**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

* + If yes, which benefit are you using?

P: I use vocrehab

* + - When did you start 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: [said no, but will]

P: Never got into the school, but I was in the work therapy program.

A: when you were in the vocational rehab program and you were looking for a potential employer, was that something you’d use the comparison tool for, to look for a potential employer?

P: yes because I can’t be retrained to do what I’ve done

* + 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: yes

A: what are some websites that you looked at?

P: for retraining and that, I can’t be a technician. I looked at different avenues.

A: how much do ratings affect your decision to whether you’d purchase a tool?

P: quite a bit

A: can you tell me a bit?

P: whatever people say about the quality. Those are important factors. Is it worth the money you’d pay for it?

* 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: yes.

A: can you talk about what you’d be looking for?

P: I’d look at overall, well that’s very good. That’s high quality, professional. The one star, I bypass.

A: so if it has one-star, you’re not going to look at it.

P: no

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

P: accountability, if it was a company or school, their way of teaching. I’d want to know how well they are with working with the veterans.

A: any aspects that are not important or you wouldn’t care about?

P: I don’t think so. As long as there was dedication, professionalism, and ability to work with veterans, that’s all I’d realy care about.

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

P:

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

P: I’d look them up further.

A: what are you looking for?

P: I’m looking in the better business bureau, their rating with them.

A: so you’re looking for verification of the business

P: yes, I’d further investigate how business good they are. I can’t think of the right word! I gotta know all those things to make a decision.

A: what makes you trust that you can trust the ratings that people put in?

P: I cross my fingers. There’s not a 100% to verify if they’re real people. That’s why I go on the better business bureau to verify if they are.

* 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:

* Have you ever looked at sites to compare schools?

P: I can’t remember them off the top of my head. I try to do online because I have problems being around other people. I try to do online mostly, but with the ptsd, I have a lot of problems.

A: you do your classes online or searches online?

P: classes online

* + 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: it would be the credibility, the trustworthiness of the school, working with the veterans. Sometimes, us veterans get the short end of the stick. I’m interested in how they work with us, limitations. Like ptsd [?]

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

P: like the tuition, how they work with the tuition for the veteran.

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

P: quite a bit. To be able to work with the school, for one, having ptsd, like an even flow, you know what I’m saying. I get confused on paper. I thank that to the gift that the military gave me.

A: it doesn’t sound like one of the better gifts that you could get.

**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: ethics, learning ethics. Their overall, how they are.

* Quality of Classes

P: how the instructor works with the students. Is there one on one, maybe, if you need it? Or they can make it more clarified if you have further questions.

* Veteran Friendliness

P: is the institution open to working with veterans with some disabilities, some that are seen, some that are not, and they can accommodate that.

* Employment Preparation

P: that’s kind of an important issue, too. We’ll go through this program, and we will hire you, and they’re not doing that. They just get you into a class, and that’s it….they help you reach that so you can be employed after education.

* Recruiting/Marketing Practices

P: that falls more into me the business ethics, how they recruit. That falls into the better business bureau.

A: which would be most helpful?

P: the veteran friendliness,s the institution overall, the quality of classes.

A: any that wouldn’t be?

P: not worried about recruiting/marketing practices because that falls under institution overall.

* 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, those are actually, the most important ones are there.

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

P:

* + Someone who applied and was accepted

P: yes, their input, as far as getting enrolled, that’s important, but they haven’t gotten into classes yet, so you can’t get a full view

* + Someone who applied and was rejected

P: you wouldn’t find out their opinion. Do they know why they’re rejected, so maybe you don’t make the same mistake they did.

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

P: if they didn’t complete it, I wouldn’t be really interested. To me, it wouldn’t give me a very good picture. They didn’t follow through. You started something, but you didn’t finish it.

* + Someone who finished their degree

P: that’d be someone to really talk to. That shows a person that, when they start something, they finish it. Their opinion is quite valid.

A: do you think that it shold be veterans only giving ratings or all of the people who can get va education benefits?

