



REPORT

From the office of the...

Spark Director

TO:	Members of the Executive Board
FROM:	Deeptha Ramakrishnan
SUBJECT:	Spark Report #2
DATE:	July 13 th 2023

Yearplan Update

Hi Executive Board members! In regards to our June yearplan goals, Spark has completed a solidified TL hiring plan, and have just completed the written phase of the application process. Interview candidates have been selected and contacted, and interviews will be conducted this week. Our finalized TL team will be hired by the start of next week, something we as a service are very excited about. We've also implemented the TL rep hiring initiative we had mentioned in our previous report in an effort to increase diversity amongst the TL pool. This has resulted in our interview candidates being from a large variety of academic backgrounds, and us having at least one candidate from each faculty in consideration for the TL position – something that was unlikely otherwise.

Summer programming planning has also been in full swing, with our first set of webinars commencing at the end of the month. We've had some challenges reaching out to certain faculty reps due to outdated contact information, or just a lack of responsiveness. We've found Instagram, and reaching out to past TLs from these faculties to help mitigate this.

Monthly exec one on ones were another initiative we aimed to launch in June. Due to the busyness surrounding TL hiring, we haven't had the chance to implement this from the PTM side, and our executives have also been busy with question ideation and marking, therefore we've held off as of now and have rather encouraged executives to reach out if they had any questions or concerns. I plan on implementing this initiative at the end of July, after TL hiring.

Events, Projects, & Activities

General Service Usage

Our service as of yet has not commenced formal usage. At the end of July and the beginning of August, we will facilitate our summer programming initiative, which will provide first years the opportunity to engage with our service.

Projects & Events: Team Leader Hiring (On-Going)

As mentioned above, we are currently entering the interview phase of Spark Team Leader hiring. Written applications closed on June 27th, through which we received 167 applications. From there, 76 interview offers (including 3 fast-tracked applicants from the executive hiring cycle) were sent to selected candidates after implementation of the TL rep hiring program we proposed at the start of the process. This program enabled us to pick anywhere from 1-5 of the highest scoring candidates from each faculty to include in the interview pool to ensure diversity of TL interviewees. We found that this helped us achieve our goal of having at least 1 interviewee from each faculty, vital in our efforts to achieve our long-term goal of horizontal growth and serve as large a first year population as possible. Initially, only 69 candidates booked an interview by the appointed date. Thus, based on score, we made an additional 8 offers to candidates on the waitlist. Afterwards, however, 2 candidates reported reasons for being unable to select an interview by the allotted time, therefore we provided them the opportunity to book an interview time. Thus in total, we have 79 interview candidates.

Interviews will take place on July 12th, 14th and 15th on Zoom. We are offering 10 hours of interviews on these days, with 5 interspersed on Wednesday, 2 on Friday, and 3 on Saturday. To prepare for these, on June 25th, Spark alumni attended a mock interview session facilitated for our executive team to familiarize themselves with the process, and for both myself and the AD to learn how to move candidates between rooms on Zoom, and ensure timing was considered adequately. After interviews, candidates will be selected based on score and the continuation of the TL rep hiring program (at least 1 top scoring applicant from each faculty) on July 16th, and offers to join the Spark team will be sent out on July 17th. We aim to send anywhere between 25-30 offers, depending on the number of executives who would like to also TL this upcoming year.

Projects & Events: Summer Programming (Ongoing)

Summer programming is scheduled to begin at the end of the month, with the Faculty Fair series, and continue into August with the 'MSU Services and Sites' webinar. The Faculty Fair webinars are taking place on July 30th and 31st, and the Services and Sites webinar is taking place on August 13th. The faculties who are being featured are Health Sciences, Science, Humanities, Kinesiology, Indigenous Studies, Engineering, Nursing, Arts and Science, and Commerce. The services being featured are SWHAT, EFRT, SHEC and Maccess, with collaboration from Macademics.

We've also obtained three \$20 gift cards from the campus store, and one \$25 gift card from the Phoenix. These will be used as giveaway prizes to garner attendance and traction for the event, and will be promoted alongside other materials prior to the webinars commencing. On the topic of promotions, Ashley and our Promotions and Publications executives have planned to start promotional materials for the faculty fair webinars next week, starting with small video clips from each faculty introducing themselves and promoting their presentation time slot to both their audience and Spark audiences through the joint post feature on Instagram. These videos will be posted to serve as a countdown to the faculty fair webinars! Services and sites webinar promotions will also occur in conjunction with the other MSU services, and this will be planned soon and launched after the conclusion of the faculty fair series.

