



REPORT

From the office of the...

Spark Coordinator

TO: Members of the Executive Board
FROM: Jane Luft
SUBJECT: Spark Report #3
DATE: Thursday, October 4th

YEARPLAN UPDATE

Wow! After a very busy August and September, Spark is up and running! This past month in particular has been extremely busy for our service, as it is for many, but we have had many successes and have overcome many challenges as well.

Since last report, Spark hired our incredible team of volunteers, hosted a Meet & Greet for the new team, and held a 2-day training weekend in early September. Our new volunteers helped with: Opening Ceremonies in residence buildings and tabling during Welcome Week, the Night Before Classes event, and Clubsfest before our official training even happened! All of these events were effective in recruiting students to register for our mentorship program as we reached our goal during Clubsfest and then opened pre-registration for next term. We also circulated our first beautiful guidebook that was all about Welcome Week and how to take care of yourself during that busy time.

Spark has also begun running sessions! We are now on the third week of the term. Attendance for sessions has been one of our bigger challenges as it has been quite low for the beginning of the year. Nonetheless, sessions have been smooth and we had a great opening week where groups ended their sessions at Altitude fire pit for a bonfire. Improving retention is one area we are hoping to work on in the next few months.

We also just ran our new event, Hike & Hangout, this past Saturday which was a big success. We nearly reached our maximum number of students we could accompany on the hike to Dundas Peak and also held a hangout for more students in Clubspace with snacks and games. This was a lot of fun and engaged a lot of first years when compared with previous Spark events that have occurred this early in the year.

Overall, this has been an exhausting, exciting, hectic, and FUN month or so for Spark and we are all very excited for the rest of the year and future events to come to life!

SERVICE USAGE

Since the last report, Spark has hired a team of 34 volunteers on top of our 6 executives, making a team of 40 Team Leaders. We interviewed 104 applicants from 163 written applications.

We hosted an event with Horizons called Night Before Classes that was difficult to collect exact numbers of attendees, but we estimate that around 100 students attended this event as the MUSC atrium was full of students.

We registered 200 students for first semester sessions and then opened up second term registration and registered 45 for next term. We have averaged 3-4 students per session group over the first 2 weeks of session.

We also hosted another Spark event for all first year students called the Hike & Hangout where we had a total of 27 students and 14 volunteers come out and either go on the hike or hangout in Clubspace with games and a movie.

Spark has 2,452 likes on Facebook, 628 followers on Twitter, and 297 followers on Instagram.

PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Guidebook #1 - Welcome Week: Our Promotions & Publications Coordinator, Surabhi Sivartnam, created content for a fabulous Welcome Week Guidebook that included a legend for reposit colours, a schedule for important Welcome Week events, and tips and tricks for taking care of yourself through such a busy week. This was a really cool resource that Spark created for first year students and was also a good way to encourage students to like our Facebook page (we could tell them to find the guidebook on our page).

Night Before Classes: This event, run in collaboration with Horizons, was hugely successful as we filled MUSC atrium with first year students and volunteers to help them locate their classes before the first day of school. We were able to register a lot of students in Spark through this event.

Clubsfest: Clubsfest this year was awesome as we had many students visit our table and sign up for Spark. We reached our goal during this time and began pre-registration at the end of the day.

Volunteer Meet & Greet and Training: The first week of class was busy for the whole Spark team as we hosted the Meet & Greet on Thursday, September 6th and then training on Saturday September 8th & Sunday September 9th. The Meet & Greet was a great opportunity for Team Leaders to meet the exec team, other volunteers, and their co-Team Leader in a fun environment. The volunteer training was also successful as we got through all our planned content with few technical difficulties.

Opening Ceremonies for Sessions: During the first week of our mentorship program, we run "Opening Ceremonies" where all students meet in Clubspace for large icebreakers and learn a bit about Spark before breaking off into their small groups. After their session, all students are invited to a bonfire at Altitude where we offered s'mores and other snacks. This was a lot of fun and ran very smoothly, aside from relatively low student turnout for the first week of sessions.

Hike & Hangout: This was a new event this year as we organized a social “Hike & Hangout” for all first year students to participate in. Students had the option of going on a hike to Dundas Peak with Spark volunteers leading the trip or they had the option of watching a movie, playing boardgames, and enjoying pancakes from LIFT Church in Clubspace. This event was a lot of fun and very successful for the first time Spark has run something like this.

UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Guidebook #2 - All Things Hamilton: Completed and ready for release this Friday, this second guidebook includes places to visit in Hamilton, how to get around using public transportation, and different events happening in the city. This will be a great resource for our volunteers to share with students to help them become more familiar with Hamilton and will also be shared on the Spark Facebook page to reach a wide range of first year students.

Spark Ambassadors: This is an initiative outlined in my Year Plan that I wanted to bring back from 2 years ago. We plan to begin recruiting first years involved in Spark to joining the Spark Ambassadors group during or just after the Fall Break so that we can begin having meetings in the second half of October.

Study Session Academic Event: Planned for October 29th, this event will be hosted in collaboration with Macademics. The event will take place on campus and will include snacks and study space. We will be recruiting the VP Academics from each faculty to help out with this event as well as having 5-10 volunteers from Spark there to help.

First Year Formal: First Year Formal is quickly approaching as it is booked at the Art Gallery of Hamilton for Friday, November 23rd. We are excited to have our first meeting with the newly elected FYC and our Events Committee to begin planning more of the details of the event. We also plan to include Spark Ambassadors in the planning process once the group has been assembled. Spark is also partnering with the Maroons for First Year Formal as they will be helping first years bus to the venue from campus.

