Comparison Tool Ratings

Research Readout

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Background & Goals

Background

When Veterans are looking for schools within the Comparison tool, they want to know about the experiences of other Veterans to form a better understanding of what their personal experience at the school would be like.

Ratings enable Veterans to quickly assess the suitability of a school (both pro and con), bolstering their confidence and level of comfort in deciding if a particular school is right for them.

Research goals

- Determine if the ratings design effectively enables Veterans to assess the suitability of schools

- Obtain feedback on:
  - Visual depiction of ratings
  - Relevance of categories
  - Trustworthiness of ratings
  - Privacy expectations

Hypotheses to be tested

- We believe that Veterans will understand the rating categories and find the ratings useful, especially in determining the Veteran experience at a particular school.

Methodology

Method: Remote Usability Testing

Reasoning: The research team conducted remote usability testing using prototypes to observe how users react and interact with school ratings. We need to be able to ask about their impressions and expectations of those ratings to determine if the current design is meeting their needs. We also need to identify any points of confusion and whether this feature will be valuable to Veterans.

Who we spoke with
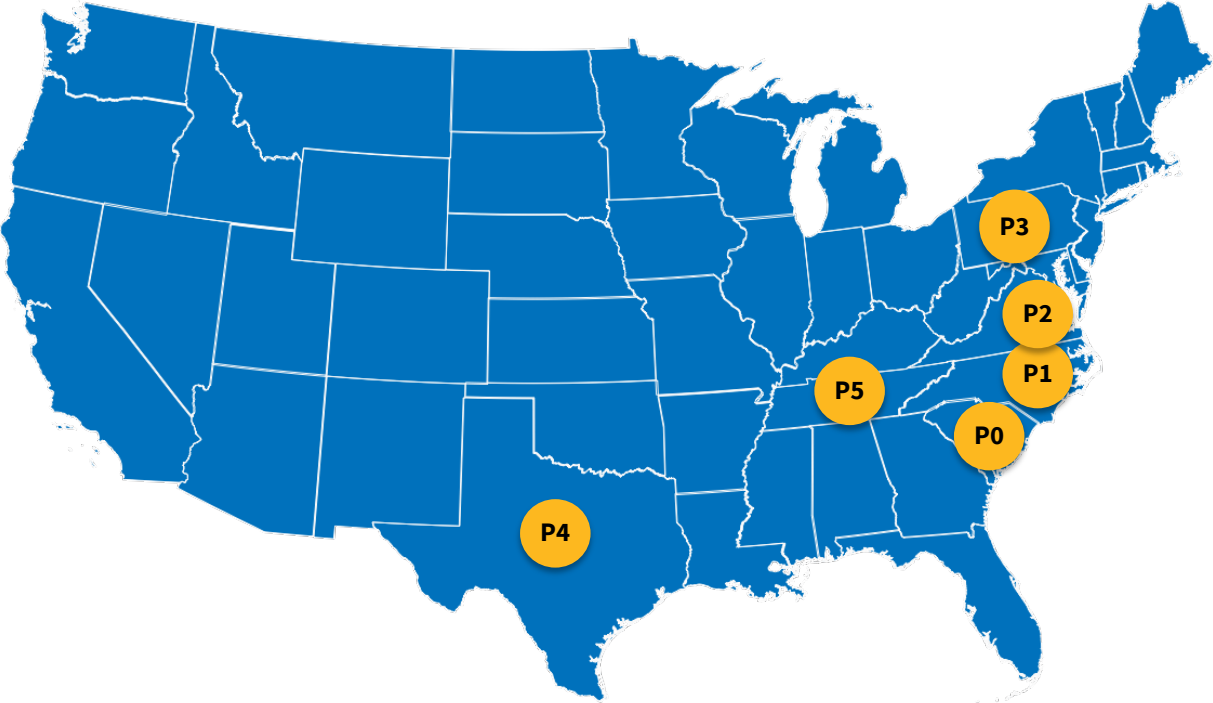
3 Women
3 Men

5
Veterans

3
Branch

2
Ethnic
Backgrounds

25-44
Age Range

Research questions

- What do users think of the star ratings?
- How does the number of ratings weigh into a user's perception of a particular school?
- Which categories are valuable to users? Are there any categories that aren't valuable? Are there any additional categories they would like to see?
- Would ratings affect the school selection process?
- How trustworthy are the ratings?
- What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating?

Research Findings

Key Findings

1. **Participants responded favorably towards ratings** and commented on various aspects of those ratings
2. Ratings **influence participants when they are making a school selection**
3. Participants **read the most important information first in the new school card layout**
4. Participants **found the categories to be valuable and aligned with their priorities**
5. Within the ratings categories, participants **had different interpretations for the N/A (Not applicable) indicator**
6. Participants **place high value on input from Veterans and some were open to other individuals submitting ratings**
7. Participants expected to see ratings as they were submitted, but **had privacy concerns for Veterans who may provide negative ratings**
8. Participants continue to **show interest in having narrative reviews alongside ratings**

1. Participants responded favorably towards ratings and commented on various aspects of those ratings

- The rating itself and the number of ratings were considered when assessing a school

- Participants noticed when a school had:
  - Lots of GI Bill students, but no ratings
  - A caution flag, but good ratings
  - Only a few ratings from Veterans

    "Oh, hey that's a pretty high rating for 155 Veterans." - P1

    "That many Veterans [attending] and nobody rated the school?" - P4

- One participant voiced concern about school involvement in the ratings process

2. Ratings influence participants when they are making a school selection

- Several participants noted ratings would affect their school selection

  "USA ratings says it's a top 5 program, but Veterans say professors are staunch in their stance, maybe I would look somewhere different...it would be an overlapping system, if you will" - P1

