

Research Readout

Comparison Tool: School Ratings



VA.gov

July 9, 2020



What We Wanted to Learn
What We Did
What We Learned
Appendix

What We Wanted to Learn

The Problem | The Product | Why This Testing

The Problem

When Veterans are searching for schools in the Comparison Tool, they're interested in the experiences of other Veterans to better understand if the school would be a good fit for them.

They may not have connections to other Veterans who've attended the institutions they're interested in and may be skeptical of the reliability of online ratings and reviews.

Incorporating a Rating System into the Comparison Tool would provide information to prospective Veteran students that doesn't exist anywhere else - a rating from other Veterans of their experiences, including utilizing GI Bill Benefits to attend institutions of higher learning.

Why This Testing?

We want to determine

1. The value that Veterans place on ratings
2. What aspects of ratings (e.g. number of reviews) are important to Veterans
3. Which rating categories Veterans are most interested in

Background

For reference, we will be differentiating between user ratings and reviews:

Ratings

Quantitative feedback

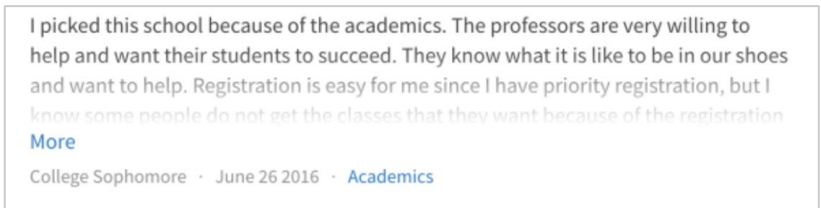
Ex.



Reviews

Narrative, qualitative input

Ex.



What We Did

Competitor Review | Discovery Interviews

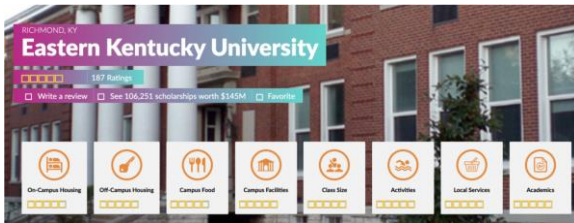
Competitor Review

Competitor Review

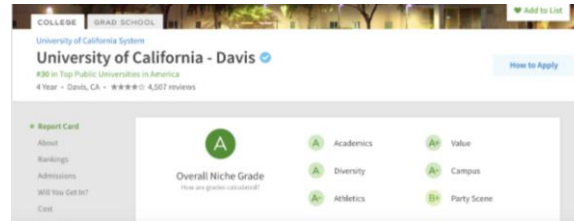
The UX team assessed several existing college comparison sites

Sites using a combination of data and subjective ratings/reviews

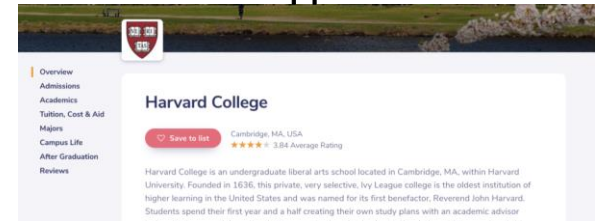
Unigo



Niche

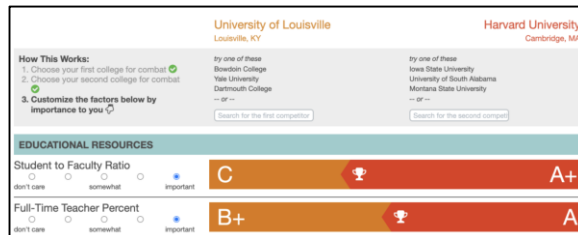


Cappex

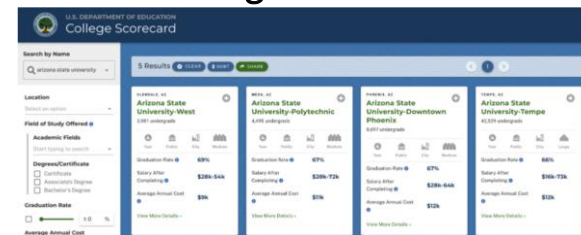


Sites which are exclusively data-driven

College Combat



College Scorecard



Competitor Review

Most Popular Categories on Reviewed Sites (3+ sites)

Category	Ratings / Data
Academics	Rating
Extracurricular Activities	Rating
Housing	Rating
Food	Rating
Value for Your Money / ROI	Data / Rating

