**Discussion Guide for CT Redesign for Search, Compare and Initial Profile Page**

**P5 (Mobile) - Stephen**

*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 searching and comparing schools on the GI Bill Comparison Tool.

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.
* **You'll be interacting with a prototype and a demo tool.** This is a demo tool that may not function exactly the way you expect. Some areas of the prototype will be clickable, and some will not. Since it's a demo, none of your actions will affect your actual VA information or benefits.
* **If for any reason and at any time you want to stop the session, please let me know.**
* **Are you comfortable if I record my screen and 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**

Before we look at the website, let’s start with a few warm-up questions.

* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? Yes – I exhausted my Post 9/11 GI Bill, but interested in STEM supplemental scholarship funds.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - When did you start school? Where did you go? I used part of the Bill and YR in New Orleans and another for public policy program at GW.
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?
    - Which benefit?
    - Where are you in the school selection process? Very early in the process. I work full time, but my employer like it when people go for advanced degrees and I’ve heard you can take a sabbatical of sorts. I’ve heard they can make room for that. And it’s like 9 months for STEM – so early in the process looking around, looking at schools.
* When you were first looking for schools, how did you go about finding potential options? What was important to you? So I’m contacting colleagues, old people in my cohort from grad schools, going to different websites. I haven’t used too many of the Veteran listings and websites…really using other people in my network predominantly. Less online resources but I expect that to pick up. For me, it’s academic rigor whether they’re an esteemed university. Where the program ranks based on other programs. Standing of the school and the program itself. That’s a big consideration of mine. Then if there’s any sort of Veteran scholarship. If it ranks highly in Veteran relations. Some schools have been really great. Roy and GW were great. That’s a big consideration and then other people’s opinions – colleagues and people in my grad school program.
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? So I’ve heard of it…I may have used it in the past…where it was a document about what types of funds are offered, but I don’t know if I’ve used the tool itself. I can’t remember though I have heard of it. I just can’t recall if I’ve used it.
  + If yes, what did you use it for?

**Initial Take - 5 minutes**

This is the GI Bill Comparison Tool, which allows you to see the benefits you can receive at various schools. Can you tell me what your initial thoughts are when you see this page? What do you think you can do here?

So having used the VA website for healthcare, it does look familiar as far as font/layout/icons and what not. It’s kind of on my phone…looks relatively squished towards the middle of the screen. If it was the actual tool itself, I might be able to manipulate it more. I may have come across this in a similar survey or I may have gone on here. Maybe I have used it in the past.

What can you do? It looks like I could search for universities of interest. I could do that based on zip code, state or city…which is nice. I know that with Post 9/11 if you were in a major metropolitan area, the housing allowance would depend on the location of the university so that was a consideration. Employers? That one…I don’t know about that section for school. Refine search…I don’t know what that would bring up…

**First Task: Radius from Location - 10 minutes**

* Let's say you aren't sure what you want to major in, but you're moving to **Daytona, Florida** and want to find a school within 10 miles of your location because you don't want a long commute. How would you use the Comparison Tool to find schools that are within that driving distance?
* I don’t know the zip for Daytona off hand…clicked location…well Daytona came up..I’d just immediately go to that. Clicked 10 miles…I’d go to that thing. I think Flagler is near there. Then I would just search. Clicked Search.
* Preference for zip or city: If you search for city, I think you’re talking about incorporated metropolitan area. Zip code might be a slightly larger land area. I would probably…a lot of universities fall outside metropolitan area. If I knew the zip code, I’d probably go to the zip code. If it came up quickly, I’d probably just go with Daytona, FL. I saw Daytona, so I’d go with it.
* So based on this criteria…Veteran, Post 9/11…it gives me information on nearby colleges and how they’re rated by other Veterans. That wouldn’t be a major thing for me. GI Bill students...that might be TAPS…and they might have caps. Tuition and housing would be important to me. 100% instate…I like seeing that. So yeah, I don’t know. I would probably be scrolling through this list and looking at housing, tuition…anyway yeah. That’s what I’d be doing.
* Jen: 2
* User: 1, really easy.

**Things to watch for:**

* Where does the user look to enter the search criteria?
* Do they click the search fields?
* What dropdowns (if any) do they open?
* What location format do users say they would input?

**Upon task completion:**

* How did you think that went?
* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very easy and 5 is very hard, what did you think of finding schools by distance from location?
* Looking at the benefits for these schools, let's say someone had only served in the military for 2 years. Do you think these numbers accurately represent the benefits they would receive?
* So umm…I mean the tuition would be applicable…oh you may be eligible up to…you would only have 24 months and you need 36 months…the language says you may be eligible for up to. I might like it if there was a disclaimer or an asterisk…in case someone didn’t do 3 years. I see that it says “up to” and I see what the tuition is.   
  - If not, how would they go about determining what benefits they would receive?
* How do you think the school search results were sorted? I would think that since I searched by city that it would be the center of the city based on…and would work outward from the center of the city. It would probably be by proximity to the center of the city. Maybe it’s the city itself and not the largest metropolitan area. It’s not alphabetical. So I assume its as it extends outward from the city.
* Was there any other information you were expecting to see? I would want the accreditation – whatever the highest threshold…the most widely accredited…or received the most limited accreditation. I hope the VA would encourage people to not go to schools with substandard accreditation. I think the VA has an obligation not to promote for profit universities or lesser universities. I think there’s a lot of taxpayer funds going to --- schools (bad). Information of highest threshold of accreditation…I don’t know if I clicked on those, what would come up. I would want information on what that is and there would be some hierarchy that VA would screen schools. The rating by other Veterans…everyone loves ratings, but their ratings isn’t going to give a good assessment of the school’s programs. I know its hard to create a ranking between school programs, but I think that should be the primary consideration. How is the school viewed by the American Council of Accreditation and how does it rank compared to its peers. I think the VA has an obligation for that.

