$488,373 grant under the National Science Foundation’s Major Research Instrumentation Program, Florida Tech purchased a new scanning electron microscope (SEM) that will be installed in the High-Resolution Microscopy & Advanced Imaging Center early this year.

In an electron microscope, far smaller electrons replace the light waves used in a traditional optical microscope and allow for a much closer surface examination, down to two nanometers in size, or two-billionths of a meter.

“It really gets down onto the surface of things,” said Andrew Palmer, associate professor of biological sciences and principal investigator on the grant alongside associate professor Chris Bashur, co-PI. “The surface of a leaf might look smooth under a regular microscope, but under an electron microscope, we see it’s not smooth at all but features caverns and hills and mountains, comparatively to what we see.”

The new microscope will also include a cryostage specimen platform so that users can view samples in low vacuum mode with fewer preparation steps, and rapid freezing— at minus 180 degrees Celsius or colder— ensures better retention of sample integrity.

THE TOOL WILL BE USEFUL FOR RESEARCH ACROSS DISCIPLINES, INCLUDING:



VASCULAR TISSUE ENGINEERING THAT ALSO INCORPORATES DRUG DELIVERY APPROACHES.

Chris Bashur, associate professor of chemical engineering

The SEM’s cryostage provides the ability to image both polymeric fibrous grafts and bioprinted water-containing hydrogels.



COLLAGEN-BASED BIOMIMETIC SCAFFOLDS FOR USE IN MUSCULOSKELETAL TISSUE-ENGINEERING APPLICATIONS.

Vipul Kishore, associate professor of chemical engineering

The SEM can characterize the surface properties of the collagen scaffolds and assess their impact on cell response.



MARTIAN AND LUNAR SIMULANTS—SOIL-LIKE MATERIAL THAT REPLICATES REGOLITH FROM THOSE PLACES—FOR PLANT GROWTH.

Andrew Palmer, associate professor of biological sciences

The SEM enables researchers to see the shape of individual grains and how they change based on treatment.



Read more: link.fit.edu/ftm-sem

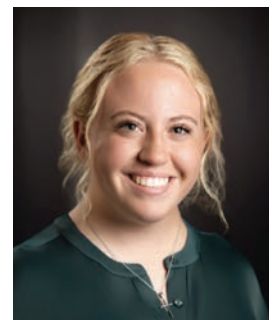
ASF NAMES 2024 ASTRONAUT SCHOLARS

Florida Tech seniors Elizabeth Beraducci and McKenna Taylor have been named 2024 Astronaut Scholars by the Astronaut Scholarship Foundation (ASF). Beraducci, an aerospace engineering major, developed her passion for space after witnessing a Space Coast rocket launch in 2021. She has since worked on spacecraft control and autonomous vehicle programming. Taylor, majoring in astrobiology and astronomy and astrophysics, was inspired by her grandmother’s enthusiasm for astronomy. Her current research involves studying bacterial samples from the International Space Station. As Astronaut Scholars, Beraducci and Taylor each received a \$15,000 scholarship award.

 Read more: link.fit.edu/2024astronautscholars



Elizabeth Beraducci



McKenna Taylor

The Rise of Florida Tech Ice Hockey

In Florida, where palm trees sway and the sun shines year-round, ice sports are far from the norm. Yet, at Florida Tech, the student-run club ice hockey program stands as a testament to passion and perseverance, bringing together a diverse group of students united by their love for the game.

“We are about working hard and playing hard. We work even harder in school than we do on the ice. Our whole culture is about going out there, having fun and getting involved,” team president Jake Medeiros said.

Balancing the competitive nature of ice hockey with creating a fun and inclusive environment might seem challenging, but the team has perfected it.

“We make sure everyone gets time on the ice and feels included,” Medeiros said. “That includes off-the-ice activities, too, like team barbecues, playing paintball and watching football games together.”

Sam Colliton is entering her second year on the team and loves it.

“I never played hockey with men until I came to Florida Tech. I remember during the first tryout, I was so scared because I did not know what to expect, but it was a blast. The team was very welcoming, and I felt right at home on the ice,” Colliton said.

The team has fully embraced the philosophy of head coach **ROB MCINTOSH** '16.

“Everyone has a role and something to contribute—every shift, every play, even if you do not touch the puck, you are a part of this team,” McIntosh said.

The future of Florida Tech ice hockey looks bright. With a rich history, growing popularity and strong culture, the team is poised to become an even bigger part of the campus and local communities.

Now entering his final season as a player on the team, Medeiros has his eyes toward the future.

“My long-term vision is for Florida Tech ice hockey to become a full-time athletics program with scholarships and full funding—everything the varsity teams get,” he said. “Just in the past four years, the program has grown dramatically, and I believe my vision is a very achievable goal.”

 Read more: link.fit.edu/ice-hockey



From left: Florida Tech ice hockey players Jake Medeiros, Sam Colliton and Logan Rutt

Ice Hockey By the Numbers

January
2003
TEAM ESTABLISHED

31
PLAYERS for the 2023–2024 season, a record for the team

Up to
350
FANS pack the Space Coast Iceplex in Rockledge for home games

III
COLLEGE HOCKEY SOUTH DIVISION

3
WOMEN on the 2023–2024 season team

2.5
MINIMUM GPA to remain on the team



FAMILIAR FACES:

Rodd Newcombe

A SERIES CATCHING UP WITH THE CAMPUS FIGURES WHO MADE YOUR TIME AT FLORIDA TECH MEMORABLE

“Building meaningful connections with students is the cornerstone of my work. Whether offering guidance or just saying ‘Hi,’ I strive to support them in their journey.”

—Rodd Newcombe

For nearly a quarter of a century, **RODD NEWCOMBE** '14 Ed.S. has been a steadfast presence at Florida Tech, dedicating his career to supporting student success and fostering a thriving academic community. From his beginnings as a systems librarian to his current role as director of academic support services, he has witnessed and contributed to the university’s evolution through innovation and unwavering dedication to students. His story is one of passion, perseverance and commitment to making a difference in the lives of countless students and alumni.

How long have you worked at Florida Tech? What’s the secret to that kind of longevity?

I celebrated my 24th anniversary Oct. 25, 2024, marking my journey since joining Evans Library as systems librarian in 2000. The key to my longevity stems from a genuine passion for my work—each day brings a new adventure worth embracing. Maintaining a consistently positive attitude, regardless of circumstances, has been fundamental to my success and satisfaction in this role.

What is your current role at Florida Tech, and how has it evolved over the years?

I served as systems librarian, overseeing the tech team and media services. My role expanded to include supervision of technical services and the cataloging team. With a master’s in library science and information studies and a lifetime of experience in libraries, I enjoyed working alongside our exceptional library staff. In 2007, I became director of academic support services and started helping students succeed. Earning my Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA®) certification has guided my approach to directing students toward success.

What do you love about your job?

I love collaborating with colleagues and supporting students. The diversity and

challenges of my role keep me engaged, and each day offers unique opportunities to learn and grow.

How have you seen the campus and students evolve throughout the years?

Through five university presidents, I’ve seen tremendous growth—new buildings, diverse majors and a global student body. Alumni are represented across the globe, including right here, on campus, demonstrating the strong, lasting bonds Florida Tech creates.

How has the Student Success and Support Center (SSSC) changed over the years?

The evolution of the SSSC reflects our commitment to comprehensive student support. SSSC now offers services like supplemental instruction and the Intensive Writing Lab. Tutoring has grown from 2,250 appointments in 2019 to nearly 7,500 per year. Something I need to emphasize is the support that we receive from the departments is so appreciated.

What are some of the memories at Florida Tech that stand out to you?

My favorite memories involve witnessing students transform from their first campus visit through graduation and beyond. Particularly rewarding are the moments when former students return to share their successes or join our staff.

Florida Tech A ‘Green College’

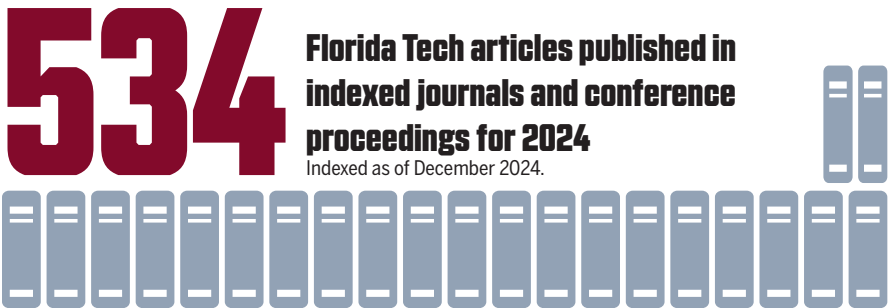
Florida Tech maintains its status as a “Green College” for the eighth consecutive year with its inclusion in *The Princeton Review Guide to Green Colleges: 2025 Edition*. The accolade highlights the university’s dedication to sustainability and environmental responsibility in both its educational practices and its operations.

 Read more: link.fit.edu/2025greencolleges



Scholarly Publications: 2024 Year in Review

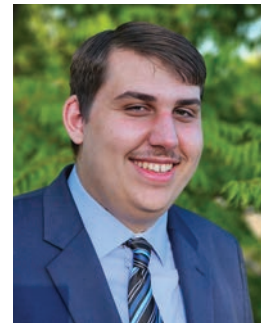
“To The Stars Through Science”—it’s both our motto and our mantra, and it means we strive for greatness through scientific research, scholarly inquiry, in-depth study and relentless determination. This pursuit was quantified through the following Scopus data:



ONES TO WATCH

History-Making Pair Awarded Farmer Scholarships


For the first time, Florida Tech has bestowed its illustrious Farmer Scholarship upon two students in the same year. The 2024 recipients are Florida residents Carter Tomasky and Alina Janshon, who have demonstrated exceptional academic achievement and outstanding character.



Tomasky, from Brooksville, is majoring in mechanical engineering and applied mathematics.

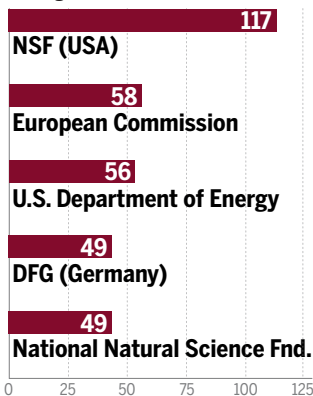


Janshon, from New Port Richey, majors in applied mathematics. Ranked among the highest in their respective graduating classes, both students completed high school with GPAs well over 4.0. Janshon joins her brother, Titus, at Florida Tech. A junior majoring in aerospace engineering and chemistry, he was a finalist for the Farmer Scholars program in 2022.

 Read more: link.fit.edu/2024farmerscholars

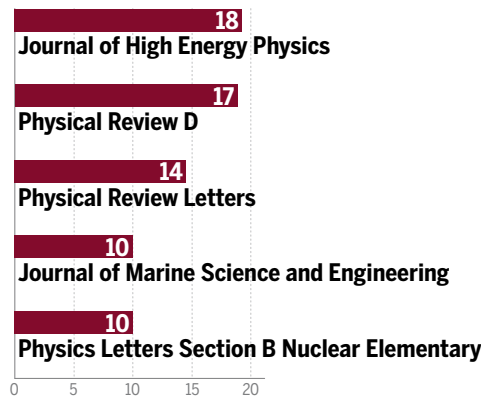
Top funding sponsors

Our top funding agency was the National Science Foundation followed by the European Commission and the U.S. Department of Energy. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (the German Research Foundation) continues to be a strong funder, as well.



Top journals

We published most frequently in the following journals. Other top titles included *Journal of Organizational Behavior Management*, *Mathematics*, *Toxics* and many others for a total of 145 sources.



