Participant: *Eric*   
Date: 11/04

**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.

* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits?  
   *ayear ago is when I used it last and I am looking to use it.*
  + 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?
* What was most important to you when you were looking for potential schools?  
  *um the program and obviously affordability and the GI bill was a big factor. Like what percentage of the tuition would the GI Bill cover?*
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before?  
  *Yes. I like it because it lets you know or it gives oyu some value by knowing others use it. I think theres some type of ranking? Uh like the school has some type of value with the va it seems like.*
  + If yes, what did you use it for?

\*\*As a disclaimer, we will be looking at ratings data for several schools. This data is fabricated and does not represent the actual thoughts or experiences of Veterans. \*\*

**First Task: Feedback on School Cards - 5 minutes**

Let's say you've done your research and you're interested in attending **University of California-San Francisco**. How would you go about finding **University of California-San Francisco** on the Comparison Tool? When you find what you're looking for, you can say "I found it".  
  
*so im seeing three schools here that say Dartmouth but I think the top one is what I am looking for? I assume the GI bill students is current students? But I don’t know… That’s a big deal because it tells me if the college is familiar with the process. I know from personal experience that sometimes the money doesn’t flow in right away.*   
 *This information is very helpful – especially the housing because its always a black box with housing, zip codes are involved… who knows how that wroks now with virtual schools now. Um this tuition seems appropriate for the percent of GI bill we have. Im surprised how small the number of gi bill students is, I think others have hundreds’s or thousands.   
  
Um im looking at school ratings… I don’t really know what these ratings mean. I don’t put much stock in ratings. Why is it rated by 102 veterans but only 85 GI bill students attend… doesn’t make sense to me. Who did you solicite to rate this? Im just being inquisitive. What I need to know is tuition housing books.   
  
I like that it listed the town, private, stuff like that, good information.   
  
I’m assuming these numbers (estimated total payed to you) is for 9 months of the year? I just know that its different if you go full time or part time… you almost need a PHD to figure out the percent of the program or courses… like you need to be more than 50% but you don’t have to be 100% uh so that’s important to how you get your benefits.   
  
So I am in a graduate program so I would really care about if I go full time or part time after work and that’s really what I think about but I want to take enough credits to get the housing allowance so I don’t understand this fall, winter, spring, housing… I mean if youre not in school I don’t think you get housing so I don’t understna dhtat. Oh okay I see so this is what im talking about (sees enrolled drop down) This is what I would really care about*

– user really cares about seeing the enrolled percentage drop down.

*Its so dependent on the school you are in because they all have different policies on what is considered full time or half time… maybe if I click learn more it will tell me. Okay yes. That’s a big deal and I didn’t realize that at first and its very important to me*

Things to watch for:

* Does the user notice the ratings on the school cards?  
  *uh I guess its good, you want some feedback but uh I don’t know… let me read this first before I respond (reads how ratings are collected section) “oh… is that all the ratings? There are no comments? What am I missing here? Yeah I might expect comments. Okay I don’t really understand how the 4.2 uh I guess there is an average somewhere or is that an overall rating? Um it seems like people were generally happy here… im happy that the GI Bill support is high though… that is really what I would expect from this website as long as schools don’t come in and argue about bad ratings… you know if a school is rated poor gi bill support and if they don’t get military students they don’t get that money… the veteran friendliness I would expect honest ratings here and to see higher ratings here gives me a positive outlook.  
    
  ratings are so subjective… its hard for me to put tremendous value in the education ratings but I think veteran friendliness is more culture to me, tells me a school culture and so the three on the right are important*
* *What do you think of true to expectations  
  no 1 or 2 star ratings so that is good. Uh 4 seems fine, I don’t know what other schools are I mean the brochures are never 100% true so that seems fine here.   
    
  if the veteran community rating was low I would be concerned about attending the school, I am a veteran I want that community.*

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What do you think of school card?
* What do you think of the ratings that you see?

Research questions:

* What do users think of the new school card layout?
* Are users interested in sorting or filtering search results by star ratings?
* What do users think of the ratings?

**Second Task: Initial Look at Ratings - 15 minutes**

Since you've found the school, how would you go about determining if **University of California-San Francisco** would be a good fit for you?

Things to watch for:

* How does the participant open the school profile page (School name or View Details link)?  
  *clicks on school profile, right away says: I forget, can you have two schools on the same screen at one time… I forget, if not I guess I’d use multiple tabs.*   
    
  Okay so this is 87 ratings and has 4.3 out of 5 and 3.4 job preparation that makes no sense to me… there must be averages somewhere…   
    
  Okay but you asked me about apartments um… the husing allowance is 4,100 a month vs 1700 a month so that sounds good to me… sign me up for Stanford BUT… I know palo alto is also more expensive, I acutally don’t know the cost of living at the other one… I don’t know if I need a cost of living estimator on the VA website, I just want facts but maybe if they linked me to something, if not id search apts in palo alto… I mean most schools website give you housing costs.. so the schools usually provide that information or the veterans office will provide that. I would just go direct to the school. Other students.. other literature..  
    
  Why is the total per year 37 but the total paid to you is different… I think this is the 9 month thing I was talking about before I mean… you only get housing when you are in school, not the whole year… um… this doenst make sense to me… okay if  
   I went full full time I get 49…. Okay I like this here… gives me a more relastic viewGraphical user interface, application

  Description automatically generated
* Ratings impact on decision to go to the school  
  they have a low to medium impact on my decision. They would have some but im going to classify it as low to medium… I mean educational ratings to me are not systemic? Or are? I missed this. I like veteran friendliness that makes sense to me. Um but you look at in historical information 2 mil a year that’s just not a lot of veterans so… im sure that this SCO maybe this is not her ful time job I mean some schools have thousands of veterans… Or this is there full time jobs but they have other responsibilities… like why is it a challenge to use VA benefits that is frustrating but I would have to call and ask.  
    
  I would look at the student feedback section and take htat into account.  
    
  Would like to see veteran alumni access / support.

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What do you think of the school now that you've seen the ratings?
* What do you think of the categories?
  + What do you think "True to expectations" means?
  + Some categories say that a certain number of individuals did not rate, what do you think of that?
* Where do you think the ratings come from?
* Do you have any questions about the ratings?

Research questions:

* What do users think of the star ratings?
* How does the overall rating weigh into the user’s perception of the school?
* How do the individual ratings weigh into the user’s perception of the school?
* Do users understand the “Not yet rated” indicators?
* Do users think the “Not yet rated” scores affect the overall score?
* What do users believe “True to expectations” means?
* What do users think of the “About Ratings” content?
* Are there any aspects of the ratings design that users find confusing?
* Do users think the ratings are useful?

**Third Task - Comparing Prestigious Schools - 15 minutes**

Let's say you are considering attending either **Stanford University** or **Dartmouth College**. Both schools have the program you're interested in and you plan on moving to an apartment close to the school you attend. Walk me through how you'd use the Comparison Tool to help you decide which school you'd attend.

Things to watch for:

* How does the user compare schools (look at them one at a time, open multiple tabs, etc.)?

Upon completion of task:

* How did you think that went?
* What do you think of the schools now that you've seen the ratings?
* Which school would be a better fit? Why?

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?
* How do users think ratings are collected?
* What level of privacy do users expect if they would provide a rating?
* 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.

**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!