



REPORT

From the office of the...

Spark Director

TO: Members of the Executive Board
FROM: Mitchell German (he/him)
SUBJECT: Spark Report #3
DATE: September 29th, 2021

Year Plan Update

September has notoriously been a very busy time for Spark with the beginning of our Mentorship (Sessions) program and with the start of the academic year for the Team Leaders and Executives. However, it has also been a time where we start to see many parts of our Year Plan finally coming together. Since Spark's last EB Report was submitted, the following updates will be provided in this EB Report:

- 1. FYC x Spark First Year Formal Planning** → Spark's Events Coordinators are starting to brainstorm the logistics behind executing First Year Formal in the Winter term. I have been in communication with the FYC Coordinator about how this will look (keeping the COVID-19 pandemic in mind) and how the first years in FYC will be involved.
- 2. Launch of Spark's Discord Community** → Spark has officially launched its Discord Community called the *Spark First Year Hub*. All first years who signed up for Spark Sessions were provided with the link to join our Discord. It is an opportunity for first years to get to know other first years and Team Leaders who aren't in their designated Session time. It is also an opportunity to ask TLs questions relating to first year and university life.
- 3. Completion of Spark Team Leader Training** → Spark's Team Leaders completed their training on September 11th and 12th. This training was in addition to the upcoming MSU-wide training that is mandatory. During this weekend, TLs were trained on Spark-specific expectations, Queer Competency with PCC, Indigenous Competency with Stephanie George, Accessibility Training with Maccess, and training from the SSC.
- 4. Sessions Registration/Sessions Starting** → Sessions registration was open for approximately 2 weeks and closed on the 15th of September. The Promotions & Publications Coordinators (Jo and Irene) and the Outreach & Engagement Coordinators (Abithiny and Sofia) did a phenomenal job at maximizing our outreach to the target population of first years. Weekly Spark Sessions started the week of September 20th and are taking place in a virtual setting.
- 5. Start of Weekly Sessions Training** → Spark's Session Coordinators (Vithuyan, Kyobin, and Ryan) have begun their twice weekly Sessions training which takes place virtually on either Tuesdays from 7pm-8pm or Saturdays from 12:30-1:30pm.

Events, Projects, & Activities

General Service Usage

Service usage has definitely increased for Spark considering the start of the academic year! We now have our entire team, and all of the first years that will be interacting through Sessions for the year. As is expected, some of the first years that had signed up for Spark did not attend their first Session, but this is typical. We are going to ensure that TLs still try and reach out to communicate with them, even if that is simply a check-in. However, we are hoping that the strategies we proposed in the Year Plan will help to keep this retention up! Again, Spark has had a total of 220 first years register for our Sessions Program and there will be more first years (outside of just Sessions) that attend our events throughout the year. However, these are still in the planning process at this point.

Projects & Events: Sessions Registration and Commencement of Sessions (Completed/On-Going)

This year, we were a bit late to launch Sessions registration due to obstacles that the P&P Coordinators faced in graphic creation and the timing of Team Leader training. Registration closed on September 15th and was left open for approximately 14 days. The P&P Coordinators ran a phenomenal promotional campaign, and I am extremely proud of them for all of their efforts and dedication. Acknowledging that all of Spark's promotions have been entirely virtual for the past 1.5 years, it can be difficult to launch effective campaigns that are eye-catching and that our target population doesn't simply scroll past. Through a variety of graphics (of which I will include below under 'Outreach and Promotions') and promotional materials, as well as incredible outreach done by the O&E Coordinators, Spark surpassed our goal for first year registrations in our Mentorship (Sessions) Program and we also surpassed last year's registrations! ***This year, Spark received a total of 220 first year registrations for our Sessions*** and the entire Spark Team is excited to be able to support them through their first-year journey at McMaster and beyond.

