**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? Yes, I have.

-fantastic. We love repeat visitors.

* + If yes, what did you use it for? I am trying to narrow down a university that I’d like to do my graduate coursework at. And so, I’m going on there to check my benefits at each school, in terms of my housing stipend to see how much is allotted to me. Also, how much it covers tuition wise, yellow ribbon program. All that good stuff.

-you sound like an expert user. We might have to put your name down on a short list.

* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? I am not taking classes right now. I am looking somewhere to go, before this pandemic hit, my intent was to start in January. now my intent is to start next fall.
  + 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? personal preference outside of anything related to my military benefits, I personally am looking for a Christian university because of the other classes I’m interested in taking. Because of the va and gi bill, I’m mostly focused on tuition, how much is covered, if there’s a yellow ribbon program, the housing stipend. For example, the school I’m interested in, I went out to visit it before all this broke out actually in February. I I was looking at apartments in the area to see if the stipend was compatible, to see if it was going to work for me.

-you’re doing a lot of research

Trying to be thorough.

* + How would you determine if it was a good fit for you?
* If you knew a fellow Veteran who'd attended a school you were interested in, what would you most want to know from them? I guess, I think this sounds terrible. I would want to know if the bah, the housing stipend was what it was portrayed, if it was timely in coming through. My sister and brother in law are currently using their gi bill benefits. When things are happening like a pandemic, I’d ask them if they’re still getting their allotments and if it’s still working out for them. I’d ask them how consistent their payments were, if it was accurate based on what’s found online. Maybe personally if they’re having issues with, some schools have a particular department that will handle those claims, like a registrar or admissions. Like if they had issues getting support or using their benefits. Some schools have specific departments that will handle this.

**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?

Those first three fields, that’s what I would have put in there had it not already been in there. type of institution, schools, yep, that works. I personally am only looking for in person. Is that ok for this for now?

-yeah, that’s great

[clicked search field] so it auto-populated. I would have personally typed in university of California and see what popped up. It seemed when I clicked on it, it just auto.

-[a explained this is a prototype] so you don’t have to type. Also, any data that we look at is going to be hypothetical data, as placeholder data. That’s an important thing to know for some of the tasks that we’re going to look at down the road.

I don’t think there’s anything else down there I need. Looks like I’m at the end of the page I’m going to hit search. [srp] ok, so looks like it’s only one of them and it came up. So I can see 100% in-state alright. [saw benefits first] housing per month, books per year, and it has a rating. That’s nice, 4.8 out of 5. Rated by 155 veterans. That’s nice.i do like that little bit I don’t know if that was on the site the last time I was here. If it was, I kind of forget. That’s a nice little added bit to the school website.

-who do you think is providing those ratings?

Hmm. Well, it should be vets like me, students. That’s a great question. I guess that poll is going to be, maybe from vets. They’re probably polled maybe when they’re freshmen. Maybe this is a rating, like once you get in and use your gi bill. Unless they’res being polled after the fact, after their 4 years of being there or however long it takes them. Once you’re there for a number of years, or maybe beyond their time at uc-davis. Not to throw any judgments, a freshman or someone who’s using their benefits for the first time vice someone who after their 4 years there, maybe it wouldn’t make a difference, their experience there.

-so you think someone who actually has gotten credits under their belt. Sounds like their ratings would be more valuable.

Yeah, sure. I think that’s a good word. More valid.

-what about spouses and children of veterans who transfer their benefits?

When I see the word veteran to me, that’s just someone who served. Maybe it’s someone who has been able to use their gi bill benefit there, I feel like maybe it should be a different qualifier. Their input to me doesn’t make a difference, whether it’s a spouse or a vet who’s using their benefits because their experience would be similar through the process, and their experience with the va in using that benefit. that wouldn’t matter, but the qualifier there, I think I would just change the wording of that population. Most vets probably have their own benefit to use unless they pass it off to someone else. I would also assume most vets are going to college using their own gi bill, but that’s a strong assumption. Maybe just by saying veterans, that’s including a population that has served and has attended this school, but they’re not using their benefit because maybe they’re older and they didn’t exist back then, and maybe they had already passed it off to someone and now they’re paying out of their own pocket. For it to be significant data for me, it wouldn’t need to be broken apart under every population, but maybe by those that have attended and used their gi bill, and maybe just vets that have attended there and not used their gi bill. For two reasons, 1 I can see how the process works with that university, how much they support and help you get enrolled. Sometimes there’s glitches. When I did my undergrad, it took a minute to get me enrolled. That was under the old program, Montgomery chapter 9 or something for reservists. those two types of populations, whether they used their gi benefits at the school or if it’s just a vet. As a vet, I value the opinion of other vets when it comes to establishments, but maybe they didn’t use their gi bill. Maybe they are just a veteran who rated it because they attended there. does that make sense?

