



MOREHEAD
PLANETARIUM+
SCIENCE CENTER

The University of
North Carolina at Chapel Hill



2025

ANNUAL REPORT

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR & CHAIR

DEAR FRIENDS,

At Morehead Planetarium and Science Center, curiosity remains our guiding star. This year, that spirit reached every corner of North Carolina. From the mountains to the coast, our outreach teams brought hands-on science learning to all 100 counties, ensuring that students and families experienced the wonder of discovery close to home.

Our Science for All initiative continues to lead this mission. The Saunders Science Scholars program in Gates County, now celebrating its first class of graduates, shows how community partnerships can open doors to college and careers in STEM. These students remind us that curiosity is powerful, potential is universal, and access makes all the difference.

While our reach extends statewide, our roots remain strong at UNC at Chapel Hill. Morehead continues to shape the Carolina experience by blending art, science, and storytelling that inspire both campus and community. This year's UNC Science Expo invited thousands to explore cutting-edge research, and the *I AM* performance by Grammy-nominated artist Radhika Vekaria transformed the dome into a space for reflection and connection.

Through Career Launchpad, we invest in the next generation of science communicators and leaders. With more than 150 student employees, Morehead stands among UNC's largest student employers, offering mentorship, professional training, and opportunities that prepare students not just for work, but for purpose. These Tar Heels carry forward Morehead's legacy of service and discovery across the state and beyond.

This year's success reflects the collective effort of our staff, students, and supporters. Your generosity sustains programs that make science accessible to all and ensures that Morehead remains a place where imagination meets opportunity.

As we look ahead to new exhibits, campus collaborations, and statewide celebrations, we remain steadfast in our mission to serve, to inspire, and to make science accessible for everyone. Thank you for being part of the Morehead story.



Todd Boyette
Director, Morehead Planetarium and Science Center



FROM THE ADVISORY BOARD CHAIR

This year reaffirmed what makes Morehead remarkable: purpose, partnership, and impact that reaches across North Carolina. Our board is deeply proud of the staff, students, and supporters who make this mission possible every day. Together, we're ensuring that Morehead remains both a cornerstone of Carolina's campus and a beacon of science education for all.

With appreciation,
Brigid Troan
Chair, Advisory Board



IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS

69,409

TOTAL VISITORS

37,184

GENERAL ADMISSION
GUESTS

31,954

GUESTS VISITED FOR
PLANETARIUM SHOWS

1,037

PLANETARIUM SHOWS
ATTENDED

100

NC COUNTIES REACHED

\$771,587

RAISED FROM
PHILANTHROPY

150+

STUDENT EMPLOYEES
MENTORED

43,693

ON-SITE & OUTREACH
PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

ABOUT MOREHEAD

MISSION STATEMENT

To serve North Carolina and beyond by bringing together the unique resources of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to engage the public for an enhanced understanding of science.

A BRIEF HISTORY & ASTRONAUT LEGACY

Morehead Planetarium and Science Center, located on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, opened its doors in 1949. It was one of the first planetariums in the United States and the first in the South, built with a gift from John Motley Morehead III, a UNC alum, chemist, and philanthropist. Designed to enhance science education, Morehead quickly became a landmark and has evolved into a lasting memory for many North Carolinians.

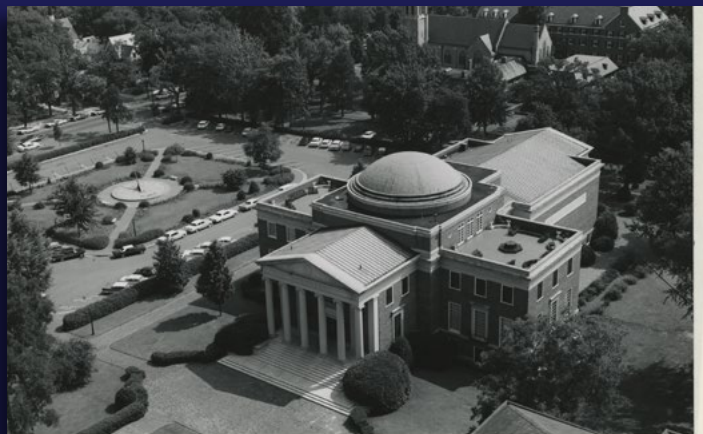
One of the most notable chapters in Morehead's history occurred during the 1960s, when it played a critical role in the early days of the Space Race. Between 1960 and 1975, Morehead trained over 60 NASA astronauts in celestial navigation. At the time, space travel was still new and uncertain, and astronauts needed to rely on manual navigation in case of equipment failure. Morehead's Zeiss star projector and expert staff provided realistic simulations of the night sky, helping astronauts learn how to identify stars and constellations for spacecraft orientation and emergency guidance.