Sessions officially began on the week of September 20th and they run Monday through Thursday from either 1:30-2:30pm or 5:30-6:30pm. Each first year is assigned one Session time that will take place on the same day and time each week. Each Session group is led by 2-3 Team Leaders. At this point, they are ALL taking place virtually with the hopes that we will be able to have them in-person for the Winter term. However, we will also have online alternatives for both TL and first year accessibility. I am extremely proud and continuously impressed by the Sessions Coordinators. Both the Team Leaders and the first years have found their Sessions to be both engaging and helpful! September is such an exciting time for our Sessions Coordinators as they finally get to see all their work throughout the Summer come to life! Huge shoutout to Vithuyan, Kyobin, and Ryan! While not every first year that registers for the Spark Mentorship (Sessions) Program actually comes to the Sessions, we have still had fantastic retention thus far! This is something I will keep an eye on throughout the year, as it was a goal on Spark's Year Plan to implement specific strategies (i.e., Spark Achievement in Leadership Award, registering for the full year, etc.) to help curb the loss of retention into the Winter term.

Projects & Events: Spark Discord Community (Completed/On-Going)

Spark has officially launched its Discord Community called the *Spark First Year Hub*. Recognizing that first years are constantly shifting to new virtual platforms (Facebook, to Instagram, to Discord), it is important that Spark adapts to these changes given the nature of the Service. When Team Leaders reached out to the first years in their Session group, they provided them with a link to this Discord community in the introductory email. This allowed first years to join our Discord which already has the Director, AD, Execs, and TLs on it. As stated previously, the purpose of this is to allow for the development of relationships between first years and other first years or Team Leaders who are not in their assigned Session time.

Something we have been weary of is the difficulty of monitoring this virtual space to ensure we are still promoting a safe(r) space. With that being said, we have included “Spark First Year Hub Guidelines and Expectations” that were developed by myself and the AD to help protect this safe(r) space in Spark. All members (Execs, TLs, first years) of this Discord are required to react to the post to indicate that they agree with the guidelines that have been set out. It has been explicitly stated that Spark reserves the right to temporarily or permanently remove individuals who violate these policies. Members are reminded that they can reach out to a TL, Exec, the AD, or myself should any of these policies be violated or if they are involved in a situation that makes them uncomfortable. Further, we provided an anonymous Microsoft Form where individuals can ‘report’ violations if they aren’t comfortable coming to a Spark TL/Exec/AD/Director directly.

The Discord consists of various channels where first years can ask questions, study with other first years/TLs in audio/video channels, and play games/icebreakers with others. Therefore, it is a space where they can engage in play, but also learn more about McMaster and the resources we provide.

Projects & Events: First Year Formal w/ FYC (Upcoming)

First Year Formal in collaboration with FYC is Spark’s biggest annual event. Last year, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions surrounding this, First Year Formal was not possible. However, it is something that both Spark and FYC are hoping to be able to host again in the Winter term.

I have been in touch with the FYC Coordinator (Julian) over the past few weeks regarding First Year Formal and what the involvement of the first years in FYC will look like. At this time, I have asked the Spark Events Coordinators (Myra, Darshana, Ester) to begin thinking about what they want First Year Formal to look like and what kind of involvement they expect from FYC. At this point, we are in the VERY early stages of planning. We plan on holding off on putting down any deposits at this point being weary that we are unsure how the pandemic will unfold in the Winter and what McMaster’s/Hamilton’s policies will look like at this time.

If anybody has any suggestions about how to approach this without putting down any deposits too early, I would greatly appreciate the help! Baila did not run First Year

Formal last year, so the most recent information I have to refer to from predecessors is from two years ago.

Spark and FYC are also aware of the fact that faculty formals may (or may not) be occurring around the same time point we are hoping to host First Year Formal (e.g., Formaldehyde, Health Sci Formal, etc.). As a result, we plan to reach out to faculty societies to ensure these dates don't overlap. This is acknowledging that this could be a source of 'competition' for Spark.

