

THE **Union**

Annual Report

2025-2026



Table of contents

04	Executive summary	20	Our people
06	Event support	22	Organizational chart
10	Most utilized spaces	24	Student employment
12	Users and reservation stats	27	Our End of Year celebration
14	A day's events	28	Improvements
16	Building numbers	29	Looking ahead
18	Notable events		

Executive summary

The Madison Promise, JMU's strategic plan, emphasizes the creation of an innovative, sustainability-focused campus that serves as a central hub for cultural, social, educational, and economic collaboration. Pillar 5 underscores the importance of developing facilities and spaces that not only enhance learning and research but also generate revenue and strengthen community integration. The Campus Master Plan reinforces this vision by prioritizing enhancements to the student experience through expanded residential, co-curricular and event spaces that foster belonging, well-being and student success.

A key component of this effort is strengthening student lifestyle and engagement infrastructure, particularly through The Union and multipurpose event facilities. With over 500 recognized student organizations (RSOs), JMU students demonstrate a culture of involvement, leadership and creativity. This level of engagement underscores the importance of continued investment in The Union facility that can fully support the breadth of student activities — from meetings and trainings to performances, competitions and large-scale events. Expanding and modernizing these spaces offers a clear opportunity to

further elevate student life and engagement on campus. Limited no-cost spaces for RSOs create competition among campus groups and departments, often pressing student organizations to seek spaces on campus that cost and exceed their budgets. This constraint directly impacts student engagement, inclusion and the overall campus experience.

The Union already serves as an important cornerstone of campus life, supported by a dedicated and highly effective professional team. Leadership within The Union excels in communication, organization and alignment with departmental values, ensuring that building stakeholders remain informed and supported. Additionally, the focus on student employee development is a notable strength, with staff prioritizing mentorship and integrating meaningful work-based learning into daily operations. This commitment enriches the student experience and contributes to the development of future leaders.

At the same time, the current facility presents a meaningful opportunity for transformation. Originally designed for a smaller student population, The Union has served the campus well over time and continues to be a gathering place. As JMU has grown, so too has the need for spaces that reflect the scale, flexibility and the evolving expectations of its students. With strong operational leadership in place, professional staff have proactively begun reimagining the facility to enhance both its functionality and overall experience. Recent improvements include refreshed interior finishes such as new paint and updated carpeting, the addition of a flexible-use room and individual study spaces, and enhanced signage to improve wayfinding. Together, these thoughtful upgrades are elevating The Union's environment and strengthening its role as a welcoming, accessible and inclusive hub for the campus community.

The reopening of Carrier Library will free up valuable space within The Union, enabling more flexible programming such as pop-up events and informal gatherings. This transition will allow for increased creativity in how spaces are used and provide additional opportunities for student engagement in the short term.

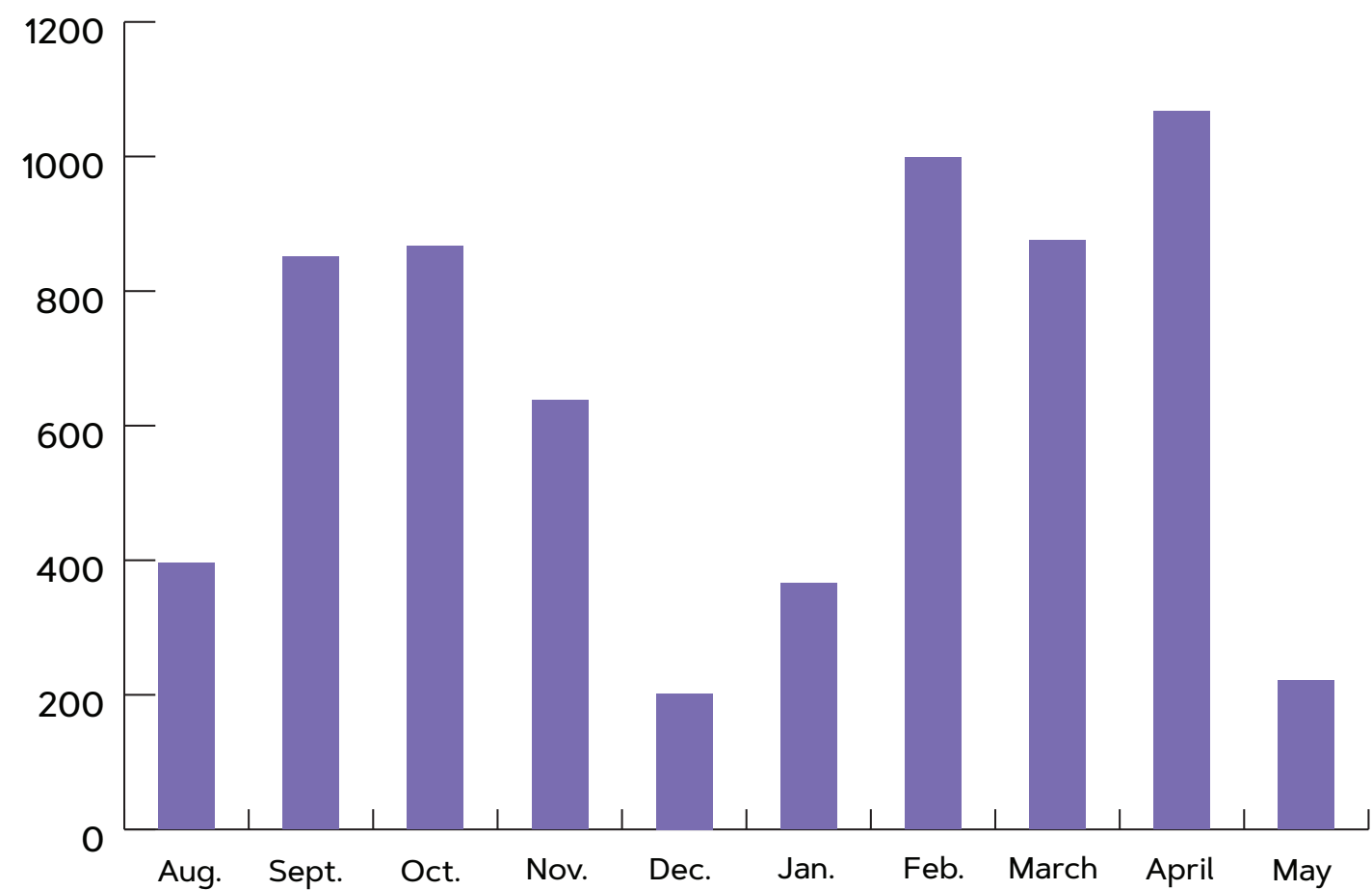
To fulfill JMU's strategic goals and support a growing, dynamic student body, significant investment in modern, flexible and accessible student union and event spaces is essential. Enhancing The Union strengthens student engagement, improves operational efficiency, and positions the campus as a vibrant hub aligned with the university's long-term vision.