Subject areas

Subject areas spanned industries, from “physics & astronomy” to “veterinary,” and included the following (in order by number of articles, most to least):

- » Engineering
- » Physics and Astronomy
- » Computer Science
- » Mathematics
- » Materials Science
- » Environmental Science
- » Earth and Planetary Sciences
- » Chemistry
- » Chemical Engineering
- » Social Sciences
- » Psychology
- » Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology
- » Medicine
- » Agricultural and Biological Sciences
- » Business, Management and Accounting
- » Arts and Humanities
- » Energy
- » Multidisciplinary
- » Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmaceuticals
- » Economics, Econometrics and Finance
- » Decision Sciences
- » Immunology and Microbiology
- » Neuroscience
- » Nursing
- » Health Professions

Lacrosse-ing The Pond

Hurt Sisters Find Second Family in Melbourne

By Jerry Durney

Sports can turn teammates into family. For the Hurt sisters, the reverse is also true.

For the past two seasons, sisters **MILLIE HURT** '24 and Phoebe Hurt have donned the Crimson and Gray as regulars on the field for Florida Tech's women's lacrosse team. But with Millie's graduation in 2024, the 2025 season will see Phoebe, a midfielder for the Panthers, switch roles from the youngest Hurt sister on the field to the oldest, as Ruby Hurt joins the team.

The Hurt sisters' journey to Florida Tech began overseas in Manchester, England, at Bolton School.

"We all started playing in high school, and in England, you start high school at the age of 11," Millie says. "It was the first time we ever picked up a lacrosse stick and, as you can imagine, the level in which we were playing was not very competitive. But it was an outlet and something that we saw could lead to more opportunities for us."

The sport's limited profile in England encouraged Phoebe to stick with it.

"Because lacrosse isn't very popular in England, it made me more interested in learning about the sport," Phoebe says. "Outside of our high school, I didn't have many friends who played. So, I think being able to enjoy something different is what made me stick with it."

The sisters quickly refined their skills and began to play internationally, with all three selected to play on the Wales Under 20 National Team. Phoebe and Ruby even represented Wales at the 2024 World Lacrosse Women's U20 Championship in Hong Kong. It was an honor that was not lost on the trio.

"I feel pride for every team I've played for, but Wales is like a different feeling," Phoebe says.

"Playing for Wales, I feel as if we're one massive family," Ruby adds.

As the time approached for Millie to further her education, she wanted to continue to play the sport she had grown to love. Her options felt limited until a fateful trip to Canada for an international tournament unlocked a door.

"I first heard about Florida Tech when I was playing in the 2019 [World Lacrosse Women's U19] World Championships," the eldest sister says. "I didn't think that it was an option to play in the States at that point in my career because I didn't know anyone who played overseas."

She spoke to a few coaches who recommended she make her interest known to some U.S. collegiate coaches. Shortly after, former women's lacrosse coach Mackenzie Rafferty contacted her about playing for the Panthers.

"After I researched more about Tech, found out what the team culture was like and saw the program's successful history, I went on a visit to the campus and saw firsthand the morale of the team," Millie says. "It was like a family to me already, and I knew it was somewhere I wanted to spend the next four years of my life."

Millie came to Florida Tech in fall 2020 and earned her biochemistry degree in May 2024. After graduation, she accepted a marketing communications specialist job at SCIEX, a biotechnology company.

As Millie established herself on campus, Phoebe noticed the many opportunities that her sister was receiving in the biochemistry field. Although

other NCAA programs recruited her, Phoebe couldn't resist the familiarity of Melbourne and the Space Coast or the university's welcoming atmosphere. She decided she wasn't finished playing alongside her sister and committed to attending Florida Tech in 2022, also opting to study biochemistry.

She was grateful to have someone close to her who could guide her both on and off the field.



From left, Ruby, Millie and Phoebe Hurt with their father, Simon, celebrate Millie on women's lacrosse senior day.

"It's nice to have Millie here as an older sister," Phoebe says. "Sometimes, if I was ever missing home or needed someone to talk to, we could go out and get something to eat, or I could just go to her apartment. That seemed to help me when I first came here, and I know that with me still here, it will help Ruby, as well."

Spending time in the Panthers' midfield before eventually shifting to more of a defensive role, Millie played in all 57 games during her four years for the Crimson and Gray, tallying 67 draw controls, 61 ground balls, 38 caused turnovers, 26 points and 18 goals.

Similarly, Phoebe has been an all-action midfielder during her first two

seasons at Tech, registering 49 draw controls, 33 ground balls, 19 caused turnovers and 10 points over 26 games. During a Panther victory at Palm Beach Atlantic University April 5, 2023, Millie even recorded the assist on a goal for Phoebe.

“I feel like I’ve received more opportunities by coming to Florida Tech than I would have at home, especially going into the biotech industry,” Millie says. “I wanted to go into the business side of science. With my experiences here, I was granted the opportunity to meet new people and go to events that I wouldn’t have had the opportunity to if not for Florida Tech.”

As Tech takes to Rick Stottler Field this spring, so does the next iteration of the Hurt sister duo, with Ruby now in the fold.

After witnessing her sisters’ experiences transitioning to academics and athletics in the United States, Ruby isn’t worried now that it is her turn.

“I feel like it’s just as comfortable here as it is at home,” Ruby says. “With Phoebe here, I know that I will always have someone to go to so that I can feel free to talk about any problems that I might have along the way.”

Each Hurt sister has brought both tangible and intangible qualities to the program, head coach Kelsey Richardson says, and she looks forward to seeing what is in store for the two younger sisters.

“I would say Phoebe probably has the biggest fire in her in terms of aggressiveness on the field,” Richardson says. “Millie is the kid that you tell her to run through a wall, and she’ll say, ‘Which wall? What time? How hard?’ She will do anything for the team and be the best player she can be. Then Ruby, coming in as a defender, her play style is a mixture of her two older sisters.”

Having played with three pairs of sisters while at Syracuse University, Richardson likes the idea of a team being a family, both metaphorically and literally, and would like to see more of it at Tech.

“I tell our team all the time, we want to have a family dynamic,” Richardson says. “So, what better way to do that than by actually having sisters on the team? I think that provides an extra level of that ‘have your back’ mentality.”



Legacy of 37 Hall of Fame Induction

On Nov. 9, 2024, Florida Tech Athletics inducted five individuals into the Florida Tech Sports Hall of Fame during its annual Legacy of 37 fundraiser at the Charles and Ruth Clemente Center for Sports and Recreation.

The class was the first to be inducted since February 2020 and included:



- » **AUSTIN ALLEN** (Baseball, 2013–2015)
- » **CHRIS CACCIAPAGLIA** (Men’s Cross Country, 2009–2012)
- » **VICTOR ROCHA FURTADO** (Men’s Swimming, 2015–2019)
- » **KRISTINA HUBA** (Women’s Tennis, 2010–2014)
- » **RANDY MUNS** (Athletics Supporter)

Their addition brings the Florida Tech Sports Hall of Fame up to 67 individuals and nine teams.

The induction took place as part of the Legacy of 37 event featuring Florida Tech’s famous Chopper Dropper, a ball-drop chance drawing with 10 \$370 prizes, four \$3,700 prizes and one \$37,000 grand prize that went to Thomas Mira with winning ball No. 151.



LIANA KREAMER

Transforming Work Meetings: Strategies for More Effective and Engaging Collaboration

I'm sure you've heard it before—maybe from colleagues, leaders, friends or even yourself: “I am dreading my upcoming meeting.”

Work meetings often have a bad reputation. People commonly complain about their frequency, the lack of purpose or how tedious they can feel. Memes and phrases like “this meeting should have been an email” have become cultural staples.

Yet, over 55 million meetings take place daily in the United States. The average employee spends nearly 10 hours each week in meetings, and for executives, this number jumps to nearly half their working time. If meetings are as unproductive as people claim, consider how much of a CEO's salary is wasted on ineffective discussions!

Rather than seeing this as a hopeless situation, I view it as an opportunity.

My research focuses on making work meetings more effective, engaging and satisfying, ultimately leading to better outcomes for individuals, teams and organizations. I call myself a “meeting scientist,” studying and sharing best practices for every stage of a meeting—before, during and after.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Meeting success starts with preparation. Research suggests having a clear and purposeful agenda shared in advance is a crucial factor in making meetings more effective. Be intentional about your attendee list—over-inviting can reduce inclusion and participation. Focus on who absolutely needs to be there, and consider listing others as optional participants. Aim to keep meetings as short as possible while still achieving your objectives. Avoid defaulting to the hourlong meeting just because it's standard practice. Designing a meeting requires intention—every element should have a purpose.



My research focuses on making work meetings more effective, engaging and satisfying, ultimately leading to better outcomes for individuals, teams and organizations.



.....

Liana Kremer
*assistant professor,
School of Psychology*

DURING THE MEETING

Whether you're facilitating or participating, engagement is key. Actively involve attendees, ask and answer questions and ensure quieter voices are included. Consider using round-robin discussions to ensure everyone has a chance to speak, incorporating interactive elements, like polls or brainstorming sessions, and creating a safe environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

AFTER THE MEETING

The meeting isn't over until next steps are clearly defined. Take five minutes to recap key points, decisions and action items. Assign responsibilities and deadlines to specific individuals—Joe should leave knowing his next task, and Kate should understand when her deliverables are due. All participants should walk away feeling that something was accomplished, they have a clear path forward and their time was well spent.

While these best practices might seem obvious, they're surprisingly rare—75% of managers report never being trained on how to design or lead a meeting, even though they spend a significant portion of their roles in meetings. This lack of training is a missed opportunity to foster more productive and engaging collaboration.

The goal of my research is to flip the script on meeting culture. Imagine a future where people say, “This email really should have been a meeting.” By implementing these strategies, we can transform meetings from dreaded obligations into powerful tools for achieving better outcomes.

Liana Kremer is an assistant professor in the industrial organizational psychology program within the School of Psychology in the College of Psychology and Liberal Arts. Her research centers on the science behind teamwork, leadership and workplace collaborations, with a focus on work meetings.





DARPA Funds Bhattacharyya’s Research Into Preventing Cybersickness

A Florida Tech team led by associate professor and computer scientist Siddhartha Bhattacharyya has received funding from the renowned Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) to help develop ways to prevent soldiers from experiencing cybersickness in a cognitive attack when using **MIXED-REALITY (MR)** systems.

This DARPA research effort, “Modeling and Analysis Toolkit for Realizable Intrinsic Cognitive Security (MATRICS),” is a collaboration led by Collins Aerospace and involving Smart Information Flow Technologies and the RTX Technology Research Center from the private sector and Florida Tech and Iowa State University on the academic side.

MATRICS is an \$8 million project overall, and Bhattacharyya and his team will receive \$304,000 for their work.

This work falls under DARPA’s Intrinsic Cognitive Security (ICS) program, an effort the agency is tackling before military personnel rely heavily on MR systems. The program aims to explore and validate the use of mathematical and computational theories, known as **FORMAL METHODS**,

to provide guarantees that MR system designs mitigate potential cognitive attacks.

Bhattacharyya and his two Ph.D. students, Parth Ganeriwala and Candice Chambers, will investigate modeling and analysis with formal methods and cognitive architectures for MR systems to help detect and prevent **CYBERSICKNESS**.

“It is expected that with the application of a variety of formal methods, a diverse range of cybersickness issues can be captured to prevent the harm that can be inflicted on humans as they are working with MR,” said Bhattacharyya, computer science and software engineering program chair.

Cybersickness can cause dizziness, nausea, headache and fatigue.

The research Bhattacharyya, Ganeriwala and Chambers will conduct will use existing physiological and operation-context data to model parameters and equations and then use that to build formal models of MR user cognition.

