**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

*Participant 5 – Ruth Carson*

**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 – like previously used them, I just graduated. Post 9/11. Not planning to use any benefits in the near future
  + 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?
  + 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? A lot – I really liked hearing what other people have to say.
* 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)? I think I look at both – I want to look at what the rating is. I’m used to 1 to 5 due to shopping on Amazon. But I generally want to see if they are in the 4 to 5 rating and see how many people have rated them because there are always the outliers.
* Are there any aspects that aren't important to you? Not really.
* Why are these aspects important or not important to you?
* What helps you decide if a rating or review is trustworthy? See I have trouble with that – I try to look for something more, like videos or details. Not this was a great experience. Looking for details to see if they’re true.
* Do ratings influence your ultimate decision? If so, how much? I would say they’re not solely, but pretty important in how I make decisions. Trust just the score – I know it’s easier for people to just give the score, but I don’t think just numbers give people the same warm and fuzzy. Was there a problem with the VA. Was there a problem with the class? I think that I would look at ratings, but it wouldn’t hold as much weight without words.
* Are there any particular sites that you frequently visit that use ratings? What do you like about these sites? You know I like that you can look at all of them – the most recent, the good, the bad. So I like that you can sort and they have them all available there.
* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools? Honestly, I really don’t. I don’t even remember how…I was not planning on going back to school. It was the last thing I wanted to do and I got something from a school about a environmental program and I was like that’s really cool. And I was like I think someone said I had education benefits…so I actually went kicking and screaming a little bit. Did the school have things to make things easy for me to attend? An online program was important to me. I work a ton of hours so. I don’t think I talked to anyone. University of Maryland.
  + 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? I would want to know was it a good program, was it a good educational benefit. I think there are schools that talk a good game but when you go, it’s not that great. Did they make it easy to use Veteran benefits, was there something there in case you needed it? One of the things that impressed me about the school was they had veteran specific scholarships available in case benefits didn’t cover the costs. That would have been helpful to know about.
* 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 – what do you think of the school, how they operate,
* Quality of Classes – do you have good professors
* Veteran Friendliness – make it easy to use benefits
* Employment Preparation – is it preparing you for job?
* Recruiting/Marketing Practices – I’m not sure about that one
* Most important – quality of classes, I think institution overall and veteran friendliness are good. Employment preparation was good, but I wasn’t getting a new job. It wasn’t important to me, but I could see it being important to others.
* I’m also wondering if…people do need to do remote school, Maybe there should be something about how well the classes do online. Is it easy to do online. That type of thing. I know that doesn’t really make sense in those words. In some schools, that transition hasn’t been good. There’s no way I could go into the school, so I need to squeeze it in wherever I could. To know they are good at online classes.
* 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 – I don’t think they could speak to the whole experience. Just the application process. So maybe a limited area where they could give feedback.
  + Someone who applied and was rejected – No. Honestly people would have a negative response, maybe they’re angry. I think that taints their perspective.
  + Someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree – absolutely, why was that, was it a personal thing and they should be able to speak to that and give valuable insight
  + Someone who finished their degree – absolutely
  + Vets or beneficiaries – I think it should be veterans only. If it’s the VA website, I think there are unique aspects to being a veteran that affect your education. If it’s through the VA, it should be Veterans only.

**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.

I have looked at this – it didn’t help me decide on a school but I did look at it. I was clicking on everything just to see

Typed university of Maryland global campus…I will say that it gives you locations, but it doesn’t give you the overall global campus. Because I’m not anywhere near a base, I would say that none of these really fit. Clicked view details on first option. And this is all new..this stuff? (EYB) This looks like it has a lot more information than what I saw. It looks like it has a lot more information on exactly how much the GI bill will pay, how much you will pay…all in one nice little area instead of having to run around to a bunch of sites. It has a lot of info in one area. Yeah, I like this info and how its laid out. I will say for the estimated benefits per term, my school didn’t have 2 semesters, it had like 3 semesters per year, the way it was laid out. So this wouldn’t be completely accurate for fall/spring…and that’s because I’m in a graduate school program…opened school costs and calendar. Opened school calendar, changed terms to 3. Changed enrolled to ¾ and clicked update benefits. This enrolled thing gets a little wonky….That actually gives a whole lot more information. Clicked learn more for enrolled. I would ask in here whether its grad school or undergrad…because that matters. I know I was taking like 6 hours a semester. I know that’s not full time. I think that would change that information more. Up here with Term 1, 2, 3 in Term 3, it shows $0 tuition, but that’s not true. At least not for me. Opened learning format and schedule. Opened scholarships and other funding. And then for Yellow Ribbon…degree level I’m expecting would be grad or undergrad. I don’t understand that right off. The Yellow Ribbon I presume that is something that would be auto populated. Kicker bonus…what? Clicked learn more. Oh yeah, I’m not a highly skilled person. That helps…knowing to go all the way down through all these sections does help.

Yeah, that’s super helpful to already have the housing in there…ohhh…cautionary information. See if it explains…Yeah, I think that overall, you know it’s always good to know what the complaints are. Tuition fee charges…that would be good to know. That is really good information to have there. It would be a good place to know what questions to ask…I know when I was looking it was like looking at 75 websites to find information.

* If ratings were incorporated into the Comparison Tool, where do you think it would make the most sense for the ratings to appear? I think right around here in Cautionary information – let people see the good things and not just the negative. Truthfully, I had a really good experience with their Veterans group. They helped me when I had issues filing with the VA. And it would give people a heads up on what to ask for.
* What are your thoughts on the trustworthiness of ratings that would appear in the Comparison Tool? Why? Take it all with a grain of salt.
* Amazon is what a lot of people are used to – so being able to look at the ratings. Being able to sort one star reviews and reading the reviews. There was exactly 2 decades between my graduate and undergraduate degree so that was one of the nervous points for me because I’m like…I don’t know how to do this. I do not feel more tech savvy having completed the program.
* Veterans group stepped in when payment gap appeared in helping to find scholarships
* Accessibility of educators – can you reach out, what is the interaction like?
* Ease of online usage?
* Ability to sort by online students
* I think all the things you guys are developing are really helpful. If I have to go to one more VA site, I’ll throw my computer against the wall. Putting all these resources into one place and making it easier is vital and I really appreciate the job you’re doing.

**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!