

A photograph of two women in a museum setting. The woman on the left is wearing a grey jacket over a plaid shirt and glasses, looking up at a large dinosaur skull exhibit. The woman on the right is wearing a bright pink puffer jacket and yellow pants, smiling at the camera. The background is a large, dimly lit museum hall with a massive dinosaur skull mounted on the wall, illuminated with blue and green lights.

MuSeUm

A Creative Collaboratory

2025 -2026 annual REPORT

2025-2026 annual REPORT

The MSU Museum is an innovative and experimental collaboratory that exists to catalyze creativity. Here, people can openly explore, express, and experiment with ideas across disciplines and interests, and indulge their natural curiosity about the world. The Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums and is the state's first Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. The MSU Museum is a registered scientific institution with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) and a member of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience.

Since its inception in 1857, the Museum has been dedicated to the acquisition of diverse objects and specimens, as well as the creation of exhibitions that intricately capture our shared histories and experiences. These valuable collections and exhibitions serve as catalysts for enriching teaching, learning, and research endeavors, establishing the Museum as a pivotal space essential to the success of both students and faculty members. Administratively, the MSU Museum operates within the University Arts and Collections unit under the auspices of the Office of the Provost at Michigan State University.



Visitors experience *Physical Spells [The Wor(l)d in the Atom]*, an exhibition exploring the intersection of art and physics.





From the MSU Museum DIRECTOR

It is with tremendous pride and heartfelt gratitude that I welcome you to the MSU Museum's 2025–2026 Annual Report. After an extended period of working beyond our walls, this is the year we came home, transformed and emboldened, ready to show the world a 21st-century university museum built for discovery, collaboration, and imagination.

In January 2026, we reopened a renovated facility primed for what comes next. This first step concentrated on the essential infrastructure you mostly do not see but absolutely feel. New climate systems and building upgrades protect more than one million objects for generations, while new labs and gathering spaces give our communities room to convene, collaborate, and create. It was never a finish line. It was the foundation for the redeveloped galleries and bold experimentation still to come.

What inspires me most is how students claimed this Museum as their own. They applied in extraordinary numbers for hands-on experiential internships, filled our galleries late into the night, and found their voices through programs that turn curiosity into confidence. This is far more than a museum that supplements a Spartan education. It helps shape the creative, civic-minded graduates the world urgently needs.

Our spirit of innovation runs deep. We launched an audio-description system that opens *Habitat Hall* to visitors who are blind or have low vision. We were chosen among a select group of cultural institutions worldwide to build a digital pipeline that brings

collections to life through virtual and augmented reality. We joined the American Alliance of Museums to design a national academy for the next generation of museum leaders, a clear sign that the field looks to MSU to imagine what comes next.

This year, we also began celebrating a quarter century as Michigan's first Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution. It remains a genuinely two-way relationship, one that lets us share extraordinary exhibitions with mid-Michigan while carrying Spartan scholarship and innovation onto a national stage, and we will continue to mark this milestone through the year ahead.

None of this happens alone. To our staff, whose dedication fuels every achievement; to our partners, who dare to imagine with us; and to our donors and friends, whose belief makes the extraordinary possible, thank you! You are why this Museum soars.

With our doors open and our sights set higher than ever, we turn now to a bold new chapter, reimagining the galleries within and redefining all that this Museum can offer. We are not merely preserving a legacy. Together, we are building the future of academic museums.

With deep appreciation,

Devon M. Akmon
Director, MSU Museum



From the **VICE PROVOST** University Arts and Collections

Within the first couple of months of the MSU Museum's mid-January opening, the building was humming—with students engaging with collections and de-stressing at a silent disco, and expert panels exploring the connections among music, physics, and video games, a packed open house featuring MSU's science collections across campus, and graduate student experts from many fields shared their creativity and ideas through fast-paced public talks.

Welcome to the vibrant ecosystem of the MSU Museum. The refreshed building provides spaces for enhanced interaction and engagement, and recent initiatives have created new tools and approaches for multi-disciplinary exploration. From its launch nearly 170 years ago, the Museum was envisioned as a place for hands-on learning and experimentation through collections. As its name attests, it is MSU's museum, and in its newest phase it has opened its doors in a way that invites campus and community to co-create and build the future together.

In March the Museum served as the primary host site for the national a2ru Emerging Creatives Student Summit, where over 70 students from research universities around the country converged to learn how to create together across disciplines. In partnership with Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB), the Museum hosted the latest MSUFCU Arts Power Up Residency, where visionary artists are embedded alongside researchers to foster interdisciplinary collaboration at the intersection

of art, science, and technology. Such programs exemplify the power of cross-disciplinary thinking, producing unexpected connections and ideas.

Sparkling conversation and fostering curiosity to explore new ways of thinking are vital roles for museums today. Through dynamic programming with partners on and off campus, the MSU Museum has opened up a space for dialogue, exchange, and learning. And for relaxation, humor, and connection. During the spring semester, students discovered that there are comfortable hang out zones in the reconfigured building. Even Zeke the Wonder Dog stopped by to take a selfie on one of the new comfy sofas (and to visit the student-created exhibition featuring 170 years of MSU's traditions as seen through the museum's collections).

The next phase of the Museum's history will be created together by campus and community. That kind of partnership, experimentation, and collaboration across areas of expertise and perspectives is what MSU was built to do. The MSU Museum plays a valuable role in fostering that way of working and in making the University's public impact tangible.

Sincerely,

Judith Stoddart
Vice Provost
University Arts and Collections

SUPPORTING student SUCCESS

Supporting student success sits at the heart of the MSU Museum's mission. Today's students navigate real and pressing challenges: rising rates of isolation and anxiety, mounting pressure to translate their education into meaningful careers, and a growing need for spaces where they can explore ideas, connect across disciplines, and find their place in a large university community. The MSU Museum directly answers these challenges. Our work spans curricular partnerships, paid professional experiences, public platforms for student scholarship, and wellness programming, all designed to help students grow as thinkers, communicators, and engaged, civic-minded leaders. Increasingly, we also serve as a vital third space, a place beyond the classroom and residence hall where students study, gather, and find belonging on a large campus. The result is a museum that does more than supplement a Spartan education. It helps shape the confident, creative, and civic-minded graduates that Michigan, the nation, and the world urgently need.

The evidence is everywhere. As we prepared to reopen the MSU Museum in January 2026, we launched recruitment for paid student internships across numerous departments. The response was extraordinary: 612 applications from 528 unique applicants for 34 positions, with applicants representing 16 of MSU's 17 colleges. Roughly 1 percent of MSU's entire student body applied for an internship at the Museum, a powerful signal of how students see the Museum as a place to learn, work, and grow. These are not ordinary campus jobs. They are structured, mentored experiences that build the professional skills, portfolios, and networks that translate directly into post-graduation success.



