



Apply for Cohort 7 (2026-2027) of the Students Participating as Ambassadors for Research in Kentucky (SPARK) Program

WHO: Any undergraduate students at the University of Kentucky with at least two academic years left until graduation and a GPA of 2.8 or higher are invited to apply for SPARK. We seek talented students interested in developing research expertise and projects in health disparities.

WHAT: SPARK is a dynamic collaboration between the Center for Health, Engagement, and Transformation (CHET), [Aetna Better Health of Kentucky](https://aetna.com/better-health/kentucky), and other university and philanthropic partners. You can read more about the program here: <https://medicine.uky.edu/centers/chet/spark-program>. 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. Students are introduced to community-engaged research focused on health disparities and receive extensive mentorship.

Students accepted into the program will be **required** to complete a research project in one of the following areas:

- Community-engaged prevention, youth tobacco and substance use prevention/mental health promotion, the impact of psychosocial, policy, and structural determinants of health on substance use and cancer prevention (Dr. Melinda Ickes <https://education.uky.edu/people/melinda-ickes> and Dr. Delvon Mattingly <https://medicine.uky.edu/users/dtma239>)
- Medication safety and adherence, health education, and culturally relevant health practices (Dr. Olufunmilola Abraham <https://pharmacy.uky.edu/crome/crome-team>)
- Diverse family systems and issues of adoption including child development, parenting, family functioning, and intersectionality of identities (Dr. Rachel Farr <https://psychology.as.uky.edu/users/rhfa223>)

In collaboration with mentors, students develop a research question and a small research study. Students conduct this project in their home communities over the summer, receiving funds to support their research. After implementing the project, students meet with their mentors, undertake data analysis and write-up, and present and publish their research in professional settings.

It is expected that students will respond to all communication (email, calls, etc.), complete all assignments, and provide information promptly and professionally for the duration of the program.

WHEN: All students accepted into the program must register for the course [BSC 390](#) offered



in Spring 2026. This didactic health disparity research training course will begin in January 2026 to prepare students for their independent research project. Data collection for the independent project will take place May through August of 2026. Research activities will continue throughout academic year 2026-2027. All students will present their projects at an annual conference at the University of Kentucky in Spring 2027.

WHERE: The SPARK program will take place primarily in person. Meetings and training sessions are both anticipated to occur at the Health Kentucky Research Building at the University of Kentucky. When necessary, remote options will be made available.

RESOURCES AND BENEFITS: Students will receive excellent research training, faculty and community mentorship, a \$5,000 stipend, ample resources for their research project, and professional development opportunities.

APPLICATION INFORMATION: The application deadline is **November 16, 2025 at 11:59pm**. Please submit your application online at the following link: <https://medicine.uky.edu/centers/chet/spark-applications>. The required application components include:

1. Personal statement (limited to two pages) describing your overall interest in health disparities research, topic(s) of interest that align with mentor expertise, and your career goals
2. Resume, including GPA and major
3. A list of three professional references with contact information
4. A letter of support from **one** of your three listed professional references emailed to chet@uky.edu
5. Unofficial transcript (Freshmen applicants may include their most recent unofficial high school transcript.)

For more information about SPARK and eligibility, please visit:

<https://medicine.uky.edu/centers/chet/spark-program> and/or contact and/or contact Ariel Arthur, ariel.arthur@uky.edu

Resume and cover letter resources: <https://studentsuccess.uky.edu/stuckert-career-center/services>