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## Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is three-fold: (1) provide a basic introduction to Spark seminars, (2) aid in your seminar design, and (3) aid in completing the course proposal template for efficient review and approval of your seminar. (The template for your proposal can be found at:

<https://ucmerced.curriculog.com/>.) This purpose is reflected in the format of each section, where you can quickly find pertinent information about the Spark seminars (**Spark:**); considerations for Design (**Design:**); and instructions and examples for various aspects of the course proposal (**Proposal:**). When efficient, the Design and Proposal information is combined.

**Spark:** Spark seminars are indeed seminars, with four contact and eight non-contact hours per week. Each section has a 24 maximum student capacity. In addition to honing research skills, students will have the chance to engage deeply in the seminar’s topic. They are Seminars should thus model informed, engaged, and respectful discussion. In addition, they should provide students with opportunities to appreciate what it means to be a student in a research university, including developing a basic understanding of research in one or more disciplines.

**Proposal:** Your Spark proposal includes all the information needed for review. The proposal is not a syllabus, although there are common elements. An example Spark seminar proposal is included in [Appendix C](#) along with step by step instructions on navigating the form in [Appendix D](#). The audience for the proposal is reviewers across the campus (i.e. General Education Subcommittee, UGC, School, etc.), whereas the audience for a syllabus is the students. The proposal template is designed for easy copy-and-paste to/from your syllabus. Syllabi will not be accepted in lieu of Spark proposals.

## Choosing a Topic for a Spark Seminar

**Spark:** The topic of each seminar is chosen by its instructor based on areas of research or special interest. Topics should be broad enough to be viewed from multiple perspectives, but focused enough that students can engage with the issues of the topic in some depth. An important part of the student Spark experience is engaging in in-depth study with a faculty member, thereby *sparking* the students' interest in the topic and/or in the spirit of research.

### **Design:**

Spark topics should be:

- based on a topic or issue(s) that will be of interest to students from a variety of intended majors
- related to a topic or issue(s) about which the instructor has significant knowledge
- approachable from multiple perspectives and, if possible, multiple disciplines and methods
- designed so that students develop basic research skills related to the topic so they can carry out a small research project

Spark topics may be:

- based on a current issue, such as a political debate, a cultural phenomenon, a new technology, a research theme at UC-Merced or the University of California
- related to a more “timeless issue,” such as poetry or evolution

Topics should not be:

- an introduction to a particular discipline (i.e. a classic “101”)
- so specialized that UC-Merced first-year students from differing educational backgrounds would struggle to understand the course materials (no Spark seminar will have a prerequisite to enroll)
- so specialized that only students who plan to major in the instructor’s field would be interested in the topic

*Examples of potential Spark topics include, but are not limited to:*

- National Parks and their Conservation
- Approaching Ethical Dilemmas
- Food for the Planet
- When Science is Political
- Challenges of Global Engineering
- Gadgets Electrical Engineers Make
- Water Crises
- Dirt and Soil
- Cognition and Music
- What is Poetry For?
- Stories of Sickness
- Hip-hop: Music, Poetry, and Culture
- Dinosaurs. What do we know?
- Third Wave Feminism?
- Evolution
- History and Race
- *Hamilton*: Theatre, History, and Revolution
- Poverty, Economics and Ethics
- Student Protests: Then and Now
- Intersectional Identities in the Central Valley

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- Educating America
- Health Disparities in California
- Should Political Talk be Civil?
- Social Media and Mental Health

Instructors may also browse First-Year seminar topics here.

UCB: <http://fss.berkeley.edu>;

UCSD: <http://ugseminars.ucsd.edu/Listing.aspx>;

U of Kentucky: <http://firstyear.ku.edu/fys>;

UCSB: <http://www.duels.ucsb.edu/academics/seminars/list>;

UNC: <http://fys.unc.edu>

**Proposal:** Following the Registrar’s CRF Style Guide, limit your title to 30 characters, including spaces. The title will be listed in on the course schedule, Banner, and the student’s transcript.

### Spark Seminar Description

**Spark & Design & Proposal:** The official Spark seminar description (per the CRF) is given below. Within the Banner system and schedule, your seminar will look like a discussion session; however, it is a unique course with its own description. The description communicates to students (and reviewers) the specific focus and goals for your seminar. Your description will be available on Banner’s schedule of courses; should be included on your syllabus; and is required on the Spark Seminar Proposal form. There is no word limit, but the GESC recommends no more than one (1) paragraph.

Spark Seminar Description (from CRF): Spark seminars introduce students to life at a research university. Students focus on the nature of inquiry by exploring a particular topic over the course of the semester, approaching it from multiple perspectives and possibly multiple disciplines. Students learn how to generate research questions, engage with campus and/or local resources, and think critically. Students synthesize and present their ideas in writing and other forms of communication (visual, oral, and/or numerical).

### Learning Goals, Objectives, & Outcomes

**Spark & Design:** The primary Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs) relate to the students’ initial development of three basic research skills: (1) asking questions, (2) finding information and thinking critically about it, and (3) explaining ideas. These skills mirror the first three GE Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and indeed are fundamental to student success at UC-Merced and beyond. An abridged list of the GE PLOs is below; the complete list is in [Appendix B](#). Faculty are highly encouraged to address “Cultural and Global Awareness: Engaging with Differences” (GE PLO 4) and/or “Citizenship: Contributing to the Public Good” (GE PLO 5), through the course topic or in at least one assignment.

