

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

GI Bill Comparison Tool Redesign Beta Testing

Research Readout

Background & Goals

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Background

The VA team has fully redesigned the GI Bill Comparison Tool and conducted multiple rounds of testing to assess its effectiveness. The team seeks to conduct a large-scale usability test to ensure that the tool works well for a wide variety of users.

Research goals

- Determine the effectiveness of the Comparison Tool for a wide range of users
 - Completion of basic tasks (e.g., searching and finding schools)
 - Utilization of comparison functionality
 - Ability to customize benefits

Hypotheses to be tested

Researchers believe that individuals will be able to use the tool to find schools that accept VA education benefits, learn more about those schools, and compare potential school options against one another.

Methodology

Method: Remote Unmoderated Testing

Method: Unmoderated usability testing with questionnaire

Reasoning: Researchers need to assess the effectiveness of the tool on a large-scale audience in a realistic scenario. Unmoderated usability testing allows users to interact with the tool in their natural environment and utilize the tool without input or prompting from a facilitator.




By using a questionnaire, researchers were able to gain basic feedback and metrics on what users thought of the redesigned Comparison Tool

Timing: Testing with questionnaire ran from Sept. 10 – 16. Data analysis was conducted Sept. 17 – 20.

Research questions

- Are users able to effectively utilize the search(es) to find institutions?
- Are users able to use the comparison functionality?
- Do users believe the information on the profile pages is valuable to them?
- Can users determine the specific benefits they would receive at a particular institution? And they customize them to their situation?

Participant Profile

	 19 total participants	 12 desktop participants	 7 mobile participants
Chapter 33	7 Women	5 Desktop *	2 Mobile
13 participants	6 Men	3 Desktop	3 Mobile
VR&E	2 Women	2 Desktop	0 Mobile
5 participants	3 Men	1 Desktop	2 Mobile
Chapter 30	1 Man	1 Desktop	0 Mobile
1 participant			

* Includes 1 participant using assistive technology

Research Findings

Key Findings

1. Overall, most **participants had a favorable impression of the redesigned** Comparison Tool
2. Most participants rated **searching by name and location “Very easy” or “Easy”**
3. Most participants were **able to find filters and apply them to their search results**
4. Participants rated **information on the search results as relevant and helpful**
5. Participants indicated the **profile page was easy to understand and had valuable information**
6. Most participants said **benefit estimates were accurate; not all saw how to update them**
7. All participants were **able to compare institutions; the process was easier on desktop than mobile**
8. Multiple participants **mentioned they liked comparing institutions and highlighting differences**
9. Participants were **most challenged by the location search results**
10. Multiple participants said they found the tool to be helpful and **would recommend it for comparing institutions and their anticipated education costs and ROI**

Research Findings

1. Overall, most participants had a favorable impression of the redesigned Comparison Tool

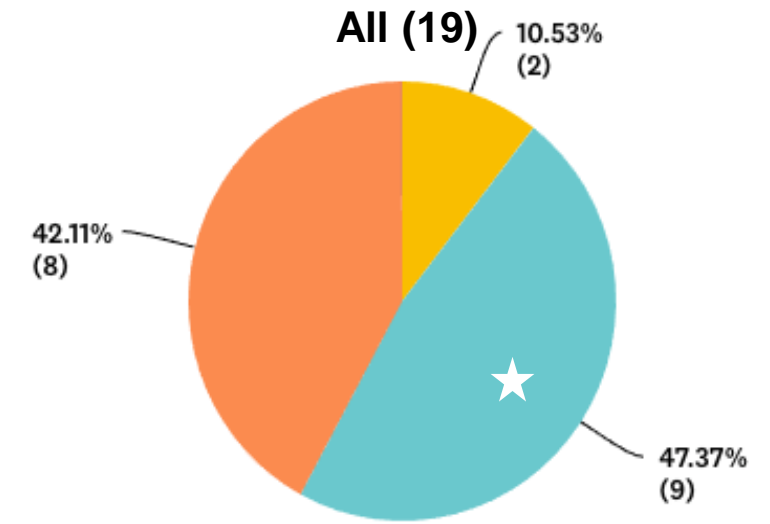
- Most participants had a favorable impression of the tool

“I like the comparison tool. It was easy to use and gave lots of information.” - P3

- Mobile users who gave a “Neutral” rating had specific challenges engaging with the tool

