**Discussion Guide for Comparison Tool Redesign (School Certifying Officials)**

**SCO2 – Michael Janvier**

*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 the Comparison Tool.

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.

* Briefly, what is your role, how long have you been a SCO or School administrator, and how do you interact with service-connected students?
  + I’ve been a SCO at Embry Riddle for just a little over a year. What I normally do is get the documents from the students and process that through VA Once. That’s pretty much generally my job. Also because I work directly with the students, I work as a counselor, advisor or if they have any questions on enrollment. It’s just something I get to do because I’m working with them.
* How many GI Bill students are at your school? In total roughly 700-800 usually Va or GI bill benefits.
* Does your school have a Veteran center? We do – yes. So right now our school, my office along with 3 other SCOs at the school, in the building that we’re in we have a Veterans lounge and Veterans or those using benefits can use it as a lounge, a TV some computers. We just set up a “lending library” where graduates can drop off unused books and we can lend it to other Veteran students to help with cost of books. We share a building with another department, but it’s pretty much our space.
* Any other people working inside the Veteran Center other than SCOs? Just the other 3 SCOs and our director.
  + If so, how large is it?
  + If not, is there additional staff that supports military-connected students and processes certifications?
* Have you used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?

**First Topic: Handling Questions - 10 minutes**

* What kind of questions do you typically field from Veterans? From other beneficiaries such as spouses or dependents?
  + At Embry Riddle you have to be enrolled in a degree to be enrolled in Flight. It’s like a minor. Since our tuition is already high for a 4 year degree. By that point, there’s no money to cover the flight by the time the semesters cost. Yellow ribbon kicks in to finish paying for the rest of the semester.
  + As far as Veterans because we are a flight school, they’re main question is whether GI Bill will cover flight. Technically, the GI Bill doesn’t cover it. So we have to break their heart. They ask if Yellow Ribbon will cover it – so we have to tell them that that works with the GI Bill. There’s also the Memorandum – and we have to tell them that that isn’t covered either.
  + They want to know about the living stipend and the book stipend that they’re going to be receiving. They want to know how it works – they are coming out of the military and they don’t know how it works. That’s a common thing – we explain what paperwork they need to send us, etc.
  + What do they ask about the most?
  + What do they ask about your school?
  + Are there any pain points?
  + Is there anything you aren't able to help them with?
    - Questions aren’t able to help them with – not necessarily, sometimes we’ll get certain questions on when parents try to use multiple types of benefits because a student qualifies for CH35 where they have transferred benefits. We have to explain that they can’t do it. And it’s tricky explaining it to them that that won’t work.
  + How much interest is there from your GI Bill students for the Yellow Ribbon program?
    - So Embry Riddle is a Yellow Ribbon school to help finishing paying for yearly semester. I believe that we’re pretty good on the Yellow Ribbon part. It gets complicated with active duty. The VA doesn’t cover active duty Yellow Ribbon.
* If you have questions about education benefits, how do you go about finding the answer?
  + We have the SCO handbook and if that doesn’t clarify the questions I have, I’ll Google it. Usually when I do a Google website, then I’ll go to the VA.gov website (DEA site?)
  + What types of questions do you normally have?
  + How do you learn about new benefits or changes with the GI Bill?
    - We get the emails from VA.
  + How do you pass that information to students?
    - We have a spreadsheet – we have a database of all our students. And we have a bulletin board to post things to.
* Do you reference VA sites for your work?
  + If yes, which ones?
    - Since the SCO handbook is online, I normally look at that first. I’ll call the VA and they’ll ask if I’ve looked at the handbook. The VA website and the benefits are what I normally look for.
  + How often do you visit these sites?
    - It really is kind of sporadic – normally at the beginning of the semester when we’re dealing with a lot of new students. I’ve been an SCO for a year so there’s still things that I’ll come across that I don’t know. So I’ll have to look for it and confer with counselors to see if we can make that happen.
      * I was a student here and I was doing work-study so I was working in the Veterans office doing paperwork. Meeting students and doing paperwork. When I graduated and this job opened up…that’s what she wrote.
  + What information are you looking for?
  + Do you use non-VA, third party sites for your work?
    - I would say Yes only because I’ll do a Google search for something that’s a little off the wall. When I do that, sometimes I get sent to forums…like Army based forum where they asked the same question and I see how people responded. I think that’s the only time I’ve used an outside site.

**Second Topic: Usage of the Comparison Tool - 20 minutes**

You said you had used the Comparison Tool before.

So I have – I’ve used it before…I think I used it as a student. The only thing I noticed that if you are trying to revamp…if you want to compare two or three different schools. You were only looking at a school in a city. If you wanted to do a side-by-side comparison I think that would be interesting.

I don’t think I’ve had the need to pull it up and use it. Or maybe…I don’t think there was a need for me as a SCO to use it.

Helpful to compare – You got the tuition. So this is where it gets….our tuition is higher than this. Okay so what you have…it says $17000…it should go to the cap of $25000, that’s the annual cap of the GI bill. I just pulled it up on my computer and I see it at $25000…or that’s how much the GI Bill will cover. Our yearly tuition is really a little over $36000 (issue with benefit %)

Helpful to consider:

* + - Tell them whether GI Bill will not cover flight program. They feel like they got cheated, but there’s nothing written other than our memorandum that the GI Bill is not going to cover the flight program. If there’s a way for them to see that through here…maybe add an asterisk, that it won’t cover the Flight program.
    - I just noticed the complaints…it doesn’t tell me what the complaints are. It just says Financial issues and change in degree plan/requirements. Can you give more detail…what was actually written down as a complaint? So if someone complains somewhere I guess there’s a document somewhere. It just says 1 complaint, but that could have been…if it’s a financial issue it might have been something about the flight program. It would be helpful to have more info on the complaints. And perhaps information on if that complaint was resolved.
    - I feel like this is more for the student. I feel it might be good to promote this more to the students…figuring out what they can get out of the GI Bill.
* How often do you visit the tool?
* How did you originally hear about the Comparison Tool?
* Did you receive any training on the Comparison Tool?
  + Do you train others in how to use it?
  + How long did it take you to feel comfortable using the tool?
* What common tasks are you typically trying to accomplish on the tool?
  + What kind of information are you typically looking at?
  + The tool is geared towards Veterans, but is there any information that is helpful for you?
    - Is there any additional information or functionality that you would like to see?
  + How accurate is the information on your school?
    - If information on your school isn't accurate, what do you do?
    - How long does it take for information to be fixed?
  + How do you find out about changes/updates to the Comparison Tool?
  + Are there any other sites that you use to perform similar tasks?

**Final Topic: Making It Easier - 5 minutes**

We've talked about the Comparison Tool and finding out information on education benefits.

* If you could change the Comparison Tool to meet your needs as a SCO, talk me through what the tool would look like.
  + What would it do?
  + What would you change?
  + What would you keep the same?

*Consider asking about Yellow Ribbon program again*

**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!