

## CARBON REDUCTION CHALLENGE

# TELE- COMMUTING 2.0

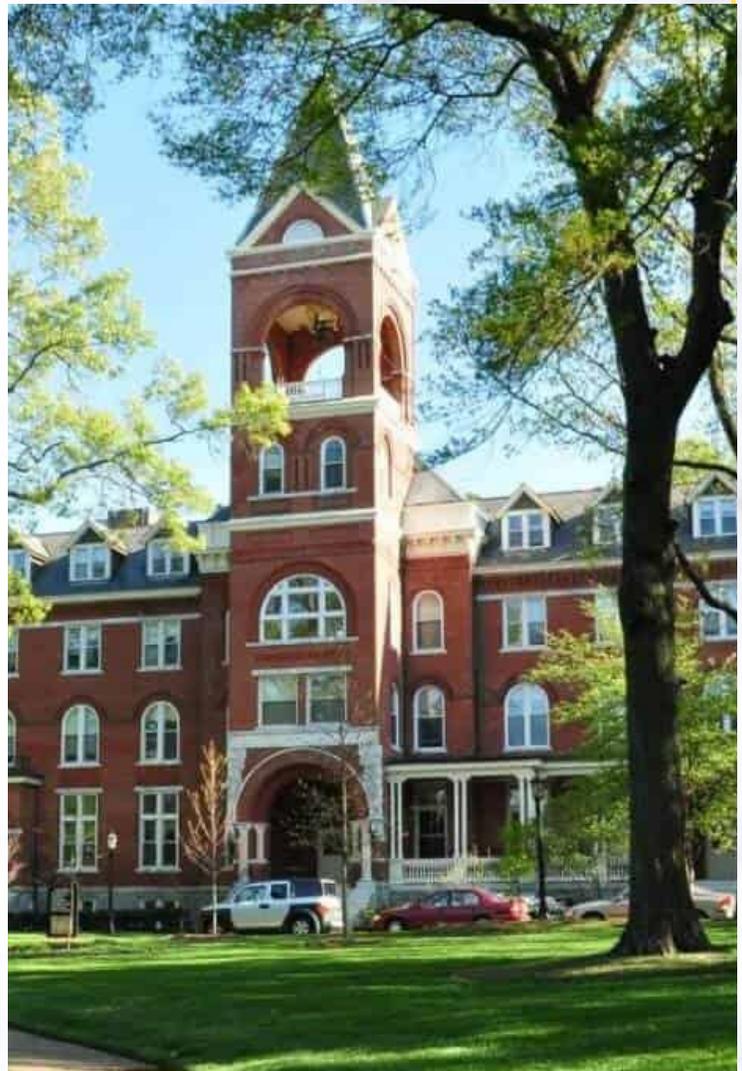
### Main Recommendations

1. Define benefits for employees and the college itself
2. Create a simple & accessible form to submit the policy
3. Define on what grounds an employee can be terminated or can no longer use the telecommute options

Agnes staff can  
save over 5, 508  
pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>  
& \$537/year!

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A new proposal of  
recommendations  
to the Agnes Scott  
College  
Telecommute  
Policy



## SUMMARY OF PROPOSED CHANGE

For the 2020 Georgia Tech Carbon Reduction Challenge (CRC) Agnes Scott College's Center for Sustainability was invited to participate and recruited me to be the volunteer student representative. To begin, I administered a pre-survey to four different departments at Agnes Scott to collect data on their transportation behaviors. Overall, 33 people received the survey and 26 replied. Throughout the response to the survey, the main concerns I observed were about the need to commute to and from work.

*Therefore, the objective of this project is to improve the Agnes Scott College current telecommute policy so it will be more easily used and applicable to more staff. Specifically, I have drafted revised recommendations and edits to the policy.*

The recommendations I propose come as a result of the savings Agnes has seen since remote learning (Agnes has saved over \$80,000 on utility bills. Based on the current trend of telecommuting, Agnes is anticipating to save over \$320,000 a year).

By expanding and revising the current telecommute policy, Agnes's sustainability will increase due to the explicit and hidden benefits of telecommuting; benefits ranging from the saving of carbon emission rates, a decrease in utility/energy bills and usage, saving employee's personal time and money, and saving the lifespan of work equipment from wear-and-tear.

# DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION

## Agnes Scott College

Since 1889, Agnes Scott has inspired students to discover new opportunities, new challenges and new strengths through a liberal arts education in a setting dedicated to women.