- 1 user struggled to figure out how to select schools to compare
- 1 user correctly believed the benefit estimates were not accurate for his situation, but saw no way to remedy that

“I had issues selecting schools to compare at first. Took me a couple minutes to figure out” - P5



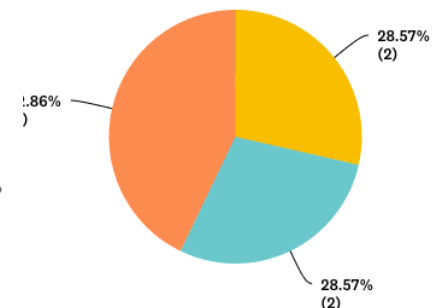
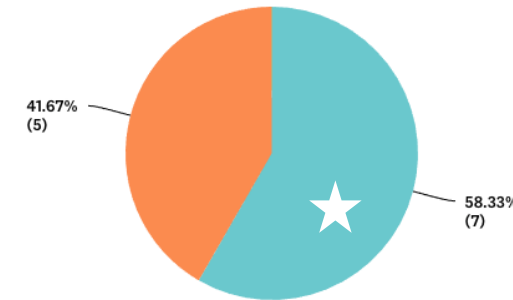
Very Bad Bad Neutral Good Very Good



Desktop (12)



Mobile (7)



Meet Participant 16



Participant 16 wants to find medical schools within a particular city. She types the word “Medical” into the search and receives a mixture of medical schools and on-the-job training options, but not the schools she was looking for. She’s unsure if all the schools have been loaded into the system.

Clicking on one of the schools, she sees the Estimate Your Benefits section and notices that “*GI Bill pays to school*”, “*Tuition and fees charged*” and “*Out of pocket tuition*” were all zero! (Tuition data for this school is not currently in the system.)

She tries updating her benefit information on both the search page and the profile page. She needs to know an exact number for the cost of the school.

Participant 16 had a difficult time with the Comparison Tool – and her feedback reflects this. We’ve marked her scores with a star for the purposes of clarity.

Searching in the Comparison Tool

Research Findings

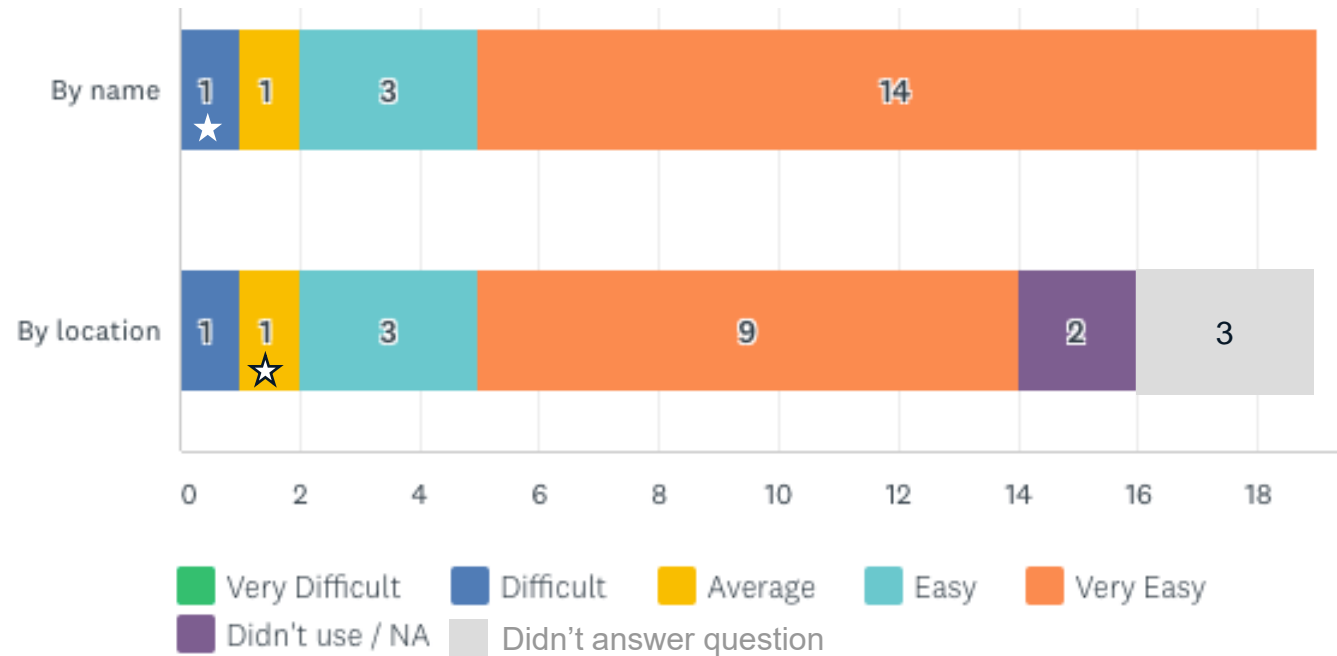
2. Most participants rated searching by name and location “Very easy” or “Easy”

