**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P2 – Dan Snedden**

*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 have – that’s actually several times and looked over the past 5 years.
  + If yes, what did you use it for?
* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? Yes I have – I have about 9 months left. I think I figured it out that I can squeeze in a 2nd? Master degree
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - When did you start school? Where did you go? North Carolina State
  + 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? For undergrad, I was one of those high achievers that came into the army after 4 years of college. For grad, I was looking more at programs, but also wanted to make sure – in DC metro, the cost of everything is outrageous. I wanted to make sure that if the cost/tuition went over, Yellow Ribbon would cover it. I’ve also done work in Veteran policy…Veteran policy work.
  + How would you determine if it was a good fit for you?
* If you knew a fellow Veteran who'd attended a school you were interested in, what would you most want to know from them? This is a really open-ended question…my first question are what are the good restaurants in the area? I hate to be that guy, but I and this is a larger issue, but I would be curious on the return on investment. Other than that, program specific information. Programs you recommend. Programs you don’t. That’s in the hypothetical would be my first. Anything I’ve done…and whatever I use the GI Bill on, will be much more targeted. That’s not the most usual, but I could be wrong.

**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 just want to see what the options are for GI Bill are…I know I’m 9/11 and personally I’m more interested in “in person and online”. Well, there’s a pandemic right now…but then also I mean, it’s good to have the flexibility. Anything I would be doing now, I would be interested in evenings, nights or online.

Rated by 155 Veterans…interesting. Generally I don’t care about what other Veterans think…they’re either brilliant and on top or other mouth breathers.

Scrolling up and down page. I can check to see if there’s Yellow Ribbon. Principles of Excellence, I don’t know that. I don’t know 8 Keys to Vet Success. Rogers STEM – I know that, because I advocated for that. I don’t know if the average vet would know that. Priority enrollment – that’s important. Independent study….Gender, that is a think. Specialized mission – are there any others? Isn’t gender specialized mission?

Who providing – it’s going to be people who have great experience, horrible experience or too much time on their hands.

Certainly fine

Oh…number of GI students, that’s also good to have. I forgot about that. I have a quick reference that when you’re at the bar to win the argument over how many GI bill students there are on campus.

I think that the biggest…I mean I kind of already, this wasn’t so much a factor for either school. I knew with North Carolina there would be an issue with tuition coverage. Since it’s become a pro-rate, you really can’t make a budget on that. I think with GW for my grad work, I actually reached out to their certifying officer just to ask about Yellow Ribbon. I don’t think I used the pool for that. But that’s about it. I guess I could see if I was going for something more non-traditional or specialized how this could be a lot more useful for those types of stuff.

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?

The benefits breakdown is interesting…I guess I know what my tuition was for my grad program because it was obscenely outrageous and I’m glad for Yellow Ribbon. For NC state, I don’t remember what it was…which is probably the most entitled thing for anyone to say.

So Yellow Ribbon…cautionary information, that makes sense with the for profit issue. So with the ratings, are these all…are they going back to whenever the calculator pool started? That it probably is and that’s certainly good thing to have big picture. But I mean we’re looking at big picture – so two to four year intervals for people. So my thought is if UC-Davis was 5 stars in 2015, but 4.8 if it dropped in 2 years. I would want to make that more relevant

How would you like to convey that relevancy? Rating over the past 3, 4,5 years, rating all time…it might be extra work. I think that could be helpful.

I would hope that the school would have that out there (school certifying official). It would be nice to have their email or some sort of contact info. Accredited Yes…I mean non-accredited schools shouldn’t be eligible for GI bill. We should only be sending veterans to regionally accredited. Credit for military training No…then UC Davis wouldn’t be a place for me.

I think that things like GI bill support – that’s very good to have and rate that. Marketing practices – that’s interesting also…while they get 4.5 while job preparation is a full 5 stars. Maybe they undersold? Veteran community – that can mean a lot of things to a lot of people. We actually at NC state of all places – it didn’t have an on campus Veteran Center…well it did, by the time we left. But we really had to work to get that. GW was like that to a lesser extent…well no, it had a veteran place on campus, I just didn’t like anyone there. Veteran community – I think of other people

Oh there is a thing I can click on all of these…or one at a time.

I think my also not clicking that was the virtual environment versus me being by myself. Clicking through ratings…I’m just reading through each of these. Something that I, I hate to…the job preparation one, I would add to that. I know this is a complicated subject – do we have higher education to broaden our horizons and become better citizens and make someone a better employee or do we have higher ed because better degree to get a good job. I was told good job. I got a master’s degree for a good job. I was one of those underpaid, underemployed Veterans. I still think I’m underpaid, but there’s a clear path.

Veteran community – add something about Veteran Center/facilities. The school supports and engages Veterans. It’s suicidal not to.

Trustworthy – I mean, I’m probably a cynic…how trustworthy is anything? As we learned today, I take any opportunity to give my opinions. I really don’t know where that comes from (the ratings). Rankings always fluctuate and I would think that experience would fluctuate over time. The most recent 3-5 years over time. I know there is not an insignificant population…you have high performers or utter mouth breathers.

Collected – We reach out to Veterans….I didn’t get that, or it went to a spam folder. I assume it would be something from EDA. Something like click the stars and not much going into it. Not a written review.

Privacy – If the VBA reaches out and said you go ahead and rate this and says we’re not going to share your individual ratings and just pipe them into the system, I have no reason not to do that. If I was predisposed to not believe that and if I think of all the data breaches if it comes out that I said GW was 3 stars instead of 4.

Fine

When I was looking at GW, Georgetown, George Mason, I generally knew what I was going to be doing, in the general realm of policy. I went with GW because I wanted that program in particular. I suppose if they all had equal programs and all had relatively equal ratings and happen to come to CT, then it would be more of a red flag if all those schools were just one star. But if all were 3.5 and above…I guess.

Who provide ratings – question worth asking, but I would err to the side…I don’t know, that’s a tough question. Beneficiaries are 10-15% of the population…I don’t remember the numbers. I know its more than a rounding error. I would err on the side of giving them a voice and I don’t think it would be substantially different.

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?
* 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.

Berkeley not rated because they’re a bunch of lazy hippies there. Fairfield must suck because it’s 2.1, but it could be very 10 spiteful, rock-chewing ones…I don’t think this would be a tipping point. If there was a bad rating, it might be something to look into.

I was 30 when I got out of the Army – so living on campus wouldn’t be a thing for me.

I mean, unless I was looking for a law school…lakewood springs, school is facing a potential lapse in a program approval and yet it’s rated quite well. That’s when you do research on your own. There’s a Catholic school and HBCU.

Fine

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!