**Estimate Your Benefits Usability Testing Discussion Guide - Standard Desktop**

**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're going to take a look at the GI Bill Comparison Tool. Specifically, we're looking at how to calculate your GI Bill benefits for institutions and programs within the Comparison Tool.

Before we get started, a few things I want to mention:

* This entire session should take about 50 minutes. I don't want to keep you much longer than that, so I may occasionally prompt you with the next question or topic.
* During this session, we want to hear your honest opinions. We're not testing your ability. We just want to improve these tools to better meet Veteran's needs. I won't be offended by any opinions you express and 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 the screen and audio as we talk today? We use the recordings to confirm that we have captured your opinions accurately. The recordings are deleted after we finish analysis, and none of your comments will be attributed to you directly.

* If yes: Great - thank you. Once I start recording, I'll ask again so we have your audible confirmation.
* If no: Ok. My team will just observe and take notes as we go.

Start recording.

* I have started recording. I'd like to confirm: Are you comfortable if I record my screen the audio as we talk today?

**Warm-up Questions - 5 minutes**

Before we look at the website, let’s start with a few warm-up questions.

1. Are you currently using or have you ever used your GI Bill education benefits?

P: I just finished a degree program using my gi bill benefits.

A: what were you studying?

P: Computer science. I was getting an emphasis in ai. My final project was an education app in Chinese.

A: do you speak Chinese?

P: yes, the military taught me Chinese.

A: are you interested in getting a teaching certification?

P: [?]

A: just a quick note on your part when we wrap up to check out the rogers stem scholarship.

* (If applicable) When did you start school? Where are you going to school?

P: cal state Fullerton. At least for my master’s. I’ve got two degrees prior to that.

1. How did you (or would you) find out what benefits VA provides for your education and housing?

P: the first thing that was required when I left the military was taps. They definitely introduced a lot of the tools. I don’t know if they introduced all of the tools. A quick google search brings up several calculators, which seem to be reliable.

A: when did you separate from service?

P: jan. 2016, but I had to start preparing to enter college prior to that.

P: [regarding taps] I think I ended up taking it twice anyway.

1. Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?

P: yes, if that’s the one I’m thinking of, then that’s the preferred calculator. That’s the one that taps recommended.

* If yes, fantastic!
  + When do you think the last time you used it was?
  + What were you looking for?
  + Do you recall how you first learned about it?
  + If no, no worries. We're checking that out today and always appreciate getting a fresh perspective on it.

For our session today, I'm going to give you a couple tasks to do online. While you're going through them, it would be really helpful if you'd think aloud - kind of like you'd do if you were talking to yourself. We are interested in your first reactions, what you're thinking & wondering as you go through the process. The more you say about what you are thinking and wondering, the more we’ll learn.

When you think aloud, it helps us understand what works well and where we might want to make improvements to make things even easier. If you have questions, it’s likely that many other Veterans will, as well, so feel free to ask them along the way.

I'm going to give you control of my screen & mouse. I'll pass control to you and you should receive a message that prompts you to control the screen.

**First Task: Calculate Benefits at School / IHL - 15 minutes**

You are considering attending **UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY** for data science and want to know what costs (including tuition, fees, etc.) are covered under the Post 9/11 GI Bill. How would you use the Comparison Tool to find out what benefits you would receive if attending University of California-Berkeley?

*Potential prompt:* Let's say you were interested in taking classes at this school remotely, how would you go about incorporating that information?

P: according to the assignment, have I used my gi bill before or have I not? Not that it matters. Ok, let’s try usc Berkley. Ok, it doesn’t accept it that way. Let’s try again. University of cal—[she found it]. Tuition annually, 100% in state, housing, monthly, books. And let’s see, view details. Tuition and fees, housing allowance. Student complaints. [clicked on that link] it says there’s a student complaint, but I can’t tell what that means. I don’t really like that it’s not telling me what that means. Maybe it would be better to not have that at all or to be more specific.

A: what kind of things do you mean?

P: it’s like when giving it a review on amazon, usually, it’s like saying it broke or that you were charged more for something. It doesn’t really say here. Yeah, it says there was a financial issue. Honestly, if I were to reuse this, I would be checking out the previous school that I went to, and see, what was that problem? But I know that Berkeley is a really good school.

A: about the student complaints, was there any information that was in that area that helped you understand what the complaint was?

P: it does say complaint by type and it tells you what it is, but it also doesn’t say if the complaint was verified. I would be concerned based on previous experience with my gi bill that their office isn’t very cooperative, and therefore their office was being charged with things that they didn’t understand. To me, it’s concerning because I don’t know enough about what the problem is, and there’s no way to figure that out. The source detail doesn’t lead to anything. The other one led to something. This doesn’t seem to lead to anything.

P: [ I use touch screen controls for magnification all the time because it makes me more comfortable.

A: back on track here. We’re looking for the benefits you’d get if you went to uc Berkeley.

P: ok, yes. [started clicking through the mini accordions and adjusting fields] [clicked calculate button] ok, that seems to be the same.