- Most participants rated searching by name “Very easy” or “Easy”

“Search by name worked a lot better than I expected. I'd seen this tool before but ignored it.” -P4

- Participants mostly rated search by location “Very easy” and “Easy”, but had some issues

“On the map, some colleges came up as being in other states, like a PA school in Washington DC” – P12



3. Most participants were able to find filters and apply them to their search results

- 74% (14/19) of participants used the filters

Filter Used	# of participants
State	10
Is accredited	8
Has a Student Veteran Group	7
Type of school (e.g. Private, Public)	6
Country	3
Has no cautionary warnings	3

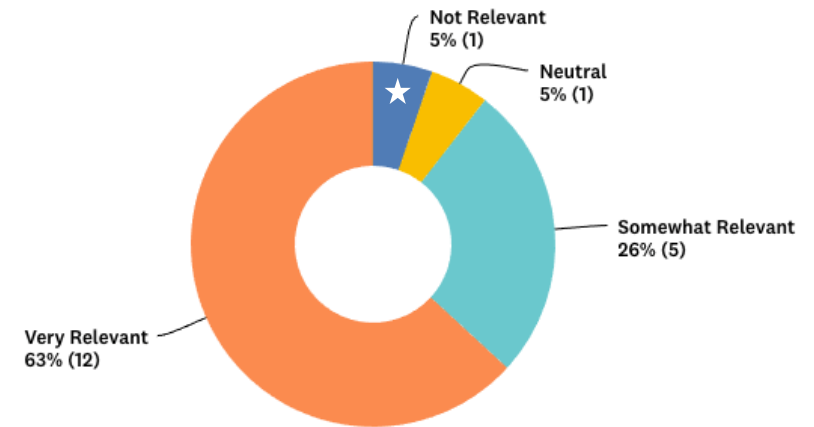
- 4 participants wanted to see additional filters or modifications to the current search
 - Learning format (e.g. online, hybrid, in-person)
 - Preferred apprenticeships to be a filter
 - School type (e.g., medical)
 - Program

Research Findings

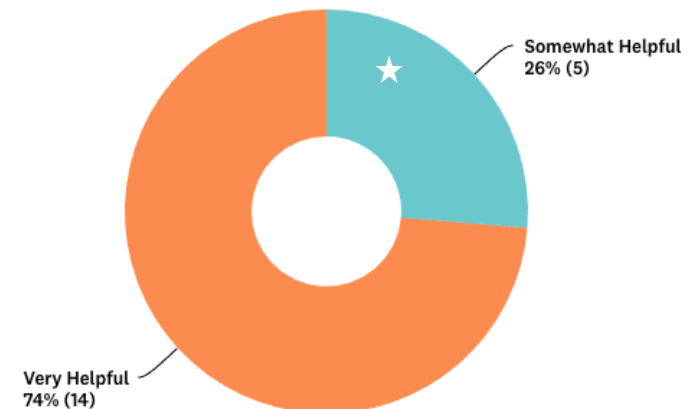
4. Participants rated search results as relevant and helpful

- Most participants rated their search results “Relevant” or “Very relevant”
- All participants rated the information displayed on the search cards as “Very helpful” or “Somewhat helpful”

What did you think of the search results you received?



What did you think of the info displayed on the cards on the search results page?



