THE GI’S OF WASHINGTON STATE COLLEGE

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HISTORY 300

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History major and Honors student Claire Thornton wrote this paper for History 300 – Writing in History, a class that prepares our students to become junior scholars in their own right. She participated in a pilot class on “The World in the 1940s” developed by a team of faculty and graduate students with support from an E-Learning grant from Provost Dan Bernardo’s office. Lydia Gerber taught the class with special support from Elizabeth Carney from the Office of Assessment of Teaching and Learning (ATL) at WSU. Claire’s paper is based on primary sources available at WSU Manuscripts, Archives and Special Collections (MASC) in the Holland/Terrell Libraries. MASC archivists Trevor Bond, Cheryl Gunselman and Mark O’English provided strong support for Claire’s project.

Kim Mueller, Director of Alumni Engagement, is happy to help us share Claire’s paper with WSU’s 100,000 alumni by offering the link on the Alumni Association’s CougNews Email Newsletter. Claire would be delighted to hear from alumni who were at Washington State College between 1946 and 1950. She can be reached at claire.thornton@email.wsu.edu. She plans to continue her research on this topic and hopes to turn it into her Honors Thesis in the future.
Imagine this: you’re on the frontlines of hell, fighting for your life in a foreign land thousands of miles away from your loved ones and even further from whatever dreams you once had for your life. A few months later, you’re in a quiet library in the peaceful Palouse, immersed in academia and working towards those dreams you had once thought would never materialize. Thousands of World War II veterans who attended Washington State College (now University) on what was referred to as the “GI Bill” underwent this astonishing transition. War’s end brought not only gratitude and relief to the brave Americans who won it, but also offered an exciting new opportunity to these heroes as they returned home. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, which became widely known as the GI Bill, was a truly transformative piece of legislation, enabling hundreds of thousands of Americans to earn a college degree who would not have been able to before. This GI Bill provided a number of opportunities to veterans that would help them, as the name suggests, readjust. Still emerging out of a crippling depression, the government offered low-cost mortgages and low-interest loans to start businesses in efforts to stimulate economic growth and prevent high rates of unemployment. Most famously, however, the GI Bill gave veterans the chance to attend college on the government’s dime.

Any soldier who had been on active duty for 90 days and not discharged dishonorably was given a month of paid schooling (at colleges, universities, or other vocational schools). For each additional month of service, another month of paid education—up to four years’ worth—was granted. A monthly subsistence allowance was also given to each veteran to help with living expenses. For the young men who grew up during the poverty-stricken 1930s, and at time when a college education was limited to only the most privileged, this legislation was an
enormous opportunity. 7.8 million veterans—51 percent—responded by enrolling in universities at astounding, unprecedented rates.\(^1\) Our own Washington State College was one of the institutions veterans flooded to during this momentous chapter in American history. The aim of this project is to assess the impact of the GI Bill on Washington State College, including the subsequent responses and transitions of both the veterans and the administration. It investigates the academic successfulness of the veterans, as well as their assimilation into collegiate life and integration into the student population. Finally, it measures the changes veterans brought to campus and recognizes the characteristics of this era that are unique to this chapter in WSU history.

These goals are achieved by utilizing a number of sources. Several oral interviews in the WSU Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections (MASC) have been key to the research of this paper as they are direct primary sources that offer insight into the matter from a number of perspectives (GIs, non-GI students, faculty, etc.)\(^2\) Analysis of these interviews, and the predominant attitudes present within them, greatly direct the argument of this paper. The MASC also had in its archives numerous other university-published documents from the post-war era that provided helpful statistics in addition to interpretive information about the feelings and mindsets of all parties involved. In order to place this issue in a broader context, secondary sources have been consulted on the subject of the GI Bill, yielding vital statistics and

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\(^2\) The WSU Foundation funded the Centennial Oral History Project, which occurred between the years of 1982-1988. Many of these interviews were conducted by WSU Research News Coordinator William Stimson, who talked with former faculty members and students from various time periods in the university’s history. These interviews, audio files and written transcripts, are found in the WSU MASC, Archives 202. They are also found online in the WSU Libraries Digital Collections. URLs of interviews used are found in their respective footnotes.
other relevant information that assist in the comparison and greater understanding of the issue at WSC. Through the in-depth examination that occurred in the creation of this paper, its significance became increasingly apparent. Not only did Washington State College transform the lives of World War II veterans, the veterans transformed the college itself. While neither the college nor the veterans experienced a perfectly graceful transition, each changed the other permanently, and (fortunately) for the better.