This year's Union Annual Report showcases the wide range of events supported by the facility operations team and celebrates the many successes achieved throughout the year. As the university and the Department of Student Life begin planning for a new Union, current professional staff and student employees remain forward-thinking, actively exploring best practices across peer and aspirant institutions, to help guide internal improvements and ensure future spaces are innovative, efficient and aligned with the evolving needs of the JMU community.

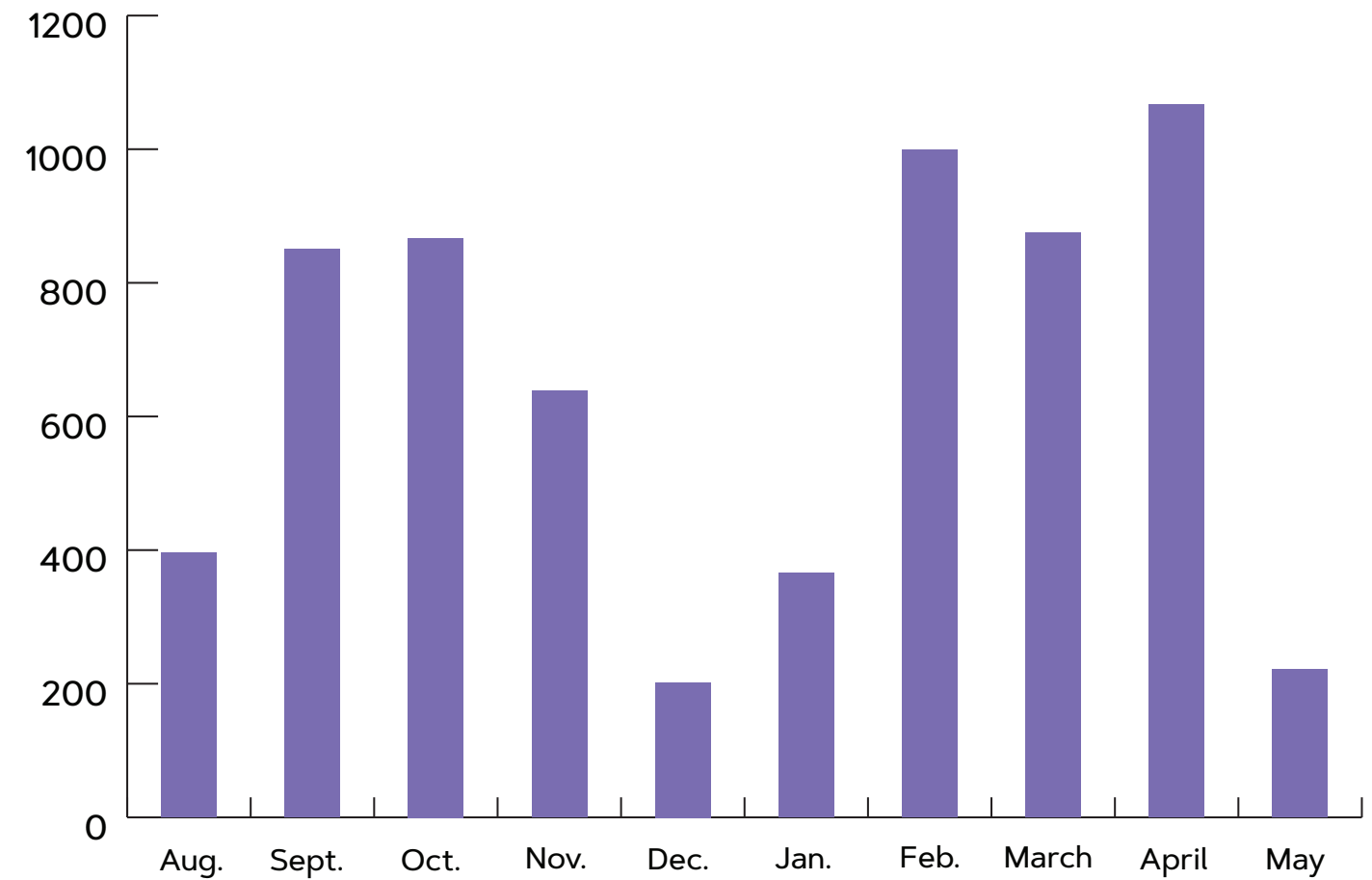


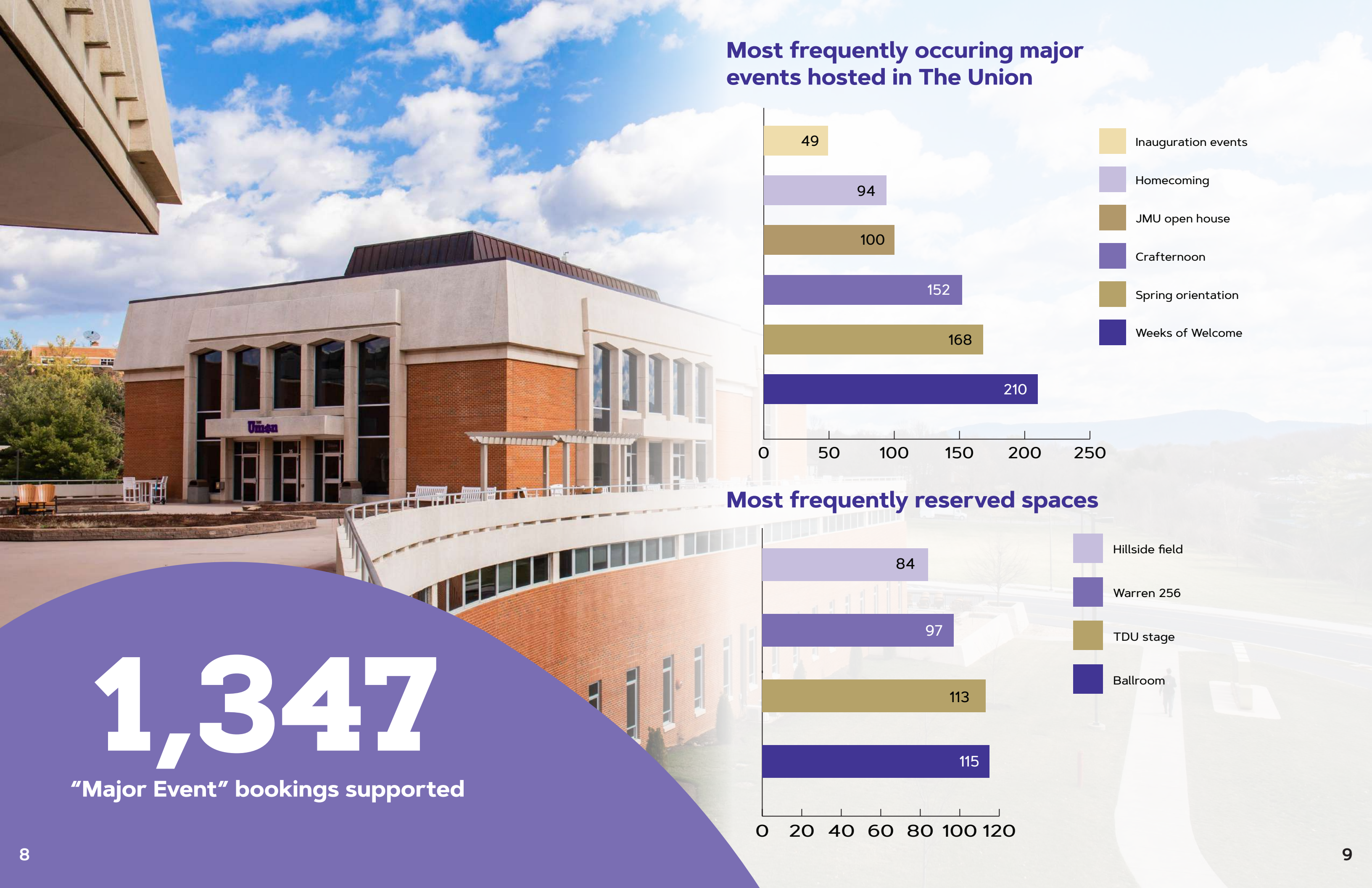
Event support

Total bookings by month

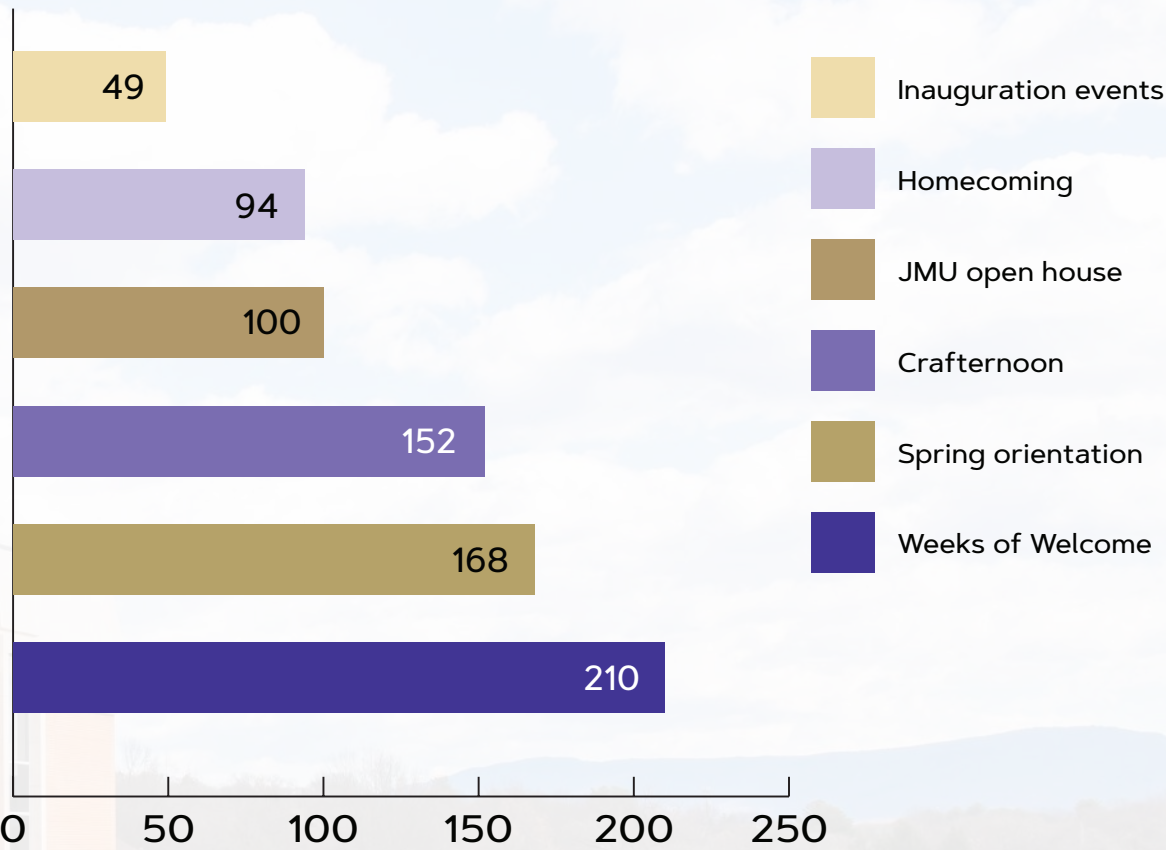


Total reservation hours by month