**Proposal:** You may have additional CLOs. Include all CLOs in the proposal form; an example of a completed Spark proposal form in [Appendix C](#).

- **GE PLO 1 (required):** *Life at the Research University: Asking Questions*
  - UC Merced graduates take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world that reflects

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engagement with the mission and values of our research university.

- **GE PLO 2 (required): Reasoning: Thinking Critically**
  - UC Merced graduates are equipped with multiple tools of analysis to support accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.
- **GE PLO 3 (required): Communication: Explaining & Persuading**
  - UC Merced graduates communicate in a variety of ways to diverse audiences.
- **GE PLO 4 (Optional): Cultural and Global awareness: Engaging with differences**
  - UC Merced graduates see themselves in relation to local and global cultures and systems of power, past and present.
- **GE PLO 5 (Optional): Citizenship: Contributing to the Public Good**
  - UC Merced graduates are engaged with their communities for the benefit of society.

## Seminar Activities

**Spark & Design & Proposal:** Course activities are designed such that students can achieve and demonstrate the CLOs. The seminar activities and learning outcomes should be aligned so that students learn what is intended and the assessments measure what the students have learned. Each Spark seminar will provide a variety of learning opportunities. Every Spark seminar will include specific activities and experiences that directly support the first three GE PLOs.

Spark seminars are traditional Face-to-Face courses\* (approximately 0-29% online), as opposed to hybrid/blended courses (30-79% online) or online courses (80-100% online). Therefore, the content is typically delivered orally or in writing, may use web-based technology for class facilitation (e.g. posting syllabi online, uploading assignments, etc.), but online deliver of content is minimal.

**Proposal:** Below are examples of assignments associated with standard Spark activities that support the three required GE PLOs. If your seminar includes GE PLOs 4 and 5, there should be associated CLOs and activities directly related to those CLOs. There are likely additional activities within your seminar; include all the main activities within your seminar. See the example completed Spark proposal in [Appendix C](#).

**As part of each Spark seminar, students will:**

- 1. Define a research question (Required). (PLO 1)**  
Sample assignments: research proposal; list of research questions; hypotheses
- 2. Identify campus and/or community resources; conduct and document research using that resource (Required). (PLO 2)**  
Sample assignments: getting books out of library and writing annotated bibliography; going on a lab tour or conducting a small experiment and documenting observations; getting a Vernal Pools tour and collecting data; attending a theatre production or concert and writing an analytical review; visiting the UCM art gallery and producing a visual analysis; attending a

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\* As defined in the [UGC CRF Policies and Procedures](#).

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campus lecture and writing a summary and response; interviewing community members and transcribing their responses; conducting a survey and collating responses.

### 3. Communicate research in two ways, one of which is written (Required). (PLO 3)

Sample assignments: a lab report and a spreadsheet; an argumentative essay and an oral presentation; a written visual or musical analysis and a multi-media PowerPoint presentation; an analytical review and a performance; a written analysis and a data graph.

## Assessment

**Spark & Design:** While there are likely multiple assignments within a course, there should be an assignment that allows students to demonstrate their overall achievement of the CLOs. That is the assignment students should upload to their e-portfolio [<https://catcourses.ucmerced.edu/dashboard/eportfolios>]. The e-portfolio is a requirement of the General Education program and is separate from an e-portfolio you may use within your course. Prior to each semester your Spark seminar is offered, you will receive an email from the Assistant Dean of General Education about the inclusion of instructions regarding e-portfolio upload to be included in your course syllabus.

**Proposal:** In the proposal, identify what that assignment will be and explain how it demonstrates students' achievement of the CLOs.

## Special Instructional Needs

**Design & Proposal:** Spark seminars will meet in spaces that provide standard instructional resources (e.g. multimedia projector, whiteboard) unless otherwise requested. If your seminar requires a specialized room (i.e. computer room, instructional lab, studio-arts, etc.), please note that in your Spark course proposal.

## Submission Process

1. **Timeline:** For the fall 2018 term, unless otherwise announced, submission of Spark proposals to General Education Subcommittee (GESC) for approval must be submitted no later than February 15, 2018.
2. **Spark Proposal Form:** The proposal summarizes the content, intended Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), and how the intended outcomes connect to the relevant GE PLOs. The content of the proposal aids reviewers in understanding whether proper learning assessment tools are part of the course and assessing student workload. The proposal form provides a foundation for the syllabus, distinguishing general features of a course design.
3. **Completed proposal forms are submitted to GESC for review:**
  - a. Submit the proposal information through the Curriculog system [<https://ucmerced.curriculog.com/>]. Detailed instructions about navigating Curriculog can be found in [Appendix D](#).
  - b. If the Spark proposal is approved, both the instructor and school Dean (or designee) will be notified by the Senate Analyst. The notification allows the school to determine if the

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approved Spark seminar aligns with the unit's teaching plan as a regular teaching load, overload, and/or planned appointment of a Unit-18 Lecturer.

