**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

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

**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?

P: Yes. I’m currently on break for the summer, but I’ll be using vocrehab for my last semester.

* + If yes, which benefit are you using?

P:

* + - When did you start school?

P: I started with post-9/11 gi bill my spring semester of 2014.

* + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?

P:

* + - Which benefit?
    - Where are you in the school selection process?

P: I’m currently finishing my last semester of my master’s degree. I would have been done this last may, but a tiny human decided to surprise us.

* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?

P:

* + 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?

P: yes, that’s usually a really big factor into my decisions.

A: what do you typically look at?

P: I look at the bad reviews, and then I decide whether I’m willing to take the risk when I’m purchasing.

* Do you typically look at ratings when making your decision?

P:

* 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)?

P: I tend to look at, if im looking for a specific thing, if what I’m looking for is 4 stars and up, and then I go from there to filter out what I want to get.

* Are there any aspects of star ratings that aren't important to you?

P: im not sure. I guess if there’s something that I’m pretty set on getting or maybe if a friend or family member has recommended something, it’s not as important.

* Why are these aspects important or not important to you?

P:

* What helps you decide if a rating or review is trustworthy?

P: it would have to be, I think the general consensus on most of the ratings. If there’s more positives than negatives, I tend to trust the positives than negatives more. If there’s more negatives, then that stands out.

* Do ratings influence your ultimate decision? If so, how much?

P: ultimately, looking at what really stands out. If I could give an example, I’m looking at mesh crib bumbers right now. So if somethings like, hey, this is really dangerous. Your kid could suffocate. So the degree of severity or how scary something sounds might discourage me from buying something.

* Are there any particular sites that you frequently visit that use ratings? What do you like about these sites?

P: amazon. That’s what I’m thinking of specifically.

A: what do you like about amazon and being able to get those ratings?

P: I like to look at the recency, so it’s easier to sort them out, and there’s a lot of variety, so that’s really nice.

* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools?

P: if I think back to when I started my masters, I looked at two specific schools, and what it boiled down to was location for me.

A: [?] what were some factors?

P: it was between a school that was 3 hours away from where I grew up or 1 hour, so I picked the closer one.

A: what were somethings that you attribute the better fit at oshkosh to?

P: in general, the accreditation. I’m in a counseling program right now and it has the k-crep accreditation, which is better than other accrediting programs. So that’s what I looked at first… when I first looked at the website, it was more appealing to me, and then I ended up talking to one of the faculty members and it sold me on it.

* + If yes, which ones? What did you like about those sites?

P:

**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.

P:

* 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?

P: veteran-wise, I think one of the other things I looked at just specifically was a veteran-focused area on campus. Oshkosh has a veterans resource center so it was really easy for me to transition there. so having people that know how to use the benefits…knowin gthat there’s people that you could connect with, but really the veteran’s resource center was a big attraction to me.

* Is there any other information that you would like to know from Veterans who had attended a school you were interested in?

P:

* How valuable would that information be in making a decision to attend the school or not?

P: it would help in general knowing there’s a place I could go where they can answer my questions, and knowing other people there having similar experiences, and we can share that.

**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.

P:

* + What do you think this factor means?

P:

* + Would it would be helpful in your decision making process?

P:

Five Star Ratings:

* Institution Overall

P: just kind of tells me, generally, is this a good or bad place to go

* Quality of Classes

P: this one kind of scares me a little bit. To me, how good are the classes that you’re going to get. How good are the instructors

* Veteran Friendliness

P: it instantly makes me think is there a place veterans can go to get help

* Employment Preparation

P: how prepared are you after for employment

* Recruiting/Marketing Practices

P: it makes me think of billboards and pamphlets. Are they getting out into the community and making their college known?

A: which would be most helpful?

P: the first one is veteran friendliness and the second one is quality of classes.

A: any that wouldn’t make a difference to you?

[?]

* 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)

P: I almost think maybe a student engagement rating would be interesting to have on there to see how much the college engages the student in different activities, which can be important when people are in different places to be able to reach out to other students on campus and be able to connect.

A: would that be all student?

