

The Zook Commission:

Reassessing World War II Veterans' Influence on Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The Zook Commission: Reassessing World War II

Veterans' Influence on Higher Education

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This thesis is an analysis of The Presidential Commission on Higher Education of 1947 and the influence World War II veterans held on the role of the Commission's recommendations. More specifically, this thesis takes a look at the recommendations presented to President Harry S. Truman in a report titled, *Higher Education for American Democracy*, and the influence veterans had on the Presidential Commission's suggestions to President Truman. Through a major change in higher education ideology, the veterans provided an example for what higher education could be in the United States. The commission concluded that changes were needed to ensure equal educational opportunity for individuals and particularly those previously excluded from higher education, and encouraged individuals to carry their education as far as their natural capabilities permitted. These conclusions of the commission established a baseline for federal policy toward higher education that lasted for several decades.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the United States over the last sixty-five years has gone through a dramatic change. Evolution and expansion in areas including student body, curriculum, and the role of community colleges, have collectively combined to alter many aspects of higher education. Who receives an education, what type of education is offered, and where and how it can be obtained, is in a large part linked to the veterans who returned home from active duty after World War II.

My goal for this paper is as follows. I hope to fill the current gap in historiography regarding the impact World War II veterans had on The President's Commission on Higher Education in 1947, more commonly known as The Zook Commission. The changes recommended by the Zook Commission were a direct response to American veterans who enrolled in the nation's colleges and universities,¹ and the policies recommended by the Zook Commission established the direction of the federal role in higher education for the next half-century. This paper will examine the interaction between the veterans, the GI Bill, and the Zook Commission.

An estimated 2.3 million veterans used educational benefits prearranged for them in the GI Bill of Rights Act of 1944, and their success at higher educational institutions forcefully challenged the *status quo*.² The Zook

¹ George F. Zook, "The President's Commission on Higher Education," *Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors*, Vol. 33, No.1 (spring, 1947), pp. 1.

² Glenn C. Altschuler and Stuart M. Blumin, *The GI Bill: A New Deal For Veterans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 86.

Commission created a six-volume report that offered policy recommendations for higher education, and examined the objectives, methods, facilities, and goals, for American colleges and universities.³ These recommendations were enacted, and the rise in the federal government's change to government's higher education budget, is evidence of the Zook Commission's influence on federal higher education policy. In 1946, the year the Zook Commission was formed, higher education spending at the federal level was \$400 million. In one fiscal year the higher education budget was \$650 million, a significant increase. By the end of the 1940's, the budget reached \$1 billion in spending, which was an increase over double the allocated funding in just six years. In 2011, the federal higher education budget is \$22 billion dollars, 55 times the 1946 amount.⁴

This paper is inspired by a variety of questions I had when studying the domestic policies of President Franklin Roosevelt during the World War II. I read in an account of American educational levels in 1936, that of the 74 million Americans at least 25-years old, only two of five had gone beyond eighth grade; one of four had graduated from high school; one of twenty had completed college.⁵

All educational opportunity research led me to the GI Bill. It was the first substantial opportunity for average Americans to obtain higher education, and

³ George Zook, *Higher Education for Democracy: A Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education*. (New York, 1947), introduction.

⁴ Chantrell, Christopher, United States Government Spending Analysis http://www.usgovernmentspending.com/downchart_gs.php?chart=24-total&view=1&year=1940_1960&state=US&local=b

⁵ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *No Ordinary Time, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 43.

resulted in a new breed of students. Prior to the GI Bill, few from modest economic and social backgrounds had an opportunity to obtain a college degree.⁶

Existing historiography for the GI Bill and World War II veterans is extensive, but lacks the fundamental argument that the GI Bill and the veterans influenced the Zook Commission, which in turn set the direction of federal funding on higher education for decades to come. Historiography for the Zook Commission is virtually non-existent in secondary sources. Books and articles make short reference of the Zook Commission, failing to describe the Commission or its influence.

What has been written about the GI Bill to date? In recent years authors have covered the GI Bill and veterans' impact in a variety of categories. Scholars and journalists recounted the benefits provided, opportunity for veterans, and the rise in the quality of life it offered. Michael Bennett, author of *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America*, argued that the GI Bill changed the political and social environment in the country. Bennett examined the impact veterans had on increasingly overcrowded campuses, rise of suburbs, as well as altering the moral fabric of the United States.⁷

Author Suzanne Mettler, in *Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation*, has written about the impact veterans and

⁶ "Status Quo" in higher education prior to the GI Bill or Rights, refers to upper middle class to wealthy, 18-21 year old white students.

⁷ Michael J. Bennett, *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Brassey's, 1996).

their education had in the postwar years. Influenced by the GI Bill, veterans applied knowledge they learned during the war to create what Mettler describes as a “civic renaissance.”⁸ Veterans looked at themselves and their new social standing as middle class citizens, and saw their status as a prime example of how government initiative could work for people. Mettler explains that civic engagement reached levels in the post-war United States that the country had never witnessed before. She concluded that civic obligation with expanded social opportunity is the key ingredient for democracy to be revitalized today.⁹

Gathering the voices of direct beneficiaries of the GI Bill, author Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the GI Bill Transformed the American Dream*, details personal stories of veterans. Focusing on a few individual veterans, Humes relies on a micro perspective to the history of the GI Bill. Covering success stories obtained from benefits like Veteran Administration mortgages, unemployment compensation, and education benefits. Humes concludes that although the GI Bill was not perfect, it was an overwhelming success.¹⁰

This paper will attempt to explain previously unexamined elements in the overall subject of the Zook Commission and veterans’ influence. Previous attention has been paid to doubts and uncertainties of the veterans. Specifically, there has been a failure to incorporate the role of the Zook Commission in defining the future of federal policy. To date, no author has argued that veterans

⁸ Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) ix.

⁹ Mettler, 175.

¹⁰ Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the GI Bill Transformed the American Dream* (New York: Harcourt, Inc. 2006), 214.

inspired the recommendations proposed by the Zook Commission. My argument, which is at the center of this paper, will come to that conclusion.

WHAT WAS THE ZOOK COMMISSION

What was the Zook Commission and what did it recommend? In the volumes of the Zook Commission, formally known as *Higher Education for Democracy: A Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education*, a basic premise is established. The premise adopted by the Commission was a belief that democracy and educational opportunity were inextricably linked. The social role of education in a democratic society is at once to ensure individual liberty and equal opportunity to all Americans. Colleges and universities could no longer consider themselves the instrument for producing an intellectual elite or a prerequisite for wealthy families to send their children to elite schools to make social contacts they would rely on in life. Rather, these schools must become the means by which increasing number of Americans are enabled and encouraged to carry their education, as far as their native capabilities permit.¹¹

Chaired by George F. Zook, president of the prestigious American Council on Education, the Commission was appointed by Truman following nationwide concerns of the overcrowded campuses. Other commission members were leaders mostly in academic fields. A complete list of membership is provided in a footnote.¹²

¹¹ John Russell, *Basic Conclusions and Recommendations of the President's Commission on Higher Education*, *Journal of Educational Sociology*, vol. 22, No. 8, Report of the President's Commission on Higher Education (April, 1949), pp. 494.