- c. If GESC requires further information or indicates that modification of the Proposal is needed, the Senate Analyst on behalf of GESC, will notify the Instructor of the request. It is the responsibility of the instructor responsible for the Proposal to provide the requested modification to the Proposal in a timely fashion.
4. Once a Spark seminar proposal is approved by the GESC and the School Dean, the School curriculum staff will work with the instructor to determine the course meeting times and location, in conjunction with the Office of the Registrar.

***Approval of a Spark seminar does not guarantee the Unit-18 Lecturer an appointment.***

## Appendix A: Why do we have Spark seminars?<sup>†</sup>

- a. The Spark seminar has been designed in response to research that demonstrates that rigorous small first-year seminars led by faculty passionate about the topic on which the course is focused have a significant positive impact on student learning outcomes and persistence to degree.
- b. Spark seminars introduce students to life at a research university. They ask students to focus on the nature of inquiry by exploring a particular topic over the course of the semester, engaging with campus and/or local resources, generating research questions, and presenting original ideas in writing and other forms of communication (visual, oral, and/or numerical).
- c. Topics will be broad enough to be viewed from multiple perspectives, but focused enough that students can engage with the issues of the topic in some depth. They should be related to an area of research and/or interest to the instructor: part of the experience of Spark is engaging with a faculty member who is sharing his or her expertise and passions with students, thereby sparking their interest in the topic and/or the spirit of inquiry and research more generally.

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<sup>†</sup> From GESC: Proposal for a New General Education Program (approved AY1617 by Faculty, UGC, DivCo, etc.)  
[[http://ue.ucmerced.edu/sites/ue.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/final\\_ge\\_proposal\\_4-27-2017\\_0.pdf](http://ue.ucmerced.edu/sites/ue.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/final_ge_proposal_4-27-2017_0.pdf)]

## Appendix B: The General Education Program Learning Objectives (PLOs)

### 1. *Life at the Research University: Asking Questions*

UC Merced graduates take an inquiry-oriented approach to the world that reflects engagement with the mission and values of our research university:

- a. They can articulate the benefits of attending a research university for their development as scholars, citizens, life-long learners;
- b. They generate questions, identify problems, and formulate answers by applying appropriate theoretical, evidentiary, analytical and ethical frameworks from multiple intellectual perspectives;
- c. They demonstrate intellectual curiosity and an understanding of the nature of knowledge and of themselves as learners;
- d. They identify and act on their own values and talents through self-reflection; and
- e. They are at ease with the ambiguity that is inherent in the process of discovery

### 2. *Reasoning: Thinking Critically*

UC Merced graduates are equipped with multiple tools of analysis to support accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion:

- a. They use analytical tools from scientific, social scientific, and humanistic disciplines;
- b. They are able to identify and evaluate sources of information; and
- c. They identify, interpret and evaluate multiple kinds of data, including texts, media, observations, and experimental results.

### 3. *Communication: Explaining and Persuading*

UC Merced graduates communicate in a variety of ways to diverse audiences:

- a. They use written, visual, oral and numerical modes of communication to explore and convey ideas;
- b. They can adjust their communications depending on occasion, purpose and audience; and
- c. They can work independently and collaboratively.

### 4. *Cultural and Global awareness:*

Engaging with differences: UC Merced graduates see themselves in relation to local and global cultures and systems of power, past and present:

- a. They engage with multiple belief systems, social structures, and ways of thinking through attention to societies, languages and cultures of the past and the present;
- b. They can identify the ways in which cultural, political, economic, technological, and environmental dimensions of society interact;
- c. They can place their own experiences in relevant analytical frameworks through attention to the relationships of diverse cultures to each other; and
- d. They gain emotional maturity and resilience by understanding themselves in the world.

### 5. *Citizenship: Contributing to the Public Good*

UC Merced graduates are engaged with their communities for the benefit of society:

- a. They are engaged citizens, having contributed to the building of academic and co-curricular communities at UC Merced;
- b. They understand and work in diverse communities;
- c. They engage with the ethical dimensions of their various roles; and

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- d. They can articulate and act on their responsibilities to the multiple communities in which they participate.

It is noteworthy that the PLOs subsume the WASC guiding principles of information literacy, oral communication, quantitative reasoning, written communication, and critical thinking.

## Appendix C: Example Spark Seminar Proposal

### All the World's a Stage - Erin Webb

#### Spark Seminar Proposal (New)

#### Spark Seminar Proposal (New)

**Instructions:** GE Subcommittee will use this form to gauge whether the necessary components of Spark Seminars are included. Use the information button (above) to get more detailed help text. Please refer to the Guidelines for Designing a Spark Seminar [LINK]. If approved, the approval notification will be sent to you and your School curriculum office for scheduling. The GE Subcommittee might also respond by requesting additional information.