The models will then help formally verify the detection of and guarantee prevention against cognitive attacks that lead to physiology-based cybersickness.

MIXED REALITY (MR):

A live direct or indirect view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented by computer-generated sensory input, such as sound, graphics, labels or 3D (animated) models.

(Source: Science Direct)

CYBERSICKNESS:

Physiology-based conditions, such as dizziness, nausea, headache and fatigue, that can be caused by aspects of mixed reality, including quick visual changes, slowing down frames and increasing latency (that’s the delay between a user’s movement and the visual response on the screen or headset).

FORMAL METHODS:

The use of mathematical and computational theories to rigorously analyze and prove the correctness of a system. For the DARPA Intrinsic Cognitive Security project, the system is a mixed reality system, and the proof is to guarantee that the MR system is hardened to prevent cybersickness.

Meissen Explores Dominican Spirituality's Influence on Natural History in New Chapter

Florida Tech Chaplain Examines How Preservation of Language Sheds Light on Nature's Role in Culture

The Rev. Randall Meissen, Florida Tech's chaplain, director of the Catholic Campus Ministry and an adjunct faculty member in the College of Psychology and Liberal Arts, has published a new book chapter, "Contemplating Bats and Bees," in the academic compendium, *In The Dominicans in the Americas and the Philippines (c. 1500-c. 1820)*, edited by David Thomas Orique, Rady Roldán-Figueroa and Cynthia Folquer.

The book was published online in August by Routledge.

Meissen's chapter examines the man credited with preserving the only surviving Mayan language texts, Friar Francisco Ximenez, and examples of the influences of Dominican spirituality on natural history. He conducted research in the rare book archives of Guatemala and Spain and developed the chapter from a presentation he had given at the International Conference on the History of the Order of the Preachers in the Americas several years ago.

Ximenez was an 18th-century Dominican priest and missionary linguist known for his preservation of

the Maya-K'iche' creation myth, Popol Vuh. He also had a keen interest in the plants and animals of Guatemala during his ministry, Meissen highlights, and recorded observations in his manuscript, "La historia natural del reino de Guatemala."

Meissen's chapter examines Ximenez's observations of nature and explores the cultural factors inspiring Ximenez's research of the region. Those include: "the Dominican tradition of collecting anecdotes about animals as exempla for use in preaching, the expansive highland Mayan vocabulary for naming native organisms, the Mayan religious myths about animals in the Popol Vuh, the practice of using mission churches as spatial reference points and the material need of the Order of Preachers in Guatemala for items such as beeswax," the abstract reads.

Meissen's research also connects back to the classroom. He teaches a course on the history of Spain and Latin America, as well as a World Religions course.



Peer-To-Peer Borrowing Surged During Pandemic, Research Finds

New research by Florida Tech assistant professor of business Alina Malkova explores how small businesses sought financing amid the COVID-19 pandemic's unstable economic environment.

Her paper, "Beyond banks: Navigating the shift to peer-to-peer lending for small enterprises," published in *Research in Economics*, developed a model to find whether the COVID-19 pandemic affected small-business owners' demand for peer-to-peer (P2P) lending.

Malkova found that more small-business owners turned to P2P platforms during this time, primarily because they were more accessible and flexible than traditional banks. Borrowers could access P2P platforms online for convenient use, and the platforms' advanced algorithms gave lenders more information about borrowers, such as neighborhood demographics, leading to a better understanding of their financial situation.

"If you are an owner or borrower and you have short-term financial problems, it may help you," Malkova says. "It helps you signal your situation."

Ultimately, Malkova says P2P platforms played a critical role in overcoming financial barriers that inhibited small businesses in times of limited access to traditional funding.



Prime is a quantity.

Unique, a product unachievable by any two other numbers. 2, 3, 5 ...

Prime is a quality.

Excellent, of the highest caliber. *Outstanding, Choice, Top-Notch ...*

In both quantity and quality, this column features Prime Examples of what makes us Florida Tech.

PRIME EXAMPLES *of* INITIATIVE

Initiative is a fresh approach. An eagerness to do something. Leading before being led. Taking initiative requires ambition. Originality. Guts. It pairs constant, proactive reflection with a readiness to act and a passion for improvement. Whether you're taking it or launching one, initiative doesn't wait. It forges the path with enthusiasm and tenacity.

Taking matters into your own hands might mean getting them dirty, but hands-on has always been the Florida Tech way.

Here are a few prime examples.

5%

INCREASE

Florida Tech's number of first-time-in-college (FTIC) students rose about 5% in fall 2023, bucking the trend.

By proactively implementing several initiatives—concentrated marketing and social media enhancements, targeted admissions outreach, new scholarship programs, a campuswide student-centric focus, cohesive teamwork and much more—

**FLORIDA TECH ENROLLED
A UNIVERSITY RECORD**

957

FTIC STUDENTS

2 FRESH APPROACHES

DBA Goes Online

Recently redesigned to meet the needs of working professionals seeking a rigorous and advanced education, the Florida Tech Doctor of Business Administration degree program is now offered online. With real-time, interactive online lessons twice a week, the program combines the flexibility of online study, the guidance of expert faculty and the support of a collaborative, close-knit cohort.

“In response to an ever-changing market, we’ve reinvented the Florida Tech DBA program to be even more convenient, flexible, accessible and affordable, expanding the reach of the College of Business at the doctoral level.”

Emily Martinez-Vogt
Bisk College of Business
graduate programs department head

VR Flights

A virtual reality (VR) headset loaded with Visionary Training Resources’ (VTR) proprietary software, FlightDeckToGo®, is being introduced into the College of Aeronautics’ Advanced Aircraft Systems course this semester. The system, featuring a 3D rendering of a Boeing 737 NG flight deck, will allow students to utilize VR flight deck familiarization modules with the guidance of checklist and procedures training to augment traditional learning materials, such as PowerPoint slides, diagrams and videos. Throughout the semester, students will provide feedback on the headset’s usability and value.

“FlightDeckToGo® by VTR will not only make our classes a more enjoyable experience, but it will better prepare our students to operate transport category aircraft that they will operate just a few years after they graduate from Florida Tech.”

Warren Pittorie '15, '18 M.S., '22 Ph.D.
Assistant professor and chair of flight education

3 EVENTS FOR EAGER YOUTH



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE IRL

Students and faculty participated in the Ocean Research and Conservation Association’s seventh annual A Day in the Life of the Indian River Lagoon event Oct. 30, 2024. Florida Tech partnered with the Marine Resources Council to lead Melbourne High School students through a series of stations to collect water quality, record physical characteristics and conduct biological surveys. They also conducted an annual assessment of oyster mats in Melbourne Beach as part of the university’s Living Docks program.



HIGH SCHOOL BUSINESS ETHICS COMPETITION

On Nov. 1, 2024, Florida Tech hosted 27 students who made up nine teams from five Brevard County high schools at the 25th annual Bisk College of Business High School Business Ethics Competition. Two teams from Rockledge High School won first and second place in the competition, designed to encourage high school students to explore the subjects of ethics and leadership, reflect on how ethical principles are related to decision-making in the business world and evaluate the ethical adequacy of actual decisions made by managers. Students competed in two rounds, earning varying amounts in cash and merit scholarships to Florida Tech.

STEMPOWER DAY

More than 1,000 students from Brevard County and beyond participated in Florida Tech’s STEMPower Day Sept. 14, 2024. University students, faculty and local leaders representing some of the Space Coast’s top STEM employers hosted several engaging and interactive sessions covering topics such as space, aviation, engineering, psychology, cybersecurity, biology, earth science and innovation. Participants built towers out of playing cards, taught a robot how to swim, made “bristle bots”—or robots for toothbrush heads—built an anemometer, extracted strawberry DNA and more, hopefully building talent and affinity for STEM fields at a young age.





Vertex Rising

Introducing
Florida Tech's
applied innovation
hub, where ideas
and industry
converge.

By Karly Horn

A “vertex” is a crucial junction where elements converge.

Florida Tech’s aptly named Vertex Applied Innovation Hub is just that—a place where different industries, ideas and technologies come together to transform bold ideas into impactful solutions.

Vertex, formerly the Center for Advanced Manufacturing and Innovative Design (CAMID), which is still a component of the hub, has been reimagined and retooled with a new mission, scope and executive director.

Officially launched in February, Vertex brings together industry, higher education, local and state governments, investors, community members and more to empower transformative partnerships, connecting them with applied engineering technologies, customized workforce development programs and the unmatched talents and expertise of the Florida Tech community.

Empowering transformative partnerships, Vertex makes it possible for established businesses to innovate and grow by connecting them with applied engineering technologies, customized workforce development programs, flexible high-tech workspaces and the unmatched talents and expertise of the Florida Tech community.

While it is housed in a robust 100,000-square-foot facility featuring labs, adaptable workspaces, manufacturing equipment and electronic resources, Vertex is more than brick and mortar.

“At Vertex, we’re not just providing a physical space,” says Samantha Miles, Vertex executive director. “We’re cultivating a comprehensive ecosystem of support and unique value-added services that will contribute to the transformative growth of the Space Coast.”

Miles, a Melbourne Beach native who comes to Vertex with 14 years of international and domestic professional experience designing and executing strategic partnerships in higher education, started at the center in October 2024.

She aims for Vertex to be recognized as a premier multidisciplinary innovation hub—first across the Space Coast, then throughout the state and, ultimately, among the nation’s top centers for applied technology and innovation.

To achieve this admittedly audacious goal, she says, Vertex must find its sweet spot as a community partner and a value-driven innovation accelerator.

“Our focus is on pursuing high-impact projects that will not only create measurable value for our community but also resonate far beyond it,” she says. “With so much potential, Vertex is poised to make a difference on a much larger scale.”

The focus is threefold: **accelerate business growth, advance applied research** and help **prepare a future-ready workforce**.

Accelerate Business Growth

A key component of the Vertex strategy is hosting what Miles calls “businesses in residence,” or BIRs.

BIRs set up shop in the Vertex facility, where they can integrate seamlessly into Florida Tech’s innovation network, accessing its resources—both tangible and intangible.

Tangibly, Vertex provides spaces and tools that support tech-oriented, diverse business operations. Labs feature high ceilings, reinforced infrastructure for

heavy equipment, ample electrical hook-ups and high-speed internet, ensuring they meet complex projects’ demands. The facility also offers meeting rooms, conference spaces and training areas to foster collaboration.

Beyond this, Vertex offers access to additive manufacturing tools, including the EOS M290 metal 3D printer for precise, high-quality parts; the nScript microdispensing machine for intricate electronic circuits; and versatile 3D printers for advanced polymers. This technology enables prototype creation across a variety of industries. Vertex also supports design and simulation by offering visualization tools, such as high-resolution 3D scanners, motion-tracking systems and virtual- and augmented-reality technologies.

Intangible benefits essentially come down to one thing: connections. To fellow advanced technology-oriented businesses. To projects. To government. To people—investors, researchers, interns. Many and varying, these connections mutually benefit all parties in the Vertex network.

JULIAN FIELD ’84, an electrical engineering alumnus who set up shop in Vertex a little over a year ago, is already taking advantage.

His business, Solar Transport Systems, is developing an inexpensive, rugged solar-powered vehicle for use primarily in the Southern Hemisphere, where incomes may be scant, but sunshine is abundant.

He started working on the car, which began as a school project for his then 16-year-old son, 10 years ago in the United Kingdom, where he completed much of the development work, building a prototype that, due to frequently cloudy skies, he could only test two or three weeks a summer.

“The combination of an innovation facility attached to my former university with its location that experiences warm weather and year-round sunshine in which to test the vehicle made [Vertex] seem like a safe harbor in which to steer my ship,” Field says. “It’s just been such the right decision to have made at every level. Really, it has exceeded my expectations.”