MSU student CoLaborator Sam Booth discusses exhibition content with visitors.

CoLaborators Sam Booth and Rachel Lewis shared their experiences with MSU Today, offering a compelling look at how the Museum supports the next generation of creative leaders.

See Sam's Student View



See Rachel's Student View





A student participates in a silent disco experience at the MSU Museum, one of many programs designed to foster belonging and engagement.



“

[Ignite] helped me improve my communication skills and feel more confident presenting my ideas. It didn't change my path, but it reinforced it.”

— Kelechi Amakoh, PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science, College of Social Science; Ignite #6

Few experiences shape a young researcher more than learning to speak about their work with clarity, confidence, and conviction. Ignite Talks MSU was created to give students exactly that experience. The format is demanding by design: 5 minutes, 20 slides, auto-advancing every 15 seconds. Through a tailored research communication workshop and rehearsals, students learn to distill complex scholarship into compelling stories, find their voice as researchers, and discover that their ideas carry weight far beyond the lab or seminar room. For many, Ignite is the first time they have presented their work to a public audience, and the experience reshapes how they see themselves and their futures.

Just as essential to student success is a sense of belonging. Students who feel connected to their campus persist, perform, and thrive at higher rates, and the Museum has made cultivating that connection a deliberate priority. This year, we rebranded First Fridays as Unwind, a monthly series that gives students space to relax, recharge, and reset. From art and music to movement and mindfulness, each event is built around a well-deserved pause. The academic year opened with the Harvest Moon Silent Disco, which drew more than 350 students to the W. J. Beal Botanical Garden. Other highlights included Comic Con at the Museum, the New Year's Silent Disco, and LOVE, a Valentine's-inspired evening of creativity and connection. Each gathering offered students a different way to step out of the rhythm of academic life and into a community of peers. In a year when student mental health remains a national concern, programs like Unwind are not amenities. They are infrastructure for community and well-being.

Experiential learning. Belonging. Wellness. Together, these are the pillars of how the MSU Museum supports student success. Across a year of transition, we stayed focused on the outcome that matters most: students who grow more prepared, more connected, and more confident through their time with us. With the building reopened and the next chapter underway, that work only deepens.

Across the past three years,
IGNITE TALKS MSU has featured

56 undergraduate, graduate,
and professional degree
student researchers
from

12 colleges and

42 departments and programs,
a reach that spans the
full breadth of Spartan
scholarship.

“

Lyman Briggs students have consistently participated in the Ignite program, developing skills to translate their research into accessible, compelling presentations. The communication abilities and confidence students gain through Ignite prove invaluable as they learn to share scientific ideas with diverse audiences and demonstrate science's societal relevance and impact.”

— Kendra Spence Cheruvellil, Dean of Lyman Briggs College



Student DJs create an energetic atmosphere during an MSU Museum community event.

COLLABORATION and COMMUNITY building

The MSU Museum exists as a catalyst for creative collaboration. As an interdisciplinary museum within one of the nation's leading public research universities, we are uniquely positioned to convene scholars, artists, students, and community partners across fields that rarely meet in other settings. Equitable co-creation is central to how we work. The communities, scholars, and artists whose ideas animate our exhibitions and programs are not subjects of our work, but partners in it.

That commitment was on full display in *Blurred Realities*, an exhibition developed by our CoLab Studio that examines the challenges posed by disinformation, misinformation, artificial intelligence, and the evolving nature of truth. The development process, already drawing attention from across the museum field, exemplifies what equitable co-creation looks like in practice. Through a global open call, the CoLab Studio received 241 proposals from academics, artists, researchers, and students across 34 countries. Eight exhibits were ultimately selected, organized around four sub-themes: The Power of Bias in Shaping Reality, Authenticity Unbound, Truth and Manipulation in the Digital Age, and Reimagined Narratives. A robust season of *Blurred Realities* programming, including panels, workshops, film screenings, performances, and a poetry slam, brought MSU faculty and students together with visiting artists and scholars to examine together what is real, what is fake, and what it means to know the difference.

As the United States approaches its 250th anniversary, our Speculative Futures series hands the question of the next American chapter to the artists, poets, scholars, and storytellers best positioned to imagine it. The series asks how visionary narratives can

Through a global open call, the CoLab Studio received 241 proposals from academics, artists, researchers, and students across 34 countries.

reimagine identity, justice, and possibility in the years ahead, with programs presented in alignment with heritage and history months across the academic year. For Black History Month, we hosted an Afrofuturism conversation and zine workshop with artist Stacey Robinson, moderated by MSU Museum curator Dr. Julian Chambliss. For Women's History Month, The Future is Feminine featured a poetry reading by Detroit-based poet Brittany Rogers alongside MSU student poets. And for Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, APIDA Sounds and Stories brought music, panel conversation, and a museum-wide Night Market that transformed the building into a vibrant collaboratory of student organizations and community groups. Each program was built in close partnership with the communities it celebrated.

Collaboration also animated our public science engagement. On Valentine's Day, more than 850 visitors turned out for the second annual SciCurious, four hours of hands-on activities, rare collection highlights, and live engagement with MSU students and faculty. SciCurious empowers student organizations to design and lead science engagement centered on MSU's collections, giving students ownership of public scholarship and the experience of teaching the public about the disciplines they love. In March, we partnered with the Alliance for the Arts in Research Universities (a2ru) to host their annual Emerging Creatives Student Summit, Rewilding, a four-day event that brought more than 75 students from 20 institutions to campus to explore interdisciplinary creative practice and affirmed MSU's national leadership in arts-integrated research.

Additionally, with the January reopening, we extended this collaborative spirit into the building itself by temporarily activating an exhibition hall as The Commons, a dynamic gathering space for conversation, creativity, and connection. From the start, The Commons has been a true collaboratory, with numerous MSU faculty and students designing and leading the performances, workshops, and hands-on activities that bring the space to life. Their work invites visitors to imagine boldly, think critically, and share their perspectives, making The Commons not a space we offer but a space we shape together.

Taken together, these efforts illustrate a Museum that understands collaboration not as a method but as a value. When ideas are built in partnership, they reach further, resonate more deeply, and make space for people that have not always had a seat at the table.



Students from across the country gathered at Michigan State University for the a2ru Emerging Creatives Student Summit.



A performer takes the stage during the MSU Museum Poetry Slam.

Families explore science through hands-on activities during SciCurious, the MSU Museum's annual celebration of science.



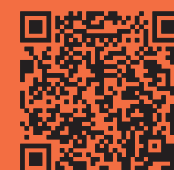
and INNOVATION THOUGHT leadership

At the MSU Museum, innovation and influence move together. The tools we build, the partnerships we develop, and the experiments we run inside our walls increasingly travel beyond them, into national programs, professional publications, and conversations about where museums are headed next. This year, that work produced new accessibility breakthroughs, new digital experiences, new artistic collaborations with cutting-edge science, and a growing national platform for the ideas behind them.