#### Instructor Information

Select  
"University of  
California  
Merced"\*

University of California Merced

**Name:\*** Erin Webb

**Email:\*** ewebb2@ucmerced.edu

**School/Program:\***  SSHA  
 SNS  
 SOE  
 MWP

**Bylaw Unit:\***  Senate Faculty  
 Unit-18 Lecturer

#### Scheduling

**Term:\***  Fall 2018  
 Spring 2019  
 Both Fall 2018 and Spring 2019

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### Compensation

- Under what capacity are you willing to teach the course?**
- Regular teaching load
  - Teaching overload

### Seminar Information

**Spark Seminar Topic/Title (30 character limit):\*** All the World's a Stage

**Seminar Description:\*** In this course, you will learn how to generate research questions related to performance, practice strategies for understanding and interpreting difficult texts and various types of performance, use composition as a tool for learning, improve your ability to write successful academic papers on any subject, and improve your oral delivery skills. To accomplish these goals, you will read and critique plays and essays about performance, watch theatrical, musical, and dance performances and films with a critical eye, and evaluate and respond to other aspects of daily life (football games, lectures, political debates, identity-forming) as performative gestures. In addition to thinking about what you might traditionally think of as "performance," we will be writing about the way in which, as Shakespeare wrote, all the world is a stage.

### Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

List all your CLOs below. CLOs that reflect GE PLOs 1-3 are required. Those for GE PLOs 4-5 are recommended. You may have multiple CLOs for each GE PLO. See examples here: <http://ue.ucmerced.edu/ge/ge-mission-and-program-learning-outcomes>

**GE PLO 1: Life at the Research University: Asking Questions\***

1. Students will generate questions and identify problems regarding performance by engaging with course readings and viewings.

**GE PLO 2: Reasoning: Thinking Critically\***

2. By exploring performance from multiple angles, students will demonstrate intellectual curiosity and an understanding of the nature of knowledge, discovery, and ambiguity and reflect on themselves learners, identifying their own values and talents.

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**GE PLO 3:  
Communication:  
Explaining &  
Persuading\***

5. Students will convey their research and ideas in written and oral forms, with due sensitivity to audience and context.

**GE PLO 4:  
Cultural and  
Global  
Awareness:  
Engaging with  
Differences**

**GE PLO 5:  
Citizenship:  
Contributing to  
the Public Good**

**Other CLOs:**

3. Students will identify, and in some cases use, analytical tools from the disciplines of theater studies, literature, rhetoric, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology.

4. Students will identify and evaluate sources of information about performance.

6. Students will experiences working both independently and collaboratively

### **Seminar Activities**

The following activities are required of all Spark seminars. Use the fields below to describe how the activities will be incorporated in your class. This information will also help reviewers adequately assess student workload.

**Activity 1: Define  
a research  
question\***

While taking this course, students will write two papers and give one oral presentation. The second paper, the "Research Paper", will help students identify a research question.

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**Activity 2:  
Identify campus  
and/or  
community  
resources;  
conduct and  
document  
research using  
that resource\***

Also included in the "Research Paper" students will find resources (books, articles, potentially other media) related to their research question and create an annotated bibliography. To help them learn how to do this, I plan to work collaboratively with the library to plan a course session in the library.

**Activity 3:  
Communicate  
research in two  
ways, one of  
which is written\***

While taking this course, students will write two papers and give one oral presentation. The first paper, the "Review of a Performance" will require students to read several theatrical and film reviews, attend a theatrical performance, and record their own observations in a 3-4 page analytical review.

Students will also be required to share their research orally with the class in a 10 minute presentation.

**Activity 4:  
Additional  
seminar  
activities**

There are no additional assignments, beyond readings and quizzes.

### **Seminar Assessment**

**What  
assignment(s)  
can students  
upload to the e-  
portfolio from  
this course?\***

Students will be required to upload their second paper, the "Research Paper", to their e-portfolio. However, they could also upload their presentation, if they provided visual aids, in addition to their "Research Paper".



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**Explain how this assignment(s) demonstrate students' achievement of the Spark CLOs.\***

While taking this course, students will write two papers and give one oral presentation. The second paper, the "Research Paper" will help students identify a research question. They will then find resources (books, articles, potentially other media) related to their research question and create an annotated bibliography.

