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

**P5 – Elizabeth Tsan**

**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?
   1. I just finished up a degree program using my GI Bill benefits

* (If applicable) When did you start school? Where are you going to school?
  + Computer Science – getting masters. I was getting an emphasis in AI. Yes, the military taught me Chinese. I do have a job as a software engineer. Cal state Fulton. At least for my masters.

1. How did you (or would you) find out what benefits VA provides for your education and housing?
   1. The first thing that was required when I left the military was TAPS. And they introduced the tools that were available. A quick Google search will bring up several calculators that seem to be reliable. My date of separation was January 2016, but I had to start preparing to enter college prior to that. I think I ended up taking it twice anyway (TAPS). I don’t think it changed for me. As the years go on, I think it’s getting better.
2. Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?
   1. Yes, if that’s the one I’m thinking one. That’s the preferred one…the one that TAPS recommended. And there are at least two and that one is more reliable.

* 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?

Veteran, GI Bill, 36 months….In person only (selected). Ok let’s try typed “USC Berkley”…ok, it doesn’t accept it that way. Typed University of Cal..and clicked option. It says tuition annually 100% in-state, housing, books. Clicked View details. Scrolling through page. Student complaints. Clicked Student complaints…it says there was a student complaint, but I don’t know what that means. I don’t like that it doesn’t tell me what the complaint. It might be better not to have that…it’s like an Amazon review where it broke, or I was charged far more than expensive. This says it was a financial issue, but it doesn’t tell me what. I’d want to know if this school is really bad to go to….but I know that Berkeley is a really good school. It does say complaint by type and says it’s Financial, but it doesn’t say if that complaint was verified. So I would be concerned based on previous experience with my GI Bill that their office isn’t very cooperative and this person was being charged for something they didn’t understand. To me, it’s concerning because I don’t know enough about what the problem is, because the source detail just leads you down to…it doesn’t seem to lead you anywhere (clicked the Source). If I had access to my computer, my computer is a tablet. And I use glasses. The reason I keep highlighting the screen because I used touch screen controls to make things larger and more comfortable.

Opened About your school, Opened Learning format and schedule. Opened Scholarships and other funding. Clicked Learn more for kicker bonus…No I don’t think I have that. Clicked Calculate benefits…ok, that seems to be the same. The links are overall pretty helpful

Historical information, so they know how many have been through that school…but they don’t’ say since when, unless it’s strictly 2019. The only thing this doesn’t include would be to see if Berkeley had a veterans resource center and try to contact them. I see the certifying officials, but there isn’t any contact information, so maybe include that there. Because at least Cal State certifying officials work within the office of the veterans office. It’s also interesting that it has contact details with physical information but not phone numbers or emails. Oh wait, wait…Student Veteran Group. Clicked site (broken link). Okay, so they have something here, but it doesn’t go anywhere. I am a pretty good bug finder. They have 518 GI Bill students…but down here that says there are 379 (Historical). Clicked Learn more for GI Bill students at the top. If GI Bill students includes family members and that one doesn’t…there could be a lot of non-Veteran students on campus…but I don’t know if that’s what it is. Overall the information I really want is the housing allowance and the book stipend. Pretty simple to find – it’s all at the top in bold letters. The total paid to you might actually be that much…but as a math person, because it doesn’t have a sub-total under Housing allowance. Housing allowance is something paid only the month that you’re in school. So you have to get a job while you aren’t in school or you don’t get any money. Yeah, I’ve gotten the impression that USC is quarter system, not semester. Because fall and spring might not actually be true…that I know. I’d want to know how long Fall and Spring were. Is there something I’m missing?

Ok so from actual experience, tuition and fees…and this is a very silly point, for Cal state. I had to pay some money in fees…like go in and pay $2. And that’s not mentioned on this sheet. It was some sort of student union fee. It was just the fact that I would always get nervous because I thought the GI bill was covering everything and it wasn’t. The first time I got this fee I assumed they had made a mistake. And it was $2 and a joke about oh I have to sell my kidney now, but it was a little disconcerting because it wasn’t mentioned. It’s not mentioned that there might be fees that you have to pay on your own. Yeah, it’s not even on the in-state tuition fees.

Even if there was ‘There may be additional fees not covered” but I’m not seeing that written here. I mean you get a million pieces of paper and you’re not going to read them all. I went to the veterans group and they explained that everyone pays the $2 fees.

I’m very picky about things having gone through this before. I would know that I could live on that rent. And the out of pocket tuition is $0. Oh wait, data science…you said I was getting a data science degree…I don’t see that anywhere here. I know I got an email saying if you were getting a science degree, there were some extensions. It would be kind of nice to have something like that, but it’s more important to know how many months of housing are paid for. Not the total amount. Overall, it says that I don’t pay anything for tuition…so other than those $2 fees and parking, Berkeley is in my financial reach. Paying for rent when school wasn’t happening would be more difficult.

