

# Campus switchboard operators field hundreds of calls a day

By Michelle Boulton

**W**hen people need to reach someone on campus and don't know the phone number, who are they going to call? The main switchboard, of course!

While faculty and staff are usually able to reach for their campus telephone directory, people off-campus don't have access to anything more than the brief listings in the Saskatoon phonebook, providing they're even calling from within the city. To help off-campus callers find the people they're looking for, the University switchboard operators direct well over 200 calls a day.

So when someone phones in, who are these U of S

voices on the other end of the line? Sitting just inside the front doors of the Maintenance Building are Joyce Hoscheit and Rhonda Gallagher. Along with Sharri Howells, whose desk is just around the corner, they take turns answering the phone and directing calls.

Considering the volume of incoming phone calls, one might think the operators have no time for anything else — but between calls, all three are also very busy with other duties in the Facilities Management Division. Hoscheit and Gallagher are the ever-pleasant receptionists for FM, and they also look after functions like processing forms and mail, calls for elevator repairs, dispatching FM

crews, and keeping track of all campus door-lock codes. Howells does data entry for the Division.

All University switchboard services were provided by the switchboard at Royal University Hospital until May 1994. According to Telephone Services, which is also part of Facilities Management, the move to the new switchboard system in the Maintenance Building at that time was part of a major upgrade of the telephone system, which included the addition of voice-mail.

But who calls the U of S switchboard and what do they want to know?

Hoscheit says, “you would be amazed.” She remembers get-

ting a call once from a man who had a really bad ant problem — he wanted her to put him through to Anthropology.

Gallagher answered a call recently from a woman who wanted to know how to make dill pickles. “I guess people figure we're a university, so we should know everything,” Gallagher says.

“I think they don't know where else to call,” suggests Hoscheit.

When they're responding to the flood of incoming calls, Hoscheit, Gallagher, and Howells need to know a lot about the University — who does what on campus and where to find them. They use a computer search engine similar to the



**The University's three switchboard operators — from left, Facilities Management staffers Joyce Hoscheit, Sharri Howells, and Rhonda Gallagher — use their extensive knowledge of campus, and a searchable computer database, to put more than 200 callers a day in touch with the right U of S person.**

one available on the U of S website to quickly look up a last name, department name, phone number, or any portion of these names and numbers. Their data is considerably more extensive than what is available on the website, and it's updated as numbers are changed or added throughout the year.

According to Telephone Services, there are more than 8,000 telephone numbers on campus. So, even with the help of a computerized search, the

switchboard operators need to keep a lot of information in their heads.

Relying on their great memories and a learned familiarity with the people on campus and how the institution operates, Gallagher says they “very seldom hang up without transferring the call to someone. And if all else fails, we transfer them to Communications.”

The areas that the campus operators send calls to the most are, predictably, the Registrar's

Office and college or department main numbers. Other areas getting a high volume of calls are the Large and Small Animal Clinics at the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, the College of Kinesiology, the Extension Division, and Student Affairs and Services.

So what do the operators think it takes to staff the front lines? Organization, a good memory, patience, and a sense of humor. It also helps to have each other on those really tough days.