Since moving into Vertex, Field has put the finishing touches on his prototype, a

task for which he utilized both Vertex’s tools and equipment, as well as its connections to Florida Tech students. He has enlisted the help of about 20 interns for projects ranging from moving the steering wheel to the left side of the car to soldering together solar cells to pitching marketing proposals for third-world country launches.

“Internships are a key mutual selling point,” Miles says. “The businesses love having access to our students through the form of internships. And likewise, if our students want to get hands-on practical experiences, Vertex offers more businesses with which they can do that.”

In turn, Field has shared real-world experience and expertise with students through guest lectures in a few Bisk College of Business classes and as a judge for some of the college’s senior design projects.

As Solar Transport geared up to send its bodywork designs to a nearby factory for production, Field reached out to CAMID director **JUAN AVENDANO** ’11, ’13 M.S., ’20 Ph.D., who set him up with a virtual reality headset to view the model and search out any obvious flaws.

“It goes one level beyond just the availability of equipment. It’s about knowing someone who knows something that can help,” Field says. “There is a kind of community feel that I’ve benefited from, as well. I think that having a thriving community of entrepreneurs and makers—people creating things—is a very stimulating way to work. It’s exciting to be in a place where stuff happens.”

In December, Vertex welcomed its newest BIR, Zeal OTM.

Zeal OTM is an established systems integrator specializing in edge-based, “on the move” (OTM) solutions that maximize situational awareness and counter-armed aircraft systems (CUAS) for land, air and sea missions. They are also the U.S. manufacturer of SAFESky Systems USA, delivering innovative drone technology for public safety.

“We chose Vertex because its collaborative environment aligns perfectly with our mission to innovate and deliver

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cutting-edge solutions for our clients,” says Jason Jones, Zeal OTM CEO. “We plan to utilize Florida Tech’s engineering resources to further develop our drone and sensor technology.”

As more businesses join the Vertex ecosystem, opportunities grow, Miles says.

Co-developed projects and joint intellectual property between like-minded BIRs that span multiple industries. Access to investors. Local government-backed, high-impact initiatives. Transformative partnerships with major corporations. Possibilities abound.

“If we leverage our assets effectively, Vertex becomes so much more than the sum of its parts,” Miles says. “It has the potential to become one of Florida Tech’s most powerful assets, driving industry engagement, expanding our global reputation, supporting regional and statewide economic development, offering industry insights for our faculty and students—all while launching our businesses in residence to new levels of success.”

Advance Applied Research

The same tools and facilities available to BIRs are equally valuable for delivering research and development (R&D) initiatives. Vertex aims not just to activate these resources but to maximize them to serve a variety of stakeholders across industries.

“This comprehensive ecosystem for innovation is a powerful advantage that adds significant value for our partners and the broader community,” Miles says.

Take Larsen Motorsports, a Vertex BIR that has built, tested, maintained and raced jet dragsters in its 27,000-square-foot headquarters within the Vertex facility for over 10 years and has hosted hundreds of Florida Tech students through its 15-week internship program.

If you ask CEO Chris Larsen, jet cars are really just a byproduct of what they do at LMS.

“We are really an applied research type of company,” Larsen says. “The material that you learn in the classrooms every day at Florida Tech, we take that knowledge and information, and we apply it, turn it into nuts and bolts.”

LMS has the largest inventory of gas turbines used for research in the United States, possibly the world, Larsen says. So, when a Florida Tech professor and his students were ready to put their theoretical research regarding a highly specialized biofuel to the test, they knew where to do it.

“They knew what they were doing, and we knew how to apply their research in the way they were looking for. We ran their fuel through our engine, and that particular

“If we leverage our assets effectively, Vertex becomes so much more than the sum of its parts. It has the potential to become one of Florida Tech’s most powerful assets ...”

—Samantha Miles, Vertex executive director

case was massively successful—a net carbon reduction over 70%,” Larsen says. “But we do this kind of applied research all the time.”

Combining rigorous applied research with practical, market-aligned applications also introduces potential funding opportunities through programs such as the U.S. Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs.

A big step toward expanding Vertex’s reach to R&D projects beyond the local community, the center was recently accepted into EMERGE, a National Science Foundation-funded program operated by private artificial intelligence-powered company Halo.

EMERGE aims to connect industry R&D teams with innovators from emerging research institutions, focusing on applied research areas critical to industry.

“My hope is that participation will offer a significant opportunity to increase our visibility, access key industry leaders and foster collaborations—especially beyond the Space Coast,” Miles says.

Prepare a Future-Ready Workforce

While Vertex has a lot to offer, it cannot be everything to everyone, Miles says. She doesn’t want to duplicate existing efforts but rather, tap into and complement them, adding new value to both the university and its many external stakeholders.

That is why she and her team are taking a very targeted approach, prioritizing partnerships with businesses and entities that could genuinely benefit from Vertex’s resources and satisfy a community or industry need.

Workforce development is a vital component of such an innovation ecosystem.

By identifying niche opportunities for training, Vertex aims to partner with government and key industries across the region to design and deliver programs that will equip our community with high-tech

skills needed for the future workplace. These initiatives not only empower families to earn more but also help retain innovative industries on the Space Coast, Miles says.

Also integral to Vertex’s workforce development strategy—as well as R&D—will be the Florida Tech Research Institute (FTRI) and Aerospace Cybersecurity Engineering Development (ASCEND) program, which support Florida’s industrial and defense base through applied research and relevant talent development.

Both soon-to-be housed in the Vertex facility, FTRI and ASCEND are valuable resources that will provide much-needed services to what is the third-largest-performing sector of the economy, according to the Florida Department of Commerce.

“Rather than serving as separate entities, FTRI and ASCEND will serve as tools that amplify Vertex’s mission and create synergy,” says professor Hamid Rassoul, Florida Tech’s chief research officer. “Our ecosystem is strengthened as a result of their integration into Vertex, ensuring a more effective and cohesive approach to achieving our goals. And Vertex’s global vision and strategic partnerships will benefit them.”

Miles is determined to work with local government and industry to discern what other such technological needs exist in the community and how Vertex might help fulfill them by bridging physical systems, software and innovative practices.

Again, not just any needs, but the kind of specific skills and services—niche professional certifications, employee trainings, prototyping, etc.—that Vertex is distinctively able to both provide and cultivate within the tech-driven workforce of the Space Coast, a hub of the aerospace, manufacturing and information technology sectors.

“This region is uniquely positioned and ready for Vertex’s mission, with its rich industrial ecosystem and skilled workforce,” Rassoul says. “Vertex is more than an innovation hub—it is a catalyst for growth on the Space Coast.”

Introducing: Samantha Miles

Executive director and driving force behind
Florida Tech's new innovation center

By Adam Lowenstein

Samantha Miles was born in Melbourne, Florida, but that is not where she stayed.

Her father, Roger Baltz, was energized by new challenges, which led him to public administration jobs from Florida to Nevada, California to Arkansas. He was comfortable with change and, in fact, embraced it.

"That experience was extremely formative for me," Miles says.

If her father showed her the value of adaptability, her mother, Jane Baltz, a New Zealand native, exposed her to her first international travel—and the power of personality.

"My dad is a southern gentleman with a slow drawl—thoughtful, steady and always put together. He's calm and composed," Miles says. "My mom is a vivacious Kiwi from New Zealand who talks a million miles an hour—fun-loving, cheerful and full of energy."

Just as Miles drew life skills from her multiple relocations during childhood, the countervailing traits in her parents would coalesce in her and become both foundation and fuel for the international achievements that were on the horizon.

Considering a career in education, with goals to earn a Ph.D. and, ultimately, land a job as a university president, Miles began her own higher education with a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Central Florida, where she also met her husband of almost 16 years, Chris Miles.

She went on to earn a master's degree in higher education leadership from Florida Atlantic University. The couple then decided it was time to travel.

In January 2012, Miles accepted a job as student experience coordinator at the University of Southern Queensland in Australia's northeast. She would not live on U.S. soil for the next decade.

As student experience coordinator at the university, Miles oversaw, in essence, any activity outside of the classroom. She introduced some elements of U.S. universities,

such as orientation leaders and student employee programs, and excelled at her job. She remained at the Queensland university for nearly two years, departing in December 2014 to work as director of global learning and student life at the SP Jain School of Global Management Dubai campus.

Over the next year, she led the experiential education program across all four of the university's campuses, developed initiatives ranging from cultural awareness to social engagement, designed and taught an undergraduate global leadership course and was an active member of the leadership committee.

Her next career move was becoming "head of learning" at a Dubai consultancy called Knowledge E.

"I joined the company, and that really changed everything for me," she says.

For the next seven or so years, Miles took on projects of complexity and significance, from medical school reform in Egypt to initiatives introducing gene sequencing there and establishing a proper research ecosystem. She worked with the UK, the Netherlands and other partner countries.

Miles returned to Punta Gorda, Florida, in February 2022. After two years of remote work with Knowledge E, she spotted her next challenge: Florida Tech was seeking an executive director for Vertex.

The position had a lot going for it: Its location on the Space Coast, an area with the natural beauty and amenities of a small seaside town but the advanced industry of a place far larger; the connection she felt with Florida Tech and its values; and how the job and her skill set fit like puzzle pieces.

She got the job and is ready to use what she learned over the last 10 eventful years to propel this nascent entity forward.

"We have the opportunity to do something different and truly special here," she says. "Let's use Vertex as the powerhouse that it can be."



“The one word that I would hone it down to is ‘impact.’ That’s what I wanted to do—meaningful work that had an impact in the real world.”

—Samantha Miles



Read more:
link.fit.edu/miles



Leaders Among Leaders

The President's Ambassadors

By Trey Avant

I imagine stepping onto a college campus with the weight of your future resting on the edge of your choices. For students at Florida Tech, that choice now includes a rare opportunity to become not just scholars, but trailblazers—**LEADERS WHO SHAPE THE UNIVERSITY’S LEGACY.**

At the start of the fall 2024 semester, Florida Tech launched the President’s Ambassadors program. This ambitious initiative invites a select group of standout students to serve as role models, embodying the very values that define Florida Tech.

Inspired by a similar program he launched at the University of New Orleans, Florida Tech President John Nicklow brought this vision to life at Florida Tech with the hope that it would not only elevate the student experience but also amplify the university’s impact in ways never before imagined.

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MEET THE PRESIDENT’S AMBASSADORS



Asa Barnhart

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING, B.S.

Junior from Auburn, California

“This experience has been invaluable, allowing me to connect with incredible people, sharpen my professional and networking skills and grow both personally and professionally.”

FUN FACT: Asa is an undergraduate research assistant in the cardiovascular flow lab.



Erin Brasher

MARINE BIOLOGY, B.S.; BIOMEDICAL SCIENCE, B.S.

Junior from Benton, Arkansas

“It has been such a joy getting to meet and work with these incredible and impressive students toward a common goal of serving our campus community and representing the student body.”

FUN FACT: Through Florida Tech, Erin has visited the Amazon rainforest and Galápagos.



Deztynee Bryan

METEOROLOGY, B.S.

Senior from Anguilla

“Representing Florida Tech is an incredible honor, and I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity.”

FUN FACT: Deztynee is an “island girl” whose love for meteorology was sparked by the impact of Hurricane Irma on her hometown in 2017.

A Visionary Beginning

The President’s Ambassadors program is rooted in two key goals: promoting Florida Tech’s values—leadership, service, inclusivity and academic excellence—and developing students into servant leaders who will shape the university’s growth and success.

“The inspiration behind starting the program was twofold,” Nicklow says. “One aspect is helping a group of students network with a broader group of individuals—community members, board members and alumni. The second aspect is fostering connections between alumni and community leaders and the university. What better way to do that than by having them talk directly to a student?”