-you know it does make sense

You’d think I was an English teacher with how much I can talk, but I teach math.

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?
* What do you think of school card? The address itself or just the entire block?

-the entire block.

Ok, I like it. I think it’s a complete snapshot. It has the location tuition, housing and books. I’d say the stuff on the left is absolutely crucial and the stuff on the right is just a very nice to have. It’s nice to see that. I guess the only thing that I could see wanting more, since it says tuition, 100% in state, I’m making the assumption that if I go there and I’m using the gi bill, I’m completely covered. That’s a nice assumption to make if it’s accurate. If it’s innacurate, maybe it needs to look different. If it’s not, if it’s 90% in-state, whether it’s a percentage or a dollar amount so there’s no misunderstanding. You know what they say about assumptions. The other ones are broken down, and they’re not something that’s influenced by the university per-se, whereas that first one is.

-how did you think the process went?

That was super easy. No problems.

* 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?

**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?

[srp] so quality of education, so this is refining the search, which I don’t think I want to change my search at all [for filters as she scrolled down page]. I just want to see if there are other things…Oh, wow. ok That’s a lot, those are some good categories there [filters]. Ok, but let’s see when I hit view details. [clicked view details] so I’m interested in the quality of education. So ratings by veterans [jump link], 4 year program, there’s all of the benefits. School costs, learning format, scholarships [tried to open eyb accordion] so I’m going to assume that’s in person and online, the learning format and location. I think what I want is at the top. I just don’t want to miss anything, and then student feedback.[scrolled to top] I feel like I would go to their website to look at their programs. Then maybe look at like the coursework for a particular degree. I guess. That’s what I’m looking for, right? Did I misunderstand the question?

-no. you’re curious about the quality of education you’d receive at uc-davis.

So I’d probably, my gut says, I probably would have gone to their website to find that. Unless I really thought my fellow vets would give some thorough, long ramblings like I did 5 minutes ago. Then maybe I would look there [ratings].

-you want to check out and see if they did?

Sure, ok [clicked ratings jump link].

Ok. Overall experience, quality of classes. Very nice. Ok. Online instruction, and they felt prepared for their job. Ok, hmm. there’s a plus sign right here, so I’d be curious to see what that means or what that looks like. So we asked them to rate it one out of five. We reached out to veterans…ok [about ratings ] ok, so Is it alright for me to click on this and see what happens? [quality of classes plus sign]

-yeah, let’s see what happens.

Wow, ok. Classes…meet Veteran expectations for a high quality. Well, yeah, that looks and sounds good, and that’s a pretty solid… I feel more comfortable looking at that number…110 people giving it 5 star for rigorous educational requirements. I’m curious as to how they say it doesn’t apply. Unless they’re my online learners. I don’t know where that N/a would come from, how you wouldn’t rate the quality of your classes.

-if you didn’t rate it, like say those 9 users who decided to skip that question…

Ah

-…whatever. Would you expect those to show up or just show you the people who just rated, and maybe it wouldn’t calculate to the sum of the whole?

Hmm. I guess that’s a decent possibility if they didn’t answer the question, and then you’d wonder why they skipped it and then I would interpret it as a negative rating. If for some reason, they didn’t, yeah. what was the 2nd scenario? Maybe they didn’t answer it or we’re just trying to come up with why it would be n/a. especially for that one. Can we click on one of the other ones?

[opened online instruction] so for this one, I would expect n/a… maybe I’d assume they didn’t take online classes. Let’s see for job prep. We have 6 people, hmm. [opened marketing] wow, school provides clear, detailed explanation of, wow. 62%. To me that answer doesn’t make sense. To me, I’d personally would interpret that negatively. I wonder why they couldn’t answer or provide clear and detailed explanations of admissions. I’d assume you could find that all online.I wonder why it didn’t apply to them. Maybe it didn’t apply to them depending on when they took their survey, maybe if these are juniors. They’re not thinking about that stuff and they forget. Let me go back to quality of classes and think about it like that. Maybe these are students that haven’t been able to take a class yet and they don’t have an opinion yet. I’m getting better at this as I keep going. I’ve been teacihing all day, 8th graders. Ok, so I like that answer. …maybe they haven’t taken a class yet. If these are ones that just started to enroll, maybe they haven’t taken a course yet. Maybe they’re still in their first semester.

-it sounds like whatever’s happening in that n/a category, we’re not really clear on that.

To me, no, and I just have to sit and think about it for a moment to see what that could be.

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?