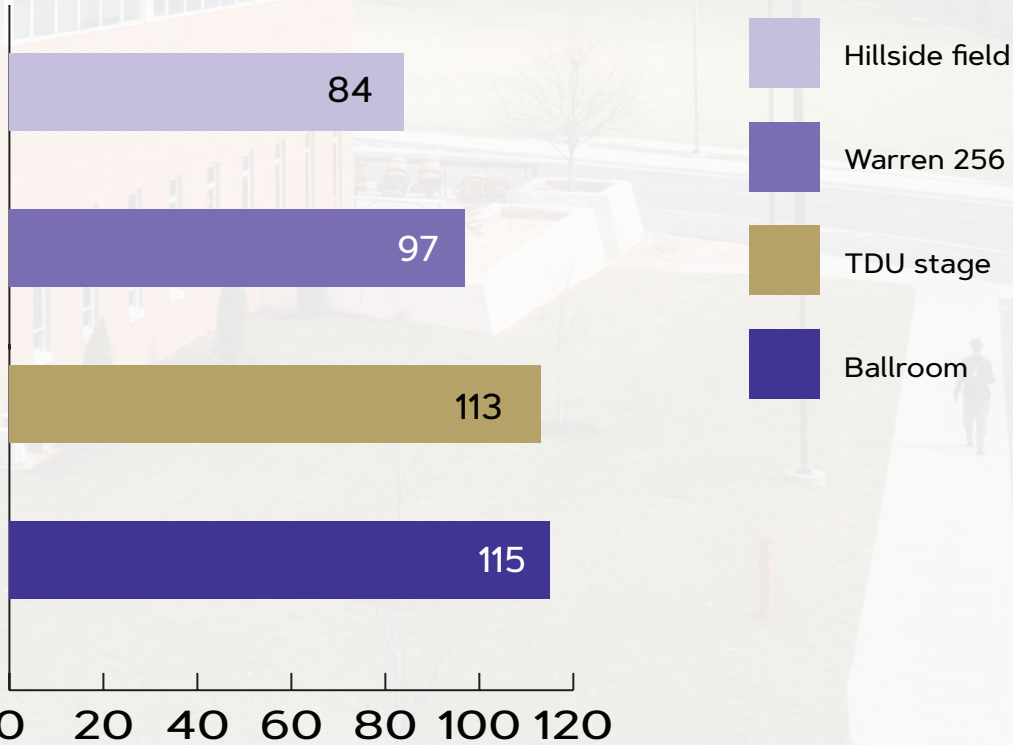




Most frequently occurring major events hosted in The Union



Most frequently reserved spaces



1,347

"Major Event" bookings supported

Most utilized spaces

By hours



Taylor 311
975



Taylor 303
954



Taylor 405
905



Taylor 306
895



Taylor 307
810

By bookings



Taylor 303
587



Taylor 311
514



Taylor 307
386

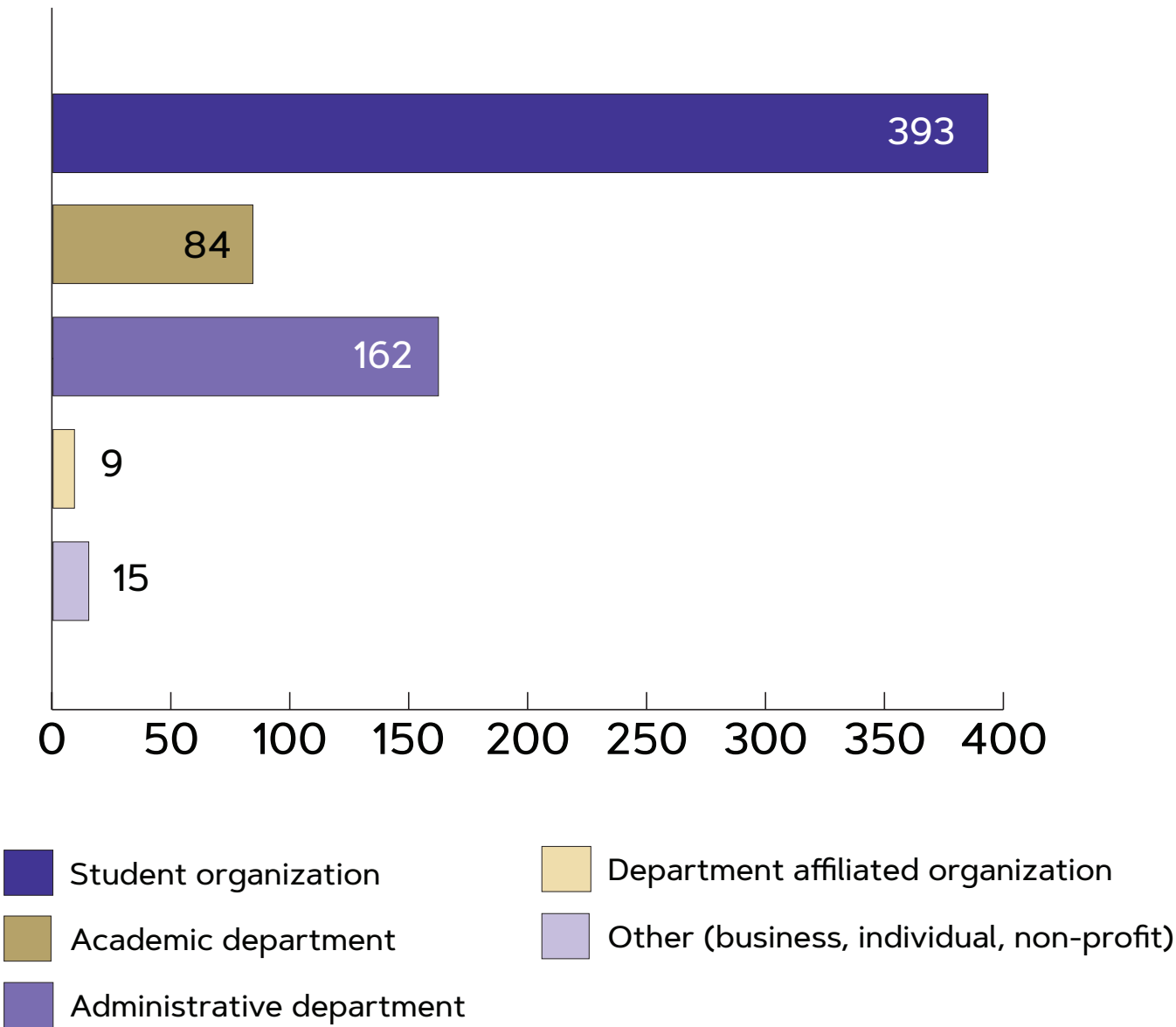


Taylor 309
335

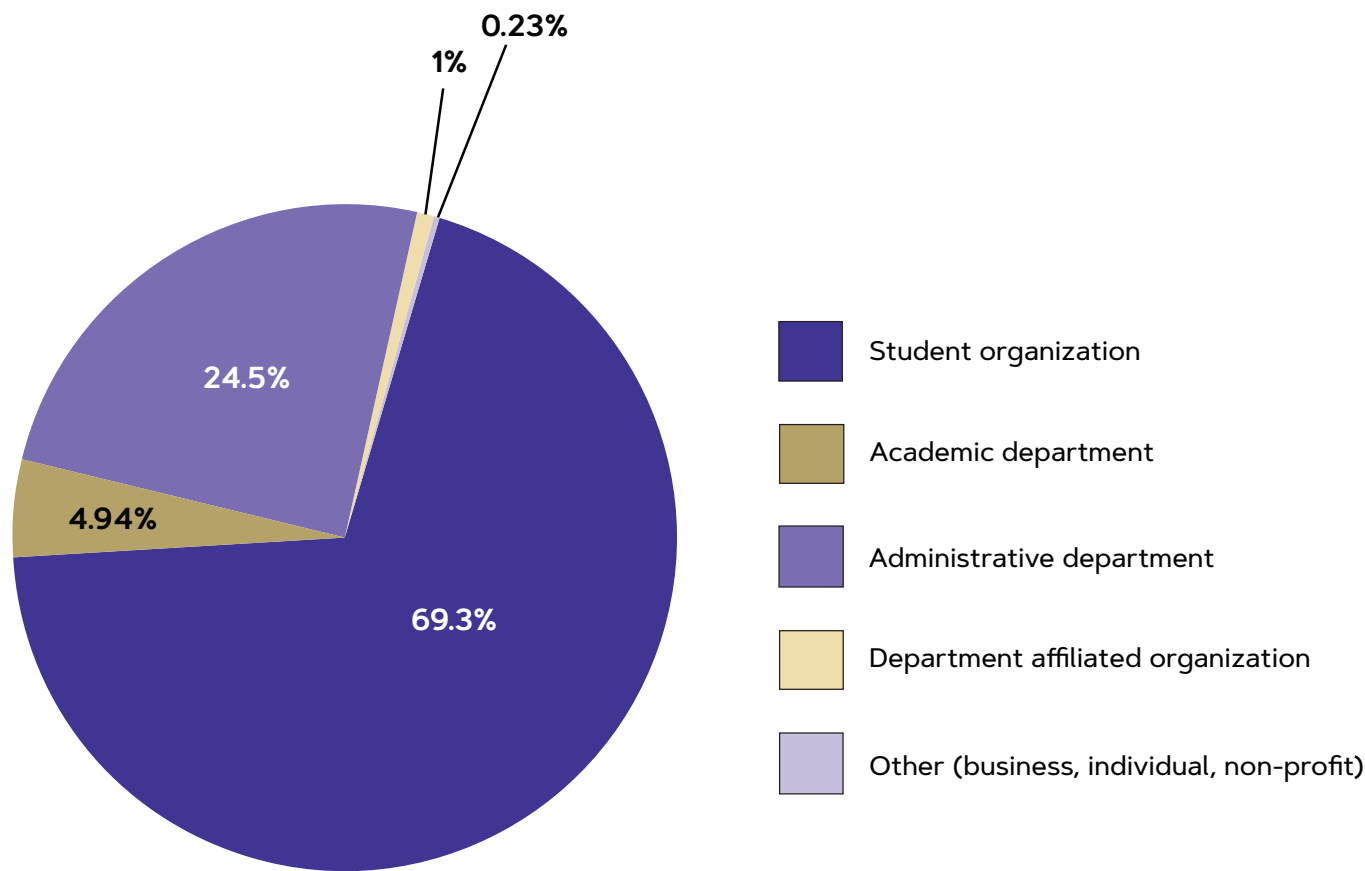


Taylor 305
332

Unique users by group type



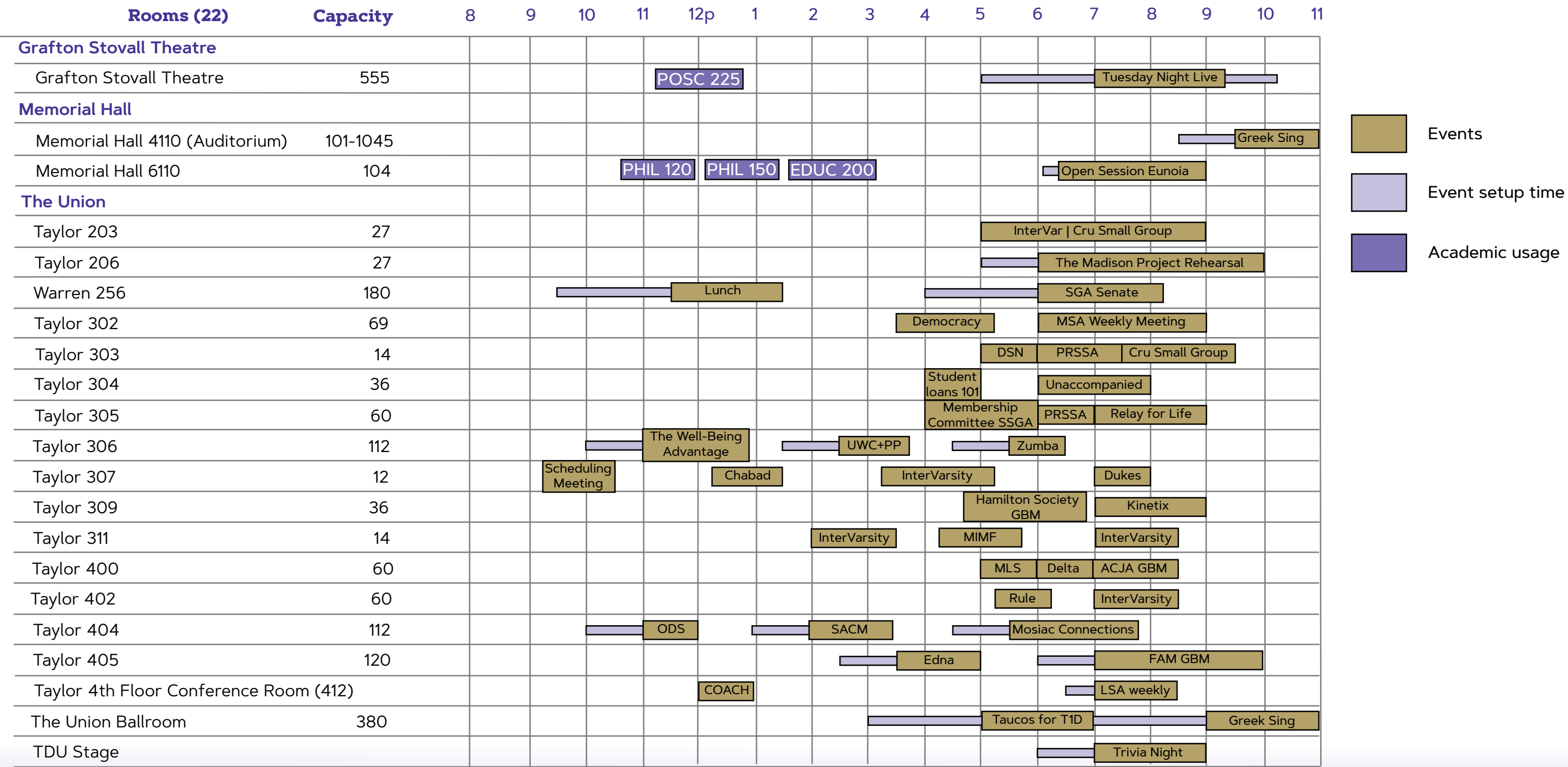
Reservations by group type



8,268
Total reservations

A day's events in The Union meeting spaces

Tuesday, March 3, 2026



Building numbers

Occupancy counts

