**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

*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 would be looking at the Comparison Tool and talking about ratings and what information is helpful for Veterans when determining if a particular school is a good fit for them.  
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 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 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 (Optional) - 5 minutes**

Let’s start with a few warm-up questions.

* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? I’m going to say a little bit. So, yeah. I was enlisted 88th and 93 aand I used the Montgomery GI Bill when I went to undergrad and I had some left over for grad school. and Come to find out, as I was doing transitioning from retiring, that I had 9/11 gi bill access, as well. [had been toying with going back to school. had used it a little bit in contrast with vocrehab].

-so you’d used your gi bill and had some left over to use?

Yes.

* + How would you?
* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits?
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
    - When did you start school? Where did you go?
  + If no, do you plan on using your benefits in the near future?
    - Which benefit?
    - Where are you in the school selection process?
  + When you were trying to pick a school, what were you looking for in a school?

I’m going to say mostly geography and reputation.

* + How would you determine if it was a good fit for you? I’m going to say geography. [looking at attending his alma mater for law school or a school in Texas]
* If you knew a fellow Veteran who'd attended a school you were interested in, what would you most want to know from them? Good question. How are the professors? How are they, this is going to sound a little weird. Everything seems to be politically divisive, so how is it in a political sense? Are these going to be professors that are open-minded in a sense that you can approach them about some things? Typically, as a retired marine, I can get past some stuff like that. Because it’s not stuff that we discussed when we were active duty with respect to a law program. Typically, what are the classmates like, what are the professors like?

**First Task: Initial Look at Ratings - 5 minutes**

Let's say you received a scholarship for **Insert school** and are curious if the Comparison Tool has any information on that school. How would you go about finding **Insert school** on the Comparison Tool?

You know, I actually did use this to see what was available for the two schools that I was talking about. [hovered over military status dropdown and two other dropdowns, plus institution and housing Qs; executed the search in the prototype, but noted it was UC, not UC-Davis. A had to switch to the right prototype; he executed search] [on srp, first area he looked at was location, then estimated benefits] oh, hey that’s a pretty high rating for 155 veterans. view details.

-can you hop back to the last screen? I have a couple of questions I want to ask you there

Ok [asked how to go back]

-you saw those star ratings and mentioned that it’s a high rating for the school there. [see below in research Q’s for who provides ratings]

-what do you think about generally, the information there where it says university of California-davis and it gives you some info there? what are your thoughts on that?

Well, it’s a public school. I believe the gi bill does 100% for, I believe it’s undergrad. One thing it’s not telling me about is graduate school…Housing and books seem to be consistent with the gi bill, so this is just a school as a whole, not necessarily individual schools there. It’s not like if I was working on an mba, or a phd or a law degree.

-where are you seeing the information that it’s a public school?

Because it says 100% in-state and it’s actually inferred because it is uc-davis. Personal knowledge that it’s public school. If it was a private school, I believe the tuition would be a little bit different. You’d pay 100% in-state and the difference between that cap and the amount that the private school would be their tuition. There’d be a delta in there that would have to be visible.

Things to watch for:

* Does the user notice the ratings on the school cards?
* Does the user interact with any of the filters?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went? Well, pretty simple once it was showing up as UC-Davis as opposed to University of California.
* What do you think of school card?
* What do you think that rating shows you?

Research questions:

* What do users think of the star ratings?
* Who do users think are providing the ratings? Individuals like me that have gone to the school

**Second Task - Detailed Ratings - 15 minutes**

You've heard great things about the Veteran experience at **Insert school**, but are curious about the quality of education you would receive there. How would you use this Comparison Tool to see if **Insert school** would meet your needs?

Honestly, what I would do is I would flip outside of it and go to usde reports and look at rankings based on the criteria. [started reading school details and scrolling down] benefits…learning format and location would be something I’d take a look at [eyb accordion]

-what do you think would be in there?

Potentially the size of classes. How it’s taught, or if there’s an online component. It said large format, so I’d bet the school is kinda spread out. If you look at Texas A&M, for instance, they have campuses in Corpus Christi, main campus college station, their law school is at fort worth. Kingsville texas has a campus. So it’s pretty spread all over the state, not just the general area. Gi bill pays to school, there it is [had been seeing estimated benefits]

-we’re looking for information about the quality of education.

[went up to additional resources, hovered over get help choosing a school link] get help choosing a school [scrolled down again to eyb, kept scrolling]

And here’s school locations. Ok, cautionary information. oh, here we go [school ratings accordion] There’s a rating system. Overall experience. Quality of classes, 5.0, veteran community 5.0. Nice! [kept scrolling down] Oh, this information. Accredited. Type of accreditation. Visit profile on college scoreboard. I don’t know what that is. Can I click on this?

