**Discussion Guide for Comparison Tool Redesign (Veterans and Beneficiaries)**

**P9 – Calvin DeWitt (Bene)**

*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're going to talk about your education journey - what's important to you in selecting schools, how you go about finding information and ways to streamline your experience with the VA.

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 are not testing your ability. 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 the 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 - 5 minutes**

Let’s start with a few warm-up questions.

* Are you currently using or have you ever used VA education benefits?
  + I am – it’s the Chapter 33 Post 9/11 benefits and I think it’s 70%. It was transferred to me from my dad. I started school the Fall of 2018.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?
    - When did you start school?
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?
    - Which benefit?
    - Is that benefit yours or was the benefit transferred to you?
    - Where are you in the school selection process?
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? I have not, no.
  + If yes, what did you use it for?
  + How did you hear about it?
  + Do you remember when you used it (while researching schools, after you had picked a school)?

**First Topic: Researching and Picking Schools - 15 minutes**

Let's talk about when you first decided to go to school.

* What made you decide to go back to school?
  + Well first…both my parents were college graduates and I did well in high school. They gave me a choice, but I always planned on going. I was originally in Kansas, but was always interested in politics and policy. So Washington DC was very appealing to me for a college. So I applied to George Washington University and a couple other schools – with schools in line with how I did in high school and try to go to as good as a school as I could. And that was right out of high school. It’s my 3rd year and I plan on graduating in the spring and I’ve been very happy with the experience.
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?
  + What resources did you use to research schools?
    - Yeah I think their websites that compare schools. US News and World Report – that’s a common one that ranks schools. And with tuition and stuff what the schools would put out. It’s not always exactly clear how much aid a school will provide. My mom works at University of Kansas and she understands how it all works and they helped me out. I used high school guidance counselors and not just what universities were telling us.
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?
    - It’s very hard just because I think one of the hardest things is knowing what classes are going to be like. You can’t get a good picture of that. You don’t really get to sit in on classes with tours and such. Trying to figure out which classes are going to be the most engaging. You can find the course catalog and I looked at that once I narrowed my decision down.
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?
    - I don’t know if there’s any specific information. Sometimes its hard to get a feel for what classes are going to be like or what campus life will be like. Like how much aid you can expect to get from an institution. Schools have their average, but that doesn’t give you that clear of a picture. It’s not clear how much financial aid you’ll get from a school until you get accepted.
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?
  + I’m sure there are…maybe like, I didn’t realize how easy it was to get in contact with advisors. Talking with them has helped a lot in getting answers to questions and I don’t think I used them enough the first year. I’m not sure, there’s some stuff I didn’t know..but it’s stuff you can’t know until you’re in it. What student life is. What professors are like. I haven’t been overwhelmed in going to college, so I don’t think there’s anything big in particular.
  + I would say US News was pretty accurate. I’ve done an internship on capital hill and that was something I wanted to do. I was very lucky to have gotten to do that and I feel like they represented that very well.
  + When you looked at US News and World report – what info were you looking for? Political science programs. I wanted to be around people who were interested in politics. Figure out what each university valued. What culture was like on campus. Class size – I wanted a medium sized institution. One that had a lot of different programs. Maybe the liberal arts field so I could take classes there.
* Are there any specific programs that you as a military-connected student are interested in?
  + I guess I’m on the military newsletter and have been to the Veteran affairs office and they’ve been very helpful with everything I’ve had to ask about. Other than that, no real programs.
  + What asking about? Typically at start of every semester – and this is expected – about 6 weeks before we receive the VA benefits, going in and making sure everything is on track and that I’ve done everything I need to do. I don’t want to be in the situation where I need to do something and it’s too late. So I’ll come into the office and ask those questions “Have I submitted everything?” and real quickly they can tell me “Yes” and when I can expect the payment. And they’ve been accurate.
  + Find office? Probably It was right by the financial aid office. So I probably went to the financial aid office and just knew it was there. I’m sure the first time I went to the office, it was to get help on something. I didn’t go in to introduce myself or wasn’t shown the office. I don’t remember specifically why I went, but it wasn’t a source of stress. I’ve always been pleased when I visited. I knew I was getting VA benefits and my dad probably told me.

**Second Topic: Comparison Tool - 15 minutes**

*Facilitator brings up CT* I'm going to bring up the GI Bill Comparison Tool so we can walk through it together. As we go through it, let me know what catches your eye or what information you think is valuable.