Measuring the boom in student population at Washington State University—at least that credited to the GI Bill—is a difficult process. No clear, uniform set of records existed within a database regarding student enrollment or veteran enrollment. However, through the MASC, a few archived university publications offered reliable statistics for key years that give us an understanding of the difference post-war years made in WSC’s student population.\(^3\) Pre-stock market crash, enrollment totaled 3,488 during the 1928-29 school year. The economic difficulties of the following years did not seem to affect enrollment as by 1936 numbers had risen to 4,701.\(^4\) Once World War II hit and masses of young men enlisted in the military, student population dropped to 4,126 (for the 1942-43 school year), one of the only times in school history enrollment has dropped more than a trivial amount. Due to the draft and general popularity of enlistment, few college-age men were left to attend college, resulting in a largely

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\(^3\) Enrollment numbers from the late ’20s through the beginning of WWII were found in several “Monthly Bulletin” pamphlets of “General Information” for various years. A tabulation of dropout survey results included overall numbers for post-war years in enrollment in addition to dropout rates. The author recognizes the lack of uniformity in sources is not ideal, but is limited by available numbers. Because both sources are university publications, their likelihood of being accurate is increased.

\(^4\) *General Information 1930*, Monthly Bulletin of the State College of Washington, 1930, WSU 181-1, Washington State University Publications, 1891 forward, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA. 1928-29 school year data was drawn from this source. *General Information* bulletins from 1938 and 1944 provided data from the previous school year as well (both are also found in MASC archives WSU 181-1).
female student population. For example, out of the 212 degrees awarded in 1945 (as opposed to numbers in the 600s a few years before), 72.6% were earned by females.\(^5\)

Once the war ended, the story changed—and it changed dramatically. The 1946-47 enrollment soared to 6,421. The next year topped out at over 7,200.\(^6\) A female-dominated campus just a few years before, women composed less than a third of the student population when veterans returned home in 1946. By 1948, females accounted for just over a quarter of all students at WSC.\(^7\) Thus, the college saw not only major changes in the size of the student population, but a drastic shift in the gender balance as well.

While no records specific to the number of GI Bill beneficiaries could be located, the growth of WSC’s population can almost undoubtedly be attributed to the bill. First, national statistics on the GI Bill support similar patterns in colleges across the nation.\(^8\) If the majority of college-age men were absent due to military service (as evidenced in WSC’s own enrollment statistics), the growth of (male) populations at all colleges immediately after the war could only be credited to returning veterans. Furthermore, because numbers exceeded pre-war and even

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\(^6\) “Tabulation of Questionnaire Reports from Students Who Dropped Out of WSC 1946-1949”, Registrar, 1950, WSU 143-2, Washington State University Publications, 1891 forward, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA: 1. It is important to note that a pamphlet in the WSU MASC (Archives WSU 181-1) entitled “Inside WSC, Facts about your State College”, lists 1947-48 enrollment at Pullman as 7,890, almost 700 more students than the above source reported. While the author has chosen to use the registrar’s numbers from the latter source, presenting the higher number would only strengthen the argument that enrollment boomed during these years.

\(^7\) Ibid.

1946-47 school year: 32.7% women.
1948-49 school year: 27.8% women.

\(^8\) Mettler, *Citizens to Soldiers*, 7.

In 1947, 49% of students in American colleges were veterans.
pre-Depression enrollment hugely, it is clear that the GI Bill enabled many more veterans to attend WSC than would have been able to without it.

This dramatic surge in enrollment provided an opportunity for WSC to grow, but first the college faced a huge challenge: providing housing for this massive influx of students. Like nearly every other college in the nation, WSC’s housing was painfully inadequate for such sudden and drastic growth. In an attempt to meet changed housing needs, the newly appointed President Compton purchased various forms of temporary housing. East House and West House were brought up from Oregon, where they had been used as migrant worker housing. One resident, a veteran, described them as “cold and drafty” and generally “horrible” to live in.