Outreach & Promotions

Summary

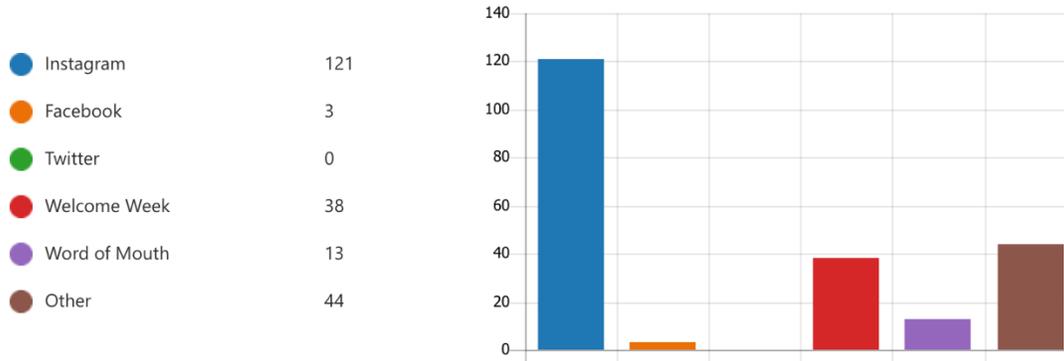
The P&P Coordinators and O&E Coordinators have been extremely busy throughout September running promotional campaigns for the opening of Spark Sessions registration. As part of this campaign, the P&P Coordinators created a graphic for Spark Session registration, a graphic to advertise the Spark Achievement in Leadership Award, and a campus tour video in collaboration with the Sessions Coordinators that were all posted to Spark's Instagram and Facebook page. The P&P Coordinators also ran a paid Instagram promotion for this after speaking with Michael Wooder. Additionally, the O&E Coordinators took the initiative to reach out to the professors of popular first year courses asking them to talk about Spark briefly during the beginning of their lectures. Throughout Welcome Week, we also had many Executives and Team Leaders who were also Welcome Week Reps or Community Advisors. We also used this as an opportunity to help promote Spark Sessions by handing out past promotional materials (Rave cards) that were still relevant to the programming we run today. Further, we also used an email list collected during Spark's Webinars and SSC's Services Fair that were used to directly reach out to first years who had indicated they wanted to be notified when registration for Sessions officially opened.

Additionally, the P&P Coordinators have set up posting groups with the TLs to help space out the reposting of our Spark graphics so that it doesn't entirely flood feeds. Thus far, it has been extremely impactful!

Below I have included the results of a question we posed on the Spark registration Microsoft Form to learn where the majority of first years had heard about Spark from. I thought it would be helpful to share.

8. How did you hear about Spark?

[More Details](#)



Promotional Materials



Likes: 122
Comments: 14
Sends: 15
Saves: 41
Reach: 2,871
Impressions: 3,433



Likes: 174
Comments: 9
Sends: 3
Saves: 32
Reach: 3,094
Impressions: 4,527



Video
Likes: 180
Views: 1,162
Comments: 11
Sends: 7
Saves: 44
Reach: 6,622
Impressions: 11,125

Social Media Engagement since the Previous Report

Instagram

Insights	Start Values	Last Report Values	Current Values
Followers	4532	5039	5,312
Impressions	46,090	31,595	64,863
Profile Visits	2,951	1,569	2,983
Website Visits	229	30	225
Reach	5,290	4,251	9,910

Facebook

Insights	Start Values	Last Report Values	Current Values
Likes	2,678	2,662	2,661
Reach	920	1474	3783
Views	108	71	63
Engagement	129	183	132
Followers	2,817	2,800	2,799

Finances

Budget Summary

The budget has been doing very well, and the majority of our expenses will come during the academic year! Since EB Report #2, Spark has spent \$55 from the Volunteer Appreciation line on Amazon gift cards for the TLs who won at our Welcome Event back in August. The benefit of this is that I now know how to use the MSU card (thanks Jan!)

ACCOUNT CODE	ITEM	BUDGET / COST
5003-0125	SPARK – OFFICE SUPPLIES	\$100
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$100
6103-0125	SPARK – ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS	\$3000
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$0
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$3000
6501-1025	SPARK – ADVERTISING & PROMOTIONS	\$2,600
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$1625
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$975
6494-0125	SPARK – VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION	\$750
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$55
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$695
TOTALS		
TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$6950
TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$1680
REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		\$5270

Executives & Volunteers

Executives:

The morale of the Execs has been absolutely fantastic, and I have said this three times now, but I truly could not ask for a more supportive, kind, and dedicated Exec Team. Generally, the attendance at our Exec Meetings has been phenomenal, especially considering the start of the academic year. The Execs seem excited to begin the year and for Sessions to finally start. They continuously bring new ideas to Spark and are definitely helping to take the Service to higher levels. The majority of our Execs are also acting as Team Leaders this year and are truly getting a comprehensive experience of Spark. At this point in time, I might reduce the frequency that we meet to biweekly, but it is still something that I am considering. I am also planning to do an Exec check-in sometime in October. Originally, I was planning for September, but I have been very busy with Spark, academics, and my personal life. We are also (hopefully) planning for an Exec Social to take place sometime during the Fall Reading Week.