Other Categories				
Campus	Professors	Safety	Graduation Rates	Post-Graduation Earnings

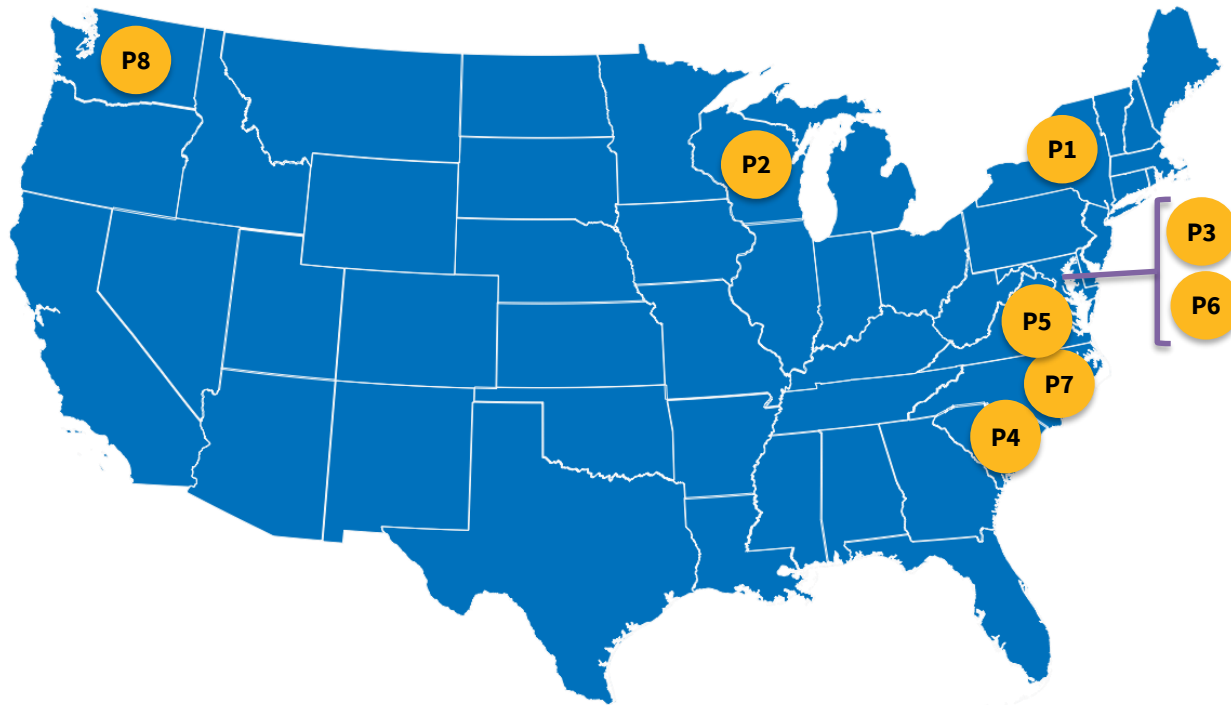
Competitor Review

Characteristics of Ratings

Rating Aspect	Unigo	Cappex	Niche
Visual	★	★	★
Shows no. of ratings	✓	--	✓
Narrative	✓	✓	✓
Rater identification	Partial Name	Partial Name	Student Level
Ability to filter reviews	--	✓	✓
Date of review	--	--	✓
Requires login to review	✓	✓	--
Displays quantitative data	✓	✓	✓

Discovery Interviews

Participants



5 Women

3 Men

8

Veterans

3

Branches

2

Ethnic
Backgrounds

25-54

Age Range

The following research methods were used:



Remote Directed Interviews with Veterans who:

- Are GI Bill beneficiaries
- Used education benefits in the past 6 months or will be using them in the next 3 months

What We Learned

Primary Finding

Participants were interested in seeing ratings by Veterans in the Comparison Tool to help them gauge a school's suitability in their education journey

“Knowing that other Veterans had that [school] experience and there was a great chance that they received a job... It would affect my decision a lot.”

