**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 used them

* + If yes, which benefit are you using?

P: The post-9/11.

* + - When did you start school?

P: I think that might have been 2014, maybe, 2013 or ‘14. My most recent use was this past semester that wrapped up in may.

A: Where did you go to school?

P: I used it at several different schools. Did you mean most recently?

A: Yeah, most recently

P: University of Maryland Global Campus

A: When did you start using your benefits at UMGC?

P: I’m going to say 2016 because I used it for some of my undergrad a little bit

* + 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: I think I might have tested it, but I’ve never actually used 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?

A: what’s your experience with ratings?

P: uhhh

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

P: oh, like a review?

A: so reviews would be the comments that people leave, this is my experience, and I bought this thing. Two pieces were missing?

P: and ratings are, I give this 4 stars out of 5? I don’t like the stars. I like the commentary.

A: talk a little bit about not liking the stars

P: yeah, because it’s so subjective and you don’t get a feeling why it was rated like that. The comments are more specific[…]the rating system doesn’t convey all of that. Is that what you were asking?

A: yeah, that’s just what I wanted to know

* 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: if that’s all I had to go off of, then I’d use that, the higher it’s rated, I’d be like, well enough people thought highly of this. If that’s that, I’d let that influence my decision. If I saw something rated 5 out of 5 stars vs. 3/5 I’d go with the 5/5.

* 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:

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

P:

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

P: oh, yeah. Amazon. I hate the ones that are just a star. And I’m like, no, make people leave a review. Don’t let them just put a star. I think yelp also has that, but you might have to put a review to justify why you gave that number of stars.

A: it sounds like you attended a couple of different schools as you were getting your education.

* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools?

P: I honestly did not. I was going to school in Hawaii. I don’t know how I found university of Maryland. I didn’t spend a lot of time comparing schools, but I needed something online because I was in hawayy. Well, let me think, surely I had to have looked for a school that had the program. To answer your question, I didn’t compare schools, or maybe I did. I’m sorry. Did that answer your question?

A: it did.

P: there had to have been some kind of mechanism to compare schools.

* + 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: maybe something about transferability. Let me see how I want to say that. One thing I do know when I was looking at the school, I made sure that classes taken from that school would transfer to my program, that it counted as part of my degree program. They’re rating the schools to see which school I should go to?

A: you’re viewing ratings as part of umgc. If you’re providing ratings, what kinds of things would you want to share about your experience?

P: maybe about some of their policies when it comes to using benefits. When it comes to deadlines, it kind of doesn’t apply to you. You could wait until the last day of the semester before you have to pay. Other schools might have to drop you. That’s a good feature. That’s good to know. For me, I didn’t get full benefits. I did have to pay out of pocket for some of my education. That’d be something I let people know. They had a pretty generous transfer policy. I was able to transfer some of my credits out of that program. Some of the classes I took, they transferred back to my program on campus… that would also be something worth sharing that, hey, this school, the classes will transfer into your degree program. What else? I guess about the teachers or the method of delivery, that kind of thing, too.

A: what about the teachers?

P: do you guys want specific feedback or general?

A: no, not about umgc. Let’s say you were having a conversation and someone was like, oh, I’m thinking about going to umgc. What would you want to tell them?...insider tips, the kind of stuff you think would be helpful

P: do they have a dedicated va academic advisor? I’d want to know that. About the teachers, I guess the quality of the teachers and classwork, learning outcomes. Kind of a would you recommend this school as opposed to would you recommend this school that you’re going to?

* 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:

* + 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: ok, so institution overall…just like, in general. Maybe the perception of the school. is this a good school? kind of a holistic, putting it all together, the quality of the teachers and instruction. I see the employment preparation. How well does it prepare you to go do the thing you were studying? Yeah, to me that’s kind of the biggest thing. Would you recommend this school?

* Quality of Classes

P: quality of classes, I would think that goes with how well does this prepare you? Are you actually going to learn anything in this class? Or is this a degree mill? That’s probably part of institution overall, the degree mill. Quality of classes would be, did you actually learn anything?

* Veteran Friendliness

P: I’m thinking, how flexible are they when it comes to getting veterans booked in classes. My husband, actually, I think through his veteran advisor, it said the classes were full online, but they got him in. that kind of thing, period. Not accomodating, but actually how much help do they give to veterans that actually handles questions about your benefits and what kind of classes you should take?

* Employment Preparation

P:

* Recruiting/Marketing Practices

P: I’d want to know, are they like those relentless..my husband, at a different school, his complaint was like, when he was looking into it, they were all like, hey, how you doing? And when he got in, that all stopped. You don’t want to feel hustled. once you’re in, where’s your support?

A: which would be the most important to you?

P: Institution overall, quality of classes, and employment preparation. The veteran friendliness, I don’t necessarily agree because I’ve been around the block. Recruitment practices, everyone’s trying to make a buck. I don’t necessarily care as much as the others.

* 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: nope, that covered everything I said.

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

P:

* + Someone who applied and was accepted

P: no. I’m sorry. I’m going back to was accepted. I tend to overthink. No, I want reviews from someone who’s actually gone. So I’m going to say no to both of them

* + Someone who applied and was rejected

P: [no]

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

P: I’lll take from them. They can give reviews/ ratings

* + Someone who finished their degree

P: yes, of course

A: should It be veterans only or all gi bill beneficiaries?  
P: it should be everybody. If you guys want, you can find a way to distinguish this. The more the merrier. You get a better representation of experiences everyone has.

A: the main thing you said was being able to distinguish veterans from other beneficiaries.

**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:

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

P: [searched for university of Maryland global campus, online]

A: [explained srp]

P: now if I, I already know which one, but if I didn’t, [scrolled down] it doesn’t matter. Whoops. I didn’t mean to click that. I meant to click view details [had clicked school name?] [scrolled down profile page

A: so this page is what we refer to the profile page so if you want to take a look at this page and see how the information is organized already

P: I’m already seeing that I’d expect the rating to be near the number of gi bill students [at the top]. That’s where I was expecting it to be. Cautionary information, student complaints! Yikes! I have never seen this. So yeah, I’m going to say that the rating could still be at the top. If they’re curious, they can scroll down and see what’s the hullaballoo.

[10 minutes later] So the ratings up top, and then they can scroll down. Where do these complaints come from?

A: the complaints come out of the va feedback tool. [a explained where they come from]

P: if there’s only 48 in the last two years. Now, that number of students, is that how many are currently using their benefits or is it in the last two years? Oh, it has a learn more [clicked on gi bill students learn more at the top]. So it’s the last two years. That might skew it a little bit. [went back to profile with A’s help]

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

P: oh, well, if this is through the va, you’d imagine there’d be a vetting of veterans. I’d say I’d trust what I agreed here. I imagine there’d be some vetting process. Not just anybody can post ratings here.

A: super.

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

P:

C: what kind of reviews catch your attention first? [the bad reviews. wonders how bad can a product be?]

C: What are some signs that a review or rating might be fake?

[too glowing, anything too extreme]

C: what was your experience like with your school’s veterans office?

[used mostly for undergrad. her experience was good overall. they were pretty responsive to her questions]

J: [asked about online access] [P said teacher accessibility would be important online].

**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!