Landing page:

* What would you do on this first page?
  + Changed status to Child. I guess this in-person/online. If I was doing this from the perspective of 2018, I would say in person online, but with coronavirus I would probably do inperson and online. Typed in George Washington and selected option. Eyes first went to Refine search section. I would expect it would be more options at programs at George Washington and then I realized its to refine the search and realized the first result is what I needed. Opened it.
  + Changed military details…changed to Child. (70% held).
  + So yeah, this is real (eyb)…this is easy to understand. Just that this is the price that the GI bill would pay to the school. One thing that is not immediately obvious is the difference between tuition and fees charged and the out of pocket tuition. I’m not quite sure what that difference means. I’m not sure if the tuition and fees being irrelevant or if it’s two different prices. My assumption is that the out of pocket tuition…the tuition and fees is the price that George Washington advertises…actually as I’m looking at it more…I think it would be the 56 – 17 to get the out of pocket. Out of pocket is the price I would pay after the VA pays the 17k to cover that 56k. It took a minute to process that, but it made sense. My first intuition was an estimate of what I’d be receiving from…but I hadn’t put in any information about how much my parents made and what my grades were, so that was my first intuition.
  + Another thing it took me a minute to process (total paid to you)…that took a minute because this is 1600 a month and this is 700 a year and that took a minute to add up. It was just a matter of figuring up how it all added up.
  + Opened school costs and calendar, opened learn more for tuition and fees per year. This is a nice little thing – I can change this if I know I’m getting financial aid or scholarships. So if I change that to 35000, click update benefits. Yeah that’s…that’s cool. I can see it changes that balance. I know I had this question going into college…I had this question going in, if my benefits change if I have a certain amount of aid. I did notice that this changed down here (tuition and fees per term). It used to be everything in the Fall and now it’s splitting it up. That would be helpful to me and especially my parents. That’s very helpful. Opened extension campus…yeah, I might take a class here next semester Opened learn more on where will you take a majority of your classes. The reason I clicked it is because you can take a few classes at Georgetown and I may do that next semester. Clicked learn more for kicker bonus. That was helpful – I didn’t know what a kicker bonus was. Oh this is awesome…(scholarship) entered 15000…ok yeah, this is helpful here. Went back to tuition and fees. Changed back to $56k. and changed scholarships to 20k. Yeah, this is helpful here based on scholarships. This helps a great deal. The only thing I can think of immediately – I didn’t know exactly how much scholarship money I would be getting and I’m just basing scholarships on the averages of what the school told me without knowing what I’d actually be getting. Regardless it’s nice knowing its going to affect. How everything is broken down. It’s nice how the out of pocket tuition is affected.
  + So this is (Veteran programs). The first thing I’m thinking is that none of these programs are a part of my college experience. Opened military tuition assistance modal. I like how this pops up and it doesn’t change the page and I can get the information.
  + Yeah so ummm…opened all school locations…I’m noticing they’re all the same amount except that…(estimated housing). I can say this is kind of what the housing benefits…this is. helpful because its what housing costs in the area. One thing I would probably like going into college…is look at what these were (1310 G St)…I think it makes sense that these are satellite schools of George Washington.
  + Cautionary information is pretty straightforward. 0 student complaints…my reaction to that is that there isn’t anything that a lot of students have a problem with. There’s no way there’s no complaints, but it would give me some comfort.
  + Contact details is nice…it’s good to have that info. And this too (SCOs)…I know I’ve emailed them before and corresponded with Collin and he’s been very helpful.
  + Yeah this is cool…(historical information). I don’t know if I really would have cared about this information, but knowing there have been 1000 recipients is that they know how to handle the workload and they know what they’re doing. One thing I did think about is having an email address up there with contact information. My preference is to go to the school if I’m on campus.
  + It’s not always obvious how much tuition to expect going in to a school. If I was still deciding between schools, it would be nice to have quick tool to put in my info, high school gpa and sat score and put in what financial aid I would expect. That is something that would be helpful to put in the website. I wouldn’t expect it – and it would be hard and things are always changing, but that would be one of my concerns. Everything through the application process it isn’t clear what the actual cost will be. It was really unclear how each different school compared to one another. I certainly wouldn’t hold that against the VA. It was something that frustrated my family.
  + Veteran programs – I think I just didn’t know what to expect. I didn’t know how each of these would interact with what I had seen above (eyb). I understand that this tells me what the school offers. I assumed if it was listed, then the university would offer them.

Search Results page:

* What do you think of the search results?
  + Do you see the school you're looking for?
  + What do you think of the information you see?

School profile:

* What do you think of what you're seeing?
  + What stands out to you?
  + What do you think of the information you see?
  + From what you see here, what information would be most helpful to you?
  + What information is NOT important to you?
  + Is there anything else you would like to see here?

Are you familiar with any of the following programs:

* Student Vet Groups
* STEM Scholarship
* Yellow Ribbon
* Would you be interested in learning more about these programs?

**Final Topic: Making It Easier - 5 minutes**

We've talked about researching and picking a school and also the Comparison Tool.

* If you could make the process of selecting a school simple and easy, talk me through what the ideal process would look like.
  + What type of information about a school would be critical to know?
  + What people or websites would you talk to to help make a decision?
  + Are there any parts of the Comparison Tool that you would change?
  + Are there any parts of the Comparison Tool you would keep the same?

**Post-Task Interview - X minutes**

* Any questions for me?

**Thank-You and Closing - X 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, well thank you so much again, and enjoy the rest of your day!