Projects & Events: First Year Formal Planning (Upcoming)

First year formal planning is now fully underway! This past week, both myself and my AD had a meeting with Wooder and Craig to discuss details, obtain feedback on our plans, and determine next steps. As such, we've contacted MUSC services and have 'First Hold' status on CIBC hall for November 24th from 7pm-12am. We have also relayed information from the meeting to our events coordinators, who are now planning to proceed by selecting food options for the event, and working with the current FYC team to determine theme ideas and choosing one by the start of August.

We've had some challenges determining the involvement of FYC in First Year Formal, due to the outgoing coordinator's term having already ended, and the incoming coordinator beginning in August. This has led to challenges with contacting and receiving responses from members of FYC, and with clearly delineating their contributions to the event without the presence of a coordinator to discuss this with. As of now, we have decided that the current FYC members, if interested, will contribute to theme

ideation and selection, and with the ideation of a promotional strategy come September. The incoming FYC team will aid with monetary contributions towards promotional materials, and with promotion of the event to the first year populace. Fortunately, one of our events coordinators is a current member of FYC, therefore her contributions in trying to contact the team and engage in theme discussions has been greatly beneficial. In the event of there being no improvement in involvement from the current FYC, we'd love to hear ideas and suggestions as to how to proceed.

Projects & Events: Team Leader Onboarding (Upcoming)

After the hiring of Team Leaders is completed at the end of this month, onboarding initiatives will begin in the middle of August. This will include a virtual TL orientation (will be themed – TBD!) where TLs will have a chance to learn more about Spark's initiatives (sessions, committees, events), and be informed of expectations during their role. I think having this in August allows for execs to start planning for their committees, and also for TLs to feel immediately incorporated within the Spark community, and to ease their transitions in September as well. This will also service as a mini social event/bonding experience for TLs to get to meet each other and form new connections.

Items like training and contracts, alongside fall session availability forms will also be provided during this orientation.

Projects & Events: Night Before Classes + Welcome Week Logistics (Upcoming)

Night before classes is an annual event hosted by Spark during Welcome Week on Labour Day. This event serves to facilitate tours for first year students, so they can identify locations where they will be having classes in Fall semester. Our Outreach and Engagement coordinators will begin planning out logistics for this soon, and newly recruited and onboarded TLs will be asked to help facilitate the event. Promotional strategies for this will also commence in August prior to and during Welcome Week, with Promotions and Publications coordinators liaising with Outreach and Engagement to devise a plan. Faculties and campus partners will also be contacted to promote the event.

Outreach & Promotions

Summary

The Team Leader hiring initiative has enabled us to engage in a variety of promotional strategies, and experiment with different platforms.

As a result of our initiatives through Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and external outreach (ie: asking other MSU services to reshare promotional materials, contacting welcome week coordinators and CA teams to share materials amongst their volunteers), we've received a total of 167 applications, exceeding our target of 150!

Our upcoming Summer Programming series allows Spark to reach a variety of incoming students in different faculties, and also make itself known to users of other MSU services. With promotional initiatives for this endeavour commencing shortly, such as reels consisting of video clips from faculty representatives promoting their faculty fair webinar, we're excited to see the reach we'll achieve in the coming months.

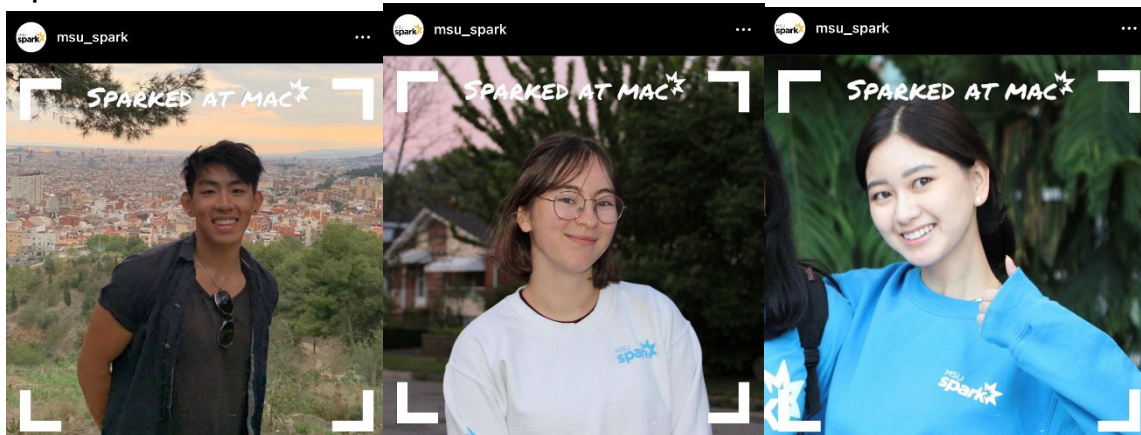
Promotional Materials

TL Hiring Reels:

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ctw9NeYJ19E/?igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==>

<https://www.instagram.com/reel/Ct4PhROt835/?igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==>

Sparked At Mac Series

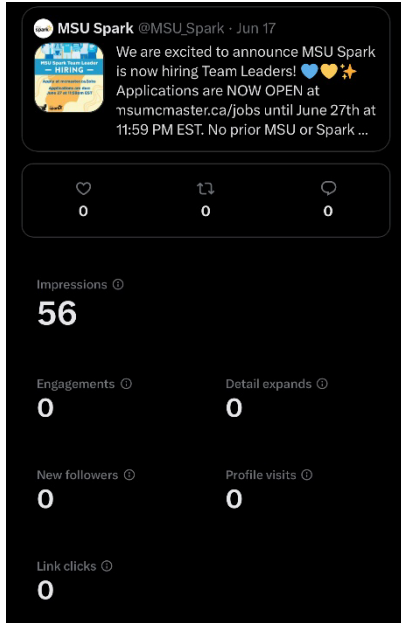


Social Media Engagement since the Previous Report

Instagram (last 30 days)

Accounts reached	9,101	>
	+262%	
Accounts engaged	676	>
	+9,557%	
Total followers	5,917	>
	-0.4%	

Twitter (most recent tweet)

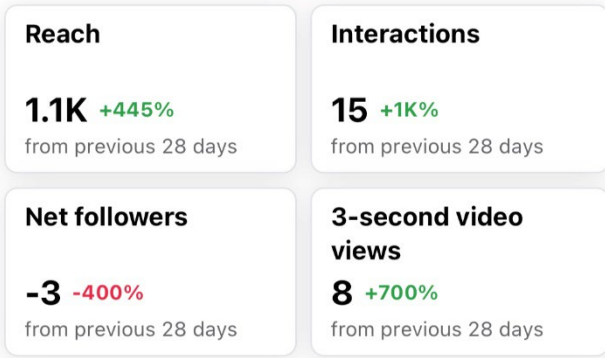


Facebook (last 28 days)

Performance ⓘ

Followers: 2,715

Last 28 days



Finances

Budget Summary

Since the last report, Spark is currently in discussion with the UG to spend at most \$600 on physical promotional materials, such as stickers, rave cards, lanyards, tote bags, water bottles, etc. The exact combination of items, and amount spent, will be determined through talks with Paula! Additionally, I am also planning on submitting a PO for \$100 within the next few days to purchase gift cards for my executive team, as a show of both mine and my ADs appreciation for all of their contributions and hard work during TL hiring.

We've also received \$85 (3 x \$20 gift cards from the campus store, 1 x \$25 gift card from the Phoenix) from campus partners to use as giveaway prizes for Summer Programming.

In terms of challenges, as we approaching having to put down deposits for First Year Formal, I'm finding it a bit challenging to appropriately budget. However, as immediate concerns arise, I'll make sure to have discussions with the VP Finance to ensure that Spark's budget is being used appropriately in order to ensure funds are still available for other key initiatives.

ACCOUNT CODE	ITEM	BUDGET / COST
5003-0125		50
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0
	REMAINING IN LINE	50
6103-0125		3700
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0
	REMAINING IN LINE	3700
6494-0125		400
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	100
	REMAINING IN LINE	300
6501-0125		3600
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	100
	REMAINING IN LINE	3500
6802-0125		500
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0

	REMAINING IN LINE	500
TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		
		8250
TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		
		200
REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING		
		8050

Executives & Volunteers

Currently, morale amongst the executive team seems to be improving! With various opportunities to collaborate, such as initiatives within coships, written application question generation and marking, and interview question generation and marking, members on the team have been getting to know each other, and the tone of conversations within meeting chats and the group chat has gotten a lot brighter! We've also been using discussion-based check-in questions, so the team has a chance to share things about themselves, and for others to also contribute. I've also been having a lovely time getting to know the members on my team through meetings with the coships, and individual conversations with them.