RFID technology expands accessibility and engagement by providing visitors with personalized ways to explore museum collections.

That spirit shaped a major accessibility milestone, the launch of a Radio Frequency Identification (RFID)-enabled audio description system in *Habitat Hall*. Developed through our Creating Access with Tech initiative and supported by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the system uses RFID technology to deliver audio descriptions to visitors as they move through the gallery. Powered by the Museum's Access Audio app and a free tag available at the Welcome Desk, the experience was designed first for visitors who are blind or have low vision, and enriches engagement for everyone. Built in partnership with Museum staff, student interns, and external collaborators, it is part of a broader effort to make inclusive design a core practice rather than an afterthought.

See More:
**Exhibition as Process:
CoLab Studio's
Adaptive Model for
Rapid, Collaborative
Curation**



Physical Spells [The Wor(l)d in the Atom] transformed the gallery into an immersive environment inspired by scientific discovery.





Detroit music innovator Carl Craig visits FRIB as part of the MSUFCU Arts Power Up residency program.

We are also building the digital infrastructure to bring our collections to far broader audiences. In 2025, the MSU Museum was selected as one of 200 cultural organizations across the U.S. and U.K. to join the Bloomberg Philanthropies Digital Accelerator Program, a competitive initiative supporting cultural institutions in strengthening their technology and infrastructure management practices. Through the program, we are developing a Digital Surrogates Pipeline, a project that brings collection objects to life through virtual and augmented reality, placing cultural and scientific materials in new contexts to inspire deeper learning. The work includes a dedicated digitization and prototyping lab guided by an interdisciplinary team of Museum staff, interns, and MSU and external experts in AR, VR, digital storytelling, and education, laying the foundation for a new generation of learning guides, activities, and immersive experiences.

Our commitment to creative experimentation is also embodied in the MSUFCU Arts Power Up artist-in-residence program, hosted by the MSU Museum's CoLab Studio in partnership with the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams (FRIB) and Arts MSU. The program brings visionary artists into one of the world's most advanced rare isotope research environments to explore what happens when artistic inquiry meets cutting-edge science. The result is exhibitions and experiences unlike anything else in our region. Spanish artist Violeta López López's residency culminated in *Physical Spells: The Wor(l)d in the Atom*, a hands-on exhibition that turned physics and linguistics into a playful, interactive experience, inviting visitors to discover surprising connections between atoms and words, quarks and sentences. In early 2026, the program welcomed Carl Craig, the internationally renowned Detroit DJ, producer, and techno innovator widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in electronic music. Working alongside FRIB researchers from January through April, Craig translated complex scientific environments into new creative forms through public conversations, panels, and collaborations with MSU faculty and students. His residency will culminate in a major exhibition at the MSU Museum next academic year, bringing his signature blend of sound, technology, and conceptual exploration into a museum context.



Panelist (right to left) Ryan Thompson, Carl Craig, Chris Vrenna, and Pablo Giuliani discuss the intersections of music, science, technology, and video games during a public conversation moderated by Amanda Cote.

Artist-in-residence Violeta López stands within her exhibition *Physical Spells [The Wor(l)d in the Atom]*, developed through the MSUFCU Arts Power Up residency at FRIB and the MSU Museum.

This experimental spirit travels well beyond our own galleries. In partnership with the American Alliance of Museums, the MSU Museum is helping design a new Museum Leadership Academy, a national program that will prepare the next generation of senior museum leaders. AAM is the field's largest and most respected professional association, and our role in shaping the Academy reflects MSU's growing influence in defining what museum leadership looks like in the years ahead.

That influence extends across the profession. This past year, MSU Museum staff served as panelists for national grantmaking and fellowship programs, authored articles in leading professional publications, served on the boards of prominent institutions in the field, and presented at nearly every major museum conference in the country. From accessibility breakthroughs at home to leadership development for the field at large, the MSU Museum is increasingly recognized as one of the places where the future of museums is being imagined and built.

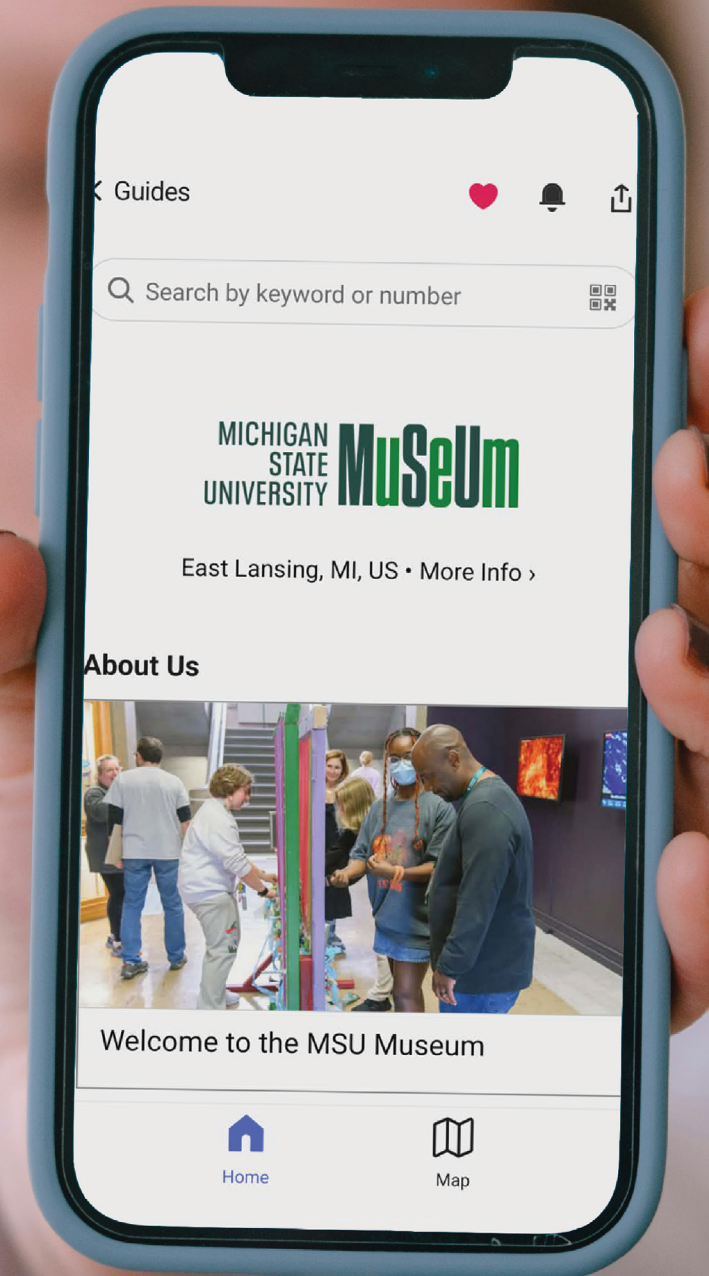


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Also available online, no download required



