**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

*Participant 6 – Brittiney Osbourne*

**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 used them – the Post 9/11. I think that might have ben 2014 maybe or 2013. My most recent use was this past semester – it wrapped up in May. I used it at several different schools. Most recently – University of Maryland Global Campus. I started using them there in 2016 because I used it for some of my undergrad.
  + 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 – well I might have tested it, but I don’t think I’ve used it. The only time I’ve used it is when I tested it.
  + 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? I don’t like the stars – I like the commentary. It’s so subjective and you don’t get a feel for why it was rated the way it was. The commentary just sheds light on it. You may have liked it because of this, but that doesn’t matter to me. I mean if that’s all I had to go off of, then I’d take it into consideration. If enough people thought this school or something was a good decision, then. I’d like 5 / 5.
* 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? Amazon. – and I hate the ones that just leave stars. Make them write a review and not just stars to justify why you gave that number of stars.
* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools? I did not – I honestly couldn’t tell you how…I was going to school on campus and I don’t remember how I found University of Maryland. I didn’t spend a lot of time looking for schools. I knew I had to find something online since I was in Hawaii. To answer your question, I don’t remember comparing schools. Maybe I did? It had to have been some kind of mechanism to compare…I don’t know.
  + 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? Maybe something about transferability…one thing I do know when I was looking at schools, I was making sure classes I was taking would transfer back to my degree program. They’re rating the schools to say which school you would go to? So maybe about some of their policies in using benefits…like if you’re using VA benefits, the payments don’t qualify for you. Others might drop you if you haven’t paid by a certain date. I’d say that’s a good feature, it’s good to know. I didn’t get full benefits so that mattered to me because I had to pay some out of pocket. They have a pretty generous transfer policy. Some of the classes I took for my undergrad will transfer just fine to program back on campus. That would also be something worth sharing. They’ll transfer into your degree program. The teachers or method of delivery, that kind of thing too. Do they have a dedicated VA academic advisor? I’d want to know that obviously. About the teachers…I’d want to know the quality of teachers, classwork and learning outcomes.
* 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 – I guess I would think just like in general. Maybe the perception of the school. It’s kind of like a holistic…putting it all together. Quality of teachers and instruction. Would you recommend yes or no?
* Quality of Classes – I would think this would go with are you going to learn in this class. Do you actually learn anything in your class?
* Veteran Friendliness – how flexible are they when it comes to…my husband actually I think he talked to a veterans advisor about getting into a full class and they got him in. How much help do they give to veterans?
* Employment Preparation - How well does it prepare you to do the things you’ve been studying?
* Recruiting/Marketing Practices – I’d want to know are they relentless like telemarketers…my husband’s complaint was that they were calling him constantly, but once he was enrolled it all just dropped off.
* Important: Institution overall, quality of classes, employment preparation
* Veteran Friendliness – I don’t really care about that, I’ve been around the block
* Recruiting/Marketing…everyone is trying to make a buck
* 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 – They’re just going off of perception, I want reviews from someone who has gone to the school
  + Someone who applied and was rejected - No
  + Someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree - Yes
  + Someone who finished their degree – Yes
* Veterans only or all beneficiaries – everyone and maybe if you want to you can distinguish between veteran and beneficiary. Well I don’t know…everyone, the more the merrier. You get a better representation of experiences with the more you have.

**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.

Typed university of Maryland global campus (scrolled down – couldn’t see auto populate). Clicked search. I’m trying to be objective because I already know which one, but if I didn’t…Clicked name…whoops I didn’t mean to click that, I meant to click View details. I would like to know what each one would give me if it’s different. Ok…same thing. I would expect the rating to be right up there at the top with the GI bill students and location. Scrolling through page. Cautionary….oh…cautionary info. Student complaints yikes…I have never seen this. Well okay….I’m still going to say the ratings would be up top and then a person if they were curious then they could scroll down and see all the hullabaloo.

* 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? Well…I trust what I read here. I’d imagine there would be some type of vetting process…not anyone can post ratings

Since you’re doing an online program, how did you pick the program you’re doing? Transfer of credits was important

I look for the bad reviews – like what’s the worst it could be. And I’m like can I live with that?

Fake ratings – maybe when the review is too glowing. I guess anything too extreme whether good or bad.

Schools Veteran office – for undergrad, that’s who I did all my dealings with. I don’t’ know if they were any more helpful than a non-veteran department. In my grad program, I didn’t use the Veteran…did I use anyone? Yeah, I had a good experience with them – I had to ask about benefits.

* Teacher accessibility

**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!