Purchased in the summer of ’46, the housing was still being worked on when the first class of veterans arrived. The rush to provide sufficient housing also precluded any landscaping efforts in these new housing areas. In fact, the area became infamously known as “Mud Hollow” or “Mud Flats,” which was referenced by many veterans and faculty in interviews. In a year-end survey of the residents of South House (another temporary housing structure), conducted at the end of the 1947-48 school year, explained the origins of Mud Hollow’s name. The area was in a “constant state of disruption due to the filling process, drainage system installation, [and] ditching,” making it impossible to keep the limited sidewalks free from mud. This was one of the most frustrating aspects of the temporary housing for students, as evidenced in the responses to one survey’s question. It asked: if you could change any single

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9 Michael J. Bennett, When Dreams Came True (Washington, DC: Brassey’s), 15.
11 Ibid.
thing, what would it be? The vast majority, 66.8 percent to be exact, answered that they would “do something about the mud.”

The aforementioned survey, an extensive and thoroughly written piece of work, presented an insightful view into student life in these forms of housing. The South House was a two-story “semi-fabricated” building, “…designed to house war workers.” The building was intended to accommodate 365 students, but was forced to accommodate up to 514 men during the first few weeks of the school year. Of the residents, 68 percent were veterans.

Residents encountered a plethora of problems with South House, which was anything but luxurious. First and foremost, the overcrowding of the first few weeks was surely stressful, doubling up in 96 square foot single rooms and piling three men into the ‘larger’ 140 square foot rooms. By the end of the semester, the number of residents had dropped, but was still operating well over capacity at 472 men. The rooms were decently furnished, but there was little storage space available between the small rooms and a maximum of two chests of drawers (even in rooms with three men). Both floors had two kitchenettes, but the upstairs kitchenettes lacked plumbing or running water. Hot water shortages were common on Friday and Saturday evenings. The lack of parking facilities was also an issue. Surveyed residents cited

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13 Ibid., 7-8.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 54. Author calculates graph to represent 279 veterans and 128 non-veterans, yielding a 68.4% rate of veterans within the resident populace.
16 Ibid., 8.
17 Ibid., 9.
a number of other problems in South House, including inadequate lighting, thin walls, lack of indoor drying space for clothing, and walls that were dirty and gray.

Despite the poor state of South House, residents took it all in stride. They understood that the school was trying, and several stated “these conditions are still better than have been provided in [other] schools of their knowledge.”\textsuperscript{18} As veterans and survivors of a horrific war, they were accustomed to far worse conditions. Furthermore, many realized they were lucky to not only have the opportunity of the GI Bill, but to have a place at a college. Demand for college by veterans throughout the nation was extremely high, and availability was limited. Simply to be attending was a huge privilege.

Aware of their good fortune, and toughened by combat, veterans were good sports about the transitional difficulties. One example of this is the tolerance for the dysfunctional nature of the automatic fire alarms in South House. Despite numerous false alarms throughout the year, residents harbored no resentment. Instead, they took the disruptions as reassurances, especially considering the frequent speculation among the men “upon the excellent burning possibilities of the house.”\textsuperscript{19} The veterans were good residents not only because of their resilient nature and good morale, but also for the maturity and responsibility that accompanied their older age and military experience. The lavatories and shower rooms of South House were made of concrete mastic and were difficult to clean. Those in charge were concerned about fungi, but noted with relief and appreciation that “since the greater part of the men living here

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
at present are veterans and generally take precautions, it has been a lesser problem...than it might become at a later date.”

The serious disposition of the veterans was not only appreciated by housing officials, but by their fellow students and the faculty as well. Many noted that classes took on a more serious tone after the war. Veterans had given several years to the war, leaving them with a feeling of urgency to catch up on their lives and plans. The wife of a WSC GI who attended the college as well observed that, “They were really intent on studies. They realized when being out in the real world that they needed an education to advance. And they were serious about it.” Veterans were significantly older than the traditional college freshman, making them already more mature, focused, and driven. This is in addition to the sobering experiences of war and the extraordinary discipline ingrained in them from military life. The result was what WSC English professor Donald Greenaway declared to be “the finest group of students that I have ever experienced overall.”

Professor Greenaway’s wife, who also taught English temporarily at the college, added, “they had a tremendous humility about them.” This particular characteristic can certainly be attributed to their recent experiences that made them thankful to be alive and their humble backgrounds that made them grateful for the opportunity to pursue higher education. One might assume that because their war experiences put them head and shoulders above the other students in many ways, the veterans would have had some level of arrogance or an

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20 Ibid., 10.
22 William and Alice Fitch, 21.
23 South House Survey, 54.
attitude that they were above certain things. After all, veterans were nationally celebrated and revered, and not undeservedly. Yet, “they did the most humble task in the most dedicated way.”

