



## Opportunities and expectations

Mary Buhr had deep roots in Guelph but she pulled them up to move west, to a city she always liked and to a job heading a college teeming with opportunities and expectations.

✦ COLLEEN MACPHERSON

Buhr assumed the role of dean of the College of Agriculture and Bioresources this summer after spending 21 years at the University of Guelph, the last part as interim dean of the Ontario Agriculture College. Barely into her first term, Buhr has already been struck by the sharp contrast in how agriculture is perceived in the two provinces.

"Southern Ontario is largely industry and manufacturing oriented and agriculture is very much on the sideline," she said. "They don't know the breadth and depth of what agriculture contributes to society. But this province, as a population, is still pretty willing to listen to the argument that agriculture can be a solution."

She has also noted a marked difference in the interactions between Saskatchewan's universities and the provincial government compared to Ontario.



Mary Buhr, dean of the College of Agriculture and Bioresources

Here, "both universities have good and close relationships with government. That doesn't happen in Ontario. There are too

many universities and agriculture is a minor ministry." These factors, coupled with this province's "much more respectful

relationship with Aboriginal People" and the University of Saskatchewan's growing reputation across the country all

made the position of dean highly attractive to Buhr.

"This college, this university, this province has the potential to be a world leader. That's the opportunity and the expectation, and that big an opportunity you don't want to blow."

Buhr, who grew up in Manitoba, earned her PhD in biology from the University of Waterloo. She worked as a visiting scientist with Agriculture Canada in Brandon for a number of years before taking a position in the Department of Animal Science at the University of Manitoba. She joined the University of Guelph in 1988, moving to the Ontario Agriculture College in 2002.

As the new dean, Buhr said she sees a number of challenges ahead, not the least of which relates to how her college is posi-

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## Updating the numbers

With the Canadian and world economies beginning to show signs of recovery, the University of Saskatchewan's financial situation has also seen some improvement according to an update delivered to Council Sept. 17.

Richard Florizone, vice-president of finance and resources, told the meeting of faculty representatives that the university's income from investments, normally about \$9.5 million annually, was about \$7 million at the end of April, higher than anticipated for 2008-09. The pension solvency deficit also improved. As of July 3, what was expected to be a deficit of about \$104 million was in fact about \$93 million.

While those risks have moderated somewhat, Florizone said Saskatchewan's declining potash revenue, which makes up



Florizone

about 20 per cent of the provincial budget, could have a direct impact on the annual operating grant the university receives from the government.

The university is already in the process of trimming \$10 million from its operating budget over the next two years. Brett Fairbairn, provost and

vice-president academic, told Council there was little that was new to report on how that process is going beyond that budget adjustment plans are being implemented by colleges and administrative units. Those plans include the elimination of an estimated 60 positions across campus largely through attrition and retirement.

"Common sense and evidence" indicates the university's current course of action "is about right," Fairbairn said, adding the institution should "take advantage of our comparatively strong position."

Florizone said the university will have a better idea of the province's financial picture when second quarter results are released in November. Those revenue numbers "may give a hint into what is to come." ■

## Leading the way in hand-held technology

✦ MARK FERGUSON

*The Globe and Mail*, *The National Post*, *Maclean's* and CBC National – these are just a few of the places stories about the U of S iPhone application, the iUSASK, have appeared recently. As the first university in Canada to offer an iPhone app, the U of S is leading the way in hand-held technology and the media has taken notice.

"I'm not surprised at all about this kind of coverage," said Rick Bunt, associate vice-president of information and communications technology. "There's a lot of demand for these kinds of services and I think the iUSASK is a good demonstration of hitting the right market at the right time."

Bunt is quick to point out how far the U of S has come technologically in seven or eight years, including the transition from telephone registration to online registration. Perhaps the biggest shift came with the launch of PAWS about six years ago, but handheld devices like the iPhone pose some difficulties for the university, he said.

"Unfortunately, there is a lack of common standards across handheld devices like the Blackberry and iPhone. In the past, we've based our services on a certain standard, but in the handheld device world, that standard doesn't exist."

Other institutions have expressed interest in having their iPhone

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## Buhr to continue her research

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tioned with the University of Saskatchewan itself.

"This university has a blessing and a curse. It has all the disciplines you could think of and so its limited resources have to serve a whole bunch of different mandates. It's got a big area to cover so agriculture, within that environment, can't rest on its history of excellence and leadership. We have to continue to move forward and, in the pattern of all successful disciplines, it has to reinvent itself."

