

VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Comparison Tool Redesign Search

Research Readout

Background & Goals

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Background

Booz Allen has been working on a re-design of the GI Bill Comparison Tool. Initial designs for the tool were created and tested in a prior iteration.

Due to several struggles that users encountered during testing, the team completely re-designed the search and conducted usability testing to assess the new design.

Background & Goals

Research goals

Determine the effectiveness of the redesigned search pages (particularly the location search) on desktop devices

Hypotheses to be tested

Since many of the original designs were simplified, researchers believe that users will be able to effectively search for schools using both name and location

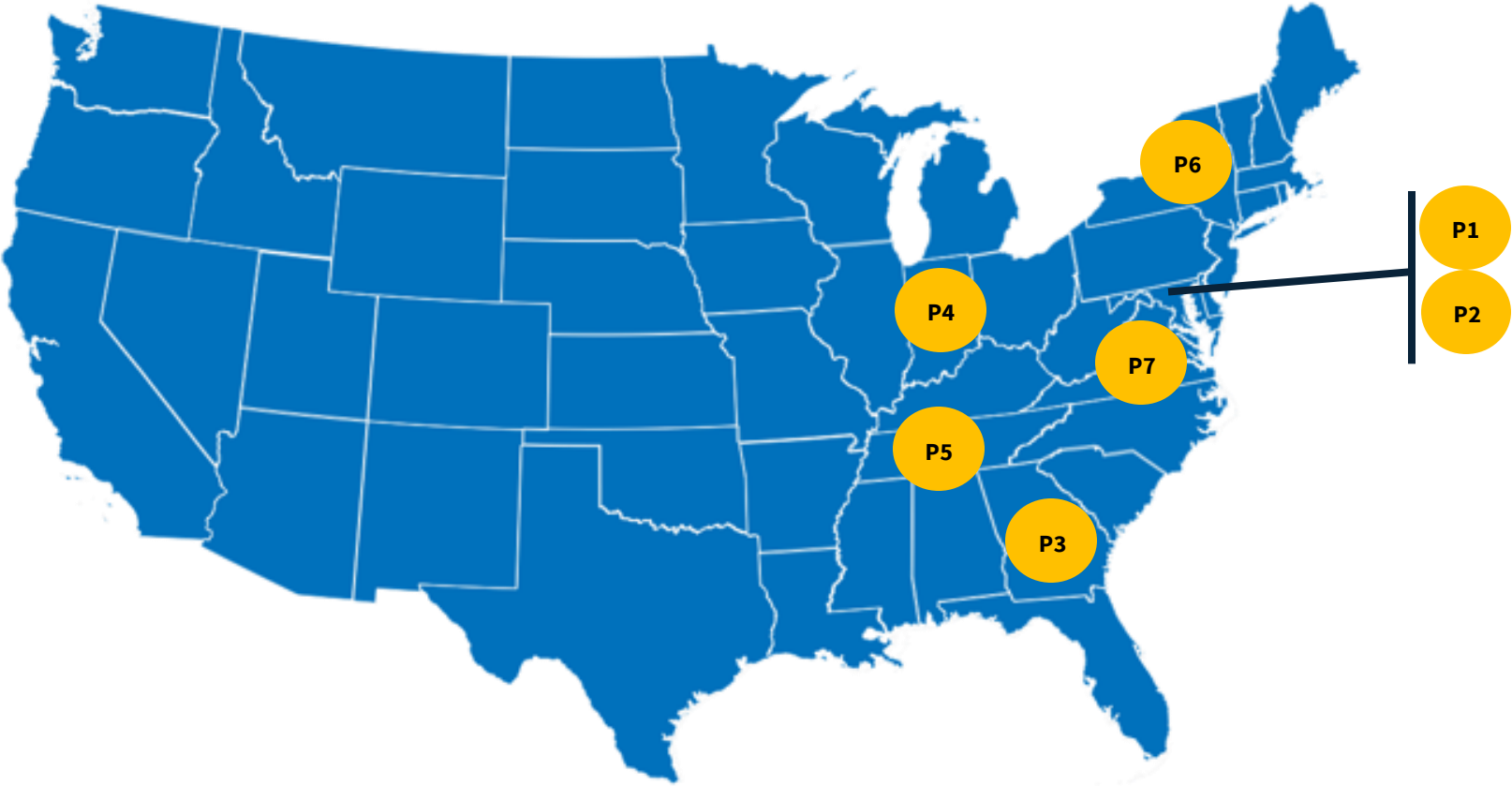
Methodology

Method: Remote Usability Testing

Reasoning: Remote moderated usability testing allowed researchers to assess how users interact with the tool and how well they were able to utilize the functionality.

It also allowed researchers to ask questions about what the user is thinking as they complete the tasks to gain better insight into thought, actions and expectations.

