



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## Spark Director

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TO: Members of the Executive Board  
FROM: Kyobin Hwang (She/Her)  
SUBJECT: Year in Review Report  
DATE: March 27, 2023

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### **Year Plan Update**

Below, I will outline some of the goals listed in my initial Year Plan, and discuss what worked, what didn't, etc.:

**Inter-Service and Inter-Role Collaboration:** Spark certainly achieved this goal this past year. During our weekly Exec Meetings, each role had the opportunity to hear what the other roles were up to and provide suggestions or feedback if necessary. Prioritizing inter-role collaboration also allowed various roles to work jointly on projects. For instance, the Outreach and Engagement Coordinators are currently working with the Events Coordinator to plan Spark Closing Ceremonies. This not only reduced the workload burden on each individual, but also introduced new perspectives and ideas into the planning process. As such, the increased inter-role collaboration certainly helped to foster a more cohesive Spark team, rather than separate subcommittees. Furthermore, Spark was able to collaborate with various MSU Services/branches (FYC, FCC, and Communication Team) and an MSU-ratified club (MacCrafters). Additionally, we partnered with other campus groups, including Archway Mentors and McMaster Housing and Conference Services. Ultimately, this helped to enhance Spark's outreach in the campus community to ensure first years know who we are and how we can support them!

**Spark Scholarship and Certificate of Achievement:** Based on the success of last year's pilot program, I ensured that the Spark Scholarship and Certificate of Achievement is implemented into our Operating Policy for years to come. This award helped lead to increased retention and engagement with Spark throughout the year. It was also a way to recognize first years for their contributions (something that is seldom done) and help to inspire future leaders while providing financial aid. Both the Spark Scholarship and the Certificates of Achievement will be announced and distributed by the Outreach and Engagement Coordinators at Closing Ceremonies.

**Spark Stars:** This is a new initiative I implemented alongside the Outreach and Engagement Coordinators this year. While the Spark Scholarship is an excellent initiative to recognize students that demonstrate a passion and commitment for Spark, it is only awarded to two first years among a large pool of qualified candidates. Thus, I wanted to implement an initiative like Spark Stars where more students could be recognized for their commitment. Spark Stars was designed to curb the low second semester retention rates. Students have been receiving a “star” for each event or session they attend. Depending on the number of stars accumulated by students at the end of the year, they will be able to exchange their stars for gifts (e.g., Spark sticker, lanyard, tote bag, a campus store gift card, etc.). With 20 eligible candidates for Spark Stars prizes, this initiative has certainly encouraged many first-year students to actively engage with the Service.

**Night Before Classes:** This was the first year that Spark fully returned to an entirely in-person format after the COVID-19 pandemic. This was an important milestone marked by the execution of a classic Spark event: Night Before Classes. Night Before Classes is an event in which first years can come and meet other first years and upper years in their faculties to go for a tour of their class buildings. This event has seen incredible turnout and has been a fantastic opportunity to promote sessions registration. Specifically, we had 170 first-year students at the event and had 17 Team Leaders and six Executives volunteers leading the tours. The incredible turnout marked an encouraging start to the year and heightened our excitement for future events to come!

**Spark Yearbook:** The Promotions and Publications Coordinators decided to create a Spark Yearbook. The yearbook features all of Spark’s highlights and volunteers from the year. For accessibility purposes, it is available in a digital and print version and will be distributed to all first-year students registered in Spark, Team Leaders, and Executive volunteers. It will also be used in future years for promotional purposes. The yearbook acts as a memento for all of Spark’s achievements and highlights throughout the year. I am grateful to always have this yearbook to look back on.

**Winter Push Initiative:** One of my hopes for the Service outlined in my Year Plan was bridging the gap of student engagement between first and second semester. With this in mind, my goal was to host a series of events and post enticing promotional material on our social media platforms to attract more students for second semester. By teasing second semester programming and hosting events open to all first-year students, my aim was to gain more Service traction and increase second semester sessions registration. To some extent, this goal has been fulfilled, but could also be improved. While I strongly advocated for more promotional material to be disseminated between the transition period from fall to winter terms, the only content that was posted were the session registration graphic and “What are Spark Sessions” reel. Thus, for

years to come, I would strongly advise teasing second semester programming more through various creative means.

**International Chapter:** This is a new initiative I wanted to implement this year that, unfortunately, did not come to fruition. Given that is not uncommon for first year international students to feel like an outsider and detached from the broader McMaster community, I wanted to coordinate a program that connects first-year international students together and promote a sense of community. When first-year students register for Spark Sessions, the plan was to provide them with an option to be assigned to an International Student branch comprised of other students with this background. For this session group, we aimed to assign Team Leaders that likewise have an international student background. While the International Chapter session group was not implemented this year, it is an addition I would like to see in future years.

## **Events, Projects, & Activities**

### *General Service Usage*

Spark saw phenomenal usage of the Service throughout the 2022/23 year. We had the highest volume of registrations for our Sessions program in the Winter term that Spark has ever seen, with 120 registrants. Further, we saw consistent engagement via our primary social media platform, Instagram, with large impact publications and posts that further set records within Spark. We were able to make a successful transition back to a fully in-person year for the first time since 2018/19, and we continued to see consistent engagement with first years coming out to our events and other programming throughout the year.