SUPPORTING faculty SUCCESS

Great universities are built on great faculty, and great faculty thrive in places that take their work seriously. The MSU Museum is one of those places. Our collections of more than one million objects fuel research across disciplines, providing specimens, artifacts, and primary sources that drive new scholarship and publications. The Museum is also a working classroom, with courses regularly taught in our Auditorium and the Forest Akers Trust Immersive Lab, where faculty bring students into direct contact with the collections themselves. Our Science On a Sphere installation, one of only a handful in the state, gives faculty a powerful tool for translating complex science into immersive public learning. And our exhibitions, programs, and partnerships extend experiential learning beyond traditional coursework, giving faculty the opportunity to involve students in real-world projects with real-world audiences. Faculty success and Museum success are deeply intertwined, and by investing in one, we strengthen the other, extending MSU's mission of teaching, research, and public engagement well beyond the walls of any classroom or laboratory.

Three collaborations this year illustrate what that partnership looks like in practice. The first is with Associate Professor Susan Bonner and the Department of Media and Information's undergraduate Serious Game Design course, where students developed games inspired by the Museum's exhibitions. Working with Museum staff to identify learning objectives and gallery spaces, students formed teams across programming, graphic design, and project management to deliver three original games: AR Butterflies, an augmented reality scavenger hunt; Past in Pieces, a matching game exploring skeletal structures; and TornAidOh!, an immersive, participatory game for the Museum's Science On a Sphere installation centered on tornado disaster response, and our first game developed for the Sphere. The course concluded with a showcase at the MSU Museum, where students from Genesee Career Institute joined the class to play the games and offer feedback. For Professor Bonner's students, the project delivered something rare and lasting: real clients, real audiences, and a real museum stage on which to test their ideas.



Faculty and students use Science On a Sphere® to explore complex global systems through immersive, data-driven learning experiences.

Museum Studies students gain hands-on experience through object-based learning, exhibition development, and collections research.



“

Access to the historical and cultural collections of the MSU Museum is incredibly important for emerging artists, MFA students, and undergraduate students. Being able to encounter craft objects in person — rather than only through images, texts, or behind a display case — offers students a much deeper understanding of construction methods, material possibilities, and the physical presence of handmade objects. These experiences allow students to study traditional arts practices in a direct and meaningful way, including the concepts, imagery, materials, and techniques that inform them.”

— Barbara Pearsall, Assistant Professor of Foundations and Sculpture in the Dept. of Art, Art History, and Design

A second long-running partnership reached a new milestone this year with Assistant Professor Suzanne Fischer and her Museum Studies students. For the third time, the Museum collaborated with Professor Fischer’s class to produce a major public exhibition, *What If We Kissed in the Shadows of Beaumont Tower?: Connecting Generations through MSU Student Traditions*, following WKAR’s *Legacy of Innovation* and *Marking Time: A Year of Spartan Marching Band Traditions*. Presented in the newly opened Forest Akers Trust Student Exhibition Lab, a purpose-built space for hands-on, student-driven learning, the exhibition represents experiential learning at its most ambitious: students moving from coursework to curation, and from theory to professional practice. Few faculty collaborations on campus give students this much creative authority, and few produce work this visible to the public. For Professor Fischer and her students, the Museum is a year-after-year proving ground.

The third partnership took a different shape, with the Museum offering a College of Music faculty member something no other space on campus could provide: room to hear what his students were creating. While the Museum was operating from its temporary pop-up space at 311 Abbot, Assistant Professor Anthony Marasco approached the Museum with a problem. His Immersive Sound Design students, drawn from Music Composition and the gaming division of the College of Communication Arts and Sciences, were composing spatial audio works for a new hundred-speaker ambisonics system the College of Music was installing in one of its concert halls. The College had a small production studio, but no large or mid-sized space where students could test how their compositions would sound at scale. Our multi-speaker playback system and 2,000-square-foot installation space gave

the class a place to refine their mixes throughout the semester and present their final compositions for critique in something close to concert hall conditions. For Marasco and his students, the Museum became what no traditional classroom could be: a working laboratory for sound, space, and creative experimentation.

College of Music
Impact Video



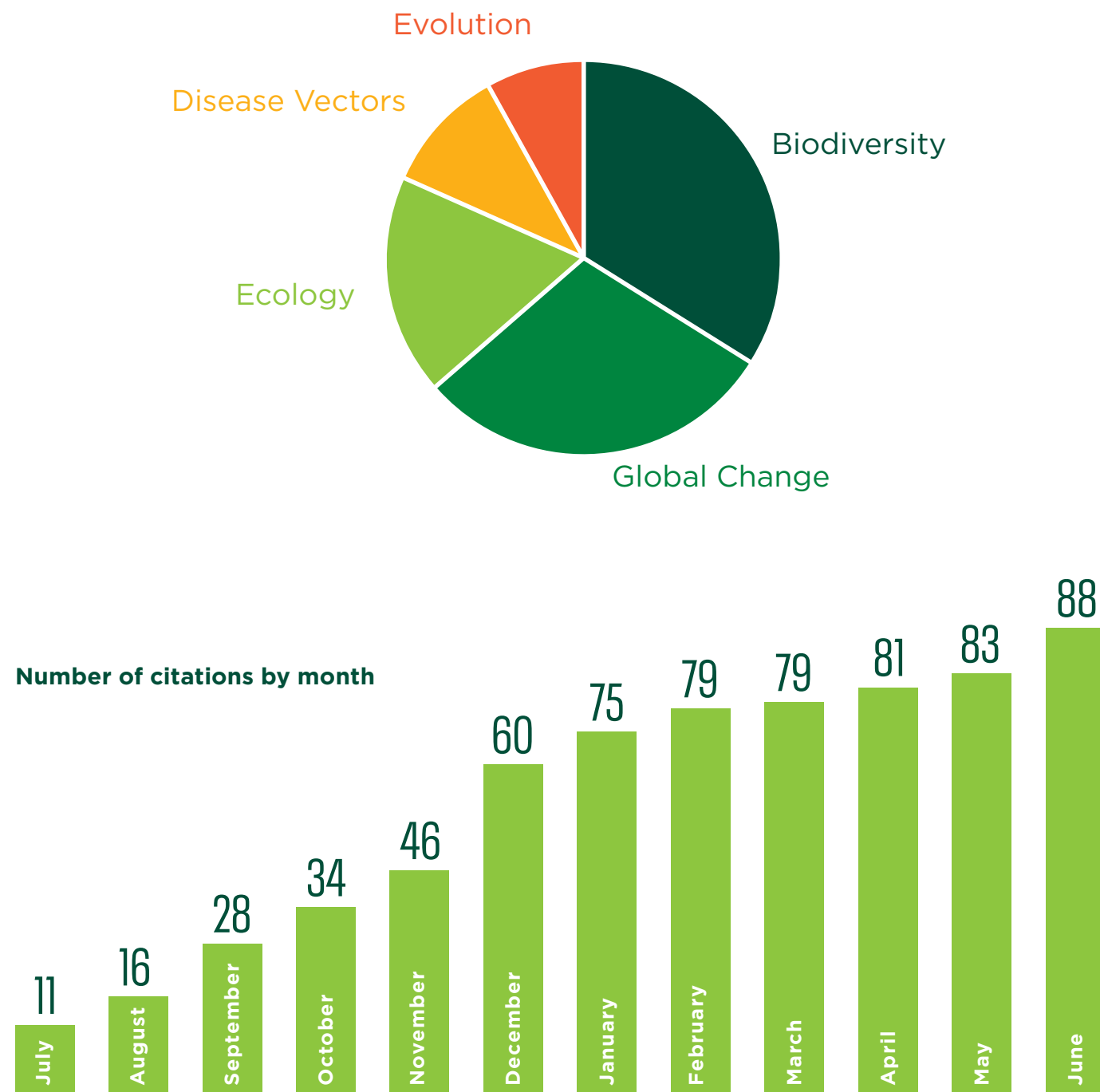
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Using the museum collections made this Honors Option truly unique and memorable for my students. Rather than assigning predetermined topics or simply asking students to do “more” of what they were already doing in class, I was able to encourage them to follow their curiosity and be creative—an opportunity that STEM majors at MSU do not often get. Students worked with something tangible and used it as a springboard for grappling with something as vast and complex as culture.

