**STEM Scholarship: Education Routing Wizard & VA Form 22-1995 Update - Prototype Research Discussion Guide**

**Introduction**

Thanks for joining us today! My name is [NAME]. I also have several colleagues on the line. They’ll be observing and taking notes to ensure that we capture your feedback accurately.

We work with a team at the VA that designs online forms.

Today, we'll be looking at a form that students use to update their educational benefits.

We're reviewing the form with students in sessions like this to ensure that it's easy to use.

The entire session should take less than 45 minutes.

Throughout the process, we are interested in hearing your honest opinions. We are in no way testing your knowledge or ability. We just want to hear your ideas and be sure the form meets Veterans’ needs. You are welcome to express any opinions you wish. We welcome your feedback.

If for any reason you want to pause or stop the session, please let me know. I'd be happy to do so.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

**Recording**

We generally record sessions, in case we need to confirm that we have captured your opinions accurately. Are you comfortable if I record the audio and screen movements as we talk?

Great! I'm going to turn the recording on now.  
Once it starts, I’ll ask again if you are okay if we record, so we have your verbal consent.

[The meeting host will begin audio and screen recording.][When we hear an announcement that it’s started,]

Are you comfortable if I record the audio and screen movements today? Thank you.

**Warm-up Questions**

Let’s start with a few warm-up questions

1. Which Education benefits have you used (Post-9/11, Montgomery, etc.)? 9/11, Post-9/11.
2. What type of degree are you pursuing? Double major in leadership and relationship development. [will be finished May 2021]
3. How far through the program are you?
4. Approximately how many months or years of education benefit do you have remaining? I do, I have approximately 16 months left. I’m using all of that up until next May.
5. [If STEM] Do you have any interest in obtaining a teaching certification after you graduate? I’m looking into it, yes.

**Prototype**

Now we're going to shift gears and review a clickable prototype that we’d like to get your feedback on.

Just so you know, the prototype is a mock-up, rather than a real website. This means only certain links have been activated and you’ll see pretend data in some areas. In many cases, as soon as you click you'll see an example of what someone might type in the fields. We do this to save you time and eliminate the need to type.

**Think Aloud**

While you are going through the site, we ask that you please think aloud and vocalize your thoughts, and decisions. We are interested in your first reaction to each page.  
The more you say about what you are thinking and wondering, the more we’ll learn.  
Thinking aloud may seem strange at first, but it helps us understand what aspects of the design work well and where we might want to make improvements to make things even easier. If you have questions, it’s likely that many other Veterans will, as well, so feel free to ask them along the way.

[Half of participants will complete Scenario 1A and Scenario 2]  
[Half of participants will complete Scenario 1B and Scenario 2]

**Scenario 1A: Change Schools**

[Start the participant on the "How to apply" page Education Routing Wizard  
<https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/> and allow them to continue to VA Form 22-1995 <https://www.va.gov/education/apply-for-education-benefits/application/1995/introduction>]

Let's say you've moved to Florida and would like to keep using your education benefits. Starting from this page, how would you let the VA know that you will be transferring from Boston College to University of Florida?

**Questions**

1. What are your thoughts on the overall process of letting the VA know that you are changing schools?
2. What questions do you have about the process?

Let's go back to the beginning and start the 2nd scenario

**Scenario 2: Apply for STEM Scholarship Science**

[Start the participant on the "How to apply" page Education Routing Wizard  
<https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/> and allow them to continue to VA Form 22-1995 <https://www.va.gov/education/apply-for-education-benefits/application/1995/introduction>]

This time, you'll be going through the screens as a history major who has 2 years of educational benefits remaining. Starting on this page, how would you apply for the STEM Scholarship?

Applying for a stem scholarship? See now, this is where that part comes in, where my thinking comes in and I apologize about that. If I have two years and I’m applying to the stem scholarship. Applying to extend…applying for a new benefit…

T: what are you thinking?

Get rid of the “Apply to…” “Extend my Post…”I’m going to see the first apply for a new benefit and think that’s what I should be doing. I know it’s an application. I’m going to see two applies. I’m going to click on the first one just because of the look. But anyways, so I’ll go with that. Ok…[he took the time to read the bullet points] ok, so I’ve got two years left and I’m a history major. I don’t hit any of these benefits. So I’d click no, and after that that’s what I’d end up clicking there [explore other education benefits link] that’s what I would do, and then I would look for other va educational benefits.

T: anything that would work for a history major?

Yeah, and that’s what I would do. I’d start looking for the reap, anything like that. I know I’m too young. I’d start looking for something that said additional benefits.

T: let’s go back. Let’s assume this person didn’t notice and tried applying.

Let’s see what they can do. So here we go and now my stuff’s in there [started filling 1995 form]

[stem page] [read bullets quickly again] ok, am I applying? Yes. I am applying. And I’m not getting a teacher’s certificate.

[eligibility page] yeah, I’d like to, just because I’m obstinate [didn’t read content above question] let me try to game the system.

T: let’s go back one step. [took him to eligibility page] ok, so you received this page. I’m curious about the information at the top of this page.

Right here is where I looked. I saw check, x, read that, x, read that. And then I read all that and knew it had to be all 3 criteria, and I still cliked yes because I wanted to be obstinate, but the first thing I saw was these [check and x’s]. thi sis definitely prominent enough. If I see this, either I messed up enough or I don’t qualify.

T: any comments on the language?

A little bit wordy right here [2nd bullet] there’s gotta be something that sounds a little more professional than “used up”. God, I can’t even think of the synonym of used up right now. Something a little more professional than used up, just because of the tense. I would say get rid of the “are” [3rd bullet] or previously earned a stem degree. Yeah, get rid of the “ARE’s” and it would be good.