Famous astronauts, including Neil Armstrong, John Glenn, and Michael Collins, trained at Morehead. The program helped prepare astronauts for various NASA missions, contributing to the success of landmark cultural and scientific milestones like the 1969 moon landing.

Today, Morehead Planetarium and Science Center continues its mission to inspire and educate through immersive planetarium shows, hands-on exhibits, and STEM education programs. Its legacy of innovation and service to science continues to thrive, connecting our past achievements in science education, regional outreach, and research with future scientific discovery.



Dr. Roy K Marshall (left), first director of Morehead Planetarium, inspects the Zeiss II with Tony Jenzano (right) and a Swedish technician (middle).



An aerial view of the Morehead building, circa 1950.



Morehead Planetarium Director Tony Jenzano training astronauts in the Full dome Theater, circa 1960.



A young guest views the retired Zeiss projector in the Gateway Gallery.



An aerial view of the Morehead building, circa 2016.



Guests enjoy an immersive show in the Fulldome Theater.

ROLE IN STEM EDUCATION

Morehead Planetarium serves as a vital leader in STEM education by fostering scientific literacy across North Carolina and beyond. Through immersive shows, hands-on exhibits, K-12 field trips, and statewide outreach programs, Morehead engages diverse audiences with accessible, high-quality science learning experiences.

As a unit of UNC at Chapel Hill, Morehead also connects cutting-edge research with the public, helping to cultivate the next generation of scientists, innovators, and informed citizens of the world.



Morehead employee, Tara, gives a ScienceLIVE! demonstration during a school outreach visit.

SCIENCE FOR ALL

STATEWIDE OUTREACH

As one of North Carolina's leading field trip and science education destinations, Morehead extends its mission far beyond Chapel Hill through a robust network of mobile programs, community partnerships, and statewide events. This year, our outreach teams delivered more than 420 programs, reaching over 13,800 students through hands-on science experiences that transform schools, libraries, and community centers into living classrooms.

At the heart of this work is *Earth & Beyond*, Morehead's traveling planetarium. This mobile dome brought the wonders of the night sky directly to students across the state, serving more than 9,400 students across 386 shows, a 20% increase in participation compared to the previous year. Alongside *Earth & Beyond*, programs such as *Science on Stage* and *STEM Connections* expanded our reach into new counties, combining engaging demonstrations with authentic conversations about science, technology, and exploration.

The impact of this outreach extends even further through the North Carolina Science Festival, which drew over 185,000 participants through nearly 1,300 public and K-12 events. From family science nights in small towns to large-scale celebrations in urban centers, the festival united schools, libraries, museums, and businesses in a month-long showcase of discovery. Together, Morehead's mobile programs

and festival partnerships create one of the largest coordinated STEM engagement efforts in the state, reaching every county in North Carolina and inspiring learners of all ages to see science as part of their world.

This year's outreach also reflected the diversity and energy of North Carolina's classrooms. In *STEM Connections*, 59% of participants identified as Black or African American and 13% as Hispanic or Latine, while *Earth & Beyond* achieved near gender parity, ensuring that both boys and girls see themselves represented in science. Each experience, whether inside a mobile dome or at a festival booth, reinforces our belief that curiosity is universal and that opportunity should be, too.

By engaging schools and communities in more than 30 counties, including several Tier 1* and rural regions, Morehead continues to demonstrate the power of mobility and partnership in expanding access to STEM education. These efforts are helping shape a stronger, more inclusive future for North Carolina's scientific workforce.

This statewide approach finds a shining example in Gates County, where a sustained collaboration has proudly grown into the Saunders Science Scholars Program, a model for what happens when outreach meets opportunity.

