

## University expands on 'green' goals

By: Rebecca Kheel

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Chancellor Nancy Cantor's announced Thursday that Syracuse University will participate in the Flexible Work and Sustainability Initiative.

The plan includes flexible work schedules for employees, specifically staff members and laborers. Employees would continue to work 40-hour weeks, but with the option of either working four 10-hour days or working five eight-hour days, telecommuting on the fifth day.

Telecommuting is when work is done from off-campus locations by phone or computer.

Syracuse University department managers and supervisors received toolkits Thursday with information about how the flexible scheduling works, and university staff could begin their four-day work schedules as early as next week, said Neil Strodel, associate vice president of Human Resources and chair of the taskforce assigned to construct the initiative.

"It's going to be incremental," Strodel said. "For example, next week there may be a couple of areas that start a different work schedule, and the following week there may be couple more. It will evolve."

Modeling the idea on other cities and universities with flexible work schedules, Cantor began the initiative over the summer when she appointed Eleanor Ware, senior vice president of human services and government relations and Louis Marcoccia, SU executive vice president and chief financial officer, to assemble a taskforce to determine if it would be feasible for the SU campus.

"There was a lot of information nationally about cities that were closing down one day," Ware said. "This doesn't work at the university because we're a 24-hour operation. She wanted us to explore what the university could do to help our faculty and staff with sustainability efforts."

SU's flexible work schedule differs from others around the country because it ties in sustainability.

"We found, generally, that there weren't many taking flexible work options and aligning it with sustainability," Strodel said of the research the taskforce undertook. "We felt that we would be somewhat distinct if we did this."

While Strodel said he believes there is an inherent connection between flexible work schedules and reducing energy consumption, he also said it's too early to tell what effects the initiative will have.

He said this belief stems from the fact that when people drive to work less, they use less gas.

"We can't (determine the effect) until we found out where our flexible work options are going to be deployed," Strodel said. "If we were to say 'the following buildings are going to be shut down on the following days,' then we could do an analysis right now. But we don't have that information yet. We're speculating that there is a sustainability link."

Steve Lloyd, SU's chief sustainability officer, maintains it may be impossible to ever know how much is saved as part of the initiative.

"We would never know really," Lloyd said. "Let's say, a department has 10 people. They all work in the same office and same room. If one person doesn't show up they aren't using their computer or a couple cups of coffee, so it would be very hard to tell."

Strodel added it is too early to tell how the university might be affected financially because they have yet to analyze what departments will be impacted.

Melissa Cadwell, marketing manager for sustainability, said the main financial effect will be on the employees who will save gas and wear on their vehicles.

One estimate from the National Resources Defense Council said people who commute to work one day a week less save an average of \$236 per year.

Those who constructed the initiative assure that students will not be overly affected by it.

"We're hoping that it doesn't affect them at all," Ware said. "We know that all the services have to be provided. The idea is not to have any kind of drop in services at all. It is to cover the work in different, creative ways. We're never going to have a day where something isn't covered."

Another potential part of the initiative is closing down the entire university on extended vacations, such as winter break. This aspect is still being evaluated by the taskforce, Lloyd said.

The university has had a flexible work scheduling system in place since 2003, but the new system differs from it in its focus on sustainability, said Lisa Brennan, assistant director of SU's Work Life and Organizational Development.

The sustainability initiative is part of a larger effort to make SU carbon neutral, a motive that started in 2007 when Chancellor Cantor signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, pledging to achieve zero net greenhouse gas emissions. A goal date for complete neutrality has not been set.

"Right now we're formulating that plan," Lloyd said. "We have a contract that's being worked out right now with a consultant. We have to get input from the university's faculty, staff and students. Then we're going to figure out what we want to do."

Recent sustainability efforts include the energy management system, which computerizes and schedules climate control and lighting in buildings.

The temperature parameters were recently changed, keeping buildings at 68 degrees in the heating season, Sept. 15 to May 15, and at 76 degrees in the cooling season, May 16 to Sept. 14.

"By reducing the temperature of university-occupied spaces by two degrees in the heating season and raising the temperature threshold one degree in the cooling season, the university will realize an annual reduction of 1,683 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions," Cadwell said. "(That is) the equivalent emissions of providing energy to 149 homes or 308 passenger vehicles each year."

Lloyd said the energy management system has already saved the university in excess of \$1 million each year. He also said that sometime in the future, the university hopes to upgrade the system so that lights and air conditioning would automatically turn on when an employee swiped a card to enter and

automatically shut off when everyone was out of the building, noting that hotels are one of the models for this plan.

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