**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

*Participant 3 – Michele Eward*

**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? I have – I actually used my…I graduated from Carol Community. And now I’m doing the Voc Rehab to do my Bachelor’s. I graduated from Carol with my Associate’s degree. I went back to school back to 2017-2018 and I ended up having to stop because I found out I was pregnant again and I’ve been taking time off to raise my two daughters. So my benefits don’t expire and I do have them.
  + 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? Yeah
* 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)? Overall quality. I compare the negative comments to the positive comments. If there are more negative, I wont’ touch certain things. If there are more positive, it’s something I will look into. Typically the higher the better with star ratings. Not really (any aspects are not important). That’s actually a good question because I’ve never bought? Something that’s not trustworthy. About 90% they influence decision. There’s other factors that weigh in – especially if its electronic. I’m an IT person and when it comes to computers and things I’m looking at specs of devices. Sizes of hard drives, storage and that type of things. When it comes to film, the quality of camera because I take a lot of pictures. Amazon for one. With Amazon it’s the Prime and being able to get things much quicker than other sites. To me, they always seem a lot better (the ratings). I just have had a real good experience with Amazon, their turn around time. I’ve not had any problems with them especially when it comes to returning things, they always credit my account quickly, I understand why a lot of people look at Amazon.
* 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? Yes. Recently I’ve been comparing a lot of online schools. I’ve been going to individual school sites.
  + 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? Specifically, what else can they offer Veterans? It’s primarily what can they offer in lieu of just having the school and everything paid for? The previous school I was at (University of Maryland-Baltimore), they had a Veteran group that would get together every month. We would do stuff together and go outside the school and just hang out and have fun. Do things. And really bond because I was going to campus and for on-campus schools I would love more schools to have 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. So we all have to have each other’s backs and it’s better to have that connection – whether it be Zoom meetings or meeting in person once a month. Having actual time together.
* 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 – in an overall, general thing. If I were to judge this school, I would not attend because the quality of the classes are not very good. And the Veteran Friendliness is nowhere near the top. Those are the most important to me.
* The overall quality of the institution itself, but that doesn’t break it down.
* Quality of Classes
* Veteran Friendliness
* Employment Preparation – it may be a 5/5, but I’d still be hesitant
* Recruiting/Marketing Practices – Recruiting for I guess the military or I’m honestly not sure, but that’s the only thing that coms to mind unless it’s more so trying to get people’s opinions on the school. And if it’s one out of five, that school isn’t worth it.
* 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)
* To show how well the school does with Veterans. Some schools are better at getting things done with paperwork. They need to have at least 2-3 VA reps within the admissions office. Not one. Outside activities, like frats/sororities that could be joined. If there’s an ROTC program for those who want to go officer.
* 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, they would automatically put a negative review on it
  + Someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree – I would say that would be beneficial because at that point, I think if you could understand why they stopped…because it could have been the school as to why they stopped.
  + Someone who finished their degree – Definitely.
  + Veterans only versus beneficiaries – I think that could be very beneficial…but it [Veteran ratings] would need to be a separate thing. Because like the chart on the screen you’re showing me, that could be any number of students, not necessarily veterans at all. Whereas if you had a completely different one for Veterans, they could have their own input and their could be other details they could give their insight into.

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

**Opened GI Bill and went to Voc Rehab, eligible for Post 9/11 yes, in person and online, typed Baltimore and clicked Search. Stopped at warning level…what does that mean about heightened cash monitoring? I am not sure, but that does not sound good at all. That’s a school I would not touch. Went to next page. Some of these schools I’ve never even heard of. Next page. Next page. Morgan State has a high number of GI bill students…that says something. I want to see what they have for UMBC because that’s where I work at. Jumped to last page…second to last page. Went to page 5. Clicked school…they have 411 students. Clicking though benefits…what is the kicker bonus? Clicked learn more. That’s something I would not be eligible for. August will be 10 years that I’ve been out…I can’t believe it’s been that long. Student complaints...hmmm…financial issues. Clicked student complaints I like that this has complaints on it. It’s not actually going into detail about the complaint because I would actually want to see what the complaints say. And I don’t know how to go back.**

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?
  + Honestly, somewhere at the top.
* What are your thoughts on the trustworthiness of ratings that would appear in the Comparison Tool? Why?
  + For the most part. If there were more positive ratings for it (I would trust them more)
  + Would help to know who was rating? Yeah and I think it would be helpful to have one for Veterans and one for the general population.
  + If you knew it was just Veterans? I’d trust them a little bit more.

**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!