**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P2 - Eric**

*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? Yes
  + If yes, which benefit are you using? Post 9/11 – I think it was about a year ago when I used it. I’m looking to use it. Went to George Washington. It was fine.
    - 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?
  + The program and affordability. The GI Bill was a big factor. What percentage was covered in tuition. Did not use Yellow Ribbon.
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? Yes. I like the CT because I guess there’s some value in knowing other people use it. I think there was some ranking or value with the VA.
  + 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".

Typed Dartmouth clicked Search. I think I found it…there’s two of them, but I think it’s the first one.

Scrolling through options – first for Dartmouth so the first one is Dartmouth College and it says Hanover and I know that’s where it is. It looks like there’s 3 schools. Maybe they’re graduate schools. I see there’s GI Bill students…I assume that’s current students, but maybe not…I don’t know. The college is familiar with the process. And I know from personal experience sometimes the money doesn’t flow in right away. The military office on campus had to tell the registrar office not to lock me out. This is looking up..I think there will be a point of contact that I can call up.

This info? Very helpful. Especially the housing. That’s always a black --- on it. It depends on zip codes. I guess with NH on campus. Tuition seems appropriate for the percent of GI Bill you have. I believe it was 36 months, 100. I’m surprised this is so small, the number of GI Bill students. I think some schools have hundreds or thousands.

I thought it was easy. I’m looking at the school rating and I don’t know what this means. I don’t put much stock in ratings. I mean it says it’s rated by 102 Veterans, but there’s 85 [GI students]. It doesn’t make sense. I don’t know – I don’t know who you solicited to rate this. It’s just me being inquisitive. What I need out of the website is the tuition, housing, etc.

Compare – the financials. Just mimic the grey boxes. Maybe ratings as you go down. Keep the menu [EYB controls] on the left and the money on the right.

Other categories for ratings? I think the alumni. After graduation support. I don’t know when you solicit these surveys.

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?

Clicked Dartmouth name. This is good information [ summary section]. The information under the stars – I’m glad there’s a website, I like that. I think this is over 9 months (EYB). I’m assuming its 9 months a year. Fall..Winter…housing allowance. I just know that it’s different if you go full time or part time. You don’t need a PhD to figure out the percent of the program. I think you need to be more than 50%. There’s something about the %/no of full time versus part time. There’s so many different styles of learning. So I’m a graduate program so I would really care about if I go part-time or full-time. Or part-time after work. I want to take enough credits to get the housing. What’s confusing me is this Fall Winter Spring…unless they do terms differently. If you aren’t in school, I don’t think you get housing. Opened Veteran on side. Opened each dropdown in military details. Opened School costs and calendar. Oh here you go. ¾ tiem selected and updated benefits. School calendar to Semesters. I like this here…I don’t know if I’d go full time or ¾ time. It’s so dependent on the school you’re in – they have different policies in what’s full time, what’s part-time. [Less money for part time] That’s important to me – making sure I get the housing allowance. Especially if you aren’t Yellow Ribbon. One thing I was..opened Scholarships and VA Funding. If you get scholarship, it goes against your benefit…ok, what am I doing?

Ratings – how strike you? Opened online instruction and job preparation. I guess it’s good. I guess you want some feedback. I don’t know. Let me read this before I go on [About ratings]. I don’t think I ever got reached out to. Is that all there is? Is there no comments? I felt like maybe…Opened Veteran dropdowns. I’m not sure about 4.2 I guess there’s an average somewhere. It seems like people were generally happy here. I’m happy the GI Bill support is high – that is what I would expect from this website. As long as schools aren’t…if a school is rated poor GI Bill support, they might not get military students. Here…the Veteran friendliness is something I would expect a higher score here.

If 100 people give 1 star, will Dartmouth call the school and say this is ridiculous take it down. I don’t know what they would do.

Any important ratings? The 3 Veteran ratings I care about. The other ones I can get other places. I think when you’re looking at different schools, there’s different ways of looking at them. There’s different perspectives with ratings. It’s hard for me to put tremendous value in Education ratings. The Veteran friendliness are more a general outlook on how the school looks at Veterans. That’s a more cultural…like a school’s culture. To me, the 3 on the right are important.

True to expectations? Well no one did one or two stars. School provides detailed explanations…4 seems reasonable. I’m sure they’re never 100% true. 4 seems fine here.

If low, what would be concern? Veteran community because it might not be a good culture. As much as you want to transition, you need a community in some respect.

Any other ratings? Good question…putting me on the spot there. Maybe alumni support. After the university experience. I assume that would be education rating.

Think of About ratings? It’s good the methodology is there. I wouldn’t be concerned if I gave them a rating. Why would they care? It’s just one rating. If a school cares what one Veteran rates, I’d be concerned.

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 Landing page breadcrumb. Entered Standford, Clicked Search. Clicked Stanford name. I forget if you can have 2 schools up at one time.

I’d have multiple tabs…I forget if you can do it on one screen. So this is 87 ratings. Stanford is 4.3 out of 5. 3.4 out of job preparation. There must be averages somewhere. You ask me about apartments, so let me stay on task. So that’s $4100 a month and the other was $1700 a month so sign me up for Stanford. I don’t think its VA’s place to say that cost of living is higher in Stanford.

Cost of living helpful? I don’t know if I really need a cost of living estimator. I just need facts. Maybe if they just want to link to a cost of living estimator. I know most schools website estimate how much they cost – like they’ll have housing costs. Or the Veterans office will. I’m not sure that the VA needs to get into that. I’d just go to the school, other students, other literature. Is there anything I need to do for the task?

Now that I look at this…why is the total $37k…changed to semesters…yeah, they’re assuming you’re in class for 9 months. You only get housing while you’re in school. This doesn’t seem right. Change School Calendar to non-traditional, 3 terms, 4 months. Yeah, so it’s 49k per year if I go full, full time. This gives me a more realistic option. Maybe an internship or summer abroad. I know the tuition and fees isn’t right, right now.

Clicked jumplink to ratings.

How much would ratings impact decision? They’d have a low to medium effect. They would have some impact. But low to medium impact. Education ratings…I think those are very personal. The Veteran are cultural. Like GI bill Support – why is it hard to use their benefits there. Veteran community…I guess I could see it, they don’t have many Veterans here. You see $2 million a year, that’s not many. That’s just not a lot of Veterans. I would assume that SCO…I’m assuming its not their fulltime job. I’d call them up and ask why is it so hard to use GI Bill benefits. Is it hard to register for classes – are you going to lock me out? The Veteran community…it’s a suburban locale…so you can find community in the city. There’s different factors in play here…

Ratings from Veterans at school – impact school? You go to Veteran community…a lot of people skipped this. Some of these just don’t apply to people. You just have to at some point just make a decision. So schools have different cultures. GW was in the city. NH is more outside the city. You’re going to the school for different reasons. It’s just hard.

Which school? Stanford…I would rather be in the city than in Hanover. Of course, that’s geography. I don’t know the program. Is there a school with lots of ratings you want me to check out?

I do want to bring this up – the student complaints. This is where I was talking about some sort of complaint or action. This would be a red flag – I would take that into account.

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!