### Resource Requirements

**Standard instructional space provided unless otherwise requested.**

**Specialized Requirements**

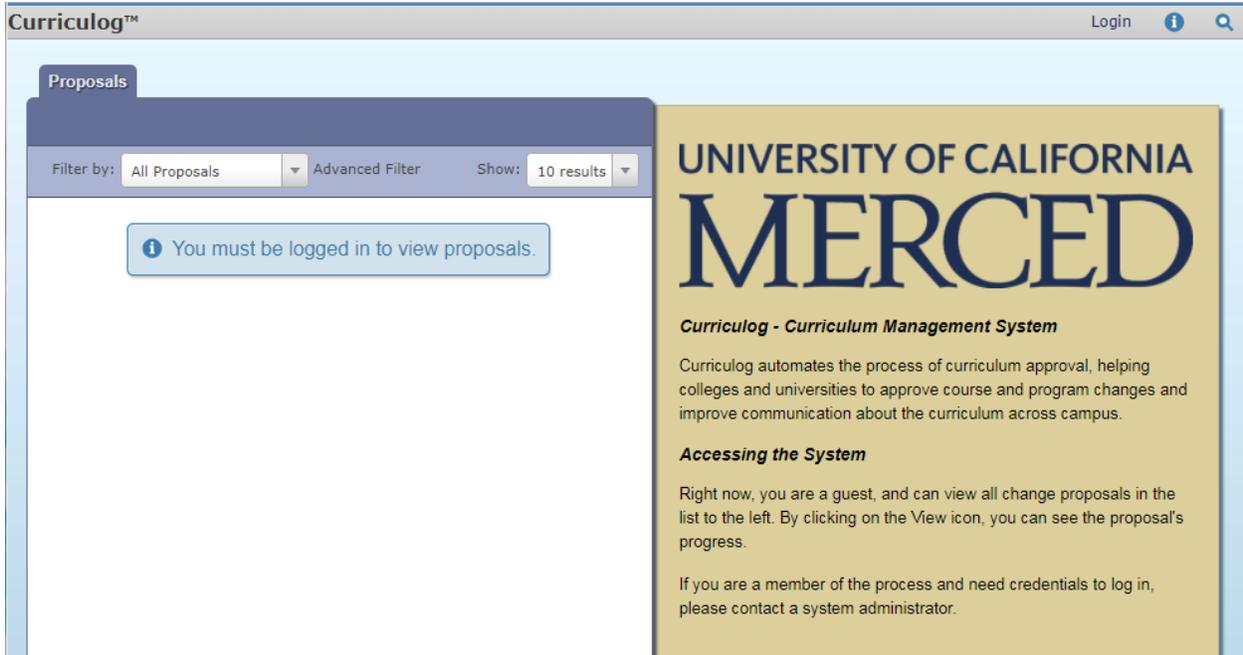
- Computer Lab
- Studio/Arts Room
- Instructional Lab
- Other

