



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## MSU Spark Coordinator

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TO: Members of the Executive Board  
FROM: Mike Gill  
SUBJECT: MSU Spark Report 1  
DATE: September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015

### UPDATE

It's been an incredibly busy, and equally rewarding summer for MSU Spark. Our Executive Team has poured hours into their respective portfolios, and over the next month we'll finally begin to see some of the fruits of that labour. However, as much of our service has yet to begin operating, most of this report will focus on items that have laid the foundation for our operation, as well as upcoming events and opportunities.

### SERVICE USAGE

We will have 240 students attending our weekly sessions. Stay posted for more details!

### PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

#### Hiring Team Leaders

Spark received 213 applications for forty Team Leader positions. We provided 116 interviews. Of the ~100 individuals who did not get an interview, 25 of them requested and received personalized feedback on their application.

We built our interviews around three key competencies for Team Leaders: Reflection and Openness, Teamwork and Communication, and Problem Solving. Applicants were then sorted into categories based on previous leadership experience as well as year of study. We guaranteed 8 spots to second year students, 7 spots to upper years with little formal leadership experience and 7 spots to upper years with some leadership experience, but who had little formal mentorship experience (i.e. they might have planned events, but had not attended multiple leadership conferences). Then candidates were then compared within these groups, with the caveat that someone from a "less experienced" category could take a space from someone in a more experienced category. This approach ensured we had a diverse team in terms of age and prior involvement. A total of 33 team leaders were hired, so that we would have 40 functioning Team Leaders when exec were included.

Of the ~70 individuals who did not receive the position, 51 asked for written feedback. This was likely a result of my heavily encouraging everyone to ask for feedback – something I suggest future PTMs continue. A total of 18,000 words of feedback were provided, which is somewhat ridiculous, but was also very rewarding. Quotes supporting the value of this feedback are listed below:

**“Thank you very much for your feedback. It was so generous of you to take the time and discuss my application with me. I just wanted to add that I think it's great that you guys provide feedbacks for the applicants, it will most certainly help me with my future applications.”**

**“Thank you so, so much for the detailed and specific feedback. I can't express how helpful it was, and how appreciative I am of the time you and the team took to review my performance! This has definitely been the best interview experience I've had thus far, and I can't wait to apply these techniques and recommendations in the future.”**

**“Thanks for the feedback, really appreciate how in depth you got. I realize now some of my shortcomings during the interview and will definitely look over this again before applying for a similar position.”**

**“I found your advice to be very useful in terms of suggesting ways that I could use to help improve my responses. For future reference, I will definitely remember to apply earlier and also keep these considerations in mind. Thanks again for the constructive criticism as it will surely come to good use for other opportunities. I wish you and the Spark committee another great year ahead.”**

### **Revising the Operating Policy**

Spark's Operating Policy was revised, reviewed by Jess and Giu, and then passed through the SRA this summer. These changes empowered Spark to engage in activities beyond just our transition and mentorship program – specifically Workshops and Online Resources – which allow our service the potential to impact far more students in the year ahead. We also introduce language that allows our service to preferentially provide spots to students from different demographics that may require more support: international students, first generation students, and off campus students.

### **Guide Book #1**

Our first guidebook was conceived, designed, and released to the public in Mid-August. This presented a very rounded, realistic, but reassuring picture of entering into McMaster. We received extensive positive feedback on the document, and are excited to produce similar relevant materials in the year ahead. However, one thing to note here is that, due to challenges with the underground, we ended up being required to pay for roughly 5 hours of design time. This is more than we anticipated, and likely later issues will require far less. We also saw our initially planned 4 weeks of design and feedback time be stretched out over 7 weeks, which has shifted production timelines for the remainder of the year. In general though, this is a very promising avenue, and we're excited to explore it further.

### **Team Leader Training**

Team Leader training took place over the weekend of September 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. We employed a mix of energizing active sessions alongside many discussion based sessions to try and keep our team interested while also ensuring our Team Leaders were able to shape the discussion with their large amount of expertise. We also included programmed time for Team Leaders to share their ideas with the service, as well as rotational sessions focused on specific skills such as applying AOP to the Spark setting, understanding

campus resources, and maintaining a supportive relationship between Co's. The idea of mentorship was explored and (hopefully) de-stigmatized.

