



**Students Participating as Ambassadors for Research in Kentucky (SPARK)
Program
Cohort 7 (2026-2027)
Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

For additional questions please contact Ariel Arthur at ariel.arthur@uky.edu

1. Q: What is the purpose of the SPARK Program?

A: The purpose of the SPARK program is to train undergraduate students at the University of Kentucky from a broad range of backgrounds, experiences, and communities to conduct impactful research to improve health disparities., led by UK's Center for Health, Engagement, and Transformation (CHET) with support from other units.

2. Q: What is the Center for Health, Engagement, and Transformation (CHET)?

A: Join the CHET Student and Trainee Listserv:

https://uky.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_06gEWVvnH6JU6PQ You can find information about CHET here: <https://www.chet.med.uky.edu/>.

3. Q: Do I have to be from Kentucky in order to participate in SPARK?

A: No.

4. Q: How do 'SPARKlers' connect with mentors?

A: Faculty research mentors from the University of Kentucky have been pre-selected by SPARK leadership. Upon acceptance to the program, students will be introduced to their UK research mentors, and will begin meeting with them in Spring 2026. Students are required to meet with their UK research mentor on a regular basis throughout the duration of the program. SPARKlers will also meet regularly with the SPARK Director beginning Spring 2026.

5. Q: How are SPARK research topics chosen?

A: The UK research mentors have expertise in the following health research areas: 1) Community-engaged prevention, youth tobacco and substance use prevention/mental health promotion, and the impact of psychosocial, policy, and structural determinants of health on substance use and cancer prevention; 2) Medication safety and adherence, health education, and culturally relevant health practices; 3) Diverse family systems and issues of adoption including child development, parenting, family functioning, and intersectionality of identities. Students are required to develop a research question and project in one of these areas. Students will receive guidance in developing a research question and project during the spring of 2026 in the course BSC 390, during meetings with the SPARK director, and during meetings with their assigned UK research mentor.

6. Q: Do I have to live in Lexington to participate?

A: No, but this position requires travel within Kentucky to research sites throughout the state. SPARKlers must be able to travel to in-person meetings and trainings in Lexington and the surrounding area. Students must also actively participate in, and contribute to, all of the training



workshops and weekly research meetings. Students must respond to all email communication promptly, preferably within the day messages are received.

7. **Q: What is the stipend and when would I receive it?**

A: SPARKlers will receive a stipend of \$5,000 during the summer of 2025, paid as a stipend over the 12 working summer weeks of the program, conditional on fulfillment of requirements of the SPARK Program (attending workshops and professional development session, meeting research milestones, maintaining regular communication, etc.). If students are not meeting the expectations or milestones of the SPARK program, their appointment may be terminated. The stipend will be provided May-August 2026.

8. **Q: Will the SPARK program be in person or virtual?**

A: The program will primarily take place in person at the University of Kentucky. As needed, meetings and training sessions will also be scheduled virtually.

9. **Q: What is the time commitment? Can I participate if I have a job during the semesters, intersession, or summer?**

A: Learning how to do impactful research to improve health disparities requires developing a variety of new skills as well as a deep understanding of previous research. For these reasons, students should expect to devote 5 hours per week to their project during each semester. During the summer of 2026, students are required to dedicate 25 hours per week to their research project. Given the demands of our program, it may be difficult to maintain another job along with the SPARK program. However, if students are able to do both of their jobs, they may participate in the SPARK Program. We anticipate the Summer Research Intensive to begin May 18, 2026 with a completion date of August 21, 2026 (14 weeks, with 2 weeks off, for a total of 12 working weeks). During this Summer Research Intensive timeframe, we expect students to commit 25 hours per week for 12 weeks. It is expected that students will respond to any and all communication (email, calls, etc.), complete all assignments, and provide information promptly and professionally for the duration of the program.

10. **Q: I plan to be on vacation during Thanksgiving, Intersession and/ or for part of the Summer. Can I still participate?**

A: As long as you are able to attend all workshops and meet all of the other expectations of the program (communication, meetings and completing your research project), you may participate in SPARK if selected. It is critical that you accurately describe your schedule/availability. It is also essential that you discuss changes to your schedule with SPARK leadership as soon as changes arise.

11. **Q: How long is the SPARK Program?**

A: The SPARK program is a 16-month program. Beginning in January 2026, students will begin the didactic health disparities research training course BSC 390 to prepare for their independent research project. In addition to the course meeting times, students will meet weekly with the SPARK Director beginning January 2026. Throughout the program students will attend regular check-in sessions with our staff and their mentorship team.

The Summer Research Intensive for the independent project will begin May 18, 2026 with a



completion date of August 21, 2026. During this timeframe we expect students to commit 25 hours per week for 12 weeks.

During the Fall 2026 semester, students will work on data analysis and developing presentations and manuscripts for publication and attend weekly book club sessions. During the Spring 2027 semester, SPARKlers will prepare to present their project findings. Finally, students are expected to participate in all SPARK promotional events. Previous students have devoted several hours of work per week during the academic year to SPARK. The program culminates with participants presenting at an annual conference at the University of Kentucky and officially ends May 7, 2027.

12. **Q: Is U.S. citizenship required for participation?**

A: No

SPARK Cohort 7 (2026-2027) Program Timeline

Spring (Jan - May) 2026	Summer (May – Aug.) 2026	Fall (Aug. – Dec.) 2026	Spring (Jan. - May) 20267
Attend meetings:	Initiate research activities – data collection	Continue research activities – data analysis and scholarly product development	Complete research activities – present findings in professional settings
1. Orientation 2. BSC 390: a. -IRB & Research Ethics b. -Health Equity 101 c. -Research 101 3. SPARK Director research meetings 4. UK research mentor meetings 5. Attend a spring conference on the UK campus	Weekly UK research mentor meetings SPARK Director research meetings Periodic group meetings	Fall didactic training Weekly UK research mentor meetings	SPARK Director research meetings Periodic group meetings
Develop research project	Additional meetings as needed	SPARK Director research meetings	
Obtain IRB approval			