Dressed in matching crimson blazers, the President’s Ambassadors are easily recognizable at events. Their presence has already left a lasting impression on Florida Tech’s community and beyond.

“I can talk to alumni and community members until I’m blue in the face about all the great things happening here, but when they hear it from a student, it’s real,” Nicklow says. “They are a critical keystone in what we’re trying to accomplish.”

The inaugural cohort consists of 15 exceptional students selected from 63 applicants, forming a diverse group of sophomores, juniors, seniors and graduate students. These students embody the university’s best: leaders with a passion for progress, a commitment to Florida Tech’s mission

“ [The President’s Ambassadors] are a critical keystone in what we’re trying to accomplish.”

— John Nicklow

and a desire to leave an indelible mark on the university.

“These students are leaders among leaders,” Nicklow says. “They were selected for this one-year experience because of their leadership experience, dedication to Florida Tech, passion for promoting change, desire to learn and grow, campus involvement and ability to mentor or inspire others.”

The program brings together students from a wide array of organizations and leadership roles, including scholar-athletes, resident assistants and members of organizations like the Panther Spirit Squad, Greek Life, Student Government Association and honor societies.

Being an ambassador is a volunteer position with unparalleled opportunities for growth and impact. Ambassadors act as the welcoming face of Florida Tech, greeting guests at university events and fostering meaningful dialogue.

The Crimson Connection

What makes these ambassadors so special? It’s their ability to turn every handshake into a bridge and every conversation into an opportunity.

“They’re the ones who will welcome you to the event—‘Hey, hello. Welcome to Florida Tech.’ They’ll engage with you, want to know more about who you are as a guest and be prepared and eager to ask or answer questions about their experiences at Florida Tech,” says **JULIA MARTINUS** ’21, ’23 M.S., event planning

MEET THE PRESIDENT’S AMBASSADORS



Darryl Chamberlin

PHYSICS, B.S.; ASTRONOMY & ASTROPHYSICS, B.S.

Senior from North Port, Florida

FUN FACT: In addition to his studies at Florida Tech, Darryl plays bass in the orchestra and jazz band.



Parker Christensen

MECHANICAL ENGINEERING, B.S.

Senior from Dallas, Texas

“ The program has been eye-opening, allowing me to see how brilliant other people on campus are. It’s been great to talk with like-minded individuals about the state of the university.”



Ava Dorow

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING, B.S., M.S.

Junior (FastTrack) from Portsmouth, New Hampshire

“ President’s Ambassadors has allowed me to interact more with people from other disciplines and be able to connect with more people outside my field.”



and production manager who serves as the program's advisor.

One of the most significant opportunities the ambassadors experience is mingling with Florida Tech's board of trustees at exclusive events. These gatherings provide unparalleled networking opportunities, allowing the ambassadors to interact with university leaders, alumni and community stakeholders.

"They truly represent Panther Pride and are able to speak about the student experience," Martinus says.

Beyond attending board of trustees meetings, the ambassadors have also participated in high-profile events like the Legacy of 37 reception and President's Circle gatherings, where they played a key role engaging with community and university leaders.

Building Tomorrow's Leaders

The program isn't just about appearances—it's about cultivating growth. Ambassadors undergo extensive training in leadership development, professionalism, networking and goal setting. Weekly cohort meetings with Martinus reinforce these skills, preparing them to represent the university confidently.

"Throughout the program, students not only contribute to Florida Tech's mission and vision, but they are also given the tools to become better individuals and more capable young professionals," Martinus says.

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MEET THE PRESIDENT'S AMBASSADORS



Graziela Encarnacion '24

**BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, MBA
INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS SPECIALIZATION**

Graduate student from Houston, Texas

“It's been an amazing opportunity to be able to share my love of Florida Tech.”

FUN FACT: Graziela is the first person in her family to attend college and will be the first to earn a master's degree.



Anna Grimm

**CHEMISTRY, B.S.—PREMEDICAL EMPHASIS;
BIOCHEMISTRY, M.S.**

Senior (FastTrack) from Kannapolis, North Carolina

“Being able to work alongside President Nicklow to highlight some of the best parts of our campus and its students has been an opportunity I will always be grateful for.”



Steven Holmberg '24

AEROSPACE ENGINEERING, M.S.

Graduate student from Forked River, New Jersey

FUN FACT: Since he started at Florida Tech in 2020, Steven has been involved with numerous research labs and has worked on several grants. He also loves going to the beach and surfing.



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The ambassadors' impact is matched by the program's effect on them. Many have expressed newfound confidence and skills, while bonds formed among the cohort promise lasting friendships.

"The program has provided many opportunities to grow as a leader and professional," ambassador Deztynee Bryan says. "Through this program, I've developed valuable skills, built meaningful connections and worked alongside an inspiring cohort of individuals who constantly motivate me to strive for excellence."

The bonds forged within the program are as meaningful as the skills gained, encouraging personal growth while building enduring friendships between cohorts and deepening their commitment to advancing Florida Tech's mission.

"In the beginning, some of them were nervous and didn't really know each other. However, there was an overwhelming commonality among all of them: They each wanted to give back to Florida Tech," Martinus says. "Now, students who didn't know each other before this program are having an amazing experience together. Seeing their growth as young professionals and watching their confidence increase has been absolutely amazing."

The benefits for ambassadors go far beyond leadership development, networking opportunities and relationship building. Nicklow has also extended a standing offer to provide ambassadors letters of recommendation for jobs, graduate school or internships.

MEET THE PRESIDENT'S AMBASSADORS



Kian Jamal

AEROSPACE ENGINEERING, B.S.

Senior from McKinney, Texas

“Being part of the President's Ambassadors program has been an incredible journey so far, offering invaluable experiences and the opportunity to connect and learn with inspiring individuals.”



Marcello Mattei '22, '23 M.S.

BIOMEDICAL ENGINEERING, PH.D.

Graduate student from Caracas, Venezuela

“I am surprised how interested the community, our president, the board of trustees and the college deans have been when meeting us in events.”



Alita Regi '19, '21 M.S.

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN, PH.D.

Graduate student from Dubai, United Arab Emirates

“I love the vibrant student body.”

FUN FACT: Alita loves painting and dancing.



“The President's Ambassadors are the face of the institution. When we talk about supporting education and our students, people can now put a face to that cause.”

—John Nicklow

“In preparation for upcoming job applications, I reached out to Dr. Nicklow for a letter of recommendation, and he graciously provided it,” ambassador Asa Barnhart said. “I am incredibly grateful for his support and encouragement, and I am excited to take all I have learned serving at this school into my future.”

A Legacy in the Making

The program is just beginning, but its potential is already clear. With a \$100,000 endowment from an anonymous alumnus, the program is set for sustained growth. Ambassadors are encouraged to leave their mark by creating new initiatives, raising funds for scholarships and leading campus activities.

“The President’s Ambassadors are the face of the institution,” Nicklow says. “When we talk about supporting education and our students, people can now put a face to that cause. They represent us so well, and I want to thank the ambassadors for what they do. I’m proud of them individually; I’m proud of the program, and I know it will have a positive impact on the future of Florida Tech.”

With its strong foundation, the President’s Ambassadors program promises to remain a cornerstone of leadership development at Florida Tech for years to come, continuing to foster Panther Pride—one conversation, one connection and one crimson blazer at a time.

MEET THE PRESIDENT’S AMBASSADORS



Mackenzie Smith

MULTIPLATFORM JOURNALISM, B.S.
Senior from Flower Mound, Texas

“Being a president’s ambassador has given me the opportunity to learn so much.”

FUN FACT: Mackenzie loves live music. In 2024, she attended 22 concerts. Her favorite music genres are indie/alternative and country.



McKenna Taylor

**ASTRONOMY & ASTROPHYSICS, B.S.;
ASTROBIOLOGY, B.S.**
Senior from Arkadelphia, Arkansas

“I am so grateful to Dr. Nicklow for bringing this program to Florida Tech.”

FUN FACT: McKenna is one of this year’s Astronaut Scholarship Foundation (ASF) Astronaut Scholars.



Liana van Woesik '24

CONSERVATION TECHNOLOGY, M.S.
Graduate student from Melbourne Beach, Florida

“Having the opportunity to lead by example and work to encourage others to find the best within themselves has been an honor.”

FUN FACT: Liana is a PADI-certified Divemaster and American Academy of Underwater Sciences (AAUS) Scientific Diver.

THE 
**BIG,
 FUN**

**FLORIDA TECH
 ALUMNI**
SURVEY

Almost 700 of you participated in the second annual Big, Fun Florida Tech Alumni Survey, the friendliest, quirkiest and most entertaining way to connect with your alma mater—and the results are in!

Compared to last year's data, some things changed—we added 8 years to our age demographic¹, while pineapple is losing traction as an acceptable pizza topping²—and some things stayed the same—we're still mostly logical-mathematical³ early birds⁴ who think quality time⁵ is the best way to say "I love you" and strongly concur that a taco is most definitely NOT a sandwich⁶. But most important, we learned some all-new details that helped us get to know our fellow Panthers a little bit more.

Your turn!

¹ages ranged from 21 to 96 (21 to 88 last year)

²only 51% say it is a topping (62% last year)

³self-identified intelligence type for 38% of respondents

⁴42% over midday macaws, night owls and no preference pigeons

⁵love language of 30% of respondents

⁶61% say it is not a sandwich

FUN FACTS ABOUT YOU

MUSICALLY INCLINED?

62% of you don't play an instrument.

For those who do:

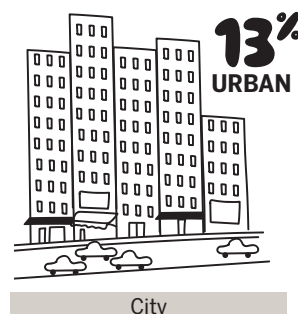
GUITAR edged out **PIANO** as the most-played, with 41 and 37 respondents, respectively. The **DRUMS** and **FLUTE** tied for third, with 14 respondents each.

Some lesser-played instruments:

- » coronet
- » euphonium
- » MIDI controller
- » sitar
- » synthesizer

70%  of you wear glasses or contacts

WHERE'D YOU GROW UP?



FAVORITE COLOR?



GAMING PERSONALITY

Well, you seem to be avid gamers—just not of the video game variety. Only about 5% of you rank yourselves at a 9 or 10 on the gamer scale. 86% identified as a 6 or lower. 58% would rather have cash than a new-in-box vintage console.

On the tabletop front, you're far more prolific. When asked about your favorites, you submitted hundreds of rare and interesting-sounding titles. Honorable mentions include: Gloomhaven, Betrayal at House on the Hill and "any good drinking game."



of you think Pac-Man is the most iconic video game character.

