



REPORT

From the office of the...
Spark Director

TO: Members of the Executive Board
FROM: Mitchell German (he/him)
SUBJECT: Spark Report 4
DATE: November 17th, 2021

Year Plan Update

Since the last EB report, there are some accomplishments to the Year Plan that I would like to share!

- The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators have officially restructured the Spark Ambassadors program (with first years) to have them more involved in Spark's programming and work closely alongside the Executive Team!
- The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators have been working with Maroons to plan out the logistics behind our Spark Wellness Bags and have secured funding from various campus partners thus far
- We have had a Team Leader step down from their position as they were unable to fulfill the commitments of their role. Another TL was hired from the initial waitlist and has been fully trained since then.
- Spark was able to have our photoshoot with the TLs for promotional purposes
- The Events Coordinators are working on carrying out a Hike and Hangout event and Applicants Workshop
- The Promotions and Publications Coordinators have executed Mac Hacks, their first publication of the year. It was garnered phenomenal engagement on Instagram (over 900 saves!).

Events, Projects, & Activities

General Service Usage

Engagement has been going well for Spark thus far. The majority of Session groups have been receiving 2-3 students, or upwards of 5-6. Considering that we have 20 Session groups total, this is an engagement level that I am satisfied with. Obviously, more is always better, but considering that we are currently

operating in a virtual environment, I can empathize with the fact that many people are likely having a bit of Zoom fatigue! I am interested to see if there will be an increase in retention when we begin transitioning back into in-person Sessions. However, engagement with our Spark Ambassadors program (first years), Events Committee (TLs) and Sessions Committee (TLs) has been record-setting!

Projects & Events: Hike and Hangout (Upcoming)

Spark's Events Coordinators are currently planning a Hike and Hangout at Dundas Peak event that is scheduled for November 20th from 10:30AM-2:30PM. This will be an opportunity for first years to be able to explore the beauty of Hamilton and get off-campus! It will also allow them to connect with other first years and Team Leaders/Execs that are not in their Session group. The event details have been submitted and approved through EOHSS in advance. Intake forms have been sent to the Underground and we are awaiting promotional materials at this point in time. It will be completely FREE for first years to register for this event as Spark is planning to subsidize the cost of admission. With that being said, we can accommodate upwards of 40 first years. All registrations will take place via Eventbrite and registrants will have to sign a liability waiver to attend. All travel to and from Dundas Peak will be on the HSR and participants will be required to use their PRESTO Card. All participants will be required to wear masks in ALL indoor settings, maintain any required physical distancing requirements, and complete MacCheck in advance. Spark will provide extra hand sanitizer and masks if necessary. Currently, we are seeking out a first aid kit, but EFRT has been contacted about this and we are awaiting a response. When first years, TLs, and Execs return, we will have hot chocolate available for them outside of MUSC. We are very excited about this opportunity to be in-person and the Events Coordinators have done a phenomenal job at planning out the logistics of this!

Projects & Events: Applicants Workshop (Upcoming)

The Spark Events Coordinators will be running our annual Applicants Workshop on November 27th from 3-4pm EST via Zoom. This is recognizing that many first years, at times, struggle to find extracurricular and volunteer opportunities both on and off campus. Not only do we want to help guide them in their resume writing process, but also provide resources to help them to find opportunities to get involved on campus. Seeing as this event is virtual, there will not be the same capacity restrictions as we have for Hike and Hangout. Spark will be collaborating with the Student Success Centre, specifically Tanya Kett, to help execute this event. First years will have the opportunity to learn effective resume writing tips, receive feedback on their resume, learn of the timeline of hiring opportunities within the MSU, and practice interview skills. Promotional material is currently being made by the UG at this time. We thought that having a virtual

event, in addition to our in-person event (Hike and Hangout) would make the Service more accessible for first years who are not yet comfortable being in-person due to COVID-19.

Projects & Events: Spark Ambassadors (On-Going)

The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators (Abithiny and Sofia) have been working with the Spark Ambassadors who are a group of first years registered in Spark Sessions that want to be more involved. So far, they have received a total of 9 first years, which is up since last year! We have restructured the program this year to allow the first years to work closely with the Executive Team. So far, they have worked with the Sessions Coordinators in developing a Session for the Winter term (because who knows what first years need better than first years!?) and with the Events Coordinators for planning events in the Winter term. It has been an excellent way for first years to be involved in Spark, which traditionally hasn't happened in the past other than for providing feedback. This was done to provide first years with opportunities to develop their leadership skills, recognizing that opportunities for first years to be involved on campus can be somewhat limited. It will could also feed back into Spark itself, allowing first years to learn about Exec roles, and potentially apply for them, or the position of TL, in the upcoming years!