Clearly, their gratitude and humility overpowered any tendencies towards conceit.

The experiences of war were still at the forefront of veterans’ minds, however. The impact of World War II was manifest in their academic work. Louise Greenaway, wife of English professor Donald Greenaway, described several prime examples of this. As someone who was asked to temporarily help the English department out during the post-war years, she had exposure to memorable writing of the veterans. She recollected with great admiration the fascinating subjects of their compositions; from the incredible sights they had seen (such as “sunrise in Fiji”) to the complex feelings that arose from taking human lives. One veteran’s essay was so poignant she recalled it in detail several decades later:

But I particularly remember one about a boy who wrote about his helmet. He even brought a picture to me and showed me a picture of his helmet. And he had used this helmet for cooking his meals and washing his socks, and so forth. And finally it saved his life one day when he was shot at. And he showed me the place in the helmet where the bullet had gone. His helmet was a great treasure to him.

The stories these men had to tell certainly would have made for some remarkable reading. Simply by the detail of recollection by these professors, one can conclude that their presence in the classroom was an incredibly moving experience. This conclusion is not drawn from only a few cherry-picked sources. In the dozens of archived interviews poured over for this paper, not a single person—faculty, student, or other—had one negative thing to say about the

25 Ibid.
veterans. This is not to say that conflicts or issues never arose, as will be discussed later, but the veterans of World War II left quite the favorable impression on Washington State College.

Perhaps Professor Greenaway best summed up their nature:

... [I]t reflected in the way they thought, in the way they acted, and in the way they approached things. You could tell it very easily, the distinction between the individual who had only had a schooling experience and those that had been out in the world a bit and had seen what had happened to the world.26

This is not to say that GIs didn’t like to have fun. Despite their serious and driven disposition, veterans’ fondness for recreation is well documented. The aforementioned South House survey described the popularity of ping-pong among the veterans several times. The Head Resident, similar to today’s Resident Advisor, reported having to intervene on several occasions to keep residents (of which the majority were veterans) from playing all through the night. The simplicity, spontaneity, and inclusivity of the activity fostered comradery within the hall. Residence halls also provided opportunities for involvement in the form of house government, dances, and coffee hours, of which the latter two were most popular.27

Recreational sports teams drew the most involvement by far from the house. Softball, basketball, and volleyball attracted large percentages of resident participation, among a number of other sports.28 Additionally, over 40% of residents had some sort of club or organization membership.29

26 Ibid., 138.
27 South House Survey, 40.
28 Softball 20.7% (6 teams) participation of house, Basketball 16.5% of house, Volleyball 10% of house.
29 South House Survey, 43.
Students did find recreational opportunities beyond officially organized functions. South House reported that an informally arranged house chorus performed “sweetheart serenades” to nine engaged couples throughout the year. This activity represented more than one thing. First, it shows the difference between the modern college atmosphere and that of the post-war era where engagements were commonplace among students. This indicates the mature tone present within these housing situations that was new to college environments and unique to this older, veteran-dominant population. Secondly, the formation of this house chorus signified the brotherhood among this diversely tenanted house. South House was made up of men aging from 17 to 42, almost 70% of which were veterans. Those demographics would appear to be an ideal breeding ground for cliques. The existence of these house activities, including this self-organized chorus, proves however that veterans (while still likely to be closest with other veterans through shared experiences, goals, and ages), assimilated successfully into larger, diverse groups and vice versa. These activities bridged the gaps between those varied demographics, uniting the men as students of Washington State College.

Another interesting and noteworthy quality veterans brought to campus was their diligence, perseverance, and general “can do” attitude that was so pervasive in the military. This characteristic was evidently transferrable to college living and permeated unexpected areas such as social life. One veteran recalled a year when students were able to book Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden, and possibly Ella Fitzgerald for a prom. Armstrong and Teagarden, while a decade past the height of their popularity, were still major names at the time (and

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30 South House Survey, 47.
31 Ibid., 54. Author’s calculations based on survey’s graph. See footnote 15.
32 Richard Gursel, 19. Interviewee could not confidently remember if Fitzgerald appeared as well.
would become musical legends). Their level of fame made it quite extraordinary that a small college in such a rural and secluded setting was able to book them.