**If specialized space required, describe what kind of lab, studio, or resources.**

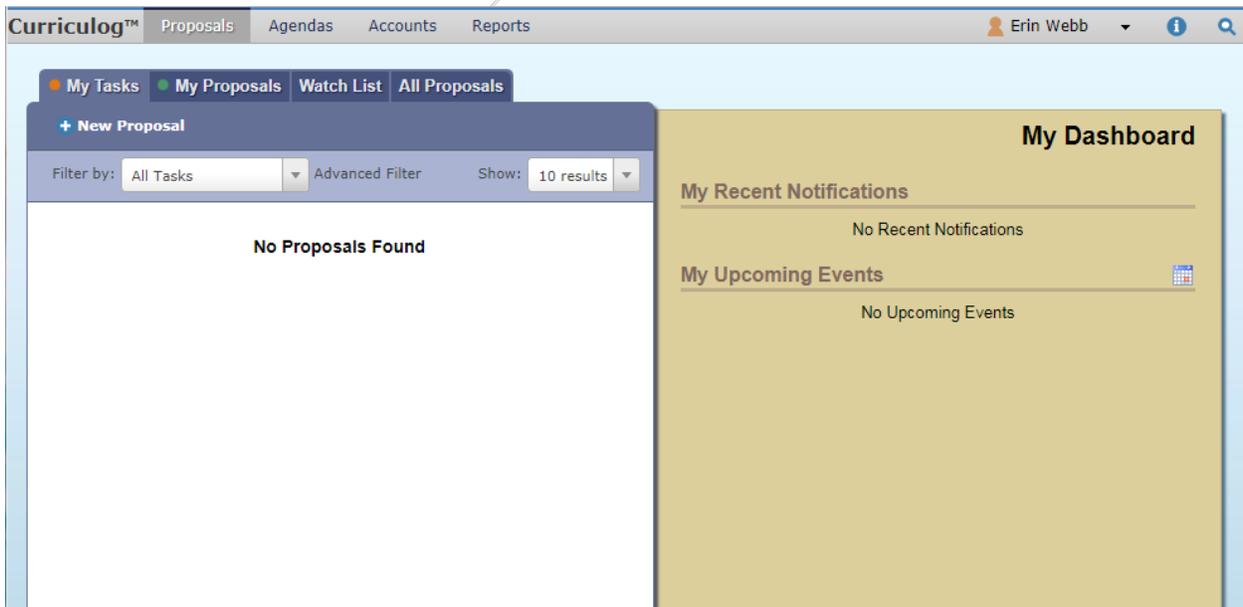


## Appendix D: Spark Proposal Instruction Guide (Navigating Curriculog)

1. Log into Curriculog at <https://ucmerced.curriculog.com/> by selecting the “Login” link in the top right corner.

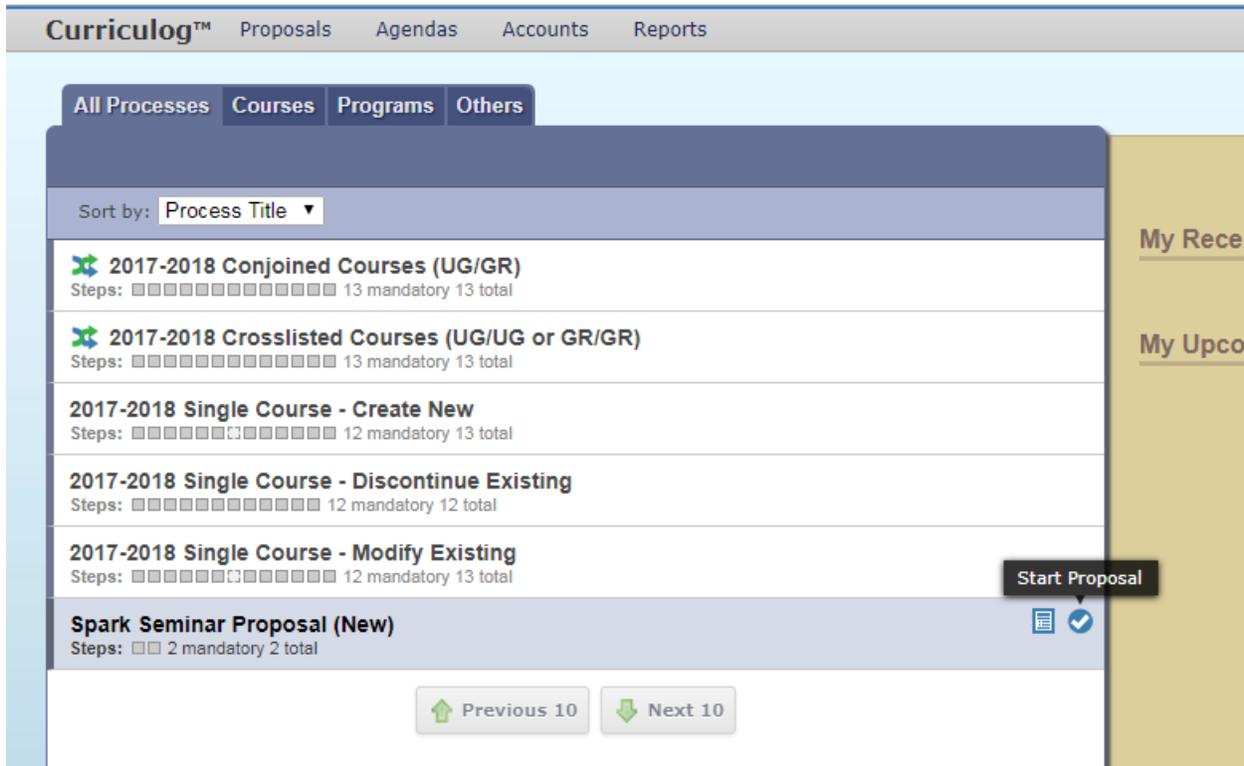


2. Login using your UC Merced credentials
3. Select **+ New Proposal** located underneath My Tasks



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4. Chose "Spark Seminar Proposal" by hovering over the row and selecting  "Start Proposal"

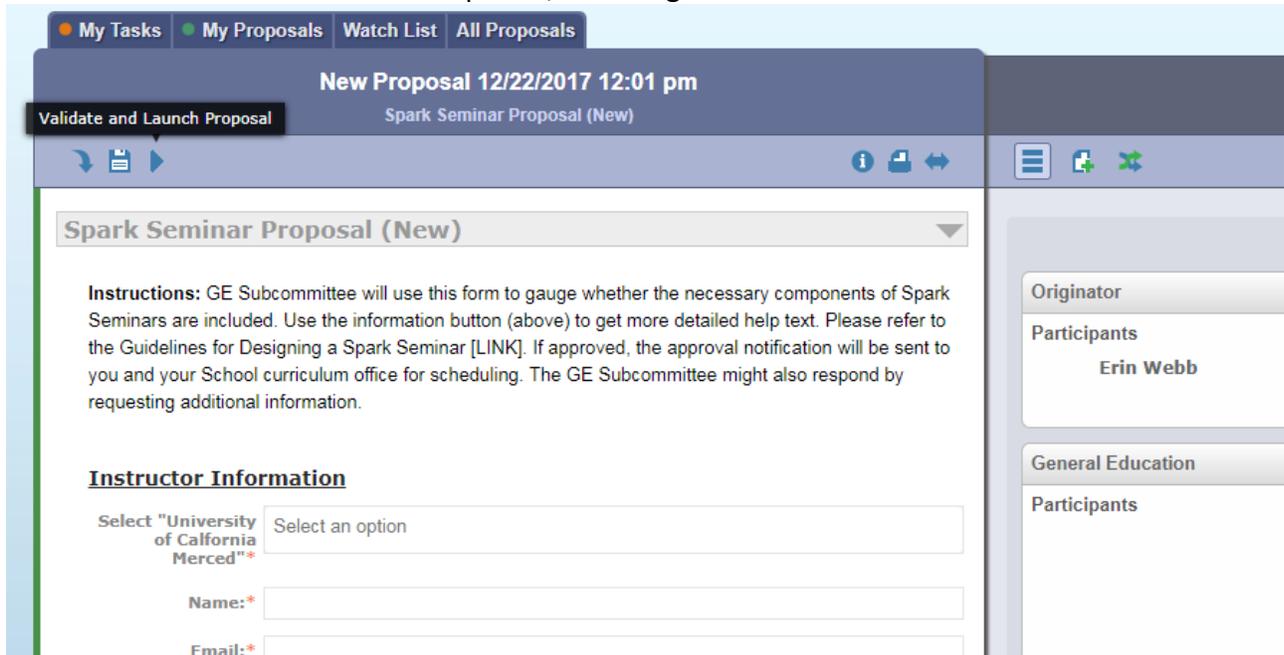


The screenshot shows the Curriculog™ interface with a navigation bar containing 'Proposals', 'Agendas', 'Accounts', and 'Reports'. Below this is a tabbed interface with 'All Processes', 'Courses', 'Programs', and 'Others'. A 'Sort by: Process Title' dropdown is visible. The main content area lists several process types with their respective step counts (mandatory and total). The 'Spark Seminar Proposal (New)' row is highlighted in grey, and a tooltip labeled 'Start Proposal' is positioned over the 'Start Proposal' icon (a blue checkmark in a circle) on the right side of the row. Below the list are 'Previous 10' and 'Next 10' navigation buttons.