420

OUTREACH
PROGRAMS

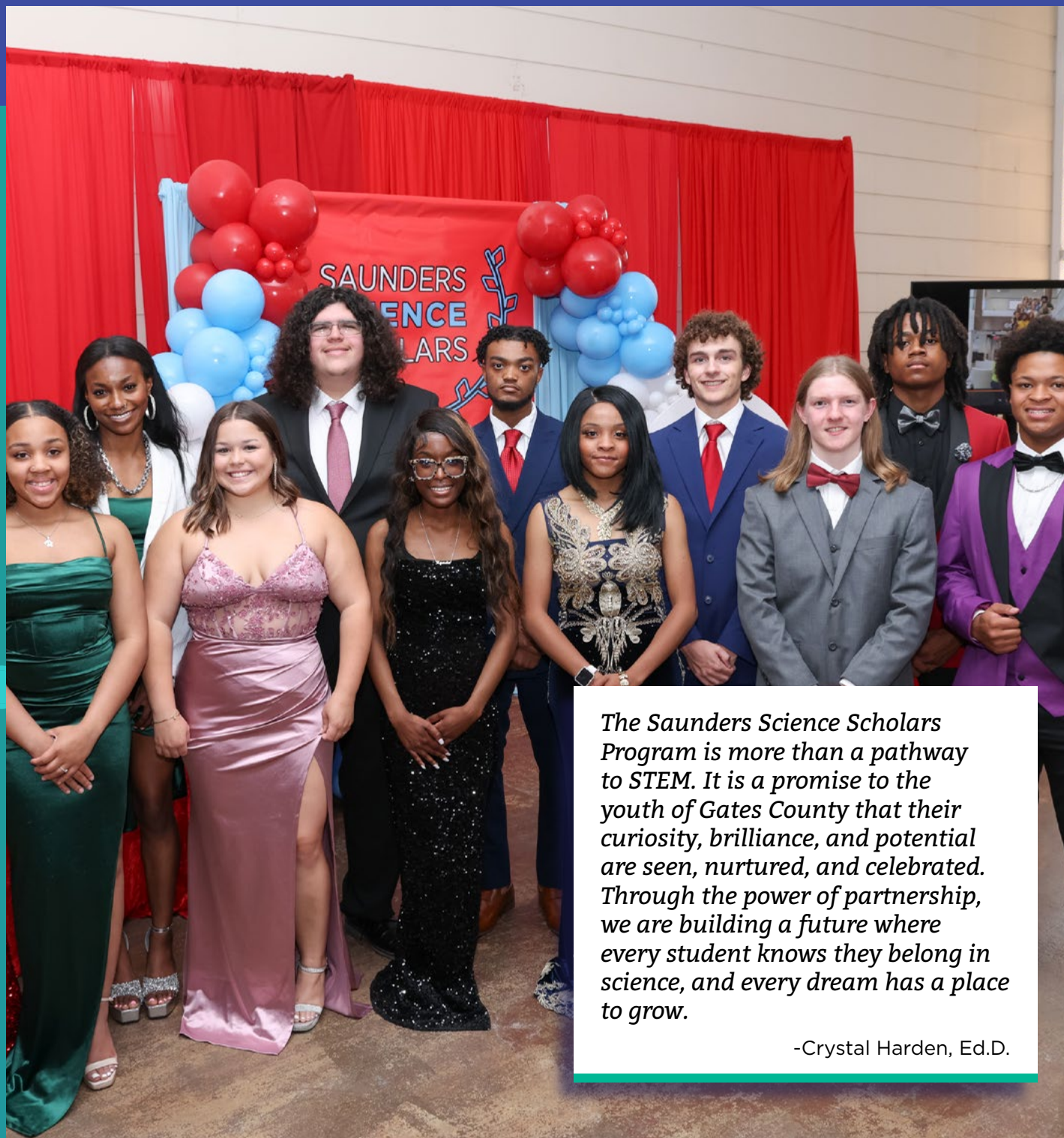
13,800

STUDENTS
SERVED

20%

INCREASE
MOBILE PLANETARIUM
(EARTH & BEYOND)

*The North Carolina Department of Commerce annually ranks the state's 100 counties based on economic well-being and assigns each a Tier designation. The 40 most distressed counties are designated as Tier 1, the next 40 as Tier 2 and the 20 least distressed as Tier 3.



The Saunders Science Scholars Program is more than a pathway to STEM. It is a promise to the youth of Gates County that their curiosity, brilliance, and potential are seen, nurtured, and celebrated. Through the power of partnership, we are building a future where every student knows they belong in science, and every dream has a place to grow.

-Crystal Harden, Ed.D.

SAUNDERS SCIENCE SCHOLARS GRADUATION

On May 31, we celebrated the first Saunders Science Scholars graduates from Gates County High School. Many of these students began their journey with us in middle school, and, thanks to the generosity of our partners and donors, all first-year college expenses have been fully covered for these graduates as they head to schools across North Carolina and Virginia.

Saunders Science Scholars is a unique partnership between Morehead Planetarium, Gates County Schools and the Gates County Community Partnership. The program helps students discover science in new and exciting ways through hands-on exploration and new enrichment opportunities.

