DRAFT DISCUSSION GUIDE
MEGA MENU/HOMEPAGE REDESIGN FOCUS GROUP

12/8~10/2015
FINAL 10/08/15

I.   INTRODUCTION AND GROUND RULES

- My name is Dave Glantz and I work for Market Connections, a market research firm in the Washington, DC area. We are conducting this focus group on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education's office of Federal Student Aid.

- I will be your moderator for tonight's focus group discussion. We'll be here for about two hours to talk about your impressions of student financial aid information provided by the U.S. Department of Education.

- As I mentioned, what we are doing today is called a "focus group."

- As a **participant**, I'd like you to…

  o Participate — I need to hear from everyone.
  o Speak up (but only one talks at a time).
  o Please avoid side conversations.
  o Address your comments to the group.
  o Remember that you're here for who you are, so say what you believe and not what you think others might say.
  o If you don't agree with what somebody says, tell us what you think — there are no wrong answers.
  o What you don't know is just as important as what you do know.

- As the **moderator**, I can be impartial because I have no vested interest in whether you agree or disagree with the things we'll be talking about. I try to ensure…

  o We get through this discussion guide: there are lots of questions and ideas I'd like to talk to you about, so I have to keep things on track.
  o We are audio and videotaping, which is standard practice to help with the accuracy of my report. I also have some colleagues behind the glass, who are involved in this project, and who are interested in hearing your views firsthand.
  o Most importantly, everything we discuss is considered private and for internal research purposes only. Our report will not identify individuals by name.
  o Do you have any questions?   **0:05**

II. WARM-UP, IMPORTANT WEBSITE ELEMENTS

Start by: 0:05	**elapsed time: 0:15**
Finish by: 0:20	

I would first like to have everyone introduce themselves. Please tell me...

- Your first name (or what you like to be called)
  - o HS SENIORS: The course of study that interests you
  - o PARENTS OF SENIORS: The course(s) of study your child is interested in
  - o CURRENT COLLEGE/ADULT STUDENTS: Your course of study
  - o POTENTIAL ADULT COLLEGE STUDENTS: Course of study/profession that interests you
  - o BORROWERS IN REPAYMENT: Current or new profession(s) that interest you

- Imagine you're looking through a site on a PC or laptop that contains important information on topics related to federal student aid that you know you'll need to find and understand. What factors are important to you personally, given the fact that you are a [NAME OF SEGMENT], to make that experience more comfortable and positive?

- If you were looking on such a site with a smartphone, tablet or some other mobile device, what else, if anything, is important to you to make your experience more comfortable and positive?

<div align="right">0:20</div>

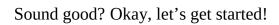## III.   EVALUATING FSA MEGA MENU/HOMEPAGE PDFs

Start by: 0:20	**elapsed time: 1:35**
Finish by: 1:55	

Just to give you some background, you may be aware that the Office of Federal Student Aid manages the Studentaid.gov website.

[SHOW OF HANDS] who has ever visited the site? StudentAid.gov is designed to provide information and advice on preparing for college, the types of federal financial aid available, how to qualify and apply for aid, and how to manage repayment of your loans.

We're not here to evaluate the current site, but instead, for the rest of our time together I'll have you review a number of possible changes to various areas of the homepage. I'll show these images to you, one at a time, so that you can tell me what you think. I'm also going to ask you questions about each of these. Again, the purpose is not to compare these images to the current homepage, but simply judge them on their own merits.

Sound good? Okay, let's get started!

0:22

I will now hand out a grading sheet that covers the images you'll be looking at. I'll let you know as we get to each place where I want you to grade what you see, and I'll give you more detailed instructions at that time.

To begin, I want you to look at homepage images A1, A2 and A3. Think of them collectively, as three different possible images on the homepage you might click on and view. Consider the layout and the content on the homepage, as well as the colors, fonts, and any other aspects that matter to you. And then I want you to do <u>three</u> things before we restart the discussion: <u>silently</u> write down your grade from A-F in terms of how <u>appealing</u> this type of design for the homepage is to <u>you personally</u>, and also grade your likelihood <u>to take action</u> based on what you see. So for example, if under "appeal" you do not like this type of layout for the homepage at all, give it a failing grade of "F". If you like it very much, then give it an "A". And of course, you can also choose any grade in between.

I would also like you to jot down the first thing you said to yourself when looking at the homepage. When you've finished filling out that information, we'll restart the discussion to get at the reasons behind your grades.

Let's go around the room and please read your grade for appeal.

- IF GRADE A or B: What do you see as the strengths of the homepage?
- IF GRADE C, D, F: What needs to change or improve to increase the appeal of the homepage? (**PROBE:** length, content, tone, ability to comprehend)

- Is there anything about the homepage that would discourage you from viewing it or taking action? What exactly? (**PROBE:** over-simplified, too complex, other format or mode of communication **(SPECIFY)** would be better for subject matter covered)

- What do you think of the three different images on the homepage?

    o   How do these impact your grade?
    o   Do you particularly like or dislike any of the images?