Our student staff conducts a building walkthrough every thirty minutes during operating hours, which we call occupancy counts. During this process they inspect the building for any concerns, monitor ongoing events and do a physical headcount in common spaces. A total of **1,148** counts were conducted from August 14, 2025 to May 14, 2026. Below is a summary of the occupancy counts in our common spaces throughout the year.

Taylor Down Under (TDU)
39,390

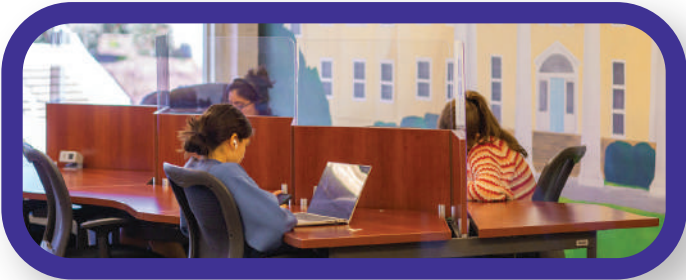
Lounging **30,100**

Billiards **7,819**

Switch **730**

Ping Pong **487**

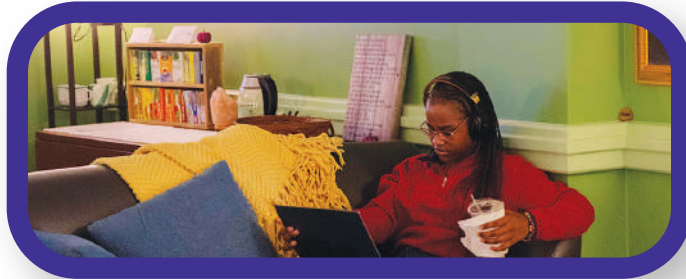
2nd Floor Lounge
16,965



Airport Lounge (4th floor)
11,326



3rd Floor Lounge
7,392



Living Room
926



Serenity Center
691

913,750 building visits during
the 2025-2026 academic year.

