

UNIVERSITY OF MOUNT UNION
HUSTON-BRUMBAUGH
NATURE CENTER

2025-2026 Fiscal Year Report

Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center
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Our Mission

The John T. Huston – Dr. John D. Brumbaugh Nature Center provides and supports opportunities for enjoying and learning in nature.

Our Faculty and Staff

Cali Granger, Horticulture and Facility Coordinator

Michael Greiner, Site and Project Manager

Dr. Amy McElhinney, Sustainability

Amy Miller, Environmental Science Outreach Coordinator

Hannah Mitchell, Lab Technician

Dr. Jason Smith, Director

Dr. Mike Zimmermann, Research Coordinator

Adam Zorn, Program and Resource Director

A Message from the Director

Dear friends & supporters of the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center,

This past year marked an important step forward for the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center as we continued to grow as a place where students, faculty, staff, and community members learn from nature together. Guided by our strategic plan, *Where People Learn from Nature*, we focused on strengthening the Nature Center's role as a distinctive academic, research, outreach, and recreation asset for the University of Mount Union and the broader region.

Much of this progress centered on deepening the Nature Center's connection to the University's academic mission. Mount Union courses used the Nature Center for immersive learning experiences, giving students opportunities to observe, investigate, and ask questions in living systems that cannot be replicated in a classroom. Faculty and student research continued to expand, supported by the Brumbaugh Scholars program, external funding, and new infrastructure that will make future research opportunities more intentional and sustainable.

We also made significant strides in building personnel capacity for the future. New faculty and staff roles, along with the dedication of our entire staff, position the Nature Center to become an even stronger hub for hands-on learning, undergraduate research, and community engagement. These roles also enhance recruitment efforts and support the University's *Students First* strategic initiative.

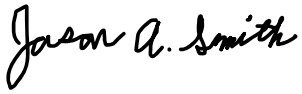
Major investments in facilities and stewardship helped ensure that the Nature Center remains safe, accessible, and ecologically healthy. The replacement of the All Persons Trail boardwalk, development of a forest management plan, construction of a small greenhouse, and continued care for our trails, habitats, and visitor spaces all reflect our commitment to responsible stewardship.

At the same time, the Nature Center remains a welcoming community resource. Through school programs, public events, guided walks, workshops, volunteer opportunities, thousands of people connected with the natural world here. Their curiosity, care, and continued participation remind us that the Nature Center's impact is measured not only in numbers, but also in the experiences that inspire learning, reflection, and a deeper sense of connection to place.

I am grateful to the Nature Center staff, University colleagues, volunteers, donors, partners, and visitors who have helped advance this work. The progress described in this report reflects a shared belief that the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center is more than a beautiful landscape; it is a living classroom, a center for inquiry, a gathering place for the community, and an investment in Mount Union's future.

Thank you for being part of the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center community and for helping us continue to be a place where people learn from nature.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jason A. Smith
Director of John T. Huston-Dr. John D. Brumbaugh Nature Center
Professor of Biology and John D. Brumbaugh Chair in Environmental and Ecological Sciences

Year at a Glance

Mount Union Engagement

Number of UMU events: 99

Research Projects

Brumbaugh Scholars projects: 3

Undergraduate research projects: 1

Faculty research projects: 2

School & Organization Programs

Number of programs: 47

Total Attendance: 1412

Community Programs and Events

Number of programs and events: 64

Total Attendance: 885

Service Projects

Number of projects: 2

Volunteers

Number of volunteers: 74

Number of volunteer hours: 650



Students measure Beech trees in the Nature Center's old-growth forest during BIO 220

2,297	210	650	$173K	96%
Program Participants	Total Events	Volunteer Hours	Grants and Donations	Satisfaction Rating

Key Accomplishments

The Nature Center's strategic plan, *Where People Learn from Nature*, was approved in the previous fiscal year and initiated without delay at the onset of the 2025-2026 fiscal year. The plan's aims are 1.) Enhance University of Mount Union Student Programs, 2.) Foster Community Engagement, 3.) Facilitate Environmental Learning, 4.) Provide Outdoor Recreational Opportunities, and 5.) Maintain Ready & Adequate Staff/Facilities. The following is a summary of key accomplishments in year one of *Where People Learn from Nature*.



New Staff and New Priorities

Amy Miller was hired to fill the new role of Environmental Education Outreach Coordinator. Her position works with existing Nature Center staff, faculty, and the Nature Center director to develop an academic plan for the Nature Center to enhance instructional efforts aimed at current Mount Union students, develop new programs to enhance engagement, instructional support and research support at the Nature Center, and engage high school and middle school students and teachers through environmental science outreach programs and training programs. (Aim 1, 3 & 5)

Dr. Mike Zimmermann, Associate Professor of Biology, has taken on the role of Undergraduate Research Coordinator at the Nature Center in addition to his faculty appointment in the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences. Dr. Zimmermann is working with the Nature Center director to enhance undergraduate research, coordinate research projects, develop additional research opportunities for students, and support research funding efforts. (Aim 1 & 5)

