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

**P2 – Steven Oliver**

*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. I used the Vocational Rehabilitation. I believe it was mine. From 2009-2012.
  + Plans to use in the future? – Yes, actually I’m not sure. I haven’t looked into that well, but I would like to further my education.
  + 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?
      * It’s still like it’s not…I haven’t dug into it yet. More just thinking about it. I’m from North Carolina, so more than likely a NC school. I don’t know what I can use and I don’t think I can use the Voc Rehab a second time. So I’ll have to look into options. I know of the Post 9/11, but I don’t know much about it. So I’ll have to research options.
* 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 thing is just like everyone else. I just want to kind of like um…get a higher education. Possibly find better employment. Find out what’s out there.
  + Currently have – have an Associate’s degree. That’s the highest level so far. It’s in Automotive Technology.
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?
  + It was a technical school before I went into the Marines. I was trying to go back to the technical school and do what I started. Yes – I went back to the same school.
  + Any research? I kind of did…honestly it was some better schools that were along the lines of what I was trying to finish. Because of the way the Voc Rehab is set up, you have to be local.
  + What do you mean by better schools? What made them better? Those schools were set up to be automotive schools – one was a diesel mechanic school. All they did was diesel mechanic. Other one was a technical school but they kind of throw automotive in there. The class experience or going down to the shop – the shop at Durham tech, it was like they just put in a few lifts. Other schools work on real vehicles and you get to see what type of work that you did as opposed to the school I went to.
  + I looked at a few of them, but I wasn’t able to go to those schools.
  + How investigate? Online. I even talked to a few of them. I had them send me stuff out about their school. Of course, talking to them on the phone. I went directly to the schools…it was like 3 schools, so I went directly to their website.
  + How did you know about them? It was just you know I just knew about them. TV commercials. Again online – stuff will pop up. Word of mouth. Just regular traffic I guess.
  + What resources did you use to research schools?
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?
    - I don’t remember any.
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?
  + Yeah. Well you know cause. It was just the real challenge was they pretty much…I guess they didn’t want to really equip as far as like the classes were just kind of structured where…it was a lot of people there. It was hard to get the 1:1 time as far as doing type of employment and stuff like that. Yeah, it was just kind of like the school…it was a lot of stuff. They try to put a lot of things into one package. Instead of focusing on a few things they just talked about a bunch of broad things. Knowing a little bit of everything (instead of specializing in a few things).
* 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:

* What do you think of the search results?
* Filtered by North Carolina
* Possibly interested in Duke or North Carolina Central. Clicked Duke
  + 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?
  + Looking through Veteran programs.
    - I don’t know too much about it, but it seems pretty interesting. I’m not familiar with it (Yellow Ribbon). Oh yeah, that’s pretty nice (after explanation of Yellow Ribbon). Am I able to click on these? (Veteran program links). Clicked Student Veterans group…oh so each of them just tell you about each individual one. Opened Principles of Excellence. Opened Military Tuition Assistance. I mean I thought it would be a big link and not a popup like that. Clicked source of student complaints…yeah, that answered my question. It was pretty straightforward.
    - What info would be helpful in decision-making? I think I was looking for type of programs that I would pursue.
    - Examples of programs – keep along the lines of Automotive and mechanical like studies, like engineering. Mechanical Engineering.
    - Most of what’s on this page is good – Veteran groups, Yellow ribbon and some other ones. I guess like you say…it’s kind of like this is a lot of information and its kind of confusing, where would I actually start. Do I just pick something and then go with it? What would I need to do to get everything going? I guess applying and everything. Last time, they had a Veteran specialist and it’s kind of like they walk you through start to finish. I guess Duke has the same thing – a Vet rep. Someone to reach out to and get everything going.
  + 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.
  + Just like I was saying…I guess you kind of have a Vets apply here. A link or whatever. Or a contact number where I can reach out to someone. Get an understanding of what I’m doing. That’s the only thing I can think of right now.
  + Talk to other people or websites – Yeah, I don’t know actually to be honest with you. I don’t know. I don’t log in to the website that much, but I’m pretty sure its on there. Yeah, I haven’t checked it in a while, but I’m pretty sure its on there.
  + Who would you talk to/get info from? I think I would prefer for it to come from the VA. I know sometimes in the past I went with what somebody else said and it was a totally different experience for me. I think the VA would give me stuff that relates to me. I would prefer my information came from the VA.
  + How start benefits? I think I would have to get in contact with someone at the VA. I don’t know who or where, but I think that’s where I would start. Yeah, I know in Durham they have a whole section that’s for 9/11 guys. I’d probably walk in there and see what direction they point me in.
  + Have TAPS? What is that again? Yeah, I believe they did…a guy came in and he did a whole presentation. Nothing too detailed, just a generalization of everything.
  + Looking for at Source – what did you expect? Honestly I’m kind of skeptical. I guess I was just looking to see what made everything so perfect. Or why everyone experienced it so good. I was just looking for something more detailed about complaining. It just looked like it was a section of a bigger page. Did answer question.
  + 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!