**Things to watch for:**

* How does the user try to get back to the home page?

**Second Task: Degree / Program Search - 10 minutes**

* Let's say you've recently heard of someone who received a Bachelor's in **Citizenship Activities**. You don't know of any schools that offer this program, but are curious about what the program would be about. How would you use the Comparison Tool to see if any schools covered by the GI Bill offer this as a program of study?
* So…I can’t see the right part of the screen so I can’t scroll over. Maybe Refine Search…or Compare? Just based on what I can see. Clicked Refine Search….institution prefrences. I go to degree…citizenship activities (no level of degree)…I click that and it’s a bachelor’s degree and get rid of the two year (can’t do that). Well…looking through Veteran stuff…Exclude results with warnings or school closings…that’s interesting. I would click search. And a number of them come up…only 3 results. It does sound like a somewhat specialized major so I wouldn’t expect a lot of results.

*Prompt* You see that **Indiana University-Bloomington** is highly rated by Veterans. If you wanted to ask a few questions about the school, how would you use the Comparison Tool to find out who to talk to?

I don’t see anything else here so view details? Scrolling through…all this is great information. Institution details…historical information…school locations…student feedback…my eyes go to that, but I don’t know if I’d go there. Maybe contact details and get ahold of their Veterans office and ask about others taking this major. Student complaints…I’d probably go to that. Yeah…I think I’d go to that.

Jen: 2

User: slightly more difficult than the location…thinking back, I think it required an extra click or 2. Probably a 2?

Return to search results: Usually I’d just use the back button (but used breadcrumbs).

Info about school cards, what think? Yeah, so I guess it would be nice if I could see how this program ranks…if I could see how this program ranks against others, that would be useful. Maybe info about the faculty perhaps. I don’t know…maybe esteemed faculty members. It contains a lot of useful information. I guess maybe some information on how it compares to other universities…says where its located. Enough info now to let me search for more later.

*Prompt* Where would you go to see how much tuition would be covered at **Indiana University-Bloomington**?

**Things to watch for:**

Part 1

* Where does the user look to enter the field of study?
* Do they click the search fields?
* What dropdowns (if any) do they open?
* Do they open the "Level of degree" dropdown?

Part 2

* Does the user click any of the jumplinks or just scroll?

**Upon task completion:**

* How did you think that went?
* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very easy and 5 is very hard, what did you think of finding schools by program of study?
* What do you think of the school cards?
* How do you think the school search results were sorted? (Why were some schools higher or lower on the list?)
* Was there any other information you were expecting to see?

**Third Task: Compare Schools - 15 minutes**

Looking at these search results, let's say you're interested in **University of Massachusetts-Amherst** and **Indiana University-Bloomington**. How would you go about comparing these two schools to see which school would be a better fit for you?

I’d probably use the compare thing – clicked Indiana, unclicked Compare and then clicked View details…it’s more info about the school, so I’d probably click Compare (hit the bottom tray)…so I’d have to click Compare here an dher and compare them. Then click Compare schools. School comparison. Hmm…okay, so you can click on each one and similarly go to this and see other information for school in Massachusetts. Hmmm…okay. It wasn’t immediately intuitive that I had to click both, maybe after I clicked the first one a box popped up and it said ‘compare to what”. It took me a minute to understand it. I don’t know if I ever would have understood it. I probably would have clicked on one and then details and then the other. It’s more difficult than what I presumed, but I clicked around and figured it out.

Jen: 2

User: 3

School location is kind of interesting…some of these things they decided to highlight…whether they had a Yellow Ribbon program. Student Veteran Group if I hadn’t previously gone to college. So that might be important…so some of these things might be…Cautionary warnings, I don’t even know what that is. Student complaints…take that with a grain of salt. I think its great that you can view it side by side. If you could scroll through the page and if I could go down the page and then flip over that would be helpful instead of going to the top of the page.

*Prompt* After looking at these two schools, **University of Massachusetts-Amherst** doesn't look like a good option for you. How would you remove that school from the comparison and add another in its place?

I go to the bottom of the screen a lot…I’d probably go back to the Comparison Tool again and uncheck one and check the one in VA or if I wanted to see all 3 I’d check all of that. So I’d go to Compare again and compare schools.

How many schools ideal to compare at one time? I’d think it’d be useful to do upwards of 4 at a time. In flipping between screens I don’t know how important that would be. I think people should be doing their due diligence and looking at multiple schools. Maybe 4.

Important info to compare: Relative standing of school, population of college town or city, whether it has single sanction honor system

Interested in a landscape view…sometimes I feel like I’m not seeing everything when it’s upright. It wouldn’t be a dealbreaker if I was just scrolling through stuff.

**Things to watch for:**

* Is the user able to successfully add schools to the gutter to compare?
* Is the user able to navigate successfully to the Compare page?
* How does the user try and navigate back to the search results?

**Upon task completion:**

* How did you think that went?
* On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is very easy and 5 is very hard, what did you think of comparing schools?
* How many schools would you want to be able to compare at one time?
* What information is important for you to see when comparing schools?
* Was there any other information you were expecting to see on the Compare page?
* Was there any information you didn't think was necessary?
* What did you think of the general layout of the page?

**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!