Spark should continue to consider novel strategies that can increase engagement, specifically in an in-person environment. For the amount of work that the Sessions Coordinators and Events Coordinators had put into organizing events, it would have been nice to see slightly more engagement and turnout for them. However, it was still successful, and they consistently brought innovative ideas to the table!

### *Projects & Events: Project 1 (Upcoming) – Self-Love Event*

- The Events Coordinators and Events Committee have been planning a self-care event, scheduled to occur on Thursday, March 30, between 6:00PM-8:00PM at the Degroote School of Business.
- While watching a movie, first year students will have a chance to craft (e.g., tote bag painting, lip balm making, hot chocolate kit making, and button making) and enjoy some popcorn.

### *Projects & Events: Project 2 (Upcoming) – Spark Achievement in Leadership Award*

- Similar to last year, the scholarship is valued at \$200 and will be awarded to two (2) first-year students registered in Spark Sessions who

demonstrate growth in their leadership skills throughout the year and who help to promote a safe(r) space on McMaster campus.

- Eligibility includes having attended either four (4) Sessions in both the Fall and Winter terms (total of 8 Sessions), or alternatively, 6 Sessions in the Winter term to accommodate for first years who registered for Spark later in the year.
- There is an application process for first years to apply for the Spark Scholarship, which allow them to reflect on their growth within the Service. All applications will be verified by one of the first year's TLs.
- The process of implementing this scholarship has been smoother this year as it has been included as an official Spark budget line (6101-0125 – SPARK SCHOLARSHIP).

#### *Projects & Events: Project 3 (Upcoming) – Spark Stars*

- While the Spark Scholarship is an excellent initiative to recognize students that demonstrate a passion and commitment for Spark, it is only awarded to two first years among a large pool of qualified candidates.
- Thus, I wanted to implement an initiative like Spark Stars where more students could be recognized for their commitment.
- Spark Stars was designed to curb the low second semester retention rates.
- This is the first time we are executing this program.
- Students have been receiving a star for each event or session they attend
- Depending on the number of stars accumulated by students at the end of the year, they will be able to exchange their stars for gifts of varying value (e.g., Spark sticker, lanyard, tote bag, a campus store gift card, etc.).
- The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators have been using the remaining funds acquired from campus sponsors to purchase gifts for Spark Stars.
- I look forward to seeing the outcome of this new initiative!

#### *Projects & Events: Project 4 (Completed) – Spark Winter Publication*

- The Promotions and Publication Coordinators (Jadyn and Linda) worked diligently on Spark's second publication of the year.
- The publication launched on March 2, 2023.
- With 292 likes and 76 saves, the publication was a huge success!
- The topic is McMaster University's meal plans, and the goal is to inform students of the differences between each meal plan branch, as well as off-campus vendors to which their meal plan applies (e.g., BarBurrito, Boston Pizza, Pinks, Pita n' More, Popeyes, Quik Chik, etc.).

#### *Projects & Events: Project 5 (Completed) – Spark Your Heart Event*

- The Event Coordinators (Anika, Daniel, and Myra) and Spark Events Committee planned a valentine's theme event.
- There were cookie decorating, pin and bracelet making, candy grams, and valentine's day origami.

- This event was executed on February 9, 6:00PM-8:00PM, at KTH B105.
- With 73 registrants, we had 88 students at the event.
- Many Team Leaders were also keen to help with the event. Specifically, we had 14 Team Leaders attend at various points to help out and enjoy their time.

*Projects & Events: Project 6 (Completed)* – **MSU Communications Team x Spark Housing Reel, “What’s Good, McMaster” Series**

- Spark collaborated with the MSU Communications Team for an Instagram reel focused on housing.
- Given that many first-year students are currently in the process of looking for houses, we thought it may be valuable to share some house hunting tips and tricks in the form of a reel.
- The reel was premised around interviewing McMaster University students, asking them questions pertaining to housing.
- Below are the questions that were asked to McMaster students:
  - What are your go-to platforms for finding a student house?
  - How did you find your current student house?
  - What is one piece of advice you would give to students currently looking for housing?
  - What is something new you learned through house hunting?
  - What’s the most important thing to look for in a student house?
  - What is an important thing to consider when searching for roommates?
- The reel features one of our Promotions and Publications Coordinators (Jadyn) and Marketing and Communications Assistant (Hayley Ma).
- It was posted on February 27, 2023, and amassed 9894 views, 262 likes, and 14 saves.
- It was definitely an effective means to inform the broader McMaster community about the Service.

*Projects & Events: Project 7 (Completed)* – **Fall and Winter Term Photos**

- At the start of each semester, we take a round of team photos.
- All Team Leaders and Executive members were invited to waterfall room with their Spark apparel.
- The Communications Officer, Will Dang, kindly took our photos.
- These photos will be used for promotional purposes.
- When volunteers post the photos to their social media platforms, the visibility of the Service increases.

