**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P3 - Amanda**

*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? No, not yet. Planning to use in the future. Post 9/11 GI Bill. So I was looking last year or a year and a half ago with the GI Bill comparison tool. I didn’t select a school and then when I wanted to, coronavirus happened. I want to do in person classes. So I’m hoping that next year I’ll be able to go back
  + 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? Accreditation, cost and how much the GI would cover. Obviously the program too, but the cost and the accreditation were important.
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? Yes
  + 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 and clicked option. Clicked Search. Clicked top option. This is it. It looks like there’s a subset of Dartmouth too – a school of business so I’m just going to click on the one that’s more general. So is this the new rating system (at the top). I think its pretty nice. I think there’s a satisfaction rating for Veterans (cautionary info). It showed how many students were there and how many complaints. Yeah, this is the new part I guess.

Seeings ratings at top – it’s pretty clutch. A regular student attending college has a different experience. We typically have to go through the Veterans department and it’s different for each school and student. Are we allowed to comment? Or is it just ratings 1-5? It would be nice if it was like Google Maps ratings. It would be nice to have a more detailed look of what they did or didn’t like.

Categories – GI Bill support would be number one. Then overall experience would come next. And then quality of classes and online instruction….job preparation is a little difficult to talk on because not every college program is going to get you to the right job. True to expectations is pretty good too…I wouldn’t list this as a priority. (All except job prep and true to expect)

TTE – what is advertised is true to what is being executed.

I’ll be a bit concerned about the online instruction for this one…but if I’m in person…quality of classes is 4.9 so that wouldn’t matter too much to me.

Any questions? So I think it would be nice to say for quality of classes is 4.9 and online is 3.2, what went wrong? Would quality be for in person and online is for online only? I think it’s a bit blurred. It’s a little confusing.

Thoughts about About ratings? So these are collected by people who have actually attended the school or completed…I think it needs to be that way so you can’t collect something that was halfway through….they’re actually at the school and can give a full picture of their experience.

Veteran privacy? I’m not sure if that’s still private if VA is still giving the names of specific students. I guess you don’t give the actual ratings that the students give. As long as the school doesn’t use it against you…but who knows what they would do with that information…

Relationship in 4.2 and other ratings? It seems like an average of all the ratings. They rated it a 4 out of 5 and they broke it down with education and veteran friendliness ratings.

4.2 or more detailed? The details. Because if a school gets 5 stars, but the GI Bill gets 1, that’s not a good sign for me.

I think the only concern is if online instruction is included in quality of classes. I’ll assume it’s part of that. The descriptions are pretty good. No just that situation here – between those two (online and quality of classes)

So it says classes here (quality) so I assume its both online and in person. But online is rated almost 2 stars lower…I would assume quality classes is a part of it. Or is this just classes that are in person?

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?

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.

Landing page breadcrumb. Re-ran Dartmouth search. It’s Dartmouth and Stanford right….scrolling up and down SRP. Where is Stanford in CA right? So I would usually take a screenshot of something like this and get the cost of that. From SRP, typed Stanford….I forgot how you would pull 2 [schools] up. Because there’s multiple…add it to your queue. I thought you could do that before…I think I’m missing something.

Compare the prices and what not. Yeah, how much I would need to pay out of pocket. It looks like they pay the school all of it…oh no, out of pocket. I would move there right? So it wouldn’t quite matter…because I think it would be out of pocket for both. It’s 22k (out of pocket) Returned to SRP and went to Dartmouth. So $25k (out of pocket). So I would have to cover this tuition cost correct? Mom and Dad I guess. I mean the difference is $3k. It just depends on where you would want to move. Or where I would want to move. SRP – returned to Stanford. Clicked View details. This one pays so much more housing…but of course its more expensive to live in CA. It’s crazy. Another way to offset this cost is to maybe rent a room. It’s $3k cheaper.

It seems like both schools have good ratings and no complaints. GI Bill support is not as good…2.5 – 3 would be my drop off point. Quality of classes 5.0…the online instruction is a little better as well. Since they’re kind of toe-to-toe. It would matter more about the costs.

Trustworthy – I would say 99.9% because Veterans don’t care if they hurt people’s feelings.

Important ratings by Veterans as opposed to general: Very important – a regular student experience is very different. Veteran is going back to school and don’t share age bracket and using GI Bill to pay for school. It’s important for that to be smooth…student loan. The GI Bill requires a little more work on yoru end. A friendly Veteran department is important and people to vouch and say this is a good Veteran school is important.

Any other categories? Maybe something about the area the school is in. the city or the neighborhood. Like walkability, accessibility, parking…something like that.

Decide? Stanford and probably rent out a really small room.

How much is based on money or rating? I’d say…60 on cost and 40 on the rating. The rating is also important. If Stanford had 2.0 rating that would be a red flag.

Thoughts on school cards? Are these like private schools or something? For Veterans kids I guess? Or is it just like something that was similar to the school…(high schools). I think its good that the main school you search comes up first and gives you all the info you need up front. And you can click on it if you need more info. City, state; amount of tuition.

Any more info? Maybe degree levels offered? Can you do that on the side panel? No…maybe Bachelor’s, Master’s, Doctorate

Not yet rated? Might just be new to the system. Or not many people have gone there. Ratings are voluntary right? It seems voluntary. It showed that some people chose not to answer. That doesn’t really bother me if it isn’t rated – if its like a small school. If it just offers a certificate.

What if it was a big school? I would assume like Stanford, maybe it’s a new school that the GI bill is now covering. But I think it just depends on the school. If it’s a big school and no ratings, you’re like what is going on there. But it could also be new to the database.

Job preparation rating is difficult to talk on, elaborate? So trying to think of an example. Is it a program like job fairs…let me read the ratings…The instructors portion – if you take 5 classes and they use a certain program, let’s say they use Excel, but you have to learn Python or something else on the job. It prepares you for the general idea of the job, but not the actual job you’re going to get. You get the general idea. I think its good. When I got my undergraduate, not all classes are applicable to a job. It’s like little bits and pieces are applicable. It’s also school assistance to getting a job. Job fairs or job forums. Where people would come and talk to you and try to recruit you.

I think maybe I dig too deep into things…I think this is great and will be a good addition to the website.

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!