**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P1 - Adam**

*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.

Device is an iPhone.

* Are you currently using or have you ever used your education benefits? I have – not currently, but I have
  + If yes, which benefit are you using? The education for college. Post 9/11.
    - When did you start school? Where did you go? 2006-2009, Longwood University. Farmville, VA. It was a Facebook game for the longest time.
* 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?
  + I was going for a business degree in a business program. So the accreditation. I didn’t want to go to a very large institution where you had oversize classrooms. I wanted personal interaction with the professors. It’s on the smaller size. Class sizes – but at the time, smaller class size and smaller school went hand-in-hand.
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? No, you were the first person I’ve ever heard say that phrase.
* Any education benefits remaining? Some, not a lot. Potentially use them in the future. Nothing imminent.
  + 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 **Dartmouth College**. How would you go about finding **Dartmouth College** on the Comparison Tool? When you find what you're looking for, you can say "I found it".

Scroll through landind page options. Entered Dartmouth and clicked option. Clicked Search …search opened at the bottom option on page. Just a snapshot of the current expenses you would see as a student. It gives the idea of what you’re qualified for.

It says Not yet Rated. Oh I had gone down too far. It says rated by 102 Veterans, so it helps you get a handle on what you could expect.

I would guess just a smaller number of Veterans…the first is Dartmouth College the scond is the school of business…it could just be lack of people interacting with it. The first one has 85 GI Bill students, the other one has less than half. So maybe just lack of numbers.

Process? It was easy. \*\*When turned it sideways, it reverted to desktop view\*\*

Things to watch for:

* Does the user notice the ratings on the school cards?

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 **Dartmouth College** would be a good fit for you?

The rating definitely helps. For me, if I was getting ready to start my college career, I might be a little bit. I might want to do more research. I was actually in the school of business in a different school. That wouldn’t necessarily discourage me – a lack of ratings. I would talk with the school to do a little more research. Also comparing what’s on…it says you may be eligible for this amount. Making sure its enough to pay the bills that do come from Dartmouth.

Amy prompted – finding more info? Oh uh…View details.

Okay…scrolling through page. Ok, pretty good amount of information on here.

Anything stand out? I mean money is always important – to see that broken down, that’s important. The breakdown of the ratings – each person is going to be looking for different things. I think this could be really beneficial for people figuring out where they want to go.

Any ratings not clear? No I think its pretty straightforward – not a lot of room for confusion in my opinion. Stopped at Veteran privacy and then kept going. Scrolled to bottom.

Helpful? The breakdown of the dollar amounts and the broken down specific reviews would be most helpful for me. It just gives you a better feeling of what you’re looking at without seeing the school itself.

Which categories important? I think most important would be the overall experience and I mean right now, online instruction would be pretty important right now. That’s something to pay attention to. As far as less important, I don’t really see any of these being a waste of screen space. I personally can’t say any of these 7 lack importance to me.

True to expectations? I think that’s important too…if you as a student show up there and someone whether prompted by something online or a person asking you, was Dartmouth what you expected it to be? You don’t want to sign up for a 4 year program and you got something different from what you expected. It’s interesting to me, that one, some of these, quality of classes are higher than true to expectations. I’d be curious why this is on the lower end.

Wanted more info on that? Me living in New Hampshire might be harder, but contacting Veteran groups and touch base with them and see if there’s any primary reason as a group of people that this school didn’t live up to expectations.

Would ratings impact whether school was a good fit? I think it would have an impact. It’s hard to say what stock I would put into it. 100 people put into it with 85 GI bill students, you aren’t getting everyone on the GI Bill. I would wonder if there was more involvement, then what these ratings would look like. Who knows, maybe if it was someone making a choice between Dartmouth and another school. It’s hard because it’s 102…it’s a pretty small sample size.

Thoughts on About Ratings? Well its just um…it lets you know these ratings weren’t collected by the school itself, it was done by the VA. Which is nice. It paints a picture of how they came to these ratings.

Privacy? I mean…anything digital or online is always subject to potential privacy concerns but you like to trust…the VA holds all my medical records. Me personally I would trust that these ratings would be kept confidential.

\*\*Never opened a category\*\*

Things to watch for:

* How does the participant open the school profile page (School name or View Details link)?

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.

Clicked breadcrumb…typed Stanford and clicked option. Search. Clicked into Stanford. So this one scored a 4.3 compared to a 4.2, but you mentioned an apartment within walking distance – is that something this site provides information about?

Helpful? Oh definitely…especially if you’re coming in out of the area and you can’t visit the campus ahead of time. Maybe something like an interactive map where you could see where housing is available relative to the campus – to see if walking to campus is a possibility. Versus making a bunch of phone calls or searching a bunch of sites. Something where you can get a feel for the area and what housing options are available.

How do ratings strike you? It’s not….to me, neither of these two schools really separate themselves based on ratings. There are some differences in ratings. I don’t see any massive gaps. So pretty similar to Dartmouth. The only thing I can say is looking at the benefits here and making sure that these dollar amounts don’t mean anything unless you know what you’re being charged. For me, it’s something different that would lead me to make a decision. For me, this information makes these schools look the same. It’s nice that neither of them has any student complaints. Well the fact that its collected by the VA, instead of me looking at this on the school’s website would give me more trust in them. I don’t know what motivation VA would have to give misleading results.

Had to be prompted to tap on True to expectations. How info strikes him? I mean it shows that basically 2/3rd of people gave it a 5 star. That’s a positive. In fact there’s no ratings of 1 or 2 stars. It’s almost 2/3rds giving it 5 star which is more information and only better in my opinion.

Did not rate? I was curious about that. You wonder if it was the last thing on the survey and people just skipped it. It looks like there are other numbers for other categories. I’m not sure why you would skip responses on a survey.

Explanation of true to expectations? To me that’s what the rating would be based on, if you agree with that statement, you would give this a 5 star rating. If not, it would go down. It’s nice to see what its based on. Those categories are important…academic programs and associated costs…maybe if it could be broadened more to…to ask people why their expectations weren’t met. It’s helpful to know this is what the user was basing their score off of.

Accurate description? I’d say pretty well…maybe one more element could be added to give it a broader reach for what expectations people are looking to have met. Overall, pretty well.

One thing I haven’t seen is housing – it’s a driver when people make a decision. Even the quality of the existing dorms and what are other on-campus or off-campus housing units.

Other factors? I was really only thinking about housing. I’m sure Google can answer questions about the area surrounding the campus. I would look at the proximity…restaurants, attractions and things like that would be helpful to people. Most schools have gyms on campus and dining halls. Just more information the better.

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!