Dr. Amy McElhinney, Associate Professor of Biology & Charles S. Gallaher Chair in Biology, will continue her existing work supporting the Green Raiders student sustainability group while adding the role of Nature Center Sustainability Outreach Coordinator. In this expanded role, she will support the University's sustainability priorities through external partnerships, environmental stewardship

initiatives, grant and funding opportunities, community engagement, and strategic sustainability planning. This role will help connect student sustainability engagement, the Nature Center's outreach, and Center for Sustainable Living initiatives with broader campus and community sustainability efforts while advancing environmental learning, stewardship, and long-range planning. (Aim 2, 3 & 5)

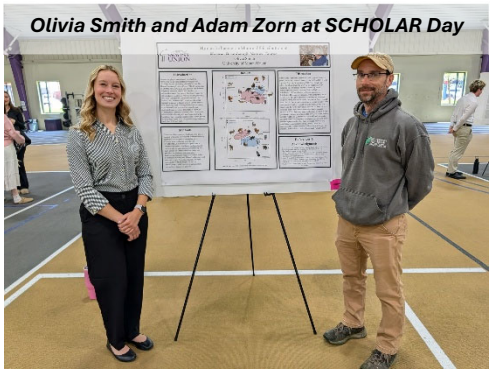
The remainder of the Nature Center staff have realigned their responsibilities to better support the Nature Center and University of Mount Union strategic plans. Additional responsibilities have been assigned to activate current plans and projects as well as develop and initiate new initiatives that advance the Nature Center's mission. (Aim 5)

Academic and Research Support

The Nature Center serves the University of Mount Union's academic programs by enhancing instructional activities and enabling and supporting research activities. The Nature Center's facilities, trails, and grounds enhance student learning through immersive, hands-on experiences. Students are exposed to forest, field, and a variety of aquatic environments where thousands of species of organisms reside.

Courses utilizing the Nature Center are predominantly represented by Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences. Biology courses included Foundations of Biological Science, The Diversity of Life, Ecology, and Genetics. Environmental Science courses included Introduction to Environmental Science, Hydrology and Water Resources, Field Studies in Ecology & Geology, and Landforms & Soils. (Aim 1)

Additional courses facilitated at the Nature Center included Integrative Core Capstone Seminar and First Year Seminar. These courses focused on experiential and qualitative attributes of the natural world instead of quantitative components like traditional science courses. (Aim 1)


Olivia Smith and Adam Zorn at SCHOLAR Day

The Nature Center supported a variety of research activities for students and faculty. Olivia Smith '26 completed her senior culminating experience in environmental science by investigating the influence of humans on mammal distribution at the Nature Center. Olivia utilized over a dozen trail cameras to capture tens of thousands of images of Nature Center wildlife for her research during the fall semester. (Aim 1)

Three students completed research projects during the Nature Center's Brumbaugh Scholars program. Each student and their mentors submitted competitive research proposals along with a request for funding. Projects represented topics covering water quality and parasite diversity, Lyme's Disease in ticks, and development of a virtual tour utilizing 360-degree imagery. (Aim 1)

- Eleanor Pace '27 – Eutrophication and Parasite Diversity in Nature Center Ponds (Mentor: Dr. Michael R. Zimmermann)
- Emily Krizner '26 – Investigating Co-Infection and Competition between *Wolbachia* and *Borrelia burdorferi* in *Ixodes scapularis* (Mentor: Dr. Heather Milliken Mercer)

- Ahmed Alzoubi ’26 – Virtual Tour Development for the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center (Mentor: Dr. Thuan Do)

Faculty research at the Nature Center included Dr. Michael R. Zimmermann’s on-going investigations of the Nature Center’s ponds and wetlands. His on-going projects are:

- Aquatic macroinvertebrate and parasite diversity in response to eutrophication
- Impact of eutrophication on the diet and parasite communities of Green Sunfish
- Snail mark-recapture to estimate trematode diversity and infection reversal
- Colonization and island biogeography of macroinvertebrates and parasites at the wetland
- Infection and dispersal of the Green Frog tongue worm in a novel snail host
- The role of a mutualistic annelid in reducing infection with trematode cercariae

Dr. Jason A. Smith’s research on Beech Leaf Disease represents one of the Nature Center’s most visible examples of externally funded, faculty-led, student-supported research connected directly to forest health, plant pathology, conservation biology, and long-term ecological stewardship. The project, *Delineating Disease Etiology and Management Strategies for Beech Leaf Disease in Northeast Ohio*, is supported by USDA Forest Service Region 9 Emerging Pest Funding and brings $60,170 in external research support to Mount Union. Conducted in part at the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center, this work uses the Center’s forests, greenhouse space, and developing research infrastructure as a living laboratory to document symptoms, monitor disease progression, evaluate American beech health, and contribute locally relevant information about an emerging forest disease affecting eastern North American forests.

