Participant: SCO - Stacy *(participant 6)*   
Date: 10/16/2020   
Time: 02:30 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.

Can you describe your role:  
*Im at Scranton for pen state. My responsibilities with veteran students… I am the go to person, I am the primary leason at pen state. Anyone using benefits at any capacity is coming to me outside of military benefits. Anything with regards of their transition to the university comes through me…. Benefits, scholarships, anything of that nature comes through me. I love my students, we are all on a first name basis bc I am the one stop ship. We have about 55 or 60 currently students using benefits. We have a vet lounge which is a social space for students. We have a secondary person but I returned from my last maternity leave early because I am the primary POC for these GI bill students.*

* Are you currently using or have you ever used VA education 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?  
  *Yeah, ive gone through it for some perspective students who were still shopping through schools and benefits.*
* What kinds of questions are you typically fielding from students? *it really varies by students. I helped one student through her medical benefits because the hospital didn’t have any. Typically its my payment came in late.. why? Typically it because they didn’t get the paperwork on time. Do I have enough credits? Im getting close to graduation and I don’t need as many benefits what do I do?* … typically the biggest hurdle I’m facing is getting students credit for their military experiences. The university has been working through fairly diligently but it’s a bigger thing to work through and I would like to see that be more expediently and that’s probably my biggest hurdle.
* What about spouses and dependents, what kind of questions have they had for you?  
  none that I can think of, our school and program works pretty expediently.
* In the event u have questions about benefits, where do you go for those?  
  *the va benefits website.*
* How do you communicate these benefits to students? *I will get them on the phone rather than have them sit and read through it. Or if they are more well versed ill send them a link directly to the VA site.*
* Have you used that new page they have for school administrators? *ive seen it but I just haven’t had a need for it in the spring.*
  + 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?~~
* ~~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?~~
  + ~~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.

* How often do you use the CT?  
  *um.. I didn’t have any students who were shopping much this fall but I may see more of that in preparation for spring enrollment. Probably around November through January.*
* *Did you have training on the comparison tool when you first started?  
  No, I spend a good amount of time on the VA website when I first started.*
* *If I was a perspective student, how would you coach me through the Pen State profile?  
  We wlak themn through the estimated prices, which are almost to the dollar exact on here… when I did a search I did one for someone who is in the national guard with the DEA benefits and then we would talkabout their financial options and scholarships avaible to veterans and dependants*
* *Talk to me about the scholarships avaialbe  
  we have half a dozen available just at this campus and the ones at our campus the students do not have to apply for they just have to self identify for military and as long as they have a FAFSA on file we will review and they will not have to do anything extra for those benefits. And a number of students come in and don’t realize they are also eligble for a federal PELL grant which can be used to help themselves, put into savings, etc… anytime we have an admitions event we make sure all our admitions staff have links to provide for fafsa and financial aid. It might be good to put a note to also say explore financial aid options with oyur university. Or even put a direct link. College board.*
* *When there are changes or updates to the comparison tool how do you find out?  
  probably via the monthly SEO emails I get, that would be the first place I see that.*
* *What other information is in those emails?  
  when they passed the extension to provid the full rule of BAH to November, changes to the handbook, significant legislature.. etc.*

I get calls on occasion from students who are unsure between chapter 33 or if they should use their family members 9/11 bill… etc.

Id like to be able to compare the two benefits pay out side by side, I have a lot of those conversttions… is it better for me to go 1606 or you know all that… and is there a way to incorporate those ideas into the comparison tool.

Landing page:

* What would you do on this first page?

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.
  + 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)