



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## Spark Coordinator

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TO: Members of the Executive Board  
FROM: Jane Luft  
SUBJECT: Spark Report 5  
DATE: Thursday, November 29th

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### YEARPLAN UPDATE

Since last report, Spark has completed all of the term's weekly sessions which we have received a lot of positive feedback on. We ran our biggest event of the year, First Year Formal, last Friday which was HUGELY successful and very rewarding after months of planning.

Some of our broader challenges have remained the same as we've struggled with the budget and with student turnout for the sessions program. We have done a lot of brainstorming and had discussion as an exec team to address this challenge for next term. We have improved upon the previous challenge of communication with the Underground as we have made changes to be highly specific in our Intake Forms to avoid miscommunication. We are still unable to clearly understand our spending at Underground but have accepted that it is a widespread challenge among services and we can work around receiving regular, exact updates on our expenses at the Underground. Another challenge we are experiencing is booking enough rooms for sessions next semester.

Overall, we ran a very successful event, have learned from last semester's challenges and have strategized to make improvements for next semester, and are very happy with what Spark has done over the first term of the school year!

### SERVICE USAGE

- "Reached" 10,655 through Facebook posts last month
- 1,843 engagements and 316 comments on First Year Formal Ticket contest
- 298 First Year Formal tickets sold, 278 attendees
- 10 Team Leader discounted tickets sold
- Averaging 2-3 students per group
- 48 students pre-registered for next semester's session program

### PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

***First Year Formal:*** Spark's biggest event of the year is done! This event involved a huge amount of incredible planning done by the Events Coordinators, Emily & Larissa, who collaborated with First Year Council, Maroons, Spark Ambassadors and the rest of Spark to run this hugely successful event. We sold out tickets 6 days before the event and were able to focus on the fine details of the event during the days leading up to it. We tried out the new ticketing system with the MSU's scanner app which worked extremely well and made entry to the event very smooth. The formal itself included hors d'oeuvres, 2 free soft drinks per person, dancing, photos, and games. We found that the more casual food setup (as opposed to a full sit down meal) was ideal and allowed for us to keep ticket costs as low as possible for first years. We also found the room with different board, card, and video games was a big hit for a lot of first years and provided a good range of activities available for the attendees. The Art Gallery as a venue was also popular and a good choice for our style of event. Overall, we received a lot of positive feedback from first years and think that majority of students in attendance had a very memorable night.

***Sessions Program Completed:*** This week marks the final week of our sessions program for this semester. The session themes for the past 5 weeks since the last report have been: *Teamwork & Compromise, Social Awareness, Life After Spark, Change & Transformation, and Oh the Places You'll Go.* We have received positive feedback from these sessions especially on sessions involving food and discussions about housing.

***Closing Ceremonies:*** This event is a casual coffeehouse at Bridges café that wraps up the semester for all first year students involved in Spark. The event involves snacks, live performances, and the opportunity to socialize with anyone involved with Spark throughout first semester.

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

***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.

We also have been examining this semester's strategy as we struggled to get high student turnout since the beginning of the semester and want to improve our strategy for next term. One way we plan to help improve student turnout is by allowing students to complete a group registration form and request that they be placed in a group with friends. Feedback from previous Team Leaders has shown us that groups with high retention often have groups of students who already connect with one another and can then go to their weekly Spark session as a group rather than by themselves. We also plan to keep registration open right up until sessions begin and potentially after the first week of sessions. One last strategy we are planning to try is to reduce the number of Spark groups per night from 5 to 4. This way, Each Spark group will

start out with more students and as the groups inevitably decrease in size, there will hopefully still be a solid group of students that want to stay connected to the program.

**First Semester Feedback Forms:** Part of my Year Plan involved collecting feedback from students involved in Spark’s mentorship program to identify ways we can improve it. I am currently finishing up the survey and am planning to incentivize completion of the survey through a small raffle prize so that we can get a better understanding of how to best serve First Years. I plan to send this feedback form to all students who originally registered in Spark, emphasizing in the email that we also really want feedback from students who never came to session or came to only 1 session since we often don’t hear from these students but this is a huge group of first years that we may be able to better support.

Not only are we looking to collect feedback from first year students who registered for our mentorship program, but we are also hoping to collect some feedback on the events we ran this semester, namely the Hike & Hangout, Back to the Grind and First Year Formal. While these events were all successful and had quite good turnout, there is always opportunity for improvement and it is valuable to understand why these events had high student attendance so that we can use that information when planning future events.