The Beech Leaf Disease project also strengthens collaboration beyond the University through ongoing work with Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories and other forest health partners. More than 100 American beech seedlings were planted in the Nature Center’s new greenhouse to support disease research, plant care, observation, and future experimental work. Undergraduate involvement is central to the project: Hannah Mitchell has contributed to the research and coauthored professional presentations on Beech Leaf Disease etiology and management research at the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center, while Beech Leaf Disease data collection was incorporated into ENV 301: Field Studies in Ecology & Geology as an undergraduate course activity. Through this integration, students participate directly in field-based monitoring and learn how ecological and plant health data are collected, recorded, interpreted, and connected to real forest management questions. Together, the grant, Bartlett collaboration, greenhouse seedling work, student presentations, and ENV 301 field activities demonstrate how the Nature Center is becoming a place where research, teaching, student mentoring, external partnerships, and stewardship reinforce one another. (Aim 1, 2 & 5)



Experimental BLD treatment with Bartlett Tree Research Laboratories in the old growth forest

A second grant project, entitled *Survey for potential fungal pathogens of Eurasian buckthorn in the eastern Great Lakes region of the U.S. with biocontrol potential: Year 1* was

recently awarded to University of Mount Union (to Dr. Smith) from the USDA Forest Service. This approximately $100,000 grant will enable Dr. Smith and students to conduct novel research on alternative ways to manage non-native invasive woody plants impacting natural areas in the region.

Additional research and data collection conducted at the Nature Center included an on-going Eastern Bluebird bird banding project by volunteer Al Eibel, Purple Martin nesting success and banding by Al Eibel and Program and Resource Director Adam Zorn, Snapshot USA camera trapping project (year 7) by Adam Zorn, and The Lewis and Clark Resurvey: A 250th Celebration of American Wildlife camera trapping project by Adam Zorn and Emily Weeks '26.

Fostering Community Engagement

The Nature Center partnered with Stark Parks, The Wilderness Center, Beech Creek Botanical Gardens, and The Ohio State University Extension to revive the dormant Ohio Certified Volunteer Naturalist (OCVN) program in Stark County. From September through November, eleven participants attended eight workshops and completed a final project to complete the training portion of the OCVN program. Several OCVN participants completed volunteer hours and participated in Nature Center programs to complete their program requirements. (Aim 2 & 3)



Dr. Jason Smith and OCVN participants on the Nature Center's trails

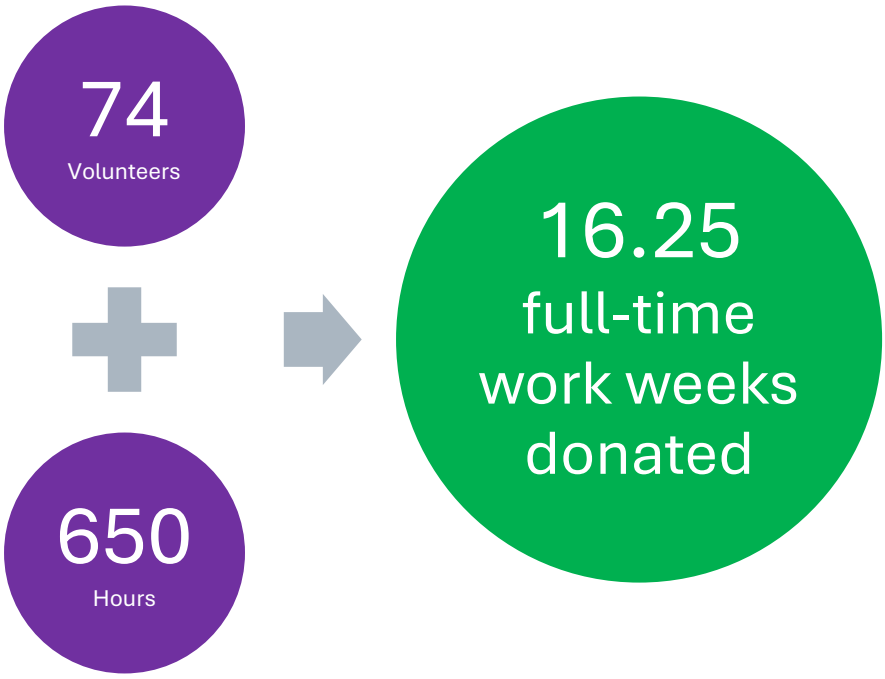
The Nature Center partnered with Canton Audubon Society, Stark Parks, and The Wilderness Center to plan and facilitate the 3rd annual Stark County Bird Quest. Bird Quest is a county-wide event encouraging participants to view and report bird species present. A gathering of participants is organized to encourage fellowship and share experiences from the 24-hour Bird Quest. (Aim 2)

The Nature Center partnered with Stark Parks to facilitate a series of Spring Bird Walks on the Nickel Plate Trail in Louisville. This partnership and series of guided bird walks marked its 12th year. (Aim 2)

On August 3, 2025, the Nature Center hosted Tuning in with Nature, an afternoon of live music in the Visitors Center pavilion. The monthly Acoustic Music Jam participants played folk tunes for two hours followed by an hour-long performance from a string ensemble from the Alliance Symphony Orchestra. An audience of over 60 people were treated to beautiful weather, the natural chorus of the Nature Center's forest, and lively music from amateur and professional musicians. (Aim 2)

Amy Miller attended several meetings and facilitated presentations for middle school and high school science teachers at the Stark County Educational Service Center's teacher meetings and conferences. Through partnership with the Service Center, many county educators have learned about the Nature Center and the variety of resources and opportunities the Nature Center can provide to support them and their students' learning. (Aim 1, 2 & 3)

The Nature Center's volunteer program is led by Cali Granger. Cali assumed the leadership role after the retirement of Bonnie Twaddle, Community Outreach Coordinator, in June 2025. Enhancements to the volunteer program include access to an online application for new volunteers. The application allows potential volunteers to indicate time, day of the week, and area of interest to apply their volunteer hours. A few volunteer opportunities were formalized with full descriptions: stewardship, trail guide, and Visitors Center weekend docent. Each volunteer description highlights a summary of what to expect as a volunteer and the general responsibilities and requirements of the volunteer in that role. Beyond formal volunteer roles, many people donate their time to a variety of tasks such as gardening, trail monitoring, and event support.





