Participant: *Tessa (participant 4)*   
Date: 10/16/2020   
Time: 12:00 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?  
  *I’m not currently, I haven’t, but my husband has. I am currently in the process of setting it up now.*
* You mentioned your spouse has?   
  *yeah so im a veteran and a dependant so im trying to find out whats best, if I can use his that would be great because mine has a little bit longer expiration so we might save that for my kids. We are using post 9/11*
* So have your husbands benefits been transferred to you already?  
  *yeah he did the transfer when he got out, so just a couple months at the time. He is in that limbo where his deadline got extended but when we go in there it still says its expired so the VA is trying to help us figure that out. The intent of the act that was past the 9/11 or GI bill it was supposed to be extended but there was a 2 month window for ETS that wasn’t covered so were trying to figure that out.*
* What school are you looking to attend in the spring?  
  *Texas AM extensions is one I’ve been looking at, some online options, I guess the biggest thing is just trying to figure out credit from classes ive took in the military cause some of those colleges will recognize and so im in the process of trying to get some of that translated through the education office. You know if one college recognizes that ive already completed one year that makes a huge difference. Ive had a lot of education in the military.*
* The education you had in the military, was this provided by your branch or some higher learning?  
  *originally it was supposed to be a DOD accredited masters program but halfway through the funding for the program expired and it wasn’t renewed so technically I didn’t get any college credits for that unless I would pay x # of dollars. So eventually I did get credit from the military but I did not get a diploma or transcript*
  + 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?  
  *um, 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 orginally I wanted to be a stay at home mom but all my kids are finally in school now so im ready for that next step.*
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  *um well accessibility… being with-in 30-45 minute drive or remote, that’s very important. That’s probably the most important id say. As much as id like to branch out, cause there are some other schools just a little farther, but it just doesn’t seem feasible.*
  + What resources did you use to research schools?
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?  
    *Ive had trouble reaching out to schools with getting the right POC. Some schools don’t have a military liaison, sometimes I get crickewts when I ask a question. That’s the biggest thing, the junction between the GI bill and that civilian knowledge.*
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    *several times we have tried to look up technical programs that colleges offer that would be covered by the GI bill but we can never get a straight answer as to whos running it or how the GI bill works. There are several schools that are local that offer welding trade schools and accept the GI bill but it was like the schools didn’t care to bridge that gap in knowledge. Another one was a trade school in technical programming but it was hard to track down that information… is it online? .. etc. It seems like a great way to use your GI bill but in practice its hard to nail down the details.*
* 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.

* Do you ever come to the VA website or have you visited before? And what parts do you check out?  
  *Yes I’ve used the disability and healthcare on a regular basis, I haven’t been on… um I guess I did check my GI bill to see if it transferred to my kids… I did verify that. I guess that’s about it.*

Landing page:

* What would you do on this first page?  
  *I see post 9/11 gi bill, that’s the first thing I checked. Now when I first started looking at education benefits so I would probably have clicked learn more but ive already figure that out so im past that… lets see schools, in person and online, and I would type… ‘texas A&M’ oops closed out on me ( the dropdown)*

Search Results page:

* What do you think of the search results?  
  *hmm it says college station so im not sure on that… let me click on in... I thought it was close to me but now im not sure*
  + 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?  
  *looks at school locations and extensions, no it doesn’t show it… okay. Its in kaline or harker heights… So that does give some interesting options, id be curious if I could search by zipcode… let me go back and see what else I can search… Goes to search types ‘georgetown,tx’ oh boy… All the Georgetowns… I don’t see the school im looking for. I guess I could try… ‘kileen,tx’ hmm okay its still kinda wonky. Okay lets see if we remove the TX… hmm maybe ‘harker heights’ … hmm okay…*
* What if we try kileen again and click that second page  
  *ah there we go, that’s the one I was thinking about*
  + What stands out to you?  
    *its good to see it was broken down by semester by tuition, housing and books. So what is school costs and calendar… oh okay that’s by semester… so that is neat, they have other programs available that might help.*
  + Any of those programs in particular stand out?  
    *um the yellow ribbon, umm don’t know what these other ones are. If I wanted to learn more about those id click on it and see*A screenshot of a computer screen

    Description automatically generated *huh okay I may not be eligible for that, I thought it was for disabled vets but it looks like its only for purple heart. If I wanted to find out if I was eligible I guess I would look at their fact sheet and go from there… oh so its who MAY be eligible… hm okay so its possible.* Graphical user interface, text

    Description automatically generated
  + What do you think of the information you see?  
    *I like that list of schools, its nice to see how the costs vary by location, that would be a good benefit, ill check that out. So going down it shows POC, but there is no contact information for them… of course I know those things change pretty regularly. Graphical user interface, application

    Description automatically generated  
    So I see they offer credit for some military training. That’s good.*
  + From what you see here, what information would be most helpful to you?  
    *Um… I guess first and foremost is knowing what’s covered and if I will have any out of pocket expenses of any kind. And you know with all the horror stories out there, to know that its not a scam type, no student complaints, its affiliated with a big school, there is plenty of recipients, that’s good. Those two things I would look at first.*
  + What information is NOT important to you?
  + Is there anything else you would like to see here?  
    *maybe a link to their military person or the GI bill because sometimes you have to apply though the school, I don’t know if that’s changed but having that access or referral to their site.*
  + Are you looking for a link to apply to the program or for the GI bill benefits? *for the GI bill.*

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.  
  *If I was looking at a wide range of schools id probably put in ‘georgetown’ my local area and then kind of go from there so I would go to Texas (left sidebar filter) I guess the first thing I would be looking at is cost of the school and what is covered. Some of these its nothing some of it is completely covered, some of it is a portion, so that would be um… I guess the other thing that might be neat, you know on best buy you can compare some products it would be nice to have a comparison tool where you can see side by side 2-3 schools.*what are the factors that you would be comparing schools on*.* 
  + *Gi bill students, housing, books, um maybe you can expand it and see more details… I guess some of the programs the yellow ribbon programs… I guess that would be it.*
* *the other thing I would want to search is… I notice some of the schools accept military credit so that would be nice to see here (left side filters) that might be another thing that’s important you know?*
  + 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)