[started scrolling down] ok, that seems to have all the people that went there [historical info table]. the only thing is to try to see if uc Berkeley had a student resource center and to try to contact them. [found a bug in student veteran group link]. It says that they have 518 gi bill students, but it says down here that they have 379. I don’t know why those numbers don’t add up. Oh, that makes sense. If this one includes family members and this one doesn’t, that would explain it [historical info table. Overall, the information that I really want is the housing allowance and the book stipend, because you don’t get that amount elsewhere. As a math person, I would be extremely tempted to check because it doesn’t have a subtotal down here [housing allowance]… the fact that it doesn’t tell you how many months it actually is, I would assume that’s for the year, and it’s not [IDEA: LIST TOTAL NUMBER OF HOUSING BENEFIT MONTHS – 36]…Is there something I’m missing?

[idea: have button grayed out unless a change will happen?]

A: I’ll circle back to the original task. Do you feel like you’ve found that information?

P: from actual experience, tuition and fees, and I don’t know if it’s possible for the website to know this, for calstate Fullerton, I had to pay some money in fees. Every semester, I had to pay $2.

A: what was the $2 for?

P: it was some silly student union thing. The first couple of times it happened, I got really nervous because I thought the gi bill was covering everything, and it wasn’t. the first time I got this, I assumed it was some kind of mistake. My husband and I would joke about this, and I’d joke, oh I have to sell my kidney now! But it was a little disconcerting. I mean, it’s certainly not bolded that there might be fees that you have to pay on your own. Yeah, it’s not even in the in-state tuition fees.

A: so disclosing all the information would be helpful.

P: yeah, even if there’s additional fees not covered. Mind you, you get a million pieces of paper. Do you honestly read them all?

Things to watch for:

* How does the user select the school (School name or View Details)?
* Where does the user initially look for their benefit information?
* How often and after what actions are users viewing “Estimate your benefits” panel to track changes there?

Accordions

* Does the user engage with the accordions without prompting?
* Which accordions does the user open?
* When making changes to inputs located in several accordions, do users go back and check previous accordions to see if changes are holding?

Calculate button

* Do users click calculate for every accordion or just once after all changes are made?
* When users click Calculate, do they notice which values have changed?
* When do users expect re-calculations to occur (as they are making them or after clicking Calculate)?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?

P: considering you gave me the website, I’m very picky and very thoughtful when it comes to certain things, at least now, having gone through it. I know my rent is currently less than the amount for the housing allowance. I know that I don’t live in Berkeley, but I do know that I could afford that, at least in Berkeley. That’s important, and the fact that the out of pocket tuition is zero dollars. I don’t know how much the books are, and if you’re a science student, that’s more expensive. Oh, wait. You said data science. I don’t see anything about getting a data science degree, not that that’s important.

A: do you think there would be additional information based on the program?

P: kind of. You’d have to apply separately. It would be kind of nice, actually, but it would be most important to know how many number of months are accounted for.

* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy, how would you rate this task?

P: it seems like a 5. It gave me the most important information immediately. I’m very picky and I’d want to contact the school and get more specific with them pretty quickly.

A: what would be the questions you’d ask the school?

P: I’d want to know if they have a student veterans club, if they have an office, and I would want to know, because of my previous experience, the additional fees I’d be required to pay that weren’t included on that list. It may only be $2, but I’d want to know so that I’d pay it. Depending on how much that housing allowance paid, you might be pretty broke.

A: let’s say you got a 3k scholarship from your local rotary club. How would you go about factoring that in there?

P: it says there’s a scholarship thing in here [typed into scholarships, then clicked calculate button]. Gi gill pays to school, ahhh. [saw the new field in gray panel]. So you’d try to use your scholarship after you expended all of your gi bill benefits. It doesn’t say that. That’s kind of a sneaky statement, but it’s true. It pays you less if you have a scholarship. It should have a statement. Like you should wait until you’ve used your benefits.

* Were you able to find what you were looking for? Did it seem like anything was missing?
* Do you have any questions about the benefits you would receive at this school?

Accordions: Let's take a look at the Estimate Your Benefits part of the page.

* What did you think of the accordions (Your benefits, Learning format and schedule, Scholarships and other funding)?

P: easy to look at. I can kind of see why it’s here.

A: why do you think it’s there?

P: partly it’s broken up so you can change things individually and also so you can fit things on the screen. I’d like to see how it would work on a mobile phone. Considering once you’ve put in your benefits, you don’t need to change your information a lot. You might want to check your information for these two [online vs in person] those three [ other location]. Doesn’t seem to note any changes between in person and online, but your housing allowance is stripped. Yeah, I guess it’s kind of good that it’s broken up into smaller chunks.

A: what do you think about how the chunks are labeled?

P: I guess it’s ok.

A: anything feel like it doesn’t make sense or anything jumping out at you?