What about the campus population of the late 1940s was different than any years prior or subsequent? The majority of students, veterans, had been exposed to a bigger world. This is true geographically in that they had travelled across the nation and throughout the world in the military, but true in a figurative sense as well. After defeating Hitler and the Axis Powers, dodging bullets, and surviving the unimaginable horrors of war, these men’s confidences would have soared. It is this same confidence that conquered any and all potentially intimidating obstacles, including this major one: pursuing a level of education most had never planned or hoped for, after being several years removed from high school. The military’s training and the resulting effects of victory would have instilled a great sense of efficacy in these veterans, and those attitudes affected and influenced Washington State College.

In dissecting the dozens of interviews previously mentioned, numerous examples of a more direct and empirically evident influence veterans had on Washington State College were discovered. The first and most noticeable effect to many (aside from demographics and seriousness of education) was the change in political power concerning student government. WSC 1950 graduate William Fitch noted “Along with the influx of veterans came the desire for a more democratic style of government. More openness.”33 Mr. Fitch was likely referring to the past history of fraternity-dominated student government that seemed to disappear with the arrival of veterans. While some veterans did join fraternities, many were older and had families or other responsibilities that made them disinterested in the frivolities of Greek life. Yet as

33 William and Alice Fitch, 44.
participants in one of the most important fights for the preservation of democracy, politics at any level was understandably important to them, and subsequently veterans (and unaffiliated independents as a whole) infiltrated the political system of WSC.

While the hands that held political power may have shifted, veterans did not appear to have much of a specific agenda for the campus. One veteran interviewed stated, “They blended in with everybody”, versus having their own subgroup or focus on GI issues. Yet by removing the power from a concentrated group and spreading it throughout the entire population, their impact on student politics was profound. They stimulated a major change to WSC that has never been reversed, and which students still benefit from today.

Life at pre-war Washington State College was drastically different from that of the latter 1940s for married couples. First of all, they used to be a rare sighting. Marriage and college, before the war, were for the most part mutually exclusive entities. If couples got engaged, they typically left college or were close to graduating. William Stimson, who conducted a number of interviews with people who were involved with WSC during those years, remembered that, “a guy in the thirties told me he thought there were three married people, three married couples, on the whole campus. And it really wasn’t liked at all. He got married in college, and he felt that they were ostracized.”

This exclusion may have been in large part due to the fact that there was no social place for married couples. The university enforced rigid moral standards in those days, with nightly

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35 William and Alice Fitch, 21.
curfews in place and strict codes about mixed gender intermingling. Men and women mostly socialized with their respective genders, through segregated housing and sororities or fraternities. Married couples threatened the preservation of these standards, as they blurred the lines of what was appropriate. Older, worldly-wise veterans were less likely to conform to these rigid standards, and many were married already. Washington State College went from a place where married students were practically nonexistent, to creating an entire housing district exclusively for families. While the married college student would soon become less common again as this generation graduated, the former stigma vanished permanently.

Years of military experience, particularly overseas, ensured that no veteran returned to civilian life as sheltered or naïve as the typical college freshman of that time. After spending years fighting for their lives and for their freedom, they were also unlikely to follow any rules they perceived as juvenile or unnecessary. They were also unlikely to fear the repercussions for their dissent. Prior to the war, alcohol was even more taboo at WSC than intermixing with the opposite gender. Veterans were already accustomed to a certain lifestyle, one that involved drinking. Therefore, when they came to Pullman, they brought their alcohol (or at least their habits) with them. One veteran interviewed confirmed that “there was booze in the [fraternity] house” during this time, despite that it wasn’t allowed on campus. The veteran’s wife spoke of the frequent rumors of spiked punch at functions. As for the dormitories, men found the large water cabinets over toilets to be excellent beer coolers. Cokes in the student union building

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37 William and Alice Fitch, 82.
were enhanced by the contents of brown paper bags.\textsuperscript{38} Most veterans did respect the rules, at least out of convenience to themselves, as “there was an awful lot of beer consumed...in downtown Pullman.”\textsuperscript{39} Of course, the level at which alcohol was consumed on campus at this time is nearly indeterminable and purely speculative. Nevertheless, the prominence of alcohol in college life increased drastically, and has never since reverted to its once scandalous reputation.