Our award-winning faculty helps students gain the tools—a well-rounded knowledge of the arts and sciences, critical thinking and leadership skills, and an appreciation of world cultures—that provide a lifetime of success and satisfaction. Agnes Scott College is an independent undergraduate college in downtown Decatur, Georgia, nestled inside the perimeter of the bustling metro-Atlanta area.

Agnes Scott College is ranked No. 1 in the country among national liberal arts colleges on the Most Innovative Schools list in U.S. News & World Report's 2020 edition of Best Colleges. Additionally, Agnes Scott is ranked first for First-Year Experience among all colleges and universities, and fourth among national liberal arts colleges for Best Undergraduate Teaching.



## AGNES SCOTT SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

“This is the day we stop and consider what we can do - individually and collectively - to ensure that access to clean air, clean water, and safe open spaces is ensured for everyone.”-Susan Kidd, ASC Executive Director of Sustainability

### Check out some awesome awards and accolades!

- Awarded STARS GOLD rating in recognition of its sustainability achievements from the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)
- Five solar arrays on campus, generating solar power and offsets 150 metric tons of carbon emissions annually (generates 342,200 kilowatt hours per year of renewable energy, which is enough to power 31 average sized U.S. home)
- A Second Nature Climate Solutions Acceleration Fund grant recipient
- Campbell Hall is heated and cooled by a geothermal HVAC system which is the most energy efficient HVAC system available in 2014





## WHAT IS THE CARBON REDUCTION CHALLENGE?

"This summer, due to COVID-19, all organizations are adjusting to a new "business as usual." Looking ahead to when the pandemic eases, we [Georgia Tech] think that there's an opportunity for organizations to recover in a way that can curb their emissions by supporting effective behaviors that were used during the pandemic. Therefore, the carbon reduction project this summer will focus on using surveys to gather data about how behaviors and/or business practices at your organization have changed during COVID-19, quantifying the CO2 reductions and cost savings of these changes, and coming up with recommendations for how your organization can support a more sustainable business-as-usual when COVID-19 eases".- Lalith Polepeddi, Research Scientist, Global Change Program

# TELECOMMUTING POLICY REVISED

**Three recommendations to be implemented into the current policy to improve the telecommute policy post-COVID.**

Throughout the pre-survey sent to staff , the main concern I ran across multiple times was commuting to and from work. Therefore, the objective of this project is to draft revised recommendations and edits to the Agnes Scott College current telecommute policy. (Please refer to Appendix A, B, and C for a deeper elaboration and explanation on the recommendations). Note: The recommendations are heavily inspired by the Georgia Commute Options (GCO) Telecommute Policy. [<https://gacommuteoptions.com/>]

## Recommendations

1. Create an easy and accessible telecommute form for employees to submit time to telecommute to supervisors. Employees should know how and where to request work from home privileges, who will be approving, and the timing and deadline for approval from supervisors
2. Employees should be aware of the college's benefits and incentives provided to them as a result of telecommuting
  - a. E.g. saving money on gas and time, discounts from various organization (provided by partner, Georgia Commute Options), reducing carbon emissions from commute time
3. Supervisors and employees should create and redefine a work-from-home culture equivalent to the office culture
  - a. E.g. Extend in-office amenities like healthy snack delivery or catered meals (via food delivery credits or gift cards to remote employees
  - b. Offer and extend 24/7 technical support, and borrowing of college-owned technology (l pads, laptops, etc.)
  - c. Offer trainings and workshops for new communication software such as (Zoom, Slack, Google, Microsoft Teams, etc) to promote teamwork and social interactions between employees and students

## CO<sub>2</sub> CALCULATIONS AND COST SAVINGS

Proposed change: How much will the 426 staff employees save on gasoline and pounds of CO<sub>2</sub> if they work from home three days out of the five day work week?

1. Calculate the total miles (numbers are from my pre-survey) divided by the number of responses.
  - a. 1, 243 miles/ 18 (# of respondents)
  - b. Average number of miles= 69.1 miles
2. 69.1 avg miles X 250 workdays (5 days a workweek)= 17, 275 miles per year
3. 69.1 avg miles X 150 (3 days in a workweek)= 10, 365 miles per year
4. Note: 25.1 miles per gallon in 2018 (EPA)
5. 25.1 gallons/ 17, 275 total miles/year= 688.3 total gallons/ year (5 days)
6. 25.1 gallons/ 10, 365 total miles/ year= 412. 9 gallons/ year (3 days)
7. 688.3 gallons - 412.9= 275.4 gallons saved
8. 275.4 gallons X 20 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub>/gallon (FuelEconomy)= 5, 508 lbs of CO<sub>2</sub>

Results: If all of the 426 staff employers work from home three days out of the five day work week, employers will save **5,508 pounds of CO<sub>2</sub>** and **\$537.03** (this number does not include cost of reduced maintenance, parking fees, extra stops (dropping children off at school) etc.)