P: I instantly think all student. From my own experience, that can be difficult, in general for other adult students coming in, to connect with other students as opposed to coming out of high school.

A: any other ratings?

P: not for me.

* Who do you think should be able to submit ratings for a school?

P:

* + Someone who applied and was accepted

P: No

* + Someone who applied and was rejected

P: No

* + Someone who attended classes, but didn't complete their degree

P: Yes

* + Someone who finished their degree

P: Yes

A: do you think it would be beneficial to have veterans only making these ratings or anyone who had used gi bill benefits?

P: as a veteran myself, I think veterans only. I think there’s a unique challenge being a veteran as opposed to a child of a veteran.

**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.

[a explained CT landing page to her] If you’d like to put in UW OSHkosh…

P: [typed in her school name] oh, boy. Let’s just go with oshkosh and see what happens. It’s interesting that the high schools pop up. That’s interesting that the high schools pop up. That’s kind of weird.

A: so this page that you’re on is the search results page. Any thoughts about whether ratings would make sense here?

P: maybe that overall school rating could be on this page. I don’t think the detailed ratings would make sense here.

A: alright, and if you want to click into this one. There’s a lot of information on this page, so if you want to scroll down and get a feel for what’s available here.

* If ratings were incorporated into the Comparison Tool, where do you think it would make the most sense for the ratings to appear?

P: ok. I know her [a SCO in the list] I didn’t know they had this much information on here. Ok.

A: ok, so if you want to head to the top of the page again. So, here we are. On this school you’re obviously familiar with. Where would it make sense for ratings to appear?

P: so the overall rating could be up here, where they have the star ratings. And I picture it maybe above this cautionary. It’d make sense if it was near the student feedback.

A: as you were looking down the page, did the items reflect your priority or feel like they were in the right spot?

P: to me, the accreditations and things like that would be a little more important. I always picture contacts and addresses towards the bottom of the page. But it’s always interesting that it says tehse are the people you can contact, but there’s no contact information for them. Yeah, so that’s interesting to me.

P: in my experience, the vrc has their own website you can link to. That might make it easier for the veterans looking at the school and be like, oh cool. They have their own space.

A: that’s interesting. So you have a veteran resource center on campus?

P: yeah. We have our own lounge, our own area to do homework, hang out.

A: sometimes the school might have a link here [suggested student veteran group link] so it looks like this one doesn’t.

P: I almost wonder if a student veterans group is a student veterans association, because we do have a SVA, too.

A: that’s a good point. That’s probably what it’d be linking to.

* What are your thoughts on the trustworthiness of ratings that would appear in the Comparison Tool? Why?

P: you know, I think I would take it into account. Knowing myself, I’d want to know where the ratings came from. If it was from students in the school. sometimes the va is kind of goofy, so if it were me, I’d look into where that came from. I’d trust them with a grain of salt.

A: what would be helpful for you for understanding or providing access to where that information came from?

P: like a link or a blurb. Something like, this is based on a 2019 student research form.

A: ok. So the date is going to be important for you to see?

P: yes, because if it’s from 2014, it’s not going to be as valuable or current.

A: what about that list that we went through, like if it was somebody who had applied, veterans vs. all beneficiaries?

P: from, I’ve taken some research courses so I’d know it’d be pretty difficult to get two groups. Veterans would be really helpful, especially veterans who have enrolled or who have graduated. [?] again, grain of salt on everything.

A: yeah, so the most important would be veterans who have enrolled or graduated.

P: when looking at va websites, I expect veteran opinions as opposed to a 19 year old who’s having trouble with algebra. I tutored algebra.

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

P:

C: earlier we talked about the trustworthiness of reviews. is there something that warns you that a site’s reviews might not be trustworthy?

[the number of reviews, like if there are a number of reviews trashing something all at once]

C: when you were looking into the two master’s programs, where did you find out information about the two schools as you were comparing them?

[looked on the school websites for info]

C: would there have to be a minimum number of ratings for that to influence your opinion about a school?

[there would be. 3 or less, would be less reliable.200-300 would be ideal]

J: [asked about Veteran Center]

**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!