We've received very strong positive feedback on the training so far. In future, we may consider doing three shorter days of training, or potentially doing morning and afternoon sessions so that team leaders are able to stay energized for longer, given ~16 hours of training is an extensive amount of time. Beyond that, providing food and caffeine is absolutely necessary (in my opinion).

### **Spark Student Registration**

Spark student Registration was, in my opinion, an outstanding success. We received 273 total registrations, for a total of 240 spots (we are planning to have groups of 12, as 10 is the ideal number in a session, but we expect some students to not attend each week). Of those 240 students who obtained a spot in the program:

- 30 are registered international students (12.5%)
- 53 are first generation students (22.1%)
- 67 are off-campus students (27.9%)

These are, in my mind, fairly impressive statistics. We partnered with the SSC in order to send out emails to all first year international students as well as first year first generation students. I believe that this is a very beneficial relationship to maintain, and I hope that it may prove even more valuable in second term, when more students realize that they may need support during university.

The 33 students who were unable to fit in this term's program were all students who had already benefitted from building relationships at Horizons. Further, we are guaranteeing them space in our Winter session, should they choose to apply. We will also be adding them to the mailing list, and regularly updating them on Workshops as well as other events that can support them over this term and help them connect with the Spark Community.

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

### **Opening Ceremonies**

On September 20<sup>th</sup>, we will be introducing the Fall Spark Cohort to our program through our 2 hour long Opening Ceremonies. Ehima Osazuwa will be speaking, Rebecca Raminhos – a past student and Spark Exec – will be speaking, and I will be introducing the program.

Beyond this, students will get a chance to meet with their groups for the first time, and start building the comfort which is necessary to run effective sessions.

### **Academic Success Workshop**

On September 27<sup>th</sup> we will be hosting our first large workshop. This event will be open to all first year students, and will feature sessions on expectations, resources, and study habits. We've partnered with the SSC to present the resources they provide to students, as well as faculty societies to introduce students to peers in their own academic discipline.

The workshop will end with faculty specific Q and A time. The event itself will run from 6:30 pm until about 9 pm on the Sunday – which is the same time we plan to have all of our workshops. The rationale is here is that most students are around on Sunday nights, where as there are likely conflicts at other points during the week.

**Team Leader Social**

This Friday, the 18<sup>th</sup>, we will be hosting our first Team Leader social in the form of a relaxed board game night. Fostering TL cohesion is a large priority for our Exec this year, so it’s exciting to see us taking steps towards this so early in the year.

**BUDGET**

Category	Ytd	Pr. YTD	Approved Budget
Special Projects	\$0	\$0	\$4,000
Advertising Promo.	\$1,500	\$0	\$2,400
Leader Training	\$138.43	\$0	\$500
Wages	\$2556.61	\$2402	\$6600

**VOLUNTEERS**

We have yet to have substantial challenges in this area. Finding a time to accommodate training for 20 people at a time was challenging, as so as a result we’ve resorted to Sunday evenings from 4:30 – 5:30 and 5:30 – 6:30. These times were set long before the shifts in SRA, so we may need to adjust as a result.

**CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Our budget, especially the resources devoted to promotional materials, is very quickly evaporating. Given that we’ve more than doubled the staff we need to train, and the students we need to support – as well as added two entirely new pillars to our service which allow us to engage with many, many more students on top of this (Events, and our Online Publications), it’s not really a surprise that the budget created last year is insufficient to meet our needs.

As a result of this, as well as a large, spectacularly exciting event that we plan to hold in late January (First Year Feedback Forum), we will likely be looking to apply for additional funding in the near future.

**SUCSESSES**

The team is very excited and cohesive. The responses from training have been positive, and individuals are very excited to contribute in ways beyond their explicit role.

During Spark Student registration, we had a week with over 12,000 post reach and thousands of clicks / interactions.

**OTHER**

I’m excited to hear your feedback!