



Operating Policy – MSU Spark

1. Purpose

- 1.1. To be a student-led, student-run Service of the McMaster Students Union (MSU) that is devoted to setting the stage for first-year student success in university;
- 1.2. To provide students with small group environments that facilitate first-year growth, and build personal development and reflection skills for their undergraduate career;
- 1.3. To encourage extracurricular participation by introducing first-year students to campus services, clubs and leadership opportunities;
- 1.4. To connect students to their peers and upper-year students to promote increased support on academic issues and associated first-year challenges;
- 1.5. To actively support the broader first year population by acting as a resource, identifying areas of need, and hosting workshops to address these areas.
- 1.6. To form and maintain personal connections and relationships between students;
- 1.7. To form and maintain personal connections between first-year students and upper-year students.

2. Operating Parameters

2.1. MSU Spark shall:

- 2.1.1. Be planned and promoted over the spring and summer;
- 2.1.2. Facilitate workshops during the summer term for incoming Level I students to prepare them for transition;
- 2.1.3. Offer weekly sessions, which shall:
 - 2.1.3.1. Be comprised of small groups of first-year students;
 - 2.1.3.2. Be led by at least two (2) non-first-year, undergraduate Team Leaders;
 - 2.1.3.3. Occur during the fall and winter terms;
 - 2.1.3.4. Be between 1-2 hours per session;
 - 2.1.3.5. Be held once per week for the length of the term for a minimum of 8 weeks;
 - 2.1.3.6. The topics of each week's sessions will be planned by the Spark Session Coordinators in conjunction with the Spark Director and Vice-President (Administration), as necessary;
 - 2.1.3.7. A session may be comprised of:
 - 2.1.3.7.1. Leadership activities;
 - 2.1.3.7.2. Presentations from speakers;

Approved 13K
Revised 15D, 20Q, 22-07

- 2.1.3.7.3. Discussions;
 - 2.1.3.7.4. Journaling/reflection periods;
 - 2.1.3.7.5. Games; and
 - 2.1.3.7.6. Other activities deemed as appropriate by the Spark Director.
 - 2.1.4. Facilitate optional study groups and social events at various points throughout the term to promote building inclusive student learning communities;
 - 2.1.5. Facilitate optional, open workshops twice per term to address the specific challenges faced by most first-year students at relevant points throughout the year.
- 2.2. The MSU Spark program is available to all eligible first-year students at no cost to the participant;
- 2.3. MSU Spark shall be guided by the following learning outcomes:
 - 2.3.1. Providing a sense of comfort, connection, and support within McMaster University;
 - 2.3.2. Appreciating the importance and value of extracurricular university involvement;
 - 2.3.3. Demonstrating self-reflection and the ability to identify opportunities for individual growth;
 - 2.3.4. Clarifying academic, personal, and career-related goals, and assisting students in creating a plan of action to accomplish them;
 - 2.3.5. Facilitating an improved suite of leadership skills, including communication, teamwork, and conflict resolution.
- 2.4. Incoming or current first-year students shall sign up for MSU Spark through an online application process;
 - 2.4.1. Eligibility requirements for participation are as follows:
 - 2.4.1.1. The applicant is currently (or will be, in that calendar year), a Level I student at McMaster University.
 - 2.4.2. Spots offered in MSU Spark are provided on a first-come, first-serve basis.
 - 2.4.3. Exceptions may be provided to participants who have a high potential to benefit from the program, including:
 - 2.4.3.1. Students who belong to marginalized groups;
 - 2.4.3.2. Students on academic probation; and
 - 2.4.3.3. First-generation students.
 - 2.4.4. The Spark Director shall set the appropriate cap for the number of first-year participants based on available resources, including, but not limited to:
 - 2.4.4.1. Volunteers;
 - 2.4.4.2. Budget; and