¹² Appendix A

John W. Snyder, Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, initiated the process of establishing such a commission when he submitted a report to Truman in July, 1946. Snyder's report was entitled "The Veteran and Higher Education." This document raised questions about growing shortcomings faced by schools in their effort to accommodate the new wave of veterans, along with others seeking college admission for the first time.¹³ More options were needed in the higher education community, and only the federal government seemed to be in a position to provide campuses with the resources they needed to meet this new and dramatic challenge.¹⁴

A diverse educated population was identified as a potential source of strength for the country. Educators' task was primarily a matter of dealing with surging admission; other questions involved what kind of education could be provided, the design of new and more practical curriculum, as well as an expanded community college system. The Zook Commission concluded that the United States would have to educate more of its people, increase federal funding, and create new patterns of education that prepared citizens in skills and trades areas.¹⁵ These recommendations became federal policy.

My work will examine the dramatic shift in the student population. This paper will focus largely on the story of the veteran student body and their impact. These students demonstrated what higher education could accomplish when curriculum better matched student needs. An example of the surge of students is

¹³ George F. Zook, "The President's Commission on Higher Education," pg. 10

¹⁴ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. I. Establishing Goals* (New York: Harper & Brothers. 1947), Pg. 2

¹⁵ *Ibid* 22-23.

recounted in a 1945 New York Times article. The University of Denver, in 1945, enrolled 2,539 students enrolled in their fall term. By spring, enrollment had shot up to 3,631.¹⁶ A more diverse population joined the previous *status quo* student body, with expanded demographics in age, sex, economic background, and physical capabilities.

Along with the changes in student body, alterations also that took place in higher education curriculum and community colleges proved that veterans influenced aspects of the recommended changes by the Zook Commission. To understand why the Zook Commission recommendations were such a shift away from prior policy, I will briefly discuss the national history of higher education.

I will conclude with the argument that the recommendations regarding higher education policy referred to in the Zook Commission's report, would not have been possible if not for the veterans who came to college campuses and influenced the Commission.

The Zook Commission found many barriers in higher education that held back potential students, and they argued that without significant structural changes the country would be held back from reaching its potential. Although the GI Bill and veterans on campuses played the crucial and influential role in making those recommendations possible, until now their story has remained untold.

¹⁶ Humes, 121.

VETERANS PAVE THE WAY WITH SUCCESS

The degree of the changing role of higher education requires perspective by recounting its previous limited role. From early colonial years until the Civil War, education was largely a function of mothers and the location was the home itself. The few who were capable of going off to college frequently found themselves studying for the ministry or studied philosophy. Practical application of higher education was rare except in the case of profession such as the ministry or law.¹⁷

But as the country expanded and population grew, the Industrial Revolution brought new jobs to urban areas. However, pay was minimal and standards of living were low for workers. For all but a few, providing food, clothing, and shelter for their families was the goal of most urban and rural Americans.¹⁸

Using college as a way to change a person's quality of life status was very limited by the end of the 19th century. The 20th century brought a new understanding for what colleges could provide people, and with it, a new vision towards what a student population should encompass. The idea that higher education could enable individuals to move between social classes on the basis of their intelligence and academic qualifications was appealing.¹⁹

¹⁷ Goodwin, 43

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Arthur M. Cohen, *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), pg. 117

As demands from wealthy families and students increased, pressure for college entrance jumped between 1900 and 1920, and facilities and resources simply could not accommodate all who sought entry. The institutions looked for defensible criteria on which to discriminate, even among the wealthy. Religion, age, disability, sex, and ethnic background were common grounds for denying college applications, restricting many capable students the chance at obtaining a college or university degree.²⁰

All too many college administrations limited the size of their classes, restricted more practical curriculum, and continued to uphold elitist views, preferring to pass on bright talented individuals in order to keep the status quo.²¹ Higher education between the two world wars continued to bring ambivalence, not progress to institutions. Emphasizing the point, colleges just years before the signing of the GI Bill of Rights, still restricted admissions by implementing barriers that kept out students along lines of socioeconomic status, gender, race, and religion.²²

Despite the increased demand for a higher education, America's colleges and universities remained mainly for the upper class. And while institutions occupied an increasingly important and visible place in American culture, they still retained an overwhelming association with the elite in the country, the *status*

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² David O. Levine, *The American College and the Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pg. 20-21

quo.²³ Change would begin when Franklin D. Roosevelt signed The Service Readjustment Act of 1944, popularly known as the GI Bill of Rights.

Change and expansion from the mid 1940's was dramatic and swift. The context for this expansion was a country that had come out of World War II as the world's most powerful nation. Its population continued expanding, and its economy, released from the depressing grip of the 1930's, enjoyed a spectacular rate of growth.²⁴

Prior to the GI Bill, government and citizens worried that the economy would slump back into a depression. After the war, many felt that the job market would be bleak with the infusion of 15 million returning veterans as well as the ten million civilians who had been employed in the war industries. Public officials had already considered postwar challenges and had made plans in advance. The enactment of the GI Bill of Rights was the most influential of those postwar plans to higher education.²⁵ The GI Bill offered a variety of options and benefits beyond education for veterans who returned. Education benefits were not the only option for veterans, as they were also offered inexpensive mortgages for buying homes, unemployment compensation, and small business loans.

As for the basic coverage, the GI Bill offered to any veteran who served 90 days of active duty the following: tuition payments of up to \$500, book

²³ Daniel Clark, "The Two Joes Meet. Joe College, Jew Veteran": The GI Bill, College Education, and Postwar American Culture. *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (summer, 1998), pp. 165-189.

²⁴ Cohen, 175.

²⁵ Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) pg. 16.

allowances, and stipends of \$50 a month, or \$75 for married men. This program provided enough to cover, in 1946, a fully-subsidized education. Even at most Ivy League schools, other universities, vocational programs, technical programs, community colleges, and even acting school, or institutions training chefs, an education could be obtained at this rate.²⁶

The veterans, mixed with the traditional college students, became role models, and challenged preconceptions that suggested that veterans would be unable to handle the college experience. With a number of schools predicting massive increases in student enrollment, administrators looked at the relationship between veteran students and the previous traditional students, and started embracing the manner that veterans assimilated to college. The new campus demographics led to questions being asked regarding proper housing for veterans and types of courses desired as a possible first step in realigning new standards.²⁷

Veterans pressed schools to change their entrance policy, even prior the Zook Commission's recommendations.²⁸ College admissions began to incorporate the success of the veterans, and envisioned a demographic mix of greater diversity in the student body. They questioned whether or not barriers were in the best interest, both educationally and financially, for their school. Many colleges looked at veterans as an added bonus to their campuses, and they saw a new and high level for what their schools could be.

²⁶ Humes, pg. 31.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Benjamin Fine, "American Teachers Told They Must Prepare For Many Complex Post-War Problems," New York Times, October 28, 1944.

Even if colleges did not initially realize the opportunity of an expanded student population, many still needed to make adjustments in order to accommodate the wide variety of veteran students who were coming to their campuses. Some school believed that accommodations only needed to be addressed for the few years, because they believed veterans would be on their campus, but not for a long period of time.