Profile Pages and Estimated Benefits

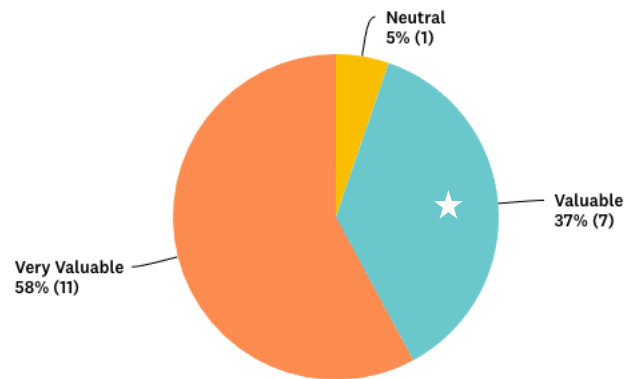
Research Findings

5. Participants indicated the profile page was easy to understand and had valuable information

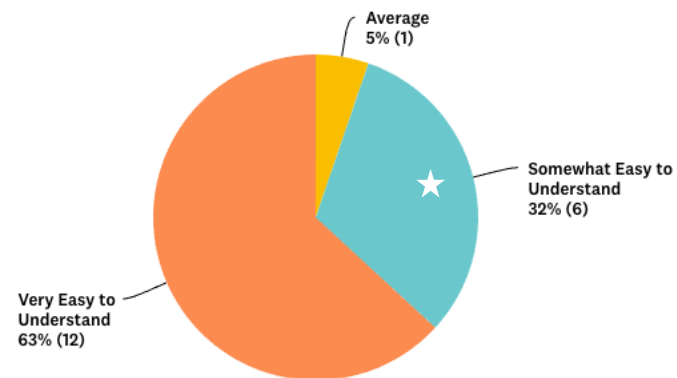
- Participants thought information was easy to understand and valuable
- Participants thought it was easy to find information

“Overall, the tool was highly intuitive and provided the information I was looking for” – P13

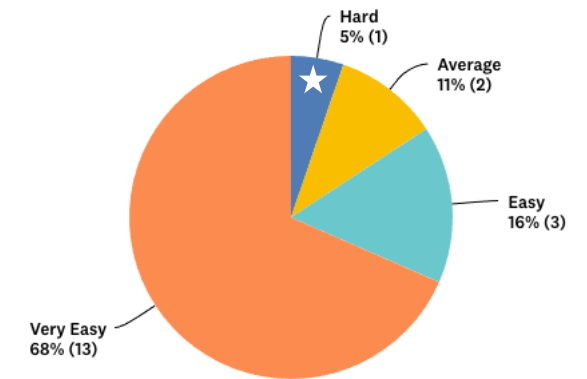
Value of information



Understanding content

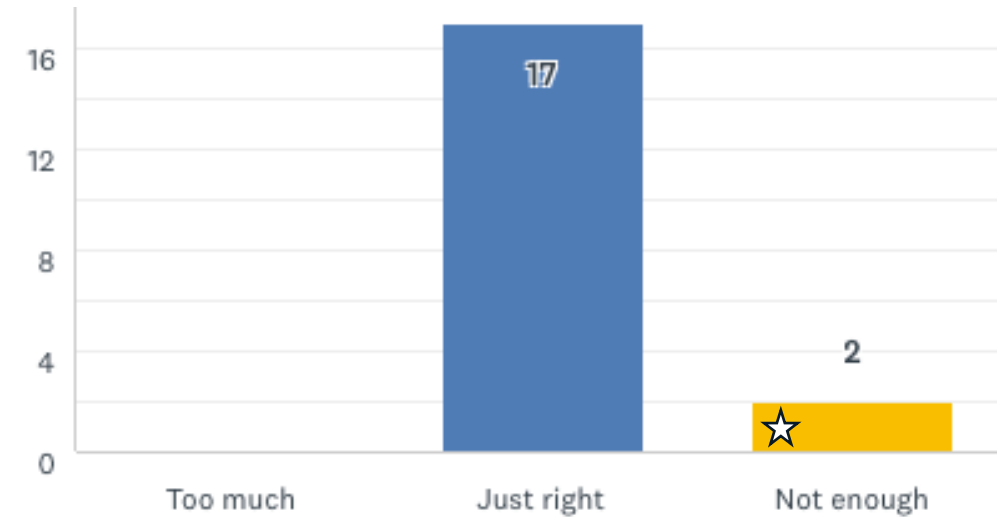


Ability to find information



5. Profile page, cont.

- 89% of participants indicated the amount of information on the profile page was “Just right”
- A few participants requested additional information on the profile page
 - Top majors at a school
 - Graduate programs
 - Graduation rates