## CO-BENEFITS

**Agnes's sustainability will increase due to the explicit and hidden benefits of telecommuting; benefits ranging from the saving of carbon emission rates, a decrease in utility/energy bills and usage, saving employee's personal time and money, and saving the lifespan of work equipment from wear-and-tear.**

- Employees will save around \$537.03 a year, and 5, 508 pounds of CO2 from their personal commute to and from work
- Saves carbon emissions from modes of transportation
- Increase use and personal agency to use public transportation (or decrease of personal vehicles) to and from campus by employers
- Deeper trust among employees and employers during COVID. This creates an increase in worker productivity. Also, employees have flexibility and comfort of being at home which also increases worker productivity
- Curtails absenteeism and a decrease in office supplies
- Explore possible collaboration with organizations such as Georgia Power or Georgia Commute Options for college employees to have discounts for the personal energy usage that will be increased at home
- Increase of sustainability on campus

### **Quotes from survey participants to support the benefits**

- "Have kept thermostat regulated, printers off, electricity off"
- "Our energy usage (electricity and natural gas) has decreased"
- "Working remotely has had some positive outcomes such as a reduction of hours of travel time, air pollution, and the use of resources (air, paper, etc.) at the office"
- Lack of interruptions that come from an in-person office environment. I'm also physically more comfortable (clothing, temperature, lighting) than I am in my office at work"
- "Eating at home more (less eating out)...perhaps healthier eating"
- "Because I am at home, I am able to be more productive with breaks that I take. At work, I would spend 15 minutes walking around the building, but when I'm at home, I can use that time to put a load of laundry in the wash or empty my cat's litter box".
- "Traveling to meet with donors (via car or plane) has been suspended until further notice. All donor interactions are either via phone, ZOOM, email or mail"
- "Enjoy much higher productivity with no commute time"
- "Being able to be comfortable and have control over things such as clothing, temperature, lighting, etc that I'm not able to control in the office"

## ANTICIPATED OBSTACLES

Although I have made some suggestions to the current telecommute policy, there are still some potential roadblocks that will occur in the home. There will be the obstacle of maintaining confidentiality and privacy in the home, especially for employees who may work in financial aid or the wellness center, or have children in the home. Another roadblock will be the increased usage of energy and utilities in the employee's home. This may disproportionately impact faculty whose income will now go more towards energy and utilities bills instead of other avenues. In the survey, many participants mention suffering from "Zoom fatigue" (a mental drainage from online meetings and conferences). As well as employees experiencing little physical and social interactions with others (in this case students). In the survey, a participant mentioned they were worried about not being physically active enough because they are sitting at home all day. This could potentially be another roadblock within the telecommute policy.

## MINIMIZING NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

1. Prepare a guidance document for working remotely (tips, and tricks)
2. Training on how to work confidential at home
  - a. Supply each employee with a school- owned computer that has VPN/ security
3. Mandatory check ins with supervisors
4. Expand the incentive program for those working remotely,
  - a. Including benefits from Georgia Commute Options and HR
5. Provide tips and ways to save on energy and utilities bills (collaborate with Georgia Power)
6. Create workshops for mental health awareness and programs to release stress and exercise
7. Create social video parties for engagement of students and employees



## NEXT STEPS?

### Timeline of upcoming next steps

#### 1ST

- Work with the Center for Sustainability to propose the changes to the teleworking policy to the college's VP for Business & Finance. Target date: TBA

#### 3RD

- Create outreach program to faculty and staff

#### 2ND

- Meet with Human Resources and Georgia Commute Options to ensure that the college uses all the programs available to us

#### 4TH

- Continue to document the carbon reductions from this project and make additional recommendations for the future



## CONCLUSION

For the 2020 Georgia Tech Carbon Reduction Challenge (CRC) Agnes Scott College's Center for Sustainability was invited to participate and recruited me to be the volunteer student representative. I was already following the issues of carbon reduction during remote learning, so I felt that this challenge was important for me to pursue. I have learned a lot throughout the eight weeks, and will continue to research how COVID has and continues to impact higher education. By participating in the CRC, I was able to see one of these impacts, telecommuting. This project provided recommendations to the current telecommute policy in order to save carbon emission rates, money, and time during and after COVID.