Who we spoke with



5 Women
2 Men

5
Veterans

2
Branches

4
Ethnic
Backgrounds

18-74
Age Range

Research questions

General:

- Can users effectively interact with the search interface?
- What challenges do user have with the new interface (if any)?

Location search:

- Are users able to effectively utilize the location search?
- How do users engage with the map and list view?
- Can users effectively use the radius option?

Estimate your benefits controls:

- Do users notice the benefit controls?
- Do users interact with the controls if settings aren't accurate?

Research Findings

Key Findings

1. Participants were able to **successfully run both name and location searches**
2. Participants **readily used the radius option** to narrow down their search
3. Participants **didn't realize the results include on-the-job training and VET TEC programs**
4. Participants **easily manipulated the map**
5. Some map functionality **presented challenges**
6. Location search **wasn't effective when participants looked for a specific school campus**
7. Participants were **moderately interested in filters**
8. Participants could **generally identify if default benefit estimates were correct for their situation**

Research Findings

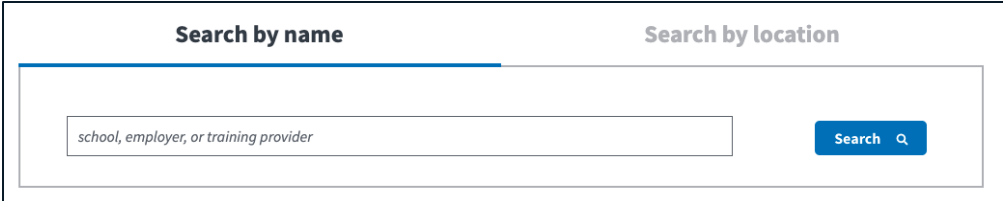
1. Participants were able to successfully run both name and location searches

- All participants who ran searches were successful in returning results

"I think I'd just do 'Search by name'... and then refine search and update the state to Texas and hit search." – P2

- Two participants initially stated that they didn't think the location search functionality was available

"I see 'Search by location' in the upper right hand, but its broken and muted" - P7



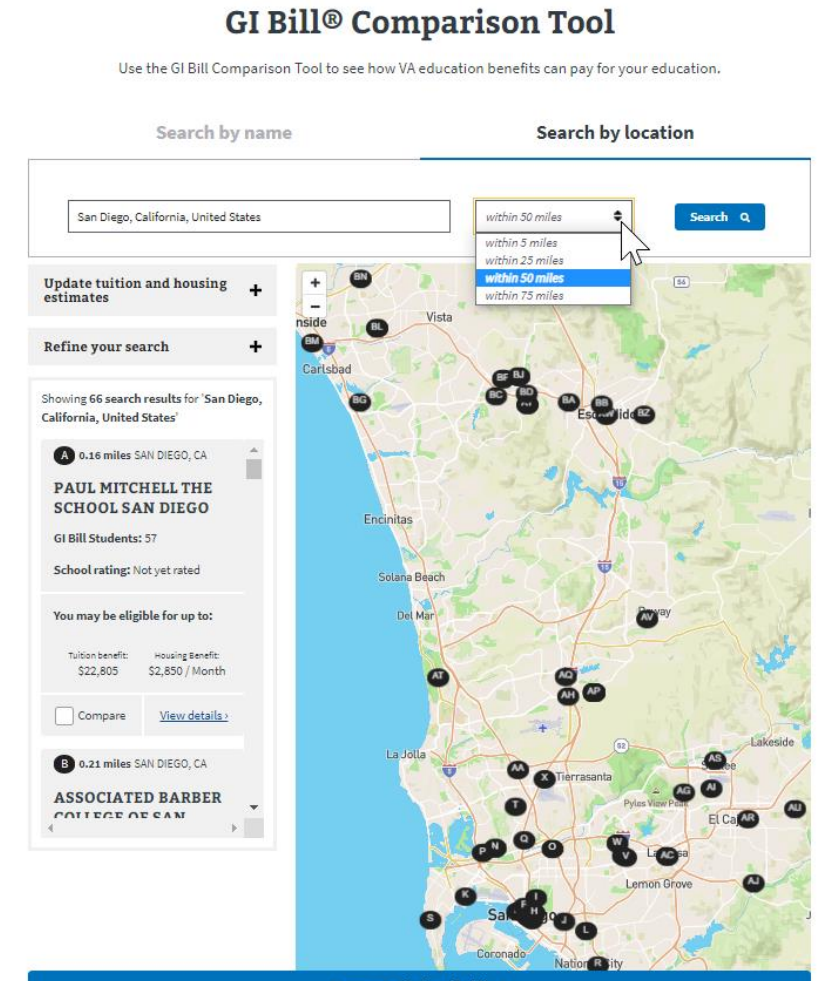
The screenshot displays a search interface with two tabs: "Search by name" and "Search by location". The "Search by name" tab is currently selected, indicated by a blue underline. Below the tabs is a large text input field with the placeholder text "school, employer, or training provider". To the right of the input field is a blue button labeled "Search" with a magnifying glass icon.

