Become a SPARC³ Scholar!

What is SPARC³?

The Gaston College SPARC³ program enhances the college experience of students studying Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM). Students in this program experience STEM classes that are interactive and hands-on. The program also provides scholarships to talented students with financial need (SPARC³ Scholars), and personalized support services (i.e. advising, mentoring, tutoring, internships, and research experiences).

The mission of SPARC³ is to ignite student curiosity and to prepare future STEM professionals for success in an evolving work environment.

SPARC³ Scholar Details

Scholarships ranging from $1,000 to $5,600 will be offered to 15 Full-Time Associate of Science students per year. The amount awarded will be determined based upon financial need.

Eligibility Criteria: To be eligible students must:

- Maintain U.S. citizenship, nationality, or lawful U.S. permanent residence
- Enroll full-time in the Associate of Science program at Gaston College
- Demonstrate financial need based upon federal guidelines
- Have an overall unweighted GPA of 2.75 or higher
- Meet all prerequisites for required courses by time of enrollment in the courses

Benefits for SPARC³ Scholars

- Students will have guaranteed enrollment in specific sections of required courses.
- SPARC³ scholarships can be used to fund tuition, fees, books, and living expenses
- Students will be paired with a faculty mentor based on their interests.
- Students will be able to meet, network with, and interact with industry professionals.
- Students will have expert advising to guide them for their classes and their future plans
- Students will be able to form a bond with other scholars, which gives them a ready-made network of friends

How to Apply:

- Apply for the SPARC³ scholars program using Gaston College’s established scholarship application system on the Gaston College Website.
- Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form,
- Complete a scholarship application, including a letter of intent and professional recommendations from former instructors and/or supervisor(s)/employer(s).

The Awarding Process

- Applicants will be accepted annually beginning in the spring semester until all scholarships are awarded.
Applications will be reviewed by the program team and financial aid office. Applicants will be selected based on their academic merit, professionalism, potential for success, and financial need.

Finalists will be interviewed by the Program Director.

The Program Director will notify recipients and invite SPARC³ scholars to orientation.

SPARC³ scholars will sign a scholarship contract that outlines all responsibilities and limitations of the award, including the requirements for maintaining eligibility.

**SPARC³ Scholar Requirements:**
- SPARC³ scholars will be required to attend an orientation before their first semester.
- SPARC³ scholars will be required to will meet with a STEM mentor at least three times per semester.
- Students will be required to participate in at least 75% of SPARC³ events each semester.
- SPARC³ scholars will be required to be part of a learning community that follows a curriculum plan which includes courses such as General Biology I and II, General Chemistry I and II, Pre-Calculus, English, Statistics, and Research and Measurement.

For more information please contact:

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**Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is STEM?**

STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math. Possible fields of STEM study include: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Math, Statistics, Pre-Engineering, Computer Science, Geology, and Biotechnology.

**I am a Nursing/Allied Health/ Health and Fitness Science/Massage Therapy/Business/Computer Science/etc… student. Do I Qualify?**

Unfortunately, you most likely do not qualify for this scholarship; however there are a good number of other scholarships available to you. This scholarship is restricted to Associate of Science students.  Associate of Applied Science students are not eligible.  If you are unsure as to whether or not you qualify, please feel free to contact the SPARC³ Program Director. Information regarding other scholarships can be found in the financial aid office.

**I only have one semester or year of classes left before I graduate. Am I eligible for this scholarship?**

While this scholarship is geared towards new students, this does not automatically make you ineligible for the scholarship. In order to be eligible you must be able to participate in the learning community/cohort courses. If you are unable to do this, then you are ineligible. If you can, then you may be eligible. Please contact the SPARC³ Program Director to discuss your options.
How Can You Use the Scholarship Money?

SPARC$^3$ scholarships will be used to reduce the amount of unmet need by funding tuition, fees, books, and living expenses. Funds will be distributed twice per semester (beginning and midterm) through the financial aid office per college procedure.

What is a Learning Community/Cohort?

SPARC$^3$ scholars will be part of a group of students (learning community/cohort) that are required to follow a curriculum plan designed by program faculty. Students will have guaranteed enrollment in specific sections of courses. This structure allows you to experience instruction together, work together in groups, and form peer relationships while building essential STEM-related skills. The cohort courses are selected from the A.S. curriculum and emphasize contextual, hands-on instruction. By following this plan, students will complete at least 37 credit hours together and be provided with undergraduate research experience. Please see the chart below that shows the planned curriculum for SPARC$^3$ Scholars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Cohorted Courses*</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall 1</td>
<td>Pre-Calculus Algebra (MAT 171) 4 Credit Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 1</td>
<td>General Biology II (BIO 112) 4 Credit Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 1</td>
<td>General Chemistry II (CHM 152) 4 Credit Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2</td>
<td>Writing/Research in the Discipline (ENG 112) 3 Credit Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2</td>
<td>Research &amp; Measurement (BIO 285) 4 Credit Hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*An additional 3-6 hours/semester will be selected by the student and their advisor to complete their full-time load. The electives will focus on the student’s field of interest (i.e. engineering, physics, biology, etc.).

I want to take classes that are not part of the curriculum plan. Can I do that?

Yes. An additional 3-6 hours/semester will be selected by the student and their advisor to complete their full-time load. The electives will focus on the student’s field of interest (i.e. engineering, physics, biology, etc.), and will help to complete the universal general education transfer component of the Associate in Science degree.

The brochure mentions “program events” that I am required to participate in, if selected. What are these activities?

Students will be required to participate in at least 75% of SPARC$^3$ program events such as presentations by industry professionals, experiential learning activities, and field trips to regional STEM industry or educational sites.

How will my mentor be assigned to me?
Students will be assigned to a mentor based upon interests, and will meet with him/her at least three times per semester. Efforts will be made to pair students with a mentor familiar with their cultural background.

**I have received financial aid from the college and/or another scholarship. Am I eligible for to be a SPARC³ Scholar as well?**

Yes. Your eligibility is based on your overall financial need as determined by your FAFSA data, not whether you are receiving money from another source.

**I applied, but was not selected to receive scholarship money. Can I still be part of the learning community?**

Yes! Students who apply, but are not selected for a scholarship, can participate in the learning community and supplemental experiences at their own expense.