Participant: *Matthew (participant 5)*   
Date: 10/16/2020   
Time: 01:15 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 am currently using someone’s benefit. I am a child.*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?  
    *The GI Bill, which specific I do not know off the top of my head*.
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?
    - When did you start school?  
      *Uh fall of 2018…and started using the benefits fall of 2018*
  + 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)?
* Where are you in your education journey?  
  *I am in the tail end of my education journey, getting ready for my senior year. After which I am looking to enter the job force.*
* Have you been managing your benefits or tracking so that you have enough to see you through your education journey?  
  *um my mom and I, the way we understand it we haven’t been tracking because it should cover me. We have been able to take advantage in more ways than we expected.*
* In fall of 2018 did oyu enter right out of high school? And is your mom the vet? *Yes and yes.*

**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?  
  *So uh… we spent most of our time in Virginia since my mom was air force, in her last place of work we had to move to Alabama, and one of the things that was most important to me was to be close to Virginia since it felt most at home. I applied to 5 colleges here in Virginia.* 
  + What resources did you use to research schools?  
    *uh so… the high school I was attending did a pretty decent job helping us scout for colleges. Mostly I would use.. I cant remember the website now, a site that helped you track your standing in standardized tests for different schools. Outside of that, going to different school pages and filling out applications.*
  + At what point did you narrow down to the 5 schools?  
    *um I looked based on location and then from there, looked at tech, and seeing how I stacked up against the student bodies.*
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?  
    *well I applied to tech, didn’t get in, um making a choice before actually getting in set my expectations high but uh it ended up working out.*
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    *going in I knew I wanted to do computer science but there weren’t any recourses to see the departments without going to the schools in person.*
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?  
  *its difficult because i… probably just being able to know some of the professors and their backgrounds. I could have done more research on that part I guess.*
* Are there any specific programs that you as a military-connected student are interested in?  
  *um unfortunately I haven’t been able to connect with those groups, I think they connected to my email because of the GI bill but I personally however, have not reached out to attend those events.*
* *Anything else important about the school selection process in relation to GI bill?  
  um something at the time that I wasn’t too aware of was the full benefits to be considered instate while using the GI bill but once we learned more with the Gi bill we learned I would be able to take advantage of instate tuition.*   
  Hey Matthew, thanks for your time today, I do have one question: you mentioned you weren’t originally aware you would be eligible for in-state benefits with the Gi-bill, can you share how you learned you were eligible for in-state benefits with the GI Bill ?  
  *We had been in alabama, my mom was getting ready to move back to va, it was up in the air but what let to finding out… once I selected radford, I interacted with the recourses from the school – the school certifying officials, so she reaches out and connects us to what*

**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.

I’m going to ask you to look up Radford university as your hypothetical.

Landing page:

* What would you do on this first page?  
  *Id look at status: child, look at the benefits, I would assume post-9/11 gi bill, I believe that’s what I’m getting. Um my mother probably has… 24 months… typoe of institution: schools, and id select in person and online.*

Search Results page:

* What do you think of the search results?  
  *so I see Radford university and some others where Radford happens to be in the name… tuition is very important. Um not sure about the 80% in state… the view details, I see the estimated benefits… that’s very important. I can go ahead and continue to change some stuff over here.. im currious what happens if I change cumulative post 9/11 to 30 months… looks like it calculated out based on the different percentage my benefits. I see I can look at scholarships.. ill add the scholarships I have ($500) I see okay.. school costs and calendar. This is more about me and how much it would be… learning format and location, lets see if I want to take online instead… I don’t think I saw anything change… oh okay I see it now… k. its definitely helpful to see how in person vs online impacts the benefits you receive. And I think the learn more having to explain it further is pretty helpful.*   
    
  so I assume these are the programs at the school… I see school location and costs for housing… cautionary information I assume this is where I put bad reviews. Certifying officials, I assume these are people I could contact. I know ms gail, she helps when I get my tuition paid. Hmm okay its interesting to see how many others are receiving these benefits currently at the school.
  + Do you see the school you're looking for?
  + What do you think of the information you see?  
    *I think the estimate your benefits is a great tool, to tinker and see how many benefits you can receive. If you were between tech and Radford then you could see which one receives more benefits, then you might go there.   
      
    I thought it was cool to see how many people are currently receiving benefits at the school.   
      
    complaints could be useful.*
  + *It would be nice to see standardized test scores to know the range you need to get in but I cant see it fitting in here really, but I think if I was going back this would definitely actively used.*
  + *Um you mentioned diversity, what does that mean to you and what do you expect to see?  
    maybe if there was another link that… I think uh one of the many factors people look at is how many ethnicities, is it diverse, is it all white. I think that’s something students, especially now students will be actively looking for.*
  + *I wish I started looking earlier at schools or that councilors reached out sooner to let me know how to prepare, I was almost short on my applications and it was a stressful time.*

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?

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 or add?  
    *so… yeah I mean.. just looking at it right now I think it’s a great tool, I see that it has all the different ways to learn more about what you are clicking but I think for my use of it right now it’s a pretty good tool. It might be nicve to favorite a few of these schools. So instead of having to tab over if I could favorite under my account. Just a little bit quicker.*
  + 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)