*Projects & Events: Project 8 (Completed)* – **Winter Sessions**

- Despite our overall registration number of 120, we had around 50 first-years students consistently attending sessions.
- The topics that were covered through winter sessions included the following: *Expectation Setting, Teamwork and Collaboration, Introduction*

*to House Hunting, Hidden Gems on McMaster Campus, Positive Thinking, Culinary Skills 101, Goal Setting, Discover Your City.*

- For the “Culinary Skills 101” session, we collaborated with the Food Collective Centre.
  - Specifically, first-year students had a chance to learn and practice their culinary skills within their sessions.

*Projects & Events: Project 9 (Completed) – Spark Ambassadors Program*

- Spark Ambassadors is an opportunity for first-year students to work alongside Spark’s Executive Team to learn more about what Spark does behind-the-scenes and further engage within the Spark community.
- It provided first-year students with more of a leadership role within Spark and an opportunity to create some of Spark’s winter programming.
- Below is the general logistics for the Ambassador program:
  - *Outreach Coordinators:*
    - Week 1: Winter Intro to Spark Ambassadors Session
  - *Events Coordinators:*
    - Week 2: Talking about what a good event looks like, brainstorming events
    - Week 3: Planning logistics, starting to put event plan together
    - Week 4: Implementing and promoting event
    - Be at the event helping out and stuff
  - *Sessions Coordinators:*
    - Week 5: Bag packing
  - *Director and Assistant Director:*
    - Week 6: Join a Spark executive meeting

*Projects & Events: Project 10 (Completed) – Sessions and Events Committee*

- The Session and Events Coordinators have been working with their subcommittees to prepare winter semester’s programming.
- Both committees are comprised of Team Leaders that were interested in undertaking additional responsibilities by helping with either event or session planning.
- Sessions Committee has planned Session 5 and 7, which are focused on positive thinking and goal setting, respectively.
- Events Committee organized a Valentines event on February 9, 2023, which included activities such as speed friending, cookie decorating, and a candy gram.
- Both committees were incredibly enthusiastic about their roles and have brought forth insightful ideas. I am proud of all they have achieved!

*Projects & Events: Project 11 (Completed) – Spark Fall Publication*

- The Promotions and Publication Coordinators (Jadyn and Linda) worked diligently on Spark’s first publication of the year.
- The publication launched on November 29, 2022

- With 260 likes and 119 saves, the publication was a huge success!
- The topic is McMaster Apps, and the goal is to inform McMaster students of essential phone apps for university life (e.g., MacEats, MacQuest, McMaster Safety App, and McMaster Recreation App).

*Projects & Events: Project 12 (Completed) – Spark Wellness Bags*

- Spark ran the Wellness Bag initiative again this year.
- This initiative provided first-year students with free wellness bags filled with snacks and self-care items.
- Using the \$1450 we amassed through our kind sponsors, we were able to execute this event at MUSC's Clubspace on December 7, 2022.
- 200 wellness bags were all distributed in the first two hours!
- We are grateful for all our campus sponsors for making this possible, including McMaster Alumni Association, McMaster Social Sciences Society, President's Office, the Department of English and Cultural Studies, and the Campus Store.
- Additionally, I am thankful for my Outreach and Engagement Coordinators for seamlessly planning this initiative!
- This initiative was promoted on our social media and Community Advisors were asked to disseminate the promotional graphic to the first-year students on their residence floor.

*Projects & Events: Project 13 (Completed) – So, You Think You Can Craft (Crafting Event)*

- The Events Coordinators (Anika, Daniel, and Myra) have collaborated with MacCrafters on a crafting event for first-year students.
- First-year students were provided with various crafting supplies and tutorials, so they can craft while forming relationships with their peers.
- Given the extensive number of leftover materials from last year's event, we did not purchase any new supplies this year.
- The event occurred on November 9, 2022, in T13 building's room 125.
- We amassed a total of 36 registrants and 22 attendees.
- 10 Team Leaders volunteered at the event.

*Projects & Events: Project 14 (Completed) – Hike and Hangout Event*

- The Events Coordinators (Anika, Daniel, and Myra) organized a hiking event at Dundas Peak for November 26, 2022, between 10:30AM-2:30PM.
- Hike and Hangout was a HUGE success!
- The Events Coordinators did a fantastic job ensuring that everything was logistically in place for this event.
- Among the 42 registrants, we had approximately 15 people come out for the event!
- We took the HSR to Dundas Peak, took some photos for promotional material, and came back to campus for hot chocolate and some snacks!

- I could not have asked for a better event, and shoutout to the Events Coordinators for pulling this all together!

*Projects & Events: Project 15 (Completed) – Meet the Services Fair*

- Spark participated in Meet the Service Fair on September 27, 2022.
- The Outreach Coordinators (Vithuyan and Milica) ran the booth.
- Team Leaders and other Executives were also invited to help at the booth and represent the Service.
- We adorned our booth with the Spark banner, information board, and stickers.
- We were able to accomplish the following objectives by participating in this event: (1) inform more students about the Service, (2) promote sessions registration for the Winter term to first-year students, and (3) promote our upcoming events (i.e., So, You Think You Can Craft and Hike and Hangout) to first-year students.