Regardless of perceptions of exactly how long the veterans would be attempting to obtain a higher education, changes started in multiple areas. Prior to World War II, colleges rarely considered having to accommodate married students; after the GI Bill, that policy changed. Married students on campuses prior to World War II were uncommon, and in some cases, universities had “marriage bans” to restrict married couples from attending or applying for admission.²⁹ By 1949, that policy was dying a slow death. It was observed by educators that the ban against married students was most likely going to have to be thrown out. The reason stated by officials was that married students had crushed old preconceived notions that couples could not succeed, due to the demands placed on them being too great.³⁰

As married veterans did extremely well, educators concluded that married veterans had improved, not negatively impacted, the tone and the standards of their campuses and were open about the successful influence they projected on campuses. “Veterans have liberalized campus regulations. There is considerably

²⁹ Benjamin Fine, “Educators Praise Their GI Students,” New York Times, October 11, 1949.

³⁰ Ibid.

less of the old rah-rah college life; students have become more serious about preparing for the future,"³¹ noted a nameless professor interviewed by Benjamin Fine in The New York Times.

In some instances married veterans moved into campus dorms with their families. In other cases, colleges made accommodations for new married students who had children by setting up school nurseries, due to wives of veterans taking college course work along with their husbands.³² This idea alone was unimaginable just years prior to the GI Bill's implementation.

In the aforementioned case of the University of Denver, housing provided for the veterans created a village on the Denver campus. Pioneer Village, as the town was called, had 340 families living in units, and veterans were a great example that married students could juggle multiple priorities, and should not be barred from an education due to their family or marital status.³³ They enjoyed solid graduation rates, and proved they were worthy of educational access regardless of conflicting priorities.

Lifting barriers like the "marriage ban," provided expansion of the student population, and veteran married students with families provided inspiration for breaking down other barriers that had restricted certain demographics who desired a higher education, but had been shunned due to admission processes that remained constant with the standard student population.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Benjamin Fine, "Colleges Work Out Programs to Meet Special Needs of Veterans Back on the Campuses," *New York Times*, November 15, 1944.

³³ Humes, 129.

Disabled veteran students demanded they not be left behind in accessing their education as well. Thousands of wounded veterans found the courage to succeed in the classroom so they could follow their dreams in the postwar world. Not shying away from books, the classroom, or even physically demanding vocational training, many disabled veterans were provided special vocational or technical training at institutions around the nation.³⁴

In 1944 ex-servicemen were eager to continue their studies regardless of their physical handicap. One report observed of disabled veterans, “they seem profoundly grateful for what their country is doing for them, and rather than looking for all they can get, they seek only as little as they need.”³⁵ During the ensuing years, thousands of veterans were added to college campuses. Quickly adjusting themselves to the classroom, the disabled veterans broke down the old ideology that previous years established regarding “crippled” students.

At the University of Southern California (USC), disabled veterans were reported as, “attending classes and doing a good job readjusting themselves to their studies. The University was ready to fit its post-war curricula in order to meet the needs of the returning veterans.”³⁶ By providing an example that disabled people who desired a higher education could succeed regardless of their handicap, veterans influenced the Zook Commission to recommend that barriers to handicapped students, should be eliminated.

³⁴ Benjamin Fine, “Colleges Work Out Programs to Meet Special Needs of Veterans Back on the Campuses,” pg. E9

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Benjamin Fine, “Colleges Are Adjusting Their Programs to Facilitate Return of Service Men,” New York Times, March 5, 1944,.

Campuses with a veteran population had a diverse student body that included married veteran couples, disabled veterans, and more diverse demographics. Also joining the new demographic, were veterans of “older age,” many in their late 20’s and beyond.

Veterans proved the case that they could succeed regardless of their age. By 1948, signs pointed to a new potential for a wider age bracket on campus. Harvard, prior to 1940, saw the typical college student who graduated, was 21 or 22 years old. In 1948, with a large number of veterans in the senior class, the average graduating senior fit between the ages of 23 and 24.³⁷ Also, among undergraduates, it was also not uncommon to see some men on campus who were 30 or 35 old.³⁸

What the elder veteran students were accomplishing was challenging the status quo, and breaking down the misconception that older students were past their prime when college education was possible. With each veteran who walked across the stage and received a diploma, the case was being further established that barriers to education due to age, was hurting, not helping the country.

Veterans were not only challenging the status quo, but they were also changing the entire idea of what was possible for an individual who desired higher education. Extracurricular and athletic programs had been part of the norm of a college student’s life prior to World War II.

³⁷ Benjamin Fine, “Harvard Graduating Class, Nearly All Veterans, Sets New High Standards for Students” New York Times, June 6, 1948.

³⁸ Ibid.

New students in their 30's, or even 40's, were married, some were disabled, and collectively they were focused primarily on their education.³⁹ They had little time or desire to participate in afternoon games when training themselves to be students, functioning as a husband and often as a father mandated their full attention.

Veterans changed the very nature of college life as well as the concept of who went to college and the emphasis on what they studied. The Zook Commission viewed these cultural changes and recommended structural alteration to ensure that the federal government would not let institutes of higher education return to the role they played prior to the war.

³⁹ Benjamin Fine, "Educators Praise Their GI Students" New York Times, October 11, 1949.

ZOOK ENVISIONS A NEW STUDENT POPULATION

It wasn't long before media accounts proliferated of a student explosion and cramped campus facilities that clearly could not meet the demand.

Before long the expectation was that government needed to come up with solutions. However, now the responsibility was placed firmly at the only level of government that had the resources to respond, and that was the federal government.

Education issues historically had been handled by the local and state governments. When Truman received the urgent John Snyder report on the need for rethinking federal policy on higher education, the President declared his intention to act quickly and decisively announcing his intentions by making a major address to the prestigious American Council on Education. Addressing the demographic changes on campuses, Truman noted that

The happiest thing to me is the fact that these returned soldiers and sailors, marines, Wacs and Waves, and so forth, are giving you such a headache on education. I hope they will continue to do that. And if they do, I think the country is perfectly safe. So many people now want education who didn't want it before, that you are having a difficult time taking care of all of them. Of course, I was led to believe that the war would ruin all education, but it seems to stimulate it.⁴⁰

Federal intervention now seemed a foregone conclusion. This idea of creating a central role for the federal government added to the paradigm shift that

⁴⁰ Truman, Harry. "Remarks to the Members of the Conference on Emergency Problems in Higher Education." *Harry Truman Papers*, 162. July 11, 1946. The American Presidency Project. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters. University of California, Santa Barbara.

was in process of taking place. It had started with the GI Bill and would now be extended by a dynamic role to be played by Washington.

Truman didn't wait long to take action. Two days after receiving Snyder's report, the White House wrote to a select group of prominent Americans, asking them to serve on a newly established National Commission on Higher Education, soon to be known as The Zook Commission. "It seems particularly important, therefore, that we should now re-examine our system of higher education in terms of its objectives, methods, and facilities; and in the light of the social role it has to play," Truman stated in his letter.⁴¹

Although change was already well underway, far greater change and a direction to that change was soon to follow. Truman charged the Commission to consider options, recommend a more active role for the federal government in higher education, be innovative in their thinking and, importantly, report back the president as soon as possible. Truman was ready to alter the role of Washington in higher education, and indeed he would:

I hope the Commission will concern itself with the following: ways and means of expanding educational opportunities for all able young people; the adequacy of curricula, particularly in the fields of international affairs and social understanding; the desirability of establishing a series of intermediate technical institutes; the financial structure of higher education with particular reference to the requirements for the rapid expansion of physical facilities.⁴²

⁴¹ The American Presidency Project, *Harry Truman Papers*, 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*

The Zook Commission was asked to consider the larger and more philosophical questions involving the role of education in a democracy. How could education broaden the concept of democracy in America? Zook's group was charged with considering how expanded educational opportunity could increase the chances for world peace. "Unless we have a code of morals which respects the other fellow's interests and in which we believe that we should act as we would be acted by, you never can maintain peace," Truman claimed.⁴³ Truman and others witnessed the veterans' success, and believed education might be one of the ways to promote humanity and a more peaceful planet.