- 2.4.4.3. Logistical constraints.
- 2.4.5. Online registration applications will include questions for students in order to allow for diverse session groups;
- 2.4.6. Sessions should aim to include diverse groups of students, based on:
 - 2.4.6.1. Differing personal goals;
 - 2.4.6.2. Faculty;
 - 2.4.6.3. Personality type;
 - 2.4.6.4. Comfort level; and
 - 2.4.6.5. History of prior involvement.
- 2.4.7. The application information shall remain confidential to the Spark Director and Assistant Director.
- 2.5. A certificate of completion shall be granted to participants who attend and participate in a minimum of 75% of weekly sessions;
 - 2.5.1. Additional recognition events for student participants may be planned at the discretion of the Spark Director and Assistant Director.
- 2.6. MSU Spark shall award the “Spark Scholarship”, valued at \$200 each, to two (2) participants annually who have demonstrated distinguished commitment and engagement within sessions;
 - 2.6.1. Eligibility requirements for the scholarship are as follows:
 - 2.6.1.1. Must be a Level 1 student at McMaster University registered in MSU Spark;
 - 2.6.1.2. Must attend at least four (4) sessions in the fall term and four (4) sessions in the winter term, or at least six (6) sessions in the winter term;
 - 2.6.1.3. Must complete a standardized application form;
 - 2.6.1.4. Must acquire a reference from one (1) Team Leader.

3. Personnel Structure

- 3.1. The Spark Director, who shall:
 - 3.1.1. Be responsible for the planning and promoting of MSU Spark during the summer and managing MSU Spark throughout the academic year;
 - 3.1.2. Perform duties as outlined in the Spark Director job description;
 - 3.1.3. Be hired by a hiring committee struck by the Executive Board that shall consist of:
 - 3.1.3.1. The Vice-President (Administration);
 - 3.1.3.2. The outgoing Spark Director;

- 3.1.3.2.1. If the outgoing Spark Director is re-applying for the position, the Spark Assistant Director will sit on the Committee;
- 3.1.3.2.2. If the Spark Assistant Director is applying for the position, the seat will be filled by a member of Executive Board;

3.1.3.3. One (1) Executive Board member.

3.2. The Spark Assistant Director, who shall:

- 3.2.1. Assist the Spark Director with planning and promoting MSU Spark during the summer and managing MSU Spark throughout the academic year;
- 3.2.2. Perform duties as outlined in the Spark Assistant Director job description;
- 3.2.3. Be hired by a hiring committee struck by the Executive Board that shall consist of:

- 3.2.3.1. The incoming Spark Director;
- 3.2.3.2. The outgoing Spark Assistant Director;

- 3.2.3.2.1. If the outgoing Spark Assistant Director is the incoming Director then the seat will be filled by the Vice-President (Administration);

3.2.3.3. One (1) Executive Board member.

3.3. The Spark Outreach & Engagement Coordinator(s), who shall:

- 3.3.1. Be responsible for coordinating outreach and promoting the role of MSU Spark for first-year students;
- 3.3.2. Be responsible for overseeing the Spark Scholarship program;
- 3.3.3. Perform duties outlined in the Spark Outreach & Engagement Coordinator job description;
- 3.3.4. Be selected by the Spark Director and Assistant Director through an application and interview process.

3.4. The Spark Promotions & Publications Coordinator(s) who shall:

- 3.4.1. Be responsible for the creation of engaging and informative materials for first-year students;
- 3.4.2. Perform duties outlined in the Spark Promotions & Publications Coordinator job description;
- 3.4.3. Be selected by the Spark Director and Assistant Director through an application and interview process.

3.5. The Spark Sessions Coordinator(s) who shall:

- 3.5.1. Be responsible for the research and development of all MSU Spark sessions;
- 3.5.2. Perform duties outlined in the Spark Sessions Coordinator job description;

- 3.5.3. Be selected by the Spark Director and Assistant Director through an application and interview process.
- 3.6. The Spark Events Coordinator(s) who shall:
 - 3.6.1. Be responsible for creating and implementing inclusive social events for both MSU Spark students and the broader first-year community;
 - 3.6.2. Create and implement four (4) large scale workshops focused on first-year success;
 - 3.6.3. Help implement summer programming for the incoming first-year community focused on first-year success in coordination with the Spark Director;
 - 3.6.4. Perform duties outlined in the Spark Events Coordinator job description;
 - 3.6.5. Be selected by the Spark Director and Assistant Director through an application and interview process.
- 3.7. The Team Leaders, who shall:
 - 3.7.1. Be student volunteers who lead the weekly sessions with first-year students;
 - 3.7.2. Regularly engage in informal meetings with MSU Spark students;
 - 3.7.3. Perform the duties outlined in the Team Leader job description;
 - 3.7.4. Be selected by the Spark Director, Assistant Director, and Executive Team through an application and interview process.