Volunteers:

This year, we have a SUPER diverse team of Team Leaders, which I am extremely excited about as this helps us to more effectively support a broader population of first years. This also includes a mixture of brand-new Team Leaders, and returning TLs. With this, we actually had the returning TLs write out pieces of advice for the new TLs and shared them through Facebook. It was a great opportunity for those who have been in the role before to impart wisdom to those that are brand new! Sometimes, I think hearing it from the Director/AD/Execs is a bit different then when you hear the advice from somebody who is actually in your role. The morale of TLs has been contagious, and we have been doing introductions in our Facebook and Discord for the past few weeks and everybody has been very interactive and engaged! The Execs and AD have also done a fantastic job at supporting the TLs thus far and ensuring they are comfortable in their roles. We have had our TL Welcome Event back in August, and had TL Training on September 11th and 12th. This year, I cut training down slightly recognizing not only that many TLs were also Welcome Week Reps and went through significant training for that, but that many TLs are likely becoming fatigued in the virtual setting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This decision was made to ensure that while it was shorter, they were also more engaged. I have received positive feedback about TL Training this year and am satisfied with this decision. Last year, one thing that Spark struggled with was participation from TLs during Sessions training. A lack of participation during this time makes it difficult for the Sessions Coordinators to run an effective training. However, we set out expectations early of the TLs to ensure they were engaged within their personal boundaries. I attended Sessions training this past week and all the TLs were super involved. Having been a Sessions Coordinator in the past, this truly warmed my heart!

Successes

The Spark Team has MANY successes that I am proud to share:

Sessions Training: The Sessions Coordinators (Vithuyan, Ryan, Kyobin) ran their very first Sessions training this past week. I was sitting in the call to help support them should anything come up, but there was no need! They were so phenomenal, and I am constantly impressed by the work they do. Their positive dynamic is contagious for the TLs. They were extremely engaging, and they fostered an environment where many TLs had their cameras on and were willing to engage! Very proud of the work they have done! From a more professional standpoint, I was very impressed that they decided to run through the Sessions training expectations again that we had set out during Spark TL Training. I think this made for very clear communication to the TLs and has set a very positive tone for the year.

Sessions Registration/Promo for Registration: The P&P Coordinators (Jo and Irene) ran an extremely effective promotional campaign for Spark Sessions registration. They quite literally were able to reach out to any possible stakeholder that could help us with promotion, and it shows in the amount of registrations that Spark received (220, which is up compared to last year!). Their campaign was multi-faceted and included many of the Execs as well, which I loved. Very proud of this team and cannot wait to see all the fantastic campaigns they run during the academic year! Additionally, we had a super diverse group of first years that registered for Spark from quite literally all faculties! This only further proves the effectiveness of the campaign that Irene and Jo ran!

Spark Mini-Scholarship: The O&E Coordinators have worked very diligently to ensure the *Spark Achievement in Leadership Award* was put in place prior to first year registration for Sessions! This was done recognizing that it would be part of our promotional tactics as an attempt to increase Sessions registrations! Not only were they granted the funding they had requested through the SPF, but they also outlined very thorough eligibility that has been communicated to first years within Spark. Overall, HUGE shoutout to Abithiny and Sofia! This was a big step forward in the continuous development of Spark as an MSU service.

Current Challenges

Spark is currently experiencing the following challenges:

Communication: Throughout the Summer, it was a bit difficult at times to reach out to TLs and ensure they were receiving the communications that myself, the AD, and the Execs were sending within our Facebook page. I thought this would get better once the academic year started, but it has still been a bit difficult. I think part of the confusion might be that we also have a Discord that we want to try and encourage the TLs to use more frequently seeing as that is where the first years are. However, Discord is also not an extremely popular platform amongst upper-years (feel like I am aging myself a bit here...HAHA). Moving forward, we are going to set more clear expectations, and use the platform that TLs are the most comfortable with recognizing that this may be causing part of the issue.

Miscellaneous

I have nothing more to add, thank you for reading!