The Commission on Higher Education produced, after a year or research, a six-volume report. Each volume addressed specific issues, and listed recommended changes that would help produce a better and more opportunistic higher education system. Regarding changes in the student body, a section of the report was dedicated to "Equalizing and Expanding Educational Opportunity." Veterans proved with the GI Bill that students who had the drive and motivation to receive an education could be successful if certain barriers were eliminated.

An underlying premise of the Commission was its contention that the federal government must play a constructive and continuing role to open up higher education to greater numbers of students, who like the veterans, would prosper if only given an educational opportunity. Addressing the need for assistance on behalf of those limited by economic hardship, the barrier was

⁴³ The American Presidency Project. *Harry Truman Papers*, 162.

raised early in life and it prevented individuals from attending high school, even when free public high schools existed near their homes. The report found that by allowing opportunities for higher education to depend on an individual's economic status, the United States was denying millions of people a chance in life, and was also depriving the nation of a large number of students who could lead and be successful in subject matter.⁴⁴

The report found that race, religion, and physical handicap were factors in keeping potential students out of higher education. "The quota system denies the basic American belief that intelligence and ability are present in all ethnic groups, those men of all religious and racial origins should have equal opportunity to fit themselves for contributing to the common life."⁴⁵ Statements such as this one by the Commission clearly demonstrate how advanced for its time the report was in understanding the crippling nature of prejudice in holding back those victims of discrimination.

Consequences of inaction regarding this change were stressed, and the realities of needed change were starting to form. If the United States was going to model democracy in the world as part of its superpower status, education should be the centerpiece of what makes democracy work. Plain and simple, as a first step access to higher education had to expand and expand rapidly. This could only be done with federal intervention in the process.

⁴⁴ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. I. Establishing the Goals* (New York: Harper & Brothers. 1947) Pg. 27-28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 30.

The Commission found that too often talented young people were not continuing their schooling beyond high school. As the world's emerging superpower with global responsibilities, Zook and his fellow commissioners thought there was no better time than the present to call for a nation of educated and intelligent citizens. This could be accomplished in large measure by the infusion of support for higher education.

“The present state of affairs is resulting in far too great a loss of talent—our most precious natural resource in a democracy,” the Zook Commission reported. There were to be serious consequences the Commission warned if changes were not made.

If the ladder of educational opportunity rises high at the doors of some youth and scarcely rises at all at the doors of others, while at the same time formal education is made a prerequisite to occupational and social advance, then education may become the means, not of eliminating race and class distinctions, but of deepening and solidifying them.⁴⁶

Problems were stated clearly and concisely by the Zook Commission. Higher education reform was in dire need, and the student body needed its barriers to be drastically eliminated in order to get the expanded new student population in line to obtain a higher education.

Policy changes were required to create a more diverse student body. “It is obvious, that free and universal access to education, in terms of the interest, ability, and need of the student, must be a major goal in American education,”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid, 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

the Zook Commission laid out. A proposed path to success was recommended in a “six step” recommendation.

The Zook Commission called for initiatives to open colleges to greater diversity and opportunity for those previously excluded from educational opportunity. These steps worked hand in hand with the large success educators witnessed with the production of the GI Bill, and hoped to build on that success for the future. Focusing on student population expansion, creating an arena for diversity, and expanding access, the Commission recommended that high-school students who were unable to continue into higher education because of the costs, have an option of attending local community colleges with minimal costs and the ability of its students to live at home while extending their educational experience.

The Commission recommended that financial assistance be provided so that students not be denied higher education because they could not afford the costs. Financial aid was seen as the only way to counteract the effect of low family incomes. Although tuition-free schooling was a major factor in making it possible for veterans to enroll, the Zook Commission understood that even with their tuition covered, veterans still would not have been able to financially support themselves if not for the allowance provided for them in the GI Bill.⁴⁸

The Commission recommended that lowering tuition costs in publicly controlled colleges and aiding deserving students through larger programs of scholarships and fellowships, would help expand the student population.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 37-38.

By doing so, economic and social barriers would start to be eliminated for more students, along with the desired possibility of developing success stories from elements of the population that had long been held back previously. No matter a student's social or economic background, providing scholarships and financial assistance held out the promise of elevating those from challenging backgrounds to futures with professional and personal success⁴⁹.

Recommendations by the Zook Commission aimed for an America in which those previously burdened by prejudice based on race, gender, religion, disability or national origin should be included in the mandate creating wider educational opportunity in institutions of higher education. The Zook Commission stated that that opportunity should not just be given to veterans, but an even larger portion of society. The United States would have to renounce the practices of discrimination and segregation in educational institutions that plagued the country by standing for the *status quo*⁵⁰.

Educational leaders and institutions needed to take positive steps to overcome the conditions, which obstructed free and equal access to educational opportunities. Educational programs everywhere needed to be aimed at undermining and eventually eliminating the attitudes that were responsible for discrimination and segregation—at creating instead attitudes that would make education freely available to all.⁵¹

The Zook Commission studied the demographic composition of the student body prior to World War II, and they saw as a major flaw that diversity

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 32.

was non-existent. Age, class, and gender limitations were obvious for any person who took a stroll onto college campuses. After the G.I Bill was successfully initiated and the veterans proved worthy, the Zook Commission saw their success as the key to the future. No longer were colleges limited to overwhelmingly white, middle-or upper class males. Many of the veterans came to campuses with little or no money, and lived solely on their stipend earned by their active wartime duty. Many who came from a working class background could never have imagined that after the war they would be exchanging their weapons for textbooks.

The Zook Commission's recommendations were an ideological shift in federal policy toward higher education that opened the doors of opportunity for generations to come. Eliminating barriers would help families, and lead to a large expansion of higher education population, with success along the lines as the veterans returned from fighting, and took to the classroom.

Harry Truman addressed the findings in the report at the end of 1947. At a time when foreign affairs consumed most hours of his schedule, he took time to address how higher education and the report's findings were crucial. "We are challenged by the need to ensure that higher education shall take its proper place in our national effort to strengthen democracy at home and to improve our understanding of our friends and neighbors everywhere in the world."⁵²

After chairing the Commission, Zook was convinced of one item in particular. Each individual, man or woman, white or black, poor as well as rich, needed to be able to develop their talents and interest, to the fullest. No longer

⁵² The American Presidency Project. *Harry Truman Papers*, 235.

could the country be satisfied with the suppression of talent, for any reason whatsoever.

An optimistic Zook was confident that a new era in the life for Americans would emerge due to the recommendations.⁵³ Writing in 2011, it is a fact of American life there are significant barriers for those who want to obtain a college or university education and degree. But what cannot be argued is that the students today who comprise the campus population are worlds apart in their diversity and numbers from the limitations of 1946. When one walks onto college campuses today, much of the destiny hoped for by the Commission is on display to that visitor.

