**School Ratings Discussion Guide**

**P5 - Jennifer**

*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 – in the past used it and I will be using it again soon I think. Both my Montgomery and Post 9/11 GI Bill. Yeah so I can do the old system and the new one.
  + If yes, which benefit are you using?
* 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’ve been looking on and off for 6 months. I’m looking at Interior Design so it’s a bit of a niche. It’s not like looking for University of Alabama. I don’t know if its still in effect, because I’m 100% disabled Vet, the Yellow Ribbon is supposed to be afforded to me. So that’s important to me if it’s still usable.
* Have you ever used the GI Bill Comparison Tool before? No I haven’t.
  + 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".

Checked GI Bill benefit – kept 9/11. You said Dartmouth College right? I have a friend who works there ironically. I know people everywhere. My husband is like who doesn’t know you? Okay, so I got that. God, that’s cheaper than my husband’s prep school. (On SRP). This is nice having the breakdown like this – it’s 95% of the questions I would ask. What are we going to get out of that. Okay…umm….opened Learning format and location. Ok so now I like how you have “will you be taking any classes in person?” Will it change the benefits if its stuck because of COVID? I actually work for the Army recruiting battalion. They’re like oh I won’t get the housing allowance since its online. Opened scholarships and funding. Opened Yellow Ribbon learn more. So I appreciate that info. And they still do the kicker, oh my gosh. I like the school ratings and like my suggestion for school ratings is I would put…I’d read it overall so that people who have had less than a perfect experience. I think those ratings should be put to the top. We want to see the negatives. Anyone can say positive, but we’re more interested in hearing the negative. That’s just a byproduct of military service. I like the fact that you have all the names of the folks there – how often would this website be updated if something changed. That’s a big sticking point and we call and reach out and they say “this person isn’t here anymore”. That’s definitely a big thing. For obvious reason, if there’s a mass exodus of people from a whole bunch of schools, then I understand, but if its just here and there, but it hits the credibility of the VA and the school. I like the historical information and the institution codes. Omg, that’s great. Filling out the information in any forms and trying to fill that out. Oh and you can download the data, awesome. Okay so this actually looks really good. I have no issues with this. Used jumplink to ratings when prompted to return.

I’m telling you now – every Veteran we’re all like “we want to hear the bad stuff” especially of like the date of when that review was given. If it was 4 years ago, they may have cleaned up their act since then. Having the date you know. That’s one thing I would be very interested in.

True to expectations? So I…for me, true to expectations is I went to the website, I found the program and am filling out the application and everything that is being depicted is actually happening. If I need to contact the school, I can reach out to them and you get that response in a good timely manner. There’s…true to expectations is something I would be excited about. You want it to be an easy process. I hate the fact that you have to dumb down things to the 6th grade level, but it’s what we’ve become. I would also recommend…if there’s ability to have actual reviews, I think that would help. But then again, I also know people who would be like fill out an evaluation and they would just fill out the stars. But I think there would be people who would give more information.

Collect ratings? From my perspective, I would expect it to be a third party – I would not want someone from Voc Rehab saying “Hey”…looking at these reviews and deciding what goes in. It needs to be a non-partisan 3rd party. It also makes Veterans feel better, knowing their ability to get us information that’s unbiased and hasn’t been filtered through. People don’t trust the VA right now…especially with the current information. The information is not timely and they don’t allow people to question it. Having a 3rd party would be a much better use.

Important categories? No I think these are actually good – these are all questions I would have.

Less important? No….not at all. You’re hitting all the benchmarks and questions we would have. The experience of the website, the school. The Quality of classes that’s a really big one. I was at Grand Canyon Unive and it used to be okay, but it started to go…it went downhill and part of the reason I left a really bad review is because the quality of classes had gone down. Online instruction is important, even after COVID is gone. Job preparation…I think it needs more emphasis. People are going to college for a career and the school isnt’ making you employable at a career. University of Phoenix…you can’t even get hired for a government job. I do think you need an education rating for accreditation. It’s a really hot topic. There’s a lot of big name schools that have moved online. You aren’t going to question them when their accreditation is not an issue. Another thing to put in there would be do they meet Department of education rating the 85/15 rule. It’s just one of those things where you’re like wow. There’s too many predatory schools and this administration has rolled those protections back. That needs to go back in.

Predatory, which category? I would probably put it under Veteran friendliness because it’s almost an exclusive Veteran issue. I would say Veteran friendliness just because it needs the ability to say it’s an accreditation issue. You will not be able to get a job. Not necessarily just on ratings. You can put it in About Ratings with like an asterisk. If a school has been deemed predatory or has accreditation…not predatory, when info comes up there needs to be a banner saying this school has had accreditation issues therefore you need to be careful if you choose to use this school. They shouldn’t have to worry about it. Get every school up in the system, but get that banner warning up about accreditation.

It would just be a strong suggestion to not allow those schools to receive funding, but that’s something that’s bigger than you guys. Hopefully with potentially new administration, they’ll re-tighten up those options and find a way to get out of those schools completely.

Amy told her about caution flags – oh good, having that alone is a huge difference. Being a person with a brain injury, there are things I’m not strong at. There are schools that say just because you aren’t good at math, we can get you through.

Which rating predatory? Probably the True to Expectations. Quite frankly I think your bigger issue is that they would just get out on social media and you would have media picking it up.

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.

Typed in Stanford. Do you have the ability to pull up previous searches and compare them? What I would do…clicked view details. I would probably have a bar down here (under EYB) that says Compare schools. I would also see if…returned to Landing page…have a…if you have the ability to a block or field where you could …okay I want to go to school for interior design. You put in the degree you’re looking for and all the schools with that program appear. You would have the ability to put a checkmark next to the ones and you have a list of the ones…like up to 3 and you can see all the information side by side. That’s another thing…we love comparing information. This only allows you to look at information one at a time. I would actually say…yeah, have the option to have multiple options to search. There’s a lot of times people say they want to get a degree in molecular biology…but they don’t know the schools. The ability to put that information in would be huge. You don’t have it now, but it’s going to limit the functionality because you have to open multiple windows and bounce back and forth. It’s not as user friendly. I like the information at the top…maybe kids of veterans know they want to go to school, but don’t know where. I think that would make it a lot easier.

Ratings compare? They’re kind of low for such a prestigious school. I appreciate the fact that people took the time to be honest. I would rather see a lower score because people took the time and answered honestly. Now that I want to see what they said about Harvard. I prefer this…I love this where it has student complaints. This is awesome. Complaints by type. I would definitely be more interested in seeing this because it said that people took time. I like the fact that you have STEM scholarships, independent study…that’s not even on the other two schools I looked at. It’s definitely interesting to see.

Amy prompted about ratings to Harvard…went to Harvard page….I actually enjoy seeing it in this format…clicked student complaints…I actually like this format better. Caution flag oh that’s cool.That’s actually really neat. I actually prefer seeing it this way because it shows the issues. Where are the reviews? There aren’t any? Wow, that’s different. Interesting. I really like the cautionary information. People wouldn’t think there would be cautionary info at Harvard. I like seeing that.

Affect perception of school? A little bit, I definitely enjoyed seeing…I like seeing the rating, but I would actually prefer the breakdown from the cautionary information standpoint. I like that a lot more. Obviously you wouldn’t have to call it cautionary information. I think that’s a better layout. Especially if you were able to click the number and read actual reviews, I think that would be so much better. If you’re trying to create a useful comparison tool, giving more information is better than less. I would prefer to click on the number and read reviews. That’s one of those things you’d be a lot more interested in.

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!