**Discussion Guide for Stakeholders**

**Justin H, Justin M – Student Veterans of America**

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]
  + We run the gamut from programming.
  + Justin: I work in the Education service and in some regulation work. How we use the GI Bill CT is solely with the student veteran mind. For us, there isn’t much distinction – it’s from the perspective. Of a student veteran and what tools can be improved to provide a higher education experience.
  + Monk: My role is to deal with primarily the VA as a whole, typically Veterans Benefit Administration. I handle the one-off calls that we handle in respect to that. I think Justin H covered it.
  + Amy: Scenarios for CT?
  + Justin: Largely what I think might be the thrust is ways to improve the CT. We’re really trying to find the same info a student Vet would look for in a school. What information is missing. How the display of that info could be displayed to better serve the Veteran. Checking cost. Flags. Particular availability of benefits at an institution. We can kind of just start walking through things – I don’t want it to be a volcano of info from me.
  + What you kind of mentioned there is does it have the info student veterans need? Broadly speaking, it’s useful. But I think to answer that question honestly – not all the info. One of the things we think would help is a better data exchange or cross sharing with existing sites. Like College Navigator and College Scorecard. We notice that there are differences in the info being provided to students. From SVA’s perspective, we think it would benefit students and that info could be imported over to the CT so they can have a more extensive information on what’s available. We could probably get you a list of things that we think should be shown from College Navigator and College Scorecard.
  + Monk: It’s obviously focused on costs. It’s viewed through lens of GI Bill. But when we talk about CS data. They have much wider breadth of info. Student debt burdens. Salary by study. More demographics about student body. Test scores. More info about student body as a whole. If a student wanted to use that info, they can use both tools to cobble it together, but we would like to have that info married. So they can see info on the school and then the the GI Bill money.
  + Justin: I’ll keep rolling – that’s our big recommendation. Cross-sharing/linking where its easier to get a holistic perspective of the institution. Which kind of leads into next point. Better being able to utilize information is a side by side comparison function. I think this is where we get true to CT name. You can obviously have multiple tabs open. It’s hard to compare multiple institutions and comparing multiple aspects. It would be helpful to have side by side compare within the tool itself. We’ve all seen side by side comparison on a number of websites comparing products or services. It’s an in page way to look at 2 or 3 different things. We think that would be helpful for military students.
  + Amy: Critical factors?
  + Justin: I know that’s how most comparison functions work – they can’t give detailed layout. Include most important. I think how much GI bill pays for that institution, housing allowance – even different zip codes in same area. That’s important to students relying on that to live. We’ll get into some things we would like the GI Bill to include in the future. For example, flags for complaints about an institution. How many complaints does this school have against them. There are probably other points, but those are the most important things.
  + Monk: No I think that’s pretty much the driving point. I think the wish for side by side comparison would include data from other sources. I guess there are tiers in this where you include data like we want. Total debt after graduation, % student taking loans, % claiming Veteran status. It would tell them the environment the student is getting into.
  + Justin: I would say another thing is maybe the existence of relevant Veterans programs and whether the institution utilizes the Yellow Ribbon payment option. That’s an important benefit to Veterans. And like Justin said, that’s not exhaustive.
  + One of the other things we’ve talked about is a rating function. Like Amazon or other platforms. We’re aware that we can’t build it out like other websites. But some ability for Veterans to rate institutions so when others are researching schools, they can reference what their peers thought.
  + I can roll into the remainder of what we have. Another thing is the ability to maintain closed schools in the tool. Those are typically almost universally removed from the tool. We disagree on that. We think its important that they stay in the system, so folks understand why they closed down. And for groups that work with Veterans, research organizations to get a holistic view of schools that have participated in the past and have had access to funds and keep an eye on institutions closing down and why. We think its important that the CT include the closed schools instead of removing them entirely.
  + Many of these come from the way the CT interacts with Feedback Tool. Those go into VA database and that’s not public and that’s something we would like to see. We would really like to see that the CT links to complaints about a school that shows the volume of those complaints and the nature of them. Currently, the CT links to the About page, but doesn’t get to the actual complaints. We think its important for it to link to the detailed complaints that a student can see.
  + Monk: I do want to mention is the underlying data itself. Graduation rates. And including that.
  + Justin: CT includes some information about complaints and it’s broad. The source link goes somewhere that’s not helpful. It has the category, but the student can’t get a sense of what is going on in each of these areas. And then we touched on a comprehensive database. To the extent that something like that could exist – that the CT and complaint database work together and provide relevant info to students.
  + We think caution flags should be added to schools with a substantial number of complaints. The number of complaints is in a school is displayed. For VA to be able to let students know about it – a flag on the school. Number of complaints school had recently or had in total. Those are two ways. There are other ways to flag the school, but we think its important to bring attention to a high number of complaints.
  + Amy: Complaint window? Thoughts?
  + Justin: It’s a good question – it’s something we’ve written on. I think from SVA’s perspective – more information and better information is better for the student. We’re still thinking if the student has some ability to see before the 24 month window. It would be like if you were trying to choose a product or a service and you only get a snapshot in time. I understand things can change significantly in a 2 year period, but we think its important for students to be able to look back in time and see the full picture and full number of complaints. Whether or not the flagging system would work differently. I think there should be some way to look back.
  + Amy: Grad rates? Additional thoughts
  + Monk: Like I mentioned I don’t know how far the extent of your work goes. I think a lot of it is the Department of Education’s dataset. I want to highlight graduation rates and would like to see it improved. It’s sort of incomplete. It doesn’t include Veterans who use alternative sources of funding or those that exhaust their benefits before graduating. We at least recommend that the data be improved. Be more inclusive of Veterans who are not using the GI Bill. And start being able to measure their outcomes. The way we currently put it out there is incomplete. More just putting it on your radar.
  + Justin: Even in VA itself, we’re interested in the amount and data type of info shown. We can get more and better info from the Feedback Tool and then feed that back to the Comparison Tool.
  + Monk: Be aware of incentive to game a rating system.
  + School closed – having school available or actually in the CT? Can see either option. For schools that are closed, it could be advantageous to see schools that had been previously available for the GI Bill, but are not longer. If the VA could provide a list of those schools.
* 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!