BUDGET

<i>ACCOUNT CODE</i>	<i>ITEM</i>	<i>BUDGET / COST</i>
5003- 0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0.00
OFFICE SUPPLIES	REMAINING IN LINE	\$60.00
6501-0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$1,623.17
ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS	REMAINING IN LINE	\$1,376.83

6501-0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$1,700.00
ADV. & PROMOTIONS	REMAINING IN LINE	\$1,300.00

6802-0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$690.00
LEADER TRAINING	REMAINING IN LINE	\$60.00

<i>TOTALS</i>		
TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$6,810.00
TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$4,013.17
REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$2,796.83

Since the summer, a lot more of the budget has been spent as our events and sessions have begun.

In Annual Campaigns, \$1500 was spent on the venue deposit for First Year Formal, and approximately \$125 was spent on supplies for sessions and snacks for our Opening Ceremonies bonfire nights.

In Advertisements & Promotions, the biggest expense was the cost of our first guidebook for which I am still waiting on a final invoice for, but is estimated to cost between \$825 and \$990. This cost was a lot higher than anticipated as the cost of the guidebook designed by the Underground from last year was only \$165. We have met with the Marketing & Communications Director, Mike Wooder, to discuss promotional budgeting for the remainder of the year by planning out future campaigns and guidebooks. We have decided to make a change to keep costs of guidebooks lower by changing the format from a 16-page full guidebook to a summarized 4-page publication. We also are planning to move towards a template-based system allowing future Promotions & Publications Coordinators to simply update information and have the Underground make minor changes to the previous year's issue in order to keep the cost of future guidebooks low as well. That being said, I am anticipating overages in this budget line due to the fact that the past two years' Promotions & Publications Coordinators designed all promotional campaigns and Spark did not need to pay the Underground to design any materials. I have spoken to the VP Finance, Scott Robinson, about the anticipated overages and he has okayed us to spend our budget in a way that accurately reflect the costs to run Spark.

In Leader Training, I am again still waiting on a final invoice from the Underground for staff T-shirts but they are estimated to cost around \$500. The other \$190 was spent on lunch (pizza) for the volunteer training weekend.

VOLUNTEERS

A huge success for Spark in the past couple of months was hiring our incredible team of 34 volunteers! After reviewing 163 applications and

interviewing 104 applicants, we are confident in our team of dedicated and passionate Team Leaders.

One challenge related to volunteers was scheduling individual makeup training for individuals who had to miss part of our full team weekend training. There were several volunteers that had conflicts with different parts of the training weekend so I am still in the process of connecting with each of those individuals to make sure they are caught up on the important training material from the weekend. Since each individual missed something a little bit different I need to have almost all 1-on-1 meetings (rather than group meetings) with these volunteers which has posed a challenge within the busy month of September.

Another challenge is ensuring volunteers are available to attend their weekly training. Due to scheduling difficulties with our Sessions Coordinators this year, we had to schedule the weekday training on Wednesdays during a time that overlaps with regular session times. This means that volunteers with session on Wednesday nights are unable to attend this training and if they are also unavailable on Sundays (our other training day), they can really only attend half of the Wednesday training. Fortunately, this is only the case with one of our volunteers but we are hoping to find a better weekday training time for next semester.

We have been successful in having a few social gatherings for volunteers so far. We had a movie night during training weekend, a potluck after training this past Sunday, and many volunteers come out to our first event which they found to be a lot of fun. Among the executive team, we have had an executive team bonding dinner and are having fun in our meetings and Spark events together. For executive appreciation, I wrote each of them a letter of appreciation and presented them to each member during an executive meeting.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The main challenge we are facing is student attendance which is a little concerning for this point in the year. We had full registration for the fall term (200 first year students) but we struggled to get high attendance even on the first week of sessions which is typically the week that we have most students come out. We averaged about 4-5 students per group during the first week (total 93) and 2-3 students per group during the second week (total 49) which is a lot lower than we'd hope for early in the semester. We know that there were a few big midterms the second week which likely affected week 2 retention but the first week's attendance is a bit strange. We are currently brainstorming ways to increase student retention for the remaining weeks.

Another challenge we are facing is communication with the Underground. We have had good communication with the designer for our promotional material (Kayla DaSilva) but I have had troubles getting quotes and bills for materials I have ordered that don't have a standard price (e.g. rave cards, t-shirts, guidebooks, etc.) I understand that they are quite busy this month but I am

just hoping to have improved communication in the future so that I can budget accurately for the remainder of the year.

SUCSESSES

One major success was registering 200 students for first semester of Spark and another 45 for next semester! I had been worried about registration during Welcome Week because I found it difficult to promote Spark while also being a Residence Orientation Representative but we actually reached our goal of 200 students during Clubsfest on September 5th. After that, we opened up pre-registration for second semester sessions and had 45 students sign up in advance for term 2.

Another success was our volunteer training weekend. The weekend went very smoothly and we were able to get to know the team, enjoy some delicious pizza, and take the classic Spark team photo at the Edwards Arch. We also hosted a small but fun team social in Clubspace that weekend where we watched a movie and enjoyed some snacks.

Our first week of sessions was also deserving of a high five as we had a great time at the Altitude fire pit each night for s'mores, music, and fun times!

Finally, our event Hike & Hangout was a huge success! This is the first time Spark has run an event that focused on building social connections at this time of the year. We have typically run an academic workshop at this time in previous years but due to past low turnout, we tried a different kind of event and it went great! Shoutout to LIFT Church for making tons of pancakes for all our participants and volunteers. Students who went on the hike and students who hung out in Clubspace all had a great Saturday taking a break from studying.

OTHER

Nothing else to report. As per usual, feel free to reach out if you have any feedback/questions at spark@msu.mcmaster.ca or bring them up during Thursday's meeting! Thank you for taking the time to read this report.