Participant: Johnathan *(participant 8)*   
Date: 10/19/2020   
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 am currently using them and this is my second year of using them*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?  
    *CH 33 I believe*
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?  
      *Transferred to me, it was my moms.*
    - When did you start school?  
      *Last august was the first time I started using benefits, august 2019.*
  + 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?  
  possibly… but I couldn’t tell you if I remember using it or 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?  
  *um part of that was reputation of school but also how far the GI bill went in covering the school. I am familiar with the Yellow Ribbon and some other programs. I do go to a private school so finding out how far the benefits go.   
    
  I reached out to the schools and they were able to provide VA advisors that helped me out. And some ones website gave me the values each school gave based on the yellow ribbon program but I cant remember what site it was.*
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?
  + What resources did you use to research schools?
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?  
    I think trying to figure out what school is the best fit for me and what *school I am going to get the maximum value for the benefits I have. My mom has 3 kids and she decided to transfer the GI bill to me… so figuring out how far we can make that go for value and money. I think at first it was difficult to know where to go but once I was directed to a couple of recourses it was easy to figure out.*
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    *um… I think one thing I had a couple different places id go but it would have been nice to have one place to see the different schools side by side rather than writing it all down and comparing.*
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?  
  *I had scholarships to the school but with using the GI bill those scholarships didn’t count and that would have been helpful to know before going to school so I could understand what was going on there. It was basically one or the other, the GI bill ended up being more useful but I initially thought it would stack on top of each other but that’s not the case.*
* 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?Graphical user interface, application

  Description automatically generated  
  *so im seeing the schools, this is the one I currently attend… the price looks relatively close to what im getting. Its nice to see the GI Bill Students so that was something I was initially looking for.* 
  + 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?  
  Graphical user interface, application

  Description automatically generated  
  *hmm im actually pretty sure I used this before, I do like that it gives the location, private school, the size, the environment of the school because those are factors when choosing a school. I think it is kinda interesting that you can change in here (estimate your benefits) what you were searching for… hmm so this is saying there how much is paid to you… that’s a little confusing because it says 17,416… that’s what I assume is a ryearly number but above it says per month and per year… okay but then here (estimated benefits per term) I like that it reflects it fall, winter, spring… when the benefits get paid out is important.   
    
  okay veteran programs… I think this is the veteran group I was talking about and I see the yellow ribbon program… I undertstnd the VA pays a certain ajmout of tuition and then it just adds on to help bring down the cost of school.. that’s my understanding… and I know that varies school to school… some are unlimited… some schools have a limited amount of yellow ribbon benefits… Okay I see the SCO, this is a person I generally deal with at my school so that’s nice to see its accurate information there. Hmm the additional information… doesn’t mean much to me but I think it can be useful to some people.*
  + 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?  
    *the estimated benefits per term, Im pretty sure most schools break out the cost per term so you can compare that side by side so I know how much I have per term. I think that’s valuable.*
  + What information is NOT important to you?
  + Is there anything else you would like to see here?  
    *um… Im assuming if I clicked on the yellow ribbon it would bring me to the page that details that, but I think it would be nice to see that info on this page specific to the school.*
  + What happens when you click on that yellow ribbon link?Graphical user interface, text, application

    Description automatically generated  
    *okay so I was expecting a detailed page on the yellow ribbon program that applies to every school, this seems like it gives you some information about the yellow ribbon program but id like to be linked to that page that gives me a little more yellow ribbon information.*   
      
    *one thing… this looks like its only for undergraduate… when I am ready to look for a masters vs. bachelors is there anything for me to search? And how does the tuition and fees change from undergrad to grad?*

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.Graphical user interface, application

  Description automatically generated  
  *being able to compare 3-4 schools next to eachother and see those numbers right next to eachother would be great, personally cost is a big driving factor for choosing a school for me.*
* What other schools were you looking at?  
  *a school in florida, a school in Michigan, and a school in Georgia. Having something like product comparison side by side to compare each one . Something id compare on… housing allowance, whether its campus housing or average rent in the area so you can see how far that housing allowance will go. Like it doesn’t mention how much the university housing is vs how much you are given so that would be helpful to know. If I were to do it again I would look for the yellow ribbon program.*
* *Veteran programs – what information would you like?  
  just knowing they are there is all I need to know… one other thing id like to see is a review process of people’s interactions with the VA coordinating staff at the school. I’ve had a really good experience at my school but know others have a harder time with that and that would be a turnoff for me at a school. I see cautionary information but just something to see how people who are using the benefits at this school are able to post reviews.* 
  + 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?  
    I would say I really like the way it searched, it was really easy to find the school itself. I think having the estimated benefits per term layed out the way it is with tuition and fees, housing allowance, and book stipend, the rest I would leave as it is.
* Hey Johnathan, how did you pick between the 4 or 5 schools you looked at?  
  well a few factors, proximity to relatives and how the school I attended paid out benefits.
* How did you get connected to the vet group since you weren’t originally looking for it?  
  through the VA coordinator at my school.

**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)