- To what extent does the homepage give you clear instructions about next steps for taking action or accessing additional information?

- How likely are you to take action after having viewed this?

- What makes you say that?

- Still looking at this homepage, where would you click to find out about preparing for college?

- What topics or themes would you expect to see when clicking there?

- Now I will show the content you might see when clicking here. On the line marked Image B, please grade it from A to F on its <u>usefulness to you personally</u>.

  0:47

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE B. THEY FILL OUT GRADING SHEET
Let's go around the room and please read your grade for usefulness.

- IF GRADE A or B: What drives you to give this information a high grade?
- IF GRADE C, D, F: What needs to change or improve to give it an "A" grade?

  [SHOW OF HANDS] At the top of the homepage, you can see the title, "Prepare for College". Given the way it looks to you <u>visually</u>, do you expect this to be a <u>link</u> to somewhere, or simply a title?
  - o What makes you say that? [**IF LOOKS LIKE A TITLE:** What should be done to make it look like a link?]

  [SHOW OF HANDS. POINT BENEATH "PREPARE FOR COLLEGE" TO "CAREER SEARCH"] Similarly, based on the way it looks to you, do you expect the term "Career Search" to be a <u>link</u> to somewhere, or simply a title?
  - o What makes you say that? [**IF LOOKS LIKE A TITLE:** What should be done to make it look like a link?]

Image C
- Where can you see the "I want to" box?
- What do you expect to see if you click there?

Now I will show an example of what you would see if clicking that box. On the line marked Image C, please grade it from A to F on its <u>usefulness</u> to you personally. **0:53**

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE C. THEY FILL OUT GRADING SHEET

Let's go around the room and please read your grade for the usefulness of the "I Want To" box.

- IF GRADE A or B: What drives you to give the box a high grade?
- IF GRADE C, D, F: What needs to change or improve to give it an "A" grade?

- In your opinion, is this the same as a search box, or is it somehow different?

- **[SHOW OF HANDS]** Do you prefer this format, or a search box? Or both? ==**1:00**==

- Where would you go on the home page to log in?

- What would you expect to see after logging in that you would <u>not</u> see otherwise? **(PROBE IF NEEDED**: loan, grant history, making payments)

This next image shows what would appear if you click the login button. On the line marked Image D, please grade it from A to F on its <u>usefulness</u> to you personally.

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE D. THEY FILL OUT GRADING SHEET

- IF GRADE A or B: What drives you to give the log in button a high grade?
- IF GRADE C, D, F: What needs to change or improve to give it an "A" grade?

- Is this all the information you feel you would need to log in? **(PROBE AS NEEDED)** ==**1:10**==

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE E. THEY FILL OUT GRADING SHEET
- Suppose you've logged in. What are your feelings about the dropdown items you see here? On the line marked image E, please grade it from A to F on its <u>usefulness</u> to you personally.

- To what extent is this helpful to you?

- IF GRADE A or B: What explains your higher grade?
- IF GRADE C, D, F: What needs to change or improve to give it an "A" grade?
==**1:15**==

- We spoke earlier of searches, where can you click in order to conduct a search?

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE F. THEY FILL OUT GRADING SHEET
- Let's suppose you typed, "Help Me Pay My Loans", and this is what you see. This is image F. Please grade it on its usefulness to you personally.

- IF GRADE A or B: What explains your higher grade?
- IF GRADE C, D, F: What needs to change or improve to give it an "A" grade?

==**1:25**==

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE A *MOBILE VERSION*.

I also want to show you how this same homepage would look on a mobile device, like a smartphone. I will scroll down so you can see all of the information.

- **[SHOW OF HANDS]** Who generally likes what they see?

- Who feels there is room for improvement? **(PROBE)**

- How simple or difficult do you think it would be to find what you are looking for?

SHOW NavGif "Types of Schools" animation.
- **[SHOW OF HANDS]** Having seen this animated example, does the process seem easier, more difficult, or does it make no difference?

Image G

Briefly, under Image G, I want to shift to your feelings about the layout and content of the following page, and grade it too on its usefulness to you personally:

SHOW PDF HOMEPAGE G. THEY FILL OUT GRADING SHEET FOR CONTENT, LAYOUT, USEFULNESS   **1:45**
- What specific feedback do you have on the content?

- And how about for its layout?

WRAP UP
[TIME PERMITTING]

1:50
- In what way has this homepage and its features changed the way you think about the financial aid process in general – does the process now seem easier, or more difficult, than you had thought, or does it make no difference?

- What final advice would you give to the folks at Federal student Aid to make your website visit a more positive experience?

Those are all the questions I have for you. Thanks for participating!   **2:00**