



# 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 3  
DATE: November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015

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## UPDATE

October has brought a much needed sense of routine and consistency to the Spark team. We've settled in to a solid rhythm of running sessions, hosting trainings, and preparing for future publications and events.

A number of structural changes have been implemented in order to address minor gaps/issues we've encountered so far. Team Leaders have had an opportunity to provide feedback on programming, and exec have addressed all the most prevalent concerns.

Our timeline is complete for the rest of the year. We're excited to build on past successes, offer better service to students, and create deeper experiences for Team Leaders.

## SERVICE USAGE

We have had an average of **5.15 students per session** – which is still higher than the average for Term 1 last year. Note that the decrease in total average is largely due to the fact that the session immediately before and immediately after reading week had uncharacteristically poorly attended.

We recently checked the statistics for our 1<sup>st</sup> Spark Guidebook, and the publication had **1,718 reads** – people who clicked through the whole document, **an average read time of 3 minutes 42 seconds**, and **3,414 total views**. That means that, all together, people have spent **4 days and 12 hours** reading the first guidebook. That's pretty amazing, and speaks to the value of making the resources available to a large public through the internet.

Helen Genis has been an amazing force in creating this engaging, accessible resource, and has continued working to ensure that future books are just as successful.

## PAST EVENTS, PROJECTS & ACTIVITIES

### Guidebook #2

Guidebook #2 was just released, and is being circulated through a number of different channels. This guidebook contains easy to access instructions on utilizing the HSR and Sobi, dealing with difficult roommates, and rebounding from a difficult September / October. We've worked out a standard "Rate

Card” with the underground for this design, and are planning to keep these publications short and sweet. We’ve also created a publications committee to help with idea generation and design for future editions, which should again help keep costs minimal.

### **Session 3, 4, 5, and 6**

Session 3 was built around organization and time management. Students were introduced to google calendar as well as other productivity tools and techniques. The session prompted students to explore the idea of prioritizing their life, and reflecting on how they have been investing their time so far.

Session 4 focused on the ideas of teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation. A number of high energy activities were present, and students seemed to really respond well to the session. As a result, we plan to do our Teamwork session earlier next term, as we believe it may help with retention and general interest.

Session 5 was Discover Hamilton, and was built to help students get comfortable on the HSR and connect with interesting place downtown. Students travelled by bus to one of two coffee shops in Hamilton, where they met their Team Leaders and engaged in unprogrammed conversation. Twenty dollars was provided to each pair/trio of groups in order to allow for snacks to be purchased. The MSU Maroons were hugely helpful in acting as guides / way-points for students inbetween MUSC and the coffee shops.

Session 6 revolved around the ideas of compromises and comfort. Students were prompted to explore where their personal comfort lies, and what helps them expand their comfort zones. In addition, the idea of asking for help was discussed. This is a great session for more honest discussion from Team Leaders regarding their own boundaries, and provides a great example of the “grounded” nature of Spark we are constantly striving for.

Massive kudos to Kevan McDougall and Lindsay D’Souza for re-inventing and overhauling all of these sessions. These two have also recently finished fine-tuning all the remaining sessions for the term, so that they can begin a second round of re-vamps and idea generation for the Winter Term.

### **Spark Ambassadors**

Our first meeting for Spark Ambassadors was held this past week, and roughly **25 students attended**, with a total of **33 registered as interested**. This is a brand new initiative designed to help Spark students who are keen to get more involved a chance to do so. These individuals will be helping provide feedback on sessions and events, design promotional materials, and help spread the word for January registration.

Huge shoutout to Wid Yaseen and Mario Hanna for spearheading this initiative.

### **Weekly Training**

Weekly training has been altered in response to Team Leader feedback. We are now doing whole group training, as having larger numbers present help to bring more energy in to the room. We are spending almost no time describing activities any more – rather we are trusting Team Leaders to read through and understand simpler activities, and are making time to act out all of the most challenging activities in each session

We have also introduced more time for TL-cos to reflect on the past session, as well as to plan for the upcoming session. This is a result of the general consensus that Team Leaders struggle to find sufficient time to sync up with their co each week.