*Projects & Events: Project 16 (Completed) – Fall Sessions*

- After weeks of promotions (e.g., creating promotional reels, posting graphics, reaching out to other Services to promote our content, and holding information booths), Spark has closed registration for our Mentorship Program (i.e., Spark sessions).
- As a result of the aforementioned efforts, we had 198 first-year students register for sessions.
- All registrations took place through Microsoft Forms. The link was be
- We offer sessions Monday through Thursday at two times: 1:30PM-2:30PM and 5:30PM-6:30PM
- If I were to provide feedback on sessions operation, I would advise making them 1.5 hours in length, rather than an hour to allow for enough time for groups to complete the activities and talk.
- The first week of Sessions started on September 19<sup>th</sup> and we are currently on the fourth week of sessions (i.e., the halfway mark).
- While attendance has significantly dropped since the first two sessions, we have 65-70 consistently attending first-year students.
- This year, we decided to hold all sessions in MSUC rooms, which posed numerous roadblocks related to room-booking that will be further discussed in the “Challenges” section of the report.
- In preparation for each session, the Sessions Coordinators (Deeptha, Nick, and Tuqa) have been leading sessions training on weekly basis with the Team Leaders.
- Session trainings are currently held every Thursday, 7:00PM-8:00PM, and Saturday 1:00PM-2:00PM.

*Projects & Events: Project 17 (Completed) – “What I Wish I Knew in First Year...” Reel*

- The Promotions and Publication Coordinators (Linda and Jadyn) have created an Instagram reel to promote sessions registration.

- This reel features Team Leaders sharing things they wish they had known when they were in first year.
- As will be discussed in the social media analytics section of the report, this reel was incredibly helpful in helping the Service gain traction.
- Here is the link to the reel:  
[https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiIRSHCpOnh/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CiIRSHCpOnh/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

*Projects & Events: Project 18 (Completed) – SSC Event and ClubsFest*

- The Student Success Centre has invited Spark to take part in their Student Services/Learning Fair booth on August 31.
- On September 6, Spark also partook in ClubsFest '22.
- We used both these events as opportunities to promote sessions registration and inform first year students about the services we provide.
- The Events Coordinators (Anika, Daniel, and Myra) have taken on the responsibility of both the SSC and ClubsFest booths, and they did a phenomenal job!
- They created a poster featuring past Spark photos and created a game where individuals have a chance to win various prizes depending on the popsicle stick that they draw.
- We also distributed Spark swag at the event, including stickers and rave cards that overview the Service's mission. Additionally, we had a QR code directing interested students to the Spark Sessions registration form.
- Team Leaders and other Executives were also present at various points to volunteer at the booth and represent the Service.

*Projects & Events: Project 19 (Completed) – Welcome Week Booths*

- The Outreach & Engagement Coordinators (Vithuyan and Milica) have taken the initiative to reach out to each Faculty Planner to seek further opportunities to promote Spark to the first-year students.
- Spark held a booth at the following Faculty's Club Fair: Science, Nursing, Kinesiology, Engineering, Health Sciences, and Arts and Sciences.
- The dates of the booths were dispersed during Welcome Week
- Numerous Team Leaders and Executives contributed their time by representing the Service at these booths
- Each of the booth had a QR code for Sessions registration for students that are interested.
- Participating at these Welcome Week booths undoubtedly helped expose Spark to more first year students. This is evident by the fact that 102 session registrants (~52%) indicated that they heard about Spark through Welcome Week. As such, these booths were incredibly effective in informing the first years about our Mentorship Program.

*Projects & Events: Project 20 (Completed) – Night Before Classes*

- Night Before Classes is an event in which first years can come and meet their peers and upper years in their faculties and go for a tour of their class buildings.
- The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators (Vithuyan and Milica) was responsible for organizing this event, and they did an incredible job.
- This event was held on September 5, 2022 at the MUSC/Mills Plaza
- We had 17 Team Leaders and six Executives volunteer for the event.
- With a turnout of 170 first-year students, the event was a huge success!
- Given that we had significantly more first-years show-up than initially anticipated, it was admittedly challenging to manage as we did not have enough volunteers.
- In groups of 8-10, Team Leaders provided first-year students with tours of their class buildings.
- Snacks were provided to attendees as were the QR code to Sessions registration for those that were interested.

*Projects & Events: Project 21 (Completed) – MSU x Spark Reel*

- Over the summer, the MSU Marketing and Communications Assistant (Hayley) had reached out to Spark for a collaboration opportunity on an Instagram reel.
- After weeks of planning, we filmed the reel on September 13, and it was posted on September 16, 2022.
- This reel was intentionally posted before sessions registration deadline in hope to attract more first-year students to sign-up for the program.
- As will be seen in the social media analytics section of the report, the reel gained substantial traction from students.
- Currently, it has 15.0K views and 513 likes.
- I would also like to take this time to thank some of the Executive Board members that kindly agreed to make a cameo in the reel—we greatly appreciate it!
- Here is the link to the reel:  
[https://www.instagram.com/reel/CilhUx1OCLc/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CilhUx1OCLc/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

*Projects & Events: Project 22 (Completed) – Summer Programming*

- The Events Coordinators (Anika, Daniel, and Myra) planned a Summer Webinar Series based on the following themes: University Life and Faculty Fair on July 31, August 6, and August 7.
- Over the duration of the three days Spark's Webinars ran, we had a total of 168 registrations. Some Webinars had a greater attendance than others, as would be expected. The single most attended was the Faculty Fair Webinar, in which students had a chance to interact with representatives from each faculty.
- Spark also received a sponsorship from the McMaster Campus Store of a \$25 gift card, which was gifted to one of the attendees at random.