The transition these former soldiers made into WSC students was remarkably smooth, considering all the factors at play that would have made it challenging. This is not to say that conflicts did not arise and issues were nonexistent. As one veteran put it, “some of these older guys that had really been in the war were still around in their old combat boots, and they didn’t give a God damn about anything. They worked hard.”\textsuperscript{40} This particular quote perfectly captures the spirit of the veterans, which inspired the following incidents.

While respectful and hardworking, these veterans were intolerant of certain things. This was the case with the compulsory men’s calisthenics and especially the uniforms that students were required to buy. Veterans, who had endured years of hard physical training and exertion during the war and literally were in ‘fighting shape,’ found this requirement silly for them. Moreover, they were at college to get an education, not a fitness assessment. To add insult to injury, veterans had to use their precious funds on a slightly ridiculous looking uniform. Through repeated objections, and even an editorial in the Evergreen penned by a veteran against the

\textsuperscript{39} William and Alice Fitch, 82.
\textsuperscript{40} Richard Gunsul, 25.
requirements (particularly playing “dress up”), policies were changed. Veterans no longer had to buy the uniforms.\textsuperscript{41}

Their older age shook up social structure of the campus, as the power upperclassmen once held over underclassmen disappeared. This is illustrated in the vanishing of the age-old custom of the freshman beanie. Male freshmen were once required to wear one the first week of classes, or face slightly humiliating punishment from upperclassmen. No one, it appeared, volunteered to enforce this tradition with incompliant 25-year-old combat infantrymen.\textsuperscript{42}

Because veterans were older in both age and in experiences than the typical college students, many problems could have potentially arisen from immaturity or insensitivity from other students or faculty. As the previous examples have shown, veterans had little patience for frivolous, juvenile, or superfluous traditions and practices. Yet these were important to many in the college, which could have created tension. Numerous veterans had first-hand knowledge of the geography and politics discussed in class, which may have been advantageous in some cases (such as using it in their English essays) but also potentially problematic. Their experiences may have made them more likely to challenge professors with conflicting views. While little evidence of these conflicts is available, a veteran did acknowledge its great potential for occurrence in one interview.\textsuperscript{43} Perhaps the lack of evidence speaks more to sensitivity and supportive nature both faculty and students had towards veterans, or suggests that once again veterans were not ones to be rashly confronted.

\textsuperscript{41} William Fitch, 27.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 99.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 81.
Despite the overturning of some rules and customs, veterans were still held accountable for many things. A memo to faculty from the registrar demonstrates the university’s rigidity in certain matters. It reminds faculty of the requirement for all veterans to attend class in order to receive subsistence payments, and asks all professors to report veteran attendance to the registrar’s office. Written in December of 1946, in the early stages of implementation and acclimation for the GIs, it reveals that not all veterans were always model students, as attendance was apparently becoming a problem. This new rule was to be instituted the next semester, and reports sent to the Department of Veteran’s Affairs.\footnote{Memo to the Faculty, Registrar H. M. Chambers, December 17, 1946, WSU 143-2, Washington State University Publications, 1891 forward, Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections, Washington State University Library, Pullman, WA: 1.} It is unknown if this memo originated from within the Registrar’s office, or resulted from pressure by the VA, making it difficult to analyze its significance. However, it does show that there was accountability in the program and that measures were taken to ensure government money was not being wasted.

Much has been discussed in this paper about the military’s influence on these veteran students, but the most significant effect war had on soldiers was something so silently dealt with it didn’t even have a name during this time. Today, we know it as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. Because its effects were kept so private, it is difficult to find accounts of victims, especially among such a specific and limited group (WSC veterans). However, evidence does exist that PTSD did affect veterans at WSC and incidents did occur. Fraternity members remember being frequently awoken by the nightmare-induced screams of an ex-Marine member.\footnote{Stimson, 152-153.} Being haunted by such nightmares most likely would have been the most common PTSD-related experience for veterans. Because of the private handling of those matters, the
extent of their suffering will never be known. For this same reason, manifestations of PTSD on
campus are difficult to find, but one interesting event was mentioned in an interview.

