Participant: *SCO – Matthew Barber (participant 15)*   
Date: 10/21/2020   
Time: 3:00 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.  
*I am the lead SCO at the university of Idaho., that’s going though the whole process… my main job is to certify students w the VA so they get their funding, the monthly stipend, putting out the fire aftet that… if they have debt letters I make srue they get paid, I notify students if they have any debt… We have \_\_\_ and I have a back up… theres just 3 of us that are SCOs. We have on average right around 300 (veteran) students that we certify per semester… I wish we had 500 students.*

What are the main questions you are fielding?  
*The two we get quite a bit is how do I get started with my benefits with the VA? What do I do? I will walk them through getting their benefits with VA.gov. second is Where is my money. And third is with the Comparison tool, so they will say last semester I got \_\_ amount of money and this month I got this month so ill show them the comparison tool and walk them through wjhy that happened.*   
  
do they have questions that stump you?  
*um sometimes, a lot of it is 1606 and 30s, they will stop by and ask me why haven’t I been paid and I let them know okay you need to self report and then they might come back and say well I got paid but I didn’t get as much as I expected. The other one I get is debt letters.  
  
I have the CT pulled up… um when it comes to what bill do you want to use, sometimes they don’t know what they want to use and another one… what benefit do you want to give up… let me see here. (what page were you looking at here) Yeah so it says hmm okay so I thought at one point it said what benefit do you want to give up but im not seeing that anymore.* Sometimes they don’t remember what benefit they applied for… majority will say well ill go with post 9/11 and 9 times out of 10 im correct on that.   
  
How do you tend to learn about new benefits or changes with the GI bill?   
*Typically I will get a VA Webinar on it w any changes and also ill get a news letter through the VA that says these changes have happened and we have a weekly newsletter that we send out to anyone who is using VA educational benefits, so we will send out stuff they need to know… so back in the spring when things were changing we sent a newsletter, we posted it on our website, facebook, and email. We try to be as quick as possible and through as much social media as we can. We want to make sure we don’t miss getting that information out to them.   
  
I am using this tool from august through end of September almost every single day and hten after that… maybe once a week um and then around October when students are asking about their VAH or monthly stipend I will show them the CT and say well this is what you should be receiving and if not ill talk to the VA and figure out what the difference is.* The first month of every semester I use it almost daily.   
  
What do you normally do to show a student their benefits?   
*so my first question to a student is are you a veteran, active duty, or dependent. 90% of ours are veterans… so ill select that and ill ask them, how long have you been discharged because that gives me an idea what chapters they possibly could be. Majority are Ch 33 every so often we get the VRE. Then I show them this… Graphical user interface, application

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and we will typically select 36 but they can go in and change that to see why they got how much we got. Um I usually have them select in person and online, I don’t see much a difference but I know with the va it is a little different Graphical user interface, application, website

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um and ill have them type in the name, usually two options pop up and ive clicked on both and they are both the same… I used to say well why aren’t our extension campuses showing up here but then I click search and… A screenshot of a computer

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sometimes its on the other page ill click on the school that shows up first that’s us right there…. Um depending if they are in state or out of state we will select yellow ribbon and we have two students who are rogers stem recipients and that really narrows it down and then ill scroll to the top and click view details.*   
  
On that left navigation on search, whats happening as youre doing that, what are you showing them?  
*well I tell them here that we are a yellow ribbons school and with that it possibly could change things here and I show them here where it say tuition its 100% instate but then I can go into the details to really go in depth so I just like to click that to see if there is any difference and then I explain if there is any difference with them.*   
  
Graphical user interface, application

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*um I also like to go here, if they are new we click no, if they are returning we select yes. But typically we click no and then I start going through this side here (the your estimated benefits right side) I stress to students that this is an estimated amount its not definite but it is fairly accurate but I tell them this could change. And then I explain how the tuition is paid from the VA and then I will show them the housing costs and scroll down to the school locations portion I show them this is what the different locations will pay. Um and VAH the housing allowance is half fo the national average if you are strictly online so I stress that to the. If its possible id like to put something in there to state if you are online you get half the national average for your housing allowance.   
  
um last time I had this open was probably about 3 weeks ago.  
Graphical user interface, application

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the address here doesn’t look accurate and we aren’t sure who to contant to fix this. Contacting the SAA is the typical path forward for this.*

*What would be helpful to update yourself in the tool?  
um these two things here it would be nice to have an edit button (SCO information) or the mailing address, if we could go in and update that, that would be nice… also to have a phone number and or email so they can contact us a lot easier.  
um the iadditionall information I don’t know… um I like the information… this right here (institution codes) that’s not nessisary because I think the students don’t know what that means but I think the SCOs should be the ones who have this already. I don’t know I mean… I don’t know why a student would want to see that information because typically we are going to have that information… um instituation summary, I like that information, the amound paid.*

*What would you change?  
honestly the way it is set up it is so user friendly, it just flows, it asks the right questions, I don’t think its too confusing, I wouldn’t change a thing other than the little things I mentioned.  
  
Do you have studnets who come in already knowing about the comparison tool?  
Verry few. Ive been here a year and a half and maybe after 1000 students ive only heard about 50 bring it up to me.*

* 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?
  + 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.

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)