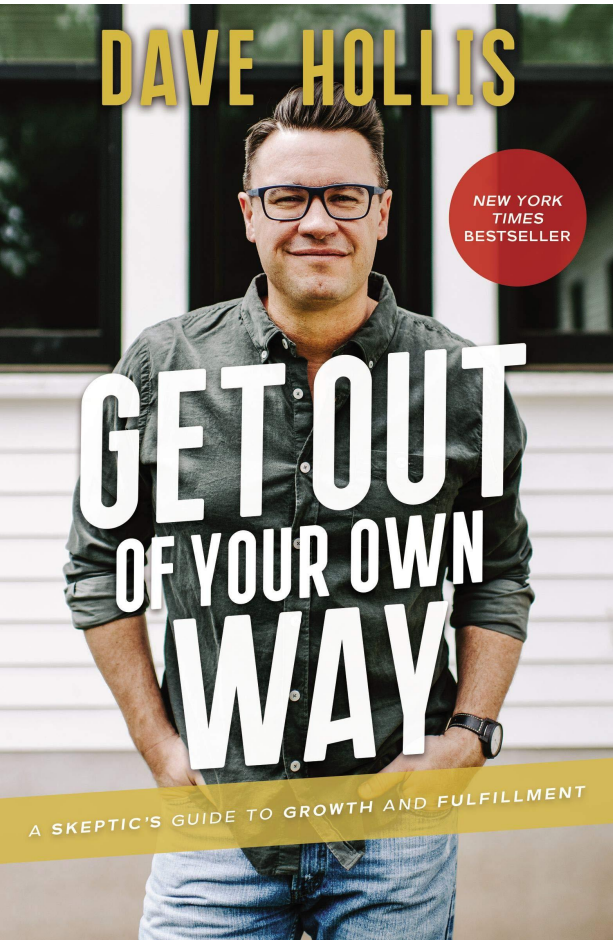


ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF REMOTE WORK AT STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

A Report by the University Senate Environment Committee - May 3, 2021





Hear this: In the rush to return to normal, use this time to consider which parts of normal are worth rushing back to.

If things go back exactly as they were we will have missed the opportunity to take the good from this bad.

The gift nobody's asked for is sitting here for us all to open — an opportunity to do some housekeeping in where we focus, who we spend time with, what we consume, how we work, what matters and most importantly what doesn't.

Take notes. We're getting a lesson we cannot forget when things return to normal.

-Dave Hollis, March 25, 2020.

ALL OF US WANT A *BUSTLING* CAMPUS



NONE OF US WANTS A *BURSTING* CAMPUS



RATIONALE

- By 2019, the University Environment Committee had begun to discuss whether remote work might be one strategy to address the parking and traffic crises.
- Since March 2020 when pandemic operating restrictions were put in place, Stony Brook University employees have clearly demonstrated that remote work is possible.
- Against this backdrop, the Environment Committee decided that the time was appropriate to estimate the extent to which remote work could help to address some of the environmental issues facing Stony Brook University.

METHODOLOGY

- Seven question survey created in Qualtrics.
- Survey conducted March 31, 2021 through April 12, 2021.
- Several questions were deliberately left as text entry to allow nuanced and complex responses.
- The last question solicited open comments by the respondents.
- Qualtrics options were set to prevent multiple responses from the same computer and detect bot activity.

RESULTS - 1

- Complete responses received: 531, none flagged as suspicious.
 - Staff.....258 (48%)
 - Faculty.....169 (32%)
 - Graduate Students...99 (19%)
 - Administration..... 5 (1%)
- Primary work location:
 - West Campus.....360 (68%)
 - East Campus.....103 (19%)
 - South Campus.....32 (6%)
 - Southampton.....16 (3%)
 - All other.....20 (4%)

RESULTS - 2

- A large majority (87%) travel to work in single occupancy vehicles.
- Mean one-way commute distance of 17.5 miles.
- Mean one-way commute time of 36 minutes.
- Mean self reported days per week that could be worked remotely while fully meeting academic and professional responsibilities:
 - Faculty.....2.7 days/week (54% remote work possible).
 - Graduate Students... 3.2 days/week (63% remote work possible).
 - Staff..... 3.4 days/week (69% remote work possible).
 - Administrators..... 1.8 days/week (32% remote work possible)
(Only 5 administrators answered the survey so this number may be less accurate than the others.)
- Many nuanced and insightful comments were received.

DISCUSSION - 1

- Most respondents preferred a hybrid model where they worked remotely some days and on-site some days, with some scheduling flexibility to meet changing work requirements.
- Many respondents felt they were as productive if not more productive when working remotely as they would have been on-site.
- Very many respondents cited avoiding the time, expense, and stress of commuting and parking as one of the best aspects of working remotely.

DISCUSSION - 2

- The New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act of 2019 mandates ambitious carbon footprint reductions for all State agencies including Stony Brook University.
- A Stony Brook employee that commutes in a single occupancy vehicle generates an average of 3.24 metric tons of CO₂ annually. A reduction in commuting miles by University employees might be creditable towards the University meeting these legislative goals.

DISCUSSION - 3

The terms and conditions of employment at Stony Brook University are set by University and State policy. Some positions clearly require 100% on-site attendance while other positions may allow some work to be conducted remotely. Any long term remote work policy would have to involve a formal process, similar to that used during pandemic restrictions, worked out between:

- Faculty and Department Chairs / Deans,
- Graduate Student Employees and Graduate Advisors,
- Staff and Supervisors.

Even if the percentage of remote work actually achieved was one third to one half of the self reported value, that would be of tremendous environmental benefit.

CONCLUSIONS - 1

Allowing the continuance of some remote work by some employees could serve a number of State and University purposes by:

1. Averting a return to the parking and traffic crises that have plagued SBU in past years.
2. Reducing the need to construct additional parking.
3. In locations where additional parking is still required, lessening the level of crisis increases the ability to convert existing surface lots to multilevel structures, thereby preserving irreplaceable green and open space.

CONCLUSIONS - 2

5. Helping the University meet mandatory carbon footprint reductions.
6. Providing additional time to implement attractive long-term alternatives to accessing campus via single occupancy vehicles, instead of being forced by crisis into short-term reactive fixes.

It is the committee's conclusion that allowing appropriate levels of remote work can be an important tool to achieve these worthy goals **without compromising the vibrancy of a fully occupied campus.**

CONTRIBUTORS and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Survey questions: Sarah Battaglia, Matthew Eisaman, Mona Ramonetti, Frederick Walter, and Thomas Wilson.
- Qualtrics survey: Mark Lang.
- Data analysis: Sarah Battaglia, Carlos Colosqui, Matthew Eisaman, Mona Ramonetti, and Thomas Wilson.
- Report: Thomas Wilson. Editorial input from the Environment Committee.

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THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?