Engaging with the museum collections also allowed students to learn how cultural research and museum collections function as legitimate forms of scholarship. This expanded their understanding of academic research and exposed them to ways of knowing that they often perceive as less “rigorous” than science, but which are essential for understanding human behavior. For future health professionals, this experience provided an additional tool for making sense of why patients may behave differently than expected in clinical settings.”

— Kenna Lehmann, Assistant Professor and instructor of Human Biology and Society

PUBLICATIONS CITING USE OF MSU MUSEUM vertebrate collections



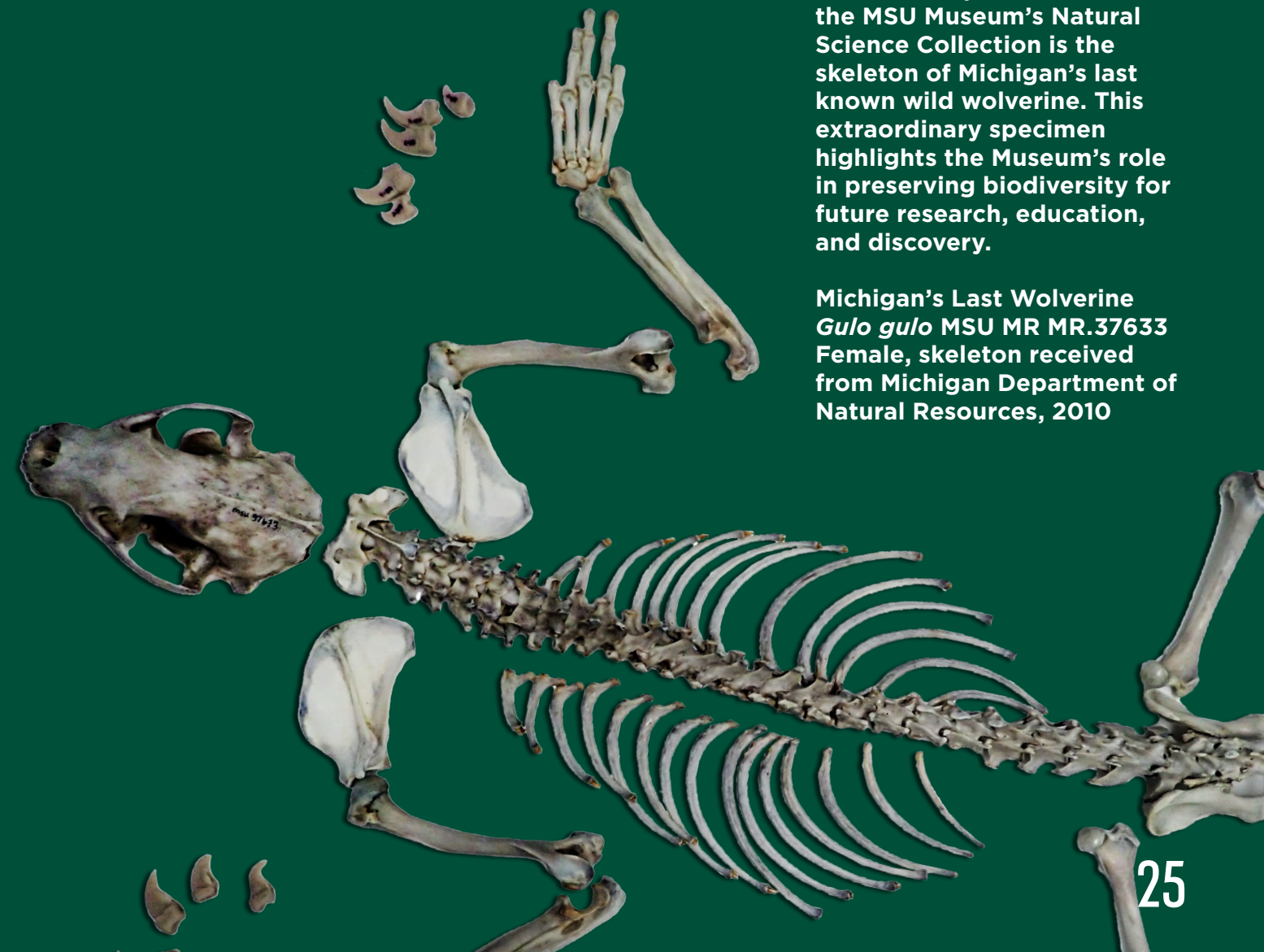
148,190,943 total

MSU MUSEUM Specimen Records Downloaded

July 1, 2025 to June 30, 2026

Among the more than 117,000 vertebrate specimens in the MSU Museum's Natural Science Collection is the skeleton of Michigan's last known wild wolverine. This extraordinary specimen highlights the Museum's role in preserving biodiversity for future research, education, and discovery.

Michigan's Last Wolverine
Gulo gulo MSU MR MR.37633
Female, skeleton received from Michigan Department of Natural Resources, 2010



A QUARTER CENTURY with the SMITHSONIAN

This year marks a milestone for the MSU Museum. It celebrates 25 years as the first Smithsonian Affiliate in Michigan. Since 2001, this relationship has shaped our exhibitions, programs, research, and the opportunities we extend to the MSU community and the broader public.