- P4

Finding 1

All participants stated that ratings affect their decision-making process

Fire TV Stick streaming media player with Alexa built in, includes Alexa Voice Remote, HD, easy set-up, released 2019 by Amazon

★★★★★ 190,861 ratings | 1000+ answered questions

#1 Best Seller in Electronics

- Most participants desire products / services that have 4- to 5-star ratings
- Participants pay attention to the number of ratings -- the more, the better
- Participants generally expect written reviews to accompany ratings
- 2 participants mentioned they prefer video reviews as they are more in-depth

CR Consumer Reports		Innerspring Mattresses RATINGS						
95 Rated Models (as of May 2020)		WORSE ————— BETTER						
Overall Score	Brand & Model	Petite side sleeper	Average side sleeper	Large/Full side sleeper	Petite back sleeper	Average back sleeper	Large/Full back sleeper	Firmness rating
85	Avocado Green TM ● Recommended	●	●	●	●	●	●	7
84	Casper The Casper Hybrid ● Recommended	●	●	●	●	●	●	3
83	Eden Allen EA Signature Platinum Plush ● Recommended	●	●	●	●	●	●	5
80	Besofrest BR-800 12" Medium Firm ● Best Buy	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
80	Charles P. Rogers Powercore Estate 50002 ● Recommended	●	●	●	●	●	●	6
79	Avocado Green Mattress Pillowtop TM ● Recommended	●	●	●	●	●	●	5
78	Savvy Posturepedic Performance Copper II [®] ● Recommended	●	●	●	●	●	●	4

"[When considering a purchase], I always look up reviews first – generally I want to get something other people have gotten and reviewed."

- P7

"I don't like the stars– I like the commentary. It's so subjective and you don't get a feeling why it was rated like that."

- P6

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Provide users with a star-based ratings system
- Start with star / numeric rating and evaluate to see if it sufficiently meets users' needs

Future enhancements

- Ability to filter search results by ratings
- Narrative reviews and / or video reviews

Finding 2

Most participants believe ratings on the Comparison Tool would be trustworthy



Would trust ratings on Comparison Tool



Take feedback with a "grain of salt"

Participants generally expected ratings to be verified / vetted.

"On the VA website, I would trust that it's coming from someone who had access to this. They would have been vetted as a Veteran."

- P1

"Knowing myself, I would want to know where the ratings came from...Just a link underneath or even a blurb that says where the information came from."

- P2

Recommendation

Recommendation

- Include copy within Comparison Tool explaining source of data and mechanism of ratings collection to build user trust

Finding 3

Participants were evenly split on whether ratings should be given by Veterans only or by any GI Bill beneficiary

- Half of participants said ratings should be provided by Veterans only
- Half of participants mentioned ratings should be given by Veterans and other beneficiaries

Participants stated that they would like to be able to distinguish Veteran ratings from non-Veteran ratings.

“[Ratings] have an importance, especially if they’re coming from Veterans... Outside people that are not Veterans, yes, their opinion plays into it, but those of us that are Veterans rely on each other. That goes back to our training.”

- P8

Recommendation

Recommendation

- For MVP, only Veterans should be allowed to provide ratings

Future enhancements

- Consider allowing all education beneficiaries who can be vetted to rate schools
- Allow users to filter ratings to be Veteran-only

Finding 4

The majority of participants were interested in ratings from individuals who'd taken classes or graduated



Wanted ratings from those that finished their degree



Wanted ratings from those that attended classes, but did not complete their degree

Participants mentioned seeing ratings would provide them with a fuller view of the institution.

Thoughts on someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree:

"I would want to know what happened for them not to complete the degree. Was it [the] classes or the whole school?"

- P4

Thoughts on someone who finished their degree:

"That's someone to really talk to. When they start something, they finish it. Their opinion is quite valid."

- P8

Recommendation

Recommendations

- Ratings should come from Veterans with a recent association with the school
- Explore mechanisms for collecting ratings
 - Solicit ratings on CT profile pages
 - VA could prompt individuals who've attended classes or recently graduated asking them to complete a rating for their school
 - Additional changes in education status, such as submission of a 22-1995 (Request for Change of Program or Place of Training), could trigger prompts for feedback

Finding 5

Participants were split on whether an individual who had only applied to a school should be allowed to submit a rating



Applied and accepted can provide ratings



Applied and rejected can provide ratings

Participants said these individuals would have limited experience with the school or might leave negative ratings and reviews.

Thoughts on someone who applied and was accepted:

"I don't think they could speak to the whole experience. Just the application process. So maybe a limited area where they could give feedback"

- P5

Thoughts on someone who applied and was rejected:

"No, because you'd automatically put a negative review on it."