It gave me the most important information immediately. I’m very picky and I would want to contact the school and get more specific with them on the phone. I’d want to know if they do have a student veterans’ club, if they have an office and I would want to know the additional fees I would be required to pay that were not included on that list. It might only be $2, but I do want to know about it. Depending on how much that housing allowance paid, you might be pretty broke.

*Potential prompt:* Let’s say you received $3000 from your local Rotary Club to help fund your education. How would you go about factoring in that money?

There’s this little scholarship thing here. Typed in $3000. I don’t know if that really helps mathematically…and appears somewhere in here. Ah, that’s interesting, GI Bill paid less then. Maybe you try to use the scholarship after you’ve expended all your GI Bill benefits. That’s kind of a sneaky statement, but true. It pays you less if your scholarship will pay for it.

Left side – it’s easy to look at. I can kind of see why it’s here. Partly it’s broken up so you can change things individually. It fits better on a screen. I’d like to see if the mobile site was better. Considering once you put in your benefits, you really don’t need to change your information a lot. Maybe change those two (Learning format and schedule). Doesn’t seem to be any difference in in-person versus in-person and online. Yeah, I guess it’s kind of good that it’s broken into smaller chunks. I guess the [labeling] is okay. No, it seems to have the things…like, I think that the name makes sense. Instead of “Your benefits” it could be “About you”. It’s hard to make a good naming scheme. Learning format and schedule – that one is a little weird. Format makes sense. This might be very different if it wasn’t Berkeley. Berkeley is very traditional. Can you learn at Berkeley at another location…yeah, that’s to adjust your housing allowance. I’ll be taking classes outside the US…then I’d have to adjust the school. It’s not…I feel like this might be different if it was a mobile website, something for a phone. Well I don’t think you’d see the estimated benefits on the right hand side. It might make it easier to use on mobile. That might be a positive.

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? No
* Which accordions does the user open? Scholarships – only when prompted
* 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?
* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very hard and 5 is very easy, how would you rate this task?
* 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)?
* 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** provides 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?

Clicked Employers, Typed Raging and clicked RagingWire (got wrong results), added sacramento to the end. No results. Yeah, Sacramento isn’t available. So we’ll look at Texas. It seemed to not keep my data from the lst time. Made modifications and clicked Calculate. No student complaints. Well currently, if there had been one for Sacramento. Maybe it’s not accredited. Clicking through Learning format and schedule and Scholarships, I can make a guess, but housing is going to be different. So either the data isn’t in your school or it isn’t a real school. Am I spelling it right? I usually get links and stuff from people. [What if your friend told you that Raging Wire was two words] made corrections on search. Oh…I’m blind. It’s interesting that the housing allowance after different months is lower. I have no idea what that is, that is insane. Do they have an explanation for that. I would desperately want to know why it pays less and less each time. Clicked through accordions. Will be working? No idea. No phone numbers, no email addresses.

I tried spelling it differently and it didn’t come up right away. Maybe it’s because I didn’t see the word like I expected. Yeah, there’s 3 different locations…okay go back. Went to landing page and retyped it in correctly. I didn’t know how to spell it. As a coder I know that is a complicated problem, but as a user I’m like “why didn’t it show up when I put in sacramento?”.

I’m kind of biased automatically against this school. There is not a lot of detail for this school and the fact that the housing goes down each month. When I went through TAPS, they mentioned nothing like that. The housing is a weird thing I’ve never seen before. If that’s a thing, I do not recall. I would absolutely asking questions about the legitimacy of the program. It just seems really weird. I wish it just says “because of the way OJT works, you get paid less each month…”

It was at least a 2 because I was stuck on those other two places. Thank you for telling me that I wasn’t spelling it right. I think I looked up a school from Berkelee and it had two EEs at the end and I was like No I can’t take this class, it’s in French.

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?

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

**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**

Those are all the tasks I have for you today.

* Do you have general thoughts or feedback on the Comparison Tool that you’d like to share?
  + Overall I appreciate the tool. If I go for my PhD, I don’t know if it would help me. I would like it if it helped me when I look again. For graduate degree, it certainly helped me. I was looking for very specific things. And so I was kind of stuck on – and I already had my bachelor’s so I couldn’t compare it to that – but it was easy enough to figure out what I needed to know. I am assuming, I haven’t looked at it. I haven’t started…I was thinking of going to USC. But I would like to see if it does help or not. I’m probably going to end up calling the school and asking for specific information.
* Any questions for me?
* I want to give a chanced to 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!