## 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	\$3,044.00
ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS	REMAINING IN LINE	-\$44.00
6501-0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$2,940.55
ADV. & PROMOTIONS	REMAINING IN LINE	\$ 59.45
6802-0125	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$725.00
LEADER TRAINING	REMAINING IN LINE	\$25.00
<b>TOTALS</b>		
TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$6,810.00
TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$6,664
REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$146.00

As noted above, a lot of the budget has been spent so far. In Annual Campaigns, we are over budget according to my Budget tracker, however, this includes the estimated invoice from the Art Gallery of Hamilton for which I am still waiting to receive exact numbers. The actual number will depend on the number of drink tickets used by our guests but the estimate is based on the maximum number that could have been used. That being said, I am still expecting to spend over budget in Annual Campaigns as this is the main budget line for all of Spark's Sessions programming and its events during the year. We have run our highest cost events and campaigns but we still have a full semester of sessions and likely two more small events to run next semester which will bring us over budget.

The Adv. & Promotions budget is also nearing the \$3000.00 point but the expected overages in this line have been discussed in detail and approved in previous meetings.

Finally, Leader Training is nearly used up as well because the cost of T-shirts (estimated \$500) and lunch for training weekend from the beginning of the school year. Considering that we want to show some volunteer appreciation for the end of each term, I will likely be spending over budget in this line as well to buy snacks and tokens of appreciation (cards, team photos, and a small treat) for our volunteers.

## **VOLUNTEERS**

The main challenge with volunteers is supporting them as they struggle with student attendance. A few groups have had no students come to session for a few weeks which can be very discouraging and makes attending training and fully engaging with Spark a challenge. Our Volunteer Coordinator, Josh, and I have done 1-on-1 meetings with all of our volunteers to check in and see how we can better support volunteers who are experiencing these challenges. We have also met with each other quite a bit to discuss strategies for improving both student turnout (strategies described in the *Second Term Registration* section) and supporting Team Leaders to make their experience with Spark as valuable as possible. One strategy we are considering is restructuring the way we run training for Team Leaders. Right now it is a weekly one-hour training run by the Sessions Coordinators but for Team Leaders who are sometimes finding trainings unnecessary, especially if they have low student turnout, we are considering switching to bi-weekly trainings with drop-in "office hours" that volunteers could visit to ask questions about the upcoming session. We haven't made any decisions about this yet and are working with the Sessions Coordinators to address this challenge.

## **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

As usual, the main challenge for Spark this semester has been student turnout for weekly sessions. This has been discussed in detail in previous reports and strategies for addressing this challenge have been outline in the *Second Term Registration* section).

Another usual challenge is the tight budget, especially with Annual Campaigns and Volunteer Training/Appreciation. Formal is a huge expense for Spark and

as this is only the third year it has been run and has had varying levels of success it was challenging in itself to budget. According to our Formal budgeting, all costs and funds included, Spark spent around \$1800 on running the event. This uses up a huge amount of the money we have to spend on all our other programming for the year and is leading to a really tight budget. I plan to make recommendations for some significant changes in budgeting structure for Spark next year as it was quite confusing for me this year and a lot of hidden expenses made me underestimate the cost of running our usual programming (e.g. ticket sales money and money spent on food for Formal is excluded from last year's budget tracker; about \$500 of Volunteer Appreciation is under Adv. & Promotions).

Another major challenge has been booking rooms for second semester. MUSC has recently changed their policy (or just changed their policy with us) about the number of hours that we are allowed to book per week. Spark has booked 4 rooms in MUSC from 6:30-8:00pm Monday-Thursday for the past 3 years but MUSC has brought up that due to the high demand for rooms, they are only allowing us to use 8h of room booking per week which only gets us 1 room per night. Since we are changing the structure of Spark to 4 groups per night instead of 5, we are only missing 2 extra rooms per night now but this is still a challenge as Kristina and Josh have already met with MUSC to discuss the issue and they aren't willing to give us any more time per week.

## **SUCCESSSES**

I already wrote about it but First Year Formal was AMAZING! The night really could not have gone better and the first years who came seemed to have such a good time, many staying until the very end of the night! While this event is very expensive, it is a very engaging event for first years and could definitely be refined to be less of a financial burden for the MSU while still providing a great social opportunity for first year students. We saw many people looking to buy tickets after the event sold out indicating it may have the potential to be a slightly bigger event in the future! Shoutout to our talented Promotions & Publications Coordinator, Surabhi, for her awesome work promoting the event and creating promo schedules for Spark exec, volunteers, Ambassadors, FYC, Maroons, WW Planners, AND RezLife!

Another success is student engagement for the entire semester. While turnout for sessions has been low since the beginning, there are a lot of groups that consistently have students come out every week and take a lot away from each session. Big shoutouts to the Sessions Coordinators, Anika and Nikhail, for designing 10 incredible sessions, preparing material bags Monday-Thursday EVERY week of the semester, and running 2 engaging volunteer trainings every week. While numbers may be low for sessions, the students who experienced the program really loved it and kept coming back all term!

## **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 and have a lovely winter break!