**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P1 – Dan Scott**

*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 be looking at the Comparison Tool and talking about ratings and what information is helpful for Veterans when determining 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.

* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? I’m gonna say….ummm…a little bit. So yeah. I was enlisted 88-93 and I used the Montgomery Bill. As I found out as I was transitioning to retirement, I found out I had 9/11 and have been toying around with going back to school. In comparison to Vocational Rehab.
  + If yes, what did you use it for?
* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits?
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - When did you start school? Where did you go?
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?
    - Which benefit?
    - Where are you in the school selection process?
* When you were trying to pick a school, what were you looking for in a school? Geography and a little bit of reputation
  + How would you determine if it was a good fit for you? I’m gonna say mostly geography. I was thinking of applying to my alma mater and I grew up there and they happened to be a Top 20 school. The other school is in Texas and I have family there. So I’ve been around graduates who have been there.
* If you knew a fellow Veteran who'd attended a school you were interested in, what would you most want to know from them? Good question – how are the professors, how are they…this may sound weird. Everything seems to be politically divisive – are these professors going to be open-minded? Typically as a retired marine I can get past that stuff, but yeah, basically what are classmates like? What are professors like?

**First Task: Initial Look at Ratings - 5 minutes**

Let's say you received a scholarship for **Insert school** and are curious if the Comparison Tool has any information on that school. How would you go about finding **Insert school** on the Comparison Tool?

I’ve actually…I’ve used this to see stuff about the other schools I was looking at. Status is good, GI bill…Type for institution…Clicked school location.

Physical location…just looking to see what’s here. 100% instate housing..that’s a pretty high rating for 155 veterans

Who providing – individuals like me who have actually gone and attended the school

It’s a public school so GI Bill does do 100% tuition for undergrad, but it doesn’t tell me about grad. Housing and books seem to be consistent with GI Bill. So this is just the school as a whole and not the individual ones like if I was working on a PhD.

How know its Public – personal knowledge.

If it was a private school, tuition would be different. It would be the difference of the tuition minus the cap.

Pretty simple – showing up as UC Davis California

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Things to watch for:

* Does the user notice the ratings on the school cards?
* Does the user interact with any of the filters?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What do you think of school card?
* What do you think that rating shows you?

Research questions:

* What do users think of the star ratings?
* Who do users think are providing the ratings?

**Second Task - Detailed Ratings - 15 minutes**

You've heard great things about the Veteran experience at **Insert school**, but are curious about the quality of education you would receive there. How would you use this Comparison Tool to see if **Insert school** would meet your needs?

Honestly what I would do is go outside of it and go to USA world report and look at rankings. Suburban locale. Large size. Benefits…Learning format and location would be something to look at – potentially cyber classes. If its taught online or an online component. It says its Large size, so the school is pretty spread out. GI Bill pays the school…Looking through Additional Resources..didn’t click on anything. Moving through school locations…There’s the rating system. Quality of classe 5.0..Veteran community 5.0. Nice. Looking at additional informational. “visit profile on College scorecard” – what is this? Can I click on it? I’d be interested to see if there’s some sort of rating system. I’ve noticed that with education it matters where the school is on that rating system. Especially to employers. If you excel at a top tier school, that carries the most weight. UC-Davis might have the best archaeological degree in the world. I don’t know.

I think the third party would get you in the door. I’m not fixated on going to a top 25…and I knew there was a top 5 school and see what people like me are saying about the school. So it would be an overlapping system.

Ratings prompted – interesting that the veteran aspect is better rated than the education. Job preparation is good. That’s pretty impressive scores all the way around.

Any categories important – quality of classes because that kind of goes to the professors. If their quality of classes is a 4, I’d probably have to rethink things. I don’t even know where UC Davis is.

Not interested – marketing practices. I don’t know, unless they were trying to push their program.

I don’t think there are any categories that are missing.

How would these categories stack up if asking a friend….they do pretty closely.

I’d dig into Quality of Classes and Veteran community. 90% is really high. I’m curious what NA means. That uhh…they didn’t answer the question or skipped over it. Didn’t have an opinion. Because this is comparable if I’m shopping on Amazon. If there are several items made by several companies, I’ll look at distributions. If 110 veterans said they’re happy about the classroom experience – that carries weight for me. Well clearly here, everyone had an opinion (Veteran community). Pretty much everyone was plain ole happy.

Looking at this, it would help to look at a review or two. I’d want to look at the one stars and read those. Are these guys throw aways because they’re not going to be happy no matter what? Or were they having issues with classes or professors? This is good – I would like to be able to dig into these more

Is there like a fraternity if you’re an alumni? Does it have a veteran center? Is there a place where you can go and share information?

With a 4.8 overall…if it was closer to a 4.2. If 5 star is like 70% and there was a 5% one star then I would probably want to have a conversation or two to figure out why the ratings were low. This doesn’t say, hey I’m going here right now. So I can compare other schools for archaeology and move on.