Process Title	Mandatory Steps	Total Steps
2017-2018 Conjoined Courses (UG/GR)	13	13
2017-2018 Crosslisted Courses (UG/UG or GR/GR)	13	13
2017-2018 Single Course - Create New	12	13
2017-2018 Single Course - Discontinue Existing	12	12
2017-2018 Single Course - Modify Existing	12	13
<b>Spark Seminar Proposal (New)</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

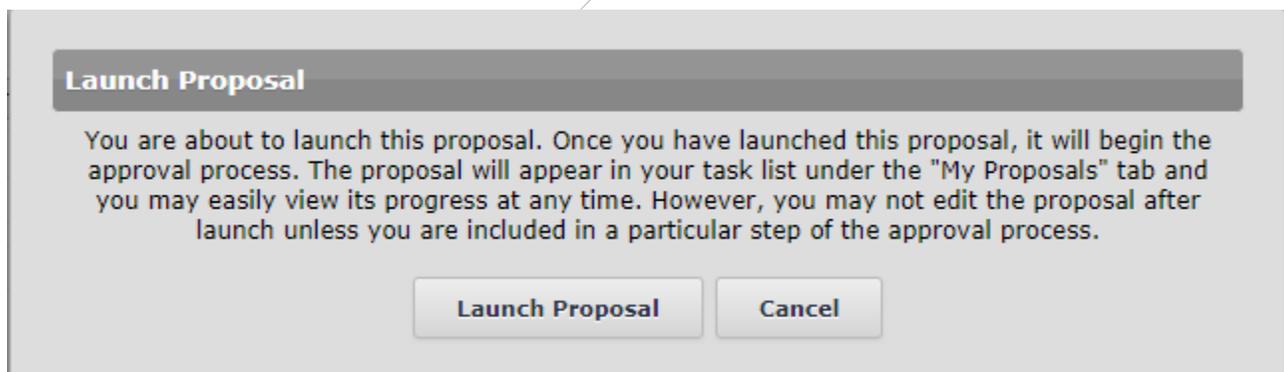
## Guidelines for Designing and Proposing a Spark Seminar

5. Enter information required on the Spark Seminar Proposal form. You can save your changes and come back to the form at any time. An example is provided in [Appendix C](#).
6. Select “Validate and Launch Proposal”, to the right of the Save button.



The screenshot shows a web interface for creating a new Spark Seminar proposal. At the top, there are navigation tabs: "My Tasks", "My Proposals", "Watch List", and "All Proposals". Below these is a header for "New Proposal 12/22/2017 12:01 pm" and "Spark Seminar Proposal (New)". A button labeled "Validate and Launch Proposal" is highlighted. The main form area contains a dropdown menu for "Spark Seminar Proposal (New)", followed by instructions: "Instructions: GE Subcommittee will use this form to gauge whether the necessary components of Spark Seminars are included. Use the information button (above) to get more detailed help text. Please refer to the Guidelines for Designing a Spark Seminar [LINK]. If approved, the approval notification will be sent to you and your School curriculum office for scheduling. The GE Subcommittee might also respond by requesting additional information." Below the instructions is a section titled "Instructor Information" with a dropdown menu for "Select 'University of California Merced'\*" and a text input field for "Select an option". There are also input fields for "Name:\*" and "Email:\*". On the right side, there is a sidebar with sections for "Originator", "Participants" (listing "Erin Webb"), and "General Education" (listing "Participants").

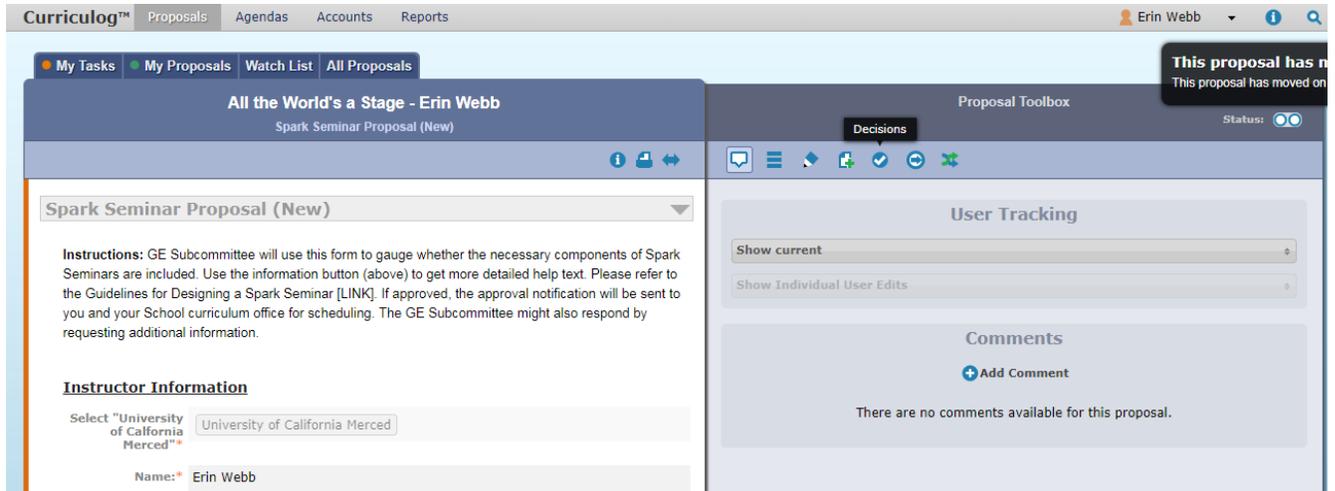
7. Chose “Launch Proposal”



