Participant: *Paula (participant 12)*   
Date: 10/21/2020   
Time: 12:02 pm

**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?  
  *not currently but I have in the past and I am planning to use them in the future. Looking at next semester*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?  
    *In the post* 
    - 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?  
      *9/11 GI bill, I cant remember what chapter that is, I get so confused there are so many chapters right now…*
    - Is that benefit yours or was the benefit transferred to you?  
      *That is my benefit*
    - Where are you in the school selection process?  
      *Id like to go back to school…I’m looking at going back into the workforce but I want to try to get a job where I work from home and to do that I would like to get a different degree from what I currently have.*
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?  
  no. never heard of it.
  + 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?
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  *um that they have online classes and that they also have… a… I want a school that has a satilite office nearby because every so often I like to go into an actually office and talk to an actual person… every so often id like to go in and take a class in person… um because of the difficulty for me… some things I am very good at doing online and other types of things I might need a teacher to walk me through it depending on the class um… I don’t know um… either the level or the topic.*
* *Where are you in your selection process?  
  um I have reached out to two different schools and they have agreed to review my transcripts but they don’t have the satilite schools near me and that is the thing that kind of put them out of the running for me at least. The big deal for me is… um well there was one school is tarted to attend, they lost their certification and went out of business… I guess I could say it was ITT Tech, it put me back quite a bit. They were around for so long and then bam, and those credits didn’t transfer very well many schools… one reason im considering going back to strayer is that they would take those credits… \*sigh\* um and I also have approval with my post 9/11 GI bill with that college, so everything is all set but im not happy with the degrees they offer at this satellite location (Huntsville)* 
  + What resources did you use to research schools?  
    *So I go online and I always make sure the schools are accredited, what schools are local or have a local satellite, and then I look at their degree plans to see if they have anything im interested in or anything that goes along with the degree I’m currently interested in, and then I look to see if they will accept my credit from ITT Tech, and all of that together really narrows things down pretty quickly.*
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    um it takes the schools a lot of time to tell you if they will take the credits from ITT Tech, I mean if it was a major college that was accredited they have no problem but the time I’ve spent its very difficult. Any other school (than strayer) wont take the ITT Tech credits, its almost a waste of time and money of the GI bill, its one of my biggest struggles and frustrations.
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?
* 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?

Search Results page:Graphical user interface

Description automatically generated  
  
*Oh… \*what was that oh for? I find it interesting how many students are going to the school who are GI bill students… I would have thought it would be more… I remember when taking classes that the entire class was full so that just jumped out at me… I like seeing the other locations so if I moved I could see where else I could go.*

* 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?
* What would you do next?Graphical user interface, application

  Description automatically generated  
  well lets see, I think the next thing id see how clicking in person only impacts my housing allowance… um and that did up it so if that’s what it would take I would definitely change to in person classes.
* Oh I think the cumulative post 9/11 changed that to you, lets try updating that…
* Lets click learn more…

School profile:A screen shot of a computer

Description automatically generatedGraphical user interface, application

Description automatically generated  
well I see the tuition, housing, book stipend… first thing I notice is the estimated housing allowance compared to all other locations for strayer… the contact details for the physical address…   
  
pauses at additional summary… Graphical user interface, application

Description automatically generated  
  
um weather it’s accredited um… because that’s a big deal for me obviously so I wont have a problem again… they give you credit for military trai ning that’s really good. Oh it gives you the institutional code so if you were doing FAFSA, is that what that is? That’s really good. Um… A screenshot of a computer screen

Description automatically generatedGraphical user interface, application

Description automatically generated  
some colleges will make you pay even if the… ive had this problem with my daughter… colleges make you pay if they didn’t have the right paperwork in time but they would reimburse you after they got the money from the VA… it was a really irritating process, I had that issue with my daughts… not usually with veterans but you have that issue with dependents… so I like that you can review the schools policy but looks like not right now. So its good to know if you need to pay and wait for a reimbursement. A screen shot of a computer

Description automatically generated  
uh so when I did my GI bill I did buy into that kicker, im sure you understand that when you buy into the kicker you receive a additional amount of money every month and I assume it helps you calculate how much money you’re getting in the benefit every month… um does it put it in the housing allowance? Im not seeing where it went… ah if I push no… lets see.. okay it went to housing allowance… there we go.   
  
um theres no information about travel, food, um… I don’t know how all inclusive they are trying to get but if you are helping a student decide if they want to go here… a lot of people who have never gone here before are just looking at the computer and not knowing anything else… or that you cant access a map through hereA screenshot of a computer screen

Description automatically generated  
 well then how would you know that this location is rural, not a location for someone who didn’t already have themselves established, didn’t have a mode of transportation, didn’t have a way to get food. I mean, that’s really important to know. The other thing that it doesn’t include is that this location.. and I say this because in the military you do end up going to a lot of satellite learning institutions… this satellite location, has an actual library, that is not on this page and I say that because that is something that a student might want to know. The satellite I went to for ITT Tech, did not have a library but they did have a computer lab, those kinds of things.. a student want to know. What amenities does this college have? These are all important to the student because satellite colleges come in such a wide variety of flavors like you could get such a variety or things, bare bones OR it could get so involved you have a computer room, a library, teachers, a cafeteria…. I mean you just don’t know if you have never been there before. Almost like Priceline… what amenities does this hotel have and a check, that would be very helpful… does it have a library, cafeteria, computer lab, a lending closet… ITT Tech had a computer lending closet so if you didn’t have a computer you could borrow a computer… anything really.

* 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!

**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)