Dr. Mike Zimmermann and high school students during Environmental Science Outreach STEM program

Environmental Learning

The Nature Center's environmental education programs reached an audience of nearly 2,300 people in fiscal year 2025-2026. Nature Center staff facilitated 111 educational programs and events. Audiences were comprised of K-12 schools, homeschool groups, community organizations, and general public.

Program requests were submitted by a variety of schools and community organizations for audiences ranging from pre-K to adults. Nature Center staff facilitated educational programs for the following audiences: 4-H, Alliance Area Chamber of Commerce, Alliance High School Advanced Biology class, Alliance Kindergarten, Alliance Kiwanis, Alliance Lions Club, Buckeye Elementary 1st grade, Canton Women's Club, First Presbyterian Church of Salem, Flower Garden Club, Garden Club of Youngstown, GlenOak High School, Homeschool Co-op, Louisville Elementary, Marlboro Elementary School 4th grade, Marlington Middle School, Minerva Area Christian School pre-K, 2nd grade, and 3rd grade, North Canton Homeschool Co-op, Northwest High School, Ohio State University Extension Stark County and Mahoning County, Salem Elementary School, Small World Montessori, Stark County Educational Service Center, Town Garden Club, United Local Schools 3rd grade, Washington Elementary School. (Aim 3)

Nature Center staff facilitated 64 educational events for public audiences. Events included guided walks, workshops, lectures, exhibits, and community science. Several new programs were developed including Tuning in with Nature, Tick Talk: What's Trending?, How to Make a Meadow, Bird Photography, App'n to Know, and Nature Photography Hikes, and Environmental Science Outreach STEM programs. A variety of learning and engagement opportunities represented the best attended events. These included Full Moon & Firefly Hike, Tuning in with Nature, Summer Research Showcase, Holiday Open House, Trail Camera Treasures, Photo Contest Open House, Sugaring Day, and Bluebird House Construction. (Aim 3)

Environmental Science Outreach STEM programs were organized for high schoolers interested in environmental science and biology. The free program series offered six sessions throughout the

month of June covering a variety of topics. Each session was facilitated by Nature Center staff and faculty from Mount Union's Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences. Each day-long program introduced high school students to core environmental science and biology concepts through hands-on learning while highlighting STEM academic and career pathways. Students built scientific skills, explored environmental issues, and learned about natural science college and career opportunities through field investigations and interaction with Mount Union faculty, staff, and students. (Aim 3)

Outdoor Recreation

The Nature Center's trails and environments provide opportunities for guided and self-guided, nonconsumptive recreational activities. These activities foster a connection to the natural world and enhance the well-being of the community.

Most Nature Center visitors utilize the trail system as a component of their visit. Nature Center staff, specifically Site and Project Manager Mike Greiner, take great pride in maintaining approximately four miles of trails at the Nature Center. Clearing fallen trees, cutting overgrown brush, modifying muddy/wet spots, and regular mowing are all required to keep the trail system open for visitors throughout the year. (Aim 4)

One of the largest infrastructure projects completed in recent years was the full removal and replacement of the Nature Center's boardwalk known as the All Persons Trail. Approximately 1,700 feet of old, rotten and slippery boardwalk was replaced with a new, slip-resistant boardwalk. Nature Center staff removed the old boardwalk and prepared the area for the new boardwalk by clearing brush and straightening sections of the trail. With the assistance of a contractor with an excavator, aluminum tubes were driven into the ground to support the new boardwalk, which elevates the structure off of the ground to slow the lumber from rotting and resist frost heave. Nature Center staff prebuilt boardwalk sections that were later placed along the trail in preparation for the contracted carpentry crew to assemble the actual structure. The goal was to have much of the work completed in house to minimize the expense and amount of time external contractors were needed for construction. Once the stringers were framed in, new slip-resistant decking was screwed down with a side rail installed for safety along the edge. This project was a vast improvement over the original 25-year-old boardwalk, and it affirmed the Nature Center's decades-long initiative to provide accessibility to Nature Center trails to the community. (Aim 4 & 5)

The Nature Center's various habitats provide and support a plethora of guided and self-guided opportunities to observe native flora and fauna. Bluebird boxes are maintained for native bird species like Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, and House Wrens. These birds perch prominently upon the nesting boxes in many locations around the trail system. The Purple Martin colony at the North Woods section attracted 15 pairs of Purple Martins in its second year of existence which creates a cacophony of sound and visual observation around the site. Benches and an interpretive sign were installed to encourage visitors to observe the busy, insect-eating birds. The bird observatory inside the Visitors Center is a year-round attraction to view common birds in the garden and at the bird feeders. (Aim 4)

Annual displays and handouts in the Visitors Center encourage visitors to explore and identify a variety of flowering plants during the spring and summer months. Guided walks highlighting the plant diversity of the Nature Center and threats to their health were provided for UMU courses and public audiences. A dry erase board outside the Visitors Center highlights recent wildlife and plant observations from across the Nature Center to prompt visitors to explore. (Aim 4)