P: no, it seems to have the thing, like, I think the name makes sense. It could be named, instead of your benefits, it could be, about you, but it’s hard to make consistent naming. Learning format and schedule, that ones’ a little weird. Learning format makes sense. That’s true. Some schools are weird. You don’t spend most of your time at the school. you spend it elsewhere [107] Berkeley is very traditional. Can you learn at Berkeley at another location? Other location, yeah, that’s to adjust your housing allowance. Taking classes outside the US, then I’d have to adjust the school, and that’s not what I want. Yeah, it seems to make sense. I feel like this might be different if it was a mobile website, something for a cellphone. I don’t think you’d see the estimated benefits on the right hand side. I do think the breakup of the estimated benefits on the left hand side might make it easier to use.

* What did you think of how the questions were grouped together?
* When you were clicking through the accordions, what did you think about how they opened and closed?

**Second Task: Ivy League school - 10 minutes**

You know that the Post 9/11 GI Bill covers Ivy League schools like Brown University, Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton. Let's say you wanted to know what costs would be covered at one of those schools. Pick an Ivy League school of your choice and see what benefits you would receive at that institution.

Things to watch for:

* How often and after what actions are users viewing “Estimate your benefits” panel to track changes there?

Upon completion of the task:

* How do the benefits at this school compare to what you'd get at UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA-BERKELEY?

**Third Task: OJT or VET TEC - 10 minutes**

OJT - A friend of yours told you that **RAGING WIRE DATA CENTER in Sacramento, CA** does on-the-job training for veterans in data science. Can you find that data center and let me know what benefits you would receive if you trained with this employer?

VET TEC - A friend of yours told you that **GALVANIZE INC** is a VET TEC training provider with a program in San Francisco, CA for data science. Can you find that provider and let me know what benefits you would receive if you took this program?

P: so do I know if this is online, in person only or in person and online?

A: let’s say that’s in person.

P: this one is supposed to be in san diego.

A: sacramento.

P: ok, well, it certainly wasn’t the one I picked. [she needed an extra space in the name and to remove the s at the end] sacramento wasn’t available. I’m going to load up for Texas. It seemed to not keep my data from last time, which is fine [in EYB calculator fields]. Ok, it’s certainly less overall [benefits]. Student complaints. Ok, well, currently, I would say, if there was one in sacramento, maybe it’s not accredited. Maybe it’s not a real place. Those kind of scams happen. I can make a guess based on those other two places. The housing allowance would be different since they’re two different locations. Unless I started googling, I’m going to say it’s not in your database or it’s not a valid location. But it’s not coming up, but am I spelling it right?

A: well, if your friends told you about raging wire data center, you’re going through the process and trying to find it right?

P: yeah. I definitely like being able to see stuff. I’d text them back and ask them. [she retyped the name after amy helped her out]. Oh, I’m blind. I’d respond thank you for sending me my update. It’s interesting that the housing allowance [ in profile] for the different months is lower. I haven’t seen something like that before. Do they have an explanation for that? I’d desperately want to know why it pays less and less each time. [she went through the mini accordions and saw if she could adjust anything, then clicked calculate at the end].

Things to watch for:

* How does the user navigate to this program/employer?
* What, if any, fields do they change within the EYB section?
* How often and after what actions are users viewing “Estimate your benefits” panel to track changes there?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?

P: I tried spelling it differently, and it didn’t come up right away maybe because I didn’t see the word like I expected it. The first thing I typed in affected the search function, which is normal. Ok, so, maybe the search function could be a little, cos I didn’t know how to spell it and I kept trying. As a coder, I’m like, well, that is a complicated problem. As a user trying to look for that, I’m thinking why didn’t it pop up like it did for sacramento?

* What did you think of this information versus University of California/Ivy League school?

P: I’m kind of biased automatically against this school. there’s not a lot of detail.

A: I think it’s built into the structure of how the on the job training programs work.

P: there’s nothing wrong with ojt things if they’re legit. It just seems like a red flag.

A: it seemed like you weren’t finding anything to support that.

* Were you able to find what you were looking for? Was anything missing?
* Do you have any questions about the benefits you would receive at this school?
* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy, how would you rate this task?

P: it was at least a 2.

**Fourth Task: Benefits Change - 5 minutes (Optional)**

You recently found out that you are eligible for the **Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment** GI Bill. You are curious how your benefits with this bill would compare to the Post 9/11 GI Bill. How would you go about changing your GI Bill selection within the Comparison Tool?

Things to watch for:

* Where do users try to change their benefit?
* Do users realize they can change “Your benefits” values on Search Results page?

Upon completion of task:

* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy, how would you rate this task?

**Post-Task Interview - 5 minutes**

* Do you have general thoughts or feedback on the Comparison Tool that you’d like to share?

P:

* Any questions for me?

P:

* I want to give a chanced to the other people on the line to ask a question.

C: using CT for searching for graduate or post-grad schools/programs?

[mentioned that it was a similar experience as searching for undergrad schools, that it worked well. Expects the same for when she starts searching for post-graduate programs for her Ph.D.]

**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!