-it doesn’t look like it’s activated. What do you think you’d get if you clicked on that?

I don’t know. I’m curious. It says scorecard. That tells me it’s a ratings system for it because that’s one thing I’ve noticed, the farther along your education goes, kind of matters where that school is within the ranking system. Because It matters to future employers, but it also matters if you performed exceptionally high at a lower tier school, that does carry some weight. If you excel at a top tier school, that carries the most weight. Uc davis could have the best archaeological program in the country, I don’t know, but that’s just an example but that would be a consideration, for their archaeological program.

-how do you think ratings from a third party would compare to ratings veterans gave to a school? Which one would you be more interested in?

I think the third party would get you in the door, would help narrow it down. I’m not fixated on going to a top 25 anything. If I was looking at uc davis for archaeology, and I knew it was a top 5 school in archaeology, then I’d be ok, let’s take a look at uc davis. From here, I’d be taking a look at what are people like me saying about this school. it would be an overlapping system, if you will.

-let’s take a look at these ratings that are right here. I’m curious to get your thoughts on what you’re looking at right here.

It’s interesting that the veteran friendliness aspect is higher than the education rating. Not that it’d mean anything. It’s just an observation. Quality of classes is good, job preparation is good. GI Bill support, veteran community, pretty solid. Pretty impressive scores all the way around. [see below for categories]

Things to watch for:

* How does the user select the school (School name or View Details)?
* Where does the user initially look for information?
* Does the user go to the ratings accordion without a prompt?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What do you think of the school now that you've seen the ratings?

Research questions:

* Are users interested in the different rating categories or just the overall score?
* Which categories are valuable to users? Are there any categories that aren't valuable? Are there any additional categories they would like to see?

Most valuable: Quality of classes because that goes into the aspect of the professors. You don’t want to end up with, hey, if their quality of classes is a 4, I’d have to rethink something else for archaeology. That’s definitely, it would put it on a short list when trying to decide where to go. I don’t even know where uc davis is. When I was looking at the other campuses though, it tells me it’s northern California.

-any of these categories you’re not interested in?

Maybe marketing practices. I don’t know, unless they’re trying to push their program, because of their ability to draw a veteran crowd that speaks very highly of them.

-any categories that it’s not clear to you what it would cover?

Nah, I think they’re all pretty intuitive.

-any categories that you think should be there that are not?

I don’t think so. I think they all seem pretty good.

-so to the question earlier about if you were going to ask a buddy, a veteran friend who’d attended a school that you were interested in, how do you think these ratings would stack up against the questions you had for them [veterans]?

Pretty fair. I’d dig into the veteran community and quality classes right out of the gate.

-when you say did into them, what are you thinking you’d do?

Well, there’s plus signs there. I’d click on the them to expand them.

-you want to try doing that and see what you get?

Sure. [opened quality of classes first] quality of classes, 5 star. 90% is pretty high. I’m curious what n/a means.

-what do you think it might mean?

That they didn’t answer the question or skipped over it, or didn’t have an opinion one way or the other. Something like this is comparable if I’m shopping on amazon, if you will, when I’m trying to find a specific item. If there are several items made by different Vendors or different manufactures, I take a look at the rating scale. If it’s 5.0, anything over 90, will definitely get my attention. I’ll have to filter things out after that to see which one I want to get. Looking at the quality of classes after 90%, 110 veterans say they’re pretty satisfied with the classroom experience. That carries some significance for me.

-great. what about the veteran community one? You want to dig into that one and see what it looks like for you?

Sure [read category description] well, clearly here everyone had an opinion. There are no n/as. 97% were pretty happy and only 4 were just a little happy. As I’m looking at this, I think what I’d be able to use is to look at a review or two because that helps me as well. If there was a 1 star, I’d like to read a couple of the 1 stars there. if there are 5 stars, I’d like to see why because that person’s 5 stars might be a 4 for me, but that 1 star might be, 1 or two guys. Are they throwaways because these guys are not going to be happy no matter what or if there is something legitimate they ran into that they didn’t get what they were looking for from the veterans service office or some other students, just the regular students? that they were having some issues there or even their professors? You know, don’t take classes with guy. This is good for this, but I’d like to be able to dig into this a little more.

-ok, ok. sounds good. Sounds good. Thinking forward. I like that.