I definitely like an overall rating, that is lovely. so breaking it down by overall experiences, good. I appreciate that. I denitely appreciate quality of classes. Online instruction, I think that should definitely stay, and from a teaching perspective, that’s where we’re headed. That should definitely stay. It’s just not something personal for me. like I said, I’m looking for in person. i wouldn’t care about that number, but that definitely is important. I wouldn’t rate it, but I’m the anomaly. It’s definitely important. Job prepraration, that’s important. Gi bill support, yes, please. that’s so important. I want to know how supportive the school is. I had a good experience at my school. I knew who to poke to get things to happen. I knew where to go. My school, for my undergrad, was definitely supportive. That last piece, especially people being in person. What made me very nervous about trying to get my masters’s where I’m looking at is that I don’t think they have an office on campus. So that really upsets me because I’m a face to face person. I want to know who the person is. I don’t just want to be emalinng some random person, to try to find them online. So it’s very important to me that I have that gi bill support in person, in a department, in a building, where I know where to go, and I did not have that at the school where I was at and it made me very nervous when I was taking a tour there. veteran community, I appreciate that. I like that this is here. Is it as important as the other things? Probably not. I mix with everybody regardless of this kind of status. Normally, you find that you have to go to a different avenue to try to connect with other veterans at the school. so this is good. If I had to rank them, it’d be down there with online instruction. It’d be right above online instruction. Marketing practices, that part is really important. I’d like to assume that all schools would have clear practices online. Is it something I’m probably going to look at? No. is it an important category? Sure. Nobody wants to waste their time digging through a school’s website trying to find all the information they have. It should be user friendly…It would still probably be down there. I’d probably put it below veteran community. Online instruction would be at the bottom for me, but it’s so important, and then marketing practices, veteran community. Maybe the other 4 are big ones, but to another vet, they’d think the gi bill support wouldn’t be as important. It just is to me.

-any other categories you’d like to see that aren’t here?

No, I’m trying to think about my undergrad college experience. I can’t think of anything else that’s really…All that sticks out to me, for college is sororities, fraternities and Greek life, which is not important and I don’t think it’s important to other vets unless they’re trying to avoid it.. one of the other things I was thinking with that column, the marketing practices, unless we’re saying marketing practices towards vets, I’m wondering why it’s under that column, and not under, well, it’s not technically education either. But like if it would be in a third column. In terms of being veteran friendly, I feel like that’s just an overall category for anyone. right? I would hope that it’s easy to find all that stuff online for any person to attend anyone’s school.

-well, we know sometimes schools pray for veterans. They like that gi bill money. So we just want to be sure that they like veterans when veterans have their own money in their own pocket book, that they like them just as much when they’re taking classes.

Ok.

-If you were looking at this, how trustworthy do you think that the ratings were?

I mean I like, The lowest is 4.5 stars, to me that’s good. 4.5 stars isn’t bad. Well, maybe it would be 4.5 stars I guess.[marketing practices]

-we have the math teacher online looking at our data.

Looking at all these n/as, To me, 4.5 stars isn’t bad. I would say this is good. Overall rating 4.8. I would feel comfortable. Even with all this questionable data right here. The other ones, they’re good. Everyone basically gave it 5 stars. We don’t have a lot of n/a’s in the other categories. We don’t have a lot of low stars. I don’t even know if I see a single 1 star or 2 star in any one of them.

-how confident would you be in the individuals that provided the ratings?

That part makes me nervous. I know my brothers and sisters. If they’re all marines. Yikes. If they’re air force. I don’t know. Oh, my goodness. I don’t know. that’s why I was wondering about that earlier. I think about when I was a freshman in college vs. being a senior in college, there was so much difference in my personal growth in how I could asses something in my freshman year to my senior year would have been totally different. To me personally, I might look at it and be like, that’s nice. I don’t know how much stock, if I needed to put a lot of stock into an opinion, I love my brothers and sisters, I do, but I don’t know who provided the data. I would think maybe the most that are willing to participate in surveys are probably going to be those that had a positive experience. I don’t know if you’d be able to get ahold of anyone that didn’t have a positive experience or who would still be around.

[read about ratings] we reach out…when they transfer. Ok. Or when they graduate. Ok. So.

-how does that sound to you?

It sounds ok. And I guess maybe if you’re asking for these ratings when they’ve received their coe, that could mean that they haven’t used them yet, and then maybe that’s where the n/as would come into place. I would hope it’d make sense not to poll somebody who hasn’t used them yet. Or like if it’s an older vet who’s gone to uc-davis and could tell me about their experiences, but hasn’t used the gi bill.

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?
* What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating? From the va? you’re the one asking me for input on a school and I’m giving you this information?

-mhmm.