Both my AD and I acknowledge that currently with hiring and their individual initiatives, executives are very busy and have a lot on their plates.

Therefore, we try to make meetings as fun as possible to help ameliorate the mood, but more practically, we also actively emphasize that channels of communication are open, and that if executives are ever overwhelmed, to feel free to reach out. We find that this has been working so far, with a few executives reaching out to us for accommodations, which we've been able to incorporate within our planning and scheduling. We hope that with the conclusion of the TL hiring cycle, executives will have some time to rest and focus on their individual initiatives, prior to welcome week activities. To show executive appreciation, I'm planning on placing a PO for \$100 to provide each executive with a \$10 gift card to a store of their choice!

We're also bringing back monthly 2on1 meetings (which will eventually transition to 1on1 meetings between executives and the director once the AD starts meeting with TLs) to help us as PTMs get to know the executives and their needs better, and to also give them a chance to share any concerns they may have as we move out of the summer and into the Fall.

TLs haven't been hired as of yet, however morale amongst the TL team is something that will be discussed in the next report!

Successes

Initiative

Spark executive roles require a lot of creativity and have many moving parts, which can make it hard to make progress without initiative. However, members of my team, despite their busyness, have always shown initiative and are always willing to share new ideas and take their initiatives to the next step. They're always thinking multiple steps ahead (sometimes even further than myself), and show enthusiasm regarding their roles, which has been great to see. They're also actively setting up meetings with campus partners and other coships to collaborate with their activities, which is amazing!

Communication

With the team getting to know each other better over the past few months, the nature of communication has drastically improved. Executives are more willing to speak up and share their thoughts and feelings, and also have been approaching myself and my AD more often when they need to. Additionally, the tone of conversation has been a nice balance between serious, when tasks are being explained and instructions delivered, and fun and warm, when check-in questions are happening, or team members are interacting and discussing other topics together. Our Facebook messenger set up has also been working well, with executives not only using the group chat to share questions and celebrate accomplishments, but also to collaborate with one another on initiatives, serving as Spark's main platform of interaction. I hope that communication will stay as open as it currently is over the year, and that executives will share any ideas and perspectives they have! Open communication is what helps us consider a wide variety of ideas, enabling us to serve as wide a first year population as possible.

Current Challenges

Delays in Response/Lack of Response

Many of our executives are currently liaising with other campus partners and MSU services to collaborate on their initiatives both in the summer, and throughout the year. However, some coships have been having delays in response or a lack of response from many organizations. They've been trying their best to communicate with these partners through a variety of platforms and means, however sometimes to no avail. Seeing this as a PTM makes me sad because the executives already have so much on their plates, and this is something I had hoped they wouldn't have

to be concerned about. I've also noticed that its been discouraging to them because they feel as though those organizations don't want to collaborate with them on their initiatives.

Throughout this, I've been trying my best to encourage them and to let them know that the lack of responsiveness is in no means a reflection on themselves or the quality of their initiatives. I've also been helping them find alternative means of communicating with these partners, whether it be through other individuals we know personally associated with these organizations, or by coming up with alternative solutions. However, any advice regarding this would be much appreciated!

Scheduling and Last Minute Cancellations

During our TL hiring cycle, we've had to schedule interview times where executives are available to facilitate their stations. However, since the start of the cycle, we've had difficulty with executives being available. During a few meetings, we had an honest conversation with them regarding the importance of their presence at interviews, and to try their best to be as open with their availability as possible. We also did our level best to schedule these times at least a month in advance, so executives would have time to make accommodations in their schedules. However, over the past week, we've been receiving messages from executives regarding them being unable to make certain times. This has been hard on both myself and my AD, as it has resulted in us having to make changes to the TL interview schedule, and other details, such as Conflict of Interest considerations. We both understand that the executives are busy individuals, and we're glad that they feel comfortable enough to openly share this with us, however the last minute nature of these cancellations has made scheduling more challenging on our end. Hopefully we can find a better way to handle them as the year goes on!

Miscellaneous

I'm sure members of the EB are aware of this, but I would just like to formally state that due to professional school, I am stepping down from my position as Spark Director effective July 21st. Therefore, this will be my last report to the board. I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank you all for the opportunity to serve as Spark's director these past few months! It's been lovely hiring and working with my team, and watching both them and the service flourish over time. Spark is a service that means a lot to me, and has positively shaped my undergraduate experience, and who I am as

an individual, and I'm excited to see all the lovely things the next director (whom we're currently in the process of hiring) will achieve with the service!