**Discussion Guide for Stakeholders**

**Melissa**

Thanks so much for joining us today. Our team is investigating how different users engage with the GI Bill Comparison Tool and are interested in hearing how you use the Comparison Tool in your work to support schools, employers, and their military-connected students.

**Warm-up Questions**

* [Name & Role]
* To say that an ELR would use the CT as a first choice, I can’t say that they would. With Yellow Ribbon historical information is for checking info – to see if what the school says they are doing is matching up. Right now going to WEAMS to find that information.
* WEAMS is something that we are in many times daily updating because its what we use to update the approval so the processer and those doing the certifications or we need to do the approval. It’s something we’re always in.
* I did reach out to SCO that had been around for a while and all the ones I asked said that they don’t use it. But they would be willing to ask students for their input.
* I do notice that when I’m. in the CT when there was like a delay in typing – one of the reasons they have difficulty finding their school. We have a school near us…they type in Vol State and they have to type out Volunteer before they get any results.
* Acronyms – I don’t think the school has the ability to add those. Because that Vol state…or using the initials rather than the full name. So someone may choose to type asu.
* Your SCOs use tool to verify difference in payments. There needs to be a much larger disclaimer in that these payments are estimates. That what. You calculated was Main campus and you’re going to this campus. I think there needs to be more emphasis that this is just for informational purposes.
* The students…it used to be Comparison Tool was easy to find. It’s harder to find. You have to go to either…it used to be on the revolving pictures and it’s been removed for COVID. So now you have to look for it. You may find it under Choose a school, or if you go under Student, there is no option for it. So if you look for it in a dropdown, it’s not there. So having it more visible on the front page. The Education and Training page – it used to be on the revolving picture. It’s labeled Choose a School. I already know what school I’m going to. Also under grey tiles under Education and Training…under Get Started, there isn’t a link there either. You have to go to Get Started Home. If its something they want students to use, it needs to be more visible. (benefits.va.gov). And I’ve trained our SCOs in that it’s the site they need to get info from – it doesn’t change as often. So when you refer to someone and say go out to the GI bill website and its hard to find.
* One of the students is that it seems to be more streamlined. Data needs to be more up to date. You don’t know what fiscal year or academic year. They may be looking at it and it needs to be more dated – particularly for the historical piece. Definitely data when it comes to data coming from the school coming from their ID number. Historically ELRs haven’t been responsible for putting in those numbers. We would correct those in WEAMS and would expect it to be corrected overnight, but it’s not happening. If we can’t update that timely once a school lets us know its wrong, then schools get irate and people get told the info is bad. That’s a recent experience…it took nearly 3 weeks to fix it.
* Data agreement? I don’t know, but my expectation is overnight. When I update it, its immediate, but the public, I don’t know how often that gets done. I would expect it to cycle at night. We have not had any instructions that there would be additional things to do – just update WEAMS and if there’s anything else, we aren’t in that loop.
* Mixed response to items that were not a part of the Comparison Tool. Additional information – I guess there’s more information on the Comparison Tool…if you look over to the side, it wants to take you other places. Landing page – all the things on the right panel. They don’t want to be distracted by other choices that the VA wants us to know. Career Scope, how to submit a complaint through a feedback tool, etc. (That was from a student)
* And then when it came to dropdown boxes, dependents were confused about why there wasn’t a transfer of benefits option. To them – it’s not Post 9/11, it’s a transfer of benefits. If we could relate or have a nickname of Post 9/11. It needs to be TOB or Transfer of Benefits. It needs to apply to the benefit chapter. Like if you were choosing Post 9/11 it’s CH 33. Dependents don’t have the Chapter number. Many of us just read the number and don’t read the name. Or I’m going to see VR&E. I know that VR&E is Chapter 31, but there needs to be consistent in having chapter name and number.
* Then VR&E student – that’s a name change VA has taken. Some students may not know what to select for CH 31. If you go under VR&E, it’s not necessarily covered in full cost. It can’t just say full cost. There are restrictions. VR&E has their own rules and regulations. That’s VR&E’s realm. The only thing I expect it would show is BAH information. If you answer Yes to GI Bill and run it, then it says Full Cost for tuition and books. It should say See your VR&E counselor. The housing would be their monthly stipend.
* I recently found out until VET TEC that it doesn’t affect the Post 9/11. I also found out that you can be a student using the GI Bill and a VET TEC student at the same time. We had a student doing that.
* There’s a lot of information that comes up on the tool. I like the..where it allows you to make changes to your choices that you selected. The Cumulative service. It’s hard to find that percentage chart to find out what the levels are.
* I think there needs to be more of a disclaimer on the amount of benefits. Schools complain about student complaints because they don’t understand a valid complaint. To them, they say yes the student goes here and it’s something we can do it. To VA, it’s yes there going to the school and yes they’re a GI Bill student. The classrooms are cold – that’s a valid complaint.
* I wouldn’t give the ability to update on their own. Data integrity. I know the fear of data hacking is out there…having more hands in the pot also. I like it that its pulling information where a government entity is putting it in. The SCO, they have to go through a process with training and be on the right form, so we wouldn’t want them to update that. The physical and mailing address that’s something that has an approving authority. I know one of the databases you use is WEAMS….one of them is public WEAMS. The public WEAMS needs to go away and just funnel it all through the Comparison Tool. We’re going to need phone numbers and possibly email addresses for this. I do know that SCOs reach out to the counterparts at other universities if they have trouble getting transcripts and enrollments. I think its important that they can look up that info.
* Trying to find the direct number is hard – could be Admissions, Financial Aid, Registrar or a separate entity. Of course, the accreditation you don’t want the schools doing that. The historical data, I like that.
* Fiscal year, maybe that data isn’t available for academic year.
* The institution codes – it’s helpful in knowing when things were updated.
* OPTIONAL: Could you tell us a bit about how your work supports Veterans?
* How long have you been doing this work?

**Use of the Comparison Tool**

* How does the GI Bill Comparison Tool factor into your work?   
  + About how often do you use the Comparison Tool?
* What tasks do you use the Comparison Tool to accomplish?
  + What kind of information are you typically looking for?
  + What do you do with that information?
  + Are there other sites or tools you use to perform similar tasks?
  + Any other tasks? (repeat series, as needed)
* OPTIONAL: What are your thoughts on the accuracy of the information in the tool?
  + If you find information on schools that isn't accurate, what do you do?
  + How long does it take for information to be fixed?
* OPTIONAL: How do you find out about changes/updates to the Comparison Tool?
  + How effectively does that meet your needs?

**Making Improvements**

* If you could change the Comparison Tool to better meet your needs, what would you be able to do with it that you can’t now?  
  + How would that be beneficial to you?
* What else would you like it to do that it doesn’t already?
* Would you have any interest or need to update data in the Comparison Tool? If yes, what would you want to update?
* Is there anything within the Comparison Tool that you find incredibly useful as-is and think shouldn’t be changed?

**Thank-You and Closing**

Thank you! Those are all the questions we had for you today. Do you have any questions for me?

[ If time allows, ask for Qs from the team ]

We really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us today. Your feedback will help us make ensure the Comparison Tool works well for those who rely on it.

Thank you so much and enjoy the rest of your day!