I don’t know. Would you share that with…would I want? I feel like some of that information is beneficial to the school if they want to know how their veterans feel. If I had some constructive criticism or a negative experience, I wouldn’t want my name associated with it. You wouldn’t want you name associated with it, especially if it was a smaller veteran population. So maybe it’s chunked, like every few years or so…. If it was grouped, like if it was every may, every graduation, hey we polled your graduating vets and this is what they said, and I was the only graduating vet. then the school would know exactly what I said about them! So I’m just thinking numbers wise…because schools could do that.

-I’m curious to get your thoughts, so we have all these categories. And then we have the big one at the top, 4.8 stars. Can you talk about the relationship and what that means to you?

The first one is going to be an average of all the others, but, an average of all the others or a separate rating asking an overall, hey, what would you rate this university out of 5. So it’s either a category all by itself or it’s an average of all the ones below it. I think it would be more valuable to me, if you could only rate the vets one question, and that’s their answer. And then all these other categories are separate values of their own.

-how do you think that went?

For me personally, scrolling through, Oh, easy.no, it’s good. It’s user friendly. It makes sense. And this is a marine talking, so I think everybody else will be ok. all my brothers and sisters.

-Ok, great.

* 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.

So university of California in there to get started. [srp] these are my options through uc. They have a campus at Berkeley. Davis, Fairfield, san Francisco. How many do I have to choose from? Lakewood springs. Ok. Merced. So it’s at 8 up top. I just want to make sure they all are university of California. Ok, cool. So i’m trying to figure out which one I want to go to?

-mhm. So looking at this, are there any you’d rule out right away? Any you’d put on a top list immediately? How would you approach it?

Ok, So putting aside my, Oops. [had hit an arrow, went back] I might have it a different…how do I get myself back. So ruling out where I want to live, if that matters to me, so if I’m looking at it. So this one doesn’t have a rating, but it has a lot of students [Berkeley] is it new? That’s something I’d ask myself. So there’s davis. Fairfield has a low rating. 10 people, but that’s not a lot in case someone had a negative experience or they just had a really bad year until they got their program together.i don’t know. That’s a really low rating. The other one doesn’t look too great either, satellite campuses. Lakewood springs has a really good rating. It has a caution for potential lapse in program approval. For educational reasons, I’d try to avoid that one, and I’d wonder if the program I want is in jeopardy. So, not yet rated [merced, riverside] historically black, I am not, but that might be important to some of my brothers and sisters. For riverside. Yikes[santa clara]. What is going on down here? That is not a great rating. I’d be interested to see what’s going on for santa clara. [scrolled up some]

-any top picks at this point?

If it’s all, not a matter about housing, because the housing changes drastically between some of them. Depending on where I’m living and traveling to for classes, maybe that matters to me. I don’t want to say it’s going to rule out some of the unfavorables. I try not to make money first about everything, but that aside, the lower rated schools, I definitely won’t support, so I’m not a fan of, 3 stars is questionable, but it’s also 36…women only. Hmm, that’s curious, but it’s also 36. Anything below 3 stars, I’m guessing I’m going to rule out because that doesn’t sound too good.

-well I can see that we are coming up on time

I did talk a lot, so if you all still have questions, I do want to help you

-that’s all right…how did you think that went?

I liked it. I definitely liked having it there. it’s a nice snapshot. It stands out, all the graphics, color, it works. I appreciate it.

-ok, great. Is there one or two schools that would definitely be on the short list?

Oh, yeah, this one guy down here. This one was terrible. Yeah, 1.2, so santa clara. Yeah. And you have to wonder, too. If this many students used their gi bill, and who knows, but if you only had 28 vets respond and rate it. That’s really low. That would be a no-go. It might be a tie between the not yet rateds. It might make me nervous because if it hasn’t been rated yet, I’m going to interpret that as either the campus has not been open very long or it’s not very big or they haven’t had a program established.

-definitely.

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?
* 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 how much the ratings would weigh into her decision if she went to the ct] I guess I would be looking for a favorable rating, especially, the university I went to with them not having a place on campus, I would love to know how other vets fared out in getting support. It could put me at ease. Like, hey, she emails you back. It’s wonderful…[if the surveys came back saying they weren’t helpful, that might push her to look at other venues]… to me, the most valuable opinion from another vet when it comes to a school is, ok, how vet friendly were they in terns of, is there an office, will they help you, did you feel supported? That kind of thing.

j-would you be looking for a review or narrative to accompany the ratings at some point?

Like we do on amazon when we buy things? I might give it a once over. Let’s just click in and view a handful of comments. I’m not going to scroll through a 100 veteran comments for lakewood springs. [if the comments were smaller, she’d read 3-4 and would filter them by best, worst, most recent. Most recent would be most valuable for her.] [would be interested in the most recent vets that have been polled if a narrative is an option].

**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!