Collecting data through community science is a regular component of Nature Center outreach and environmental learning. Community science is the public participation in scientific research where participants collect data, make observations, and study the natural world. Nature Center staff and visitors contributed to the following community science projects: iNaturalist, eBird, Project Feeder Watch, Christmas Bird Count, Great Backyard Bird Count, and Project NestWatch. (Aim 4)

Facilities and Advancement

The historic Huston House was purchased by the University of Mount Union to become part of the facilities at the Nature Center. The 2-story farmhouse sits adjacent to the Nature Center's Huston Barn and was once the home of John T. and Catherine Huston. In the 1990's and early 2000's, the home was operated as a bed and breakfast known as the Huston House. The Huston House retains much of its original character throughout due to the care and maintenance of its previous owners. The home's previous use presents opportunities to host seasonal Nature Center staff and researchers, small group gatherings, and events focused on historical and cultural topics. (Aim 5)

Nature Center staff worked with Lucy Harp, a master's student in Higher Education Administration and Student Affairs at Kent State University and Resident Director of Hoiles-Peterson and Elliott Halls, to examine opportunities for the Huston House and develop a short-term use plan. The proposed phased approach recommends activating the house as a mission-aligned residential, research, and community learning asset of the University of Mount Union. Initial use would prioritize limited housing for student researchers and stewards, lodging for visiting faculty, scholars, speakers, and first-floor space for small meetings, donor and community gatherings, sustainability workshops, and other programs connected to the Nature Center's academic and outreach mission.

Longer term, the Huston House is envisioned as a Center for Sustainable Living that extends the Nature Center's work from day-use education into an immersive living-learning environment. Its location beside the Huston Barn and adjacent to the Nature Center creates a unique opportunity for students, faculty, visiting scholars, alumni, and community partners to live, learn, conduct research, and practice sustainability in direct relationship with the land. This vision aligns the historic identity of the original Huston Farm with future-facing priorities in undergraduate research, experiential learning, sustainability education, public outreach, donor engagement, and place-based environmental stewardship. (Aim 1, 2, 3 & 5)

A small greenhouse was constructed near the operations building for the purpose of propagating native plants for restoration and research projects. In the fall of 2025, nearly 1,000 native seeds were planted in pots including a variety of acorns as well as dozens of wildflowers and grasses. Seeds were gathered by Nature Center staff and volunteers. An additional 300 bareroot trees and shrubs were planted into pots in the spring for future restoration projects. Over 100 American Beech seedlings were planted in late spring for Dr. Smith's beech leaf disease research. (Aim 1, 2 & 5)



The Huston House as seen from Union Ave on the west side of the Nature Center

The All Persons Trail (boardwalk) was replaced this past year. Approximately 1,700 feet of old boardwalk was removed and replaced for a budget of $200,000. The project was supported by the Brumbaugh Endowment, but Nature Center staff worked with the University's Office of Advancement to provide an opportunity for community members to provide donations to offset the cost of construction. This was the Nature Center's first experience actively seeking donations for a project. Six donors contributed to the project for a total of $10,000. Additionally, Mike Greiner worked with Heather Duda, Director of Grants, to complete an application for funding from the Athletic Brewing Company and their Two for the Trails conservation program. The Nature Center was awarded a $10,000 grant to assist with completion of the project. (Aims 4 & 5)

A forest management plan was developed for the 200 acres of forested land at the Nature Center. Field work to collect data took place in fall 2025 with the assistance of a professional forester. The forester wrote the plan with management recommendations to improve the health and long-term viability of the Nature Center's various forest communities. The plan was reviewed by Nature Center staff, Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The $3,000 cost of developing the forest management plan was covered in full by funding provided the Environmental Quality Incentives Program administered by NRCS. (Aim 5)

The creation of the Goris Family Scholarship for Undergraduate Research represents a major advancement in the Nature Center's ability to support faculty-mentored student research. Developed through donor engagement centered on student impact, the scholarship will provide renewable stipends beginning in Fall 2027 to support undergraduate research conducted through the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center. Funding may support research supplies, fieldwork and data collection, conference travel and presentations, and professional development opportunities. When paired with the planned academic use of the Huston House as residential research housing, the Goris Scholarship strengthens Mount Union's ability to attract and support high-achieving students interested in hands-on scientific inquiry while reinforcing the Nature Center as a distinctive academic, research, and recruitment asset (Aims 1, 2 & 5).

Impact Metrics and Visitor Feedback

UMU Courses at the Nature Center

BIO 100N (Foundations of Biological Science)

BIO 141N (Diversity of Life) - 9 fall dates, 9 spring dates

BIO 220 (Ecology) – 6 fall dates

BIO 240 (Genetics)

CAP 400 (Integrative Core Capstone Seminar) - 19 fall dates

ENV 190 (Introduction to Environmental Science) - 12 fall dates, 8 spring dates

ENV 210 (Hydrology & Water Resources)