- I am incredibly proud of the Events Coordinators and the P&P Coordinators for their tireless work on this project.
- All Webinars were recorded and sent to registrants to reference at later points as they choose. The slide decks to each Webinars were also forwarded to registrants, so they can revisit key information from the presentations.
- For future years, I would consider ways through which components of the summer programming can be provided in-person.

***Projects & Events: Project 23 (Completed) – Adding Spark Scholarship to Spark’s Operating Policy***

- Last year’s Outreach & Engagement Coordinators piloted the Spark Scholarship initiative with the goal of increasing second semester session retention rates and acknowledging students that demonstrate a passion for Spark.
- Seeing the success of last year’s Spark Scholarship initiative, we added this initiative to the Operating Policy, such that it can be implemented yearly by the Spark Director.
- In doing so, acquired a budget line dedicated to the Spark Scholarship so the Service can receive consistent funding for this initiative.
- With the support of Spark’s Outreach and Engagement Coordinators (Vithuyan and Milica), a memo was composed and sent to VP Admin (Mitchell German) and the Administrative Services Coordinator (Victoria Scott).
- The clause that was added to the Operating Policy provides the following context:
  - The Spark Scholarship will be valued at \$200 and shall be awarded to two (2) first-year student registered in Spark Sessions who demonstrates growth of their leadership skills throughout the year and who helps to promote a safe(r) space on McMaster campus.
  - Eligibility includes having attended either four (4) Sessions in both the Fall and Winter terms (total of 8 Sessions), or alternatively, 6 Sessions in the Winter term.
  - There will be an application process for first years to apply for the Spark Scholarship.
  - All applications will be verified by one of the first year’s Team Leaders.
- These changes are reflected under Section 2 (i.e., "Operating Parameters") and Section 3.3 (i.e., the role description of the Spark Outreach & Engagement Coordinators) of Spark’s Operating Policy.

***Projects & Events: Project 24 (Completed) – Updating Outreach and Engagement Coordinator Job Description***

- With the addition of the Spark Scholarship on the Operating Policy, I also updated the job description for the Outreach and Engagement Coordinator role.

- The revised Operating Policy states, in Section 3.3.2., that the Outreach and Engagement Coordinators are “responsible for overseeing the Spark Scholarship program.”
- The job description for the role is consistent with the new policy.

***Projects & Events: Project 25 (Completed) – Adding Summer Programming to Spark’s Operating Policy and Updating Event Coordinator’s Job Description***

- Since Horizon has been rescinded, Spark has been undertaking summer programming for the incoming class of first-year students.
- Thus, I added summer programming to Section 2 (i.e., “Operating Parameters”) and Section 3.6 (i.e., Personnel Structure – Spark Events Coordinators) of the Operating Policy.
- The following clause was added:
  - “MSU Spark shall facilitate workshops in the summer term for prospective Level I students at McMaster University to prepare them for their transition.” – Section 2
  - Spark Events Coordinators shall “Create and implement summer programming for the incoming first year community focused on first year success.” – Section 3.6
- Given that Spark’s Events Coordinators are primarily involved in summer programming, this responsibility has also been added to their Job Description.

***Projects & Events: Project 26 (Completed) - TL Hiring***

- I am incredibly proud of the dedication demonstrated by the Executive Team during the Team Leader hiring process. This would not have been possible without them.
- Spark has hired a total of 35 Team Leaders for the 2022/23 year. The vast majority of the Executive Team (n=8) acted as TLs during the year as well.
- We received extremely positive feedback on Spark’s hiring process.
- We conducted a Team Leader Welcome Social with our TLs that was mandatory to attend. During this time, we did icebreakers to allow the team to get to know each other a little bit better, and also shared some important upcoming logistical information.
- In addition to the Welcome Social, Team Leaders were added to a Facebook group, where members have been posting introductions of themselves and interacting with one another.
- We have also emailed a copy of the Spark Team Leader Guidebook created by the previous Spark PTMs to all the TLs.
- We held virtual Team Leader training on September 17, 2022. This was mandatory for all TLs to attend, and covered Spark-Specific Training as well as Session #1 Training.

## Outreach & Promotions

### Summary

The Promotions and Publications Coordinators have worked tirelessly throughout the year to make high impact publications that are relevant to the first-year experience. Spark saw record-setting engagement on its Instagram this year, and that is entirely attributed to the Promotions and Publications Coordinators, Linda and Jady. I am beyond proud of them and all of their hard work throughout this year. If I were to state one key takeaway from this year about promotions, it would be the importance of starting early. We saw a clear correlation between the length of promotional period and number of registrants. For the most part, the Promotions and Publications Coordinators were proactive about uploading promotional content, so as to optimize our traction.