⁵³ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. I, Pg.32.*

A VAREITY OF OPTIONS: CHANGE IN CURRICULLUM

In July of 1945, Columbia University boasted that it would be offering more than 900 courses in almost every conceivable subject. Many colleges followed the same path after veterans made it clear that they wanted a range of courses in their interests and in fields other than those traditionally focused in the liberal arts.⁵⁴

The Zook Commission dealt with the problem that many of the universities faced when only offering liberal arts curriculum, noting that “present college programs are not contributing adequately to the quality of students' adult lives either as workers or citizens. This is true in large part because the unity of liberal education has been splintered by overspecialization.”⁵⁵ According to the Zook Commission, students were faced with a barrier that held them back from pursuing an education in fields that frequently offered more career options upon graduation.

The veterans proved that a larger student body could be more successful if given the chance to matriculate in degree programs more pragmatic than liberal arts. When the large diverse student body containing veterans entered school, the curriculum system they were offered, provided additional barriers.

For much of the second half of the 19th century there was expanded curriculum based off the idea to attract more students, but not to expand career options for them. When curriculum options were presented, college ensured that

⁵⁴ Benjamin Fine, “Summer School Enrollment Rises—Courses Offered to Deal With Post-War Problems,” *New York Times*, July 1, 1945.

⁵⁵ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Equalizing and Expanding Individual Opportunity, Vol. II* (New York: Harper & Brothers. 1947), Pg. 6-7.

students maintained the classical liberal arts programs as their main degree programs, and did not compromise the firm traditional idea of a liberal education. College presidents and faculty alike were quick to point out that a core traditional liberal arts standard was still required for graduation, regardless of the student's specialized focus.⁵⁶

The second half of the 20th century brought change to what curriculum was offered when the GI Bill of Rights was passed and established in 1944. The call for a larger undergraduate degree program, technical schools, vocational schools, and professional schools, started a new conversation about curriculum, and debates about change became commonplace. The impact of a larger more diverse student population brought on the realization that colleges and students could be more successful if offering a larger range of options.

Change started by first attempting to combine the idea of general education with a liberal arts education.⁵⁷ President Constance Warren of Sarah Lawrence College, maintained that, "to put students into purely vocational schools with no liberal arts training would be to deprive them of their means of obtaining the breadth of vision necessary to function efficiently either in the vocation or as citizens, to say nothing of depriving them of the means of living with rich enjoyment."⁵⁸

A mix needed to be found. On the opposite side of the argument, seeing no way to compromise, were individuals like President of St. John's College,

⁵⁶ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy. Vol, I, Pg. 32.*

⁵⁷ Benjamin Fine, "College Program to Combine Vocational and Liberal Courses Seen as Post-War Objectives," *New York Times*, August 13, 1944.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, E9.

Stringfellow Barr. President Barr argued that curriculum should not be altered as a result of the new diverse student population. To obtain a degree through St. John's College, students had to finish all required liberal arts and sciences programs, including four years of mathematics, four years of foreign language and four years of science. President Barr boasted that his program was built around the "100 greatest books,"⁵⁹ and he insisted it was the standard to follow.

However, veterans were providing a strong argument for curriculum change; what needed to be offered in a way that would apply to their everyday life, and focus on life skills and skill sets, in order to be career ready right after school.⁶⁰ Providing common cultural experience for students, it was crucial for higher education to expand their degree offerings in order to obtain broader fields of interest for students who were talented in areas other than strictly "100 greatest books" style curriculum. Courses like the humanities, social science, government, and English, were recommended to make up the common core of an undergraduate degree for those not attending a vocational or technical school. A common core of learning was essential for those who intended to acquire a higher education regardless of their skill, background, trade, or profession. This would allow a solid foundation of an educated public to take place, as well as to address the needs of the new veteran student population.⁶¹

The influence of the veteran's desire for more curriculum options led the Zook Commission to state that; "the failure to provide any core of unity in the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Benjamin Fine, "Growth of the Junior College," *New York Times*, Jan. 16, 1944.

⁶¹ Benjamin Fine, "Harvard's Study of the Role of Schools in a Free Society Proposes Broad Changes," *New York Times*, July 29, 1945.

essential diversity of higher education is a cause for grave concern. A society whose numbers lack a body of common experience and common knowledge is a society without a fundamental culture; it tends to disintegrate into a mere aggregation of individuals.” The argument struck a cord, and continued. “Some community of values, ideas, and attitudes is essential as a cohesive force in this age of minute division of labor and intense conflict of special interests.”⁶²

Changes were to take place to prepare for success in the future in areas other than classic liberal arts subject matter.

Zook focused on how colleges adjusted to the veterans by adding new programs and degrees. Majors such as home economics, music, and agriculture were beginning to be offered to allow the larger student population to find a subject matter they enjoyed and were successful in. Degrees proliferated until courses in practically any specialized area of study were available, striking a balance with general education and liberal education options.⁶³

Common ground was essential between liberal arts and a new curriculum that offered more variety. The Zook Commission warned against not being able to find a balance between liberal and general education options, as some colleges continued the liberal arts only path.

“The crucial task of higher education today, therefore, is to provide a unified general education for American youth. Colleges must find the right relationship between specialized training on the one hand, aiming at a thousand different careers, and the transmission of a common cultural heritage toward a

⁶² George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. II, Pg. 3.*

⁶³ Cohen, 137.

common citizenship on the other.”⁶⁴ Understanding that millions of dollars would be lost if adjusting curriculum did not take place, college presidents shifted from the position taken by President Barr and others. After witnessing the number of new students entering college, many administrators moved toward accommodations with curricular change, providing new opportunities for students.

Establishing a variety of curriculum proved to be highly popular and successful. The veterans persuaded curriculum to enter a growth mode where additional buildings, faculty, and staff were put into place to bring in an era of expansion. Heavily influenced by the driving force of veterans, the Zook Commission recommended higher education be expanded even further. “Thus conceived, general education is not sharply distinguished from liberal education; the two differ mainly in degree, not in kind. General education undertakes to redefine liberal education in terms of life's problems as men face them, to give it human orientation and social direction, to invest it with content that is directly relevant to the demands of contemporary society.”⁶⁵

The Zook Commission was careful not to discredit those who hoped to obtain a liberal arts education, and wanted to emphasize that there was room for both in higher education. “General education is liberal education with its matter and method shifted from its original aristocratic intent to the service of democracy. General education seeks to extend to all men the benefits of an education that liberates.”⁶⁶ Clearly, the best possible option for higher education was to strike a balance of curriculum offered to students.

⁶⁴ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. II, Pg. 3.*

⁶⁵ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. I, Pg. 103.*

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Striking a balance was key, as well as breaking down curriculum barriers allowed new a new setting for students who were not ready to leap into the university setting. Changing the way students could take courses was an option that helped fit the new diverse student body that emerged from the postwar world. Veteran students coming to higher education from different backgrounds had multiple needs, priorities, skills, and talents, and desired different options upon entering classrooms after the GI Bill was enacted. With their rapid success, major expansion was implemented in order to open up as many educational opportunities for the students. Included into those opportunities, campuses began revamping and prioritizing summer school as a way for students to have every avenue open for to them for success, a sharp change from previous summer school options.