SCIENCE FOR ALL, CONT'D.

ON-CAMPUS ENGAGEMENT

As a unit of UNC at Chapel Hill, Morehead Planetarium is not only a hub for statewide outreach but also a vibrant part of campus life. As one of the university's most iconic landmarks for over seventy-five years, Morehead serves students, faculty, and staff by offering unique opportunities to engage with science, discovery, and creativity just steps away from classrooms and residence halls.

Through shows, exhibits, and special events, Morehead enriches the Carolina student experience outside the traditional classroom setting. We also partner with academic departments, student

organizations, and campus initiatives to strengthen UNC's role as a leader in science education and public engagement.

By employing hundreds of Carolina students in educational and operational roles, Morehead functions as both a space for learning and a launching point for future careers. Our presence on campus underscores the university's mission to serve the people of North Carolina while inspiring Tar Heels themselves to explore new horizons and share the wonders of science with the world.

45

COUNTIES SERVED
ON-SITE FIELD TRIPS

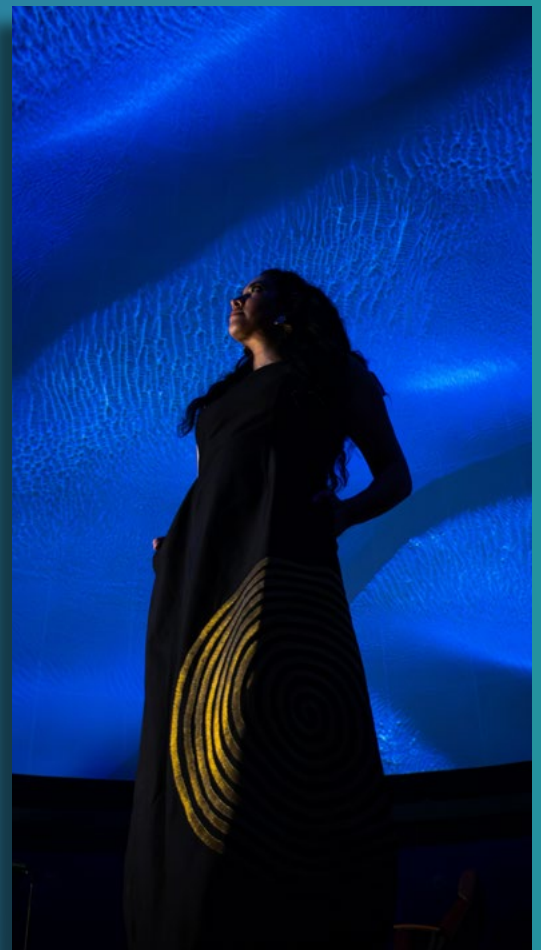
1,352

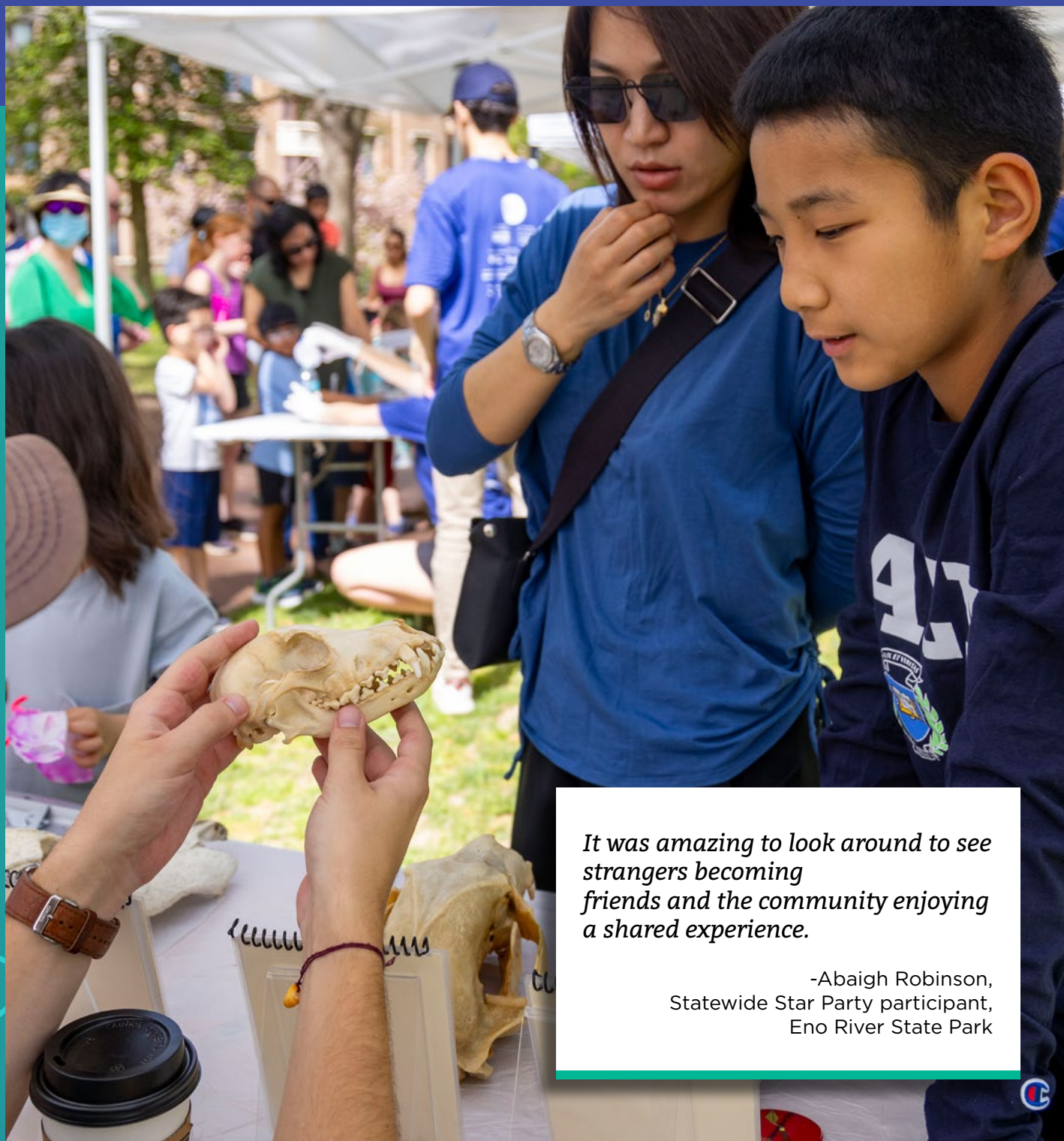
ON-SITE & OFF-SITE
SUMMER CAMPERS

I AM: THE EXPERIENCE

In the spring of 2025, Morehead proudly hosted Grammy-nominated artist Radhika Vekaria for *I AM*, an immersive experience that blended music, visual storytelling, and meditation. Projected onto the dome, *I AM* invited audiences to reflect on identity, personal connections, and the universe through a rich tapestry of sound and imagery.

This unique performance transformed our GlaxoSmithKline Fulldome Theater into a space of contemplation and wonder, offering students and visitors an opportunity to explore both the cosmos above and their inner selves.





It was amazing to look around to see strangers becoming friends and the community enjoying a shared experience.

-Abaigh Robinson,
