

PantherOvation Final

My PantherOvation project aims to increase UNI students' involvement on and around campus, particularly by highlighting the UNI greenhouse and the biological preserves. The primary issue that I'm targeting is that UNI students need to spend more time connecting with their environment and engaging in things outside of their major. Being out in the world and connected with nature has many benefits, including relaxation. It is also one of the most significant ways to grow our desire to protect the world. The more people who are out in nature, the more people who will care to fight for it and defend it.

My initial plan was to focus more on the Preserves, but I realized that with the cold, the greenhouse would be more accessible to students. The greenhouse is also directly on campus, meaning students would be more likely to visit it than the Preserves. I chose to keep it simple by making a flyer that has a variety of plants from the greenhouse highlighted. The intention is that students would use this as a scavenger hunt to go through the plants in the greenhouse. I included pictures so that people would have some reference for what they are looking for. I also really like all the animals in the greenhouse, so I added them as a little bonus challenge at the end. For the Preserves, I just ended up highlighting the maps that are already on the website (UNI Biological Preserves). I thought it would be better to leave it up to students to plan their own hikes because it will give them a lot more time to actually explore what is around. My plan is for this to work similarly to the scavenger hunt, where students have to check off each trail system as they visit it. It will also allow them to customize their routes to fit their desired activity level. One way I evaluated the importance of this project was by asking around to see if fellow UNI students had had much previous experience with the greenhouse and the Biological Preserves. In general, students were typically familiar with the greenhouse, while many had not even heard of the Biological Preserves. This highlights the importance of this project. The flyer at the bottom of the page is what I intend to use to promote these green areas on campus.

One thing I believe that will be an important outcome of this project is getting students involved in nature and plants. There are probably limited people on campus who have actually engaged with the natural resources that the campus offers. Robin Wall Kimmerer's grammar of animacy is a good example of how shifting the dialogue around nature will allow us to be more connected to it and the environment. Her belief is that referring to plants and animals as "it" removes some of our kinship towards them. She thinks that we would all feel more connected to nature if we used human pronouns, like he or she, to talk about the plants and animals we find in nature (Kimmerer 2013). Although I don't expect many UNI students to begin referring to plants and animals as he or she, I do think that this project will allow students to feel a deeper connection to nature. Research also supports that nature can play a major role in increasing social connectedness, which in turn enhances our own well-being. People who live in locations with more green spaces often report feeling a greater sense of community (Russell et al. 2013). This suggests that this project will help students feel more connected on campus. This is particularly important for new freshmen or transfer students who haven't found their niche yet.

Getting out on campus and exploring new buildings that are unrelated to your major is also a good way to gain some appreciation for what other UNI students and faculty do on a daily basis. If students are able to gain a greater appreciation for what others are doing, it may help to increase collaboration and communication between departments. This is one of the things that we talked about as being the holy grail for solving wicked problems. Many campus issues could likely be solved if people were more willing to meet others outside their major and learn from people who may think in different ways. The Tools and Weapons Podcast with Brad Smith talked about this idea. The guest speaker emphasized the importance of "complex adaptive systems" to solving complicated problems, particularly those that will arise as technology changes. He mainly highlights that this should be done by incorporating people from various careers and political parties (Smith 2022).

My project has a few different challenges; some are logistical issues, while others are barriers I see to the actual impact of the project. Logistically, one of the most significant issues is that it is too cold to do more activities in the Biological Preserves. Many of my original ideas for this project revolved around the Preserves because I think they are underutilized by many UNI students. However, a significant amount of each school year is spent in the cold winter months, so it seemed more worthwhile to highlight the greenhouse and have the Preserves as more of an addition to the project. Another issue I could see occurring is that in my photos, some plants are currently in bloom, so they may appear a little different in the images than they would later on. This could make students frustrated when trying to complete it. A barrier to the actual impact of the project would come from how much time, effort, and intention students actually put into completing the scavenger hunt and challenge. If students just rush through it as fast as possible to get it done and don't actually take into consideration the broader goals, connecting with nature and gaining appreciation across departments, then much of the impact will be lost.

I believe that this project would be a beneficial way to get UNI students more involved in nature, their environment, and the campus as a whole. I think that it will provide valuable information to students, and I think it will be particularly impactful for underclassmen who are still learning their place in the campus community. I'm currently a senior, and I wish that these locations around campus had been advertised to me more as a freshman or sophomore. I believe that this is a good project idea that will help connect our campus to the environment around it, while also fostering collaboration and communication across various departments.

Works Cited

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Scavenger Hunt

1. Staghorn Fern
2. Dendrobium Hybrid
3. Euphorbiaceae
4. NuMex Easter Pepper
5. Passion Fruit
6. Agave Tree
7. Venus Fly Trap
8. Lemon Tree
9. Pink Chicken Gizzard
10. Dragon Fruit
11. Hanging Pitcher Plant
12. Fishbone Cactus
13. Sarracenia Pitcher Plant
14. Red Leaf Ginger
15. Polka Dot Begonia
16. Pennywort
17. Sensitive Plant
18. Old Man Cactus

Wildlife Bonus

1. Bearded Dragon
2. African Grey Parrot
3. Koi Fish
4. Golden-capped Parakeet

Images



Biological Preserves Challenge

1. Wetland Trails
2. Upland Trails
3. Tallgrass Prairie Trails
4. Daryl Smith Prairie Trails