Research Findings

2. Participants readily used the radius option to narrow down their search

- Preferred maximum commutes for participants were:
 - 25 - 70 miles one way
 - 30 - 45 minutes
- Two participants suggested having an additional radius option of 10 or 15 miles

"I think there should be a 'within 10 mile' option." - P2



3. Participants didn't realize that results include on-the-job training and VET TEC programs

- Participants expected results to be:
 - Just institutions of higher learning
 - Vocational/technical schools
 - Places to earn certificates to full degree options

"I would expect them to all be institutions of higher learning" - P7

- After opening the filters, one participant said she liked seeing on-the-job training as an option

4. Participants easily manipulated the map

- Participants engaged with map in a variety of ways
 - Grabbing the map to move it around
 - Using the + / - controls to zoom in or out
 - Clicking on pins to learn more about institutions
- Two participants who didn't see the map functionality (due to deployment issues) said a map would be helpful

"If I want to expand search results or look in a particular area or refresh in a particular area, it'll come up with different results. It helps to visualize" - P2

5. Some map functionality presented challenges

- Location search is helpful for exploration, but not necessarily for finding specific schools

"Oh, so if we were looking for ECPI actually, I think I'd just do search by name... and then refine search and update the state to Texas and hit search. " – P2

- Some locations may have large numbers of pins which may make discovery difficult

"In some areas like in New York where there are dozens of schools, it might be more challenging to navigate.....could be hundreds of icons in a small crunched area" - P6

- Location search was “too much” for some participants

"It was more confusing doing the location search because when I first pull it up and see its not in alphabetical order Its just... its too much." – P4

6. Location search wasn't effective when participants looked for a specific school campus

- 5/7 participants initially attempted a location search and generated many results
 - No participants were able to locate the specific campus using location search
 - All participants were unsatisfied with their results and switched to a name search

"I would probably search by location. Umm... enter San Antonio and then search and I would look for ECPI.

Since it's not here, I would assume it's not in San Antonio so I would go to 'Search by name' and type in ECPI and I see this shows all their locations. " - P1

7. Participants were moderately interested in filters

- Participants were interested in filters for accreditation, type of school and type of program/degree

"I'd just select schools and uncheck VET TEC and I would check 'is accredited'... check 'has no cautionary warnings' and... update results." - P2

- In the current filter list, two participants thought the “Country” filter was for “County”
- One participant suggested adding school demographics to filters

"I would add demographics to these filters because a lack of diversity or lack of opportunity for people in minority groups is important to a lot of people." - P3

8. Participants could generally identify if default benefit estimates were correct for their situation

- Some participants didn't see the controls to update their benefits or didn't expect to be able to do so

"For me, for Chapter 35, it's straight across the board for everyone. It's ~\$300 a week for everyone. It's just a straight stipend. I don't know if you put that on this kind of site" – P4

- Some participants struggled to fill out the benefit estimate fields

"For military status, if there was an option to say dependent [that would help]. That cumulative active duty should go away because I clearly wasn't on active duty " – P2

Additional Insights

- Several participants were interested in school ratings, but many expected them to come from a 3rd party (e.g. US News & World Report)
- Participants liked seeing accreditation, but some had questions. (e.g. what “regionally” accredited was, accredited by what body, etc.)
- Participants were interested in the ability to compare schools

ECPI UNIVERSITY- NEWPORT NEWS

NEWPORT NEWS, VA

Regionally accredited

GI Bill Students: 387

School rating: Not yet rated

You may be eligible for up to:

Tuition benefit:

\$22,805

Housing Benefit:

\$1,542 / Month

☐ Compare

[View details >](#)

Recommendations

Recommendations

General search

- Modify styling of Name and Location search heading so they both appear to be available options
- Continue autocomplete implementation to aid fast and accurate input of search terms
- Incorporate the types of educational options into the search card results (IHL, OJT, VET TEC)
- Consider updating school rating label so it's clear Veterans are providing these ratings

Location search

- Keep 75 miles as the largest radius option
- Consider adding an additional radius option between 5 and 25 miles
- Update the default radius to 25 miles
- Investigate ways to improve display when large numbers of search results are present
- Consider ways to enable users to easily find a specific school on the map

Recommendations

Filters

- Modify the presentation of the “Country” filter to prevent confusion
- Investigate filter options that would allow the user to specify:
 - Types of schools
 - Types of degrees

Estimate your Benefit controls

- Investigate options for bringing attention to default benefit settings
- Update benefit controls to show chapter numbers for each benefit
- Consider moving Fry scholarship selection to GI Bill selection field

Next Steps

Next Steps

1. Refine UIs as noted in recommendations
2. Continued development of UI elements which tested well