**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

*When the participant is ready, begin the session with the following intro*

*Participant 1 – Michael Ryan*

**Intro - 5 minutes**

Thanks for joining us today! My name is Amy and I also have some colleagues on the line observing and taking notes. Today we would like to talk about ratings and what types of information help Veterans determine if a particular school is a good fit for them.  
Before we start, a few things I want to mention:

* **This entire session should take about 45 minutes.** I want to be sure not to keep you much longer, so I may occasionally prompt you with the next question or topic.
* **In this session, we want to hear your honest opinions.** We just want to improve these tools to better meet Veteran's needs. I will not be offended by any opinions you express, and I welcome your feedback.
* **If for any reason and at any time you want to stop the session, please let me know.**
* **Are you comfortable if I record my screen and audio as we talk today?** We use the recordings to confirm that we have captured your opinions accurately. The recordings are destroyed after we complete analysis, and none of your comments will be attributed to you directly.
  + If yes: **Once I start recording, I am going to confirm that you are ok with me recording this session once more.**

*Start recording.*

* \*\*I have started recording. I'd like to confirm: Are you comfortable if I record my screen and the audio as we talk today?"

**Warm-up Questions (Optional) - 5 minutes**

Let’s start with a few warm-up questions.

* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? Has used them during an apprenticeship to cover some bills while working. Also took an online course – like a month and a half. Thomas Edison State College. Post 9/11. That would be going back to 2011 with apprenticeship and 2014 with brief stint in college.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - When did you start school?
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?
    - Which benefit?
    - Where are you in the school selection process?
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? I have – not recently.
  + If yes, what did you use it for?
* Any Post 9/11 entitlement remaining? Yes – I believe I have some. I’m just getting back into schooling to get something going for the Fall.

**Ratings Experience and Overall Value - 15 min**

I'm curious about how you use ratings when you're looking at a particular product or service. For example, if you're purchasing a new vacuum cleaner or trying a new restaurant, how do you decide if you want to try that product or service?

* Do you typically look at ratings when making your decision? Yes. I would typically go for – I’d type in the product and reviews. Consumer Reports. My father actually has a subscription that I sometimes use. I look at video review of the product.
* When you're looking at ratings, what aspects do you pay close attention to (e.g. number of stars, number of people who rated it)? So I mean, the stars or rating would be first and I would go straight to a pro/con list to see if it matches up with what I want. I’m trying to get information that wouldn’t be listed on the product’s website. Stuff they wouldn’t put there. It’s usually better to go for a 3rd party – nonbiased.
* Are there any aspects that aren't important to you? I mean it’s pretty broad – are we trying to narrow it down to a school rating? The overall…usually they’ll have two categories below the overall…ease of use, durability whatever it is. Typically overall [rating], I think that may be the most useful.
* Why are these aspects important or not important to you?
* What helps you decide if a rating or review is trustworthy? Reviewing the site they [the purchaser] got it on. Like looking at Apple products reviews at a site they [Apple] sponsor [isn’t trustworthy].
* Do ratings influence your ultimate decision? If so, how much? Maybe like a third. Typically I’ll search and look for something that will back up what I’m thinking. So going back to the idea, I can go to the website and get all the facts. When I go to the reviews, I’m looking to see if someone has assessed those.
* Are there any particular sites that you frequently visit that use ratings? What do you like about these sites? Consumer Reports. There’s Ratings…except without the A…it’s a YouTube channel. I really prefer the video, I feel like I get so much more out of it. A lot of the reviews are just one paragraph per item, but I get better info from videos.
* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools? I have, I’m really looking for something more local. I’ve been reviewing online, for profit schools but those reviews can be all over the place. I’m considering a Tech school…they have a strong online presence. It’s not just the school, but the program. The online programs kind of scare me because the accreditation is all over the place. Transfer of credits…schools don’t always acknowledge them.
* A few have had ratings. I’ll try and pull it up. I lost it already…sorry. Grade reports. (gradreports)
  + If yes, which ones? What did you like about those sites?

**Categories - 15 minutes**

The VA would like to give prospective students better visibility into the educational experience other Veterans have had at a particular school. Some sites like Amazon allow users to rate a product or service on a variety of factors such as product quality, timeliness of delivery, etc.

* If someone who had previously received VA education benefits provided ratings for schools (particularly ones you were interested in attending), what factors would be most valuable to you? For me getting into it, it would be their input on the veterans counselor and how they went about using the GI benefits. Did they do it on their own or use the counselor? From a Veterans perspective, I want to know how they went about their counseling. How the school worked with them. The experience of the school I feel like I could get that from other things. The financials…for me, the toughest part is getting the ball rolling. A lot of these places have not been very responsive with the coronavirus. But ironically, once you put out that you’re a Veteran, you get bombarded from for profit schools. Phoenix was very aggressive at one point.
* Is there any other information that you would like to know from Veterans who had attended a school you were interested in?
* How valuable would that information be in making a decision to attend the school or not?