Beating out Mario (38%)



TOP 5 TRIVIA

Night Out with Friends SPORTS GAMES

- 1 Pool
- 2 Cards
- 3 Bowling
- 4 Darts
- 5 Cornhole

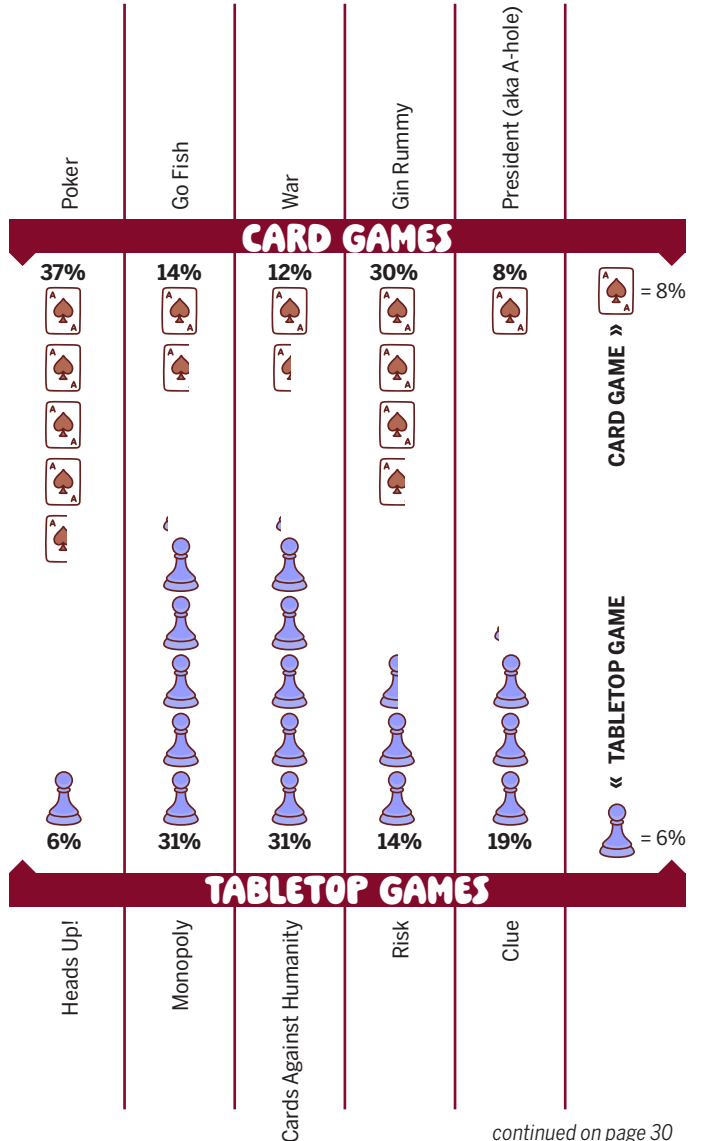
Absolute Favorite BOARD, CARD OR TABLETOP GAMES

- 1 Monopoly
- 2 Chess
- 3 Scrabble
- 4 UNO
- 5 Trivial Pursuit

Never Need to Play Again GAMES

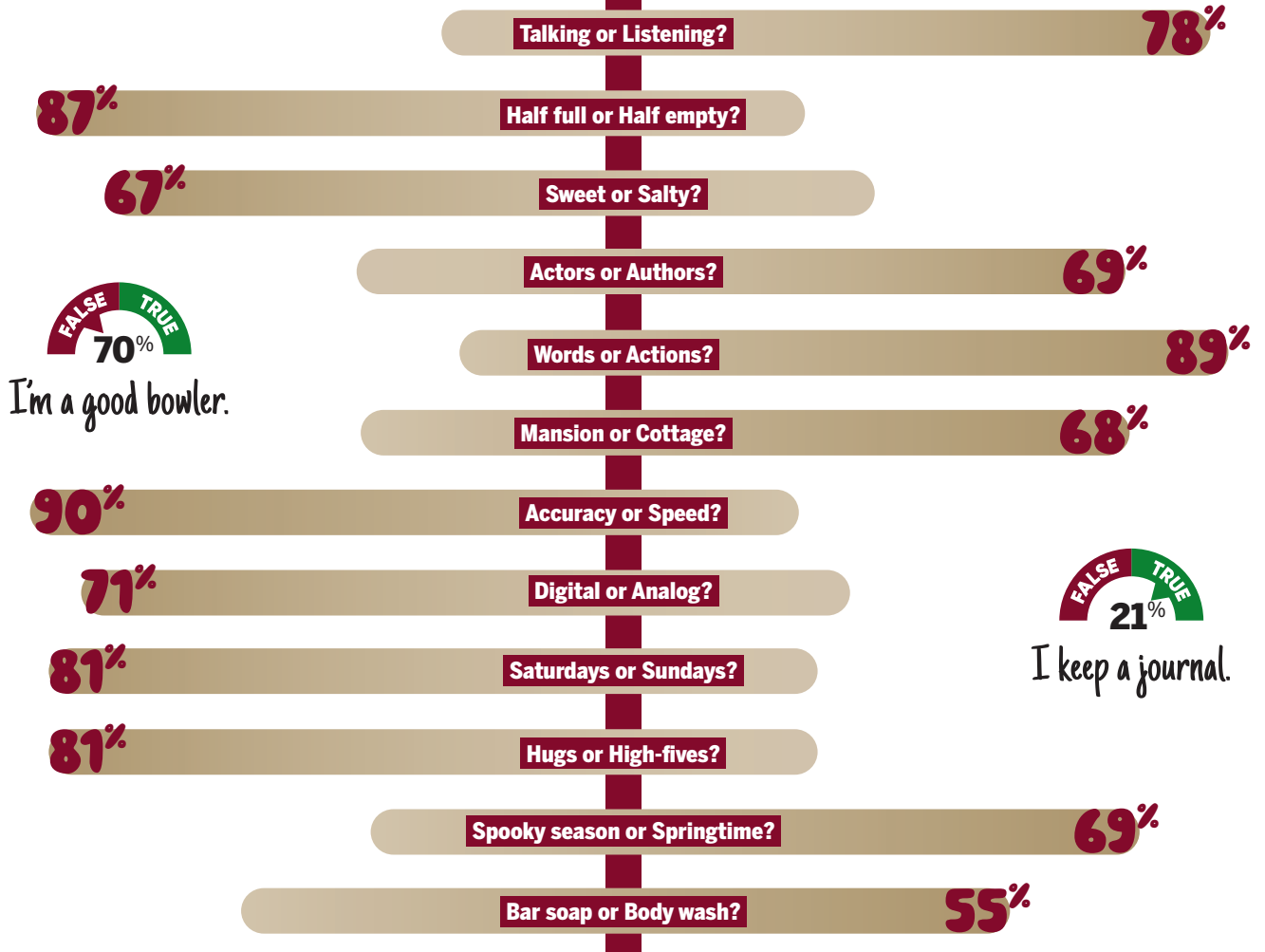
- 1 Monopoly
- 2 Candy Land
- 3 Risk
- 4 Poker
- 5 The Game of Life

We proposed some popular "Game Night" options for you to consider. Here's how your answers stacked up.

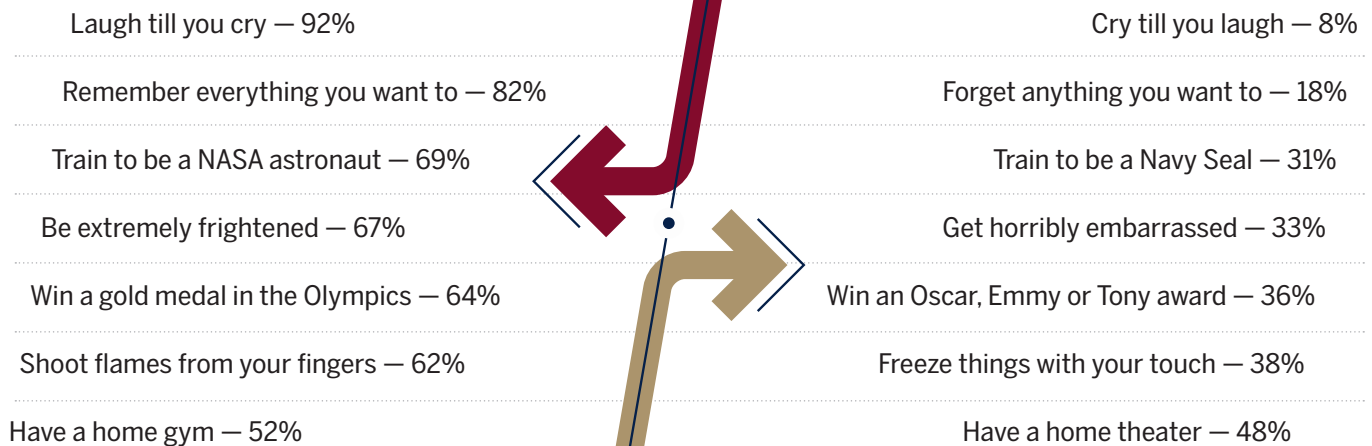


Sometimes, there's no better way to get to know someone than a good old-fashioned this-or-that exercise. We were hoping for a mix of surprising, validating, funny and random responses—and you delivered.

THIS OR THAT?



WOULD YOU



RATHER?

FAV FACULTY

Faculty love runs deep. Of the hundreds of professors you remember fondly, the following names were mentioned three or more times in your list of favorite or most influential Florida Tech professors.

“Too many great professors! Dr. Harris, Dr. Quiroga-Nunez, Dr. Lingam, Dr. Perez, Dr. Warren, Dr. Rassoul, Dr. Pereira, the list goes on. This school is phenomenal!”



IN CONCLUSION

Here's to the outliers! Those who...

Drive a muscle car (.4%)

Identify their favorite color by nanometer (465 nm, to be exact)

Have never actually been on campus (7%)

Would rather start a band than a business (30%)

Consider Sonic the Hedgehog, Pikachu or Lara Croft the most iconic video game character of all time (3% each)

YOU ARE NOT ALONE.

FINALLY,

congratulations to **JOHN S. (SCOTT) TWADDELL III '77 A.S.**, who won the drawing for an awesome Florida Tech prize pack!

Thank you to everyone who participated in the second annual Big, Fun Florida Tech Alumni Survey. We hope you had fun, got a good laugh or two and learned a little something about your peers—and hey, maybe even about yourself. While no two Panthers are the same, rural resident or urbanite, card player or board gamer, the talkers, the listeners, the basic, the extra—**here, you belong.**



Imagine you've been stranded on an island.

WHAT'S YOUR JOB?



I have been to Spain.



I love sushi.

A MESSAGE FROM THE FLORIDA TECH ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

My fellow Panthers,

In 2024, Florida Tech experienced tremendous triumphs and new beginnings. As we embark on a new year, it is an exciting time to be a student and alumnus.

The alumni office is bustling with events this time of year.

In January, we hosted our annual Martin Luther King Jr. commemoration, which in addition to honoring the Civil Rights icon, recognizes our own Julius Montgomery, the first Black professional to work in the U.S. space program and first Black student at Florida Tech. The event is always one of the most heartfelt, emotional and moving experiences I've had, and I highly recommend attending next year's event if you've never been.

The upcoming WISE Awards luncheon will recognize alumni, students, faculty and staff members who embody the spirit of advancing, mentoring and leading the development of women in the community and workplace. Inspired by Joan Bixby, a Florida Tech alumna and former university administrator, it is a great event to see and hear from women in our school and community who have worked hard to succeed and make a difference in the areas about which they are passionate.

Finally, the university's 37 Hours of Giving (formerly Day of Giving) event will be March 7 and 8. As you consider supporting our beloved alma mater, remember, it is not about the amount you give, it is simply about supporting students and their success. I always like to represent and donate to the four areas that I feel have affected my life the most: engineering, psychology, Alpha Phi and the Alumni Association.

If you haven't been to campus in a while, visit us anytime. You will see how much the campus has grown, not just in size and structure, but in programs, equipment and student experiences. The time, talent and treasure of our alumni are on display the moment you step foot on campus.

As always, please reach out to the alumni office anytime. We love to hear from you!

I look forward to seeing many of you on campus in 2025.

Yours,

Sherry Acanfora-Ruohomaki
'93, '00, '05 M.S.
FTAA President



YOUR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

Sherry Acanfora-Ruohomaki

'93, '00, '05 M.S.
President | Melbourne, FL
sherry@facetscg.com

Ameen Sarkees '89

Vice President | Merritt Island, FL
aysarkees@yahoo.com

Warren Pittorie '15, '18 M.S., '22 Ph.D.