Prior to World War II, summer school was only offered at a limited number of institutions. After the GI Bill, veterans in many cases began desiring to have classes during non-traditional times, days, and semesters, in order to fit their lifestyles and goals. Summer courses might help a married student complete a program more quickly in order to start a family. Older students who were also working full-time might be allowed to take more classes during the summer, rather than just during traditional semesters. When veterans provided the demand, more colleges began to offer summer courses as a means to attract more students, and allow more options for their larger non-veteran student population.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Benjamin Fine, "Summer School Enrollment Rises-Courses Offered to Deal With Post-War Problems" New York Times, July 1, 1945.

Columbia University expected at least 10,000 students to enroll in the summer term of 1945, and New York University prepared that same year for an increase of 10 percent from their summer term of 1944, bringing their summer total to 11,000 students.⁶⁸ Accelerated courses were offered as well for students not interested in the four-year graduation plan. Colleges expected to drop the three year accelerated programs they had offered during the war, and return to the traditional two-semester four-year program.⁶⁹ Summer school along with accelerated courses offered veterans a new way to find success at a quicker pace. In addition, newly concentrated programs were being offered, as well as three semester systems utilizing summer session enabling a fast track for students.⁷⁰

At first, not all first colleges agreed with this option. During the war some veterans were able to take accelerated courses in order to complete their work early.⁷¹ Accelerated programs were opposed at the time and later by many higher education administrators. "There is no excuse in peacetime for the hurried 'catch-as-catch-can' type of education," Raymond W. Fairchild, president of Illinois State University proclaimed in the early months of 1944,⁷² and if veterans were expected to make these changes permanent, they would have to prove administrators like Raymond Fairchild wrong by working harder than ever, and they did.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Benjamin Fine, "Study Reveals Liberal Arts Colleges Expect To Emerge Stronger After the War" New York Times, April 1, 1945.

⁷⁰ Benjamin Fine, "College Presidents Forecast a Rapid Return to Liberal Ideals After the War." New York Times, April 30, 1944.

⁷¹ Benjamin Fine, "Colleges Are Adjusting Their Programs to Facilitate Return of Service Men." New York Times, March 5, 1944.

⁷² Benjamin Fine, "College Presidents Forecast a Rapid Return to Liberal Ideals After the War.", E9.

Students were expected to work harder and longer than other classmates, and found accelerated programs being just that. On average, expected classroom work jumped from eighteen hours of work a week, to twenty-seven hours of work a week, which provided for an increase of about 50 percent. It just wasn't class work that was increased.⁷³

For instructors and students alike, continuing accelerated courses meant that many courses would be longer, instead of meeting three times a week for fifty-minute periods. For years this was the norm for those students, on track for a degree in the liberal arts arena, who usually worked on their degree for four years. With accelerated programs, those who desired that path would have to meet five times a week, for eighty minutes each, an obvious increase in their work load. But for many, well worth it.⁷⁴

The accelerated programs did not just offer longer class periods. Campuses also introduced a new concept in order to make up for lost time for veterans, in the form of different class times to work around their schedule. In addition to summer school courses and accelerated courses, evening classes were offered to students. Those desiring to either take additional classes, worked during the day, or those who only had evenings available, were offered courses at different times in order to work on whatever higher education ambition they had.⁷⁵

As the Zook Commission looked into the productivity being produced by

⁷³ Benjamin Fine, "Harvard Business School on a Peacetime Basis Will Train Methods Learned During War" New York Times, Feb 3, 1946.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Benjamin Fine, "Colleges Make Plans for Influx of Veterans under the GI Bill of Rights Program" New York Times, June 18, 1944.

accelerated programs, night classes, and extension of summer school programs, their recommendations took into consideration that the future of higher education must continue to build upon eliminating barriers like class availability for students. Programs that veterans helped push forward, expanded in a way that helped Americans develop student talents at different times and pace, an example of change.

The Zook Commission recommended that the future of higher education offer classes to larger student bodies, and classes be offered at more flexible times. Understanding that veterans had a far different background than the previous traditional student population,⁷⁶ it was crucial to eliminate those barriers that the veterans had in the early years of the GI Bill, but did help change. And these programs needed to be extended not only at the university level, but also at the community college level because it was at the community college level where much of the higher education expansion was believed to take place for the larger student body in the years to come.

⁷⁶ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. II, Pg. 8.*

ACCESS ON A NEW LEVEL: THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Community college expansion was proposed within months after officials started to see the crowding taking place on college campuses. Expansion was a way to increase curriculum options for the new veteran student population. Community colleges prior to World War II, as well as in the early years after the GI Bill, were defined by being lumped in a general category, listed as: community colleges, community institutes, and institutes of arts and sciences with little attention.⁷⁷

The public had questions about what exactly an education at community college contained, and by 1949, even after the veterans influenced schools, there was still no standard definition, as the case is today. At best, many people had perceptions about community colleges, that they were a location where the needs of the population within the community could be met. It was a college that offered courses for students who could get training in a “semi-professional” job for a relatively inexpensive price, since students could commute to school from home.⁷⁸ It was viewed in a sense as an extension of high school, sometimes thought of as a 13th and 14th grade.

Before the start of the war, community colleges had a modest history of growth in the country. They were concentrated heavily on the West Coast of the country, and through the years, the colleges had grown through the Midwest and to the Atlantic shore. They became popular in these areas for many local

⁷⁷ Benjamin Fine, “Increase of the Two-Year Community Colleges Calls for a New Kind of Instructor” New York Times, Nov 13, 1949.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

students due to their low cost, often tuition free, as well as their strong vocational and technical programs. At the start of the war, the United States had nearly 600 community colleges, with a large amount of room for expansion once the veterans arrived. That number would soon increase.⁷⁹

By the late 1940's, veterans who attended vocational and technical programs at community colleges were educated in all types of vocational skills and trades that made them career ready upon completion of their program. By 1950, 5,000 community colleges, vocational schools, and trade schools were organized to meet the demand of the veterans. In that period, community colleges attracted more than twenty-five percent of the loan money offered to veterans for education, and demand for an option other than the university type of education was high.⁸⁰

With money flowing from the veterans' GI Bill benefits, the community college system played a larger role in the country, and reached a new level of popularity, as recommended by the Zook Commission. Students enrolled at community colleges, some finished with two year degrees, some transferred to four year institutions, and some became certificated in technical or vocational areas.⁸¹ The community college was in a sense, the total package for the veteran student in need of a variety of options.

Community colleges expanded possibilities for the new student body as well, and the Zook Commission realized large expansion eliminated a number of

⁷⁹ Benjamin Fine, "Growth of the Junior College" New York Times, Jan 16, 1944.

⁸⁰ Arthur M. Cohen, *The Shaping of American Higher Education: Emergence and Growth of the Contemporary System*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers), 194-95.

