**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

*Participant 2 – Amanda Flyte*

**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? Yes – I’m currently on break, but I’ll be using Voc Rehab for my last semester. Start school – current program or in general. I started with Post 9/11 in Spring semester of 2014. I am currently finishing my last semester of my Master’s degree. I would have been done last may, but tiny human decided to surprise us.
  + 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? No
  + If yes, what did you use it for?

**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? So that’s usually a really big factor in my decisions. I usually look for the bad reviews and weigh the bad reviews with the good reviews and decide if I want to take the risk. I look at the star ratings. I tend to look at…so if I’m looking for a specific thing, see if it’s 4 stars or up and then filter out what I want to get. If there’s something I’m pretty set on getting or if a friend or family member has recommended something, it’s not as important. Trustworthy – it would have to be. I think the general consensus with most of the ratings. If there’s more ratings or positives…more positives, I trust those. More bad, I trust those. Ultimately, again looking at what really stands out…like I’m looking at mesh crib bumpers, so if something comes up that’s really dangerous then I won’t go with that. I get the seriousness of the rating might discourage me from buying something. Amazon is what I use. That’s what I’m thinking of specifically. I like to look at the recency of the ratings and sort them out. Has the product improved and stuff like that. And there’s a lot of variety so if I don’t like something, I can go to something else.
* 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)?
* Are there any aspects that aren't important to you?
* Why are these aspects important or not important to you?
* What helps you decide if a rating or review is trustworthy?
* Do ratings influence your ultimate decision? If so, how much?
* Are there any particular sites that you frequently visit that use ratings? What do you like about these sites?
* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools? If I think back to when I started my Masters, I looked at two schools and what it more boiled down to was location. We were relocating my husband was getting out of the Army, and we were moving home and the decision was one hour away or three hours away so I chose the closer one. Any other factors – I did look more at their programs. I was a little more swayed by the program. It seemed like it would fit me a little better. Whitewater…that was the school. One of the things was the accreditation, so I’m in a counseling program right now and the school I’m at has a better accreditation. Where I’m at and Whitewater were the only accredited schools. In general, when I was looking at the website, it was easier to understand. It was more of a feeling. And then I started talking to one of the faculty members and that kind of sealed it. Oshkosh
  + 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? The Veteran…just specifically just a Veteran focused area on campus. Oshkosh has one of those so just having a place where I can get help. Coming in to college as a 24 year old because you’re going to school with a lot of younger students but there are still people you can connect with. The Veteran resource center was a big draw for me. I think it would just help to know that there’s a place I can get questions answered and other people are having similar experiences.
* 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**

* (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?

Five Star Ratings:

* Institution Overall
* Quality of Classes – how good are the classes, are they going to meet your needs, quality instructors
* Veteran Friendliness – is there a place for Veterans to get help
* Employment Preparation – self explanatory, how prepared you are after graduating
* Recruiting/Marketing Practices – makes me think of billboards, pamphlets, are they getting out and making their college known
* Which most helpful? The first one is Veteran Friendliness and Quality of Classes
* Recruiting and Marketing don’t really help me.
* 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)
  + Maybe a student engagement rating? To see how much the college engages students in different activities. Particularly when people are in different places how to connect people. I instantly think all students, but it would be interesting to have veteran exclusive. An adult student coming in versus someone fresh out of high school. Very difficult. Nothing else for me.
* Who do you think should be able to submit ratings for a school?
  + Someone who applied and was accepted - No
  + Someone who applied and was rejected - No
  + Someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree - Yes
  + Someone who finished their degree – Yes
  + More beneficial Veterans only or all beneficiaries? That’s a tricky one. As a Veteran, I would say Veterans only. Because as a child of a Veteran, it would be a different experienced.
  + I’ve already exhausted the Post 9/11.

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

**Typed UW Oshkosh, clicked Search with no results. Typed Oshkosh and clicked first option. That is kind of weird that high schools appear. Found the school.**

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.

* If ratings were incorporated into the Comparison Tool, where do you think it would make the most sense for the ratings to appear?
  + Maybe like the overall school rating could be on SRP, but not the detailed ratings. Oh they’re a Yellow Ribbon school…(SCO), I know her! I didn’t know they had so much information on here. So I would expect the overall rating to be up in the summary page and the more detailed ratings being above cautionary information below school locations. To me, the accreditation and stuff would be more important. I always picture contact and stuff at the bottom of the page. It says these are the people to contact, but no actual contact information. Yeah, I don’t think I saw…scrolling around. So that’s interesting to me. The VRC has its own information and that would make it easier for Veterans to look at this school. It has its own lounge and space to do homework.
* What are your thoughts on the trustworthiness of ratings that would appear in the Comparison Tool? Why?
  + I think I would take it into account. Knowing myself, I would want to know where the ratings came from – from students at school. The VA can be a little goofy. So I would trust them with a grain of salt. Just a link underneath or even a blurb that says where the information came from. It’s 2019 student research form. The date is going to be important. Info from 2014 is not going to be as important. Veterans specifically would be very helpful. Overall info will also be helpful. We Veterans can be a little selfie? When looking at a VA specific website, I expect more of Veteran specific information.
* What has been your experience with Veteran resource center? What has stood out the most?
  + Veterans working there – connecting with other veterans, navigating the GI bill is a pain in the butt and how the school is going to help me.
* Would want 200-300 ratings
* Trustworthy – I’m not sure if something would trigger an untrustworthiness. In general, the content of the review. If a business does something wrong or seemingly wrong, then people just trash it even if they haven’t ever been there.

**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!