



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## Spark Coordinator

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TO: Members of the Executive Board  
FROM: Jane Luft  
SUBJECT: Spark Report #4  
DATE: Thursday, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018

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### YEARPLAN UPDATE

Since last report, Spark has completed half of the term's weekly sessions which we have received a lot of positive feedback on. We released our second guidebook, "All Things Hamilton" and had a good level of engagement in this online resource. Spark also ran an event in collaboration with Macademics called "Back to the Grind" where we hosted a study session with snacks and upper year volunteers to provide first year students with a resourceful and quiet study space.

Some of our broader challenges have been with respect to budgeting, particularly planning for volunteer appreciation expenses. We also are still experiencing difficulties connecting with the Underground to clarify expenses and billings for the materials we have purchased.

Another significant change since last report is that we recently begun our Spark Ambassador program that offers first years that are involved in our weekly mentorship program the opportunity to be involved in some of the planning processes of Spark. We have scheduled weekly meetings where we plan to collect their feedback on Sessions, Events, Promotions and Publications. We also plan to involve them in promotional campaigns and event planning that might be interested in. We are really excited to continue with this program and see how our ambassadors shape Spark with their first year perspective.

Overall, Spark's operations have been smooth and exciting but we are experiencing a few difficulties within budgeting and communication with the Underground.

### SERVICE USAGE

- **Second guidebook:** 5,294 people reached, 1078 engagements.
- **Weekly sessions:** Averaging 2-4 students per group (20 groups total); completed 5 weeks of the program (halfway through the term).

- **“Back to the Grind” study event (run in collaboration with Macademics):** Approximately 50 attendees.
- **Spark Ambassadors (new program):** 7 first year students joined the group.

## **PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES**

***Sessions 1-5 Completed:*** We are halfway through the term of our mentorship program as we have completed the first 5 weeks of sessions. The session themes for these weeks have been: *Intro to Spark, Perspectives, Discover Your City, Academics & Resources, and Support & Wellness*. We have received positive feedback from these sessions and as well as some suggestions to improve them for next semester.

***Back to the Grind:*** This even took place Monday, October 22<sup>nd</sup> in collaboration with Macademics. Held in MUSC 311/313, this event was quite successful as the room was nearly full for the whole 2.5 hours and included snacks, coffee and study space. We had upper years wearing nametags with their name and program available to help first years but we found that most people kept to themselves to sit and study.

***Spark Ambassadors:*** We held our first Spark Ambassadors meeting on Tuesday, October 23<sup>rd</sup> and had quite a good turnout of students. Most of the students had signed up online prior to the meeting but we also had a few show up and sign up officially afterwards. In our meeting we went through some of the plans for the year as a group and chatted about why everyone wanted to be a Spark Ambassador. Our group seems very excited and keen to be a part of this program.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES**

***First Year Formal:*** Our biggest event of the year is quickly approaching as we are now less than a month away from the date (November 23<sup>rd</sup>). Through consultation with the newly elected First Year Council, we have chosen the theme for the event as “An Evening on the Red Carpet”. Ticket sales have just opened on the MSU website and we have promotions planned for the upcoming weeks.

***Closing Ceremonies:*** As the mentorship program comes to a close at the end of November, we will host “Closing Ceremonies” for Spark where all students who have participated in Spark throughout the semester are invited to an event to close off the year. We have booked Bridges for November 28<sup>th</sup> and plan to have snacks and activities that our Events Committee is going to be helping with.

***Second Term Registration:*** Last year Spark really struggled to register the typical number of first year students in our mentorship program for second semester so we are planning to start promo for registration a lot earlier than last year. We are aiming to start in early December and remain open until Sessions begin the week of January 21<sup>st</sup>. Some of our promotional strategies

we have planned will involve the Spark Ambassadors with a promotional video and spotlight features of Spark students.

**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
6102-0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$2,605.82
ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS	REMAINING IN LINE	\$394.18
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
<b>TOTALS</b>		
<b>TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		\$6,810.00
<b>TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		\$4,995.82
<b>REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		\$1,814.18

We have spent a significant amount of our budget at this point in the year but this was expected due to the use of Underground designers to develop our promotional materials. As mentioned in my last report, we are experiencing difficulty getting exact numbers from the Underground about our expenses so it has been difficult to budget without knowing exactly how much we have spent so far.

The Annual Campaigns line is also fairly well spent at this point as we have paid for our biggest expenses of the year (venue deposit for Formal, bonfire pit at Altitude, and Discover Your City cash for Session groups). We plan to support the high cost of First Year Formal by doing some sponsorship and fundraising and we will also be receiving \$1000.00 from First Year Council. Although we don't have many high cost events in the remainder of the year, I do anticipate spending overages in this line as well seeing as previous years often used the Adv. & Promotions line to pay for Annual Campaign costs but we will not have extra money left in that line this year.

One challenge I am facing is deciding how to spend money on volunteer appreciation. At this point, we have only spent money on the pizza at our

training weekend and the other (approximately) \$500 was spent on Team Leader shirts. This leaves me with very little money to spend on team socials and volunteer appreciation even if the \$500 is moved into Adv. & Promotions (this is being discussed). Seeing as Spark volunteers maintain a very high level of commitment throughout the entire school year and we only had one Team Leader from last year re-apply, I feel it is very important for us to show adequate volunteer appreciation this year.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

Our team of volunteers is really phenomenal, and we've had very few challenges in terms of volunteer dynamics.

One challenge has been budgeting for volunteer appreciation socials and small gifts/food/etc. as mentioned above in the "BUDGET" section. Another challenge has been supporting TLs if they are struggling with student retention since it can be discouraging to have little or no students attend your session. One way we are trying to support TLs through this challenge is by meeting 1-on-1 with every TL and strategizing with them ways to improve student turnout and hear about any other challenges they are facing.

In terms of successes, we've had great volunteer involvement in our Spark events so far which has been challenging in previous years. Josh Marando, our Volunteer Coordinator, and myself have been meeting with each of our 40 volunteers to check in and see how things are going with Spark so far. This has been really helpful in collecting feedback and has served to support TLs in their role. Another success we've had was a fun Executive Team bonding excursion to Halloween Haunt at Canada's Wonderland.

## **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Our main challenge is still student retention. 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 midterm season also has an effect on student attendance so we have tried having TLs invite students to just come for a "study session" so that they are remaining connected to the program, even if they don't necessarily have time to break from studying. One strategy we have brainstormed to improve attendance within this semester is having a "Bring your friend to Spark" week which would help to create bigger groups in session and also expose new first years to our service. Strategies we plan to implement to improve retention for second semester are: allowing students to sign-up in groups, beginning registration very early, and making bigger groups of students to start.

Another challenge we are still facing is communication with the Underground. We have had good communication with the designer for our promotional material (Kayla DaSilva) but I am still having 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 getting our bills requires the use of computers that designers use but it is getting really difficult to accurately plan the budget for the remainder of the year as I still have not seen any invoices or bills after asking and following up a couple of times. I am hoping to have improved communication in the future.

## **SUCSESSES**

One major success within Spark has been student engagement, despite low student attendance at Sessions. Through meeting with TLs, we have heard that the students who have been coming consistently to their weekly sessions have been very engaged and are really enjoying the program. We also have had much better turnout at our events for all first years this semester compared with previous years.

Another success is our second beautiful guidebook, “All Things Hamilton”. We reached 5,294 people and had 1078 engagements with our Facebook link to the guidebook indicating that our reach is going beyond the students attending session every week.

## **OTHER**

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