**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P3 – Amanda Machey**

*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? Yes I have – I am trying to. I think I’ve chosen one, but I’m trying to find a university to do my graduate work at. I’ve gone on there to see the housing stipend and how much it covers tuition wise, Yellow Ribbon, etc.
  + If yes, what did you use it for?
* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? I am looking for somewhere to go. Pre-pandemic I had hoped to start in January, but now it looks like it will be the Fall.
  + 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? I personally am looking for a Christian university because of the additional classes I’m interested in taking. I’m focused mostly on tuition, housing stipend. The school I’m interested in before all this broke out in February. I was looking to see if the stipend was compatible. Trying to be thorough.
  + 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? I guess I think this sounds terrible…I’d want to know if the BAH, was what it was portrayed and was good about coming through. When things like a pandemic or government shutdown, wanting to know how consistent their payments were. Maybe personally if they had any issues…some schools have a department to handle that stuff specifically. If there was somewhere that could help them use their benefits

**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?

Those first three fields, that’s what I would put in there and I’m at 100% now finally…type of institution, schools, yep that works. I personally am only looking for in-person. It autopopulated, I would have just started typing and clicked on it when it appeared.

I don’t think there’s anything else down there that I need. So it looks like there’s only one of them and it came up. I can see 100% instate…alright, housing per month and books per year. And it has a rating, that’s nice. 4.8 out of 5 and rated by 155 Veterans. I do like that little bit. I don’t remember if that was on the site last time I went.

Who providing – like me, students…that’s a great question. That poll will be maybe from vets maybe when they’re freshman. Like a rating once you get your GI Bill or after your 4 years. Or maybe beyond their time at UC-Davis. That’s a good question, I don’t think I would think of that off the bat. A first semester freshman…someone after their 4 years, maybe it wouldn’t make a difference. Values someone who has been there longer. More valid. When I see the word Veteran, that just means someone who served. So if it was someone whose been able to use the GI Bill, I think it should be a different qualifier. Their input doesn’t make a difference if it’s a vet or a spouse. I imagine their experience would be similar. That wouldn’t matter, but the qualifier there…I would change the wording of that population. Maybe…and most vets have the benefits to use, but I assume most vets are going to college using the GI Bill…maybe just by saying veterans it’s people who had already passed it on and are just paying out of their own pocket. It wouldn’t need to be broken apart for every population, but maybe those attending using their GI Bill and those that aren’t. So I could see how that process is…sometimes there’s glitches…it took a minute to get me enrolled (Montgomery), so those two populations whether they use their benefits. As a vet, I value the opinion of other vets. But maybe they’re just rating it because they went there and not using their benefits.

I like it (the card). It’s a complete snapshot. It’s location and tuition which is important. How many students. The stuff on the left is crucial and right is nice to have. The only thing that I could see wanting more is when I see 100% tuition in-state, I’m making the assumption that I’m completely covered. If that’s inaccurate, it needs to be different. That way there is no misunderstanding. That’s the only thing I can think of. But the other ones are broken down and not influenced by the university

Super easy – no problems

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?

So this is refining the search and I don’t think I want to change the search. I just want to see if there are other things. Those are good categories there. Clicked view details.

Quality of education…so ratings by veterans. There is all of the benefits. School costs. Learning format – I’m going to assume that in-person. I’m assuming that what I want is at the top…but want to make sure I don’t miss anything. Scrolled back to top. I guess I would go to the institution and see what they say. My gut says I would probably go to their website to find that. Unless I thought my fellow Vets would give some long ramblings like what I just did. Clicked See ratings by 122 Veterans.

Okay, so there’s a plus sign here and I’d be curious to see what that would be…reading the about ratings…seemed to read first 2 paragraphs. Is it okay for me to click on this? Opened Quality of classes…well yeah, that looks and sounds good. I feel more comfortable looking at that number 110 people giving it 5 star for education…curious to say it doesn’t apply…how you could not rate the quality of classes. I guess that’s a decent possibility if they didn’t answer the question…and I would interpret that as a negative rating. Can I click down on any of the other ones. For this one (Online instruction), I would expect it because they may not have taken online classes. They did it for job preparation…which doesn’t make sense to me. Marketing practices…that doesn’t make sense to me (definition). I would assume you would find that all online. Maybe it’s when they took the survey? Maybe they forgot? Let me go back to Quality of classes…maybe these are students who haven’t taken a class yet. I’m getting better at this. Okay, I like this answer better. Maybe they haven’t taken a class yet or still in their first semester. Not clear? To me, no. I’d have to think about what the possibilities were.