We are not simply recipients of Smithsonian content. We are contributors to a shared mission of advancing knowledge and public engagement.

The relationship is reciprocal by design. It allows us to borrow artifacts, share traveling exhibitions, and collaborate on programming with one of the world's most respected cultural institutions. Just as importantly, our research, collections, and ideas flow back into the Smithsonian and its national network. It is the kind of contribution only a major public research university can make: scholarship and creativity that

not only draw from a national network, but help shape it. We are not simply recipients of Smithsonian content. We are contributors to a shared mission of advancing knowledge and public engagement. Since reopening after pandemic closures, the partnership has only grown. Recent years have brought premieres of Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES) exhibitions including *Sounds of Religion* and *Knowing Nature: Stories of the Boreal Forest*, which launched its national tour at MSU and now travels with *A Boreal Balance*, an interactive game by MSU students that carries the exhibition's themes of climate, Indigenous knowledge, and environmental interdependence nationwide. We have hosted Leadership for Change interns for multiple summers and joined Smithsonian cohorts on community dialogue and cultural sustainability, including the African American Craft Initiative. We have welcomed acclaimed Smithsonian curators and directors, including Jorge Zamanillo, founding director of the National Museum of the American Latino, and Dr. Margaret Weitekamp of the National Air and Space Museum. Museum staff also consulted on the reimagining of the national exhibition project.



Quilt featured through the MSU Museum's Smithsonian Affiliate partnership highlights the power of museums to connect local audiences with national conversations. "20 and Odd", quilt made by Carolyn Crump in 2012.

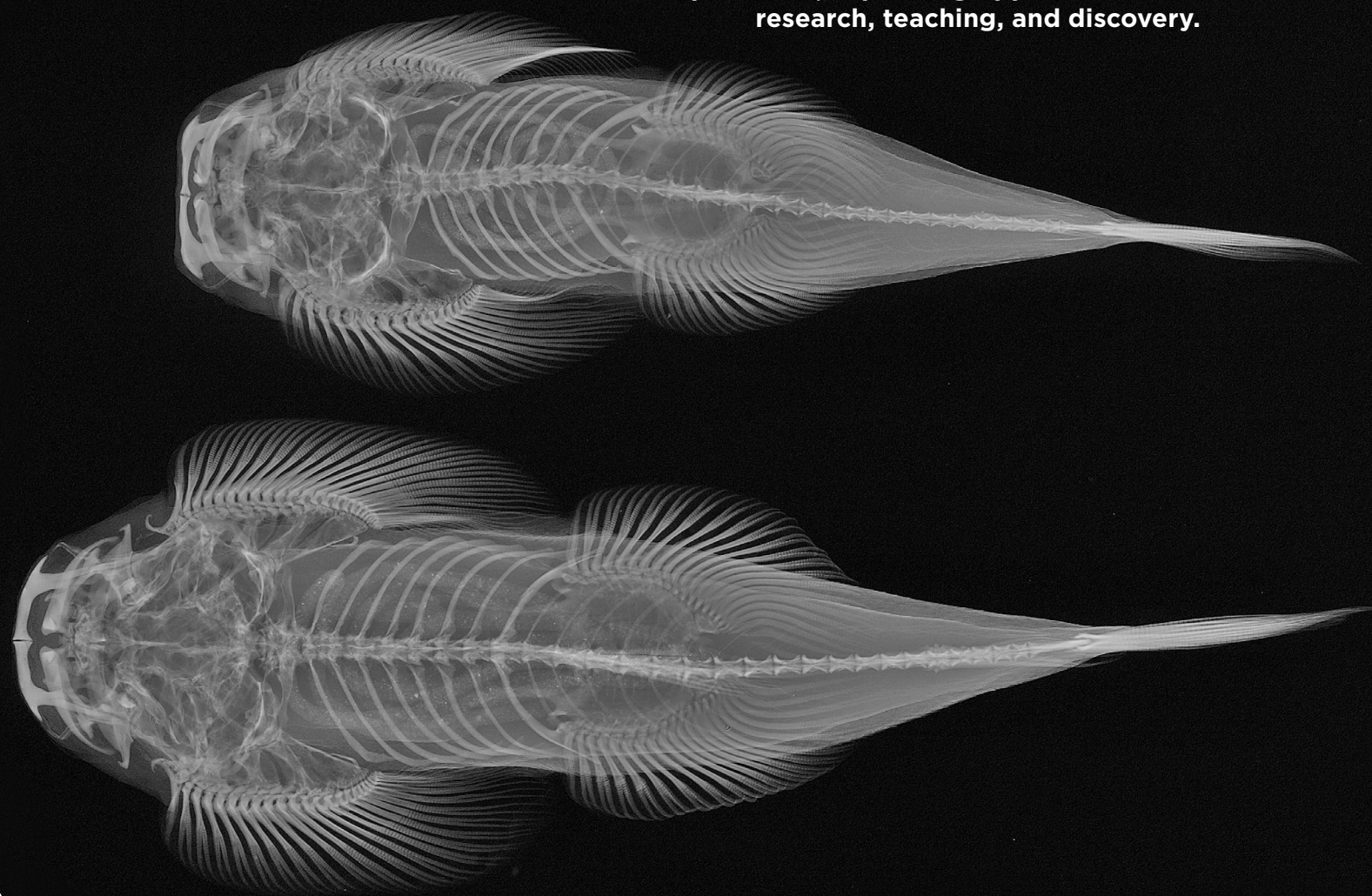


The MSU Museum has lent quilts from its collection to *Held in Cloth: Quilting the Black Experience*, a traveling exhibition organized by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES). The loan reflects the reciprocal nature of Smithsonian Affiliation, with MSU collections contributing to scholarship and exhibitions nationwide.

Hamtramck, My Home,
made by Sharon Ray in 2016



Advanced imaging technologies reveal hidden details of natural science specimens, expanding opportunities for research, teaching, and discovery.



The National Youth Summit convened students, educators, and museum professionals for conversations about leadership, civic engagement, and community impact.

Two milestones from the past year capture the breadth of this partnership. In October 2025, the MSU Museum hosted students from Everett, East Lansing, and Waverly High Schools for the Smithsonian's National Youth Summit, our third time convening Michigan students for this national program in recent years. Alongside institutions across the country, participants considered how young people can help create educational access and opportunity for all. Students examined pivotal moments of youth-led activism, then connected that history to challenges they see in their own schools today. The Museum team included MSU Teacher Education students, who helped develop and facilitate sessions for the high schoolers. For the teens in attendance, the Summit was a chance to see themselves as part of a long lineage of young people shaping public life.