⁸¹ David O. Levine, *The American College and The Culture of Aspiration, 1915-1940*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986) pg. 184.

barriers students previously had when considering a higher education. The Zook Commission realized these barriers as well as the success community colleges provided an expanded student population. Upon review of the community college system, Zook listed the expansion of community colleges as a priority, and recommended massive expansion immediately across the country in order to provide citizens with the community college as a viable option for a continuation of their education.⁸²

In the Commission's report, volume II, "Equalizing Opportunity," the Zook Commission purposed that education should not end at the twelfth grade level, and that a new fourteenth grade should be made available for students who desired to continue their education. Tuition-free education should be available at all two-year community colleges, in order to expand extensively the opportunities for those who previously had barriers that held them back from pursuing higher education.⁸³

Community colleges in the future would have a large part of the responsibility for expanding opportunities. Larger student population as highlighted in volume I, and federal funding, helped local schools build programs in order to create a solid foundation for learning.⁸⁴ Veterans provided an excellent example of why community college expansion was necessary in larger towns and cities. Education was made more available to a larger rural population that previously had no access to higher education. The Zook Commission realized that community colleges could be successful if more were available in

⁸² George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. III, Pg. 5-9*

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

more locations to a larger number of students willing to work hard to obtain an education. Barriers like cost, transportation, and locations had for years kept many rural and urban residents away from a higher education.⁸⁵

The Zook Commission believed that once the trend caught on, and more colleges were made available, the next 20 years would see much of the four-year university course work be completed by students who first enrolled at a community college. Enrollment numbers would rise in higher education due to the expansion of the community college system across the country, and higher education success in the country would reach a larger level of the population, than what was witnessed during the veterans' post-war experience.⁸⁶

Zook developed an idea that expansion of community college campuses and curriculum could be more successful if along with "tuition-free" access, massive increases in federal aid were allocated in order to help students with day-to-day costs of living. The final report of the Zook Commission recommended a new role for what a community college should entail after studying how veterans impacted the higher education.

The Zook Commission believed that colleges would serve a cross section of the population. Apprentice training, such as technical and vocational classes needed to be available on a larger level. Offering a variety of courses in multiple areas of content and expanded curriculum to the student population would prepare students for a satisfying career option after a two-year program, as was

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Benjamin Fine, "Increase of the Two-Year Community College Calls for a New Kind of Instructor" New York Times, Nov 13, 1949.

the case for many veterans.⁸⁷

Community colleges met the needs of the veterans who wanted an extended general education, vocational training, a professional career, and or the option to transfer to universities. Schools located in areas that made it possible for people to receive an education without moving. The Zook Commission recommended that community college expansion continue, in order to continue to offer students options in non-traditional ways, like providing satellite programs for less populated areas that would not be able to support their own campus.⁸⁸

In the end, the commission's recommendations paid off. The veterans and the Zook Commission together impacted community colleges by increasing the number of students who decided to take the community college approach to their education. Figures show that between 1945 and 1975, the public community colleges gained an increasing share of the 11 million students who gained access to a higher education. Nearly half of those 11 million students enrolled in a community college, and were able to because of the expansion that took place during postwar years and the Zook Commission's recommendations.⁸⁹

At the time of this writing, the importance of the community college system is still stressed in higher education, and the underlying value of community colleges has been reinforced. Recently the Department of Education in their "College Completion Tool Kit," a publication to create action plans for higher education in the United States, emphasized once again the role community colleges need to play. In the Department's study, a chart was published focusing

⁸⁷ George Zook, *Higher Education for American Democracy: Vol. II*, Pg 7-9.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Cohen, 196.

on education requirements for jobs in the year 2018. Although it is a forecast of expectations, the numbers are an example of how community colleges have become an integral part of America's system of higher education.

By 2018, it is forecasted that 28% of jobs will require at least a high school degree. Twenty-three percent of jobs will require at least a Bachelor's degree, followed by 17% of jobs requiring an Associate's degree, which requires workers to graduate from a community college. According to the statistics posted by the Department of Education, over 62% of the job market will require a person to have either "some" college experience or a graduate degree. On the reverse side, only 38% of the jobs in the 2018 market will be looking for workers who have a high school diploma, or less.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ United States Department of Education
http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/college_completion_tool_kit.pdf

ZOOK COMMISSION'S RELATION TO HIGHER EDUCATION TODAY

The Zook Commission had a lasting impact on the Executive branch's role in higher education in the decades after its report. Education committees became more common in the White House; two were formed in the 1950's, and 10 were formed in the 1960's. In particular, ten years after the Zook Commission, a Presidential-sponsored group, formally known as the Committee on Education Beyond the High School, was released and reaffirmed the Zook Commission's recommendations. Popularly known as the "Josephs Committee," it was delivered in 1957 as an examination of the purposes and functions of higher education which confirmed the goal of equality in higher education, while focusing on "the development of the aptitudes and abilities of our population."⁹¹

In 1973, Lewis B. Mayhew, author of "The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education," credited the Zook Commission with envisioning and helping produce the community college movement of the 1950's and 1960's. Mayhew believed that the Zook Commission may have been more influential for its time than was the Morrill Act of 1862, which allowed for the creation of land-grant colleges.⁹²

Five years after the Zook Commission released its report, James G. Harlow wrote an article for the *Journal of Higher Education* titled, "Five Years of

⁹¹ Kerr, Clark, "Four Decades of Education Commissions." *Change*, Vol. 5. No.9, 1973, pp.5

⁹² Thompson, Mark, "Commissions and Zeitgeist: A Brief Critique of Commission on Higher Education." *Journal of Education*, Vol. 55. No.4, (July 1978), pp.310

Discussion.” In Harlow’s article, criticisms and arguments are discussed regarding the Zook Commissions recommendations, and a solid evaluation of the Commission’s report is detailed in the article in 1953, as a reflection after the public had five years to review the report’s recommendations.

The arguments in opposition to the report’s recommendations came from workers in privately financed colleges and universities, which were not to receive direct federal aid under the Commission’s recommendations. Also, many of the published reports in opposition to the Commission’s recommendation came from college administrators rather than college faculty. In those complaints, administrators had been worried about the recommendations regarding goals and student population numbers. The Commission, in their report, set a goal of 4,600,000 students enrolled by 1960, which complaining administrators felt was impossible because that was triple the student population that was in place in 1953.⁹³ If left alone, administrators felt the student population numbers would increase naturally due to economic and population growth, and no “goal setting” was necessary. “The recommendations of the Zook Commission are only accelerating the natural student population growth that was taking place prior to World War II.”⁹⁴

Harlow’s article provides insight into the minority barrier that the Zook Commission addressed. The country still faced huge discrimination problems, and college campuses reflected that problem. Prejudice played a large role in

⁹³ Harlow, James, “Fiver Years of Discussion.” *The Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 24. No.1, 1953.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

the country's politics, and as Harlow's points out in his article many southern organizations never would have allowed complete implementation of the recommendations of the Zook Commission. Southern votes were needed to pass bills regarding funding for higher education, and support for a budget would have been a struggle. So a number of Zook's recommendations took time to evolve over the second half of the 20th century.