For Buhr, that means creating opportunities for faculty to explore new areas of both basic and applied science. It means continuing the college's proactive efforts to recruit students to a sector that traditionally has more jobs than graduates. It means teaching those students "in a way that prepares them for change. We have to build that into the education we provide." It means maintaining and expanding the college's connections with industry which she described as "deep, strong and vibrant, ... a hallmark of a great college."

And it means strengthening the college's connections with aboriginal people. "There isn't a science college at this university that has a significant number of indigenous people as students. Agriculture is an accessible science. We need



Buhr

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Mary Buhr

to be inclusive and work with indigenous people to ensure they have access and that we can access what they have," including a unique knowledge of the land.

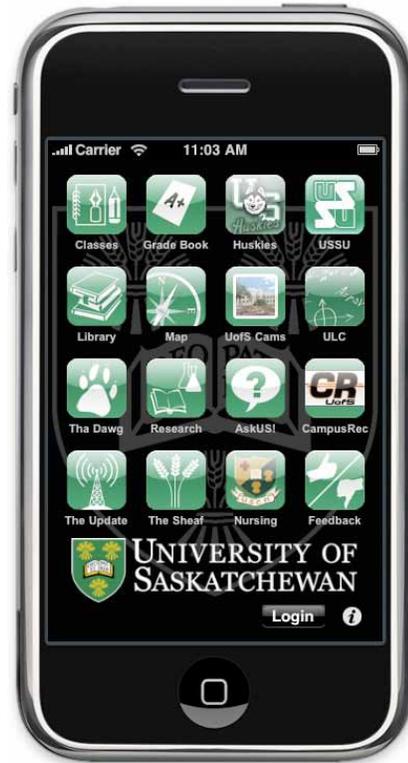
Asked about other observations from her first few weeks at the U of S, Buhr said she is "incredibly impressed" with the college's students, with her fellow deans - "there's a fabulous group

of people running this place" - and with the connections to the federal, provincial and commercial entities all located on campus. "The power of that functional group is amazing."

Busy as she is settling into the role of dean, Buhr is also setting up a research lab to continue her work on sperm physiology and its relationship to fertility and artificial insemination. The goal, she said, is "more offspring from the best males, more productivity with fewer inputs." Her research in Guelph centred on dairy cattle and pigs "but we've done everything, no word of a lie, from honeybees to elephants." In Saskatoon, she will shift her focus to beef cattle, a new area for both her and for the U of S. "We sperm people are pretty thin on the ground."

Buhr said she recognizes the challenge of finding time for research but she is determined, for a couple of reasons. "Number one is that it's an awful lot of fun. I'm

just stubborn and I don't want to give it up. Secondly, administration will suck up as much time as you allow it to and keeping an active research program going keeps you real. Peter MacKinnon and senior administration here have been very supportive but everybody knows the most important part of my job is this office. It's up to me to find the balance." ■



## Latest iUSASK version to use GPS

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application designed by U of S programmers in the Department of Computer Science. "We're not in the business of offering and supporting professional-quality technology services, but we are having discussions with Computer Science, ITS, and other groups to see how we can work together to make these services successful."

The limits of the iUSASK seem endless, but there is a long way to go before class registration and other services would be available in the palm of your hand. "This is an institutional challenge," said Bunt. "We have 17,000 users on PAWS every day and we can't just take all of the resources from PAWS and put them on the iPhone app. We can only do so much right now. But computer science can do some incredible things. They deserve a lot of praise."

Over 2,000 people worldwide have downloaded the iUSASK application so far, and with the newest version of iUSASK available for download, instructor and programmer Chad Jones is excited about the growing popularity of the app he helped create. Among other features, Jones said the new campus map might be the most interesting button on version 1.2, as the GPS map shows a user's location with a blue dot.

"It's a wonderful tool for finding your way around campus."

Jones figures about 4,000 people on campus carry either an iPhone or an iPod Touch (which is also compatible with the iUSASK). The Campus Computer Store alone sold 700 iPod Touch models during their back-to-school promotion.

"The goal of the iUSASK from the very beginning was to engage the university through the growing trend of handheld communications," said Jones. "We noticed students on their cell phones and handheld devices after class and we thought, we want to be there." ■

### OCN Publishing Schedule Fall 2009/Winter 2010

No.	Publishing Date	Deadline
5	Oct. 16, 2009	Oct 8., 2009
6	Oct. 30, 2009	Oct. 22, 2009
7	Nov. 13, 2009	Nov. 5, 2009
8	Nov. 27, 2009	Nov. 19, 2009
9	Jan. 8, 2010	Dec. 17, 2009
10	Jan. 22, 2010	Jan. 14, 2010
11	Feb. 5, 2010	Jan. 28, 2010



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