**Pull up categories visual provided by EDU**

**Yeah, this is what I’m talking about. Not paying attention to the top one, but the ones underneath.**

* (As applicable) In terms of school ratings, there are a few factors I would like to get your feedback on.
  + What do you think this factor means?
  + Would it would be helpful in your decision making process?
* For this one, 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. Recruiting/Marketing – that’s like a nuisance to me. That’s not a huge, deciding factor. Whatever school this one, I’m actually glad…no I guess that’s actually a low mark. It’s a benefit, but not a big one. Veteran Friendliness – the school they have their own veteran counselors and have their own veteran area. You can get some one on one attention and that would be a huge benefit in deciding. Quality of classes – great benefit, something I would use to weigh in on the decision. I see average rating and institution overall as equally…I don’t really put too much value into it. I’ll look at the next four categories. The Employment Preparation would weigh a lot more heavily than the Recruiting and other ones. I’m always interested in class sizes and availability of instructors.

Five Star Ratings:

* Institution Overall
* Quality of Classes
* Veteran Friendliness
* Employment Preparation
* Recruiting/Marketing Practices
* Are there any other types of ratings that you would like to see? (For example, the percentage of Veterans who would recommend a particular school)
* Who do you think should be able to submit ratings for a school?
  + Someone who applied and was accepted – interesting only if talking about the process to get there, if there was a counselor involved, GI benefits, but not as far as the school. I’d be more interested to hear their perspective from the VA side.
  + Someone who applied and was rejected – I wouldn’t put much weight in that one.
  + Someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree – I would, because that is a reflection of me.
  + Someone who finished their degree – Yes, interested because they have gotten to the point I want to get to.
* Better veterans only or any benefits – I guess…I’m more interested in the Veterans opinion because that’s a reflection of what I’m doing.

**Pull up a school profile page on the CT**

The VA is considering incorporating ratings into the GI Bill Comparison Tool so beneficiaries of education benefits can provide feedback on the schools they have attended. The page in front of you is a school profile page on the GI Bill Comparison Tool.

Delaware Tech.

Typed Delaware Tech..clicked Delaware Tech and George Wilmington. It’s jumping around a bit (screen). They have several campuses, but this is the one I’m looking. Right there, where it says 2 GI Bill students, somewhere right there, a link to see their reviews would grab my attention. It is nice to see right off the bat to see how many active GI students are there. That’s nice info right off the bat. It’s a small school in a small town so that number doesn’t surprise me. I’d like to have the star rating but make it clear that it’s only for 2 students. ^^All on search results page

This is very important to me – the housing allowance. This gets my attention here too – student Veteran groups. I think it’s a good layout. If not on the first page, the reviews…oh there’s more, scrolling on down. This is Veteran only complaints? I would assume it’s Veteran and I’d be interested in see if it’s a GI Bill complaint. I know about 10 years ago there was stories where the GI Bill wasn’t coming through and issues. I’d be curious to see if that was still an issue and see what the complaint was. Clicked All campuses…sorry, clicked to see what the complaint was…was this where it should have brought me? I would like to see what the complaint was. [This was not what I wanted/expected]. [Tried to hit the Back button...] I’m trying to get back and I can’t. [ Prompted on how to return]

I feel like here (SCO)…I’d wonder if they were veteran counselors, or certifying officials.

Where would ratings appear?

For my own situation -this is disappointing for me. Not getting credit for military training because I was hoping to get that. That’s a big factor to me.

Here at the top – near GI Bill students, that would be a good place for it. Anyone who has been accepted and taken a course should be able to rate. Applied, but didn’t get in, that doesn’t weigh too heavily.

Trustworthy – 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.

* What did you like about grade reports? - Didn’t really see much there
* Would like to see both the process and assessments of the school itself [for ratings].
* I feel like I got more out of this session than you did. I’m going to have to go to this website and click around because I saw a few things I didn’t like.
* If ratings were incorporated into the Comparison Tool, where do you think it would make the most sense for the ratings to appear?
* What are your thoughts on the trustworthiness of ratings that would appear in the Comparison Tool? Why?

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

**Thank-You and Closing - X minutes**

Well we really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us today. Your feedback is so helpful to us as we continue to work on the site and make sure it really works for Veterans.

Thanks! Lastly, do you know any other Veterans, caregivers, or service members who might be willing to participate in a future user research session? If Yes: Thank you! I'll have our team send you an email with a little blurb that you can pass along.

Great, well thank you so much again, and enjoy the rest of your day!