P: it should be all people. You want the majority of ratings, not just centered with one category. If you get a broader one, you get a different idea than just having a narrow opinion. I’m more openminded with things, I’m sorry.

A: that’s ok. That’s why we’re asking these types of questions.

**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: it’d be cool to see it after we get past the information they’re asking. Like this one [landing page], after we get past it, the ratings help you make a better decision into which direction we’re going.

A: do you want to go ahead and try a search for a school?

P: that’s ok. That’s how I feel. Once we get past this page, you’d see a rating and you’d go further into that and see, this is a good school instead of weeding all the way through.

A: should we try to do a search now?

P: ok. [searched for cwu, 0 results on srp; tried adjusting state filter]

A: let me help you out for a second. I’ll take the mouse for a second [went to landing page] on this page, are you interested in seeing informaitom for the post-9/11 or the vocrehab program?

P: vocrehab.

A: ok, so here we can select vocrehab. Are you eligible for the post-9/11

P: I could be. I don’t remember. I’m eligible for all sorts of things

A: do you want to look for schools or employers?

P: schools

A: online or in person?

P: online

A: and this is going to be interesting [online filter]. It’s going to tell you how much money you’re going to get for the housing. What’s the school or employer you’d like to search for

P: central Washington university

A: [typed it in and searched] ok, and shazam! We have it! So based on your earlier comments, if there were ratings here, that would help you figure out things right away?

P: yeah. if there was nothing there, you’re weeding it, kind of.

A: [took him to profile] so you go click view details. So we’re here, and each school in the comparison tool has a page like this. So we can see where it is, and then we have some information for the benefits you’d get doing vocational rehab and on the right side, it shows you an estimate. This isn’t a guarantee, but it tells you, based on your input, what you’d get. [explained housing] so this is where you’d look for your benefits. There are different elements over here that you can open up and make adjustments if you need to. So here, how do you want to take classes? If you decided in person or online, you can make a change there. if you were eligible for a kicker bonus, if you were highly skilled, department of defense actually has some money that would kick in. and then here, they have veteran programs. [scrolled down] and this shows all of the locations for the school. this particular school has a number of extension campuses where you could go. And then we have cautionary information, student feedback. This comes in from the va school feedback tool, the feedback tool. A couple of complaints here in the last 24 months. And then there’s some contact information. and then at the very bottom of the page, there’s some credit for military training. There’s a single point of contact for veterans. That’s nice. And then that’s the bottom of the page

P: see, they don’t give you the rating or nothing, so you’re kind of, oh, I don’t know.

A: so that’s what we’re doing. Where does it make sense for them to show up on this page?

P: at the beginning. When we opened that up, it makes sense to have it right there [institution summary] it makes sense for you to have it so you know it right there. it’s helpful to know and it gives you a good idea of things, subjects you want to find out about before you make your decision.

A: so you think that’s going to be an important piece of information for people to figure out?

P: for me, it would be

A: would it be important to know how mjuch the gi bill would pay to go to this school?

P: [?] what’s paid for, tah dahdahdahda. To me, it goes hand in hand, the rating and this part we’re looking at [EYB]. To me, those are two key elements to know.

A: that makes a lot of sense.

P: if you integrate the two, to me, it would be the whole platform that you’d want to know instead of going in this direction and that direction, you’d have it all right there.

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

P: that’s a shot in the dark. They have an importance, especially if they’re coming from the veterans, especially if we can look up and see and verify certain elements of it. For veterans, to veterans, it’s important. Outside people that are not veterans, yes, their opinion plays into it but those of us that are veterans rely on each other. What do you think? That goes back to our training.

A: would it be important for you to see that these are ratings from veterans for this school?

P: yeah.

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

P:

J: what classes did you take with the vocational rehab? [he mentioned he trained to work landscaping]

J: how did you decide to take those classes? Did someone recommend them to you? [spoke to counselor and director, got an idea

C: work therapy program, [?]

**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!