**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 think I have, but that was a long time ago.

-that’s fine. We’re working on making it better, so if you’ve used it in the past, maybe it’ll work better this time.

* + If yes, what did you use it for?
* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? I’m currently using.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using? The post-9/11

-where are you going to school? at amu.

* + - When did you start school? a long time ago, but I am going on my second bachelor’s now.
  + 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? the main thing I was looking for is convenience. I wanted online. The second thing is I needed something that had my degree plan that I wanted.
  + 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? The list of the classes, how many papers you have to write, and the format. What’s required as far as how many posts you have to do a week. Stuff like that.

-sounds like a lot of it is course mechanics.

Yes, what’s their setup.

**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?

[hovering over military status dropdown] ok, you said uc-davis?

-university of California-davis, yeah

[a suggested she use the arrow keys as it was squirrely]

[clicked search field, clicked search button] ok, you just wanted me to tell you once I got to…

-yeah

To uc-davis.

-do you think you found the right school?

Yes.

-ok, excellent.

-how do you think that went, the process of finding that?

The process was easy. It was just mouse cooperation.

-can you talk to me about what you see here about university of California-davis?

What I have on here, what the tuition is, I have the estimated benefits. For housing it gives the amount, for books it gives the amount, and then it talks about… [scrolled down to review filters, then back up] ok, yes, and that’s all that’s on this screen, and when I click on view details…

-before you click on view details, so you’re seeing the tuition, housing and books here?

Yeah. My money benefits.

-ok, your money, alright. excellent.

How many students they have enrolled that are using the gi bill and how many veterans have filled out the surveys and rated it, which is very important information.

-you said that’s important information?

Yeah. That’s another thing I look at also is how many gi bill students they have at their school. I use it to gauge with how proficient they are in dealing with military students that are using their gi bill.

-so the number of gi bill students is important to you?

Yes.

-ok, good. Then you said you’d be interested in looking at the details?

Yeah. The money part is good, but that lets me know benefit wise, but what other information do they have on the school.

-ok, why don’t you click on it and see what they have there

-ok, so on the view details, it pulls up more specific information. it talks about how much the gi bill pays the school, out of pocket, the housing allowance I’d get by month, and then the stipend. And then it breaks it down by month.

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?
* 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?

Ok, you said for qualifications?

-the quality of education. So some of that stuff, like the question that you had about length of classes or papers. If you were going to take classes here, what would that be like?

Ok, I gotcha.

-where do you think you’d find that information here?

Down where it gets to learning format and location, that’s where I’d click on.

-what would you expect would be there?

The setup of how it’s broken down like the classes. Is it 8 week courses, 16 week courses. The location of where the actual learning is taking place. That’s what I’d expect to be under that tab. And along that same line, how often do their classes start, is it rotating every other month? And I’d expect to see a school calendar based on the options that it’s showing [calendar eyb tab]

-are there other things you’d be curious knowing about this school?

No, that would be the gist of it. As far as deciding if I want to go here or not. To me, it comes down to the classes that are offered, what’s the format, format, how long are the semesters, that type of stuff. and if they offer online classes.

-ok. Can you go ahead and scroll down the rest of the page and see what else is down the rest of the page and give us some thoughts on what you see?

I see a list of the different veteran programs. Military tuition assistance, the vet group site. Principles of excellence, I really don’t know what that is, but since it’s there I’d click the link. Yellow ribbon, I know what that program is, and then priority enrollment, I’d click on that link to see what that is. so out of all of those, principles of excellence and priority enrollment, I’m not too sure what that is, but I’d click on it because it is veteran programs to see what it entails. And then you have school locations, there’s different cities that these schools are at, and cautionary information. that’s actually very good info, but according to this, like you said, it’s not real, but there’s no student complaints in the last 24 months. So that would be a real flag like wow, that’s top notch. And then school ratings. It breaks it down by actual subject matter as far as how they were scored by veterans.

-what are your thoughts on these ratings?

They’re very important and because they’re done by veterans, it’s the same people that go through the same stuff, we all have a military background. It’s not somebody that just graduated high school and is going to college. it’s from a veteran standpoint, so I think it’s very important. And then the veteran community one, that goes back to what I was saying earlier, how many veterans they have at the school. and then online instruction, they have it on here. 4.5 out of 5 stars is actually amazing.

-so veteran community and online instruction sound like they’d be particularly interesting to you. Are there any others?

The gi bill support because it sounds like they would have an actual office or at least designated personnel that are trained in gi bill.

-what if it was a 2?

That tells me that you don’t have anybody that’s trained in having to deal with veterans or the gi bill. If I have questions because the gi bill process in general is not the easiest because there are so many different programs. When I was in school, I had so many questions when I was trying to figure which chapter to use for my gi bill stuff. If you don’t have a gi bill individual that specializes in that, you’re not going to be able to help me out as a veteran is my question.

-are there any you that don’t care about?

Job preparation for me wouldn’t phase me because I have a job. I’m not going to school to get a job. I’m going to school to broaden my horizons as far as experience goes. that one wouldn’t sway me either way. I’m not looking for a degree to get a job because I have a job.