Statewide Star Party participant,
Eno River State Park

NC SCIENCE FESTIVAL/UNC SCIENCE EXPO

Each spring, the North Carolina Science Festival hosts its signature event at Morehead with the UNC Science Expo. This event is one of the largest on-campus celebrations of science, technology, engineering, and math at UNC-Chapel Hill. For Morehead and UNC-Chapel Hill, the Science Expo is an opportunity to open the university's doors and showcase the groundbreaking research happening across campus

in a way that is approachable and engaging for the public. Visitors can meet real scientists, ask questions, tour campus labs, and experience the connection between science and everyday life. The event strengthens the bond between the university and the community, highlighting Morehead's role as a bridge between world-class research and the people of North Carolina.

SPACE THAT INSPIRES

1,037

PLANETARIUM SHOWS
ATTENDED

29,809

ON-SITE FIELD
TRIP VISITORS

EVOLVING EXHIBITS

Over the past year, we have made several upgrades to our exhibit spaces. These include: a hands-on installation called *Try Me*, a quiz game that tests visitor knowledge on Morehead trivia as well as current UNC science research, and an exhibit on the role of cilia in the human body.

The Morehead exhibits team also updated our organization's exhibit philosophy, so that we can create more engaging and interactive experiences around scientific processes and the tools involved. This philosophy promotes a shift towards "anchor experiences," interactives that provide a higher level of engagement and apply to a wider range of current science content.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Morehead will host a number of exciting, new events in the coming year. We will welcome Grammy-nominated artist Radhika Vekaria back to the Planetarium for another edition of *I AM*, dancing under the dome returns, with the newly instituted Meteor Mixer, and Snap Pea will curate a fabulous meal inspired by Morehead's past and future in November.

