

**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Search and Compare Redesign

**Research Readout**

# Background & Goals

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# Background

Booz Allen utilized prior research with Comparison Tool users and stakeholders to guide the re-design of the Comparison Tool. These updates include a redesigned search, the ability to compare schools, and updated navigation for school profile pages.

Initial designs for search, the comparison functionality, and school profile navigation were created and tested to validate their effectiveness.

## Background & Goals

# Research goals

Determine the effectiveness of the redesigned search, compare page and profile page navigation on desktop and mobile devices

# Hypotheses to be tested

Users can effectively search for schools by location and degree program using the new design.

Users will be successful at using the new navigation options on the school profile pages and can easily find and utilize the comparison functionality.

# Methodology

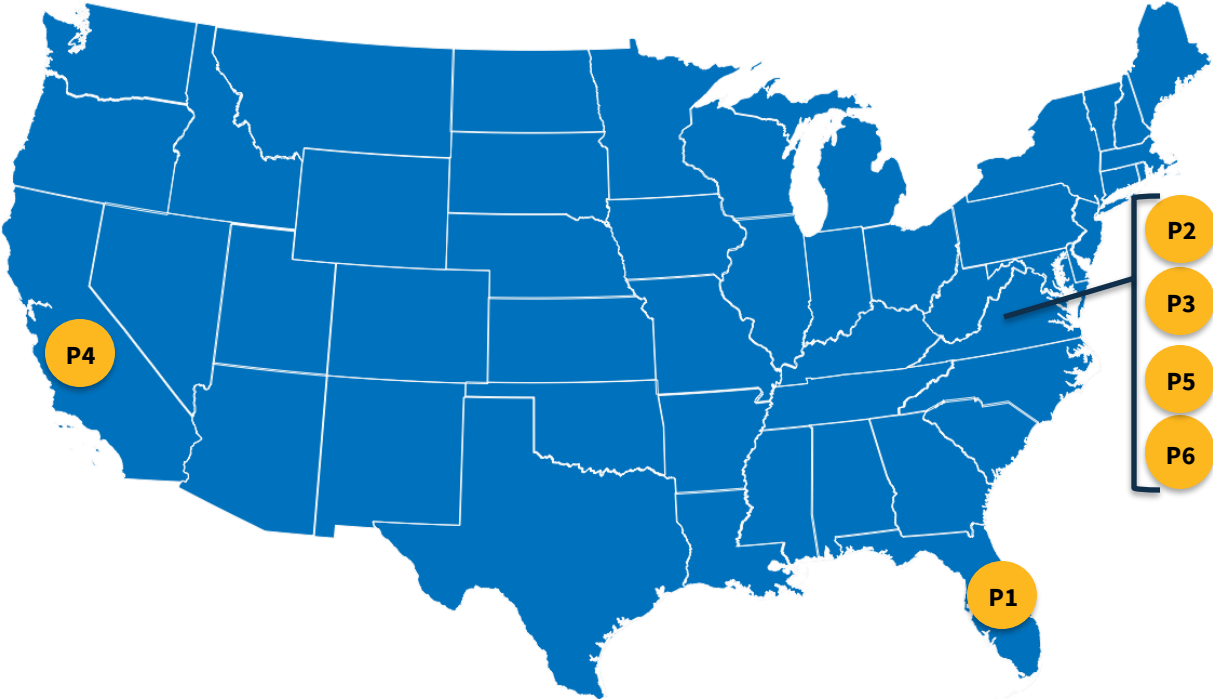
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# Method: Remote Usability Testing

**Reasoning:** Remote moderated usability testing will allow researchers to assess a user's ability to complete basic, but critical functionality on the tool that has been redesigned. We will be able to see what the user looks at, clicks on and how they expect the functionality to work.

It also allows researchers to ask questions about what the user is thinking as they are completing the tasks to gain better insight into their thoughts, actions and expectations.

# Who we spoke with



3 Women  
3 Men

6  
Veterans

2  
Branch

3  
Ethnic  
Backgrounds

25-44  
Age Range



# Research questions

## **Search**

- How do users expect the different searches to work / be executed?
- What challenges do users have (if any) with the new search interface?
- How do users expect search results to be organized/sorted?
- Do users understand how benefits numbers are calculated?

## **Profile Page**

- Do users recognize the jumplinks as navigation tools?

## **Compare**

- How does the proposed select-to-compare functionality work for users?