It gives mid-Michigan audiences direct access to collections they would otherwise travel to Washington to see.

In January 2026, along with our reopening celebrations, we presented the exhibition *X-Ray Vision: Fish Inside Out*, organized by the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History and SITES. Featuring 40 large-scale digital X-ray prints from the Smithsonian's National Collection of Fishes, the exhibition guides visitors through hundreds of millions of years of fish evolution, transforming anatomical documentation into elegant, almost abstract portraits that bridge science with art. It gives mid-Michigan audiences direct access to collections they would otherwise travel to Washington to see, and serves MSU students and faculty as a teaching tool at the intersection of biology, evolution, and visual culture.

Twenty-five years in, the relationship is stronger and more reciprocal than ever. We celebrate this milestone and look forward to the work still to come.

our work CONTINUES

The January 2026 reopening was not an ending but a beginning. After more than 75 years without a major renovation, the MSU Museum has completed essential infrastructure upgrades that prepare the building, and the institution, for everything that comes next. New climate control systems will safeguard our collection of more than one million objects for generations to come. Flexible learning environments, collaborative labs, and modernized spaces have replaced rooms that no longer met the needs of contemporary scholarship or public engagement. The renovation also brought to life signature new spaces made possible by the Forest Akers Trust, including the Forest Akers Trust Student Exhibition Lab, a purpose-built home for student-curated exhibitions, and the Forest Akers Trust Immersive Lab, where collections meet emerging ways of teaching and learning. Two new student lounges welcome Spartans into the building as a place to study, gather, and belong. Approved by the MSU Board of Trustees and made possible in part by a generous multimillion-dollar gift from the Forest Akers Trust, this work positions the Museum to safely steward its collections, maintain national accreditation standards, and pursue a bold vision for the years ahead.

With the building ready, attention now turns to the galleries inside it. The MSU Museum has launched Ascent, a \$20 million campaign to reimagine and rebuild our exhibition halls. The campaign will produce a new generation of galleries that better reflect MSU's strengths in research, teaching, and creativity, and that invite the public into the questions our scholars and students are pursuing. Early signs of what Ascent can become were on full display this spring at Ascent Act II, an evening that transformed the newly renovated Museum into an immersive experience of live performance, projection art, and culinary creations from James Beard-recognized chefs, many of them MSU alumni returning home to celebrate the future of the institution that shaped them. Ascent is more than a fundraising effort. It is a statement about the kind of institution the MSU Museum is becoming.

***Ascent* is more than a fundraising effort. It is a statement about the kind of institution the MSU Museum is becoming.**

Chef Kate Williams prepares plated dishes for guests during Ascent Act II, the MSU Museum's signature fundraising event.





Student-created projections transformed the exterior of the MSU Museum during Ascent Act II, turning the building into a canvas for creative expression.

We are also looking beyond the historic building itself. A museum of our scope and ambition requires modern, purpose-built facilities for its collections, and we are actively developing plans for a new permanent collections facility on the MSU campus. This future home will provide the climate-controlled storage, research access, and curatorial workspace that a collection of more than one million objects deserves. It will also unlock new opportunities for teaching, scholarship, and public access that our current spaces cannot support. The work is in its early stages, but the case is clear: a 21st-century university museum needs 21st-century infrastructure to serve the generations of Spartans, scholars, and visitors still to come.

Underlying all of this is the work of charting where the Museum goes next. Over the coming year, we will develop a new five-year strategic plan to focus and catalyze the impact of the MSU Museum across the university and the broader community. The plan will build on the momentum of the reopening, the ambition of Ascent, and the public mission of a great land-grant institution, while inviting the voices of students, faculty, partners, and supporters into the conversation. Together, these efforts mark a transformative moment for the MSU Museum, one in which infrastructure, vision, and community align to shape the institution we are becoming.

MSU MUSEUM

CHEAT SHEET

A guide to
who we are,
what we do,
and why it matters.

What is an interdisciplinary museum, and why does it matter at a research university?

An interdisciplinary museum doesn't sort the world into separate boxes for art, science, history, and culture. A single exhibition might pair scientific specimens with contemporary art, or use cultural artifacts to illuminate emerging technologies. At a major research university like MSU, this approach is uniquely powerful: it mirrors how today's most important questions get answered, across disciplines, in conversation. By weaving these perspectives together, the museum helps visitors better explore and make sense of a rapidly changing world, where the challenges and discoveries shaping our lives rarely fit within a single field.

How does the museum translate academic research for the public?

Groundbreaking research often lives in journals and laboratories that few people outside a field ever see. At the MSU Museum, we work closely with faculty to translate their discoveries into experiences anyone can engage with, through exhibitions, public programs, and creative collaborations across campus. The result is research that doesn't just stay on campus but reaches curious minds and lifelong learners in ways that spark curiosity and conversation.

What's behind the recent renovations?

The museum recently completed a \$28 million infrastructure project, the kind of work you mostly don't see but absolutely feel. Think HVAC systems, windows, climate controls, and other essentials that allow a museum to safely care for its collections and its visitors. With that foundation now in place, the museum is entering an exciting new chapter: redeveloping its core exhibition halls while introducing new temporary exhibitions along the way. Expect things to change frequently. We're actively experimenting with fresh ways to present our collections and connect with the public, and we invite you to come back often to see what's new.

What does it mean to be a Smithsonian Affiliate?

The MSU Museum is Michigan's first Smithsonian Affiliate, and the relationship is genuinely two-way. Affiliation means we can borrow artifacts, share traveling exhibitions, and collaborate on programming with one of the world's most respected cultural institutions. It also means our research, collections, and ideas flow back to the Smithsonian and its national network. Museum staff, alongside MSU faculty and students, are central to this bi-directional work. It's the kind of contribution only a major public research university can make: scholarship and creativity that don't just draw from a national network, but help shape it. We're not just recipients of Smithsonian content; we're contributors to a shared mission of advancing knowledge and public engagement.



How big is the collection, and how is it used?

The museum stewards more than one million objects and specimens, spanning the sciences, cultures, and archaeology. These aren't just on display; they're working collections. Faculty and students use them for research and teaching, visiting scholars consult them, and curators draw from them to build exhibitions that connect the past, present, and future. We also lend pieces to other museums, contributing to exhibitions and scholarship well beyond East Lansing. Many beloved items will return in upcoming galleries as part of our long-term plan, alongside pieces that haven't been seen in years. Caring for a collection of this size is one reason the recent infrastructure work mattered so much, and it's why the museum maintains accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums, a mark of excellence held by only a small percentage of museums nationwide.

Is the museum really free?

Yes, completely. Admission is free, and our public programs are free too. This isn't a marketing perk; it's a reflection of MSU's identity as a land grant university. When MSU was founded, the land grant mission promised that knowledge and learning should be accessible to all, not reserved for those who could afford it. The museum carries that mission forward every day. Whether you're a student, a faculty member, a visiting scholar, or a curious neighbor, the door is open.