Projects & Events: Spark x Maroons Wellness Bags (Upcoming)

Spark is VERY excited to share with you our Wellness Bags that we will be distributing to first years in December prior to exams! We will be collaborating with Maroons (Coordinator, Sofia Ivanisevic) as a means to split some of the expenses as well as to have more people power in the packing and distribution process. Currently, we plan to create approximately 200 Wellness Bags that will contain items that help to promote self-care during a time that is quite stressful and anxiety-inducing for many first years (especially considering this is likely their first time writing university-level exams). Contents will include items such as: granola bars, hot chocolate, tea, chapstick, motivational notes, popcorn, colouring pages and Crayons, etc. We have budgeted approximately \$1000 for this, and thus far have secured \$750 from internal sponsors to make this possible (President's Office, Humanities, Indigenous Studies). Sponsors will receive advertising within the Wellness Bags and on our Instagram. First years will be required to register to receive these Wellness Bags in advance, and they will be distributed during set time points. At this point in time, we are considering ways to ensure that only first years are registering. We have considered asking them to show their class schedules upon pick-up. This is to recognize that Spark's mission is to support first years, and we want to ensure the time, money, and energy we are expending are doing exactly that. Within these Wellness Bags, Spark will also include rave cards with a QR code to help promote sign-ups for Sessions in the Winter term.

Outreach & Promotions

Summary

The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators have done an absolutely fantastic job at reaching out to internal partners to securing funding for the Spark Wellness Bags. They reached out this past weekend, and we have already been hearing back with lots of interest!

The Promotions and Publications Coordinators will be busier in the upcoming weeks creating promotional material for our Normalizing Failure Campaign, Applicants Workshop, and Hike and Hangout. Since the last EB Report, they released a publication titled Mac Hacks that highlighted what discounts you can receive as a McMaster student. This publication was wildly successful (see the Instagram insights below) and I could not be more proud of the P&P Coordinators, Josephine and Irene. The publication was even accessed and viewed by students at other universities outside McMaster!

Promotional Materials

Mac Hacks – 8 Slide Carousel Publication

Likes: 732 (Spark record!)

Comments: 12

Sends: 400

Saves: 923 (ALSO A SPARK RECORD!)

Reach: 6,963

The image shows a carousel of 8 slides for the 'Mac Hacks' publication. Each slide is titled 'MAC HACKS' and contains information about various student discounts and services. The slides are:

- Slide 1: Introduction** - Did someone say FREE or STUDENT DISCOUNTS? Well look no further. Spark has you covered! Check out this compilation of free items and discounts you can get as a McMaster student.
- Slide 2: Free Software** - Includes Zoom Premium, Microsoft Office 365, and GitHub Student Developer Pack.
- Slide 3: Student Discounts** - Includes Student Beans, UNIDAYS, and McMaster Campus Store Software License Discounts.
- Slide 4: Student Loyalty Cards** - Includes The Student Price Card (SPC) and International Student Identity Card (ISIC).
- Slide 5: Technology Discounts** - Includes Apple, Dell, Microsoft, Samsung, HP, and Lenovo.
- Slide 6: Music Discounts** - Includes Spotify Premium Discount and Apple Music Discount.
- Slide 7: Grocery Stores** - Includes Fortinos, Bulk Barn, and Shoppers Drugmart.
- Slide 8: Other** - Includes Amazon Prime for students and Criterion on Demand.

Social Media Engagement since the Previous Report

Instagram:

Insights	Start Values	Last Report Values	Current Values
Followers	4,532	5,312	5,347
Impressions	46,090	64,863	19,146
Profile Visits	2,951	2,983	905
Website Visits	229	225	97
Reach	5,290	9,910	7,030

Facebook:

Insights	Start Values	Last Report Values	Current Values
Likes	2,678	2,661	2,666
Reach	920	3,783	1,316
Views	108	63	46
Engagement	129	132	71
Followers	2,817	2,799	2,804

Finances

Budget Summary

As previously mentioned, Spark has received a total of \$750 from internal partners to help fund our Spark Wellness Bags. After speaking with Jan (Accounting Intern) they are being added to the Sponsorship Line (3601-0125).

We received the following funds:

- President’s Office — \$350.00
- Humanities Society — \$200.00
- Indigenous Studies — \$200.00

I have submitted POs since the last EB Report, but I have yet to hear back about them.

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

Execs: Morale of the Execs has been absolutely fantastic, and we are now finally into the full swing of things! Recently, we actually had a Spark retreat to an Airbnb in Blue Mountain for the weekend that 9 of the 12 Execs attended (for those who did not attend, I ensured it was not due to financial reasons). It was a fantastic time for us to get to know each other better and to facilitate team bonding! Each position has been fulfilling all of their responsibilities and is consistently exceeding my expectations. They have done an excellent job at supporting me, and reaching out when they need support themselves. They are also all consistently attending our weekly Exec Meetings. I also conducted 1-on-1 check-ins with all the Execs throughout the month of October and collected feedback from them on how they have felt the transition into their role has been, how well they've been able to manage workload, and how I can support them better.

