**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? Honestly, I’m not sure if I have or not. I’ve gone to a lot of the va education websites when I’ve been looking at gi bill stuff, but I’m not sure if I’ve used that specific tool.

-not a problem. If you have fresh eyes on it, that’s great. We have a couple of things that we’d like you to get your input on.

* + If yes, what did you use it for?
* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? I’ve used them in the past, and I’m looking at using them again.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using? My post-9/11 gi bill.

-where are you in the school selection process?

I’ve identified a school. it’s really just signing up for classes, and getting the gi bill approval.

* + - 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 was looking for something that is local that was more of a hybrid program, something that was online and in person as well.
  + How would you determine if it was a good fit for you? It’s actually a school that I graduated from previously so I’m familiar with their program, their campus, their faculty, and I enjoyed it in the past. So I figured that I’d just go back.

-ok, happy alumni

Yes.

* 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 would ask them if it was a specific program, the classes that they liked, what the coursework was like, their interaction with their professors, if it was a supportive environment, or more self-led. Things like that.

**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?

First, I’d make sure that everything that’s already entered in the dropdowns is correct. I am a veteran and it has the correct gi bill and the percentage. If I’m looking just for information on the specific uc-davis school, I’d keep it at schools only, and depending on how I’d want to take my classes, I’d check which one is on there. do I have a set preference that I’m given?

-let’s say you want to go to classes in person

[would enter the school name in the search field, and hit search]. [on srp] So it looks like there is one result. It looks like this is the correct school. right away I think it’s nice that it says right here exactly what you’re getting with the gi bill. It’ll cover 100% of ins tate tuition, the housing allowance is $2,289 a month, and then it has the book stipend. It tells you how many gi bill students are enrolled, and I really like how it has the rating, 4.8 out of 5 stars. My main question would be if all students using the gi bill would be granted the 100% in-state tuition or if that is specifically just for California. I would look under view details to see what other information there is. [profile] I really like that it has the link directly to the school here. Then I would just first look at the breakdown of the benefits that’s on the side here [eyb estimates] how much this is for tuition and fees, that there’s 0 out of pocket, the housing allowance, and then the book stipend. It adds all that up for you.

-let’s say you got a scholarship for the university of California-davis, but you were curious about the quality of education you’d receive there. how could you use the comparison tool to see if there was any information about the veteran experience?

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?

I would look at the ratings up at the top here. It looks like there are 122 ratings by other veterans [clicked the jump link]. I would see if they actually allow you to leave a review or if it’s just a scale from 1-5. I like that it’s broken down to the different ratings, experience, quality of classes, online instruction. Things like that. I’d go in there, and see if those are actually, you can actually click on them to see, oh, you can [had opened overall experience]. That’s nice that it breaks it down to how many people put each rating on there. it would also be nice if you could leave a review, like type in something about your particular experience. Maybe someone had a really bad experience with a specific professor ofr the va office there. you can have a heads up on that as well.

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 would say the gi bill support would be big for me. I haven’t personally experienced this, but I know a lot of people personally that have depended on their housing benefits to pay their bills while they’re in school, and sometimes they don’t see that money for 4-5 months after applying and it’s put them in very tough situations. With the gi bill support, if there’s a lot of 1 stars, things like that, then you could know ahead of time that you could experience problems or be proactive on your end, and do everything on your end as well.

-any others that are here that you think would be really interesting or that you’d be rally concerned if it was a low score vs. a high score?

Maybe job preparation. I’m assuming that most people are continuing with their education so that they can be better prepared for their career. Like if I wanted to be an accountant, or I wanted to be a cpa, and they didn’t teach me any of this stuff and it was never addressed in the course, I think that would be really important.

-anything not important to you in the ratings?

I would say marketing practices. I guess that’s kind of important because a lot of the for-profit schools maybe target veterans and don’t necessarily have a great program that will prepare you for a career. It might not be accredited, but they make it seem like it’s accredited. If I had to be one that was least important, I’d say marketing practices, but I can see why it’d be in there.

-any other categories you’d be interested in that aren’t displayed here?

Maybe for people that are going there in person, like campus life, maybe if you’re going to be living in the dorms or utilizing the food options or the gym that’s on campus. The events that the campus has, things like that, but that all depends on how involved I think they want to be with the school.

* 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? Maybe like everybody that’s enrolled or enrolled for a semester, towards the end of a semester, a survey is sent out from the va. I assume that’s how that information would be collected.
* What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating? I work in research, so I would say that it would be private and that would remain anonymous, and that if there isn’t a text option, if it’s simply rating on a scale of 1-5, it’s all presented as simply aggregate data.

-how trustworthy do you think ratings would be?

I would take it with a grain of salt. I would think those that took the time to respond to it really liked it or they really didn’t like it.

**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.

Yep, I would enter in here university of California, hit search, and doing that, I’d assume all the university of California campuses would come up. It looks like they’re all listed here. If I was really open to attending any of them, I would probably look at the different ratings along with the housing allowance just to make sure that I could actually afford to live there and that it would cover rent and bills and things like that. And then seeing the lakewood springs campus that has the cautionary warning, that it’s facing a potential lapse in program approval, I would avoid that completely. I wouldn’t even look at it.

-even though it’s good a pretty good rating?

Yes.

It looks like some of them don’t have any ratings, and there are others that have very poor ratings.

-what do you think about the ones that don’t have any ratings? What do you think is going on there?

I would probably think there’s not that many people enrolled that are veterans using their gi bill, or that there hasn’t been a survey or requests for that. I’d look for other information on the programs [would google them or use other platform]

-how would you stack those up?

I would probably look at the highly rated schools first, except for that one that has a cautionary warning, and then at the ones that weren’t rated at all, and then at the ones with the low ratings.

-[asked her to look at hastings] and if you could check out the ratings for this particular school.

[used jump link for ratings] it looks like it has a decent overall experience. Job preparation doesn’t look like it’s that great. There’s no rating for online instruction. I’d assume that all the classes are in person that it’s just not applicable. It also looks like the veteran community is also pretty small there. It looks like there’s only 5 people that were rating that, so it reinforces the idea that the veteran community is probably quite small. [scrolled down to additional info] and the little box here with the benefits, I would just be confused by it having zero recipients. Then for the yellow ribbon, it looks like they do not have a yellow ribbon program.

-that might be a data error

For the yellow ribbon, it looks like they don’t have a yellow ribbon program [historical table] I would assume, I’d also check into how much tuition would be because I know there’s a cap on tuition, and since this is a law school, that I’d end up o paying out of pocket for it.

- so yellow ribbon is probably really important for you

yeah

-[asked her to scroll back down to ratings area]

-What are your thoughts on, see at the top, where it says 5 veterans rated this institution, and there’s a score there and there are all of these categories with all these scores? What do you think the relationship is there between that 3.2 and all the littler scores?

I would say that’s the average of all of them added up, and then divided by the scores.

-ok.

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.

-you mentioned that you’d avoid the school with the caution flag lakewood springs even though it has a good rating. can you talk a little bit more about that? why do you think it has a high rating wiht a caution flag? [heard of schools that lapsed in funding and closed. people had a hard time transferring their classes]

-why do you think a school wouldn’t have a rating? [maybe they are new to gi bill, no one responded to the survey.]

-n/a - what do you think that means – [nobody entered that. it’s not applicable to them, like if they didn’t take online classes. ]

**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!