ENV 301 (Field Studies in Ecology & Geology) - 8 fall dates

ENV 320 (Landforms & Soils) - 4 dates

FYS 100 (First Year Seminar) – 2 fall dates

UMU Facilities Reservations

ABSN Pinning Ceremony

APO

Center for Faculty Development

Leadership Mount Union

Office of Admissions

Office of Advancement

Office of Business Affairs

Office of Information Technology

Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs

Physical Therapy Program

Raider Academy

School of Business

School of Engineering

School of Nursing

UMU Honors Orientation

UMU Housekeeping

Visual Arts & Media Department

On-campus Engagement

Fall Visits

First Year Seminar (6 courses)

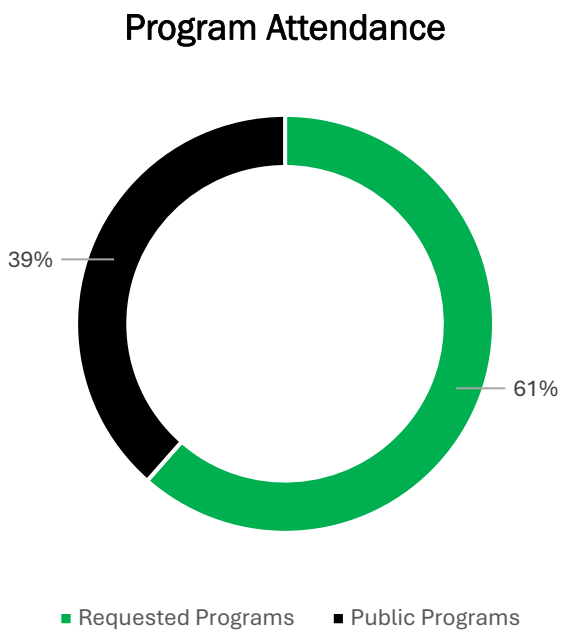
New Hire Orientation

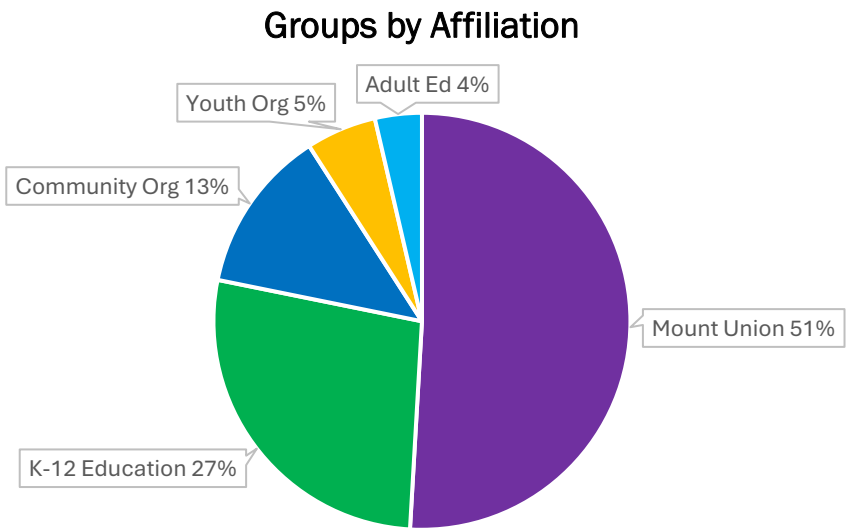
Preview

RaiderFest



UMU freshman Chase Davis holds a Blackburnian Warbler before release in BIO 141 lab





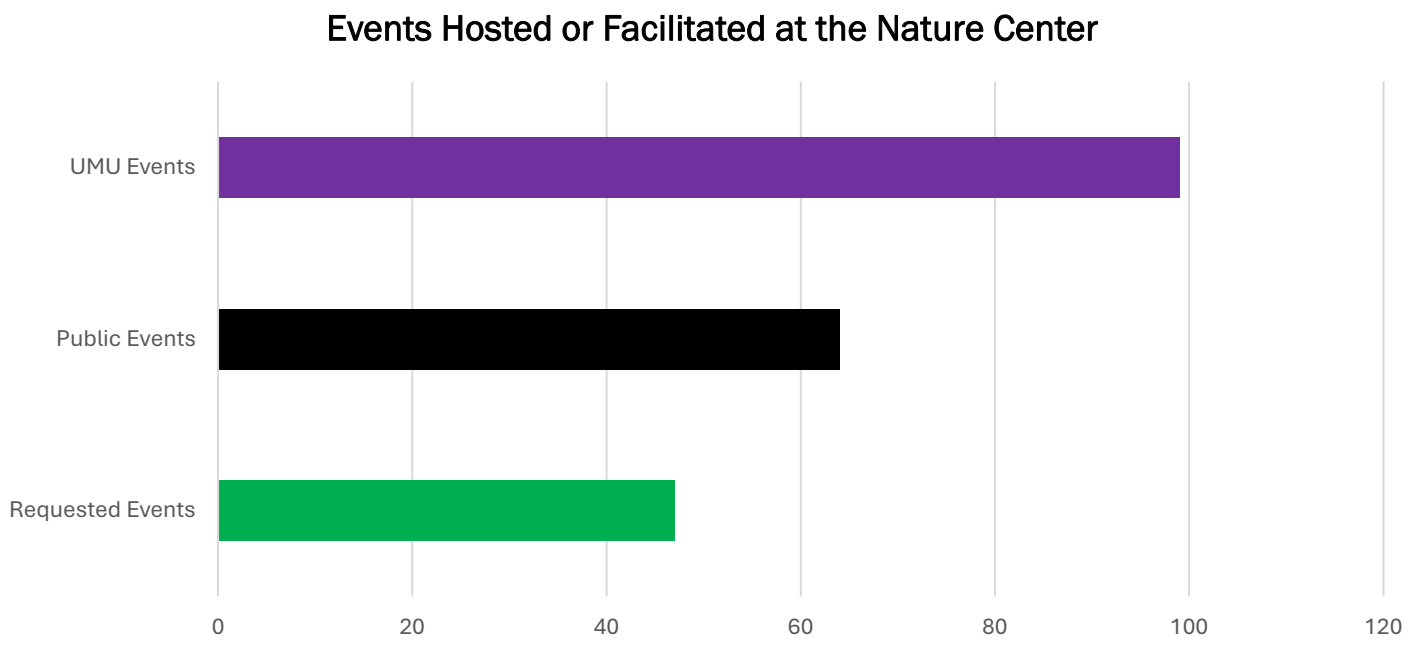
Program Attendance and Groups by Affiliation

