**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 using vocational rehab.

* + If yes, which benefit are you using?

P:

* + - When did you start school?

P: September of 2019.

A: does that coincide to when you started school?

P: it coincides to when I started school.

* + 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: no.

A: do you shop for items online?

P: yes

A: what are some websites you use to do online shopping?

P: amazon, target and Walmart

A: when you’re looking at products,, do you even glance at the ratings?

P: if it’s something like electronics, I go in and look at the ratings for that.

* 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: basically I look to see how long the product lasted, to see if the person had any issues. and if they had an issue, returning it and if they received a refund

A: do star ratings help you with your decision making?

P: if it’s something below 3 stars, I scroll past it. I don’t pay any attention

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

P:

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

P:

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

P: I guess if it’s coming from an everyday person like me or if it seems too good to be true, it makes me wonder if it’s somebody else or an employee of the company that may be making the product seem better than what it is.

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

P: I would say probably a 6 out of 10.

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

P:

* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools?

P: yes, mainly I use google and I put in the information for the school. it gave me sites of what other people said about the school. basically I look at the pros and the cons for the school, and I picked the one that was the best for me.

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

P: no, I don’t remember the name of it off-hand

A: was it a va site or a general site?

P: just a general site

A: when you were looking, were you looking at something that was on site or were you looking to move?

P: I was mainly looking for something that was online.

**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: I guess the quality of the classes, meaning how long the classes are and how easy it was to get in touch with the professors if you had an issue or if iyou had an issue onsite. How easy would it be to get in touch with someone to get the problem fixed?

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

P: another thing would be how hard was it to find a job being that basically every class was online? Did you have an issue once you got your degree? What advise would you give to someone taking online classes in order to receive their chances of receiving their online degree from the school?

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

P: it would affect me knowing that other veterans had that experience and it was a great chance that they received a job. It would affect my decision a lot knowing that other veterans went through it.

**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: for institution overall, I would probably try to see exactly what are you asking about ,the classes or the institution if you were to go inside of the classroom? That would be one thing I’d probably change, if it’s something that’s online vs. being inside the classroom.

* Quality of Classes

P: it’s fine. It’s just letting you know how the classes are, whether you’re online or in person.

* Veteran Friendliness

P: I wouldn’t change it. This is basically saying how doe sthe school treat you, how does the staff treat you?

* Employment Preparation

P: I wouldn’t change that one. It’s letting me know how the school or your counselor is helping you prepare for employment after you got your degree.

* Recruiting/Marketing Practices

P: I think that’s talking about, what did the school do to bring you in? as far as, did you see ads, did they keep in contact with you during the whole process of enrolling in school?

A: which would be most important?

P: employment preparation and veteran friendliness

a: any that you think, I don’t care about that one?

P: me personally, the recruiting/marketing practices. Once I have my mind set on a school, there’s nothing they can do to convince me even more.

* 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: no, none that I can think of.

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

P:

* + Someone who applied and was accepted

P: honestly, their opinion probably wouldn’t matter to me because they haven’t taken any classes.

* + Someone who applied and was rejected

P: I would want to see why they were rejected

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

P: I would want to know what happened for them not to complete their degree. Was it their classes or was it the whole school overall?

* + Someone who finished their degree

P: I would actually want to talk to them because they went through the whole process of finishing their degree, and the help that they got from other staff members at the school.

A: should it be veterans only who should be able to give ratings or should it be other people who are eligible for military connected benefits/

P: I think it should include the family as well if they’re using the benefits because they would want to know what issues the family members have with using the benefits with the school so it should be open to anyone using the benefits.

**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: [searched for independence university] ok.

A: does this look like your school that you’re attending?

P: yes, ma’am.

A: [explained the SRP] any thoughts about ratings appearing here?

P: I guess if someone was looking at the school, I’d want to see how they feel about attending, as well as the rate of graduation and the ease of getting into the school if they’re attending

A: ok, and if you want to click in so we can see a little bit more about independence university

P: ok. [started scrolling down] ok.

A: so you can get a feel for the type of information that’s on the school profile page. Where do you think it would make sense for the ratings to appear?

P: under student feedback because it’s already showing that there have been student complaints, so under there would be a good place to have it

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

P:

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

P: if they’re comments by veterans, I would trust it, but I’d have to know what caused them to have the issues. with one thing I’m looking at, student loans, did that come from veterans because I know the va pays for us to go to school so there shouldn’t be any loans taken out. Are they overcharging people? That might be one of the biggest things

A: how would you find out, like the complaints in particular, how would you track that down?

P: maybe click student complaints or source to take you to another option to show you what the complaints are

A: if you’re interested, you can click on those links.

P: ok. I clicked on the source, and this is the page that it brought me to. Let me try the other one. Oh! it brought me to the same page, but it’s also telling me some information as to why some of those issues may have happened.

A: so you got a little information, but not really what you were anticipating

P: mhm.

A: that’s great. We actually made it through the process much quicker than I was

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

P:

C: you mentioned that ratings influence your decision about 6 out of 10. What are the other factors?

P: price

C: when you were searching for a school to attend, what made you decide on your school?

[that it was online, homework assignments, recording lectures]

C: do they have a veteran center?

P: [yes, they do. They’re pretty responsive]

J: [how did she find her school? google search. A free computer was a plus. She first heard about them through an ad. ]

**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!