The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators, Milica and Vithuyan, established some solid connections this year between Spark and external stakeholders (i.e., McMaster Alumni Association, McMaster Social Sciences Society, President's Office, the Department of English and Cultural Studies, and the Campus Store) allowing us to receive funding for various initiatives. They also did a lot of internal outreach by further connecting first years with Spark through various means. For instance, they connected with Archway Mentor, Housing and Conference Services, and First Year Council. All of them played their part in disseminating our promotional content to their networks through various means (e.g., casting the promotional graphic on the TV screens, sharing it to their Microsoft Teams platform, emailing their contact, etc). Indeed, this past year truly reinforced the importance of bridging connections with those that share common goals.

### Promotional Materials

Please find below new posts since the last EB Report was conducted. You can reference other Spark posts by referencing prior EB Reports.

### Self-Love Event



**Likes:** 51

**Sends:** 27

**Saves:** 13

**Reach:** 2559

*Note:* It has only been 1.5 days since this graphic was posted; thus, we are anticipating increased engagement in the coming days.

*Social Media Engagement Throughout the Year*

Please find below our social media growth pattern throughout the year. As a benchmark, I have provided the benchmark for last year's trends as well.

*Instagram Followers:*

	Report 1	Report 2	Report 3	Report 4	Report 5	Report 6	Report 7	Report 8	Now
2022/23	5384	5358	6150	6311	6323	6282	6185	6110	6178
2021/22	4375	4532	5039	5312	5347	5456	5423	5407	N/A

## **Finances**

### *Budget Summary*

Successes: Spark effectively aligned spending with the budget plan from the beginning of the year. I also updated the Budget Tracker with each purchase to gain an accurate gauge of our remaining money. For the most part, I did not feel that we ever had deficient budget to run quality programming for the first-year students. We also sought out support from various stakeholders to help us run initiatives which also gave us some comfort space from a budgetary view. Spark's annual campaign budget line is not divided into each of the branches (i.e., sessions, events, and outreach). Given that there is no fixed money allocation for each role, I was afforded the flexibility of redistributing money as I see fit. For instance, there was a lot of money left over after purchasing all the sessions materials for the year; thus, I simply reallocated this money to the Events Coordinators without having to submit a formal request to VP Finance.

Challenges: Given the cancellation of First Year Formal, we had surplus money remaining under the Annual Campaign budget line. As such, the Spark team spent considerable time brainstorming ways we can utilize this money productively and effectively throughout the year. Moreover, it was difficult to manage orders placed through our order with the Underground. While the standing order was placed to alleviate the work burden, it ended up causing more stress than necessary as I had to retrospectively add all the standing order purchases into the budget tracker. Unlike other purchases made by the Service, orders placed through the Underground do not require a Purchase Order submission and is rather charged automatically to our accounts. This rendered it more difficult to track all our Underground purchases. As such, I suggest a better system to be implemented in coming years to better monitor the Underground standing order expenses. For instance, perhaps can send monthly invoices to each of the Service, so the PTMs are aware of money that has been charged to their standing order.

The next large expense would be from the Annual Campaigns budget line (#6103-0125) to purchase materials for our Self-Love event and Closing Ceremony. Additionally, we will be pulling from the Advertising and Promotions budget line as well (#6501-0125) to generate graphics for Executive Team hiring.

SPARK				
EXPENDITURE				
ACCOUNT CODE	ITEM	BUDGET / COST	PO SUBMITTED (DATE)	PO APPROVED
<b>5003-0125</b>	<b>SPARK - OFFICE SUPPLIES</b>	<b>\$100.00</b>		
	Craft supplies (bristol board, snacks)	\$32.81	22-Aug	128202
	Spark Photos	\$12.80	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Superlative Certificates	\$35.10	landing order w/ UG	127996
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$80.71		
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$19.29		
<b>6103-0125</b>	<b>SPARK - ANNUAL CAMPAIGNS</b>	<b>\$3,700.00</b>		
	ClubFest 2022 Booth	\$20.00	8-Aug	128155
	Sessions 1-3 Materials	\$279.88	17-Aug	128172
	Session 2 Snacks	\$116.31	17-Aug	128173
	Session 4 Materials	\$49.09	20-Sep	128320
	Session 5-8 Materials	\$135.56	23-Sep	128337
	Hike and Hangout Snacks	\$113.62	20-Nov	128558
	Spark Wellness Bags	\$1,298.93	30-Nov	128586
	Winter session materials	\$411.32	1-Jan	128732
	Spark Your Heart material	\$132.66	31-Jan	128824
	Outreach Sponsorship	-\$1,450.00	28-Nov-22	N/A
	Winter session 6 materials	\$165.81	2-Mar-23	128913
	Discover Your City	\$480.00	20-Mar-23	129053
	RATical self-love	\$340.00	13-Mar-23	129054
	Closing Ceremony	\$200.00	21-Mar-23	
	Spark Stars	\$326.63	13-Mar-23	129027
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$2,619.81		
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$1,080.19		
<b>6501-0125</b>	<b>SPARK - ADVERTISING &amp; PROMOTIONS</b>	<b>\$3,500.00</b>		
	TL Hiring Graphics	\$100.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Exec Intro Graphics	\$220.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Spark T-shirts	\$936.29	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Lanyard	\$340.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Rave cards x4700	\$440.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Stickers	\$159.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	The Silhouette Ad	\$25.00	22-Aug	127996
	Winter Publication	\$165.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Spark Fall Sessions Registration Promo	\$100.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	First Year Formal and Giveaway Promos	\$147.25	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Fall Publication	\$165.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Wellness Bag Sponsor Cards	\$57.49	landing order w/ UG	127996
	RATical self-love graphic	\$100.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	Spark Your Heart graphic	\$100.00	landing order w/ UG	127996
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$3,055.03		
	REMAINING IN LINE	\$444.97		
<b>6494-0125</b>	<b>SPARK - VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION</b>	<b>\$750.00</b>		
	Executive Team Gifts	\$200.00	26-Jul	128120
	TL Summer Social	\$80.00	15-Aug	128182
	Crewnecks	\$1,211.44	20-Mar	127996
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$1,491.44		
	REMAINING IN LINE	-\$741.44		
<b>6802-0125</b>	<b>SPARK - LEADER TRAINING</b>	<b>\$200.00</b>		
	Pizza	\$150.53	9-Oct	128513
	Last Winter Sessions Training	\$64.59	17-Mar	129026
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	\$215.12		
	REMAINING IN LINE	-\$15.12		
<b>TOTALS</b>				
<b>TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>\$8,250.00</b>		
<b>TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>\$7,462.11</b>		
<b>REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>\$787.89</b>		

