



REPORT

From the office of the...

MSU Spark Coordinator

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

UPDATE

Our team knew coming in that September would likely be one of – if not THE – most challenging month of the year. The Exec handled it in spectacular stride. We effectively ran 6 events over the month, as each night had a Camp-Fire event after their first sessions, in addition to Opening Ceremonies. We managed new logistical challenges associated with our team doubling in size, as well as the reality that very many of our TLs didn't really know what our program would look like. We've continued to push forward with our online resources and session design.

I'm incredibly proud of how things have gone.

SERVICE USAGE

We had **151 / 240 total students** attend our first session, which is great. This works out to an average of **7.55 students per session** – which is **50% higher** than the turnout present in Term 1 sessions last year, and matches the turnout for Term 2 last year.

Maintaining participation rates this high very much **supports the expansion to 20 Team Leader groups** – the students who are enrolling aren't any less excited about the program than the 100 who registered last year.

Generally, we expect Term 2 to have a higher turnout, as students will be more comfortable with their routine and will be happier committing time to Spark as a result.

We had roughly **80 students** attend Opening Ceremonies, which is an impressive number given that the event was held on a Sunday Evening.

We had roughly **20 students** attend our Academic Success Workshop. This is probably slightly lower than Expected, but a number of reasons for this attendance are explained below.

PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Opening Ceremonies

This event was very different from last year's iteration. We had 3 different speeches: I presented somewhat mundane information about the program and what we're hoping they'll take from it, Rebecca Raminhos shared some personal advice pertaining to her first year experience, and our President Ehima stole the show with a very relatable, humorous, and grounding story about his trajectory thus far.

Following this initial large group hype-up session, students splintered off in to groups with their teamleaders and engage in some very relaxed programming to get them talking about what they're nervous for this year. This added component of session group specific interaction was very valuable in helping to establish comfort before students ever entered in to the session room.

As mentioned, roughly 80 students attended, which was great. The only potential negative was that, because turnout was quite reduced, some session groups had 0 students, which was a tad disheartening for Team Leaders. Placing a greater emphasis in doing activities in pairs might mitigate this.

Session 1 and 2

Session 1 was focused around some introductory self-reflection, goal setting, and discussion around their hopes for this year. The goal here is really to provide students with an introduction to the format of Spark, to facilitate comfort and connection within the group, and to help get students excited for future sessions + the discussions they will hold.

Session 2 is focused around Midterms and study habits – which many students expressed concern about during their first session. A number of tangible, research-backed techniques for effective studying were discussed in the first part of the session, and the second part allowed substantial opportunity for students to have their questions answered.

Feedback on both of these sessions was very positive. However, some groups tend to run quite a bit over time, which is something we hope to adjust in future sessions. We are also beginning our first three sessions with group ice-breakers, which eat in to this session time. These icebreakers are a response to the overwhelming (~85%) number of students who gave feedback that they met more people outside of their session group through Spark last year.

Post-Session Firepit

This very optional event absolutely embodied the grounded and levelled-out values that Spark hopes to embody. Students and TL's got the chance to connect and converse in a zero-programming environment (with marshmallows). No doubt this event helped to increase turnout for session 2, and also to help students feel closer with their TL's. We

hope to maintain a post-session event in term 2, and will be investigating alternatives given that the weather will almost certainly forbid another camp fire.

Academic Success Workshop

Our Academic Success Workshop was largely a success. First of all, we developed high caliber, professional programming from the ground up (which is spectacular). Second of all, we engaged with the SSC and Faculty Societies to provide a unique perspectives to participants – many students have faculty specific academic concerns and Spark isn't the best body to address them.

Training was provided to the 6 Team Leaders who facilitated the 3 different sessions on the day of the event. Leading these sessions definitely provides a unique opportunity for Team Leaders to build skills they otherwise wouldn't practice in their role. This is one component of our larger push to give Team Leaders more opportunities to grow through their role.

Attendance of 20 is rather small when we consider the scale of Spark, but not small for the average "Academic event" that a faculty society or the SSC might host. We faced challenges around rallying consistent promotional support, given that we had just experienced Registration period, which had demanded a lot of promotion. We saw that many attendees weren't actually Spark students, which is great as it implies a fair bit of room to grow as far as encouraging Spark students to attend as well – given that content is unique from that shared in session.

Weekly Training

Weekly training is an absolutely critical part of Spark. We introduce the next week's session to Team Leaders and provide necessary updates for the week ahead.

However, it's also a place for deeper learning, both by exec and the TL's. Each week we strive to have a short reflective conversation on things we did well and didn't do well last week (as TLs).. From time to time we also incorporate more pointed discussion on key elements of effective sessions. The goals here are to help share best practices and generally ensure that our TL's are improving from week to week. Following this, we also strive to collect feedback on the session from this prior week, so that it might be improved for following cohorts and years. Finally, we like to give an opportunity for shout-outs / public recognition, as I firmly believe this is a key component of volunteer motivations. We run each training twice to allow for smaller groups and more meaningful discussion. However, as we only have one hour for each group, we often experience a time crunch.

Team Leader Social #1

We had our first Team Leader Social – it was a very low key night of boards games and cards against humanity. Given that TL's spend a lot of time in pre-programmed environments, we've strived to minimize the programming for our socials. We had probably 15 TLs attend throughout the night, and generally the event was well received.

UPCOMING EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

Future Sessions

For sessions 3,4, and 5 the topics will be Time Management and Organization, Teamwork, and Discovering Hamilton. Covering time management as well as midterms early on in the program is valuable from the perspective of giving students skills to succeed in the term. Personally, I'm very excited to see how/if dynamics shift as students get in to less skill-based sessions (i.e. Discovering Hamilton) as often this is where a lot of bonding occurs.

Spark Connector / Waterfall Excursion

We'll be hosting our first intra-Spark social on October 24th. This is a part of our commitment to help more students meet individuals outside of their own Spark group.

Team Leader Social #2

This will follow our first intra-Spark social, and may involve laser tag or a more laidback activity. We're continuing to work towards a sense of cohesion amongst the team.

BUDGET

Category	Ytd	Pr. YTD	Approved Budget
Special Projects	\$200	\$0	\$4,000
Advertising Promo.	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,400
Leader Training	\$138.43	\$0	\$500
Wages	\$2556.61	\$2402	\$6600

VOLUNTEERS

The team has been very solid. However, September has shown some variation in availability and total engagement level across TL's. Some individuals regularly go above and beyond, while others seem strapped for time. This likely stems from lingering discomfort in their roles, a still growing understanding of Spark as a service, and the hectic nature of September. We're hoping to re-visit and strengthen our mutual understanding of expectations for engagement, communication, and promotional support during our next training.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Similar to last report, our biggest challenge lies in uncertainty around our promotional budget. Given the large number of new initiative's we've taken on, we plan to fully analyze costs once we've completed our second guidebook and proceed as necessary from there.

SUCSESSES

Our events have rocked, our sessions have rocked, this executive has rocked, the team is great, this service is great, and I can't wait to see everything only get better.