Notable events

- 10 Summer conferences
- Summer Orientation
- Weeks of Welcome
- Back to School Bash
- Fall and spring JMU A Cappella auditions
- Duke It Out 3 and 4
- 21 Better Conversations Together deliberative forum events
- SMAD Day
- Explore JMU Open House
- Lambda Alpha Epsilon conference
- Spring Orientation
- AAAD Interdisciplinary Conference
- CAL Career Readiness Conference
- Battle of the Bands
- Virginia Band and Orchestra Directors Association Conference
- JMU Admitted Students Open House
- Clothesline Project
- JMU Undergraduate Research Conference
- Taste of Africa
- Madison Leads Conference
- International Women in French Conference
- CFI May Symposium



Our people: Pro Staff professional involvement

University involvement

Hiring committee

- Megan Kite: Campus Programming Coordinator and University Program Board Coordinator search committees.

JMU student employment WBLE pilot

- Megan Kite

Student affairs presentation

- Joe DeBord, Student Employee Roundtable



Conferences, committees and professional development

Megan Kite

- Student Employee Development Committee, Chair of the Staff Development Committee
- Advisor of Phi Mu
- ACUI - Rethinking your role in campus well-being
- Careers in student affairs: Embracing new directions
- ACUI Regional Facilities and Building Management Seminar
- ACUI Student Employee Supervision Course
- Talent and Development: It's Okay to Be the Boss, Making their Job Fun Again, Goal Setting, Team Retreat, The Curious Communicator, Effective Meetings