An interesting thing I found from the survey was that a majority of participants were somewhat familiar with carbon emissions rates and knew of their carbon footprint from commuting (as most of them drove to work). This gave me hope that Agnes Scott would be the perfect community to reduce carbon emissions through telecommuting, especially since there was such a positive outlook on telecommuting and many employees duties can be done remotely. With my improvements to the policy, Agnes's sustainability plan will be even more closer to lowering their carbon emissions.

## APPENDIX A

### Agnes Scott pre-COVID telecommute policy

Telecommuting is the practice of working at home or at a site near the home instead of physically traveling to a central workplace. It is a work alternative that Agnes Scott College may offer to some employees when it would benefit both the college and the employee. Employees who believe their position is suited to exploring the possibility of telecommuting as a realistic option should submit a written request to their manager proposing how it will benefit the college and themselves. The request should explain how they will be accountable and responsible, what equipment is necessary and how communication barriers will be overcome. The decision to approve a telecommuting arrangement will be based on factors such as position and job duties, performance history, related work skills and the impact on the college. The division vice president reviews and approves all telecommuting arrangements, informing the president. Each telecommuting arrangement will be reviewed six months from inception for continued viability. The employee's compensation, benefits, work status, work responsibilities, and the amount of time the employee is expected to work per day or per pay period will not change because of participation in the telecommuting program (unless otherwise agreed upon in writing). The employee's at-home work hours will conform to a schedule agreed upon by the employee and his or her supervisor. If such a schedule has not been agreed upon, the employee's work hours will be assumed to be the same as they were before telecommuting. Changes to this schedule must be reviewed and approved in advance by the employee's supervisor. Telecommuting is an alternative method of meeting the needs of the college and is not a universal employee benefit. As such, Agnes Scott has the right to refuse to make telecommuting available to an employee and to terminate a telecommuting arrangement at any time.

# APPENDIX B

## Recommendation #1 for the revised policy- Logistics

1. **Clearly define which employees can use the telecommute policy**
  - a. You may set eligibility criteria – i.e., only those employees who have been at the company for X days and hit X of their weekly or monthly goals can work remotely
  - b. Do employees that work in services (such as dining, facilities, IT, etc) included in the telecommute policy? If so, do the same rules apply. If not, what alternative or benefits will be supplied for these employees?
2. **Be as specific as possible in the required form for employees to request time to telecommute**
  - a. Questions in the form should include, how long the employee will telecommute, the work hours and duties, how many times an employee can request time to telecommute in a time period, and the request time to submit an application
3. **Clearly define on what grounds can an employee be terminated or refuse to use the telecommute options**
  - a. “The employee’s home workspace will be considered an extension of the employer’s workplace. Therefore, the employer will continue to be liable for job-related accidents that occur in the employee’s home workspace during the employee’s working hours. The employee’s at-home work hours will conform to a schedule agreed upon by the employee and his or her supervisor. The employer assumes no liability for injuries occurring in the employee’s home workspace outside the agreed-upon work hours. The employer is not liable for loss, destruction, or injury that may occur in or to the employee’s home” (Global Workplace Analytics)
4. **Identify terms for employees that misuse the telecommute policy and consequences for this**
  - a. Such as probation on requesting to use the policy
  - b. Same consequences as if employer were in the office

# APPENDIX C

## Recommendation #2 for the revised policy-Benefits to the college & employees

1. **Clearly define benefits for employees and the college itself such as:**
  - a. Offer IT support to employees
    - i. Offer and extend 24/7 technical support, and borrowing of college-owned technology (Ipads, laptops, etc.)
    - ii. Invest in project management systems to host team collaboration/shared projects for employees at home to work with employees in the office
  - b. Offer training for new communication software such as (Zoom, Slack, Google, Microsoft Teams, etc)
  - c. Extend in-office amenities like healthy snack delivery or catered meals (via food delivery credits or gift cards to remote employees
  - d. Redefine a new telecommute culture
    - i. Recognition of employees
    - ii. Celebrate home life habits
    - iii. Host bi-weekly feedback meetings on policy with supervisors
  - e. Host trainings and tips on work from home life and confidentiality in the home
    - i. Invest in an encrypted Virtual Private Network (VPN) to protect all system users
    - ii. Instruct employees to avoid vulnerable public Wi-Fi. Instead, encourage them to use hotspots or provide encryption software
  - f. Partnership with Georgia Commute Options
    - i. Provide further incentives and discounts for employees to use public transportation

## REFERENCES

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