## **Executives & Volunteers**

Undoubtedly, Spark volunteers, including the executive team and Team Leaders, have worked incredibly hard. Spark is not a small commitment by any means as it warrants year-long commitment for duties that can be incredibly time-consuming. The positive impact of the Service on the first-year student body is only possible due to the volunteers that devote their time and skills—they are truly the backbone of Spark.

*Executives:* I am incredibly grateful for my Executive Team. Undoubtedly, the team was comprised of the most dedicated, passionate, and resilient group of individuals that I truly look up to. They demonstrated empathy and kindness, and consistently put first years first. It was reassuring to know that I had their support at all times and depend on them to deliver quality programming and publications. I am so proud to be able to call them my Execs, leaders in the McMaster community, but most importantly my friends. The community we built within the Executive team is special. This was truly the highlight of my experience as Spark Director, and I learned so much through them that has helped shape me into the leader I am today. I truly think our regular Exec Meetings and check-ins helped to keep Exec morale high and would recommend doing this for future Directors. We also held several Executive socials throughout the year to cultivate strong relationships (i.e., Exec retreat, pumpkin carving, gingerbread making, Valentino's dinner, Bread Bar dinner, holiday gift exchange, and spending countless hours together in the Committee Room).

*Team Leaders:* I was consistently impressed with the Team Leaders engagement throughout the year, commitment to first years, and overall resiliency. Spark would not have been able to have the impact on first years that it did if they hadn't helped out at our events, promoted our publications, and ran weekly Sessions. For future years, I would recommend holding more Team Leader socials—even between Exec-on-Call pods—to foster more opportunities for Team Leaders to form relationships with their peers and feel a sense of community. In retrospect, I feel that Team Leaders had limited opportunities to meet others outside their coships.

## **Successes**

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

- **Executives Going Above and Beyond Within Their Roles:** Each Executive role's Job Description clearly outlines the duties that are expected of them. In the case of Events Coordinators, they are responsible for "overseeing the planning of four (4) first-year workshops throughout the year." The Events Coordinators have exceeded the number of events they were required to plan. Despite already fulfilling their minimum requirements, their passion for first-year success through event-planning has led them to execute additional events for in the McMaster University community. Likewise, the Promotions and Publications Coordinators are expected to release two publications in a year, but in

light of the remaining budget, they have been keen to release a third publication focused on navigating instances of misplacing personal belongings on campus. I am incredibly grateful and privileged to have had the opportunity to work with Executives that not only fulfill their responsibilities but go above and beyond within their roles. I learned a lot from working with them and my experience in the position was exponentially enhanced as a result of them.

