Participant: *Lisa (participant 7)*   
Date: 10/19/2020   
Time: 10:00 am

**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 am using my vocational rehabilitation. Right now I am attending \_\_\_ west palm.*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?
    - When did you start school?  
      *January 2015 and I have been able to utilize work tolerance to extend it and get my degree. I started in VA and relocated to florida.*
  + 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?  
  I have!
  + If yes, what did you use it for?  
    *I used it to compare my VAH. I wanted to go to a school that had a large income and I know that’s based on the location of the school. I also used it to find out if they had a advisory on campus, my school in VA had it and I really liked that but most schools don’t have that. Right now my consular is located in sunrise so if I need to adjust my classes they are the ones I send my grades too. Its called VET success. And if I need anything changed they are the ones who have to approve it.*
  + How did you hear about it?  
    *I don’t remember, someone told me about it, and its been very helpful ever since so I share it with other Veterans… I think I learned about it from my counselor in Virginia, she was very informative.*
  + 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?  
  *I got a med board when I was getting out of the military so when I was in the process of getting out there was a women there who helped me figure out what would be best, I knew I would be 80% disabled and so she helped me figure out with vocational rehab what would be best. I knew I was going to school because it was just money and I needed an education… it was just a matter of, I was 21 and I felt like getting an education was important.*
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  as I mentioned before, I think the amount of money I would be getting and the easiness of it. NOVA the school I was attending has a lot of campuses and I found that to be helpful. It was important I had a good counselor to help me navigate my new schooling she provided a lot of tools to me that I hadn’t heard about… well I think the transition can be hard especially if you have trauma or PTSD. When I first started school I was working full time and going to school full time so I would talk to her and she would recommend me different majors that would help, told me about work tolerance, a phycologist, even dental or getting eye glasses.
* What would you do if you weren’t aware of your benefits?  
  *well the biggest thing is work tolerance. I know here in Florida they don’t want you to know about your benefits and I see because my roommate is a vet but I imagineI would have kept going to different people and eventually get an answer but a lot of vets just get tired and stop trying.*
  + What resources did you use to research schools?
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?  
    *um for me, it wasn’t so much about the major… I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. But if I enjoyed the classes it was always worth it. It wasn’t difficult to choose… let me back up a bit. When I moved to Florida I wanted to go to a Christian university because I wanted to pursue ministry and I initially went to a school that wasn’t accredited which I didn’t know any better and I wish I had known that. The hardest thing was moving to a new place and then the school was not what I expected and if I do get my degree here it will almost be worth nothing.*
  + What would help you to know this?  
    *to know what I’m looking for, like there is regionally accredited and nationally accredited and I was just kind of winging it. Like if someone wans to start a small business they get a degree in business but do they really know the in and out? Or I feel like having internships… in VA my counselor was really good at this but here, they don’t really… I think the voac rehab program here could be so much better at sending out internships etc. so you do have a better chance.*
  + What do you wish you knew about the school you’re at now that you didn’t know?  
    *the school I go to is predominantly Caucasian, It would have been great to go to a school that is more diverse. I think sometimes the teachers beliefs come across in their teaching… I went to an orientation so I guess I had a pretty good idea of what I was getting myself into.*
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?
* 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?  
  well I really love this tool 1. I think its super easy to understand… Im going to do… well I actually don’t see mine. Im looking for Vocational Rehab but maybe its under Post 9/11? A screenshot of a computer screen

  Description automatically generated

Im 100% so ill do that… I think one thing that people don’t understand is if you took only one class in person but the rest online you will get paid the same and so that would be cool to see (doesn’t see this in the learn more button)

Search Results page:

What do you think of the search results?  
looks up Palm Beach Atlantic University… I don’t look at these numbers… and something I’ve noticed is this housing number is not usually correctA screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated

* + 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?  
  *so im looking at the estimated benefits and I see out of pocket but im 100% so im not sure why it says I would have to pay this… I would never have to pay this… so I don’t understand who is that for? For the housing allowance I would be checking each zip code to see which one gets the most money. Most vets are looking for who has the best education, best benefits. Um… for veterans programs they have one but they should take that off, they tried it. I like the details in principles of excellence. Oh I love this part… I would have thought I would have seen this other school location on the first search page. Like another school was listed underneath but I see they have a Orlando campus. Oh and I really like the estimated housing here so I can see the difference… its easier to compare between location and housing. I don’t know… where can I go to submit a compalin… (clicks student complaints and get taken to a new tab) oh I didn’t mean to go here… how do I go back? This is something id like for it to be uh I guess actually done, I don’t know how to submit a complaint though and if I did would you actually list it here? If the idea was put into action that would be nice… id like to see an admissions counselor like phone number or email. Okay… I see its regional accredited and I really like that you have the explanation* Graphical user interface, text, application

  Description automatically generated  
  *okay protection against late VA payments… I don’t believe this, my payments have been so late… um I think… are you saying the school cant stop you from going to class if they don’t receive the money? Huh I thought something different but that makes sense.. I thought that was about the VA paying the veteran but my VA payments are usually late and that impacts FAFSA.Graphical user interface, text, application

  Description automatically generated*  
  *huh so I see single point of contact for veterans, yes so I click that and I expect to see contact information but that’s not what I get.*  
  + 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?  
    *I would like to see a side by side comparison tool with two school so I can see # of GI Students, do they have yellow ribbon, housing allowance, the phone numbers for the CO and for the POC.   
    AH Look at that…I never noticed that before.*  
    A screenshot of a computer screen

    Description automatically generated  
    Were you looking for somewhere to submit a complaint in the past and unable to find it?  
      
    Hey lisa, you mentioned that the bible college you attended did not have the accreditation that you needed. How did you find out? And is there anything on the comparison tool that could be improved to make finding an accredited school clearer for you…   
      
    *my brother asked me, is it accredited, and one thing I liked is everything gets in to the bible college but idk I guess the school I go to now is too. But my brother asked me and I didn’t even think about it. When I looked I learned it wasn’t um… I think I just didn’t see vocational rehab here so if im new to the program well im not seeing it and I don’t know what different.   
    100% In-state is confusing like I didn’t know if id be eligible for that. Im hoping that there is better follow up If im coming out o pocket*
  + 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)