MSU Museum staff

The continued success of the MSU Museum is driven by the creativity, expertise, and dedication of its exceptional staff. From curators and researchers to educators and administrators, each team member plays an essential role in shaping the Museum's dynamic programming and public engagement. Their collaborative efforts create experiences at the nexus of the arts, sciences, cultures, and technologies for the Michigan State University community.

Devon Akmon, Director

Laura Abraczinskas, Vertebrate Collections Manager

Denice Blair, Ph.D., Director of Education

Sandra Brown, Associate Director of Development

Stacey Camp, Ph.D., Curator of Archaeology

Brittany Carter, Education Program Coordinator

Julian Chambliss, Ph.D., Val Berryman Curator of History

C. Kurt Dewhurst, Ph.D., Curator of Folklife and Cultural Heritage

Samantha Ellens, Ph.D., Archaeology Collections Manager

Teresa Goforth, Director of Exhibitions

Riley Hubbard, Assistant Director of Annual Giving

Liz Ivkovich, Senior Director of Advancement

Jeff Lambert, Fiscal Officer and HR Administrator

Micah Ling, Ph.D., Curator, Michigan Traditional Arts Research Collections

Marsha MacDowell, Ph.D., Curator of Folk Arts and Quilt Studies

Lynn Mande, Director of Finance and Human Resources

Natasha Miller, Community Engagement Manager

Chan Kin Onn, Ph.D., Curator of Vertebrate Collections

Julie Orlor, Administrative and Operational Support

Stephanie Palagyi, Director of Marketing and Communications

Kristin Phillips, Digital Communication Coordinator

Abbie Stevens, Ph.D., CoLab Studio Public Programming Manager

Mark Sullivan, D.M.A., CoLab Studio Creative Director

Lynne Swanson, Cultural Collections Manager

Caroline White, CoLab Studio Education and Learning Manager

Carrie Wicker, Museum Educator and Science On a Sphere® Coordinator

Mary Worrall, Director of Collections

MSU Museum's Community & Culture Advisory Committee

The MSU Museum's Community & Culture Advisory Committee plays an important role in helping shape a Museum that is welcoming, relevant, and responsive to the communities it serves. Comprised of campus partners, the committee provides valuable perspectives that help inform exhibitions, programs, communications, and visitor experiences. Through ongoing dialogue and collaboration, the committee supports the Museum's commitment to accessibility, inclusion, and meaningful public engagement while helping strengthen connections between the Museum, Michigan State University, and broader communities across the region.

Jena Baker-Calloway, MPH, Director, MSU Detroit Center / University Outreach & Engagement

Ruth Nicole Brown, Ph.D., Chairperson & MSU Foundation Professor, Dept. of African American & African Studies

Siddharth Chandra, Ph.D., Director, Asian Studies Center; Professor of Economics, James Madison College

Delia Fernández-Jones, Ph.D., Associate Dean for Equity, Justice, and Faculty Affairs, College of Arts & Letters; Associate Professor of History

Tesia Freer, Access Specialist, Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (RCPD)

Salah Hassan, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of English; Director, Global Studies in the Arts & Humanities

Kevin P. Leonard, Ph.D., Director, Native American Institute (Office of University Outreach & Engagement)

Blaire Morseau, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Religious Studies; Affiliate faculty, American Indian & Indigenous Studies / Digital Humanities

STUDENT Advisory Committee

The Student Advisory Committee at the MSU Museum fosters engagement and enriches the Museum experience for the campus community. Comprised of passionate and diverse students, the committee provides valuable insights and feedback on Museum initiatives, ensuring that the Museum remains a vibrant and inclusive space. The committee helps bridge the gap between the Museum and the student body, enhancing student involvement.

Payton Aiello, Interdisciplinary Humanities

Garrett Backe, Anthropology

Henry Bair, Advertising Management

Lucy Burnett, History

Isadora da Cunha Timochenco, Neuroscience

Dhruv Garg, Computer Science

Aditi Gonuguntala, Experience Architecture

Alex Guo, Humanities Pre-Law and Experience Architecture

Penelope Hall, Criminal Justice and Psychology

Zahara Johnson, Communications

Japnam Kaur, Human Biology

Emily Littlejohn, Comparative Cultures and Politics

Faith Longnight, Curriculum Instruction and Teacher Education

Peyton Olivia Olson, Zoology

Caroline Roche, Environmental Biology/zoology

Anna Vadella, Computer Science



student employees

Student employees are central to the MSU Museum’s commitment to supporting the whole student experience. Through meaningful, paid opportunities across visitor engagement, exhibitions, programs, communications, and collections, students gain hands-on experience while developing skills in collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and public engagement. Working alongside Museum staff, faculty, and community partners, student employees contribute to the Museum’s role as a creative collaboratory while building confidence, professional networks, and career-ready skills that extend far beyond the classroom.

Graduate Students

- Jessica Freedman, Media and Information
- August Hagedorn, Museum Studies
- Amandeep Jangra, Business Administration
- Rylee LaLonde, Anthropology
- Yuheng Li, Traditional Arts
- Madelyn McKinney, Anthropology
- Malin Nordmoe, Human Resources and Labor Relations
- Bethany Thies, Museum Studies
- Julia Vogt, Museum Studies
- Nathaniel Weeldreyer, Museum Studies

Undergraduate Students

- Alveera Ahmed, Economics
- Samuel Booth, Digital Storytelling
- Alexis Chiang, Comparative Cultures and Politics
- Muhtasim Chowdhury, Environmental Biology/ Zoology with a minor in Data Science
- Meira Everidge, Anthropology
- Hrithika Ghattamaneni, Computer Science
- Vatsal Gupta, Computer Science
- Penelope Hall, Criminal Justice and Psychology
- Ro Heberlein, Art History/Arts and Humanities
- Avnee Jain, Information Science
- Dan Jones, Theater
- Rachel Lewis, Art History and Journalism
- Marwaan Muridi, Computer Science
- Azaria May, Human Biology
- Jules McClary, Anthropology
- Danielle Middleton, Anthropology
- Eli Piper, History
- Ashleigh Prisby, Anthropology
- JP Purofoy, International Relations and Comparative Cultures and Politics
- Saanch Rustagi, Psychology
- Joa Song, Interdisciplinary Humanities & Comparative Cultures and Politics
- Alicia Spittler, Anthropology
- Nela Travnikova, Chemical Engineering
- Erin Vollertsen, Art Education
- Ellie Wang, Digital Storytelling
- Molly Wolfe, Interdisciplinary Humanities

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Crozier Fine Arts
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Ima Noodles | Chef Mike Ransom
Lady of the House | Chef Kate Williams

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