- **Spark Stars Fruition:** Coming into the Spark Director role, Spark Stars was an initiative I was keen to implement. While the Spark Achievement in Leadership is an excellent means to recognize students that demonstrate a passion and commitment for Spark, it is only awarded to two first years among a large pool of qualified candidates. Thus, I wanted to implement an initiative like Spark Stars where more students could be recognized for their commitment. With the support and leadership of the Outreach and Engagement Coordinators my ideas are becoming closer towards reality. We have purchased the various gifts for the first-year students and are waiting to distribute them at Closing Ceremonies. I am looking forward to recognizing committed and outstanding first-year students in Spark!
- **Winter Retention:** One of my goals for this year was to curb the low session retention rate in second semester—a consistent challenge that the Service has faced. By prioritizing this goal, we were able to reach a record number of winter term registrants this year. Specifically, we ended with 120 registrants, which is a huge success. Among the pool of registered first-year students, 32% returned from the fall term.
- The Promotions and Publication Coordinators (Jadyn and Linda) and Outreach and Engagement Coordinators (Milica and Vithuyan) worked incredibly hard to increase our registration numbers.
- In addition to posting our session registration graphics, the Promotions and Publication Coordinators (Jadyn and Linda) created a promotional reel to attract more first-year users on Instagram and emphasized that we will be offering unique sessions that are not repeats from the Fall term.
- The Outreach and Engagement Coordinators (Milica and Vithuyan) contributed to winter session registration by emailing all of the fall registrants and individuals that picked up the wellness bags.
- This term, we also reached out to Housing and Conference Services to promote our registration content. Specifically, the registration graphic was casted on all residence TVs and the Community Advisors of each building were asked to promote Spark sessions to their first-year students.
- Additionally, I contacted the First Year Council Coordinator to further disseminate registration to the first-year population.
- Archway was also incredibly helpful in promoting sessions registration to the first-year students. Specifically, the Archway Mentor Lead posted the registration graphic to their Teams channel.

## Challenges

Below are some notable challenges Spark faced throughout this year:

- **Hiring a TL team diverse in programs:** Stepping into my role, one of my goals was to recruit a Team Leader team comprised of individuals from diverse programs. In all, the majority of hired Team Leaders are from the Health Sciences program, followed by Life Sciences. Unfortunately, there is no representation from the Faculty of Engineering and there is limited number of individuals from the Commerce and Humanities programs. Recognizing that Spark is a Service intended to serve students of all faculties, future Directors should brainstorm ways to encourage upper-years to apply from various faculties and help first years from Engineering, Commerce, and Humanities feel supported and heard when they have any faculty-specific questions.
- **First-Year Formal:** Despite our original plan to execute First Year Formal, it was unfortunately cancelled after months of planning. Undoubtedly, this was one of the most disheartening points in this role. The decision to cancel the event was reached by the Executive Board due to low ticket sale rates and the projected financial deficit. The Team Leaders, particularly members of the Events Committee, that were scheduled to volunteer at First Year Formal were also discouraged by the cancellation. As such, the cancellation was disappointing for many members of the team, and it was an incredibly difficult news to deliver. I have spent several months reflecting on the experience and devising suggestions for future First Year Formal planning efforts. Firstly, the timeline of First Year Formal is not ideal for a collaboration with First Year Council. Traditionally, First Year Formal is held in the Fall term to avoid competing with the Faculty Formals occurring at various points of Winter semester. However, FYC spends a significant portion of the Fall term onboarding and training their members, which has significantly delayed the planning and promotion of First Year Formal. For example, we were not able to start promoting the event until much later into the term due to the FYC Coordinator's pushback to wait until the Council is formed. This was the case for other planning stages as well, ultimately delaying the promotional period and making everything last-minute (e.g., DJ hiring, decoration purchases, etc.). Thus, so long as we want to continue running First Year Formal during the Fall term, I would strongly advise Spark to take the greater lead with the event—even if that means running it alone without partnering with another Service. Furthermore, while I recognize the Executive Board's rationale behind cancelling the event, I feel that it could have been addressed more sensitively. Three days after we spent a considerable portion of our budget on first-year formal promotional materials (e.g., rave cards, countdown posts, and ticket giveaway graphics), I was called into the office for an urgent meeting, where I was informed that the Formal had been cancelled and the ticket sale portal had been removed from the MSU website. Given the lack of notice in advance,

it made the cancellation more difficult to process. With that being said, the Spark team would have valued more transparency and would have appreciated greater involvement in the decision-making process (e.g., consulting our thoughts on cancelling the event before proceeding). While this was not the outcome we were hoping for, we nonetheless want to thank the Executive Board for their support throughout the process. Namely, we are grateful for the Director of Marketing & Communications (Wooder) for contacting the ticket holders to facilitate reimbursements. We are also thankful for VP Admin (Mitchell) for fielding all our inquiries and providing recommendations on next steps. As well, the President (Simranjeet) has extended overwhelming support throughout the entire process—from arranging daily check-ins with me and the FYC Coordinator to handling venue cancellation—we cannot thank him enough.

- **Room Bookings:** Undoubtedly, booking rooms for sessions has been an incredibly time-consuming and taxing process. Given that Spark is only allocated three hours of MUSC booking time per week, it is not possible for us to accommodate 18 session groups, which would warrant a total of 18 hours of booking time each week. Thus, we had to reach out to other MSU Services to borrow their booking hours. Based on my experience with booking rooms throughout the year, relying on other Services' hours is challenging due to the many back-and-forth email coordination that is required, which often delays the process. If possible, we are hoping that Spark can either secure our own room to run sessions or acquire more MUSC booking hours in future years to further facilitate the process of room booking.

## Miscellaneous

With this being my last EB Report, I would like to formally thank everyone on EB for consistently supporting Spark, our goals, and myself. Your support truly made a difference, and Spark would not have achieved its accomplishments without you. Thank you for all you do to support the McMaster community! It was truly a joy coming into the MSU office and being met with the warmest welcome every single time. Thank you for giving me the opportunity of the Spark Director role. I will never forget all the special memories etched through my time in this position.



