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News for the Green Campus



## Cutting the Commute to Reduce Emissions

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Weekly hooky has become a regular occurrence for library staff on the Georgetown University campus. Of course, they have the permission of their supervisors. That's because their absence is part of a department-wide **alternative scheduling** program.

"I'm always looking for programs or processes that will improve morale and performance," explains Deirdre Francis, Director, Personnel and Staff Development Main Campus Libraries Georgetown University. "At the time (May, 08) we were experiencing high gasoline costs, and I thought implementing this program would help in alleviating transportation costs for our employees while increasing morale." Instated for the first time in the summer of 2008, the library's compressed workweek program was such a success they decided to run it again this summer.

Helping to ease fuel and vehicle maintenance costs is just one job satisfaction booster. Flexible schedules also allow employees to take care of personal business such as medical appointments or home repairs during daytime hours, which can serve to reduce home-related stress. Additionally, employees appreciate a reduction in time spent fighting aggravating traffic jams and driving during periods of inclement weather.

Georgetown staff and supervisors alike report high satisfaction with the program. It took some time for participants to get used to working longer hours and accommodating the new work flow, but everyone was able to adjust. Although employees will return to a more normal schedule during the school year, the flexible workweek offers a refreshing change and relaxed work environment which helps employees recharge for the busy fall semester.

Seasonal programs like this, as well as more permanent flexible scheduling schemes, are being developed on many campuses, not only as a means of improving morale, but also as a means of reducing institutional greenhouse gas emissions.

"Our flexible work schedule is a key human resource piece that we're now building on as

### Flexible Schedule Formats

**Flextime:** Allows employees to individualize their daily starting and ending times. A flextime schedule may be the same throughout the week or vary from day to day.

*Example:* Work from 7:30 am to 3:30 pm rather than from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

**Compressed workweek:** Permits employees to work longer days in exchange for one shorter day weekly or a weekly day off.

*Example:* Work four ten hour days with the fifth day off.

**Telecommuting:** Gives

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part of our Climate Action Plan that will be announced September 15, 2009," explains Daniel Roth, Cornell University's Sustainability Coordinator. Nine percent of the school's overall carbon footprint comes from commute-related emissions, which adds 29,000 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions to their annual total, and they're attempting to reduce this impact in part through year-round flexible scheduling options.

Cornell's flex program has been in place since the late 1990s as a perk offered to employees to boost job satisfaction. Integrating the **compressed workweek program** into the institution's climate plan and making such a program successful--both for employees and as part of their climate reduction plan--is easier said than done. For one reason, faculty and staff come to the Cornell campus from eight different counties in the region. Cornell is also located in a small town (Ithaca, NY) with limited public transportation infrastructure. After-hour dependent care options for employees working longer work is another area of concern.

Realizing that it would be difficult to try to reduce Cornell's commute-related climate impact without help, Lynette Chappell-Williams, Director of Workforce Diversity, Equity & Life Quality, decided to reach out to the **US Department of Labor's (DOL) Women's Bureau**. "We want to connect with others in the community to work collectively toward solving these challenges."

Although the Women's Bureau has worked on commuting issues in larger cities, fitting alternate scheduling into a small center is relatively new to them. Cornell will therefore fill the role of guinea pig for flex scheduling in a small center.

One of the first aspects they'll be addressing is tracking. They are currently in the process of developing an online system that will record key statistics from program participants, including scheduled hours, employing department, employee classification, program format, and so on. With this program, they hope not only to be able to measure savings in miles driven as well as provide a way for employees to coordinate transportation, and to reduce or even eliminate the costs associated with commuting.

For now, they're able to report the results from a recent survey of over 1,000 supervisors on campus: more than 40 percent take advantage of flextime, with others taking part in a compressed work schedule, job sharing, and flexplace remote/work from home arrangements.

Cornell isn't alone in their efforts to improve employee satisfaction and cut commute-related carbon dioxide emissions. Like over 1,600 worksites throughout the US, Cornell has earned the **Best Workplaces for Commuters<sup>SM</sup>** (BWC) designation. The BWC estimates that through the program, the three million commuters participating in 2005 **saved enough energy to power 200,000 homes for a year** in 2005, with 2001-2005 cumulative CO<sub>2</sub> emissions savings around 3.4 million metric tons.

Yet not all alternative scheduling schemes produce positive results. The University of New Mexico (UMN) ran a compressed workweek trial in the summer of 2008, but found that the longer hours required too much extra cooling energy, so the program was shut down after one year.

There are over 300 buildings on the UMN campus, each with a pre-programmed heating and cooling schedule optimized for energy savings. Although 30 percent of the employee population (about 730 individuals) participated in the program, the institution couldn't justify the increase in energy costs.

"You really have to think through the unexpected ramifications of such a program," comments Karen Wentworth, UMN Senior Communication Representative. Going forward, individual departments will be free to pursue flex hours, provided they fit within existing heating/cooling schedule

employees the option to conduct office work from home or a remote site. This type of arrangement is alternatively referred to as telework or flexplace work.

*Example: Work a normal 9:00 am to 5:00 pm schedule from home two days every week.*

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Chappell-Williams doesn't anticipate having the same problem in the Cornell program, especially since many buildings are open 24/7 to accommodate round-the-clock research. At the same time, they hope to find entire departments and buildings that can be shut down altogether during unoccupied evenings and weekends to reduce heating and cooling costs. Their online system that's in development should provide definitive employee fuel savings statistics which can then be compared to heating and cooling costs, but as of yet they are not able to determine this cost-benefit ratio.

Others have raised concerns that offering flexible scheduling to employees encourages extra driving on off-days and living further from campus, but here again, Chappell-Williams disagrees. "I live relatively far from work, but because of the flex program am able to work from home two days every week," she argues. "This results in significant fuel savings for me, especially because I can dedicate part of one day each week to consolidate all of my errands. I now drive significantly less than if I had been working a regular workweek."

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