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Samuelson Hall

Central Washington University

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What's in a Name? Samuelson Hall

Emil E. Samuelson (known as "Dr. Sam") saw a lot of changes during his tenure as a teacher and administrator at Central Washington University.

When he arrived on the campus in 1932, the school was known as the Washington State Normal School (WSNE), enrollment was about 350 students, the president of the United States was Herbert Hoover, and the Great Depression had just begun.

When he retired, in 1968, the school had grown into Central Washington State College (it would become CWU in 1977), enrollment was 6,174, Lyndon Johnson was in the White House, and the Vietnam War was in full swing.

Samuelson was born in 1898 in Port Wing, Wisconsin, and was one of the first two students to ever graduate from the local high school (in 1916). He attended the Superior State Normal School (now the University of Wisconsin-Superior), receiving his teaching credentials in 1918.

After a brief stint in the Student Army Training Corps during World War I, Samuelson returned to teaching and continuing his education, earning his PhD at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in 1932.

Shortly after earning his doctorate, he joined the WSNS staff as director of student personnel services and research, placement director, and chair of the Division of Education, Psychology, and Philosophy.

He continued as division chair until 1947, and also served as Dean of Men during World War II. From 1957 and 1965, he was Dean of Students, while also continuing to teach educational psychology classes.

Following his retirement in 1968, Samuelson was active in a variety of community organizations. He died in February 1985 at the age of 87 and is buried in the IOOF Cemetery in Ellensburg.

In addition to his name, nickname, and dates of birth and death, his grave marker contains the simple message, "Education is Light." He is interred next to his wife, Mary Elizabeth, who died in 1989.

In the mid-1960s, the Student Union Building was renamed the Samuelson Union Building in his honor. The building was originally constructed in 1926-28 to serve as a gymnasium. It was a two-story brick structure in the Neoclassical Revival Style with arched windows.

The building was expanded between 1935 and 1937, and again in 1951 and in 1970. In 1976, portions of the structure were restored following a fire and fire protection and an alarm system were added a few years later.

For several decades, the SUB, as it was called, was the center of student life, serving as home for student government and a variety of student services.

With the opening of the new Student Union and Recreation Center (SURC) in 2005, Samuelson was closed for safety reasons. It was used for storage for several years before being largely mothballed.

In 2015, the university obtained \$64.5 million in funding from the state legislature to demolish the oldest and most unsafe sections of the building (the south wing) and replace it with new construction as well as a complete renovation of the north wing.

Today, the renovated building, which was completed in 2018, is an integrated computer science technology center housing the departments of Computer Science, Sociology, Mathematics, and Information Technology and Administrative Management (ITAM).

But while the building was significantly revamped, one thing remained the same—it retained Emil Samuelson's name.