Participant: *Christopher (participant 9)*   
Date: 10/20/2020   
Time: 10:30 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?  
  *I am currently using the post 9/11 gi bill*
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you?  
      *it is mine. I started using the GI bill august 2018*
    - When did you start school?  
      *Prior I was using tuition assistance when I was in the military.*
  + 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?  
  *Yes I have.*
  + If yes, what did you use it for?  
    *I used it for comparing VAH rates for school in the area*
  + How did you hear about it?  
    Transition \_\_ seminar. It’s a class we take right before we get out of the marines. I had heard about it there.
  + 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… I had friends who had gotten out and they were all in school or had been through school. I mean I thought It was crazy if someone is going to pay for me to go back to school and I didn’t take it. I have the rest of my life to work I might as well take it.*
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  *that It was going to be paid for 100% because some schools were yellow ribbon but the yellow ribbon for a couple of them didn’t cover the complete tuition.* 
  + What resources did you use to research schools?  
    *I know there was information about the yellow ribbon program on the comparison tool but I cant remember if I found it all there or did it through a yellow ribbon website. Other than that there was only about 5 schools I was in-between in the greater Baltimore area.*
  + What was the most difficult part about picking a school?  
    *um for me the hardest part was getting my credits and joint transcripts to the school to see what they would accept. The military credits were a big one and then also transfer credits from the school I went to when I was using tuition assistance during active duty. I didn’t use the comparison tool when looking at schools on tution assistance (TA) because at the time I didn’t need to know about housing allowance etc. My TA was on base.*
  + Was there any information you wanted to have, but couldn't find?  
    *most schools have a veterans chapter with a liaison I wish I could find that because almost every school I looked at it was impossible to find. Coming out of the military that was my biggest thing, I knew the direction I wanted to go but I had no idea who I needed to talk to in order to get the ball rolling.*
  + Where are you in school? *I am a junior. I graduate next December. I am studying analytics and project management.*
* If you've started school, is there anything you know now about the school that you wish you had known earlier?  
  *… I don’t think so. No.*
* Are there any specific programs that you as a military-connected student are interested in?  
  *By programs do you mean \_\_\_ or extra curricular activities? The only thing ive used or participated in since I started going to school was the student veterans association. It’s a good program, I was apart of it at Howard community college and I am apart of it now too. I think it’s a good program. – How did you learn about this program and how have you benefited from it?*

**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:Graphical user interface, application

Description automatically generated

* What do you think of the search results?  
  *Well the first thing im looking for is that the cost is 100% covered, next housing and books… a big GI bill population is important to me. It would give a good community of people who have been through similar expirences. If it was only 200-300 I would think that is too small for me. Like if it only had 14 I probably would shy away from it. If there is a bigger population of GI bill students then the people who work with you at the school will know what they are doing.* 
  + Do you see the school you're looking for?
  + What do you think of the information you see?

School profile:Graphical user interface, application

Description automatically generated

* What do you think of what you're seeing?  
  *okay I see zero out of pocket, that’s good, that’s important to me. I don’t know anyone who gets out and wants to pay for school. Um I think if I was using my Montgomery GI bill these numbers would be a lot more important but im not so… I don’t think they are that important for what Im doing um but it is still good to have the information for those who want to see it.*   
    
  Hey Christopher, thanks for talking with us today. You mentioned upon landing on the school profile that if you were using your Montgomery GI bill the numbers would you were seeing would be more important to you but that they aren’t currently important to you. My question is: What information would be more relevant for you to see here?  
  + 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?
  + Scroll a little moreA screenshot of a computer screen

    Description automatically generated  
    *okay so I see yellow ribbon, um priority enrollment is KEY for veterans, it’s a pretty big factor for veterans even though many vets might not know what that is… being able to sign up for class 2 weeks before the rest of the student population is pretty nice.*   
      
    Graphical user interface, application

    Description automatically generated *um id like to see more contact information here because I actually had a really difficult time finding their phone number originally.*   
      
    *Okay I see they don’t have the STEM scholarship, I like the single point of contact for veterans, that makes my life a lot easier.. the way I found her was by going to the office and asking questions like ‘who do I talk to’ shes listed under the primary. It also helped that my roommate started attending a semester before me, helped me out.*A screenshot of a computer screen

    Description automatically generated *um I would add a more specific address, this is verry vague. This is just the address of the campus if you showed up here looking for an office you would be walking around for awhile.*

Are you familiar with any of the following programs:

* Student Vet Groups
* STEM Scholarship  
  *no.*
* 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.  
  *um I don’t think it was hard to select a community college for me because I wanted to stay in Maryland. The hardest part for me to select a 4 year university was to figure out ‘hey will my tuition be paid’ ‘will you accept all my credits’ it would take the schools 3 months to get back to me and every time I called they would send me to someone else who would send me to someone else who would ask me to email them. The hardest part was communication with people at the school when you’re not actually there. Yeah so the way I ended up talking to Denna I walked into the student veteran center and I was talking to 4 other colleges but… (got lost here)*
  + 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?  
    *One thing that when I was getting ready to leave the military, I had a hard time finding the comparison tool at first if I didn’t remember the name GI Bill comparison tool What terms would you search in the past when you were trying to find the GI Comparison too? Um it was probably something along the lines of GI Bill VAH Rates… um yeah I know I did a lot of research of the rates, I remember the tool would tell you but I couldn’t remember how to get back.*
  + 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)