Requested educational programs accounted for about two-thirds of the Nature Center's annual program attendance during the past fiscal year. Schools and community organizations represent most requested education programs. Public educational programs are organized and facilitated by the staff and published in the Nature Center's newsletter and social media.

Across all requested events and reservations, the Nature Center was host to 210 requested events requiring Nature Center staff or facilities use during the past fiscal year. Over half of the hosted events were represented by University of Mount Union courses, offices, departments, and student groups. A quarter of the events were related to K-12 educational programs, and the remainder were a mix of community organizations, youth organizations, and adult education organizations.



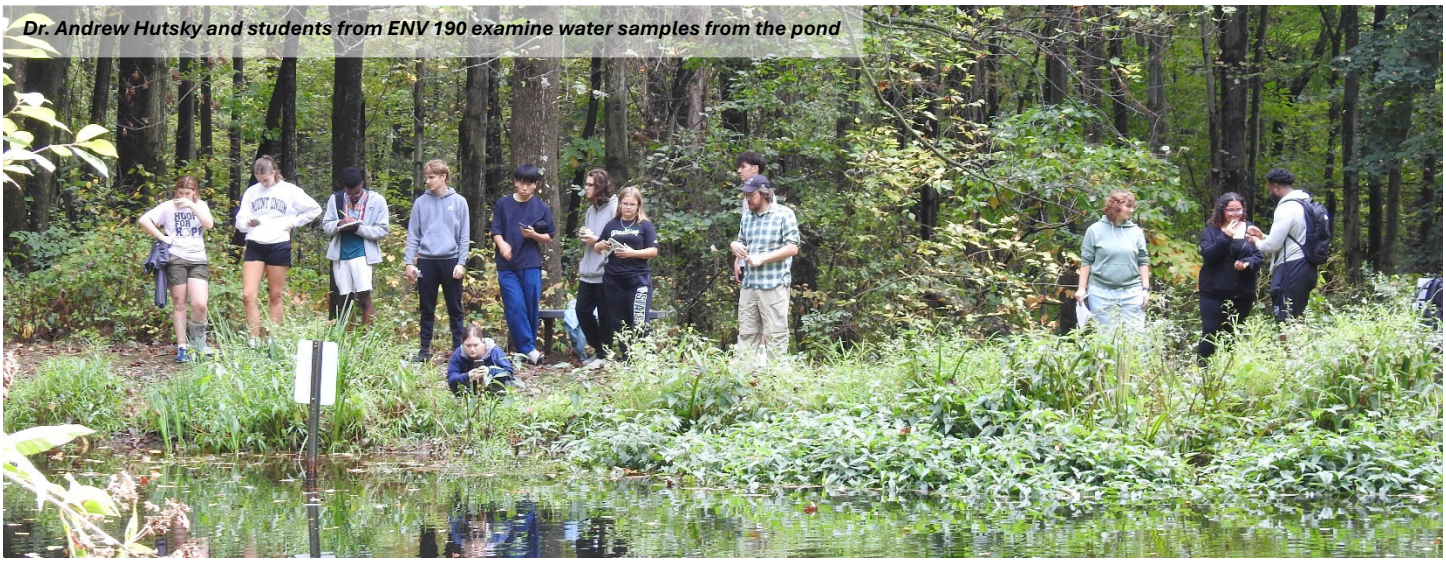
A string quartet from the Alliance Symphony Orchestra playing in the Nature Center pavilion