I like an overall rating – that is lovely. I appreciate that. Quality of classes. I definitely think online instruction should stay. It’s just not something personal for me. I probably wouldn’t open it up or care, but I’m the anomaly, everyone else would care. Job preparation – would care. GI Bill support – yes, please. You hear horror stories from vets. I knew who to poke for my school. And that last piece, people being there in person. What made me very nervous is that I don’t think they have a center on campus. I don’t want to be emailing someone. I’m a very face-to-face person. I want someone in a department in a building in person. And that definitely made my nervous when I was taking a tour there. Veteran community – I like that this is here. It’s not as important to me. I mix to everyone and not just this status. You really have to go a certain avenue to connect to other vets. It would be marked as important down there with online instruction. I would hope that all schools have good marketing..is it something I care about? No. Is it a good category – yeah. And there’s been schools where it was hard to find requirements. I would put it below veteran community and online instruction would be at the bottom. Maybe for other vets they would think gi bill support wasn’t important.

Categories you would like to see? No….all I can think of is sororities and fraternities, but that’s not important to me unless you’re trying to avoid it.

Marketing – unless it’s marketing practices towards vets? I’m not sure why it’s in that column instead of the first…or maybe a third column? That’s an everyone thing.

Trustworthy – I mean the lowest is 4.5 stars so that’s pretty good. To me, 4.5 stars isn’t bad. I would feel comfortable.

If they’re all Marines, yikes. If they’re Air Force….

I hated college the first year I was there, and loved it by the time I was a senior. If I needed to put stock into something…I would think that most willing to contribute to surveys had a positive experience.

I am reading the bottom part though…when they transfer or when they graduate…it sounds okay. If you’re asking for these ratings, when they’ve received a COE, they might not have taken a class yet.

Privacy – I don’t know…would I want. I feel like some of that info is beneficial to the school. If I had some constructive criticism, I probably wouldn’t want my name on it. Ooh…usually if it’s a smaller vet population, they could probably narrow it down. Maybe it’s trumped? And it was grouped – like every May, every graduation – hey we polled your graduating vets…so just thinking numbers wise about that coming back…that would be a lot of effort.

Relationship for big score and little ones – it’s one of two things, an average of all of them or a separate rating. So either a category by itself or an average of the ones below it. I think it would be more valuable to me, it would be what would you rate it out of 5 and all the other categories are separate.

Easy – it’s good. It’s user friendly. It makes sense. It’s a Marine talking.

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.

And these are my options through UC..campus at Berkeley, Davis, Lakewood Springs..Merced…it said 8 up top, just want to make sure they’re all UC.

Putting aside all other…ruling out where I want to live. If I’m looking at it. This one doesn’t have a rating, but has a lot of students. Is it new? That’s something I would ask myself. Fairfield has a low rating, not a lot of people if someone had a negative experience or a really bad yar. That one doesn’t look too good either. Lakewood Springs has a really good rating…cautionary warning, yikes..for educational reasons, I’d probably avoid that one. I’d wonder if my program is the one in jeopardy. Historically Black colleges and Universities…so that is not me, but might be important to others. Yikes…that’s not a good rating, I might open it up and see what’s going on at Santa Clara. 3 stars is questionable…it’s also 36…Women only…that’s interesting. Anything under 3 stars I’m probably going to rule out.

I liked it – I definitely like having it there. It’s a nice snapshot all the graphics, color.

And Santa Clara…you have to wonder too. With 244 people, you only had 28 vets respond? It might be a tie between the not yet rated…I’m going to interpret that the campus has not been opened long or a program hasn’t been established

How much would ratings weigh into your decision? Looking for favorable rating – not having a place on campus, how did other vets fare with not having a place. It would make me feel better. If the surveys came back and it was like they didn’t really help me. I’m just thinking a physical office. The level of support you get. What kind of support did they get?

Ratings – I might give it a once-over and view a handful of comments, but I’ll scroll down enough to see a small narrative. Read 3-4 comments. I might filter. 3-4 best, 3-4 worst and 3-4 recent. Maybe they’ve grown. I would be interested in the most recent.

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!