Finally, we are taking a more interactive approach to discussing the debrief component of each session, where smaller groups are prompted to develop what they think are the key take aways for a specific activity. These are then shared with the group, who collectively try to think up some questions which might help facilitate an understanding of these key points.

### **Team Leader Feedback**

Following Session 3, Team Leaders were prompted to provide feedback on a all of Spark's operations thus far. This was then synthesized and discussed by exec. A number of key take aways were identified and were presented at the next Team Leader training to re-affirm that their concerns were being addressed, and that the time they took to share feedback was worth while

### **Team Leader Social #2**

Many Team Leaders shared through their feedback that they wanted more socials/opportunities to bond with the team. As a result, we implemented another social in the form of post-training Laser Tag. This was attended by ~25% of the team, and was a very positive experience. Moving forward we hope to have more low-key bonding opportunities, such as booked rooms for Team Leaders to study within.

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

### **Future Sessions**

For sessions 7, 8, 9, and 10 are on the topics of Wellness, Diversity, Getting Involved, and Life After Spark. Some of these sessions require higher comfort with Team Leaders and higher buy-in to facilitate effectively, and so have been left until later in the term. We're very excited to provide a fairly thorough prep for students seeking to get involved, and will be pushing Team Leaders to develop a follow-up/action plan with their Spark students to help guide them towards things they want to get involved with.

### **Exam Prep and Wellness Workshop**

We're incredibly excited to host our second workshop of the year, focused on maintaining wellness and making the most of exam period. Given that the first round of exams can be an intimidating, stressful period, we're excited to be addressing this need for a range of students outside of the first year population. SHEC provided great insight for one of these sessions, and Peer Support Line has been directly integrated in to another session.

Jonathan Davis and Jack Legere have done a great job of creating novel programming, and engaging with multiple other campus partners to build what will be an awesome, well-rounded workshop.

Given a few of our Team Leaders have expressed concerns around pressure to promote events via social media, we have limited to promotional time for the event to 1 week.

Mario Hanna has done a great job of being sensitive to this reality within our team.

### **First Year Feedback Forum**

We're incredibly excited to host the first ever First Year Feedback Forum in conjunction with the University Affairs Committee. This event will provide an opportunity for first ans second year students to comment on challenges they faced during their initial year at McMaster. A number of campus partners will be present to help facilitate discussions around different components of the transition

experience. Kris Knorr, an expert in mentorship from MIETL, as well as Jennifer Kleven, from the Off Campus Resource Center, have already agreed to help facilitate discussions in these areas.

Funding will be contributed from SRA Special Projects, Spark, and First Year Council. The total cost of the event will be roughly \$2,000, and it will occur from 1 – 5 pm on February 1<sup>st</sup>, in CIBC Hall.

### **Partnership with the SSC**

I have been working with Tanya Kett from the SSC to secure funding for Spark in order to ensure that spaces are allocated to first generation students in our Winter Cohort. I am hopefully that this partnership can be secured and continued in to future years. There may also be potential for the SSC to contribute space for our weekly sessions, which is somewhat of a limiting component in the programs future expansion.

### **BUDGET**

Category	Ytd	Pr. YTD	Approved Budget
Special Projects	\$300	\$452.70	\$4,000
Advertising Promo.	\$2,011	\$1,046.48	\$2,400
Leader Training	\$395.63	\$175.74	\$500
Wages	\$2556.61	\$2402	\$6600

### **VOLUNTEERS**

The team has done a wonderful job of getting closer and opening up. I think there may have been a fairly steep learning curve for first-time TLs in our initial sessions (as we placed a large emphasis on hiring multiple brand-new people). I think at this point, however, everyone is feeling comfortable and confident in their roles.

We have also given a sufficient break between our last large push of events, and so I think our team is feeling quite recharged.

### **CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Given our shift towards more student sourced design for our guidebooks, as well as the external contributions we will be receiving for First Year Feedback Forum, I am feeling more confident in our ability to sustain the service off our current budget.

I would say our largest challenge currently is uncertainty around Space. Both the University and IAHS are hesitant to confirm bookings for term 2 until December, and MUSC is insufficient for our needs.

### **SUCSESSES**

The team is invested, the executive are going hard, and students are starting to publicly vocalize their appreciation for the service. I'm very excited to see us finish the term on a high note.