Privacy – I didn’t have to log in to this. If word got out that there was a Veterans rating system, professors might want to see if there was a dynamic shift. I wouldn’t mind putting my name down because when I have an issue, I have an issue. But that’s not necessarily the case. A way to come up with a username or anonymizer would be pretty decent.

Sounds like everything I was just talking about is listed right here (privacy).

This just gives me an overall rating of what I assume is undergrad. If I knew UC-Davis is top 5 for archaology, how many of the students who reviewed went through that program. How does this overlap with a third party (rating system)? USA ratings says it’s a top 5 program but Veterans say its very precise and professors are staunch in their stance, maybe I would look somewhere different.

I’ll give you a personal story – I was a history minor, and I would have liked to get a grad degree in history. I reached out to John Hopkins and apparently they were one of the first history grad schools in the country. They don’t offer Master’s unless you are going for a PhD. That stance was very telling. If I had a true desire to be a PhD holder for teaching history, that pushed me away in terms of getting a history degree. That type of information would be useful.

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Things to watch for:

* How does the user select the school (School name or View Details)?
* Where does the user initially look for information?
* Does the user go to the ratings accordion without a prompt?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What do you think of the school now that you've seen the ratings?

Research questions:

* Are users interested in the different rating categories or just the overall score?
* Which categories are valuable to users? Are there any categories that aren't valuable? Are there any additional categories they would like to see?
* What do users think the different categories mean?
* How do users think the rating scores are determined (average of submitted scores, calculated value, etc.)?
* How trustworthy are the ratings? If things were abnormally skewed – all1 or 5s, pretty sizable sample. I’d need to read the reviews to see
* How do users think ratings are collected?
* What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating?
* Do users think the ratings are useful?

**Third Task - Comparing Various Rating Aspects - 10 minutes**

Let's say you want to attend the **University of California** and are trying to decide on the campus where you'll take classes. You plan on living on-campus and all the schools offer the classes you want to take. Walk me through how you'd use the Comparison Tool to help you decide which campus you'd attend.

Ok, so…clicked spot…clicked search…Yeah, that’s what I would try considering I don’t know the campuses….stopped at cautionary warning…oh that tells me they ran afoul of the VA. Rating by 28 veteran 1.2…historically black college, didn’t know that…Lakewood pretty decent rating…women only school huh…10 Veterans, not a very good sample, but still…everything is 100% instate so that’s not an issue. This is curious (circling lack of school rating). Lots og GI bill population but no rating. But Davis has less students but ratings. So I’m basically using the info to see which campus I would like to attend. I would like to see a couple of the rankings for Santa Clara…I happen to know that area and it’s pretty nice (very low rating)…looked at historically black, I’m not the right demographic. I’d probably avoid Lakewood because that doesn’t look very good [cautionary warning]. Law school doesn’t apply because it seems to be gender specific. This kind of gives more umph to Davis…Lakewood is a 4.4. I’d probably want to know more about this.

The representatives at the colleges – are they employed by the school or the VA? If it was a VA person for the certifying official, their bent may be more towards the VA than the school itself. So I’d be interested to see with Lakewood. It had a decent rating system, but want to know why it’s ran afoul…that’s interesting because when I used the tool before, I never ran into any of these caution warnings. You don’t really want to go to a place that’s run afoul of the reason that I’m here. Does it mean I’d have to transfer or pay for it on my own? What’s the effect of the cautionary warning?

The ones that say not yet rated – this would be like, if there was a Veterans group, I’d reach out to them. And tell them that I wasn’t seeing any ratings on the tool and I’d like to hear what classes were like, etc.

Pretty intuitive – but not being a CA resident, I don’t know where a lot of these areas are. I’d have another tab open for Google.

Would you rather not see NA? If it’s there, it’s going to beg a question.

How trustworthy are the ratings? If things were abnormally skewed – all1 or 5s, pretty sizable sample. I’d need to read the reviews to see

Number of people – theoretically, if it’s one person you should be able to see it. If there was only 5 veterans and it’s a 3.2 …or here 10 and a 2.1, that’s a decent enough sample size. It would be enough for me to want to take a look.

How provide ratings – would receive an email asking them to provide a rating would be my guess

EYB – that was a bit confusing for me with Yellow Ribbon. How am I going to afford law school on top of providing for a family?

Things to watch for:

* Does the user look at the overall rating or delve into the detailed ratings?
* Does the user pause or read the caution flag?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What made you decide to pick that particular campus?

Research questions:

* Would ratings affect the school selection process?
* How does the number of ratings weigh into a user's perception of a particular school?
* Do users think the ratings are useful?

**Post-Task Interview - 5 minutes**

* Do you have general thoughts or feedback on the Comparison Tool that you’d like to share?
* Any questions for me?
* I want to give a chance for the other people on the line to ask a question.

**Thank-You and Closing - 3 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, thanks so much and enjoy the rest of your day!