News

What does the future hold for UConn LEGO robotics teams?

by Juliana Assis
CAMPUS CORRESPONDENT
SHE/HER/HERS
kmm24006@uconn.edu

Since 1998, For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) and LEGO Education have partnered to create the FIRST Lego League (FLL) program. On March 19, FIRST released a statement revealing that their partnership with LEGO Education would not be renewed after the 2026-27 season, leaving a UConn sponsored FLL team unsure about their future.

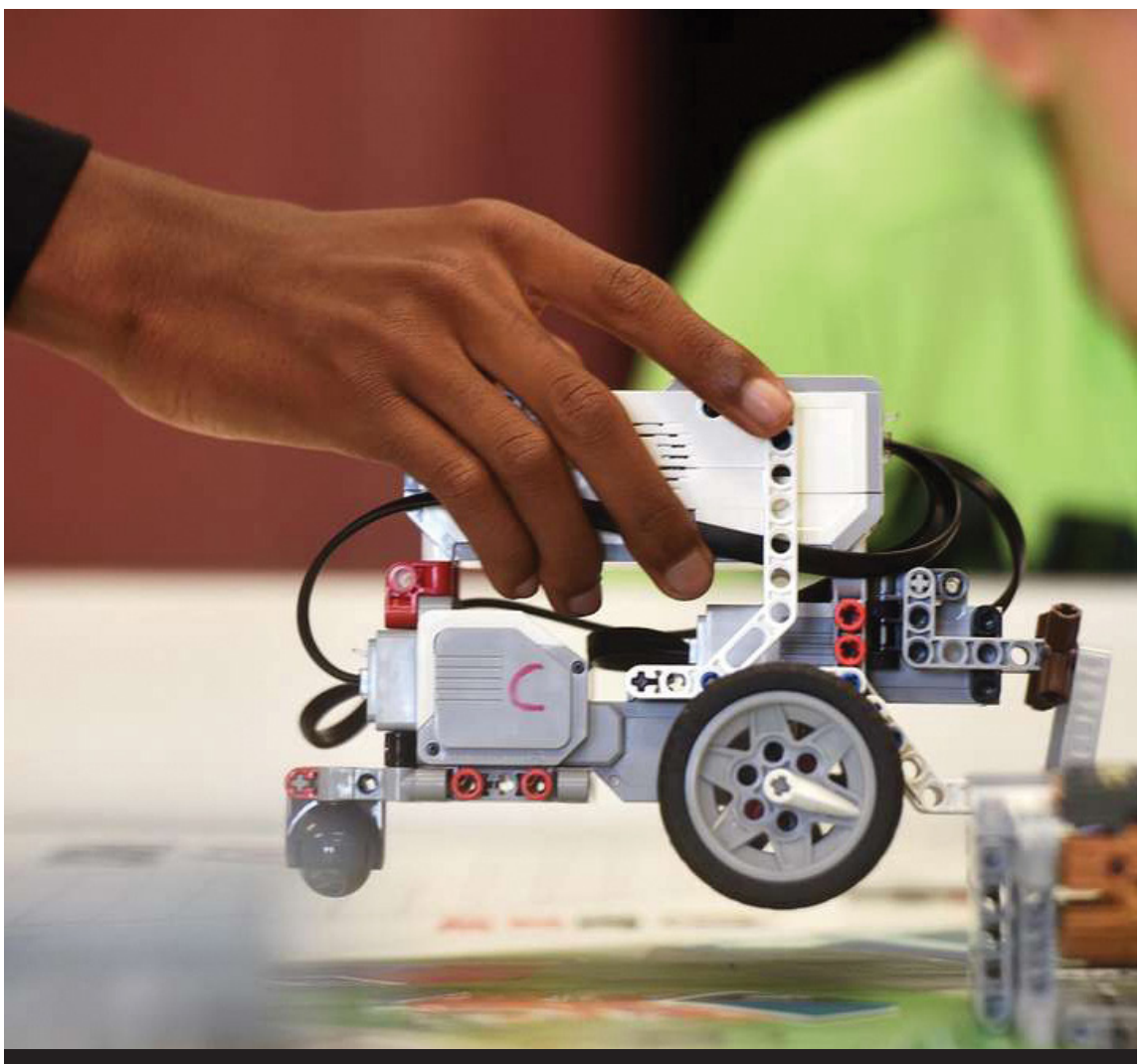
In the FLL program, teams of elementary school children build, code and compete with robots made entirely out of LEGOs.

Additionally, every season, teams are presented with a real-world problem that they are asked to engineer a solution to. Teams must present these solutions as well as their robot design to judges for the chance to win awards and advance in the competition. This program provides early access to STEM education, robotics and engineering concepts.



Caption: UConn's FIRST organization at the FIRST Tech Challenge. Lego Education will no longer partner with FIRST for the 2026-27 season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF UCONN FIRST ON FACEBOOK



A robot built out of legos. The organizations FIRST and Lego Education announced that they will not be continuing their their decades long partnership into the 2026-2027 season.

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According to the FIRST website, participants in the FLL program "gain real-world problem-solving experiences, helping today's students, families, and educators build a better future together." Additionally, through FLL, "students apply their STEM skills to friendly competition, engaging in research, problem-solving, coding, and engineering."

The Tolland County Robotics Foundation (TCRF), founded by UConn student Youssef Macary, is a local nonprofit that the UConn FIRST student organization supports through mentorship and volunteering. TCRF is home to 8 FLL teams.

Amanda Billingslea, junior mechanical engineering major, president of UConn FIRST and TCRF FLL Challenge Coordinator said she was saddened by the news. She has been an active member of the FIRST community for nine years, acting as a student, mentor and volunteer.

"It's genuinely sad news across the FIRST community. FLL was the first introduction to STEM and engineering for so many people," she said. "I've been involved both as a student and a mentor at this point, and I've seen the positive impact it has on kids."

Billingslea said that FIRST will struggle to replace this program due to logistical obstacles.

"The foundation of the program has remained the same every year, but with a new game, theme and goal," she said. "It will be more difficult for FIRST to create an entirely new program outline and background in the same time frame."

Additionally, this news could alter how current FLL teams will operate in the future.

According to Billingslea, "LEGO will be creating a new program to replace FLL, but teams must consider if it's worth investing in all new technology and restructuring their teams as well as the way they compete."

Over 15 companies sponsored FLL teams and programs for the 2024-25 season, including Apple, Google and The Boeing Company.

"It'll be interesting to see how these companies adjust their sponsorships and if they continue to sponsor at all," Billingslea said.

Billingslea said TCRF will "continue operating as normal for the upcoming season."

"We'll see if or when FIRST comes out with a new program if it makes sense for our teams to invest in," she said.

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