# Research Findings

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# Key Findings

1. Participants could perform basic searches, but **had challenges with advanced functionality**
2. Participants were **successful at running a location search**
3. Participants **don't see search results load within the viewable screen**
4. Participants **liked seeing the accreditation on the school cards**
5. Participants' success modifying benefit estimates **depended on device type**
6. Participants **found degree/program search challenging**
7. Jumplink usage **depended on device type**
8. Participants were **frustrated by the comparison process**
9. Participants on mobile were able to switch between schools, but **reactions were to data display were mixed**

## Research Findings

# 1. Participants could perform basic searches, but had challenges with advanced functionality

- Participants noticed that they could search by school name or location

*"If I know the name of the school I can put it in...I could put the city name for places where I'm going since I won't know schools in those cities" - P4*

- Several participants commented that they didn't know what "Employers" were

*"Employers? That one...I don't know about that section for school." -P5*

## 2. Participants were successful at running a location search

- Several participants wanted to run a location search by zip code

*“If you search for city, I think you’re talking about the incorporated metropolitan area. Zip code might be a slightly larger land area...a lot of universities fall outside metropolitan area. If I knew the zip code, I’d probably go to the zip code” - P5*

- One participant wondered if you could specify the distance you wanted instead of using preset options

*“I don’t know if you can add in ranges yourself. That might be helpful for people who want to go farther out. I’d actually want to be like 5 miles out” – P4*

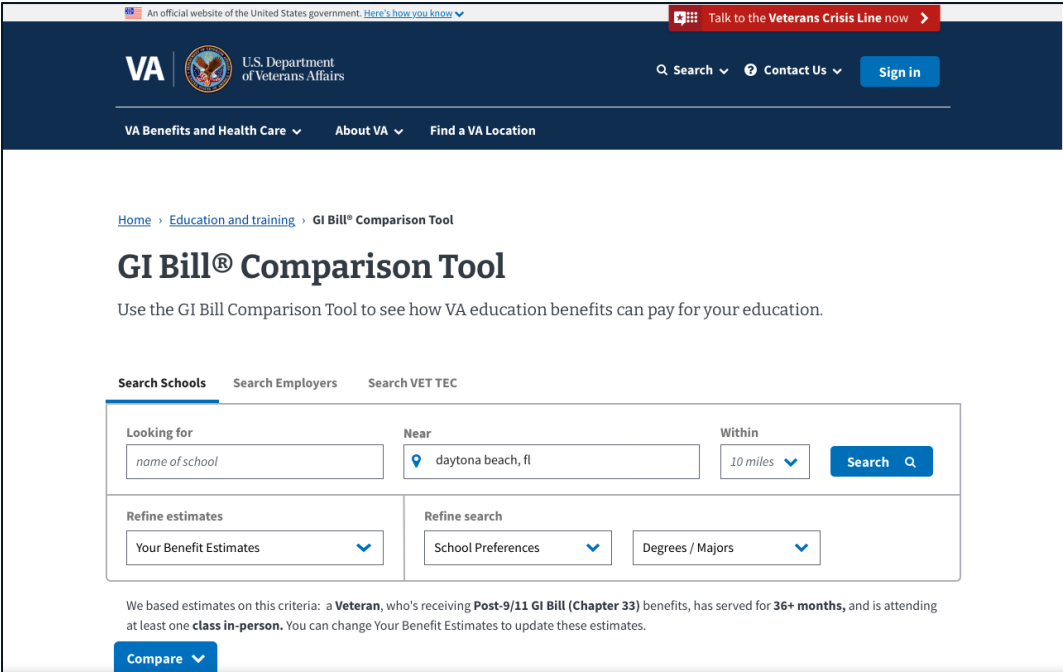
- Participants expected search results to be sorted by proximity to the location

*“I think I would have liked to see...there’s not really the mileage. Maybe this one is 7 miles and this one is 5 miles [away from the location]” - P3*

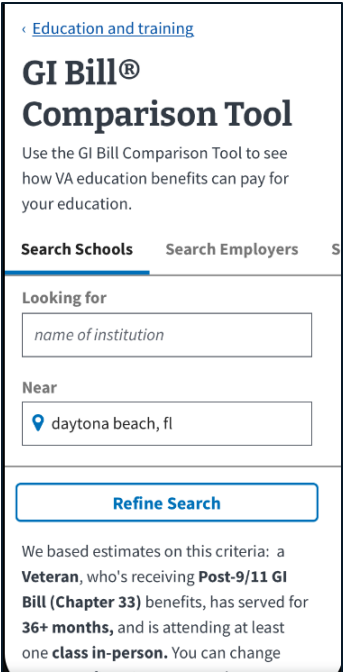
# 3. Participants don't see search results load within the viewable screen

