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

**P7 – Jonathan Weeks (Bene)**

*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?
  + Currently using – this is my 2nd year of using them. I believe I’m using Chapter 33. It was transferred from my mom. Last August was the first time I started using benefits.
  + 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? Possibly, but honestly I couldn’t tell you if I’d remember 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?
  + A big factor was how far the GI Bill would go to paying for that school. I’m a little familiar with the yellow Ribbon program. I go to a private school and figure out how much the GI Bill would pay for that school. I reached out to the schools themselves and they were able to provide (VA advisors). I don’t know if I used the VA website or something else – it told me how much they would give for the Yellow Ribbon program. Just specific to YR? Yes
* 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?
    - Trying to figure out what school was going to be the best bet. Which school was going to give me maximum value for the benefits. My mom has 3 kids and figuring out how far we could make that go. I think we found the info. It was a little hard at first to figure out where to go. The numbers weren’t hard to obtain whether it was a Google search or poking around on a few websites.
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?
    - I think one thing…it wasn’t necessarily info. There was a couple places that I went – but it would have been nice to have it all in one place instead of having to write it all down.
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?
  + Something that I wish I had known – I had scholarships to the school and with using the GI Bill, those scholarships…I didn’t get those scholarships anymore and it would have been helpful to know that before going to school. It was a one or the other deal…I originally thought they were going to stack on top of each other.
* 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?
  + Changed to Child. Searched milwaukee school of and selected option. So I’m seeing the three schools it came up with the top one is what I attend. The numbers that I see here (tuition) looks about right for what I’m getting. I see that they have the GI bill student. They have a really nice community that I’ve been able to connect with. They actually have a Veterans organization on campus, but anyone who is using benefits can use it.
  + I think…I’m pretty sure I might have used it. I might have played around with it while choosing schools. I like that it gives location, type of school, environment of the school. Those are important factors. I think its intersesting how you can change here what you were searching for (eyb). This is saying how much it pays…that was a little confusing. It says total paid to you…it was saying month and year and then it turns into what I assume is a yearly amount. That is another thing that I do like. My school goes on a schedule. And I think this is the student Veteran group that I’m familiar with.
  + My basic understanding of YR is that with the VA, they are paying a certain amount of tuition and the school agrees to pay more to bring the cost down. I know that varies from school to school. Some schools have an unlimited amount of students, while others can only give to some.
  + This is the person that I generally work with for benefits, so it’s nice to see that it’s accurate info. The information down here doesn’t mean as much to me, but could be useful to some people.
  + I think the Estimated Benefits per term (is most important). I think most schools tell you how much its going to cost each term and you can see that here. I think that’s the most valuable information.
  + How did you get connected to the Vet group? Meeting with Vet counselor
  + I’m assuming if I clicked on Yellow Ribbon – it would tell me what that information was. It would be nice if that information was here….so that is not what I was expecting. (pop-up versus other website). It would be nice if it would just connect me to the website that had that information.

Search Results page:

* What do you think of the search results?
  + 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?
  + 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.
  + If I could pick 3 or 4 schools and put them right next to one another. I think that would be easier to pick and choose schools. Cost is a big factor for choosing schools. Housing would be interesting to see – whether it be campus housing or housing in the area so you can understand how far housing would go. I did like that it talked about the Student Veteran group – it wasn’t something I was necessarily looking for, but having done it, it’s something I would look for now. I would just need to know the group was there. It says here that there are 0 student complaints…in a way a review process. People coordinating things with the VA. I’ve had a good experience with my school, but I know other people didn’t have a good experience and that’s something that would be important. I think something that is very similar to this cautionary information to allow benefits to be reviewed…this is how I felt the school handled my benefits. Allowing them to post reviews and that kind of stuff.
  + Pick school – proximity to relatives, how school paid out benefits,
  + Keep same – I really liked the way it searched and finding the school itself. I wouldn’t change that. Having this estimated benefits per term and breaking it down into tuition and fees, I would keep that. I don’t have a problem with anything else, but I’m not really attached to any of it.
  + I’m only going to be using the GI Bill for 3 years at my school and then going to graduate school. I think this is only for undergraduate – is there a function to switch between graduate and undergraduate? I assume the tuition and fees chart would change – I think it would be beneficial to switch between the two. I will have an additional year of benefits to go to graduate school.
  + Clicked kicker bonus learn more….I just didn’t know what that was.
  + Something that’s interesting to me is tuition and fees…I’m just noticing this and the numbers are different. And nothing in the spring. Maybe my school makes it all equal. I don’t. know if the school is doing it or what.
  + I was looking at local university in Fairbanks, school in Florida, Michigan and Georgia.
  + They do product comparison – like a site like that where you compare each one.
  + 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!