-if you wanted to learn more about what the categories meant, how might you figure that out?

Press the plus.

-ok, are there any that you’re curious to see what they mean, what they’re about, because they don’t make sense to you?

Overall experience because it didn’t get a 5 star. I’d look at that to see where the negative came from.

-you want to take a look?

Ok. [opened it]5 stars is almost everything, so I’d want to see what was wrong. Ok. Hold on, it went away from where I was at. Ok, so when you click on it, it breaks it down by who gave what rating. I’m not sure if I click on the star rating, if it tells me what the comment was.

-oh, ok. so you think that people might have written stuff in?

Right, but if that’s an option.

-ok. [see below]

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?
* 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? I actually would put quite a bit of weight into these ratings if I was able to read them. Just going on stars alone, that’s not going to work for me because I’d want to know. If these are veterans, these are not random high school kids. These are people that have served in the military. I would hope if they have integrity, to not be lying on when giving ratings to the school. For the lower stars, I’d want to know what they said because that is a factor in how much weight these would hold. If you’re complaining because your books didn’t show up on time, ok, I can work with something like that. I wouldn’t mark a school down because the books didn’t show up on time. I’d want to know what went down. Even for this one [had opened overall experience], they have 8% that put n/a. so you have 10 users that marked not applicable on a 5 star rating. So that skews the whole star rating just because you have 10 users that didn’t answer

-so you think the n/a is being factored into the overall score?

Yeah.

-what do you think is the relationship between these education ratings and the veteran friendliness rating and the big 4.8 that’s at the top?

I think they average it out.

-ok.

After they put the total of education ratings, and the veteran, then they came up with the top score of 4.8.

* How do users think ratings are collected? Eh, my guess is it would have to do with the survey, at the end of most classes, you do a survey for how the class went. End of course critique.
* What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating? You’re talking about not knowing or putting their name out there?

-yeah, or having their name sent to the school, being identified to the school as giving a rating

I know with schools, your name is tied to the end of course critique. With this, I would hope no name is attached to the survey questions.

-ok. no name attached to the individual responses, right?

Kind of like the end of course surveys, but this would be specific to their experience with the school. I would hope you’d be able to rate yourself, rate the stars, no names attached to it, and then they just get the data.

* 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.

Ok, yeah. I’m going to scroll down. It already shows in person. [clicked on search field, then search] I’m going to enter my school, university of California. Search. [srp] then when I get here, it has the different campuses. At this point, hold on. I would start clicking on the view details to see which campus I’d want to go to. Let me rephrase this. Let’s go back. I would first look at the cities to see how close they are to where actually I live and if I’d be willing to travel. Based on where I am, if I had to choose, university of California in san Francisco, that would be up for choice because of the amount of money you’d get for housing, you’d be able to pay. I would have the money to pay for an apartment and what not, but the rating by gi bill students is not that high. But yeah, so out of all of these on this page, the university of California-davis is the best one.

-What makes that one the best one for you?

The 4.8 out of 5 stars, and it was rated by 155 veterans.

-so the rating plus the number of gi bill students that are there?

No, this one has to do with the veteran ratings because the gi bill students is less than the Berkeley one, but because the berkeley school shows no rating, that leads me to believe that it might be a new school that just started servicing veterans.

-so the number of people that rated a school?

Yeah. So nobody rates a school out of 557?

-ok, that’s a warning for you then, huh?

Yes.

-let’s go down and take a look to the hastings campus that you were looking at before.

Ok, there we go.

-any quick thoughts on lakewood springs? That one has a pretty high rating and a pretty good number of students rated it.

No, because it has a big ole caution thing. The school has a cautionary warning on it. The school is facing a lapse in program approval, so I would not pick that one.

-ok, that’s good. Let’s check out university of California hastings college of the law. Let’s check out their details.

Do you want me to tell you why I wouldn’t do this one?

-why wouldn’t you do this one?

Because it’s women only

-well maybe they have a brother school really close by. Let’s say they have a really good law program program and you’re really interested in it [P went to view details]

-How would you get the information on the ratings?

I would click on where it says see 5 ratings [jump link] you want me to click it?

-go ahead, please.

[ratings accordion] And then that’s when I’d click my pluses to see how it would break down.

-what are your thoughts on where it says not yet rated for online instruction?

For me, that wouldn’t work because that’s what I’d be looking for is online instruction, so they only had 5 veterans rate so that’s not even a high number OR they don’t provide online instruction.

-go ahead. I was going to ask you, how many ratings does the school need to make it seem substantive or significant?

The ratings come down to how many students are enrolled, but I’d like to see at least a quarter of the total you have enrolled for the ratings. everyone’s not going to give a rating, I get that, but at least 25% out of your total. I think you’d be able to get 1 out of 4 students to give a rating.

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.

-when looking at ratings, it depends on the products/school she’s looking for.

-regarding the school with the high ratings and the caution flag, she thought that the school might have given incentives to the veterans to favorably rate the school.

-would expect to see the first rating that is provided by a veteran.

**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!