Participant: *Steven (participant 2)*   
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?  
  *Yes I have used it in the past*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?  
    *I used vocational rehabilitation*
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?  
      *It was mine.*
    - When did you start school?  
      *I used this benefit from 2009-2012*
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?  
    *Yes*
    - Which benefit?  
      *I’m not sure, I haven’t looked into it that well.. but I would like to I guess further my education.*
    - ~~Is that benefit yours or was the benefit transferred to you?~~
    - Where are you in the school selection process?  
      *um… its not anything.. I haven’t dug in too deep, im just thinking about it. Im from North Carolina so more than likely a NC school… Im not sure what benefit I would use because I don’t think I can use the vocational rehabilitation again. I know about the post 9/11 GI bill but not much else.*
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?  
  *No I have not.*
  + ~~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?  
  *a couple things… the main reason just like any one else Is because I want to get a higher education and expand on what I started with… possibly find better employment… learn what’s out there.*
* What is your starting point?  
  *I currently have a associates degree in automotive technology.*
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  *Well before I went into the marines I was in technical school so really I was just trying to go back to that technical school and finish what I was doing.*
* Did you go back to the same school after the MC?  
  *Yes.*
* Did you do any research or go back to where you had been?  
  *I did and there were some better schools but because of the way the vocational rehab is set up you have to be local which limited some of the options I was looking at. I looked a few schools but again, I wasn’t able to go to those schools.*
  + What resources did you use to research schools?  
    *Online… I talked to a few of them on the phone, had them send me information about the school. I went directly to the schools websites.*
  + How did you know about these schools?  
    *I just knew about them, TV commercials, word of mouth, online stuff will pop up.*
  + ~~What was the most difficult part about picking a school?~~
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    *Uh… I’m trying to think. No I don’t believe so. I was able to find everything I was looking for.*
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?  
  *Uh yeah. Well you know because… I guess the real challenge was they pretty much… they weren’t really um equipped for… the classes were structured where there were a lot of people, it was difficult to get one on one time. Employment assistance options weren’t really there. It was just a lot of stuff they tried to put a lot of things into one little package instead of focusing on a few specific things. They would focus on broad issues and touch on a little bit of everything, you left the program not knowing much about any one or two things but knowing a little of everything.*
* ~~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: Enters in Durham, selects USA, NC in left filters.

* What do you think of the search results?  
  *uh… so im seeing tuition, housing, and books… yeah the thing about this city is its mostly medicine and I don’t think I want to do medicine. Um…* 
  + Do you see the school you're looking for?  
    *um… probably north Carolina central or duke university*
  + What do you think of the information you see?  
    *hmm I see the verteran programs here… Uh… I don’t know too much about this but I mean um… seems pretty interesting though*
  + *User clicks on about this tool page in the school complaints.*  
    *earlier we were looking at the school complaints portion of the page, can you walk me through your thought process here… when you clicked source - what were you looking for And was this what you expected?*

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?

*Im not really finding any programs id be able attend. \*would be interested in seeing programs offered at the school ex. Mechanical Engineering… something like that.*

*This is a lot of information and its confusing, where would I actually start? If I were to pick something and go with it… what would I need to do to uh get everything going?   
you mentioned ^ is this a question you have that feel goes unanswered after browsing the school page?*

*Id like to see a veteran specialist or representative, I’m guessing duke has the same thing, someone vets can reach out to in order to get everything going.*

*Id like to see a link or whatever ‘vets apply here’ a contact number I could reach out to someone get an understanding of what I’m doing…*

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)