Ordway Tead, a naturalist and a humanist in the 1950s, as well as an editor of social and economic books for publisher Harper & Brothers, summarized the funding ideology that took place after the Zook Commission's report. Tead's quote explains the connection between the Zook Commission's recommendations and the higher education budget of President Obama:

Whatever its numerous faults and deficiencies, this report will historically come to be acknowledged as supplying something of a landmark, something of a symbol of the end of one era and the beginning of another.⁹⁵

In 2011, the federal government continues to invest in higher education at record levels. Since the Zook Commission's report, the federal higher education budget has increased yearly. The 2008 higher education budget received the same funding in 2010, a reflection of the country feeling the effects of a recession.⁹⁶ The Obama Administration continues investing in higher education. President Obama's 2012 budget proposes that of the \$3.7 trillion, \$2.6 billion is

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Chantrill, Christopher, United States Government Spending Analysis http://www.usgovernmentsspending.com/downchart_gs.php?chart=24-total&view=1&year=1940_1960&state=US&local=b

allocated to higher education, and spending over the next five years on higher education gradually increases until the year 2016.⁹⁷

The percentage of American college students who are minorities (Hispanics, Africans Americans, and Asians) has increased since the Zook Commission's report. In 1976, 15% of students were minorities, compared with 32% in 2007. The Hispanic rate increased from 4 to 11%. The Asian/Pacific Islander rate has increased from 2 to 7%. The percentage of Black students rose from 9% at the beginning of 1976, before rising to 13% in 2007.⁹⁸ From 2006 to 2017, it is projected that there will be a rise of 10% in enrollment of people under 25, and a rise of 19% in enrollment of people 25 and over.⁹⁹

The Zook Commission's recommendations echo in the ears of top officials today, reaffirming the commitment the United States must have to higher education, and an increasing higher education budget is policy. Allowing access to a higher education will continue to be funded by President Obama:

*We will provide the support necessary for you to complete college and meet a new goal: by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.*¹⁰⁰

President Obama's dedication is outlined on the President's website. The President's top higher education priorities include: larger Pell grants, more stable

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ International Center for Education Statics
<http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=98>

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ The White House: President Barack Obama Official Website
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/education/higher-education>

funding for Pell grants, investments in community colleges, increased support for minority-serving institutions, and expanded income based repayment.¹⁰¹ All of these programs have a connection to the recommendations proposed by the Zook Commission in 1947, and sixty-four years later still influence federal policy.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

This paper has traced both the pressure for change from veterans as well as identified the moment when the federal government stepped forward and made higher education a priority in both establishing policies for growth as well as substantial monetary support to create those changes.

The aforementioned report submitted by John W. Snyder to President Truman on May 17, 1946, provides the starting point for the dynamic presence of the federal government in higher education in this country. Snyder's emphasis that the surge of veterans on campuses was only the first step in federal involvement, combined with the consequent creation of the Zook Commission, launched a decades-long partnership that altered higher education in the United States and served the country well.

George Zook and the Commission report emphasized the need for changes that indeed did culminate in a partnership between higher education and the federal government during the second half of the twentieth century. The reality of how dramatic the changes were is clearly identified by the numbers. Early in the 20th century there were approximately 250,000 students in higher education institutions nationwide.¹⁰² By 1959, enrollment reached 3.2 million. In the 1970's enrollment soared to 8.6 million, and by 1980, 12.1 million.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Cohen, 114.

¹⁰³ Blumin, 115.

The GI Bill and the veterans brought change through their admirable work ethic, by placing constant pressure on the system, and by fighting against the tradition-bound educational establishment. The Zook Commission laid out a path in its recommendations that hoped to lift barriers not just for the veterans but for millions of other citizens they believed should be given the opportunity to attend institutions of higher education.

By the end of the twentieth century major strides had been made in accommodating students from a variety of gender, racial, religious and ethnic backgrounds.¹⁰⁴ Students also benefited from a greater variety of fields of study, a range of degree programs far more diversified than in the late 1940s. On average, such students live healthier lives, secure better employment opportunities, and have more options in life than those who have not had a college experience.

Community college expansion provides another example of how an invigorated buildup of such institutions has paid large dividends to those who have attended them and to the nation itself. Job training specialized programs for multiple professional opportunities and preparing students for transfer to four-year institutions are all notable contributions. Currently, there are 1,151 community colleges in the United States. Over 10 million students were enrolled in community colleges in 2002, and nearly half of all undergraduates in the United States attend community colleges before.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Cohen, 423.

¹⁰⁵ International Student Guide to the United States of America

http://www.americancommunitycolleges.com/isg_articles/consider-communitycollege.php

More often than not, accounts of how the GI Bill altered higher education neglect the dynamic and extensive role of community colleges, curriculum expansion, student populations, and the way the federal government funds higher education.

Higher education shifted profoundly in the years after the Zook Commission. As mentioned earlier, 1950's federal education budget reached \$1 billion. And by the beginning of the 1960's, funding reached \$3.2 billion, and by the start of the 1970's, the higher education budget was \$14.1 billion.¹⁰⁶

Expanded and substantially reformed curriculum introduced by colleges and universities provided new fields of study and career paths to millions of students identified with the post-war generation. The veterans who returned from World War II and embraced college as an important and a reachable goal with access to the GI Bill's educational benefits, motivated, pushed, and inspired the multiple recommendations endorsed by the Zook Commission. This thesis provides examples of areas of the Commission's influence in the surge of student population, curricular innovation, and community college expansion. These recommendations could not have taken place without the veterans, who returned and challenged the establishment to help back countless numbers of possible students to obtain a higher education.

Although praising the GI Bill for its contribution to the lives of millions of

¹⁰⁶ Chantrill, Christopher, United States Government Spending Analysis http://www.usgovernmentpending.com/downchart_gs.php?chart=24-total&view=1&year=1940_1960&state=US&local=b

veterans is the norm, this thesis concludes that it has not been appreciated how much the nation owes the veterans, and the GI Bill, for the way in which they combined to influence the recommendations of the Zook Commission, which in turn promoted and played a significant role in bringing useful and sometimes even radical change to the system of higher education in the United States.

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Appendix

List of Zoom Commission Members

George F. Zook, president, American Council on Education, as chairman; Arthur H. Compton, chancellor, Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri; Earl McGrath, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, University of Iowa, Ames, Iowa; D. Henderson, president, Antioch College, Yellow Springs, Ohio; Frederick D. Patterson, president, Tuskegee Institute, Tuskegee, Alabama; Sarah Blanding, president, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York; Milton Eisenhower, president, Kansas State College, Manhattan, Kansas; The Very Reverend Frederick G. Hochwald, director of Higher Education Division, National Catholic Welfare Conference; Horace M. Kallen, dean of the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, New School for Social Research, New York City; Alvin Eurich, vice-president, Stanford University, Stanford, California; Goodrich White, president, Emory University, Emory University, Georgia; John Emens, president, Ball State Teachers College, Muncie, Indiana; Henry A. Dixson, president, Webster Junior College, Ogden, Utah; Ordway Tead, president, Board of Higher Education, New York City; T. R. McConnell, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, Minnesota; Harry Newburn, president, Oregon University System, Eugene, Oregon; George Stoddard, president, University of Illinois, Urbana, Illinois; Martin R. P. McGuire, dean of the Graduate School, Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C.; Lewis Jones, president, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas; Fred J. Kelley, formerly director of the Division of Higher Education, U. S. Office of Education; Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam, formerly president, Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America; Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, president, American Jewish Congress; Harold H. Swift, chairman, Board of Trustees, University of Chicago; O. C. Carmichael, president, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching; Mark Starr, educational director, International Ladies' Garment Workers Union; Murray D. Lincoln, president, Ohio Farm Bureau Federation; and Agnes Meyer, journalist and social worker, Washington, D. C. Dr. Francis J. Brown served as executive secretary of the Commission.