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New, Historic Xavier University of Louisiana Rowing Club kicks off with Community Event January 19 on Bayou St. John

New Orleans - A new collegiate women's sports team at [Xavier University of Louisiana](#) is blazing trails for diversity, inclusion, and personal development on New Orleans' waterways with a special community event on January 19. Cohosted by Xavier, the [New Orleans Rowing Club](#) (NORC), and [BLJ Community Rowing](#), the nation's first Black-owned and operated rowing organization in the country, the Spring Season Kick-Off and Learn to Row Event will be held at the [NORC Boathouse](#), adjacent to 3 Fortress Road in New Orleans, LA 70122, from 3-6 p.m. and will feature free learn to row classes for all skill and fitness levels. Featuring Brannon Johnson, founder of BLJ Rowing, and David Banks, two-time Olympic rower, the event will welcome old and new Xavier student rowers for a grand celebration of the program, only the second of its kind at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU).

NORC and Xavier partnered to launch the Xavier Rowing Club program in September of 2023, and the initiative is currently led by NORC members [Elizabeth Manley, Ph.D.](#), professor of history and chair of the History Department at Xavier, and [Chloé Jobin](#), Xavier's corporate and foundations coordinator. Over the past two months, more than a dozen enthusiastic Xavier students with no previous rowing experience have learned the fundamentals of the sport on the waters of Bayou St. John and at the NORC indoor rowing facility under the guidance of NORC coaches. The team hopes to compete for the first time during the spring 2024 racing season.

"We believe that this effort will contribute to creating a more diverse and inclusive rowing culture in New Orleans and nationally while also providing Xavier students with greater opportunity for personal growth, leadership development, and physical fitness," said Dr. Manley.

The Xavier Rowing Club plans to collaborate with their fellow HBCU rowing program at [St. Augustine's University](#) to showcase members on the water and in the classroom. Before the formation of the St. Augustine's club in 2022, the last time an HBCU maintained a rowing program was at Howard University in the mid-1960s. The inaugural student crew of Xavier's club hails from cities across the country.

"[The] Xavier Rowing Club opened doors for me to embrace new experiences and ignited an unexpected passion within me. The camaraderie fostered by the coaches and friends I've encountered has been truly remarkable," said Taylor Kentish, a freshman at Xavier and member of the team's first cohort. "The support and guidance from NORC have significantly enriched my journey. Their patient and knowledgeable coaches ensure I feel secure and calm on the water. Participating in a sport not commonly found in HBCUs fills me with a sense of being part of a movement, marking the start of an incredible journey."

The program aims to advance the strategic plan of US Rowing, raising awareness of the sport while building diversity, eliminating barriers, and upending presumptions and unjust realities in rowing. Over the next several years, the partners hope to establish a fully self-sustaining Xavier Rowing Club. In the interim, NORC will provide the necessary infrastructure and coaching support to power the program.

The Greater New Orleans Foundation provided a generous donation of initial seed money through the Payne Family Foundation for Education and Youth that will be crucial to maintaining the program in its first year, and Concept2 has supplied six brand new ErgRowers through its Pulling Together Fund. Club leaders are also actively seeking other external funding sources to take the program to the next level, including support for spring racing travel, uniforms, gear, and intensive training opportunities.

For more information about the Xavier Rowing Club, please contact Elizabeth Manley at emanley1@xula.edu.



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About Xavier University of Louisiana

Xavier University of Louisiana, America's only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier's College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country.

Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African Americans and Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master's programs, have provided Xavier students (3,419 students) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at www.XULA.edu or contact Melissa Newell at (504) 520-5240 or XULANews@XULA.edu

About the New Orleans Rowing Club

Located on Bayou St. John, the New Orleans Rowing Club (NORC) is a volunteer-run nonprofit which provides rowing instruction for all ages and skill levels in a positive and inclusive environment. NORC is committed to making rowing and its benefits accessible to everyone. The club offers a juniors program for youth in grades 8-12, a masters team for adults, and learn-to-row sessions. Learn more at NewOrleansRowingClub.org and follow @neworleansrowingclub on Facebook and Instagram.