Right where it says there’s a robust community, ok, that’s fine and the school supports. That’s fine is there a veterans association that has an office or a meeting place on campus? Is there like in a fraternity sense, if you’re an alumni, is there a monthly luncheon or a monthly meeting that they can go to, or just some place where they can hang out and they can kinda talk and share information? you know, like the president of the veterans association or is there a group email that I can reach out to. You know, hey, I’m a retired marine, wouldn’t mind to talk to one of you guys, two of you guys, to see what’s going on. You know you guys gave the school very good ratings, but I’m just kinda curious, what do you see that’s not in the ratings system?

-do you think the ratings would be valuable without that review information, without those little stories that go along with it, just by itself?

With a 4.8 overall, yeah. That would get me closer, But if it was like a 4.2 or a 3.8, then, if there was, here, let me go back to quality of classes [opened quality of classes] so if this number, if the 5 stars is about 70%, if the 4 stars were 10%, and there was more of a spread, and there was like a 5% 1 star, there I’d probably want to have a conversation or two or figure out why the ratings were so low so this way, I can get a better understanding. This doesn’t say, hey I’m going here right now, but this definitely does make it on a short list. Then I’d be able to compare other schools for archaeology and move on from there.

-if you were giving the rating, if you were rating a school, and you rated it a low rating, what would your expectation of privacy be?

That’s a good question. I didn’t have to log into this. If the word got out that there was a veterans rating system for certain things, some of the individual colleges within the school or even professors would probably want to see what was going on where there was a dynamic shift where people are kind of argumentative based off of some of the stuff. I wouldn’t mind finding a way. Honestly, I wouldn’t mind putting my name down because if I have an issue, I have an issue. What I would put here, I wouldn’t expect anonymity or privacy. It would have been something that I’d addressed directly with the professor, the staff or the college, whoever. That’s not necessarily the case and the ability to come up with a user name or an anonymizer way of doing that, would probably be pretty decent.

-ok. [see below]

* What do users think the different categories mean?
* How do users think the rating scores are determined (average of submitted scores, calculated value, etc.)?
* How trustworthy are the ratings?
* How do users think ratings are collected? By some sort of feedback form.

Maybe down here where it says about ratings. Ok, it says right here. Just reading it. [read it to himself] ok, sounds like everything I was talking about is just sitting right here.

-what did you think of the process for finding out about the quality of education at uc-davis went? How did you think the process of learning about the quality of classes went?

It was pretty decent, but I’ll tell you from previous college experience, you’ll have a school of engineering, you’ll have a school of science, you’ll have a school of music, you’ll have a school of psychology, whatever the case may be. this just gives me an overall rating for what I’m assuming is undergraduate and just a crosscutting of those schools. If I knew uc davis is top 5 in archaeology, I’d like to dig down and find out of those 110 users, how many of those students were going through the archaeology department to see, to have the veteran experience, to see how that overlaps against what I’ve seen on the overall, third party rating, to see how well that overlaps. Even if us digital reports says it’s a top 5 school, but several of the veterans are saying, hey, this is really not what we expected. The professors are very precise, very argumentative, very staunch in their stances, maybe I’d look for a different school in archaeology.

-so considering ratings for the specific schools, not just the school as a whole

Yeah. I’ll give you a personal example. I was a history minor for undergrad. and I would have really enjoyed getting a graduate degree in history, but it was more just for me because there’s not a whole lot you can do with a graduate degree in history other than teach. As I was reaching out to, I live outside of Baltimore, as I was reaching out to schools for the graduate program, i reached out to johns Hopkins and apparently they were one of the first history grad schools in the country and yhey don’t offer a graduate degree unless you’re rolling it straight into a Ph.D.as much as I have an affinity for johns Hopkins, that very parochial stance that the administration gave me was very telling. if I had a true desire for to become a phd holder, for teaching high school and college history, for someone that has a very strong interest in it, that pushed me away for considering what I was thinking for a history degree. That kind of information would be useful to throw on here somewhere. saying, hey, btw, if you’re going to consider an archaology degree from uc-davis, even though they’re top 5, you have to understand their master’s degree is tied into their phd and you have to be expected to roll one right into the other, and there’s no way of bending that. For undergraduate, someone can provide their feedback for the graduate process for an undergraduate in archaeology. I have no idea why I picked that.

* What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating?
* Do users think the ratings are useful?

**Third Task - Comparing Various Rating Aspects - 10 minutes**

Let's say you want to attend the **University of California** and are trying to decide on the campus where you'll take classes. You plan on living on-campus and all the schools offer the classes you want to take. Walk me through how you'd use the Comparison Tool to help you decide which campus you'd attend.