TECHNOLOGY INVESTMENTS

Upgrades to the GlaxoSmithKline Fulldome Theater at Morehead Planetarium will significantly enhance both the visitor experience and the institution's capacity to deliver cutting-edge science education. A modernized projection system will provide higher resolution imagery, improved color accuracy, and seamless motion—transforming the dome into a fully immersive environment where audiences can explore the universe with unprecedented clarity and realism. This will enhance the sensory impact of shows, making every presentation more engaging and accessible for a wide range of audiences, from school groups to lifelong learners.





GRAND PLANS FOR A GRANDER FULLDOME EXPERIENCE

Beyond improving show quality, a theater upgrade will expand Morehead's creative and educational potential. State-of-the-art technology would enable staff to present original, custom-designed fulldome content from digital catalogs, as well as new collaborations with artists, researchers, and educators. The upgraded system would also

open opportunities for live, interactive programming, such as real-time data visualizations, virtual astronomy experiences, and hybrid events that connect the planetarium to audiences across the state and beyond. This investment would reinforce Morehead's position as a leader in informal science education and as one of the most advanced planetariums in the world.

CAREER LAUNCHPAD

MISSION READY INITIATIVE

Morehead Planetarium is one of the largest and most active student employers at the university, offering undergraduates and graduate students meaningful opportunities to gain professional experience while contributing to one of the university's most visible public outreach units.

Working at Morehead provides UNC students with a unique blend of practical skills and professional development. In addition to flexible on-campus employment, students gain experience in public speaking, teamwork, leadership, and science communication. These skills translate across disciplines and career paths. Many students also find community at Morehead, collaborating with peers who share an enthusiasm for education and exploration.



MICRO-CREDENTIAL PROGRAM & MENTORSHIP

In partnership with the UNC School of Education, we seek to create a program that provides mentorship and experiential learning. This will help students learn essential science communication skills, enhancing their competitiveness in the job market.



3rd

LARGEST STUDENT
EMPLOYER

150+

STUDENT
EMPLOYEES





HELPING STUDENTS REACH FOR THE STARS

Student employees at Morehead are integral to our mission. They fulfill many roles, such as leading planetarium shows, guiding K-12 field trip groups, assisting with science programs both on- and off-site, and supporting marketing and operations.

As one of the largest employers of students at UNC-Chapel Hill, Morehead Planetarium is a space for learning transferable skills. We have employed hundreds of UNC students throughout the years who have gone on to have successful careers in a variety of fields.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

INCOME

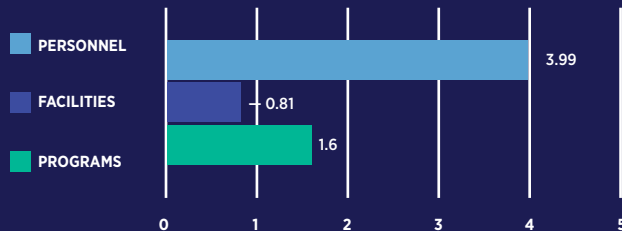
Category	FY25 Actuals (\$)	Notes
State Funding & Grants	\$1,332,000	Appropriations + F&A recovery
Gifts (Direct)	\$ 653,451	Donor contributions
Gifts via Foundation	\$ 118,136	Pass-through gifts via UNC Foundation
Endowment Payout	\$ 137,303	Annual endowment distributions
Earned – Tickets	\$ 925,472	Admissions revenue
Earned – Programs	\$ 336,473	Program/service fees
Earned – Merchandise	\$ 115,877	Gift shop sales
Earned – Memberships	\$ 46,672	Membership dues
Earned – Rentals/Events	\$ 23,551	Facility and event rentals
Other Sales/Transfers	\$ 300,000	Misc. sales, transfers, support services
Carryover from Prior Grants	\$ 789,138	Restricted grant dollars carried forward
Support from Fund Balances	\$ 1,050,000	Internal adjustments, non-recurring
Total Income	\$ 6,373,000	

EXPENSE

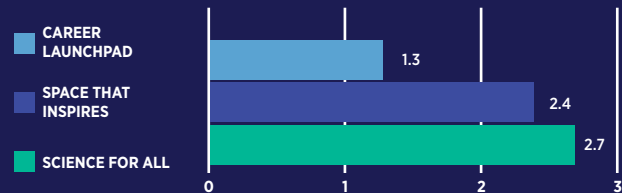
Category	Personnel (\$)	Program/Non-Personnel (\$)	Total (\$)
Advancement & Marketing	\$ 576,211	226,789	803,000
Business Administration	\$ 1,227,069	324,931	1,552,000
Visitor Experience	\$ 336,044	242,956	579,000
Science For All	\$ 1,850,638	807,362	2,658,000
Shared/Other Services	—	808,000	808,000
Total Expenses	\$ 3,989,962	\$2,410,038	6,400,000