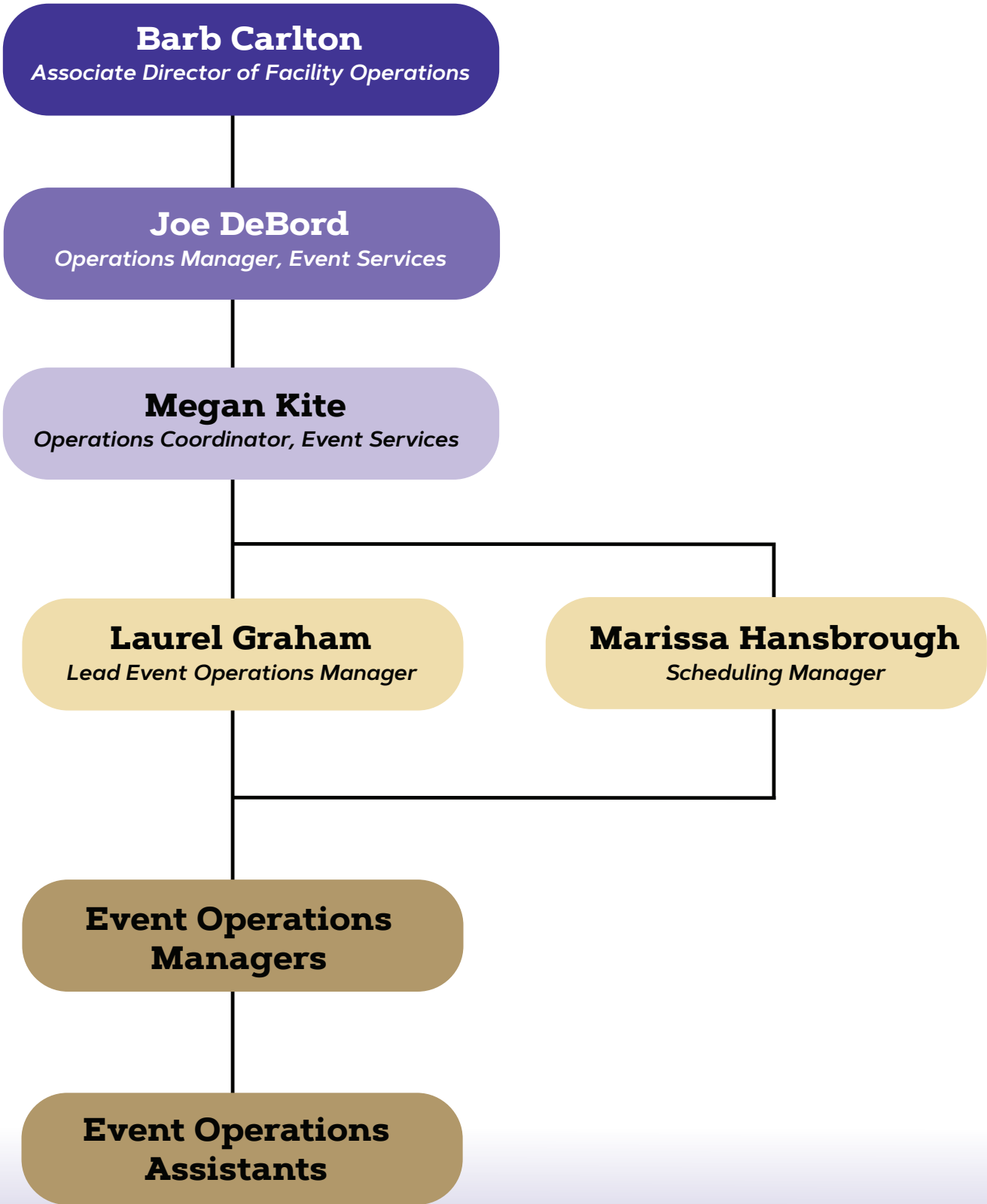
Joe DeBord

- Student Life Student Employee Development Committee, Student Life Assessment Committee, Chair of the Facilities and Events Policy Recommendation Committee
- 2025 VA Student Union Drive-in Conference
- 2025 ACUI Facilities and Building Management Seminar
- 2025 ACUI Region VI Conference Planning Committee – Logistics
- 2025 ACUI Region VI Conference
- 2026 JMU Mid Level Management Institute
- Volunteered for Summer Orientation Family Check-in, Dukes from Day One Pep Rally, Student Org Night, Student Org Annual Registration, Spring Career Fair, and Senior Candle lighting and Toast
- Completed The Places You Will Grow certificate program through Talent Development
- Talent Development sessions: Working Genius, Change Management, Take Ten



The Union

Organizational Chart



Barb Carlton

Barb provides strategic leadership and operational oversight for The Union facility, supervising facility operations staff and ensuring spaces are safe, accessible, well-maintained, and ready to support student and campus programs. She leads facility planning, maintenance, compliance, assessment, budget management, and emergency preparedness efforts while partnering with campus stakeholders to enhance operational effectiveness and user experience. She supports the operations staff in fostering collaborative relationships across the university, supporting continuous improvement initiatives that contribute to departmental and institutional goals, and strategic planning.

Joe DeBord

Joe oversees the daily operations of The Union with a primary focus on building maintenance, facility repairs, capital improvement projects, and ensuring the facility remains safe, functional, and welcoming for the campus community. He works closely with campus partners to identify operational needs, coordinate maintenance and renovation efforts, and enhance the overall building experience for students, faculty, staff, and visitors. In addition to facility operations, Joe supports Event Services by collaborating with event organizers and student staff to help ensure successful events and exceptional customer service throughout The Union.

Megan Kite

Megan provides event planning and coordination support for student organizations, university departments, conferences, and off-campus guests utilizing Union-supported spaces. Much of her work focuses on supervising the Event Operations team, which is responsible for setting up and supporting every event hosted within The Union. In addition, Megan oversees a structured Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) for her student staff, fostering career readiness, professional growth, and meaningful hands-on experience.

Laurel Graham

Laurel was the Lead Event Operations Manager. In this role, she would update the team on a weekly basis while assisting with the onboarding of new staff and leading team trainings.

Marissa Hansbrough

Marissa was the Scheduling Manager. In this role, she would manage student schedules and ensure shifts are covered for any necessary events within our Union-supported spaces.

Event Operations Managers

They supervise all Event Operations Assistants while maintaining standard building operations and leading event setups.

Event Operations Assistants

They maintain front desk operations and providing support to guests within the building.

Student staff by the numbers

12,625

hours supporting The Union, Grafton-Stovall Theater
and Memorial Auditorium events

248.75 hours in Memorial hall 147.5 hours in Grafton-Stovall Theater

Position breakdown

2 Lead Managers

Lead Event Operations
Manager, Scheduling Manager

15 Event Operations
Managers

25 Event Operations
Assistants

83.9%

Retention Rate



Successes

Work-Based Learning Experience Pilot

The Union’s team volunteered to pilot JMU’s Work Based Learning Experience model in the Spring of 2026. This was a more of a soft launch to better start implementing more intentional skill building and improve career readiness opportunities. We are currently the largest pilot group at 47 employees and are excited to see how we can adapt this to serve our manager team and assist them with growing their supervision skills.