[hovered over the filters on landing page] in person only….[ran search] university of California. We’ll try it and see what happens. Berkeley, davis, Fairfield. I didn’t even know there was a Fairfield. Oooh, that’s interesting [hovered over caution flag] facing a potential lapse in program approval. That tells me they ran afoul with the va. Merced, riverside, santa clara. Huh. Ok, so now, So 28 veterans gave that one a 1.2 [santa clara], not yet rated for riverside. Historical black colleges in here. Didn’t know that. No ratings for merced. I’m curious why lakewood springs is cautionary with a pretty decent rating. A women only law school? hmm. Alright, Fairfield, not looking too good. Oh, it's 10 veterans. That’s not a good example, but oh well. Davis, we already covered that one. Everyone seems to be 100% in-state, so that’s not really an issue, and then Berkeley.[hovered over “not yet rated” on card] This is curious. Pretty healthy gi bill population, but no ratings. Whereas davis has almost as a many as, a third of their population, a third of that amount. Pretty sizeable sample for rankings, but. Hmm. So, I’m basically using the information to see which campus I would like to attend, right? I want to make sure that I’m still doing the right thing

-yeah, any of them jumping out at you right now, that you would not want to go to one or they’d be on your short list?

Yeah, I’d like to see a couple of the rankings why for santa clara because I happen to know where that area is. It’s pretty nice. riverside. I’m not the right demographic for that. Roman catholic, doesn’t necessarily matter. No ratings there. I don’t know where merced is. I’d probably avoid lakewood springs because that doesn’t look very good. Law school doesn’t apply to me here because of the, it seems to be gender-specific. This kind of gives you a little bit more oomph to the davis. Davis is a 4.4. I’d have to take a look at this one just to see why about that cautionary warning.

-ok

I’m going to ask a question. Sort of a second or question. The representatives at college that run the gi bill… are they employed by the college or are they employed by the va?

-the school certifying officials are employed by the school, and if there’s a veteran center on campus, the people who staff that, are employees of va. Does that make sense?

It does. In my mind, if it was a va person that was sitting here for the certifying official, their bend may be more towards the va than the school itself. I’d be curious why that particular school has issues.

-just generally curious about what that warning is.

Yeah, but also it’s got a pretty decent rating system, too, so I’d take a look at it, but I’d want to know why it was running afoul. That’s pretty unique. When I was using the tool, I never ran into these cautionary warnings.

-there weren’t a bunch of them, but yeah, I’m glad that you think that they stand out.

Well, yeah. You don’t want to go to a place that is running afoul of the whole reason why I’m here, to use education benefits. If they run afoul, what does that mean? Do I have to transfer my benefits? What’s the effect of this cautionary warning longer term?

-that’s great information on the caution flag. I’m curious also, at a high level, how would you say that the ratings are impacting the decision that you’re making?

For ones, the ones that say not yet rated, I’d probably have, this would be like if there was a veterans group there, I’d reach out and say, hey I’m thinking about merced, but I’m not catching any ratings whatsoever for the gi bill comparison tool. I just want to talk to somebody to see what they thought about the school itself about those criteria. I’d probably ask some of those same questions…what are the classes like, what’s the general community like? I’d like to find a way, if I really was interested in merced because there’s this one professor I know that is aces in archaeology, I’d like to find out if there’s some way I can dig into it further to see if there’s some way that I can ask.

[see below]

Things to watch for:

* Does the user look at the overall rating or delve into the detailed ratings?
* Does the user pause or read the caution flag?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went? That was pretty intuitive. Not being a California resident, I don’t know where a lot of these areas are. I’d probably have another tab open for google so I’d double check. [would likely google them] also, two, if I was interested in the uc school system, I probably would know where these places are because I’d have done research.
* What made you decide to pick that particular campus?

Research questions:

* Would ratings affect the school selection process?
* How does the number of ratings weigh into a user's perception of a particular school?
* Do users think the ratings are useful?

**Post-Task Interview - 5 minutes**

* Do you have general thoughts or feedback on the Comparison Tool that you’d like to share?
* Any questions for me?
* I want to give a chance for the other people on the line to ask a question.

j- asked about n/a and if he preferred not to see that. [they preferred not to answer or were out of the rating scale]

j-with the ratings, would he consider them to be trustworthy? [if everything was 5.0 or 4.0, he’d be suspicious, especially if it’s a sizeable sample]

c- you mentioned that the not yet rated, you’d be interested learning why the school doesn’t have ratings. any other thoughts for why they may not yet be rated? new program,

c-how many people should rate schools before display the school ratings? 1 person

c-how do you think veterans would provide their ratings here? link by email after finishing program.

[he asked about yellow ribbon ?. a told him where to find the yellow ribbon page on va.gov]

**Thank-You and Closing - 3 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, thanks so much and enjoy the rest of your day!