William Fitch, a student and veteran, said there were times of, as he described it,
“unusual social behavior.” He once walked into the restroom in his dormitory to find it was held
up by a veteran with a gun, “hallucinating that he was back in the Army and was rounding up
German war prisoners.” Fitch and other students called the campus police. When they arrived,
the matter was settled peaceably. While it is simply speculative to diagnose a man in a story,
such hallucinations or flashbacks (as well as the aforementioned nightmares) are a common
symptom of PTSD. His cooperation when the police arrived suggests he was relatively
harmless and his actions were rooted in confusion, not malice.

Veterans faced a number of obstacles in their pursuit for higher education, from poor
housing conditions, to PTSD, to simply the struggle of returning to academia after being many
years out of school. While specific numbers of total GI dropouts are unavailable, the South
House Survey did include numbers of men who went home, including their reasons given for
doing so. Out of a dormitory that at one point housed over 500 men, 57 went home. Over half
cited the need for their help at home to be the primary reason for leaving. Eleven men said
they ran out of money. The rest, save eleven others, gave various non-school related reasons as
well. Only those eleven listed grade failures as the reason for going home. Over thirty percent
of South House residents were nonveterans, making it likely that some of those eleven were

47 “Symptoms of PTSD,” PTSD: National Center for PTSD, last modified January 3, 2014, accessed December 13,
48 “Tabulation of Questionnaire Reports” from footnote 6 does not include a category for GI Bill students in its
records.
not veterans either, further reducing the number of failing veterans. Therefore, it appears (if just in this one case available) a minimal number of GIs failed their classes. These numbers are proof of the vast success veterans, and consequently the GI Bill, experienced at WSC.

However, their success cannot be solely credited to themselves. The administration and faculty of Washington State College were well aware of the unique set of characteristics that accompanied this group of students, and adjusted their thinking and expectations accordingly. Their philosophy in dealing with veterans is clearly depicted in the authors’ letter in the South House survey. “Throughout the year the positions of the staff have undergone a continuous process of evolution. We have changed our mind and attitudes as a result of our experience.”

It was a learning experience for all parties involved, and the staff evidently kept an open mind in their dealings with students.

In fact, the entire purpose of the survey was to measure the success of the dormitory and its residents during that year. Several questions were about roles and responsibilities staff members should assume, according to the men’s opinions. Responses indicated the men had an aversion toward parental roles, particularly in punishment. In their eyes, staff should be present to aid and assist, not to handle petty matters with punitive measures. Instead, the men favored self-government and that issues be resolved among themselves except when more powerful intervention was necessary. These staff members were apparently not the only ones who adapted this mentality, as evidenced by the aforementioned allowances made regarding PE uniforms. Flexibility and understanding was essential to survive the necessary adjustments in multiple aspects of the college experience.

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49 South House Survey, 41.
Who better to demonstrate these qualities, and lead by example, than the university president himself? Wilson Compton, although a controversial president in the school’s history, won the praise of many students from that era. They admired his intelligence, respected his vision and desire for growth into a major academic institution, but especially complimented his understanding and supportive stance amidst the chaos of transition. “If Holland [the previous president] had stayed on...I’m sure there would have been disaster because he was not the kind that had the flexibility to deal with the social changes and buildings.”\(^50\) This speaks more to the idealness of Compton’s temperament and disposition than to any faults of Holland’s, a well-liked president in his own respect. All in all, these sources point to the university’s efforts to adjust to and serve these veterans.

Services were indeed provided to veterans, but their abundance, particularly in terms of manpower, was limited. Two graduate counselors were assigned to South House, a position created to meet the need of “effective academic counseling of such large numbers of men under one roof.”\(^51\) Three counselors were desired for the house, but only two were available.\(^52\) This meant that a single counselor handled academic advising for half of the entire house, an upwards of 200 men each. The Head Resident was to assume the father figure role through handling the men’s personal issues as well as to enforce rules.\(^53\) This position was one that residents took issue with in their jurisdiction of responsibilities, but the survey showed that the university was listening.

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\(^{50}\) William Fitch, 68.
\(^{51}\) South House Survey, 7.
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 13.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 17.
The Evergreen, the student-run newspaper, also published in every issue “The GI Corner”. This column addressed veteran issues and concerns, in addition to printing important notices to beneficiaries. Finally, three offices in were available to veterans to take their concerns to: The Office of Veterans’ Affairs, The VA Guidance Center, and The VA Training and Education Center. Furthermore, the Veterans Administration worked with WSC to offer vocational and educational counselors at the Student Counseling Center. All but the VA Training and Education Office, which was found in downtown Pullman, were located conveniently on campus in the Administration Building.54 While this is in no way an exhaustive list, it shows that WSC did make efforts to accommodate and aid veterans, albeit with the limited resources available.