T: let’s go back to the wizard.

I did want to say that the va using this font actually makes it less daunting. It’s just something I picked up on. I type out a heck of a lot of stuff. I always use times new roman 12, but it always looks formal. I don’t know whether you all have softened it or what, but every time I go to va.gov, the font size always looks better. Every va website I go to always looks less daunting than every other website.

T: ok, let’s go back here [wizard]

Now, that’s a big one I might click on [check remaining benefits link] again, the same thing, the wording [wants us to reduce it]. I would have hyperlinked it right there, edith nourse rogers stem scholarship, so that this way, it goes right to this page when I see it right there. I think that hyperlink would have worked on that. Aside from that, everything else is pretty user friendly. I like the radio buttons.

T: ok, let’s click yes. [had him go through 1995 back to stem page]

See, just like that right there. that hyperlink should have gone to that first page, o, that’s good. That’s good. Yes, I am applying. Everything here is fully, like I said, if I wasn’t obstinate, I would have done all that stuff.

T: any questions?

For me, it’s pretty easy. I’m just hoping that for other people, they can find it as easy and not as daunting. It was actually pretty easy.

C: What are your thoughts on whether va would allow you to submit the application even if it seems you may not be eligible?

Are you talking about where I was going to be obstinate and was going to say yes? Honestly, when I got to that part and it says would I want to, and do you want to continue? I really think there shouldn’t be a button there, do you want to apply. I really think if you say no and you’re not eligible, there should be a back button. That should not be there, to be honest with you, but I’m going to be obstinate, and say yes [eligibility page]. Now it makes it look like I’m continuing this application. Why should I be continuing this application? If I’m not eligible for it, why am I going to put in an application for it? Better off, why is the system allowing me to put an application in? now, whether it generates a form or not, I will say that it ends up wasting someone’s time. Now if this thing is about efficiency, why should I be able to submit a form?...It’ll take me all the way through! Why should it let me submit an application? Whether that actually submits a form with VA, I don’t know, but in my head, it does, and I think that’s a waste of time. Put the information out about what the scholarship is, what the degree requirements are, and aif there are any benefits that this guy is just looking for. I would just have an additional benefits page put down there.

T: what do you think happens if we click no?

I wouldn’t even give them the thing for saying yes. I would like to see that earlier [green other benefits button] and I would like to see the option of yes or no. Give them a back button too. Give that back button there a little bit more. [I suggested edit button to Theresa].

T: and what we’re trying to do is let va make the determination

Do you realize how completely inefficient that is, and I understand that it’s the government? But that right there is a control that could be made to be more efficient not only on your end but also on va’s end. Don’t tell me that everyone can apply for it. Put in a control measure for it. And that can be done on the front end. If a person is spending 30 minutes a day, I don’t know how long the average application takes, but god forbid, it’s just wasting the time for something that could have been nipped in the bud.

**Scenario 3: Apply for STEM Scholarship History**

[Start the participant on the "How to apply" page Education Routing Wizard  
<https://www.va.gov/education/how-to-apply/> and allow them to continue to VA Form 22-1995 <https://www.va.gov/education/apply-for-education-benefits/application/1995/introduction>]

This time, you'll be going through the screens as a science major who has 4 months of educational benefits remaining. Starting on this page, how would you apply for the STEM Scholarship?

[was having issues with the mouse moving]

So I’m applying for a new, oh. [selected third radio button, then swiftly went to apply now button for stem]

[started the 1995 after briefly scanning intro]

And I just put in what I’m using right now, right? That would be Post-9/11. The sad thing is I got the Montgomery GI bill and I’m never going to use it. I accepted the Post 9/11 since it’s better benefits.

[quickly moved through stem page and answered YES to all the questions, meaning he’d be eligible].

T: ok, I guess you’ve gone through enough. [he kept filling out the 1995.] [filled out until submitting the form]

Oh, that part is a little bit confusing [last school attended he confused with the new school page]

**General Questions**

Now I'm going to ask a number of questions that relate to the scholarship application process.

1. What are your thoughts on the overall process of applying for the STEM Scholarship? It was a simple process.[?] That was me typing something into the computer and having the entire form filled out. That was easy.

**Wizard Questions**  
Let's go back to the beginning of the process, so I can ask a few specific questions.

1. As you look at the information that appears when you click the STEM Scholarship option, what thoughts or reactions come to mind?
2. What additional information would help you determine whether or not to apply for the scholarship?
3. What are your thoughts on whether you’d be eligible for this scholarship?
4. [If there seems to be confusion] How might we further clarify the eligibility requirements?
5. [If they’re ineligible] Under what circumstances might you try to apply for this scholarship even though you don’t seem to be eligible?

**VA Form 22-1995 Questions**  
Now, let's look at the application form.

1. What did you think of the part of the process when you were answering the questions about the Rogers STEM Scholarship?
2. As you read through the eligibility requirements, what questions come to mind?
3. What are your thoughts on whether you’re eligible for the Rogers STEM Scholarship?
   * What information are you using to form that decision?
   * Are you able to determine under what circumstances you might become eligible in the future?
   * Would you go ahead with the application if you thought you were close to exhaustion?
   * How effectively does the form inform you of your potential eligibility?
4. What are your thoughts on these blue boxes?
5. [ When looking at the last info / alert ] When you saw this, what did you think your options were at this point in the process?”
6. Do you have the impression that your application will be processed or not processed?
7. Do you think the VA would allow you to submit the application even if the answers you've selected would not qualify one for the scholarship?
8. What, if any, modifications would make completing the form easier?