Participant:Travis (participant 1)  
Date: 10/15/2020

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

*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?  
  *No but I fit into that category of looking to use them within the next few months. I had started a program through American online.. I am coast guard and I used the coast guard tuition assistance, a quarter the way through I got into a coast guard grad program but now I am looking to go back and unfortunate that tuition assistance is no longer available so I was looking into strongly the VA benefits*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?  
    *The post 9/11 GI Bill*
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?
    - When did you start school?
    - Where are you in the process  
      *If I could find a more prestigious school or something get a leg up I would be interest in that*
    - How would you find a more prestigious school?  
      *I would use google and try to find the rankings for the program I am looking to do. I am interested in changing my masters to a MBA*
    - What terms would you use to google?  
      *selective duty, the opportunity to do that in my free time is critical\**
  + 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?  
  *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?  
  *The coast guard really values continued education, having advanced degrees and continued education every so often shows that you are engaged in self-development and that is highly sought after. And I also want to prepare myself for my time after the military*
* You are not active duty but you are still in the coast guard and qualify for post 9/11 bill? – NTS I may have captured this incorrectly   
  *from my understanding you don’t have to be active duty to utilize these services.*
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  *Out of pocket costs, whats the bottom line gonna be for me?* 
  + What resources did you use to research schools?  
    *Online search engines, no specific tool. I think it would probably be beneficial to me to research through the VA… I am somewhat familiar w/ the Yellow Ribbon Program where some schools are more advantageous to military remembers so I would be interested in that program.*
  + Are there certain sites you know of that you just can’t remember the name of or you just want to go out there?   
    *I used the US News and also The Prinston Review*
  + How do you feel about those two sites vs other sites that show up in your general online search  
    *well the name Prinston review feels bias to me but I would probably look at a few others um one that the VA offers I would also consider, you know not knowing much about the program I’d like to know how supportive they were of veterans and funding.*
  + Elaborate on Bias?   
    *my guess is its operated out of Prinston so if they are continuously ranking themselves at the top…*
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?  
    *It was awhile ago… I’d say the difficulty… at the time I hadn’t taken the GRE and I wanted to find a masters program I could do without having to take that program but also aligned to the military and nothing out of pockets, something logical at the time to get a good degree done.*
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    *….I’m not sure. Kinda difficult to call because it was about 7 years ago.*
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?  
  *uhhh… I remember it being a lot of work. Much more than I expected. I was only taking one class at a time but the program I did had me writing 6 page papers every weekend. It had me doing a lot of work for a not very prestigious degree.*
* ~~Are there any specific programs that you as a military-connected student are interested in?~~

**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?
* How would you interact with this page?  
  *The first drop down makes sense, I expect that… the second one I would want to click on the learn more but just to make sure I was eligible. If there was a way to someway check your status… not sure if that exists if I could type in something from my CAT card, some sort of tracker to pull up my eligibility. Uh… the next dropdown… Okay I would be the 36 mo+ that’s pretty self-explanatory. The type of institution… I might be interested in… well not me personally but maybe I’m interested in… Bachelors, Masters, if the schools were sorted on that as well.. maybe selecting masters would narrow down schools that do not offer that. I’d definitely would be interested in online only. The in person and online I might be also interested in if it was only a week, or a couple weekends, a minimal in person requirement.*
* Are you familiar with how housing allowance is calculated?  
  *As active duty I assume I wouldn’t get one since I am already getting one…*
* Lets say you want to search for a school, what information would you put in this search box to make that happen?  
  *um… employer name, degree, mba if we could search that… this seems much more generic, if you searched employer name ex. Delotte… I don’t know what I would expect to come up.*
* Lets go with a school or location for now. What would you pop in there?  
  *since we have in person or online and I’m in DC I might pop in Georgetown.*

Search Results page:

* What do you think of the search results?  
  *I see you can narrow it down by state and country on the left-hand site there. Let’s do that… I might find out here that Georgetown doesn’t have a business school but let’s school and see. Hmm I see there is a way to select yellow ribbon which I was interested in, I don’t know if that applies to Georgetown?*
* What do you anticipate to happen once that is selected?  
  *If they do not have the yellow ribbon program id expect it would not populate.*

*One thing before we move on… the warnings of school closings checkbox… Im not sure what to expect with that… \*after clicking learn more\* oh it’s not related to the corona virus as I expected.*

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

School profile: Georgetown University

* What do you think of what you're seeing?  
  *This seems like its tailored to a bachelor’s degree if I’m not mistaken since it says 4 year program… I wouldn’t believe the information I’m seeing on the right hand side about the cost etc… I would go back to the previous page and see one of those other schools… maybe the Georgetown center for continued education… \*on new school profile\* hmm and it didn’t get me much further, so I’d probably just go to the Georgetown website and see if they even offer an MBA, and that’s probably something I would have done before even using this.*
  + 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?
* So you mentioned right away you saw the 4 year degree and the benefits… so…  
  *for awareness they do have a mba program, I just did a quick google search, they have a program through the madona school which wasn’t listed. But anyways… Id click on the Plus ( on estimate your benefits) um under enrolled Id say id select half or less if im only trying to take 1 or 2 at a time… (amy selects changes and clicked update benefits) I don’t notice any changes. Hmm so im seeing I would have 30k in out of pocket tuition so id see if there are any other options by clicking the learn more in scholoarships.*
* Was that helpful *no.*

Are you familiar with any of the following programs:

* Student Vet Groups
* STEM Scholarship
* Yellow Ribbon  
  *id have to learn more about it, if there are any obligations. I thought it was a way for schools to have veterans part of their classes, and a way they would match the GI bill funding. I’d definitely want to do it given what I think is correct but I’m not entirely sure. From what I see there () I would do it… I don’t know what I kicker bonus is… () Id definitely want to learn more, technically I’m not DOD so I may not be eligible for that.*
* Would you be interested in learning more about these programs?
* Verterans programs drop down  
  *I see the check marks so looks like they offer them. Id want to know how they participate in these programs… you know the almighty dollar. Id like to know how much they participate.*
* Does the verteran group appeal to you?  
  *Does not interest me.*
* Cautionary Information  
  *well that’s good there are not complaints, I assume that’s only students who are utilizing the VA benefits.*
* Additional information  
  *so the accreditation is Important, I would want to get a degree from a accredited school that is worth more… I see they might offer credits for some of my military training so that is great. The historical information is valuable to show.*
* Is there anything that would be valuable here for you to have for selecting a school  
  *mmm out of pocket costs. If I could compare a select few schools and see the out of pocket cost break down that would be great. It would be interesting to see all the stats like which one is using yellow ribbon or.. side by side, like if you are cost comparing a product on amazon. If it has this feature there is an check and if not a x… if the VA has a ranking structure of the schools and how the VA deems one school over the other but given that they process so many students through all these schools id assume they are in a position to give some input on that.*
* What opinion would you want them to be ranking on?  
  *I would say each criteria could have its own rankings… uh ex Georgetown ranks second for overall processing of their VA funding or 10th in the involvement in the Yellow Ribbon Program… something like that. I don’t think there could be an overall ranking because people are looking for so many things.*

**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!

**Sample Conversation Guides *(note: these links point to resources in the va.gov-team GitHub repo)***

* [Scheduling Accessibility and Usability Study: Complex Recruit, Highly Variable based on User Profile](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/health-care/appointments/research/2017-studies/access-usability/access-usability-conversation-guide.md)
* [Veteran ID Card Discovery Interview](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/products/veteran-id-cards/research/discovery/discovery-conversation-guide.md)