- After executing a search, participants could not see results until they scrolled down the page

Desktop



Mobile



## 4. Participants liked seeing the accreditation on the school cards

- Most participants said they were glad to see the accreditation

*"I like to see that they are different kinds of schools and I can see that they are accredited – that's good to know." – P4*

- Some participants wanted more information on types of accreditation

*"I like that they are broken down by accreditation... [maybe showing how] the VA views the accreditation and the figure of merit for that. Maybe a definition of the accreditation on the side " - P2"*

**EMBRY-RIDDLE  
AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY-  
DAYTONA BEACH**  
Daytona Beach, FL  
Regionally accredited  
**GI Bill students:** 13,998  
**Rated by:** 102 Veterans  
★★★★☆ (4.4 of 5)  
**You may be eligible for up to:**  
Tuition Benefit: \$25,162 / year    Housing Benefit: \$1,698 / month  
☐ Compare    [View details >](#)

**DAYTONA COLLEGE**  
Ormond Beach, FL  
Nationally accredited  
**GI Bill students:** 13,998  
**Rated by:** 102 Veterans  
★★★★☆ (4.4 of 5)  
**You may be eligible for up to:**  
Tuition Benefit: \$25,162 / year    Housing Benefit: \$1,698 / month  
☐ Compare    [View details >](#)

**INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY**  
South Daytona, FL  
Hybrid accreditation  
**GI Bill students:** 13,998  
**Rated by:** 102 Veterans  
★★★★☆ (4.4 of 5)  
**You may be eligible for up to:**  
Tuition Benefit: \$25,162 / year    Housing Benefit: \$1,698 / month  
☐ Compare    [View details >](#)

## 5. Participants' success modifying benefit estimates depended on device type

- Most desktop participants found the controls relatively quickly

*“It’s telling you it’s the 100% benefit since its 36 months. [Opened Benefit Estimates] I think I can adjust the percentage to less if I didn’t serve the whole time” - P4*

- Mobile participants acknowledged estimates were for full benefits, but did not attempt to adjust them

*“The language says you may be eligible for up to. I might like it if there was a disclaimer or an asterisk...in case someone didn’t do 3 years. I see that it says “up to” and I see what the tuition is.” – P5*



## 6. Participants found degree/program search challenging

- On initial look, no participant (desktop or mobile) stated that they believed you could search by degree/major
- Most desktop participants were successful, but one participant stated she didn't think you could search just by degree/major

*"I think it's because it says 'Refine search' that I'm imagining it as a filter. You put in the main information – the location or school – and narrow it down from there. To go by refining it doesn't seem intuitive to me" - P3*

- Mobile participants struggled to find the degree/program search, primarily focusing on options that were visible to them

*"I was going to see if I could scroll over with the tabs. Maybe in this "Looking for" box...maybe if the search engine is strong enough that I can look up the majors...That's how I would initially look at it. It's not intuitive to me." - P6*

## 7. Jumplink usage depended on device type

- On desktop, participants generally understood what jumplinks did - though not always at first exposure.
  - Only one participant used the jumplinks
  - Two other participants recognized what the jumplinks did
  - Two participants said it was be nice to have a link to jump to the top of the profile page

*“The hyperlinks are important to help me jump to things...maybe give them a click box to help people intuitively understand what's going to happen” - P2*

- Mobile participants did not acknowledge jumplinks and manually scrolled down the full profile page

## 8a. Participants were frustrated by the comparison process

- On desktop, the comparison tray opened when a single school was added, covering the remaining results and making it difficult to select more schools to compare

*“I kind of want to see the search results, but I can’t get this to go away (comparison tray)” –P2*

- 2/4 desktop participants initially wanted to click “View details” on school cards within the Compare tray to see a comparison view

*“I guess hit the Compare button on both of them and see what it shows. Then would click View details...I would see what the school offers other than the other school.” - P1*