Volunteers:

The Assistant Director (Vivien Trinh) and I have just completed Team Leader check-ins throughout October where we collected feedback about how they've been enjoying their roles, Sessions, and what retention has been like with first years. Everything has been going very well thus far, and the Team Leaders have been doing a fantastic job checking in and supporting their first years! For the most part, they are consistently attending Sessions and Sessions training. The AD and I have been able to keep track of attendance to ensure all TLs are receiving the appropriate training and fulfilling their roles as outlined. Many of them have also joined Sessions Committee and Events Committee (approximately 15 total), which indicates to me that they are looking to be more involved in Spark (always a positive thing)!

Successes

There are numerous successes that I am excited to share on behalf of Spark!

Mac Hacks: As shared in the “Outreach & Promotions” section, our Mac Hacks publication was a huge success, and has been Spark’s top post on our Instagram so far, ever! We received 732 likes, 923 shares, 399 sends, and a reach of 6,965 accounts. The P&P Coordinators (Jo and Irene) designed such a helpful publication that is relevant to not only first years, but all undergraduate students. We even heard of students from other Ontario universities saving our publication to refer back to, which is super exciting news and demonstrates the sheer reach that this post had. This is a huge accomplishment for us!

TL Photoshoot: We were able to have a Spark photoshoot with the Team Leaders and Execs back in October at Edward’s Arch. It was a great opportunity to be able to see everybody in person, some for the very first time! While we got some GREAT pictures (which I will share below) that will be used for promotional purposes, it was also a chance for us to bond as a team and get to know each other better. Last year, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was not possible, so it was super exciting to be able to bring this tradition back to Spark!

Sessions Feedback: During check-ins with the Team Leaders, we had received fantastic feedback about the quality of the Sessions that were designed by the Sessions Coordinators (Vithuyan, Kyobin, Ryan). I had anonymously shared this with the Sessions Coordinators as well. All the Team Leaders had positive things to say, and found the Sessions to be purposeful, insightful, and engaging — something that can be very difficult to do in a virtual setting! Big shoutout to the Sessions Coordinators for the positive impact they have had, and will continue to have, on first years during their transition to McMaster!

Funding: The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators (Abithiny and Sofia) have reached out to various internal partners at McMaster thus far in an attempt to secure funding for our Spark Wellness Bags that we will be creating in collaboration with Maroons. This initiative, costing an estimated \$1000 minimum, was outside of Spark’s budget to begin with, despite being included in the Spark Year Plan. However, through their dedication and efforts, they have thus far secured \$750 in funding from the President’s Office, Indigenous Studies, and Humanities faculty only 1 day after sending the emails out. Their email was incredibly well-written, professional, and persuasive, representing Spark and the MSU extremely well. We have received positive feedback about the initiative from these partners. I am beyond proud of the dedication and effort that Sofia and Abithiny have put into this initiative, because it would not have been possible without them!

Current Challenges

Purchase Orders: A challenge Spark has had as of recently is hearing back about POs. I have submitted a few over the past couple of weeks, and I am still waiting for approval. While I acknowledge that I have not yet sent a follow-up email, trying to keep track of everything else on top of this leads to added difficulties and stress for myself as a PTM. For future, I would appreciate hearing back a little bit earlier considering some of the internal timelines we have within Spark. That would be super helpful, and if there is anything I can do on my end to help with this please let me know!

Team Leader Retention: There was another Team Leader (2 total thus far) who recently stepped down from their position as they felt that they were unable to balance the role with their additional responsibilities. From my end, I know that the TL JD from the MSU states that this position is a 4-5 hour commitment per week. Realistically, TLs only put in approximately 2 hours per week, especially in a virtual setting due to COVID-19. This has become slightly frustrating on my end, as individuals have committed to this role knowing the time commitment in advance, then are having to step down from the position despite the hour requirement being significantly less in reality. Since then, I have hired a new Team Leader from the waitlist the Executive Team made after initial interviews, and ensured they received all the appropriate training. This was done considering that we have made pre-established groups of TLs that are required to lead Sessions, and now a TL was in a position where they would have had to do this alone. I looped Christina (VP Admin) in on this process.

MUSC Room Bookings: With the hopes of having Spark in a hybrid format for the Winter term, we will have to secure rooms in MUSC that we can run Sessions in. Considering my predecessor did not have to do this, I will have to consult transition reports from other past Coordinators and Volunteer Coordinators on how to do this so that I can inform the Assistant Director of this process.

Miscellaneous

The Spark photoshoot! (Sorry, I was excited to share because this warms my heart!) Unfortunately, the whole team could not be there, but we will be scheduling another date in the future for any TLs that missed out!