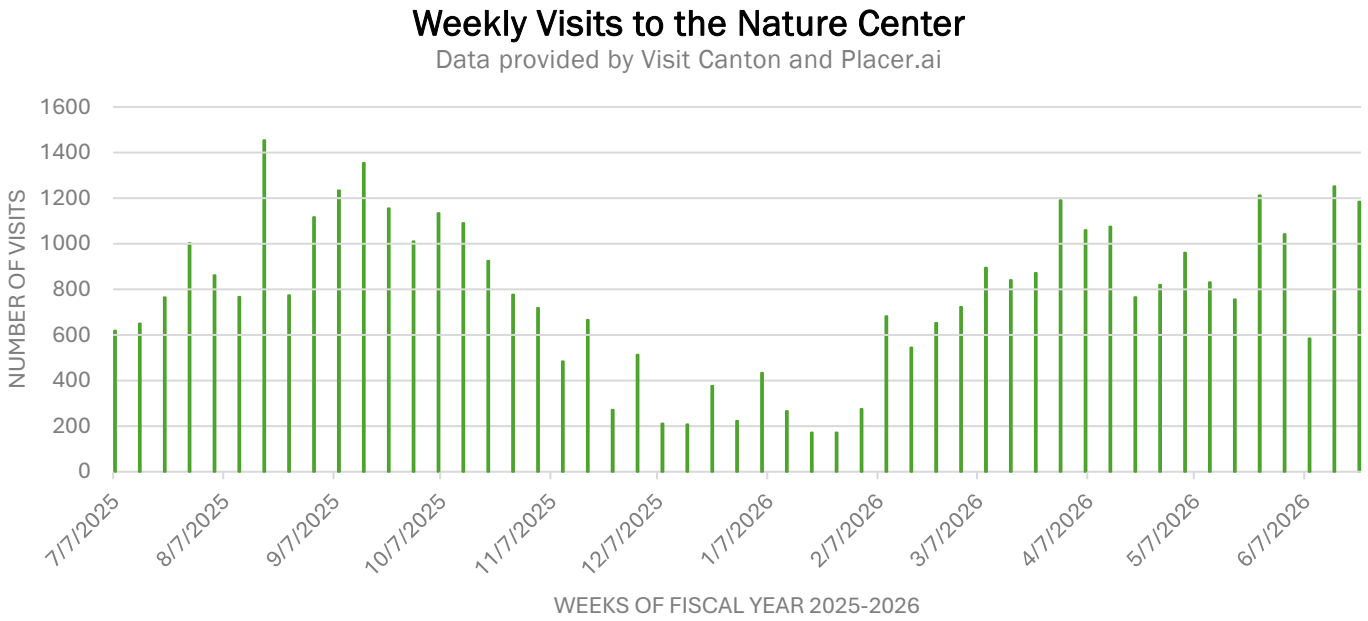
Events Hosted or Facilitated at the Nature Center

University of Mount Union events (99 total) hosted at the Nature Center outpaced the number of events offered to the public (64) and events requested (47) during the past fiscal year. The number of Mount Union events is an all-time high for university facilities use. The previous high of 88 events was recorded during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. Much of the increase was due to expanded use by Mount Union courses utilizing the Nature Center's facilities and property for hands-on, experiential learning.

The number of events offered to the public was close to the 5-year average of 68 events per year. The number of requested programs is very close to the 5-year average of 48 requested events per year. While the number of Mount Union events has increased, the Nature Center has been able to maintain a similar level of engagement with the broader community through its free educational programs.



Dr. Andrew Hutsky and students from ENV 190 examine water samples from the pond



Annual Visitation to the Nature Center

The Nature Center's partnership and collaboration with Visit Canton, the official tourism marketing organization and convention and visitors bureau for Canton and Stark County, Ohio, provided an opportunity to learn more about the Nature Center's annual visitation trends. Visit Canton maintains a subscription to Placer.ai, a location intelligence and foot traffic analytics platform. Once a physical location like the Nature Center is defined on a map, Placer.ai analyzes anonymized mobile device data to show how people move through and interact with that space. Visit Canton generated a visitation report on behalf of the Nature Center that illuminates how many visitors the Nature Center hosted during the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

The bar chart above shows how many visitors were on site during each week of the year. Peak visitation periods are illustrated during the fall and spring months with dips in visitation during winter and mid-summer. The highest week of visitation was the week of August 18, 2025, and the lowest period of visitation was the last two weeks of January 2026 over the past fiscal year.

During the fiscal year, the report totaled approximately 40,800 visits to the Nature Center representing approximately 19,300 visitors. When adjusted for the daily tally of Nature Center staff (8) and program attendees (2,297), there were an estimated 17,000 visitors at the Nature Center during the fiscal year. Many of these visitors are likely utilizing the trail system while a small portion likely represent faculty and students engaging in course work, research, departmental retreats, meetings, etc. where attendance totals are not recorded.

Though the data has some limitations regarding precise counts, it does account for far more visitors than any method previously attempted by the Nature Center. It provides a more accurate estimate of the Nature Center's impact and outreach to the community. Thank you, again, to Visit Canton for providing their support to help us understand annual visitation at the Nature Center.

Visitor Reviews

Visitor reviews are voluntarily provided through the Nature Center's visitor survey, Google reviews, and Facebook recommendations. Here is what a few reviewers had to say about their experiences at the Huston-Brumbaugh Nature Center:

"Definitely an awesome place! Hidden gem!"

"Everything is wonderful here. The grounds are well kept and easy to navigate. Most of all, the staff is amazing!!!"

"I love hiking the trails!! Great trails for exercise and enjoying nature!"

"Nice trail, lots of animal activity and not too many people. Fairly easy hike, mostly wooded. Trails are easy to follow and there are maps at almost every trail intersection."

"Best trail locally."

"Warm & welcoming, today voted in photo contest, had refreshments & enjoyed the bird room."

"My favorite local hiking spot."

"I love this place. The welcome center is amazing. The trails are good for a nice walk on a good day. My favorite thing to see is the donkey and the sheep and also the goats and the chickens."



Indigo Bunting in the field at the North Woods section of the Nature Center