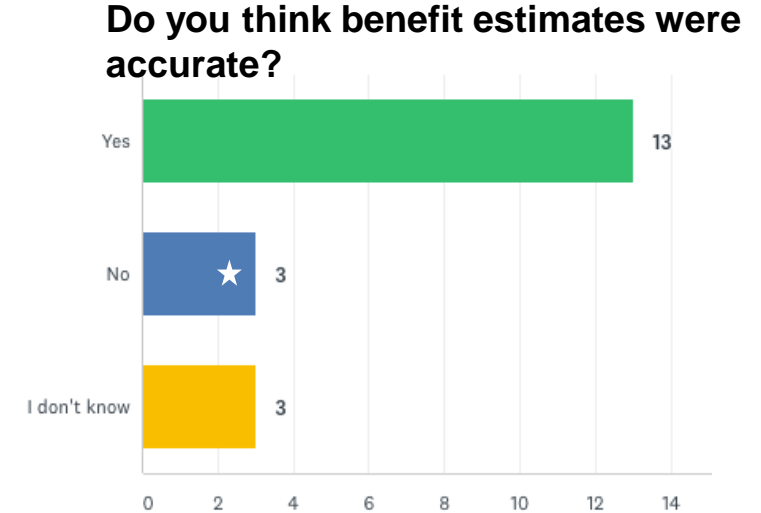


“I am looking specifically for doctoral programs and I really only need that kind of information.” – P11

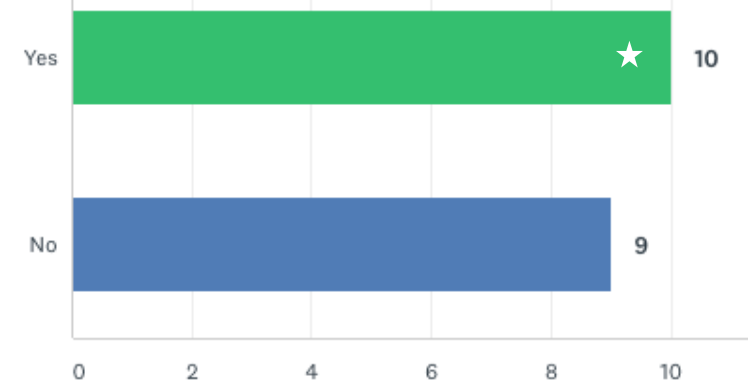
Research Findings

6. Most participants said benefit estimates were accurate; however, not all saw how to update them

- Most individuals thought the benefit estimates were accurate
- Only half of participants reported seeing a way to change fields that influence how benefit numbers are calculated
 - No difference in desktop and mobile



Did you see a way to input your military status or the GI Bill benefit you'd be using?



6. Benefit estimates – Possible issues

- There may be challenges for participants who are unable to find a way to update estimates, or if they’re unsure if the estimates displayed are accurate

Participants who were seeing “incorrect” estimates or weren’t sure if they were accurate, and couldn’t see a way to update them

Benefit	Thought benefits accurate?	See a way to change them?	
VR&E (1)	Yes	No	Issue
VR&E (2)	No	No	Possible issue
CH33 (1)	I don’t know	No	Possible issue