Event Operation Manager onboarding

We provided this opportunity for our assistants to learn more about the manager role and what that entails. Emerging EOMs were required to shadow a variety of managers to include opening, mid and closing shifts and review the position description with their direct supervisor to understand the expectations. Once that was complete they would participate in a panel interview with professional staff, peers and supervisors. If offered a position, the student would demonstrate leading 3 shifts under the supervision of a manager. We received great responses for this new opportunity and students reported that they felt more prepared for their responsibilities and the expectations that came with the role. This allowed them to better determine if this was the right fit for them and their needs.

Our student staff members Andrew Cali, Meredith Stemen and Sydney Bezelik attended the Association of College Unions International (ACUI) Region VI Conference.

“The ACUI Conference helped inspire me and my impact in the world of student affairs for the university. It really helped me realize that no matter what I do in life, student affairs work can always be an option that will make me feel extremely fulfilled.”

- Sydney Bezelik



Challenges

Local students coverage and graduation

With the struggle of having only two local students that reside in the valley fulltime, it was very much a challenge to find coverage for breaks. This past year we decided to schedule all breaks at the beginning of the semester to ensure equity and give the students ample amount of time to plan in advance.

The Union had their largest group of 18 graduating seniors this year. With a huge loss in numbers, this resulted a longer hiring period with almost 30 interviews after a pool of 98 applications were reviewed.

Inclement weather

After multiple snow days and ice, The Union continued to struggle, as over 90% of our student staff live off campus and typically were not able to get to the facility to open it. Many students shared that their inability came from their complexes’ parking lots not being plowed for days and city transit was not operating due to the conditions of the roads.

Audio/Visual Team

With the hiring of Eddie Bautista as AV and Production Specialist in summer 2025, the Audio Visual (AV) team transitioned to reporting directly under professional AV leadership. Previously, the AV team operated as a student-led group of three within the Union Event Services team, primarily supporting events in TDU, Grafton-Stovall Theater, the Quad, Hillside Field, and other campus locations as staffing allowed.

Throughout the 2025-2026 academic year, the AV team expanded both its operational capacity and service footprint, increasing support for events across all three Student Life facilities. As part of this growth, the team's reporting structure shifted to Event Management to better align technical production services with event operations and facility support.

This organizational transition improved coordination between event planning and technical production, enhanced operational oversight, and increased the team's ability to provide consistent, high-quality AV support for campus programs and large-scale events. The expanded structure positions the team for continued growth in event production capabilities and customer service delivery.



Eddie Bautista
AV and Production Specialist



Our end of year celebration



Laurel Graham was the recipient of the Over and Above Award.

This prestigious award recognizes individuals who consistently go beyond expectations to enhance student life. Through ethical decision-making, critical thinking, and exceptional leadership, recipients create equitable, healthy, and connected communities within JMU and beyond.



Improvements

Lactation space

A dedicated lactation space was created to better support lactating individuals and caregivers. The new space provides a comfortable, private environment for nursing and feeding, along with bottle cleaning and sanitation facilities. The project was completed with support from Facilities Management, Student Life, and Health Promoting Campus Initiatives.

Taylor 3rd floor study spaces

Two former storage rooms were converted into private study spaces equipped with power access and countertop work surfaces. These spaces have become extremely popular with students and are consistently occupied throughout the day.

Expanded A Cappella AV support

Additional resources allowed the AV team to expand support for campus a cappella groups. Services that previously required outside vendors can now be provided in-house at no cost to student organizations. This expansion also creates valuable hands-on learning opportunities for student AV staff while enhancing the quality and consistency of event support.

4th floor conference room

Following the creation of the Faith Spaces and relocation of the Interfaith Chapel, the former chapel was renovated into a flexible conference-style meeting room. The new space increases meeting capacity and can be configured to accommodate a variety of group sizes and meeting formats.



Looking ahead

Directional signage

Improving building wayfinding is the highest-priority facility enhancement for the coming year. Guests frequently report difficulty navigating The Union due to its complex layout. Planned improvements include directional signage at elevator entrances and exits, additional wayfinding at major building entrances, updated building directories, and orientation graphics inside elevators.

Touchwork pilot

During the upcoming academic year, The Union will pilot an enhanced customer service model utilizing the Request IT platform. Each reservable space throughout the building will feature a dedicated QR code, allowing guests to quickly submit service requests or report concerns. Restrooms and lounges will also include QR codes for reporting housekeeping or maintenance issues, enabling faster response times and improved facility upkeep. The platform will centralize customer feedback, helping the team identify trends, prioritize facility improvements, respond more efficiently to guest needs, and make data-informed decisions about future upgrades and maintenance priorities.

Madison District

Long term planning for a new student union space as part of the Madison District in central campus is a high priority. This includes ensuring that student voices are amplified and professional staff knowledge is leveraged to build a student union that will support campus and community needs. This will also be a challenge to support campus in the transition phase.

Elevator challenges

The building's aging elevators continue to impact daily operations, event setup, and accessibility. Slow travel times and limited cab size create operational inefficiencies and make transporting equipment and accommodating emergency response more difficult. Long-term modernization of the elevator system remains a critical facility need.

Chiller replacement

Replacement of the building's aging chiller system remains a long-term capital priority. This project will improve HVAC system reliability, increase energy efficiency, and reduce the risk of major mechanical failures that could disrupt building operations.

Steam line replacement

Replacement of the campus steam line, originally scheduled for summer 2026, has been postponed until summer 2027. The project is expected to impact heating, hot water, and portions of the HVAC system throughout the summer, requiring operational planning and coordination to minimize disruptions.



Congratulations Kaylee Childs for receiving 3rd place in ACUI Steal this Idea for the 2024-2025 Union Impact report!

This Union Annual report is brought to you by Nora Vedder and JMU Student Affairs Communications and Marketing.



JAMES MADISON
UNIVERSITY®

The Union

MSC 3506, 170 Bluestone Drive
Harrisonburg, VA 22807
540-568-5555 Phone
theunion@jmu.edu
www.jmu.edu/union/index.shtml
2026