While this paper does attempt to be as objective as possible and portray multiple perspectives, the limited sources available make this task difficult. Thus, some sources such as the interviews must be heavily relied upon. The reliability and credibility of oral history is greatly debated among historians due to their largely unverifiable and unconsciously biased nature.55 Another key source to this project, the South House survey, offers a plethora of information but only represents a relatively small sample of the student population at WSC. For these reasons, this paper does not claim these points are the absolute, collective behaviors and attitudes among students, faculty, and administration. Instead, it presents the available

55 Despite the factual unreliability of interviews, oral histories are increasingly accepted in the history community for their incredibly valuable interpretive qualities. Furthermore, oral histories are the most accessible and available source for accounts of daily life and everyday events. To see more on the “different kind of credibility” oral history possesses, refer to Anna Green and Kathleen Troup, The Houses of History (New York, 1999).
information and provides a framework and structure for many arguments that hopefully can be expanded upon with the unearthing of further information.

It is important to address the absence of both women and non-white veterans in this paper. This is not purposeful, but once again is due to the unavailability of information regarding these groups at WSC. Women were not drafted during World War II and composed only 2 percent of armed forces.\textsuperscript{56} The GI Bill was available to women, but higher education still did not commonly correspond with the accepted gender roles of that day. Both of these reasons explain the scarceness of women veterans at WSC and within the sources this paper relies upon. As for the lack of racial diversity, a number of factors are involved.

First, all minority groups combined were still significantly smaller than the white population in America. Nonblack minorities constituted 1.6 percent of the military, and blacks 8.5 percent. Blacks were somewhat underrepresented in the military (as opposed to composing 9.5 percent of the eligible age group), but the nonblack minority numbers were mostly proportionate to the general population.\textsuperscript{57} Education levels also impacted their GI Bill usage. Just 17 percent of black soldiers in the Army had a high school education, further limiting the number of minority veterans eligible to attend college.\textsuperscript{58} These statistics are for the nation, but it is reasonable to assume they are generally applicable to WSC. Thus, because women and minorities constituted (for various reasons) a very small number of students who went to school on the GI Bill, their presence and perspective is difficult to research, much less assess. It

\textsuperscript{56} Mettler, \textit{Soldiers to Citizens}, 11.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 56.
is for this reason they are largely excluded from this project, not because of a lack of significance or value in their voices.

Regardless, the post-World War II era at WSU (then Washington State College) is truly fascinating as, due to its unique population, campus culture was different than any other time preceding or that would follow. Yet noteworthy changes were made during this time as well that impacted even today’s generation of students. Thus, this project contributes to an in-depth understanding of WSU history, regional history, and overall studies of the GI Bill’s impact.

Fully appreciating the struggles which veterans and administration faced during this time puts current issues in perspective. Accommodating perpetually growing freshman classes of today, at WSU and elsewhere, is a challenge to both faculty and administration. College students today also encounter less-than-ideal circumstances, from primitive dorm rooms to unsavory dining hall food. Yet these challenges, while valid in their own respect, are rather trivial in comparison to the challenges of the post-World War II era.

WSC’s success with the implementation of the GI Bill is just one story of many across the nation that contributed to the triumphant legacy left by the legislation. It is true the beneficiaries were a predominantly white, male group. This, however, does not detract from its accomplishment of educating an enormous amount of individuals who otherwise never would have had that opportunity. The resulting degrees formed an unprecedented generation of higher educated individuals who were able to see their dreams realized and achieve greater financial and professional success.
The GI Bill era was but a brief chapter in Washington State University’s history. Its story, however, is one of succeeding in spite of constant challenges and obstacles. The attitudes and achievements of all involved should be an inspiration and encouragement to WSU administration, faculty, and students of today. As the participants of this era proved, success does not require, nor does it rely, on ideal circumstances. Perhaps the authors of the South House Survey best expressed the overall GI Bill experience at WSC:

To sum it all up, we, the staff of South House, feel that it has been a highly satisfactory year in spite of the “damn mud”.  

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59 South House Survey, 51.
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