6. Benefit estimates – Follow-up questions

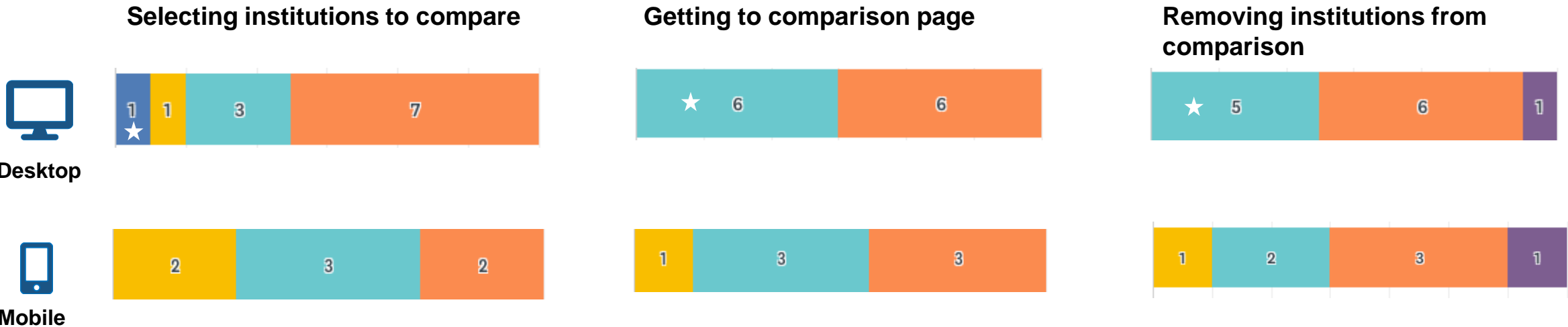
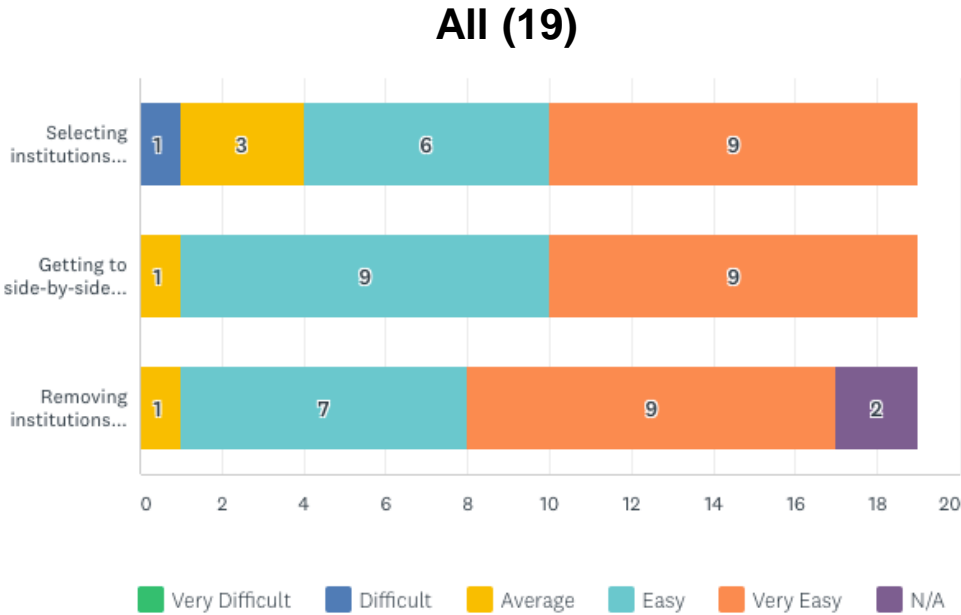
- 10 individuals reported they saw the ability to change military status or GI Bill benefit
 - 5 on the profile page
 - 3 on the search page
 - 2 people saw it on both ☆
- 7 people (of the 10 above) attempted to update these numbers
 - 5 on the search page
 - 1 on the profile page
 - 1 in both places ☆

Comparing in the Comparison Tool

Research Findings

7. All participants were able to compare institutions; the process was easier on desktop than mobile

- Selecting institutions to compare was the most difficult part of the comparison process
- The comparison process was more difficult to execute on mobile than on desktop



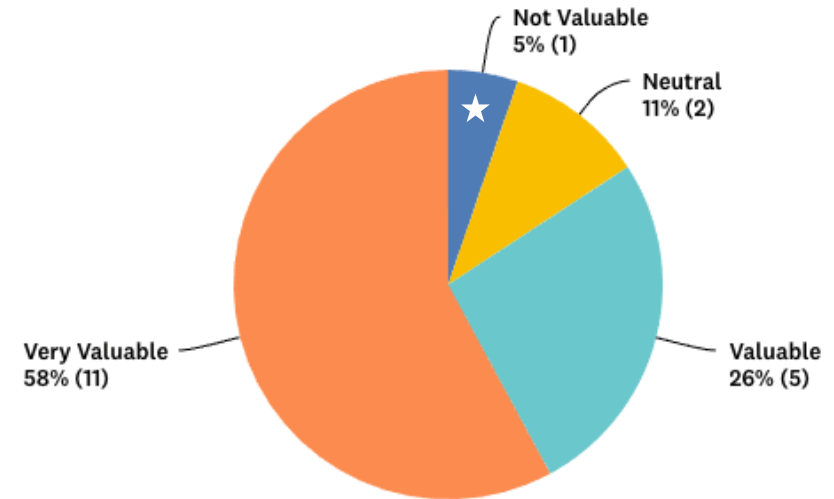
7. Comparison page, cont.