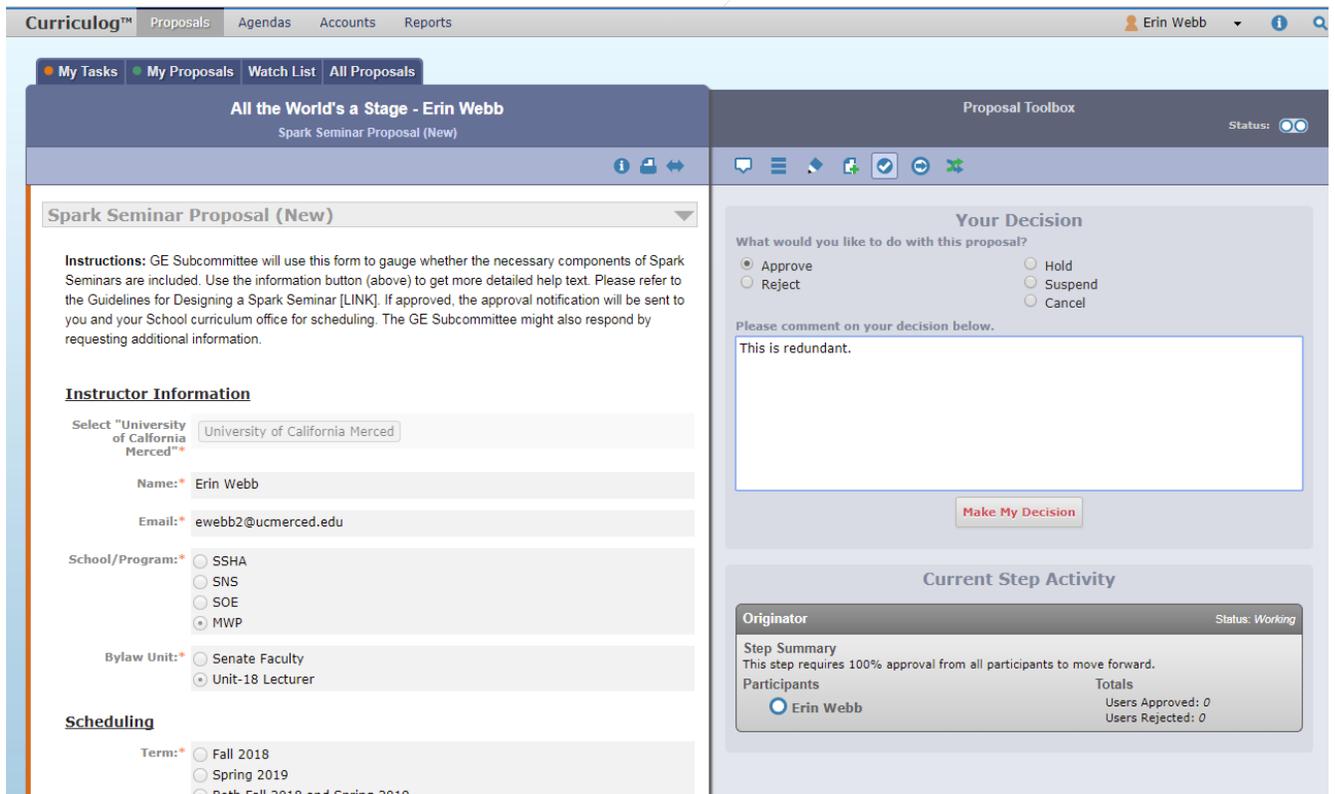
The screenshot shows a dialog box titled "Launch Proposal". The text inside reads: "You are about to launch this proposal. Once you have launched this proposal, it will begin the approval process. The proposal will appear in your task list under the 'My Proposals' tab and you may easily view its progress at any time. However, you may not edit the proposal after launch unless you are included in a particular step of the approval process." At the bottom of the dialog, there are two buttons: "Launch Proposal" and "Cancel".

## Guidelines for Designing and Proposing a Spark Seminar

- The final step, which we know is redundant, is to approve the launch of your proposal. Select the “Decision”  button in the Proposal Toolbox.



- Select “Approve”, add a comment if you chose, and press “Make my Decision”.



- Congratulations! You’ve submitted your Spark seminar proposal. It has been send to GESC for review.