**Insight Questionnaire for Military & Veterans’ Services Specialists**

Thank you for joining us today. My name is [NAME] and we also have [NAME OF OTHERS OBSERVING] observing and taking notes for this session. We are conducting research on behalf of a team at the VA that is enhancing the VA.gov website. We'll be looking at the GI Bill comparison tool and are interested in your feedback on what works well and where enhancements might be made to make it more useful for Veterans.

[If questionnaire is sent via email, replace above with the following] Thank you for your willingness to assist the VA.gov team with the GI Bill Comparison Tool enhancement process. Any insights you can provide on how the GIBCT is used will be helpful!

Role: student-facing role providing information to students and parents alike.

What answers are veterans looking for in CT? Normally since we are geographically located in one of the highest areas for military personnel in the world…we provide them with information about the admissions process. **We make it a point to stress the importance of research to determine what institution fits the student best, what institution has the program of study they would most like to pursue, and which is the most competitive. Mainly it’s become a pretty useful tool for new students or students that have never attended an institution.**

Any other things they’re looking at? Of course **the bah amounts are probably in the top tier or top 3 things.** **They have a better understanding of the institutions.** That way when they go into use the CT, they can determine what the better option is.

**The Veteran Experience with the GIBCT**

1. Based on your experience, what aspects of the GIBCT work well for Veterans?

Sometimes it does. It depends on the institution. At least for the institutions here in California, they do a pretty good job of outlining what the institutions are and what they look like. **Most of the time the students are looking for a POC as far as the institution they want to attend.** **So probably providing external links would be helpful.** Similar to WEAMS. That’s the next step I take with students when it comes to the CT. Once you find the school, you may want to look up the institution in WEAMS. Since that information is more readily available than just doing a google search.

**The comparables are great, the tuition amount, the bah… I wouldn’t expect it to be up to date constantly because it’s a monumental task, but it does give a good representation of our institution. When it comes to tuition, it does give a pretty good representation of the out of pocket costs.**

Obviously, the cost, semester vs. quarter, the breakdown for tuition for example, what’s available at the institution. **I’m not sure if students are actually looking at retention rates, graduation rates. I think that’s more for staff, but as far as that historical information, students go down to look at that info.** **Also student complaints are useful.** Obviously, there are good and bad that come with that.

**How accurate are graduation rates, salary, etc? They’re pretty close.** Obviously they’re based on an algorithm. As far as grad rate, they’re pretty close. I haven’t checked the info for our spring term.

1. What questions do Veterans have as they use the GIBCT?

Normally they don’t, to be quite honest. **When we have students that are using the CT, it’s mainly just as an informational source.** Mainly we’ll confirm the information with them and provide the up to date cost to them. **The way the cost is displayed is probably the most effective part of the tool.**

1. What modifications would make the GIBCT more useful to Veterans?

**One thing you might want to consider is the out of state fees. That’s usually a significant factor in whether students will attend an institution. If you can provide that, that would be really helpful.**

1. What additional features would enhance the value of the GIBCT?

**The visual representation of a breakdown of our population would be great.** When students are looking at veteran friendly institutions, they’re looking to see how many veterans are attending the institution. At least breaking that down would give veterans a greater understanding of their representation.

Categories? # of veterans, active duty, just a more visual snapshot, rotc, reserves, dependents, national guard…one of the things that we like to provide information on is the population that we service. Parents want to ensure that their students have a readily-available community that they’re accustomed to. We have a lot more parents asking questions about the makeup of our community. That would facilitate the process and at least alleviate questions about our population.

**At least for our institution because of our physical location, we’re very fortunate with the amount of traffic we see from dependents, we’re seeing a lot of transfer of benefits to dependents growing substantially from what I can see in our front office.** I see a greater trend of more military-connected students attending. Before, it was rather difficult for students to move out of state to attend an in state institution. This new passing of this bill has greatly facilitated that.

1. Do you have any other recommendations on how the GIBCT can most effectively offer Veterans the information needed to make an informed decision?

Obviously the way, one of the things I’ve noticed with our 25 and under vets, the functionality, the external links, its visual representation is very important. For example, there’s a city locale note with an external link to learn more. So I think **adding an external link to like a map would be great because that’s probably one of the more underrepresented things about how to get to our institution,** logistics, transit route. Considering that we’re in a pretty dense area when it comes to traffic, it’s rather difficult to get here sometimes.

Multiple campuses? [2 campuses?] That’s one thing I tell students is that you really have to be thinking about the logistics of commuting.

Comparing branches? I think it’s definitely useful for institutions to have multiple campuses. As a veteran, as a former student myself, it was difficult to make my own determination of where to attend. **Many students are basing their decision off of bah and not so much the institution as a whole.**

Any way to play up the right factors? I’m not exactly sure what that would look like. **Most institutions are known for specific programs…maybe breaking out the top 5 most popular programs.** That would allow another layer for the student to consider, at least the veteran student. Our veterans are aware of what our institution is known for…kinesiology, nursing…we’re one of two nursing programs in the entire county. That gives the veteran another layer of information. If they can’t get into our program, maybe they can get into another program.

**Your Experience with the GIBCT**

1. What are some reasons why you use the GIBCT?

Normally, when I attend seminars, conferences, in talks with other orgs and institutions, I’ll do a general look of what their programs are like, so the CT is one of the first tools I’ll check. It’s one thing to get a better understanding. We’ll do a little bit of research on the back end to get a greater understanding of this institution and what they look like. So **it’s useful for connections and collaborations.**

1. Do you feel that Veterans are aware that this tool is available?

For the most part, yes, at least the navy and marine corps which are prevalent in this area, do a pretty good job of putting that information out.

1. When you use the GI Bill Comparison Tool, what information are you seeking and what questions are you trying to answer?
2. What modifications to the GIBCT would make your job easier?

Many thanks for your feedback and insights!

* The VA.gov team