- Participants indicated they thought the information on the comparison page was valuable

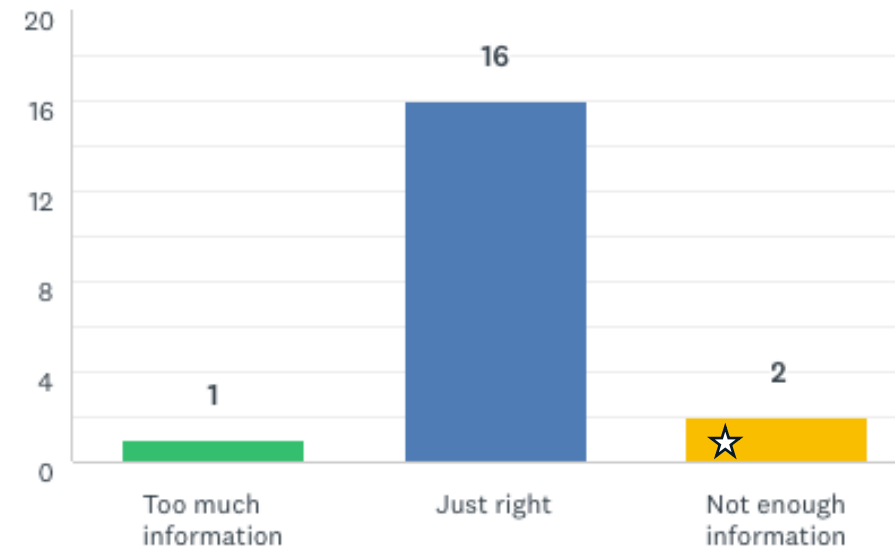
“I liked comparing the rates for tuition to see which school I can get the most benefits from”
– P7

- Participants felt the amount of information shown on the comparison page was "Just right"

What do you think of the information displayed?



What do you think of the amount of information displayed?



Participant likes, dislikes, and referrals

8. Multiple participants mentioned they liked comparing institutions and highlighting differences

Search

- Search by name worked a lot better than I expected. I'd seen this tool before but ignored it
- Searching for schools was very easy
- Map was great
- Option to click specific search info
- Ability to click according to location on the map

Comparison

- Ability to compare schools (3)
- Made it obvious only a max of 3 schools allowed
- Highlight differences (3)

Other

- Provided an easy link to click to explain stuff I thought was weird
- I loved the fact that there were indicator warnings for particular schools

9. Participants were most challenged by the location search results

Search by location

- Search by location should have an option to hide the map once you've chosen a location. It makes the information to the left of the map too cramped to read easily
- On the map, some colleges came up as being in other states, like a PA school in Washington DC

Comparison

- I had issues selecting schools to compare at first. Took me a couple minutes to figure out

Profile information

- I don't like that it's got a lot of information that I really don't need but not anything about the available programs (doctors, computer science)

10. Multiple participants found the tool to be helpful; would recommend it for comparing institutions and anticipated education costs and ROI

- Helpful tool
 - To go ahead and review because it is quite a useful and helpful tool.
 - I would encourage them to use it.
 - Use it. It's a great tool. It's the best tool to find out about MHA nationwide
 - Good resource (2)
 - Definitely use it
- Good for comparing options
 - If they are trying to decide between schools, this would probably help. I didn't know that one of the doctoral schools I was interested in was so expensive.
 - It's very helpful to compare schools to see which one you will benefit more from
 - Valuable tool to compare schools you're interested in
 - I would tell them to seriously check it out because they could find schools that are better for them in terms of cost and return on investment upon completion of their education

Recommendations

Recommendations

- Continue with phased rollout and launch of the Comparison Tool
- Consider ways to increase attention to the “Update tuition and housing estimates” as it was often overlooked by users; recommend conducting synchronous testing focused on this issue to fully understand the challenge users had with the control
- Explore ways to increase visibility of location search results listing and to give users more control of the location results display.
 - Improve location data for branches to mitigate incorrect location display (PA school displaying in DC)
 - Consider reducing the size of the map feature on location search, giving users the ability to hide the map when viewing location results, or switching locations of results listing and map display on page
- Monitor institution comparison to ensure that retains an “Easy” or “Very easy” rating by mobile users, in particular
- Continue to add post-MVP functionality: expand types of searches (by program, by degree, etc.), relevant filtering, and school-specific information (graduation rates, types of programs/majors) updates to provide an even better experience for VA.gov users

Thank you!
