**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: I have.

* + If yes, which benefit are you using?

P: I actually used my… I graduated already from Carol Community when I was still in service, and now I’m dealing with vocrehab to get my bachelor’s.

A: are you still at carol community?

P: no, I already graduated from there with my associate’s [?] degree.

A: are you enrolled in a bachelor’s program?

P: no. I went back to school in 2017/2018. And then I found out I was pregnant again… I need to get back in before my benefits expire.

* + - When did you start school?

P:

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

P:

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

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

P: 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)?

P: Overall quality.

A: do you look for a particular number of stars?

P: I compare the negative comments to the positive comments. If there’s more negative about it, I will not touch certain things as opposed to if there’s more positive, that’s something that I will look into.

A: what about star ratings?

P: yeah, typically the higher the better.

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

P: not really.

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

P:

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

P: [?]

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

P: about 90% of the time.

A: are they the primary thing that you rely on or are there other factors you’d weigh in your decision.

P: there’s other factors that weigh in, especially if it’s electronics. I’m an IT person. When it comes to computers, phones, that type of thing, I’m always looking at the specs of devices, sizes of hard drives, sizes of storage, that type of thing. Of course, when it comes to phones, the quality of camera, that type of thing because I take a lot of pictures.

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

P: amazon, for one.

A: anything particular about their ratings that you like?

P: the thing with amazon it’s the prime and being able to get things a lot quicker than most other sites.

A: how do you think their ratings compare to ratings you’ve seen on other sites?

P: to me, they always seem a lot better.

A: what do you think is effective about them?

P: I’ve just had an overall good experience with amazon. Their turnaround time is fairly quick. The prices are fairly good. I’ve not had any problems with them, especially when it comes to returning things. They always credit my account fairly quickly if that happens. I can understand why a lot of people turn to amazon.

* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools?

P: yes

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

P: recently, I’ve been comparing a lot of online schools.

A: are you going to the individual school sites or is there one site you go to?

P: I’ve been going to the individual school sites.

A: [?]

P: what else can they offer veterans? What else can they offer in lieu of just having the school paid for?

A: [?]

P: the previous school I was at, they had a veterans group that, every month, we’d hang out, do stuff together outside of the school. we would just hang out, have fun, do things and really bond. I was going to campus. For my on-campus schools, I would love to see more schools having 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. Especially now. We all have to have each other’s backs and it’s better to have that connection. Whether it’s zoom meetings, whether it’s meeting in person once a month. Whether it’s actually having time together.

A: kind of the importance of the military community.

P: right.

**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:

* 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:

**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: if I were to judge this school, I would not attend because, A) the quality of the classes are not very good. The veteran friendliness is nowhere near the top.

A: do you feel that those are the two most important to you?

P: yeah.

* + What do you think this factor means?

P:

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

P:

Five Star Ratings:

* Institution Overall

3P: the overall quality of the institution itself, but that doesn’t break it down.

* Quality of Classes

P:

* Veteran Friendliness

P:

* Employment Preparation

2P: it may be a 5 out of 5, but I would still be hesitant.

* Recruiting/Marketing Practices

1P: recruiting for, I guess the military. I’m honestly not sure, but that’s the only thing that would come to mind, unless it’s more so trying to get people’s opinions on the school. if that’s a 1 out of 5, then obviously that school is not 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)

P: there should be a section on the veterans benefits to show how well the school does with them because some schools are better than others at getting paperwork and stuff done.

A: it could be a big headache

P: exactly. They need to have at least 2-3 reps within the admissions office, not 1.

A: so can they help you with the paperwork. That’s a good one. Anything else?

P: outside activities as far as clubs/frats/sororities, that type of thing that can be joined. If there’s a rotc program, especially for those that want to go that route to go officer.

* 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, because you’d automatically put a negative review on it.

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

P: I would say that would be beneficial because at that point, you could understand why they stopped. It could have been [?] as to why they stopped.

* + Someone who finished their degree

P: Definitely.

A: what about veterans or someone who is using their gi bill benefit?

P: I think that could be beneficial. It could be a separate thing because the chart on the screen that you’re showing me. That cold be any number of students. Not necessarily veterans at all. If you had a completely different one for veterans, active duty, they have their own input. There could be other details that they could give insight to.

A: you think it could be helpful to have veterans only, but it would also be helpful to have other people, but you should be able to tell who they are.

**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.

P: [she searched for Baltimore]

A: [explained the SRP to her]

P: what does it mean when it says “School placed on Heightened Cash Monitoring”? [Saw Cortiva card]

A: what does it mean to you?

P: I’m not sure, but that doesn’t sound good at all. That school I wouldn’t touch.

A: excellent. I wouldn’t also

P: Some of these schools, I’ve never even heard of.

A: I know. There are a lot in Baltimore, aren’t there.

P: See, morgan state has a number of gi bill students, so that says something.

A: is there a specific school that you know about? Or do you think that one would be worth checking out?

P: I want to see what they have down for UMBC because that’s where I was at. [kept searching through pages; finally found UMBC].

A: [explained profile page to her]

P: ok, what is the kicker bonus?

A: [started explaining, but P opened modal] oh, there you go.

P: gotcha. Something I would not be eligible for. I’ve been out for 10, august will be 10 years since I got out. Jesus, I can’t believe it’s been that long.

A: time flies.

P: student complaints. Hmm, financial issues. [clicked on ] see, I like that this has complaints on it.

A: ok. Did you find the information you were looking for about the complaints there?

P: it’s not going into details about the complaints. I’d want to see what the complaints say. How do I get back?

A: [took her back] you’re just about to the bottom.

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

P: honestly, it needs to be at the top, somewhere in this page [institution summary, top]. Maybe a general rating on the other page [srp].

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

P: for the most part.

A: what would make you definitely trust them?

P: if there’s more 5-star ratings.

A: would it be helpful to know who was doing the rating?

P: yes. That’s why I think there needs to be a general rating for civilians as opposed to veterans.

A: if you knew that it was just veterans who were rating the schools, how would that impact your trust in the ratings?

P: I’d trust them a little bit more.

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

P:

**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!