FY 2025 ANALYSIS

Operational Analysis

in millions

Narrative (Strategic) Analysis

in millions

CATEGORY	FY25 ACTUALS (\$)	OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS:	NARRATIVE: (STRATEGIC PRIORITIES)
Income	\$ 6,373,000		
Expenses	\$ 6,400,000	Programs: 1.60M (25%) Facilities: 0.81M (13%) Personnel: 3.99M (62%)	Science For All: \$2.7M (42%) Space That Inspires: \$2.4M (38%) Career Launchpad: \$1.3M (20%)
Net Result	\$ (27,000)	Near break-even, with gap covered by non-recurring funds	Philanthropy is required to close structural shortfall

PROPOSED BOARD STRUCTURE AND STRATEGIC IMPACTS

Committee	Priorities Supported	FY26 Draft Budget Alignment
Executive Board	All Strategic Priorities	Oversight of full \$5.9 million
Membership & Marketing	Science For All Space That Inspires	\$2.66M Science For All (47.5%) \$2.13M Space That Inspires (38%)
Access & External Engagement	Science For All	\$2.66M Science For All (47.5%)
University Engagement	Career Launchpad	\$0.80M Career Launchpad (14.5%)
Special Projects	Space That Inspires	\$2.13M Space That Inspires (38%)
Alumni, Events & Fundraising	All Strategic Priorities	\$1.5M in unrestricted needed annually; \$35M+ for initiatives

SUPPORTERS & DONORS

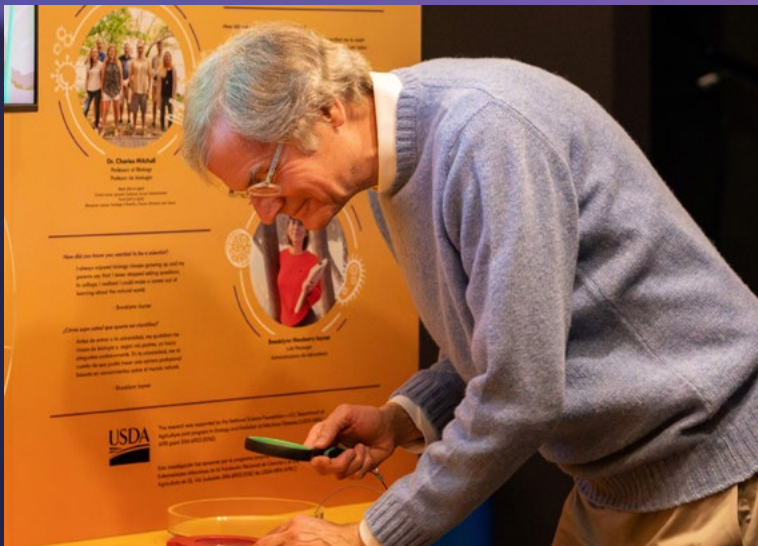
IT TAKES A VILLAGE

In addition to state funding, Morehead Planetarium relies on the generosity of individual and corporate gifts. These partnerships help us lead STEM education across the state, create transformative experiences for learners of all ages, and spark a lifelong love of science in the next generation.

SPOTLIGHT - FRANK PROCTOR

Frank Proctor (pictured below) is the founder of F3P Research, which focuses on investments in the energy sector, and he is the director of Lee-Moore Capital Company. He received his bachelor's degree in history from UNC at Chapel Hill, a master's degree in international relations from Cambridge University, and an MBA from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania.

A longtime donor and friend, Frank currently serves on Morehead's Advisory Board and chairs the University and Student Experience Committee. This committee works to strengthen campus-focused programming and outreach to make Morehead a meaningful part of every student's Carolina experience.



ADVISORY BOARD

Brigid Troan, Chair

Kenji Brantley

Anita Brown-Graham

Denise Hammock Clayton

Emily C. Frazelle

Tiffany Holung

David King

Stephani Page

Than Powell

Frank Proctor

Benjamin Saunders Jr.

