

James H. Albertson
1962-1967

James H. Albertson, executive assistant to the president at Ball State Teachers College at Muncie, Ind., was chosen as the eighth president of Wisconsin State Teachers College (WSC) at Stevens Point.

Albertson had played a significant part in Ball State's rapid expansion and this experience was valuable as he assumed the presidency on July 1, 1962. At 36 he was the youngest of the 10 WSC presidents. He held B.A. and M.A. degrees from Colorado State College, and the Ed.D. from Stanford University.

This quiet friendly man who stood 6'4" was soon at home in the community and on campus where his ability as a competent administrator was quickly recognized. President Albertson had in mind what higher education should do and the part that the campus at Stevens Point should play.

He did not consider students the product of higher education. That product, he thought, was an "environment" and he wanted the institution to demand excellence in all areas. The level of that demand or expectancy, he said, rested with the faculty. He told the students to expect excellence.

These were eventful years. WSC had under 2,500 students when Albertson came in 1962. During his five year tenure, the enrollment passed 5,000, marking greater growth than in all previous 68 years.

A new science building and a classroom center were opened, as were more residence halls and a large addition to the University Center. By 1967 architects were working on plans for a Fine Arts Building and a Learning Resources Center.

The College of Fine Arts was created in 1963, separating the departments of art, music, speech and drama from the College of Letters and Science.

Gone were the days of six class periods when nobody had a class after 3 p.m. Classes started at 7:45 and ran for 10 periods a day with evening sessions. In 1964 the institution became Wisconsin State University at Stevens Point.

President Albertson went to the Far East for the first time in 1964 on a study for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and the U.S. State Department's Agency of International Development. That trip took him to the Philippines. He was then chosen to head a team for the first critical study ever made of Vietnamese public higher education, an assignment of import, but also of great tragedy for the university.

On March 24, 1967, came the terrible news that President Albertson and his colleagues had been killed in a plane crash on a lonely rain-swept mountain north of Saigon.

The editor of the Stevens Point Daily Journal expressed the community's grief:

"His death was a tragedy of shocking magnitude. His contributions in the circles in which he moved in his brief span of years already were so tremendous that it staggers the imagination to contemplate how much more he would have added in the future were he not so suddenly taken from us."

Twice before the college and community had joined to mourn the passing of a president, but this time they gathered in stunned disbelief for a memorial to 41-year-old James Albertson who had left them in youthful vigor, his promise unfulfilled.