Treasurer | Melbourne, FL
wpittorie2012@fit.edu

John Robertson '13

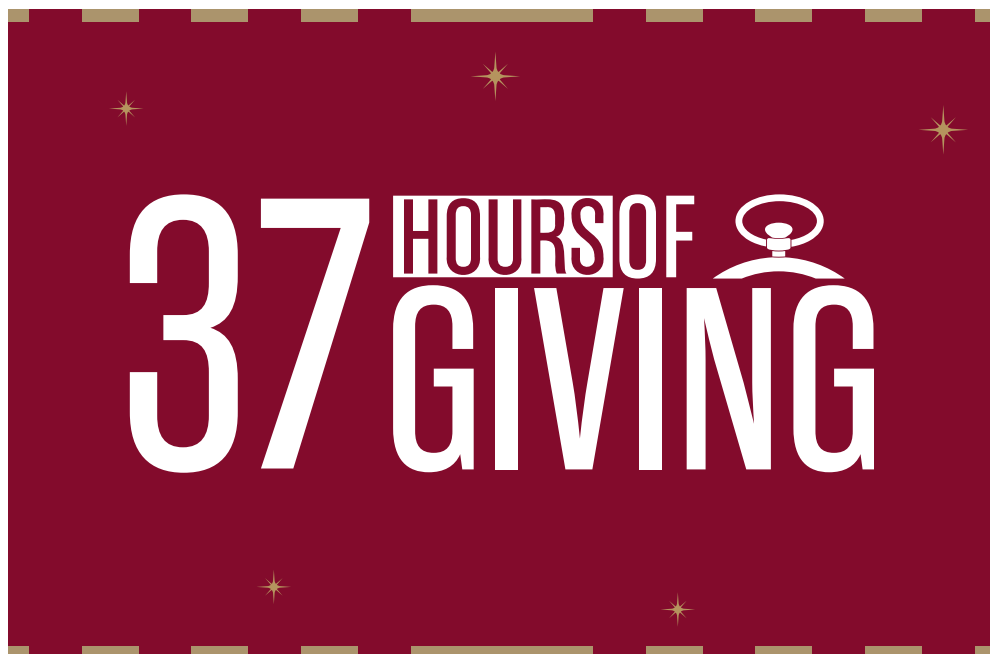
Secretary | San Juan Capistrano, CA
jtrobertson2009@gmail.com

Chris Fernando '02

Member-at-Large | Raleigh, NC
cfernando@gmail.com

Fin Bonset '96, '99 MSA

Past President | Indialantic, FL
fbonset@vhb.com



Save the Date

Florida Tech's annual day of giving event is
March 7-8, 2025

Your participation supports student scholarships, athletics and other university priorities.

Learn more:



1970s

KENNY WATTS '71 wrote and published a spiritual techno-thriller novel, *Neurifact*. The main character is a Florida Tech research professor, and many of the scenes are on campus.

JAMES "JIM" SUMNER '77 A.S., '78, was recognized by President Joe Biden for his volunteer effort at Arches National Park with a President's Volunteer Service Award. Since retirement, Jim and his wife, Patty, have been regular volunteers for the National Park Service, contributing over 1,000 hours at Arches, Denali and Glacier national parks.

SUBMIT YOUR NEWS TO
alumnotes@fit.edu

1980s

JOHN TIEDEMANN '80 M.S., after a rewarding early career with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and New Jersey Sea Grant Consortium, recently retired as School of Science assistant dean and marine and environmental biology program director at Monmouth University. He worked at the university for 26 years.

TRISH (LINDSAY) MURPHEY '85 was elected chair of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, which is responsible for fishery resources from 3 to 200 miles off North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. She represents the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries.

1 BRIAN SARGENT '87 A.S. reconnected with several Florida Tech alumni

at the United Airlines Annual Standards and Training Meeting in Denver in October 2024. (Pictured from left): **MARCUS BUCHANAN** '88, **NEAL SORENSON** '86 A.S., '88, **MARK HOMAN** '88 A.S., '90, **MARTIN GERHARD** '88 A.S., '90, **BRIAN SARGENT**, **JOHN CHAMPION** '87 A.S., '88, **DARREN PATTERSON** '93 and **DAN SULLIVAN** '93.

2 TIMOTHY LING '89 was recognized at the Ohio Manufacturers' Leadership Forum by the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) with the Babington Award for his involvement, contribution and leadership within the organization.

continued on page 34



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Growing up in Rockledge, Florida, **LETWAN SUTTON** '20 A.A., '20, '21 MBA, dreamed of becoming a collegiate athlete.

He knew of Florida Tech from its local fame but never thought he would attend the “engineering school.”

Then, in his junior year of high school, Florida Tech began recruiting him to join its new football team. He even received a scholarship to attend the university his senior year due to his stellar grades.

“On National Signing Day in 2016, I committed to playing for Florida Tech,” Sutton says. “The combination of being able to live out my college football dreams and also be able to prioritize a future attending a really good institution were no-brainers for me.”

Once admitted as a student at Florida Tech, Sutton didn't slow down.

In addition to the football team, he was a member of the Student Government Association and the Black Student Union. He became a Panther Prep Leader for the orientation team and joined Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and the intramural basketball team.

“College is an exploratory experience, but I think everything else surrounding your education while you're there is so important,” Sutton says. “Learning how to become a leader, how to communicate with people of different backgrounds and immersing yourself in different cultures.”

After completing his bachelor's degree in aviation management and his Associate of Arts in air traffic control, Sutton accepted a full-time position with Embraer, where he had completed an internship during his time at Florida Tech.

However, he soon realized his passions in the aviation industry were geared more toward finance and leadership. So, he returned to Florida Tech and received his MBA from the Bisk College of Business.

“I knew I needed a little bit more business acumen, and Florida Tech offered a great hybrid schedule for completing my degree while still working full time,” Sutton says. “The university made it easy for me to get what I needed for my career and to do it in the most convenient way possible.”

Today, Sutton is the manager of aviation tax at MySky, the only artificial intelligence-powered spend management platform designed for the private aviation industry.

In his role, Sutton helps company executives comply with the Federal Aviation Administration, IRS and Securities and Exchange Commission requirements during private travel.

“Being a people person, it's exciting getting to work with people from all over the world and get to know them not just as clients but friends,” Sutton says.

In October 2023, Sutton was honored with the National Business Aircraft Association's (NBAA) Top 40 Under 40 award. He was selected for this honor for being an innovative thinker in the aviation industry, challenging norms and breaking barriers. Sutton also serves as professional development co-chair on the NBAA's Young Professionals in Business Aviation Council.

“The award caught me off guard, but it went a long way in making me feel like my work was appreciated, and it gave me even more inspiration to keep doing good in the industry,” Sutton says.

—Erin Alvarado



SPOTLIGHT ON

Letwan Sutton

FLORIDA TECH CONNECTION: '20 A.A. air traffic control, '20 B.S. aviation management, '21 MBA

GO-TO KARAOKE SONG: “In da Club” by 50 Cent

TRAVEL TO THE FUTURE OR VISIT THE PAST: Future

DECADE YOU WISH YOU COULD HAVE LIVED: '90s

BEST ADVICE YOU'VE RECEIVED: There is no right or wrong move no matter what you do. Have experiences, learn from them and continue going forward after that.

continued from page 33

1990s

ROBERT DILL '90, '91 M.S., crossed the finish line at the Ironman Hawaii triathlon race in October 2024.

PAULETTE KING-MORIN '94 was the keynote speaker at the Episcopal Church of Our Savior's special tribute to the FDNY Retirees of Brevard County and the Palm Bay Fire Department Sept. 11, 2024.

JEWELL (WHEELER) POWELL '98 M.S. has found success in a second career as an award-winning filmmaker. Her first feature film, “Unfailing Love,” has garnered over 15 awards, including Best Audience Choice, at various film festivals.

JUSTIN MEYER '99 was awarded the Ted Buschelman Legacy Award from the Airports Council International-North America and his North American airport industry colleagues.

2000s

MARK WIESE '00 is the manager of deep space logistics at NASA's Kennedy Space Center Gateway Program. Wiese was recently featured on the podcast, “Houston, We Have a Podcast!” where he discussed his role in shaping the future of space exploration.

3 EMILY (WILL) TORLAKOVIC '03 and her husband, **NAIM TORLAKOVIC** '01, '03 M.S., started Happiness Horse Farm in Palm Bay, Florida. This volunteer-run nonprofit farm and animal sanctuary is for local community members and students.

ROBIN DESMORE '08 M.S. was selected for inclusion in Marquis Who's Who. Desmore, a distinguished professional with over 30 years of experience in government contracting and strategic management, is the CEO and founder of Avant-Garde Concepts LLC.



2010s

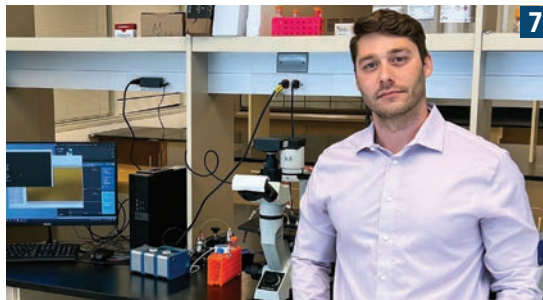
4 PAUL DECKER '11 was promoted to onsite school programs coordinator at the Seattle Aquarium. Within this role, he coordinates pre-K through college student programs that inspire marine environment conservation.

5 GAËL LE BRIS '11 MSA and **6 LOUP-GIANG NGUYEN '19** MSA, who both work at WSP, have published *The Future of Airports: A Vision of 2040 and 2070*. The book, the result of a six-year research project that has involved over 100 aviation experts and leaders around the world, explores long-term challenges and opportunities in aviation along 11 strategic topics.

NICHOLAS KARL '11 is engaged to Kathryn McClenahan, and they have planned their wedding for June. Karl is employed at Sandia National Laboratories.

7 RYAN MONTES '13 is co-founder and CEO of MicroPure Genomics, a biotechnology company aiming to improve lives by making genomic analysis accessible anytime, anywhere and for anyone. MicroPure's end-to-end automated solution for front-end sample preparation dramatically reduces preparation time, complexity (in both labor and steps) and costs, and it is backed by organizations such as the National Science Foundation (NSF).

8 CAROLYN (CHABUZ) MONTES '14 is completing a fellowship in facial plastic



and reconstructive surgery at Ohio State University. After earning her biology degree from Florida Tech, she went on to earn her M.D. from the University of Florida, from there matching for residency at the University of Colorado, specializing in otolaryngology, or ENT (ear, nose and throat).

9 EMILY (SYBO) GLATZ '15 and her husband, Jared, welcomed their Panther cub, Noah, Aug. 5, 2024.

ALEXANDER NICKERSON '15, '16 M.S., successfully defended his Ph.D. dissertation, *Sea Surface Temperatures, the Gulf of Mexico Loop Current, Hurricane Ian, and Their Junction*. Florida Tech meteorology associate professor Pallav Ray was on his committee.

continued on page 36

FLORIDA TECH ATHLETICS

CALLING ALL ATHLETICS ALUMNI!

Help us update our athletics alumni database and identify candidates for the "Where They Are Now" section of floridatechsports.com. Complete the form »



Welcomed a Panther Cub?

Contact us for a free infant T-shirt, bib or onesie. Then, send a photo of your cub in his/her Panther swag with an AlumNote about yourself, and it may appear in the magazine.

For details: alumni@fit.edu

REBECCA (HOWES)

ROCK '12 M.S., '15 Psy.D., has walked the halls of state prisons for over 12 years, not in fear but with a feeling of hope, knowing she changes the lives of an underserved population every day.