Karen Villeda

Lori Beth Wittlin

James Yankaskas

Richard Hibbits, emeritus

Florence Peacock, emeritus

Charles Sanders, emeritus

LOOKING AHEAD

FREE UNC STUDENT ACCESS

Funding free UNC student admission to Morehead Planetarium is an investment in North Carolina’s future. Your gift ensures that all students can experience Morehead’s shows and exhibits, potentially fueling a love of STEM. By removing financial barriers, we open doors to curiosity, inspiration, and academic growth. Your support helps spark a lifelong passion for learning and empowers the next generation.

DOMES RENOVATION

Morehead is pursuing replacement of its dome and installation of new software systems in the GlaxoSmithKline Fulldome Theater. These planned upgrades will provide richer experiences for our guests and enable the deployment of high-quality programming in the theater. This effort will ensure that Morehead continues to set the standard for science education and storytelling, offering audiences breathtaking journeys through space while preserving its role as a destination for discovery for generations to come.

UPCOMING EVENTS & CELEBRATIONS

Next fiscal year, Morehead Planetarium will welcome a new show called Messengers of Time and Space and a new exhibit entitled Hidden Lives of Stars. These additions will elevate the visitor experience as Morehead moves into the next 75 years. We will also celebrate the return of our evening events, such as the new Meteor Mixer and curated dinners in our fulldome theater by Snap Pea Catering.

WAYS TO GIVE

Annual fund	Matching Gifts	Membership
Your unrestricted gift allows Morehead to invest strategically in areas of vital importance to the organization and its mission.	Increase your impact at Morehead through your employer’s matching gift program. Many employers will match all or a portion of your contribution. Some will even match gifts from retirees and/or spouses.	Purchase a membership and get special benefits for yourself at Morehead as well as hundreds of science centers and museums nationwide through the ASTC Passport Program. This giving option makes a great gift for young science explorers, astronomy enthusiasts, and families alike.

THE YEAR IN PHOTOS



Teen Science Café presenter discusses their work and engages with students.



2025 Science For All Summit attendees and presenters.



NCSciFest partners gather at the Governor's Mansion to kick off the festival.



Guests test their knowledge at the Quiz exhibit in the Breakthrough Hub.



A UNC Science Expo participant examining a brain sample.



Scouts Astronomy Workshop participants engage in a solar system activity.



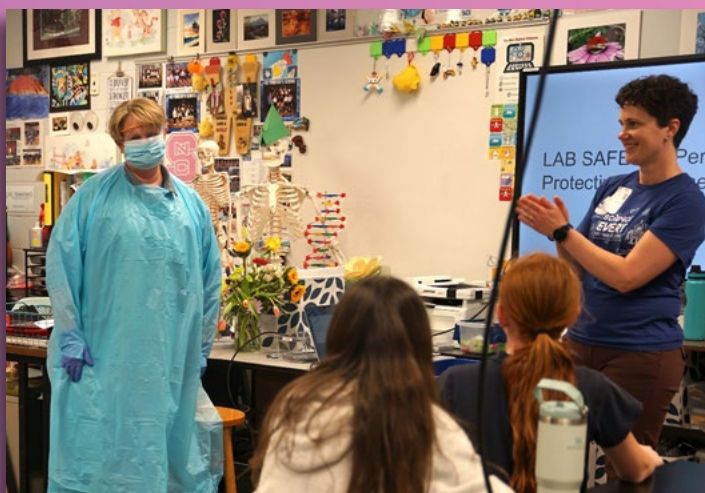
STEM Connections participants during the week-long program.



A Science in the Summer activity at Hillandale Elementary School.



Duke Energy Science Night host engages with NCSiFest spokesbot, Kelvin.



SciMatch scientist Shelby Currier presents at St. Timothy's School.



A Summer Science Camp student pets a turtle during Eco Adventures camp.



I AM: The Experience – Radhika Vekaria performs live in the Fulldome Theater.

THANK YOU

Thank you for being part of our community. Your support empowers Morehead Planetarium to spark curiosity, inspire lifelong learning, and expand access to STEM education across North Carolina and beyond. From awe-inspiring planetarium shows to hands-on outreach programs, your engagement fuels our mission and impact.

This year, we reached thousands of learners, supported educators, and created unforgettable experiences for visitors of all ages. We couldn't do it without you. As we look to the stars and the future, we are deeply grateful for your continued partnership on this incredible journey of discovery and exploration.

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VIEW OUR REPORT ONLINE

Scan the QR code to the right to get an in-depth look at this year's annual impact report. You'll find an accompanying video, debuted at the 2025 presentation.
moreheadplanetarium.org/learn-more/impact/