Compare ^

You've selected these schools to compare: Clear All Compare schools

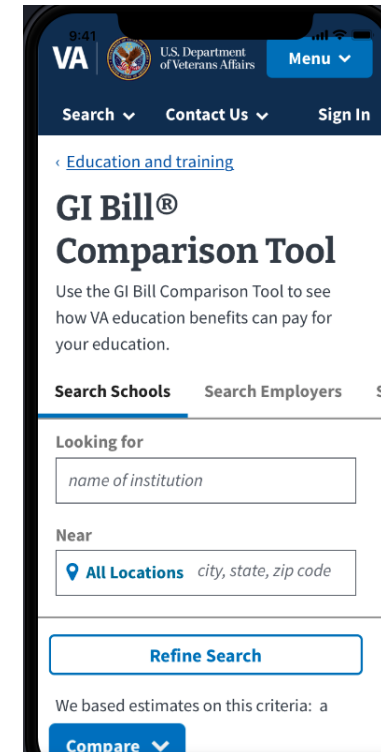
<b>UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS-AMHERST</b> Amherst, MA	<b>INDIANA UNIVERSITY-BLOOMINGTON</b> Bloomington, IN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Compare <a href="#">View details &gt;</a>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Compare <a href="#">View details &gt;</a>

## 8b. Participants were frustrated by the comparison process

- On mobile, participants said the process to add and compare schools was not intuitive

*“It wasn’t immediately intuitive that I had to click both [schools], maybe after I clicked the first one a box popped up and it said ‘Compare to what?’. It took me a minute to understand it.” –P5*

*“What does the ‘Compare’ do if I click on Compare?” –P6*



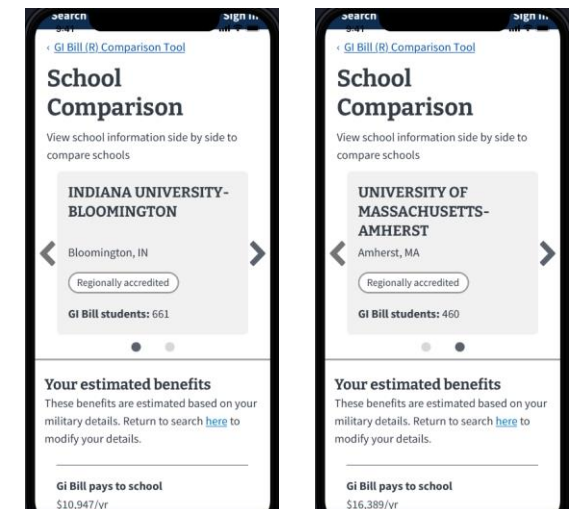
## 9. Participants on mobile were able to switch between schools, but reactions were to data display were mixed

- One participant felt the comparison page was helpful

*"I think it's great that you can view it side by side. If you could scroll through the page and if I could go down the page and then flip over that would be helpful instead of going to the top of the page" - P5*

- One participant didn't feel like he could effectively tell the differences between schools on mobile

*"Unless I'm taking notes or making screen grabs, it's not that helpful in the current state in helping me determine which school is better to go to than the other" - P6*



# Additional Insights

- When asked, most participants wanted to compare 3-5 schools
- Most participants stated that their benefit estimates would be important information to see
- Participants liked seeing the number of GI Bill students

# Recommendations

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# Recommendations

## Search:

- Make it clearer to users what “Employers” represents and why it would be important to them
- Identify ways to show that a search has been run successfully
  - Consider ways to have results appear on the screen when search is initiated
  - Review potential options for showing what criteria a user is searching on
- For a location search, consider allowing users to input a desired range
- For a location search, sort school cards by distance from the place the user inputted
  - Explore options for conveying how far results are from the location
- Rework presentation of degree/program search to indicate that it is a search option and not just a refinement of a previous search



# Recommendations

## **Search (continued):**

- Find ways to improve the process of updating benefit estimates on mobile
- Continue to display accreditation information on school cards
  - Consider adding helper text on accreditation types

## **Profile pages:**

- Build and test sticky header and navigation on staging environment to better understand the functionality and its usefulness
- Consider adding a “Return to top” link

# Recommendations

## Comparing Schools:

- Research and refine the process of adding schools to make it more organic and intuitive
  - Desktop – Ensure the comparison tray doesn't impede users from engaging with search results
  - Mobile – Consider ways to indicate to users the purpose of the Compare tray/button (e.g. renaming label, adding animation when school is selected)
- Make the call-to-action for school comparison more obvious and intuitive
  - Desktop - Within the comparison tray, remove items that would detract the user from successfully accessing the comparison view
- Look for opportunities to show differences between schools in comparison view – particularly for mobile

# Next Steps

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# Next Steps

1. Design updates to UI elements which didn't perform well
2. Begin development of UI element which did perform well
3. Re-test in staging environment

# Questions?

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