- P3

Recommendation

Recommendation

- For MVP, individuals who've applied to a school but not attended classes shouldn't be allowed to submit a rating
 - Participants expressed minor interest in a school application process rating from these individuals
 - It may be challenging for the VA to identify people that have applied to a school, but have not attended classes or were rejected

Finding 6

Participants identified several locations where they would expect ratings to appear

4 / 8

General overall rating on school cards on Search Results Page

5 / 8

General overall rating near institution name on school profile pages

6 / 8

Detailed ratings near Student Feedback section

The image displays three overlapping screenshots of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) website, illustrating where participants expect ratings to appear. The top screenshot shows a search result for 'UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY' with a yellow arrow pointing to the school name. The middle screenshot shows the school profile page for the University of California-Berkeley, with a yellow arrow pointing to the school name and another pointing to the 'Student feedback' section. The bottom screenshot shows the 'Student feedback' section with a yellow arrow pointing to the '0 student complaints in the last 24 months' text.

Search Results Page: The top screenshot shows the VA website's search results for 'UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY'. A yellow arrow points to the school name in the search results.

School Profile Page: The middle screenshot shows the school profile page for the University of California-Berkeley. A yellow arrow points to the school name, and another points to the 'Student feedback' section.

Student Feedback Section: The bottom screenshot shows the 'Student feedback' section, which displays '0 student complaints in the last 24 months'.

"[Put the ratings] at the beginning... You can scroll down and read, but it's right there when you first open [the page]. It would be an important piece of information." - P8

"I think right around here in Cautionary Information – let people see the good things and not just the negative." - P5

Recommendation

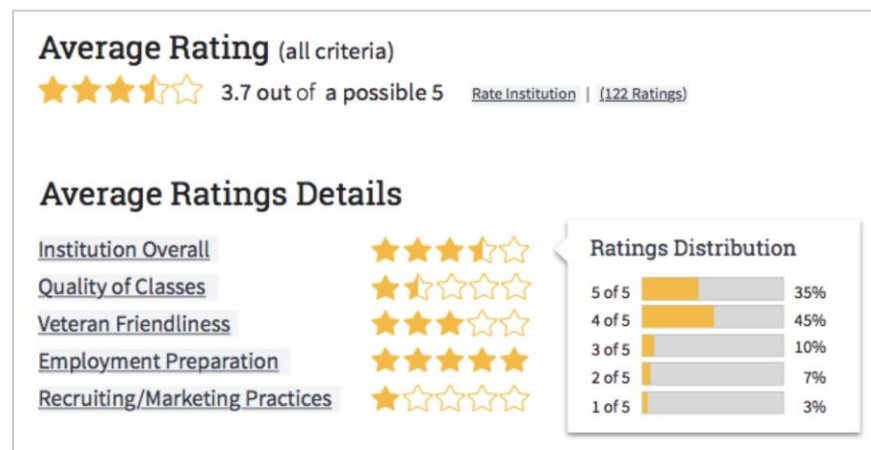
Recommendations

- Place a general rating on the school cards on the search results page
- Place a general rating at the top of the school profile page near institution name
- Incorporate detailed ratings near Cautionary Information accordion - specifically near the Student Feedback section
- If incorporating ratings into Cautionary Information accordion, rename accordion to better capture its content

Finding 7

Participants were most interested in getting feedback from other Veterans in the following areas

-  Quality of Classes
-  Veteran Friendliness
-  Employment Preparation
-  Institution Overall



The majority found "Recruiting / Marketing Practices" to be least helpful.

Participants gravitated towards areas that reflected their own situation:

- Online vs. in-person education
- Veteran's employment status

"I go straight to Employment Preparation. I've been out of work for about a year and the whole point is to go back to work."

- P1

"'Veteran Friendliness' is a big deal, but when it comes to an online school, I feel like [schools are] on even ground."

- P7

"'Veteran Friendliness' would be if the school has their own Veteran counselors and their own Veteran area. You can get some one-on-one attention and that would be a huge benefit in deciding."

- P1

Recommendation

Recommendation

- Continue refining categories so that they line up with Veteran expectations

Finding 8

Participants had ideas for additional ratings that directly relate to the Veteran experience



How helpful or adept is the school at navigating the process of getting GI Bill benefits approved



Experience with school's Veteran Center and counselors



Presence of a Veteran community

"Navigating the GI bill is a pain in the butt and how the school is going to help me [matters]."

- P2

"For my on-campus schools, I would love to see more schools having military fraternities, sororities, to have that camaraderie, especially when it comes down to that suicide thing with vets. We need each other now more than ever."

- P3

Recommendation

Recommendation

- Expand on the "Veteran Friendliness" category to more effectively and comprehensively address the Veteran experience

Next Steps

Next Steps

1. Determine path forward for soliciting ratings
2. Prioritize findings & evaluate LOE
3. Develop visual concepts
4. Review visual concepts with Education Services



DIGITAL SERVICE at VA

Thank you