**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? Yes, I have used them in the past.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using? I used the vocational rehabilitation.
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you? I believe it was mine.
    - When did you start school? [what timeframe did you use the benefit]? From 2009-2012.
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future? yes
    - Which benefit? I’m not sure. I haven’t really looked into it that well, but I would like to further my education.
    - Is that benefit yours or was the benefit transferred to you?
    - Where are you in the school selection process? I haven’t started anything… It’s just more thinking about it. I’m from north Carolina, so probably a north Carolina school. I know about the post-9/11 bill, but I don’t know too much about it. I haven’t researched the options too much.
    - For the purposes of today, we can do some exploring.
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? No, I have 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 couple of things. The main reason is probably like everybody else. I just want to get a higher education. Expand on what I started with. Find better employment. Learn about what’s out there.
* What kind of degrees…what’s your starting point? I currently have an associate’s degree. That’s the highest level I’ve completed so far.
* What’s your degree in? it’s in automotive technology.
* When you were looking for your associate’s degree, what was the most important thing when you were looking for schools? It was a technical school, so before I went into the marines, I was at the technical school. so I was trying to go back to that technical school and finish what I started.
* Did you go back to the same school before you were in the marine corps? Yeah.
* So you knew the school, and you went and finished it up? Yes, exactly.
* Did you know of other schools? There were some better schools, but because of vocrehab, the way that it’s set up, you have to be local, that kind of eliminated some of the other options there.
* Did you know of other schools? Yeah
* How did you investigate those schools? Online… talking to them on the phone. Just all based on going online.
* When you were going online, did you go directly to the school website or did you go to a bunch of sites that had the schools listed? I went to a bunch of websites, individually.
* How did you know about the other schools? I just knew about them. Tv commercials. Word of mouth.
* 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? […] a lot of stuff, they tried to put a lot of things into one package instead of focusing on one specific thing. They touched on a whole bunch of broad issues.
  + So it sounds like the classes were too large. They didn’t go into depth too much. And it sounds like their job placement wasn’t what you hoped it would be. Does that sound right? Yes.
* 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? So I guess just put my state here.
* A: ok.
* Or do I do a specific school?
* A: do you have a specific school in mind that you’re thinking of?
* I don’t, actually.
* A: are there schools that are near your city that you live in?
* Yeah. There’s quite a few schools. Which is why it’s so confusing. I don’t know what school to apply to.
* A: ok, great. Why don’t you start by putting the name of your city here then? [he typed durham]
* A: alright, so. Now we’re on the…good [he narrowed to country – usa, then state – NC]
* A: think out loud or talk to me about what you’re seeing, what information you’re getting as you’re looking down the page.
* [mentioned the tuition, housing, books] the thing is that it’s mostly medicine centered, and I don’t want to do medicine.
* A: [had him readjust the housing question to in person and online because it reset to online only] did you notice if anything changed on the page at that point?
* I think a few things popped up different. The va is up there. these are north Carolina central and duke university.
* A: why don’t we click on one of those and see what additional information we want to see there? [he clicked into Duke U.]

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? I guess the veterans programs degree.
    - A: Tell me about what you like about that
    - I don’t know too much about it, but it seems pretty interesting [was hovering over YR link]
    - A: are you familiar with the yellow ribbon program?
    - I’m not, actually. [a explained what it is]
    - A: When you see that yellow ribbon, you can understand that the school participates in that particular program.
    - Am I able to click on these? [clicked on student veteran group and a few other modals]
    - A: did that do what you expected it to do?
    - Yeah. I thought it was going to be a big link, but it was a small pop up. [kept exploring down, clicked on Source link from Cautionary Info]
  + 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 information here would be helpful in your decision making? I guess the type of programs [?]
  + When you say programs, what are some examples of programs that you might be interested in that you want to see here? I want to keep along the lines of automotive or mechanical. I guess engineering. Mechanical engineering. Something like that.
  + A: Alright. So programs would be helpful in your decision making. Anything else? Like is duke the right school for you? Mostly what’s on this page is good. The yellow ribbon. Veteran programs. This is a lot of information, and it’s kind of confusing. Where would I actually start? If I were to pick something and go with it, what would I need to do to get everything going? I guess apply and everything.
  + A: so what would you need to do to make that connection with the folks at duke university? The last school I reached out to, they had a veterans specialist. I’m guessing duke has the same thing, a vet rep that vets can reach out to and get everything going.
  + A: alright, so. If you were thinking of selecting a school and you wanted to make it easier, can you talk to me about what ideal process would look like to you? I guess a link or a contact number where I can reach out to someone, get an understanding of what I’m doing.
  + [?] a: if you were looking for information, would you be more likely to rely on people who were veterans, info from the va, or family and friends who weren’t veterans? I think I would prefer it to come from the va… I think va would tell me stuff that relates to me as opposed to somebody else. I would prefer my information to come from the va.
  + 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?
* Did you go through tap, the transition assistance program, when you were leaving service? He did go through tap, recalled a person who walked them through the transition process.
* if you are looking to start your post-9/11 gi bill benefits, how would you do that? get in contact with somebody at the va.
* When looking for other schools before, he was curious about the type of automotive school they were.

**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!