Rock is the mental health director at Hardee Correctional Institution in Bowling Green, Florida. Within this role, she oversees a team of correctional health professionals, providing therapy treatments to over 1,500 inmates.

“I received such a gift with my degrees from Florida Tech,” Rock says. “Thanks to my experience at the university, I get to go to work and do what I feel that I was put on this earth for, and that’s to help people.”

After graduation, Rock interned at Larned State Hospital in Kansas, the largest psychiatric facility in the state. Then, she worked full time at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Jackson, Mississippi, where she specialized in treating patients with PTSD, trauma and substance abuse disorders.

In 2016, Rock moved back to Florida and accepted her position with Centurion Health, which provides correctional health care services to nearly 275,000 incarcerated individuals throughout 15 states.

“It’s not a glamorous career like you see portrayed in the movies and TV shows,” Rock says. “The most challenging part is that we see the negative side of humanity and a lot of violence. But at the end of the day, you have to remind yourself, we’re all human.”

From leading group therapy sessions with the prisoners to supervising compound lockdowns, no day is ever the same, and that keeps her job exciting, Rock says.

“There are a lot of opportunities for psychologists, mental health professionals, nurses and even dentists in our prison systems that people don’t even realize,” she says. “My staff is diverse, but what we share is the passion to give back to those who need it most.”

Her Florida Tech practicum experience, working as a counselor in the Brevard County Jail system, inspired Rock to enter the profession.

“Most of the inmates I worked with were not provided the tools in life to receive something as small as a GED. So, I used to think how lucky I am that I have professors that invest their time in me every day so that I can go on and do great things,” Rock says.

In 2023, two of her most impactful Florida Tech professors, Radhika Krishnamurthy and Julie Costopoulos, invited Rock to teach a colloquium at the College of Psychology and Liberal Arts.

“It’s important for young women to see other strong women in leadership roles,” Rock says. “Both of these professors made that impression on me when I was a student. So, I was thrilled I could now fill that spot for a new generation.”

Before her presentation, Rock found herself taking calming breaths in the same women’s restroom where she would go before taking big tests 10 years earlier.

“It was very surreal when I realized, approaching the classroom podium, that I was the adult now in a room full of future world-changers,” Rock says.



SPOTLIGHT ON

Rebecca Rock

FLORIDA TECH CONNECTION: '12 M.S., 15 Psy.D.

BEST GIFT YOU EVER RECEIVED: My son

GUILTY PLEASURE: Watching the TV show “Sister Wives”

NO. 1 ITEM ON YOUR BUCKET LIST: Take a European cruise

OLYMPIC SPORT YOU WOULD GET GOLD IN: Throwing items into a garbage can—I never miss!

—Erin Alvarado

continued from page 35



10 ERIN (PITTMAN)

ALVARADO '16 and her husband, **DAVID ALVARADO** '13, '14 M.S., welcomed their Panther cub, Owen, Aug. 6, 2024. Erin has worked for the Florida Tech Office of Alumni Affairs as the communications and content manager for over two years (and happens to write these AlumNotes).

2020s

LILLY FLOWERS '20 M.A. became the youngest female African American executive director of the Exchange Center for Child Abuse Prevention in Wiregrass, Alabama.

11 NICOLE BARNETT '21 and **TREY SCHANEVILLE** '21

got engaged July 4, 2024. The couple met at Florida Tech, where Barnett was the captain of the women’s soccer team and Schaneville played football and basketball.

CAMILA RAHIM '21 M.S. has been working in human resources for the past two years and recently started a career services online business, MilaCareerServices.com.



Alumni Trip to Ecuador

In January, 16 Florida Tech alumni and friends went on an eight-day journey through Ecuador led by professors Richard Aronson and Mark Bush and College of Engineering and Science Dean John Harris. The travelers spent two days and two nights in the Andean cloud forest, famed for its wildlife, followed by five days and four nights at Sacha Lodge on the shores of Pilchicocha, a lake in the most biodiverse part of Amazonia. The group was treated to sightings of toucans, monkeys, birds of prey, army ants, macaws, anacondas, immense kapok trees and a wide variety of other plants and animals.




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 to benefit **The Scott Center for Autism Treatment at Florida Tech**

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 6 P.M. | CLEMENTE CENTER
 at Florida Tech

presented by
White Bird
 ATTORNEYS AT LAW



IN MEMORIAM

EUGENE "GENE" ANGUS

'76 passed away Dec. 3, 2024, in Rockledge, Florida, at age 70. Angus was a proud member of Florida Tech's men's rowing team and continued to actively support the team after graduation.

VALERIE BARBER '78 passed away in October 2024 following a courageously fought long illness. Barber was inducted into the Florida Tech Sports Hall of Fame Feb. 1, 2013. She had a stellar career rowing in the seven-seat of the women's varsity eight from 1975 to 1978, making three state championships and two South Region championships. She went on to represent the U.S. in the 1978 World Championships, finishing fourth. She became an Olympian in 1980 and earned a seat in U.S. women's varsity four.

ROBERT BOWLES '78 MBA passed away Nov. 20, 2024. Bowles worked as an engineer for Florida Power Corp. for 32 years, taught as an adjunct professor at the University of South Florida and served in the U.S. Navy.

RANDALL L. PINGLEY

'84 M.S., a Williamsburg, Virginia, resident who served a distinguished 28-year career in the U.S. Army, died peacefully and unexpectedly in his sleep Dec. 11, 2024, at age 76.

TIMOTHY YALE '87 passed away at age 63 Feb. 8, 2023, at his home in Millers Creek, North Carolina, after a courageous battle against pancreatic cancer. While attending the university, Yale worked as a flight instructor, air taxi pilot and check airman with Florida Tech Aviation. He then spent 34 years working in corporate and charter aviation.

JEFFREY DARGATIS II '12 passed away Nov. 12, 2024, in Satellite Beach, Florida. Dargatis was a member of the U.S. Marine Corps working in specialized linguistics, was a talented mathematician and played several instruments.

LILLIAN BICKLEY passed away at age 88 in Deal, Kent. Bickley began working at Florida Tech's Evans Library in the '80s and retired in 2008 as head librarian. She led a

life dedicated to social justice, community and education, which led her to meet notable figures such as Prince Charles, Nelson Mandela, Mick Jagger and the Rolling Stones.

DONALD WRIGHT

FAUSETT, 84, who taught mathematics at Florida Tech for about 14 years, passed away peacefully Dec. 1, 2024, at his home in Montana with his daughter after a nine-month battle with heart failure.

KEVIN GRAHAM passed away peacefully in his home at age 72 surrounded by family and loved ones Sept. 13, 2024. Graham served as Florida Tech's director of security, using his law enforcement background to modernize and improve the department. During his 15 years at the university, he also served as an adjunct professor, teaching the next generation of law enforcement professionals.

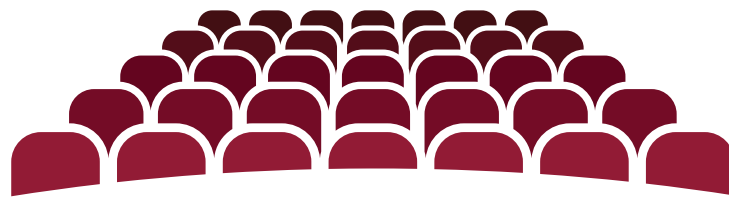
RALPH DACE KIMBERLIN, a fearless test pilot, accomplished aerospace engineer and Florida Tech professor who, over the last 12 years, shared

his expertise with faculty and students as he helped the university develop its flight test engineering program, passed away at age 84.

JOHN MORRIS, faculty emeritus from the then-department of biological sciences, passed away Dec. 19, 2024, in Melbourne. Morris retired from Florida Tech in 2022 after nearly 13 years with the university.

DARRELL "NICK" NICHOLS, 83, who served 20 years in the U.S. Air Force before retiring as a master sergeant and going on to teach in the humanities department at Florida Tech for almost 5 years, passed away Nov. 30, 2024.

DZMITRY YURAN passed away in July at age 37. Yuran was an assistant professor of communication at Florida Tech from 2015 to 2021, teaching classes in journalism, media, political communication and scientific and technical communication.



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FACES OF GREATNESS

Paralympian Carson Clough

By Erin Alvarado



In September 2024, **CARSON CLOUGH** '18 MBA won the silver medal in the triathlon event representing Team USA at the Summer Paralympic Games in Paris.

“Only a few years ago, I thought that people who did triathlons were kind of crazy,” Clough says. “And I honestly still think that. I’m just a part of the crowd now.”

Shortly after graduating from Florida Tech, Clough was involved in a wakesurfing accident, resulting in the partial amputation of one of his legs.

While many people would let an incident like this knock them down, Clough prefers to look back with a sense of humor.

“I tell people: That day, I was awarded a pirate leg on my right side,” Clough says. “The foot is still in the lake, and it can stay there.”

Not letting it slow him down, Clough began his healing journey and credits his doctors, family, friends and lessons learned as a collegiate athlete on the Florida Tech lacrosse team for his speedy recovery.

“In college, while trying to juggle schoolwork, practice and my social life, I learned I did a lot better when I kept myself active,” Clough says. “So, after the accident happened, I just continued with that same mentality, transitioning from a wheelchair to learning how to

walk again. Next thing you know, I got an email from the USA triathlon team, and in the top left corner, it had the Paralympic rings.”

In just two years since picking up the sport, Clough has competed to No. 2 in the World Triathlon Qualification Rankings.

In March 2024, Clough automatically qualified for the Paris Paralympic Games by winning the Americas Paratriathlon Championships in Miami, Florida. Over 20 of his family and friends were there to cheer him across the finish line.

“When things do get hard, when I’m tired or I’m not motivated, I just think about all the people that have supported me in different ways,” Clough says. “I am not only chasing my dreams but also theirs.”

Clough partially credits his team members at The Giddy Goat Coffee Roasters, where he is co-founder and CEO, for helping him achieve his Paralympic dreams.

Without an extra push from former Florida Tech professor Scott Benjamin, Clough might not have taken the leap when a family friend approached him with the career opportunity before graduation.

“I’ll never forget going into his office with this crazy business idea and not

FLORIDA TECH CONNECTION:
'18 MBA

CELEBRITY WHO WOULD PLAY YOU IN A MOVIE: Matthew McConaughey

GO-TO COFFEE ORDER: Espresso

PHONE SCREEN BACKGROUND: My service dog, Calder

BIGGEST INSPIRATION: Both sets of my grandparents

IF YOU COULD COMPETE IN ANOTHER PARALYMPIC SPORT, WHAT WOULD IT BE?: Sled hockey

knowing what to do,” Clough says. “He told me I’d be an idiot if I didn’t jump on the golden opportunity to craft something new and have my own business.”

Five years later, the company has expanded to three locations throughout Charlotte, North Carolina, employing over 40 residents to help create a unique coffee-roasting experience.

“Don’t be afraid to take a chance,” Clough says. “And make it a goal to just reach the finish line—literally or figuratively.”



**Office of Marketing
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BACK IN THE DAY

- 1980s ●
- 1990s ●
- 2000s ●
- 2010s ●
- 2020s ●

600 Wins

On Nov. 11, 2024, Florida Tech women's basketball head coach John Reynolds recorded his 600th career win with a 90-47 victory over the University of Fort Lauderdale at the Charles and Ruth Clemente Center for Sports and Recreation. In doing so, he became the first Florida Tech coach in any sport to win 600 games. Since he took over before the 1987-88 season, Reynolds' teams have won five Sunshine State Conference (SSC) championships and four SSC Tournament titles, made nine NCAA Tournament appearances, including an Elite Eight berth in 2002, and produced 13 All-Americans.

Pictured here: Reynolds speaks to his team during a timeout of a game in the 2010-2011 season.