- Participants viewed highly rated schools more favorably than "not yet rated" or low-rated schools

  "If it's 5.0, anything over 90 [ratings], will definitely get my attention." - P1

  [Wouldn't pick schools with 1-2 star ratings:] "That would be a no-go." - P3

- If a school didn't have ratings, some participants wondered if the school or its programs were new

  "[Not yet rated] leads me to believe that it might be a new school that just started servicing Veterans."" - P4

3. Participants read the most important information first in the new school card layout

- Priority of information: Benefits -> GI Bill students -> Ratings

  "I think it's a complete snapshot....I'd say the stuff on the left is absolutely crucial and the stuff on the right is just a very nice to have." - P3

- Participants noticed the Scorecard data filter tags (e.g. Gender, Religious Affiliation, HBCUs)

- Participants accessed school profile using "View details" link on cards

University Of California-Hastings College Of The Law

San Francisco, CA

Estimated benefits:

Tuition:	100% in-state	**GI Bill students:** 36	
Housing:	$4,614 / month	**Rated by:** 5 Veterans	
Books:	$1,000 / year	★★★☆☆ (3.2 of 5)	

View details ›

Women only

4. Participants found the categories to be valuable and aligned with their priorities

- All the categories, except "Marketing Practices", were listed as valuable by at least one Veteran

    "I think that things like GI Bill support – that's very good to have and rate that" - P2

- Veterans' personal situation influenced which categories they preferred

    "I have a job so 'Job Preparation' isn't important to me. I'm just going to school to broaden my horizons" – P4

Education ratings

Overall experience	★★★★⯪ 4.7	+
Quality of classes	★★★★★ 5.0	+
Online instruction	★★★★⯪ 4.5	+
Job preparation	★★★★★ 5.0	+

Veteran friendliness

GI Bill support	★★★★★ 5.0	+
Veteran community	★★★★★ 5.0	+
Marketing practices	★★★★⯪ 4.5	+

5. Within the ratings categories, participants had different interpretations for the N/A (Not applicable) indicator

- Participants understood N/A for "Online Instruction", but had varying interpretations for other categories

    "For this one [Online instruction], I would expect it because they may not have taken online classes" - P3

- Participants said N/A might mean that the category didn't apply to the rater or the rater had skipped the question
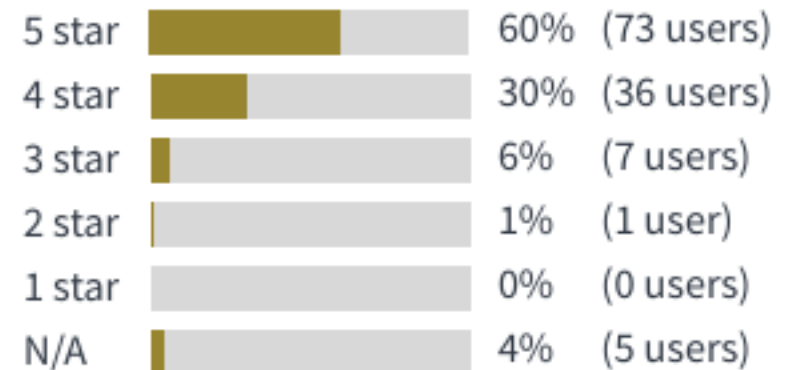
    [Prompted to what they think it means]

    "That uhh…they didn't answer the question or skipped over it. Didn't have an opinion" - P1

- One participant thought N/A might skew rating (make it lower)

Online instruction ★★★★⯨ 4.5 —

Distribution of ratings

5 star	60%	(73 users)
4 star	30%	(36 users)
3 star	6%	(7 users)
2 star	1%	(1 user)
1 star	0%	(0 users)
N/A	4%	(5 users)

Online classes are comparable quality to in-person instruction. Technology for virtual classes is easy to use. The school offers helpful tech support for online students.

6. Participants place high value on input from Veterans and some were open to other individuals submitting ratings

- Participants wanted to know the experiences of other Veterans

  "As a Vet, I value the opinion of other Vets when it comes to establishments." - P3

- Two participants voiced support for hearing from others (GI Bill beneficiaries)

  "I would err on the side of giving them [non-Veteran beneficiaries] a voice and I don't think it [their experience] would be substantially different" - P2

7. Participants expected to see ratings as they were submitted, but had privacy concerns for Veterans who may provide negative ratings

- Most participants did not want their names associated with a bad rating for a school

  "I would hope with this, your name is not attached to the survey. I hope you would be able to just rate with stars, no name" - P4

- 1 participant mentioned that schools with smaller Veteran populations might be able to figure out who submitted the rating

8. Participants continue to show interest in having narrative reviews alongside ratings

- 4 participants were interested in seeing written reviews

    "It shows how many people rated each one, but it would be nice if it also let you leave a review" - P5

Recommendations

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- Investigate a new name for "Marketing Practices" that reflects the intent, but provides perceived value to Veterans

- Find an improved approach to "N/A" ratings that isn't confusing to users

- Continue with the plan to allow Veterans to rate at the beginning and investigate the benefits and implications of non-Veteran beneficiaries rating schools

- Explore options that will enable users to see ratings, but will preserve the privacy of raters

- Bolster the "About ratings" language to instill more trust by better conveying the independent approach to collecting and displaying ratings

- Implement the new school card layout with education benefits displayed on the left side and students on the right

Next Steps

Next Steps

1. Make priority UI updates

2. Develop Ratings UI in staging environment

3. Create test data for staging environment

4. Re-test updates in staging environment

5. Continue to work closely with Education Service on ratings collection

Thanks for your attention