**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, in the process of getting them.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using? [Planning on using] Ch. 35. [Dependent educational assistance]
    - Was that benefit yours or was it transferred to you? [Transferred]
    - When did you start school? [not yet] Right now, I’m just waiting to hear back from the VA.
    - What are you anticipating you’ll do with it? Thinking of online 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? [for online school] Right now, I’m looking at Ben Foster [sp?] I’m looking at 2-3 right now.
    - You said Ben Foster is one of them? Yes, and University of Phoenix.
    - [Jump down to first topic]
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? No, I haven’t
  + 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? I want to get my GED. I have to get my GED first before I go to school. That’s what I’m looking for right now, looking at a program online so I can get my GED.
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?
  + What resources did you use to research schools? I found a few, but I’m still looking. I have to see if they accept any of VA’s benefits first. I have to find that out. Then, I’m looking at, right now, and not waiting for the benefits for Ch. 35. I’m looking at what’s affordable. At the same time, I don’t want to be going to school for one year. I’m looking for less time. The search is going on right now. I just have to keep searching.
  + What kind of searches are you doing to find that information? P: what do you mean, what searches?
  + Are you looking online, seeing ads on television, social media? I went online and I seen a few ads on tv. [go back up to CT Q’s]
  + [?]
  + 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.

[He had trouble seeing screen as he was on a tablet] [ Eventually he was able to modify landing dropdowns to: Spouse / No / DEA]

A: what about this next question, what are you thinking? Just schools is fine for now.

A: next question? Online.

A: you want to do online, alright. And then here, for enter a school… what should we put? Enter University of Phoenix. [A picked main suggestion]

P: hmm. 20. So these are the campuses they came up with?

A: yeah. Let me know if you want it to scroll, too.

P: Yeah, scroll down. So everything’s right there, huh?

A: yeah, tell me about what it means to you.

P: I don’t understand. What does the housing mean?

[A explained]

P: Gotcha. I understand. [?] Would it change if I could click on one of the programs?

A: yeah, what would you like to see?

P: let’s go with independent studies. [filter] ok, so not too much. [not too many results] let’s click on view details. Oh, they have atlanta. [had A click on Atlanta campus]

A: so this page has a lot of information on it. How about I do a quick scroll? [she showed him the different sections in profile page] [readjusted military details due to bug]

P: cautionary? What that mean? { A explained caution flags to him, clicked on alert link] Hmm. Does that say they’re being sued?[...] This is really behind the scenes.

A: and we have another section called Student Feedback.

P: I’ve never heard of that before. Any entity should have that on this site. People need to know what they’re getting into. It’s a really good tool to have.

A: you want to check it out. Like you said, it’s coming out of pocket. That’s money that your wife earned. You want to make good use of that.

P: that’s true.

A: So now we have an area for Student Feedback.

P: Hmm. 33 student complaints in the last 24 months. Wow.

A: anything stand out to you about this?

P: recruiting and marketing practices? That’s similar to the top [caution flag].

A: what does that mean to you?

P: recruiting, that would come from the students, but the marketing practices, that’s how you recruit, and how you’re getting the students to your school.

A: [showed him the rest of the page]

P: before I can find an online school to go to… I have a diploma I did online that I got back in 2011, and when I submitted it to them, they told me it wasn’t accredited. I can also look for a place that’s accredited through this tool? [Accreditation filter in SRP]

[?]

A: So GED, accredited GED options would be helpful for you. [A reviewed profile page a final time]

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? That really stuck out to me, but education and training. I see that at the top. [breadcrumb]
  + A: is there anything else you’d like to see about the school that isn’t showing here? No, not at the moment.
  + What information is NOT important to you?
  + Is there anything else you would like to see here? No, not at the moment.

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!